

Vertalersvakschool Engels 2B, les 23 november 2018

Vertaling van een aantal lange zinnen uit T.C. Boyle, 'Balto' uit de bundel *Wild Child*

Vertaler: Jorrit Bosma – Tweede versie

Bladzijde 1, regel 1

Er waren twee soorten waarheden, heilzame waarheden en pijnlijke. Dat was wat haar vaders advocaat haar aan het uitleggen was, en ze luisterde wel, ze deed haar best, terwijl haar gezicht als een glanzend halvemaanetje oplichtte omdat het zonlicht er via de gele keukenmuur op scheen, maar het viel haar zwaar.

Bladzijde 1, regel 6

Zwaar ook omdat haar vader erbij zat, op een kruk aan de keukenbar, langzaam drinkend uit een kop, geen koffie, zeker geen koffie.

Bladzijde 2, regel 20

Die dag, de dag van het voorval – of ongeval, hij zou het nu waarschijnlijk een ongeval moeten noemen – had hij met Marcy afgesproken voor de lunch in een restaurant aan de jachthaven waar je buiten kon zitten kijken hoe de zonnestralen weerkaatst werden door de scheepsmasten die deinden op het water en hoe het licht brak en samenkwam en weer brak. Het was een van zijn lievelingsplekjes in de stad, een van zijn lievelingsplekjes waar dan ook. Hoe gebukt hij ook ging onder stress, hoe murw hij ook was geslagen door het leven en door elke klus en deadline die op leken te zwellen tot ongekende proporties zodat twintig mensen ze zelfs niet aan zouden kunnen – een team, een leger – altijd had deze plek, deze tafel in de hoek van het terras met uitzicht over een woud van masten, over de verbleekte houten loopplanken, over de gloedvolle sikkel van de haven omkranst door de bergen, een kalmerend effect op hem. Dat, en ook de net-niet-te-koude sauvignon blanc uit de streek die ze hier per glas serveerden. Hij was begonnen aan zijn tweede toen Marcy de trap op kwam, heupwiegend op haar hakken als een model op de catwalk, en over het hele terras zweefde tot aan zijn tafeltje.

Bladzijde 3, regel 15

Ze zette haar glas neer en liet een kort lachje ontsnappen dat klonk als twee zangnootjes van een vogel, een lachje dat hem helemaal betoverde, en hij maakte zich nu niet meer druk over zijn werk, werk of wat dan ook, en daar was de fles in de ijsemmer, met wijn zo koud als de kelder waar hij vandaan kwam.

Bladzijde 3, regel 25

Ze keek even over haar schouder voordat ze een sigaret tevoorschijn haalde, het was hier tenslotte Californië, en toen ze zich vooroverboog om hem aan te steken viel haar haar over haar gezicht. Met een glimlachje kwam ze overeind, en zodra ze uitblies was de rook al weggerukt van haar mond om te vervliegen in de wind. Discussie gesloten.

Bladzijde 3, regel 35

Ze was opgegroeid in Syracuse, in een slaperig voorstadsje, en haar accent, met de A afgevlakt zodat zijn naam klonk als 'lelaan' in plaats van Alan, vond hij zo geweldig, het viel zo uit de toon voor iemand die er zo, nou ja, het flapte eruit voordat hij er erg in had, die er zo 'exotisch' uitzag als zij.

Bladzijde 4, regel 29

Ze was klaar met wiskunde en zat te werken aan een opstel over Aaron Burr voor haar geschiedenisleraar, Compson, tot ze opstond om naar de keuken te gaan voor een glas sap of misschien wel warme chocolademelk uit de magnetron, en ze zou pas weten wat ze wilde wanneer ze in de keuken zou staan aan het granieten aanrecht dat glansde onder de verzonken spotjes, voor de wijd openstaande deur van de koelkast.

Bladzijde 4, regel 36

Haar vader zat er nog, languit op de bank met een boek, een wedstrijd op tv, zonder geluid, rugby of honkbal, met op de achtergrond het doffe gedreun van zijn muziek.

Bladzijde 5, regel 17

'Zeker weten?' Zijn stem klonk loom en dik, alsof hij niet voort werd gebracht door trillingen van zijn stembanden, waarbij de lucht door zijn strottenhoofd stroomde zoals in haar biologieboek, nee, hij leek wel gemaakt te zijn van iets dat logger was, massiever.

Bladzijde 5, regel 24

Ze nam kleine slokjes van haar chocolademelk en las nu voor Engels een verhaal van William Faulkner, die met furieuze ogen en een getemde haardos op een versteende foto in haar studieboek stond, toen ze hoorde hoe haar vaders stem golvend door de gang stroomde, eerst mompelend, dan juist getergd en opzweepend, dan weer dikkig en met dubbele tong.

Bladzijde 12, regel 26

Dat waren letterlijk zijn woorden, 'Ik wil er zeker van zijn dat we op een lijn zitten', terwijl hij dreigend boven haar en haar vader uittorende en verbeterde leunde op het glimmende houten hekwerk, waaronder zijn schoenen met de vloer leken te wedijveren om wie het glanzendst was opgewreven, en onwillekeurig stelde ze zich voor hoe een Mexicaanse knul, afgehaakt van school, zich aan het uitsloven was op die schoenen terwijl Apodaca in een hoge stoel zat met een leren rugleuning, zijn voeten op een smetteloze stalen steun.

