

## The Family Finnegan

"You're a winner," I said to her, the only daughter of the Finnegan's.

She shimmered in flashing bulbs and frantic bells, splashes of red and white lighting her summer-freckled legs. Her bare arms dangled from the ragged sleeves of her Lemonheads T.

I jubilated, feet slipping on worn paisley carpet.

"And I'm a dancer," I shouted. This was a funny thing to say. She thought so. Other patrons did not, as seen in the hazy gaze of the bourbon soaked crone at the nearest slot. It was a tick past lunch.

She laughed, like she used to. Rosy lips and teeth and a flip of dusty pecan hair.

"You are a God awful dancer. I am going to send you to camp," she said to me.

"What, with fifth graders?" I asked as I gyrated.

She stared. Her green eyes were of treacherous depth. My hobby was making her sit still while I looked within them, marveled at the pale emerald interior, circled by a ring of deeply patinated copper. When she would let me.

That was the summer of winning twenty-eight hundred bucks at the Silver Vein, on West 5th. It was so hot in Reno that year, your clothes would sweat right off you. We were twenty-two.

Those many Reno years were explosive, suffocating. To be so close to her family, I didn't know about that. My mom sent me birthday cards on the big ones, the fives and tens. The Finnegan's, their shake-shingle house not three blocks from our eventual apartment, celebrated days like Thursday, and through to Sunday; Budweiser, Jameson's and wine coolers, and weed plump with stems. I lapped it all up, breathed it deeply. You had to remember to come up for air sometimes.

I about died of sweating at Stylos Studio, a tarnished dance school next to a shitty check cashing place on Wells. She sent me to camp. Stupid stupid unripe eyes.

When I was nineteen, I stole a hundred sixty bucks out of the register at the Kwik-mart on 13th. I got fired of course, but the video camera behind the counter was busted so

they couldn't find their way to press charges. I spent it all on Conroy's flowers, a sampler of Whitman's chocolates, a bottle of Korbel. She loves champagne.

When we were thirty-seven, she told me that Korbel wasn't champagne and that champagne only comes from France and that anybody who knew anything about anything at all would know that. It was Christmas Eve and I didn't know anything about that. She walked out our apartment on Wheeler, deaf to my questions about the importance of what was and what wasn't champagne. Headed for the Finnegan home. I followed her with bare feet into the snow. I wouldn't let her go.

Fuck yes, there were fights. I slipped a finger into her cousin late late late one Thursday, both of us reckless on Bartles & Jaymes, bobbing in the stale steam of the plug-in jacuzzi, another Finnegan house party. She was inside, passed out on the couch, and her cousin was nineteen and I was twenty and didn't know how to dance. Even her mom breathed hard on my neck one family night, the both of us wedged into the pantry. Her mom, 53 when it happened, could've walked down a hundred main streets and not a single passer-by would've known she was 53. She never told anyone.

Lord were their fights. She never hit me, but she could yell and throw anything at hand. I was agile and didn't bruise easily.

Anyway we made it to forty-six and we never bought a house. Just a fever I never caught, I guess. Didn't know she had, either, before that Thanksgiving dinner, the first in a generation we'd had away from her family. I'd been into the wine, but that wasn't something new to set her off. Her eyes, though, shallow as tea cups. During dinner it got quiet, not thankful, and things came out. It amounted to roots, and where hers went and mine didn't.

A house seems a damn thing to be so hung up on. All those years.

I was never a Finnegan. She always would be.