Her voice was what struck me. Nothing like the stagy warble we used to flinch to hear. All that bursting, witless cheer—entirely gone. I wondered briefly whether she were on something. She told me she still worked for the Ridings. Delia was growing up. Stan had remarried. The printing business was defunct, but everything else, Rochelle declared, was the same. No—she answered quickly—she was seeing no one. There were no plans to change that.

Rochelle's telephone voice that day told me what had changed. Her words edged along some terrible abyss, such as you hear in the voices of scarcely recovered alcoholics or drug addicts. As if an operation had been performed. Scooped out were the debutante's wiles, the flounce and flourish, the gloating, reckless entitlement of *mon beau plaisir*. Replacing all that was the sound of something dazed—trained to venture so far, and no farther. How palpable, how reliable to our landscape is the force of personality! A vitality gone missing, even when wicked, accuses us somehow—of something unspeakable. Against all reason, one almost wished the whole blind overbright project were restored to her—that self-help world like a shiny board game, with its hyper-earnest tenets, its gleaming appliances, its deadly innocence.

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