BALTO

by T.C. BOYLE

There were two kinds of truths, good truths and hurtful ones. That was what her father's attorney was telling her, and she was listening, doing her best, her face a small glazed crescent of light where the sun glanced off the yellow kitchen wall to illuminate her, but it was hard. Hard because it was a weekday, after school, and this was her free time, her chance to breeze into the 7-Eleven or Instant Message her friends before dinner and homework closed the day down. **Hard too because her father was there, sitting on a stool at the kitchen counter, sipping something out of a mug, not coffee, definitely not coffee.** His face was soft, the lines at the corners of his eyes nearly erased in the gentle spill of light—his *crow's-feet*, and how she loved that word, as if the bird's scaly claws had taken hold there like something out of a horror story, Edgar Allen Poe, the Raven, Nevermore, but wasn't a raven different from a crow and why not call them raven's-feet? Or hawk's-feet? People could have a hawk's nose—they always did in stories—but they had crow's-feet, and that didn't make any sense at all.

"Angelle," the attorney said—*Mr. Apodaca*—and the sound of her own name startled her, "are you listening to me?"

She nodded her head. And because that didn't seem enough, she spoke up too. "Yes," she said, but her voice sounded strange in her ears, as if somebody else were speaking for her.

"Good," he said, "good," leaning into the table so that his big moist dog's eyes settled on her with a baleful look. "Because this is very important, I don't have to stress that—"

He waited for her to nod again before going on.

"There are two kinds of truths," he repeated, "just like lies. There are bad lies, we all know that, lies meant to cheat and deceive, and then there are white lies, little fibs that don't really hurt anybody"—he blew out a soft puff of air, as if he were just stepping into a hot tub—"and might actually do good. Do you understand what I'm saying?"

She held herself perfectly still. Of course she understood—he was treating her like a nine-year-old, like her sister, and she was twelve, almost thirteen, and this was an act of rebellion, to hold herself there, not answering, not nodding, not even blinking her eyes.

"Like in this case," he went on, "your father's case, I mean. You've seen TV, the movies. The judge asks you for the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth, and you'll swear to it, everybody does—your father, me, anybody before the court." He had a mug too, one she recognized from her mother's college days—B.U., it said in thick red letters, *Boston University*—but there was coffee in his, or there had been. Now he just

pushed it around the table as if it were a chess piece and he couldn't decide where to play it. "All I want you to remember—and your father wants this too, or no, he needs it, needs you to pay attention—is that there are good truths and bad truths, that's all. And your memory only serves to a point; I mean, who's to say what really happened, because everybody has
5 their own version, that woman jogger, the boy on the bike—and the D.A., the District Attorney, he's the one who might ask you what happened that day, just him and me, that's all. Don't you worry about anything."

But she was worried, because Mr. Apodaca was there in the first place, with his perfect suit and perfect tie and his doggy eyes, and because her father had been handcuffed along
10 the side of the road and taken to jail and the car had been impounded, which meant nobody could use it, not her father or her mother when she came back from France or Dolores the maid or Allie the au pair. There was all that, but there was something else too, something in her father's look and the attorney's sugary tones that hardened her: they were talking down to her. Talking down to her as if she had no more sense than her little sister. And she did.
15 She did.

20 **That day, the day of the incident—or accident, he'd have to call it an accident now—he'd met Marcy for lunch at a restaurant down by the marina where you could sit outside and watch the way the sun struck the masts of the ships as they rocked on the tide and the light shattered and regrouped and shattered again. It was one of his**
25 **favorite spots in town—one of his favorite spots, period. No matter how overburdened he felt, no matter how life beat him down and every task and deadline seemed to swell up out of all proportion so that twenty people couldn't have dealt with it all—a team, an army—this place, this table in the far corner of the deck overlooking the jungle of**
30 **masts, the bleached wooden catwalks, the glowing arc of the harbor and the mountains that framed it, always had a calming effect on him. That and the just-this-side-of-too-cold local sauvignon blanc they served by the glass. He was working on his second when Marcy came up the stairs, swaying over her heels like a model on the**
35 **runway, and glided down the length of the deck to join him.** She gave him an uncomplicated smile, a smile that lit her eyes and acknowledged everything—the day, the locale, the sun and the breeze and the clean pounded smell of the ocean and him perched there in the middle of it all—and bent to kiss him before easing herself into the chair beside

him. "That looks nice," she said, referring to the wine dense as struck gold in the glass before him, and held up a finger for the waiter.

And what did they talk about? Little things. Her work, the pair of shoes she'd bought and returned and then bought all over again, the movie they'd seen two nights ago—the last
5 time they'd been together—and how she still couldn't believe he liked that ending. "It's not that it was cheesy," she said, and here was her wine and should they get a bottle, yeah, sure, a bottle, why not?, "and it was, but just that I didn't believe it."

"Didn't believe what—that the husband would take her back?"

"No," she said. "Or yes. It's idiotic. But what do you expect from a French movie?
10 They always have these slinky-looking heroines in their thirties—"

"Or forties."

"—with great legs and mascara out of, I don't know, a Kiss revival, and then even though they're married to the greatest guy in the world they feel unfulfilled and they go out and fuck the whole village, starting with the butcher."

"Juliette Binoche," he said. He was feeling the wine. Feeling good.
15

"Yeah, right. Even though it wasn't her, it could have been. Should have been. Has been in every French movie but this one for the past what, twenty years?" **She put down her glass and let out a short two-note laugh that was like birdsong, a laugh that entranced him, and he wasn't worried about work now, not work or anything else, and here was the bottle in the bucket, the wine cold as the cellar it came from.** "And
20 then the whole village comes out and applauds her at the end for staying true to her romantic ideals—and the *husband*, Jesus."

