

**Emily Bloch**  
from *The Elevator Version*

My father started going to therapy after Grandma died. By the time he left to live with Deborah, we were all in therapy—me, my mom, Julia. I don't know about Deborah.

Julia and I went to the same woman, Amy. She was in her thirties and pretty, with long, loose curls held back by a clip, and therapist glasses above the bump on her nose. Right after my father left in early June, Julia came to find me in my bedroom. I was lying on the bed, reading a book on dog training. "I just had an amazing realization with Amy," Julia said, pushing down on the mattress with the heel of her hand, the words coming fast. "It's so obvious. Amy thinks Mom is *depressed*. I mean, not depressed as in sad. Depressed as in clinical. As in needs to snap out of it."

"What's the difference between sad and clinical?"

"Clinical is when you don't do anything, when you mope around and don't care about what you're doing or wearing or if you're seeing anybody. It's when you don't care. When you don't *act*." She looked straight ahead. "Isn't that her? Don't you think?"

"She cares about some things," I said. "She has opinions."

"Yeah, but she doesn't do anything about them," Julia said, a little less sure. "Amy also said she thinks I should apply to schools on the West Coast."

Amy doesn't say anything like this to me. We sit in her white office and listen to the traffic from Union Turnpike. I tell her my dreams, and she writes them down carefully with a blue felt-tip pen. Sometimes she asks quiet, short questions, like, "What do you think of that?" When I'm there, sometimes I try to imagine Julia in the office instead of me, starting to talk before she sits down. If Amy cared about me, wouldn't she tell me things, too? But if she loved Julia, wouldn't she write down her dreams?

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Julia started dating my head counselor Evan a week after I quit the day camp. He called to check up on me—he had heard my lie about my dead grandmother—and when I said I had to get off the phone to walk Lucy, he asked if he could come, too. It was Sunday and he was bored, he said. How I'm telling it now it probably sounds like I got my hopes up and thought he was coming over because he liked me, but it didn't even cross my mind. He said he liked dogs, and that made more sense than anything else. He drove from Long Island, so I had to walk Lucy before he got there anyway, and when I buzzed him up, suddenly Julia was in the living room, reading a magazine. I started to introduce them and then remembered that they had seen each other once before, when Julia had brought my wallet on the first day of camp. In the living room, Julia was wearing short white shorts and a green tank top, and her big frizzy hair was pulled into pigtails. Evan looked down at her—he was a lot taller—and fidgeted in his jeans.

I started showing up late to lunches with my father. The first time, only about ten minutes. But then it kept getting worse. I'd be on the F train, my heart beating when I realized I was only at Roosevelt Avenue—a good twenty minutes away from the city—at the exact moment I told him I'd be in the restaurant. He didn't get mad, or at least he didn't show it. But once, in mid-July, I was really late. I ran from the subway to the French restaurant. I felt very slow and fat, though when I saw a flash of my reflection in a dry cleaner's windows, I realized I somehow looked good, really tall, with my hair flying behind me showing some of its blonde, and my long gauzy hippie skirt entwined between my legs making me seem tragic, like in a movie about the sixties. Maybe I was running to save somebody's life, I thought, or to stop someone from committing an injustice. Important

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things happen in the world, big things, I suddenly felt, and my running somehow felt a part of them. I had my dad's old paperback of *Franny and Zooey* with me, and I clutched it to me as I ran. I hadn't really read it on the train, just held it, and stared at the ads for Snapple and night courses at the New School. The book made me feel better about being forty-five minutes late—at least he'll see I have it, I thought.

The cold air of the restaurant hit me in the bar. I looked past the maitre d' and found my father at a central table. I couldn't tell he was furious until I got to my seat, and he didn't get up to greet me. He was jiggling his leg under the table, his hands palms down on either side of his place setting. His brown curls were still fuller than they'd been before he left, but the scowl on his face didn't match. He looked old again, his old self, and I remembered him sitting in his office for hours on the weekend, opera music blaring, all of us camped out in our own areas of the apartment, imitating his bad mood.

I started to speak, trying to hold his book out in front of me for him to notice, but he cut me off. "I'm sick of this," he hissed. "I don't know if it's you, or your mother, or what's going on here, but you make me look and feel like a fool, sitting here for almost an hour, and guess what, now I have to go. Because that's the real world, isn't it? The real world is I have work to do—" he threw his cloth napkin onto the table "—and cannot spend my day being your little beggar boy. Your sister seems to understand the real world, but somehow I must have failed you because you do not. Here--" he said, standing up, opening his wallet. He dropped two twenties down on the table. "Have a nice lunch. At least you have some decent reading material."

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Two weeks later, he called to apologize. He also told me that he was going to marry Deborah. That was why he was so upset, he said. He had wanted to tell me that day at lunch, in a special way. I didn't ask how he was going to do that.