Nothing could irritate him. Nothing could touch him. He was in love, the pelicans were gliding over the belly of the bay and her eyes were lewd and beautiful and pleased with
25 themselves, but he had to pull the stopper here for just a minute. "Martine's not like that," he said. "I'm not like that."

She looked over her shoulder before digging out a cigarette—this was California, after all—and when she bent to light it her hair fell across her face. She came up smiling, the smoke snatched away from her lips and neutralized on the breeze the moment she exhaled. Discussion over.
30

Marcy was twenty-eight, educated at Berkeley, and she and her sister had opened an Artists' Supply shop on a side street downtown. She'd been a double major in art and film. She rode a bike to work. She was Asian. Or Chinese, she corrected him. Of Chinese descent anyway. Her family, as she'd informed him on the first date with enough irony in her voice
35 to foreground and bury the topic at the same time, went back four generations to the honorable great grandfather who'd smuggled himself across the Pacific inside a clichéd flour barrel hidden in the clichéd hold of a clichéd merchant ship. **She'd grown up in**

Syracuse, in a suburban development, and her accent—the a's flattened so that his name came out *Eelan* rather than Alan—just killed him, so incongruous coming from someone, as, well—the words out of his mouth before he knew what he was saying—as *exotic-looking as her*. And then, because he couldn't read her expression—had he gone too far?—he told her he was impressed because he only went back three generations, his grandfather having come over from Cork, but if it was in a barrel it would be full of whiskey. "And Martine's from Paris," he'd added. "But you knew that already, didn't you?"

The bottle was half-gone by the time they ordered—and there was no hurry, no hurry at all, because they were both taking the afternoon off, and no argument—and when the food came they looked at one another for just the briefest fleeting particle of a moment before he ordered a second bottle. And then they were eating and everything slowed down until all of creation seemed to come into focus in a new way. He sipped the wine, chewed, looked into her unparalleled eyes and felt the sun lay a hand across his shoulders, and in a sudden blaze of apprehension he glanced up at the gull that appeared on the railing behind her and saw the way the breeze touched its feathers and the sun whitened its breast till there was nothing brighter and more perfect in the world—this creature, his fellow creature, and he was here to see it. He wanted to tell Marcy about it, about the miracle of the moment, the layers peeled back, revelatory, joyous, but instead he reached over to top off her glass and said, "So tell me about the shoes."

Later, after Mr. Apodaca had backed out of the driveway in his little white convertible with the Mercedes sign emblazoned on the front of it and the afternoon melted away in a slurry of phone calls and messages—*OMG! Chilty likes Alex Turtieff, can you believe it?*—Dolores made them chilé rellenos with carrot and jícama sticks and ice cream for dessert. Then Allie quizzed her and Lisette over their homework until the house fell quiet and all she could hear was the faint pulse of her father's music from the family room. **She'd done her math and was working on a report about Aaron Burr for her history teacher, Mr. Compson, when she got up and went to the kitchen for a glass of juice or maybe hot chocolate in the microwave—and she wouldn't know which till she was standing there in the kitchen with the recessed lights glowing over the stone countertops and the refrigerator door open wide.** She wasn't thinking about anything in particular—Aaron Burr was behind her now, upstairs, on her desk—and when she passed the archway to the

family room the flash of the TV screen caught her eye and she paused a moment. **Her father was there still, stretched out on the couch with a book, the TV muted and some game on, football, baseball, and the low snarl of his music in the background.** His face had that blank absorbed look he got while reading and sometimes when he was just sitting there staring across the room or out the window at nothing, and he had the mug cradled in one hand, balanced on his chest beside the book.

He'd sat with them over dinner, but he hadn't eaten—he was going out later, he told her. For dinner. A late dinner. He didn't say who with, but she knew it was the Asian woman. Marcy. She'd seen her exactly twice, from behind the window of her car, and Marcy had waved at her both times, a little curl of the fingers and a flash of the palm. There was an Asian girl in her class—she was Chinese—and her name was Xuan. That seemed right for an Asian girl, Xuan. Different. A name that said who she was and where she was from, far away, a whole ocean away. But Marcy? She didn't think so.

"Hey," her father said, lifting his head to peer over the butt of the couch, and she realized she'd been standing there watching him, "what's up? Homework done? Need any help? How about that essay—want me to proof that essay for you? What's it on, Madison? Or Burr. Burr, right?"

"That's okay."

"You sure?" His voice was slow and compacted, as if it wasn't composed of vibrations of the vocal cords, the air passing through the larynx like in her science book, but made of something heavier, denser. He would be taking a taxi tonight, she could see that, and then maybe she—*Marcy*—would drive him back home. "Because I could do it, no problem. I've got"—and she watched him lift his watch to his face and rotate his wrist—"half an hour or so, forty-five minutes."

"That's okay," she said.

She was sipping her hot chocolate and reading a story for English by William Faulkner, the author's picture in her textbook a freeze frame of furious eyes and conquered hair, when she heard her father's voice riding a current down the hall, now murmurous, now pinched and electric, then dense and sluggish all over again. It took her a minute: he was reading *Lisette* her bedtime story. The house was utterly still and she held her breath, listening, till all of a sudden she could make out the words. He was reading *Balto*, a story she'd loved when she was little, when she was *Lisette's* age, and as his voice came to her down the hall she could picture the illustrations: *Balto*, the lead dog of the sled team, radiating light from a sunburst on his chest and the snowstorm like a monstrous hand closing over him, the team fighting through the Alaskan wind and ice and temperatures of forty below zero to deliver serum to the sick children in Nome—and those children would die if *Balto* didn't get through. Diphtheria. It was a diphtheria epidemic and the only plane

available was broken down—or no, it had been dismantled for the winter. What's diphtheria? she'd asked her father, and he'd gone to the shelf and pulled down the encyclopedia to give her the answer, and that was heroic in itself, because as he settled back onto her bed, Lisette snuggled up beside her and rain at the windows and the bedside lamp the only thing between them and darkness absolute, he'd said, You see, there's everything in books, everything you could ever want.

Balto's paws were bleeding. The ice froze between his toes. The other dogs kept holding back, but he was the lead dog and he turned on them and snarled, fought them just to keep them in their traces, to keep them going. Balto. With his harnessed shoulders and shaggy head and the furious unconquerable will that drove him all through that day and into the night that was so black there was no way of telling if they were on the trail or not.

Now, as she sat poised at the edge of her bed, listening to Lisette's silence and her father's limping voice, she waited for her sister to pipe up in her breathy little baby squeak and frame the inevitable questions: *Dad, Dad, how cold is forty below?* And: *Dad, what's diphtheria?*

The sun had crept imperceptibly across the deck, fingering the cracks in the varnished floorboards and easing up the low brass rail Marcy was using as a backrest. She was leaning into it, the rail, her chair tipped back, her elbows splayed behind her and her legs stretched out to catch the sun, shapely legs, stunning legs, legs long and burnished and firm, legs that made him think of the rest of her and the way she was in bed. There was a scar just under the swell of her left kneecap, the flesh annealed in an irregular oval as if it had been burned or scarified, and he'd never noticed that before. Well, he was in a new place, half a glass each left of the second bottle and the world sprung to life in the fullness of its detail, everything sharpened, in focus, as if he'd needed glasses all these years and just clapped them on. The gull was gone but it had been special, a very special gull, and there were sparrows now, or wrens, hopping along the floor in little streaks of color, snatching up a crumb of this or that and then hurtling away over the rail as if they'd been launched. He was thinking he didn't want any more wine—two bottles was plenty—but maybe something to cap off the afternoon, a cognac maybe, just one.

She'd been talking about one of the girls who worked for her, a girl he'd seen a couple of times, nineteen, soft-faced and pretty, and how she—her name was Bettina—was living the party life, every night at the clubs, and how thin she was.

"Cocaine?" he wondered, and she shrugged. "Has it affected her work?"

"No," she said, "not yet, anyway." And then she went on to qualify that with a litany of lateness in the morning, hyper behavior after lunch and doctor's appointments, too many doctor's appointments. He waited a moment, watching her mouth and tongue, the beautiful unspooling way the words dropped from her lips, before he reached down and ran a finger
5 over the blemish below her kneecap. "You have a scar," he said.

She looked at her knee as if she wasn't aware it was attached to her, then withdrew her leg momentarily to scrutinize it before giving it back to the sun and the deck and the waiting touch of his hand. "Oh, that?" she said. "That's from when I was a kid."

"A burn or what?"

10 "Bicycle." She teased the syllables out, slow and sure.

His hand was on her knee, the warmth of the contact, and he rubbed the spot a moment before straightening up in the chair and draining his glass. "Looks like a burn," he said.

"Nope. Just fell in the street." She let out that laugh again and he drank it in. "You should've seen my training wheels—or the one of them. It was as flat"—*flaat*—"as if a
15 truck had run me over."

Her eyes flickered with the lingering seep of the memory and they both took a moment to picture it, the little girl with the wheel collapsed under her and the scraped knee—or it had to have been worse than that, punctured, shredded—and he didn't think of Lisette or Angelle, not yet, because he was deep into the drift of the day, so deep there was nothing
20 else but this deck and this slow sweet sun and the gull that was gone now. "You want something else?" he heard himself say. "Maybe a Remy, just to cap it off? I mean, I'm wined out, but just, I don't know, a taste of cognac?"

"Sure," she said, "why not?" and she didn't look at her watch and he didn't look at his either.

25 And then the waiter was there with two snifters and a little square of dark chocolate for each of them, compliments of the house. *Snifter*, he was thinking as he revolved the glass in his hand, what a perfect designation for the thing, a name that spoke to function, and he said it aloud, "Isn't it great that they have things like snifters, so you can stick your nose in it and sniff? And plus, it's named for what it is, unlike, say, a napkin or a fork. You don't
30 nap napkins or fork forks, right?"

"Yeah," she said, and the sun had leveled on her hair now, picking out the highlights and illuminating the lobe of one ear, "I guess. But I was telling you about Bettina? Did you know that guy she picked up I told you about—not the boyfriend, but the one-night stand? He got her pregnant."

35 The waiter drifted by then, college kid, hair in his eyes, and asked if there'd be anything else. It was then that he thought to check his watch and the first little pulse of alarm began to make itself felt somewhere deep in the quiet lagoon of his brain: *Angelle*,

the alarm said. *Lisette*. They had to be picked up at school after soccer practice every Wednesday because Wednesday was Allie's day off and Martine wasn't there to do it. Martine was in Paris, doing whatever she pleased. That much was clear. And today—today was Wednesday.

5

10 Angelle remembered waiting for him longer than usual that day. He'd been late before—he was almost always late, because of work, because he had such a hectic schedule—but this time she'd already got through half her homework, the blue backpack canted away from her and her notebook spread open across her knees as she sat at the curb, and still he wasn't there. The sun had sunk into the trees across the street and she felt a chill where she'd
15 sweated through her shorts and T-shirt at soccer. Lisette's team had finished before hers and for a while her sister had sat beside her, drawing big x's and o's in two different colors on a sheet of loose-leaf paper, but she'd got bored and run off to play on the swings with two other kids whose parents were late.

Every few minutes a car would round the turn at the top of the street, and her eyes
20 would jump to it, but it wasn't theirs. She watched a black SUV pull up in front of the school and saw Dani Mead and Sarah Schuster burst through the doors, laughing, their backpacks riding up off their shoulders and their hair swaying back and forth as they slid into the cavernous back seat and the door slammed shut. The car's brake lights flashed and then it rolled slowly out of the parking lot and into the street, and she watched it till it
25 disappeared round the corner. He was always working, she knew that, trying to dig himself out from under all the work he had piled up—that was his phrase, *dig himself out*, and she pictured him in his office surrounded by towering stacks of papers, papers like the Leaning Tower of Pisa, and a shovel in his hands as if he were one of those men in the orange jackets bent over a hole in the road—but still, she felt impatient. Felt cold. Hungry. And
30 where was he?

Finally, after the last two kids had been picked up by their mothers and the sun reduced to a streak that ran across the tile roof of the school and up into the crowns of the palms behind it, after Lisette had come back to sit on the curb and whine and pout and complain like the baby she was (*He's just drunk, I bet that's it, just drunk like mom said*) and she had
35 to tell her she didn't know what she was talking about, there he was. Lisette saw the car first. It appeared at the top of the street like a mirage, coming so slowly round the turn it might have been rolling under its own power, with nobody in it, and Angelle remembered

what her father had told her about always setting the handbrake, always, no matter what. She hadn't really wanted a lesson—she'd have to be sixteen for that—but they were up in the mountains, at the summer cabin, just after her mother had left for France, and there was nobody around. "You're a big girl," he'd told her, and she was, tall for her age—people
5 always mistook her for an eighth-grader or even a freshman. "Go ahead, it's easy," he told her. "Like bumper cars. Only you don't bump anything." And she'd laughed and he laughed and she got behind the wheel with him guiding her and her heart was pounding till she thought she was going to lift right out of the seat. Everything looked different through the windshield, yellow spots and dirt, the world wrapped in a bubble. The sun was in her
10 eyes. The road was a black river, oozing through the dried-out weeds, the trees looming and receding as if a wave had passed through them. And the car crept down the road the way it was creeping now. Too slow. Much too slow.

When her father pulled up to the curb, she saw right away that something was wrong. He was smiling at them, or trying to smile, but his face was too heavy, his face weighed a
15 thousand tons, carved of rock like the faces of the presidents on Mount Rushmore, and it distorted the smile till it was more like a grimace. A flare of anger rose in her—Lisette was right—and then it died away and she was scared. Just scared.

"Sorry," he murmured, "sorry I'm late, I—" and he didn't finish the thought or excuse or whatever it was because he was pushing open the door now, the driver's door, and
20 pulling himself out onto the pavement. He took a minute to remove his sunglasses and polish them on the tail of his shirt before leaning heavily against the side of the car. He gave her a weak smile—half a smile, not even half—and carefully fitted them back over his ears, though it was too dark for sunglasses, anybody could see that. Plus, these were his old sunglasses—two shining blue discs in wire frames that made his eyes disappear—which
25 meant that he must have lost his good ones, the ones that had cost him two hundred and fifty dollars on sale at the Sunglass Hut. "Listen," he said, as Lisette pulled open the rear door and flung her backpack across the seat, "I just—I forgot the time, is all. I'm sorry. I am. I really am."

She gave him a look that was meant to burn into him, to make him feel what she was
30 feeling, but she couldn't tell if he was looking at her or not. "We've been sitting here since four," she said, and she heard the hurt and accusation in her own voice. She pulled open the other door, the one right beside him, because she was going to sit in back as a demonstration of her disapproval—they'd both sit in back, she and Lisette, and nobody up front—when he stopped her with a gesture, reaching out suddenly to brush the hair away
35 from her face.

"You've got to help me out here," he said, and a pleading tone had come into his voice. "Because"—the words were stalling, congealing, sticking in his throat—"because, hey, why lie, huh? I wouldn't lie to you."

5 The sun faded. A car went up the street. There was a boy on a bicycle, a boy she knew, and he gave her a look as he cruised past, the wheels a blur.

"I was, I had lunch with Marcy, because, well, you know how hard I've been—and I just needed to kick back, you know? Everybody does. It's no sin." A pause, his hand going to his pocket and then back to her hair again. "And we had some wine. Some wine with lunch." He gazed off down the street then, as if he were looking for the tapering long-
10 necked green bottles the wine had come in, as if he were going to produce them for evidence.

She just stood there staring at him, her jaw set, but she let his hand fall to her shoulder and give her a squeeze, the sort of squeeze he gave her when he was proud of her, when she got an A on a test or cleaned up the dishes all by herself without anybody asking.

15 "I know this is terrible," he was saying, "I mean I hate to do this, I hate to . . . but Angelle, I'm asking you just this once, because the thing is?"—and here he tugged down the little blue discs so that she could see the dull sheen of his eyes focused on her—"I don't think I can drive."

20

When the valet brought the car round, the strangest thing happened, a little lapse, and it was
25 because he wasn't paying attention. He was distracted by Marcy in her low-slung Miata with the top down, the redness of it, a sleek thing, pin your ears back and fly, Marcy wheeling out of the lot with a wave and two fingers kissed to her lips, her hair lifting on the breeze. And there was the attendant, another college kid, shorter and darker than the one upstairs frowning over the tip but with the same haircut, as if they'd both been to the same
30 barber or stylist or whatever, and the attendant had said something to him—*Your car, sir; here's your car, sir*—and the strange thing was that for a second there he didn't recognize it. Thought the kid was trying to put something over on him. Was this his car? Was this the sort of thing he'd own? This mud-splattered charcoal-gray SUV with the seriously depleted tires? And that dent in the front fender, the knee-high scrape that ran the length of the body
35 as if some metallic claw had caught hold of it? Was this some kind of trick?

"Sir?"

"Yeah," he'd said, staring up into the sky now, and where were his shades? "Yeah, what? What do you want?"

The smallest beat. "Your car. Sir."

5 And then it all came clear to him the way these things do, and he flipped open his wallet to extract two singles—finger-softened money, money as soft and pliable as felt—and the valet accepted them and he was in the car, looking to connect the male end of the seatbelt to the female, and where was the damned thing? There was still a sliver of sun cutting in low over the ocean and he dug into the glove compartment for his old sunglasses, the emergency pair, because the new ones were someplace else altogether, apparently, and
10 not in his pocket and not on the cord round his neck, and then he had them fitted over his ears and the radio was playing something with some real thump to it and he was rolling on out of the lot, looking to merge with the traffic on the boulevard.

That was when everything turned hard-edged and he knew he was drunk. He waited too long to merge—too cautious, too tentative—and the driver behind him laid on the horn and
15 he had no choice but to give him the finger and he might have leaned his head out the window and barked something too, but the car came to life beneath him and somebody swerved wide and he was out in traffic. If he was thinking anything at all it probably had to do with his last DUI, which had come out of nowhere when he wasn't even that drunk, or maybe not drunk at all. He'd been coming back from Johnny's Rib Shack after working
20 late, gnawing at a rib, a beer open between his legs, and he came down the slope beneath the underpass where you make a left to turn onto the freeway ramp and he was watching the light and didn't see the mustard-colored Volvo stopped there in front of him until it was too late. And he was so upset with himself—and not just himself, but the world at large and the way it presented these problems to him, these impediments, the unforeseen and the
25 unexpected just laid out there in front of him as if it were some kind of conspiracy—that he got out of the car, the radiator crushed and hissing and beer pissed all over his lap, and shouted "All right, so sue me!" at the dazed woman behind the wheel of the other car. But that wasn't going to happen now. Nothing was going to happen now.

The trees rolled by, people crossed at the crosswalk, lights turned yellow and then red
30 and then green, and he was doing fine, just sailing, thinking he'd take the girls out for burritos or In-N-Out burgers on the way home, when a cop passed him going in the other direction and his heart froze like a block of ice and then thawed instantaneously, hammering so hard he thought it would punch right through his chest. *Signal, Signal*, he told himself, keeping his eyes on the rearview, and he did, he signaled and made the first
35 turn, a road he'd never been on before, and then he made the next turn after that, and the next, and when he looked up again he had no idea where he was.

Which was another reason why he was late, and there was Angelle giving him that hard cold judgmental look—her mother’s look exactly—because she was perfect, she was dutiful and put-upon and the single best kid in the world, in the history of the world, and he was a fuck-up, pure and simple. It was wrong, what he asked her to do, but it happened
5 nonetheless, and he guided her through each step, a straight shot on the way home, two and a half miles, that was all, and forget stopping at In-N-Out, they’d just go home and have a pizza delivered. He remembered going on in that vein, “Don’t you girls want pizza tonight? Huh, Lisette? Peppers and onions? And those little roasted artichokes? Or maybe you’d prefer wormheads, mashed wormheads?”—leaning over the seat to cajole her, make it all
10 right and take the tightness out of her face, and he didn’t see the boy on the bicycle, didn’t know anything about him until Angelle let out a choked little cry and there was the heart-stopping thump of something glancing off the fender.

15

The courtroom smelled of wax, the same kind of wax they used on the floors at school, sweet and acrid at the same time, a smell that was almost comforting in its familiarity. But
20 she wasn’t at school—she’d been excused for the morning—and she wasn’t here to be comforted or to feel comfortable either. She was here to listen to Mr. Apodaca and the judge and the D.A. and the members of the jury decide her father’s case and to testify in his behalf, tell what she knew, tell a kind of truth that wasn’t maybe whole and pure but necessary, a necessary truth. That was what Mr. Apodaca was calling it now, *necessary*,
25 and she’d sat with him and her father in one of the unused rooms off the main corridor—another courtroom—while he went over the whole business one more time for her, just to be sure she understood.

Her father had held her hand on the way in and he sat beside her on one of the wooden benches as his attorney went over the details of that day after school, because he wanted to
30 make sure they were all on the same page. **Those were his words exactly—“I want to make sure we’re all on the same page on this”—as he loomed over her and her father, bracing himself on the gleaming wooden rail, his shoes competing with the floor for the brilliance of their shine, and she couldn’t help picturing some Mexican boy, some dropout from the high school, laboring over those shoes while Mr. Apodaca sat high in a leather-backed chair, his feet in the stainless steel stirrups.** She pictured him behind
35 his newspaper, looking stern, or going over his brief, the details, *these* details. When he was through, when he’d gone through everything, minute by minute, gesture by gesture,

coaching her, quizzing her—"And what did he say? What did you say?"—he asked her father if he could have a minute alone with her.

That was when her father gave her hand a final squeeze and then dropped it and got up from the bench. He was wearing a new suit, a navy so dark and severe it made his skin look like raw dough, and he'd had his hair cut so tight round the ears it was as if a machine had been at work there, an edger or a riding mower like the one they used on the soccer field at school, only in miniature, and for an instant she imagined it, tiny people like in *Gulliver's Travels*, buzzing round her father's ears with their mowers and clippers and edgers. The tie he was wearing was the most boring one he owned, a blue fading to black, with no design, not even a stripe. His face was heavy, his crow's-feet right there for all the world to see—gouges, tears, slits, a butcher's shop of carved and abused skin—and for the first time she noticed the small gray dollop of loose flesh under his chin. It made him look old, worn-out, past his prime, as if he weren't the hero anymore but playing the hero's best friend, the one who never gets the girl and never gets the job. And what role was she playing? The star. She was the star here, and the more the attorney talked on and the heavier her father's face got, the more it came home to her.

Mr. Apodaca said nothing, just let the silence hang in the room till the memory of her father's footsteps had faded. Then he leaned over the back of the bench directly in front of her, the great seal of the State of California framed over the dais behind him, and he squeezed his eyes shut a moment so that when he opened them and fixed her with his gaze, there were tears there. Or the appearance of tears. His eyelashes were moist and the moistness picked each of them out individually until all she could think of was the stalks of cane against the fence in the back corner of the yard. "I want you to listen very carefully to what I'm about to say, Angelle," he breathed, his voice so soft and constricted it was like the sound of the air being let out of a tire. "Because this concerns you and your sister. It could affect your whole life."

Another pause. Her stomach was crawling. She didn't want to say anything but he held the pause so long she had to bow her head and say, "Yeah. Yeah, I know."

And then suddenly, without warning, his voice was lashing out at her: "But you don't know it. Do you know what's a stake here? Do you really?"

"No," she said, and it was a whisper.

"Your father is going to plead no contest to the charge of driving under the influence. He was wrong, he admits it. And they'll take away his driving privileges and he'll have to go to counseling and find someone to drive you and your sister to school, and I don't mean to minimize that, that's very serious, but here's the thing you may not know." He held her eyes, though she wanted to look away. "The second charge is child endangerment, not for the boy on the bike, who barely even scraped a knee, luckily, luckily, and whose parents

have already agreed to a settlement, but for you, for allowing you to do what you did. And do you know what will happen if the jury finds him guilty on that charge?"

5 She didn't know what was coming, not exactly, but the tone of what he was conveying—dark, ominous, fulminating with anger and the threat about to be revealed in the very next breath—made her feel small. And scared. Definitely scared. She shook her head.

10 "They'll take you and Lisette away from him." He clenched both hands, pushed himself up from the rail and turned as if to pace off down the aisle in front of her, as if he was disgusted with the whole thing and had no more to say. But then, suddenly, he swung round on her with a furious twist of his shoulders and a hard accusatory stab of his balled-up right hand and a single rigid forefinger. "And no," he said, barely contained, barely able to keep his voice level, "in answer to your unasked question or objection or whatever you want to call it, your mother's not coming back for you, not now, maybe not ever."

15

Was he ashamed? Was he humiliated? Did he have to stop drinking and get his life in order? Yes, yes and yes. But as he sat there in the courtroom beside Jerry Apodaca at eleven-thirty in the morning, the high arched windows pregnant with light and his daughter, Marcy, Dolores and the solemn-faced au pair sitting shoulder-to-shoulder on the gleaming wooden bench behind him, there was a flask in his inside pocket and the faint burning pulse of single-malt scotch rode his veins. He'd taken a pull from it in the men's room not ten minutes ago, just to steady himself, and then he'd rinsed out his mouth and ground half a dozen tic-tacs between his teeth to knock down any trace of alcohol on his breath. Jerry would have been furious with him if he so much as suspected . . . and it was a weak and cowardly thing to do, no excuse, no excuse at all, but he felt adrift, felt scared, and he needed an anchor to hold onto. Just for now. Just for today. And then he'd throw the thing away, because what was a flask for anyway except to provide a twenty-four-hour teat for the kind of drunk who wore a suit and brushed his teeth.

30 He began to jiggle one foot and tap his knees together beneath the table, a nervous twitch no amount of scotch would cure. The judge was taking his time, the Assistant D.A. smirking over a sheaf of papers at her own table off to the right. She wore a permanent self-congratulatory look, this woman, as if she were queen of the court and the county too, and she'd really laid into him before the recess, and that was nasty, purely nasty. She was the prosecution's attack dog, that was what Jerry called her, her voice tuned to a perpetual note of sarcasm, disbelief and petulance, but he held to his story and never wavered. He was just glad Angelle hadn't had to see it.

35

She was here now, though, sitting right behind him, missing school—missing school because of him. And that was one more strike against him, he supposed, *because what kind of father would . . .?*, but the thought was too depressing and he let it die. He resisted the urge to turn round and give her a look, a smile, a wink, the least gesture, anything. It was too painful to see her there, under constraint, his daughter dragged out of school for this, and then he didn't want anybody to think he was coaching her or coercing her in any way. Jerry had no such scruples, though. He'd drilled her over and over and he'd even gone to the extreme of asking her—or no, *instructing* her—to wear something that might conform to the court's idea of what a good, honest, straightforward child was like, something that would make her look younger than she was, too young to bend the truth and far too young even to think about getting behind the wheel of a car.

Three times Jerry had sent her back to change outfits until finally, with a little persuasion from the au pair (*Allie*, and he'd have to remember to slip her a twenty, a twenty at least, because she was gold, pure gold), she put on a lacy white high-collared dress she'd worn for some kind of pageant at school, with matching white tights and patent-leather shoes. There was something wrong there in the living room, he could see that, something in the way she held her shoulders and stamped up the stairs to her room, her face clenched and her eyes burning into him, and he should have recognized it, should have given her just a hair more of his attention, but Marcy was there and she had her opinion and Jerry was being an autocrat and he himself had his hands full—he couldn't eat or think or do anything other than maybe slip into the pantry and tip the bottle of Macallan over the flask. By the time he thought of it, they were in the car, and he tried, he did, leaning across the seat to ply her with little jokes about getting a free day off and what her teachers were going to think and what Aaron Burr might have done—he would've just shot somebody, right?—but Jerry was drilling her one last time and she was sunk into the seat beside Marcy, already clamped up.

The courtroom, this courtroom, the one she was in now, was a duplicate of the one in which her father's attorney had quizzed her an hour and a half ago, except that it was filled with people. They were all old, or older, anyway, except for one woman in a form-fitting plaid jacket Angelle had seen in the window at Nordstrom's who must have been in her twenties. She was in the jury box, looking bored. The other jurors were mostly men, businessmen, she supposed, with balding heads and recessed eyes and big meaty hands clasped in their laps or grasping the rail in front of them. One of them looked like the principal of her school, Dr. Damon, but he wasn't.

The judge sat up at his desk in the front of the room, which they called a bench but wasn't a bench at all, the flag of the State of California on one side of him and the American flag on the other. She was seated in the front row, between Dolores and Allie, and her father and Mr. Apodaca sat at a desk in front of her, the shoulders of their suits puffed up as if they were wearing football pads. Her father's suit was so dark she could see the dandruff there, a little spray of it like dust on the collar of his jacket, and she felt embarrassed for him. And sorry for him, sorry for him too—and for herself. And Lisette. She looked up at the judge and then the District Attorney with his grim gray tight-shaven face and the scowling woman beside him, and couldn't help thinking about what Mr. Apodaca had told her, and it made her shrink into herself when Mr. Apodaca called her name and the judge, reading the look on her face, tried to give her a smile of encouragement.

She wasn't aware of walking across the floor or of the hush that fell over the courtroom or even the bailiff who asked her to hold up her right hand and swear to tell the truth—all this, as if she were recalling a fragmented dream, would come to her later. But then she was seated in the witness' chair and everything was bright and loud suddenly, as if she'd just switched channels on the TV. Mr. Apodaca was right there before her, his voice rising sweetly, almost as if he were singing, and he was leading her through the questions they'd rehearsed over and over again. Yes, she told him, her father was late, and yes, it was getting dark, and no, she didn't notice anything strange about him. He was her father and he always picked her sister and her up on Wednesdays, she volunteered, because Wednesdays were when Allie and Dolores both had their day off and there was no one else to do it because her mother was in France.

They were all watching her now, the court gone absolutely silent, so silent you would have thought everyone had tiptoed out the door, but there they all were, hanging on her every word. She wanted to say more about her mother, about how her mother was coming home soon—had promised as much the last time she'd called long distance from her apartment in Saint Germain des Pres—but Mr. Apodaca wouldn't let her. He kept leading her along, using his sugary voice now, talking down to her, and she wanted to speak up and tell him he didn't have to treat her like that, tell him about her mother, Lisette, the school and the lawn and the trees and the way the interior of the car smelled and the heat of the liquor on her father's breath—anything that would forestall the inevitable, the question that was tucked in just behind this last one, the question on the point of which everything turned, because now she heard it, murmurous and soft and sweet, on her father's attorney's lips: "Who was driving?"

"I just wanted to say one thing," she said, lifting her eyes now to look at Mr. Apodaca and only Mr. Apodaca, his dog's eyes, his pleading soft baby-talking face, "just because,

well, I wanted to say you're wrong about my mother, because she *is* coming home—she told me so herself, on, on the phone—” She couldn't help herself. Her voice was cracking.

“Yes,” he said, too quickly, a hiss of breath, “yes, I understand that, Angelle, but we need to establish . . . you need to answer the question.”

5 Oh, and now the silence went even deeper, the silence of the deep sea, of outer space, of the Arctic night when you couldn't hear the runners of the sled or the feet of the dogs bleeding into the snow, and her eyes jumped to her father's then, the look on his face of hopefulness and fear and confusion, and she loved him in that moment more than she ever had.

10 “Angelle,” Mr. Apodaca was saying, murmuring. “Angelle?”

She turned her face back to him, blotting out the judge, the D.A., the woman in the plaid jacket who was probably a college student, probably cool, and waited for the question to drop.

15 “Who,” Mr. Apodaca repeated, slowing it down now, “was”—slower, slower still—
“driving?”

20 She lifted her chin then to look at the judge and heard the words coming out of her mouth as if they'd been planted there, telling the truth, the hurtful truth, the truth no one would have guessed because she was almost thirteen now, almost a teenager, and she let them know it. “*I* was,” she said, and the courtroom roared to life with so many people
25 buzzing at once she thought at first they hadn't heard her. So she said it again, said it louder, much louder, so loud she might have been shouting it to the man with the camera at the back of the long churchy room with its sweat-burnished pews and the flags and emblems and all the rest. And then she looked away from the judge, away from the spectators and the man with the camera and the court recorder and the bank of windows so
brilliant with light you would have thought a bomb had gone off there, and looked directly
at her father.

* * *