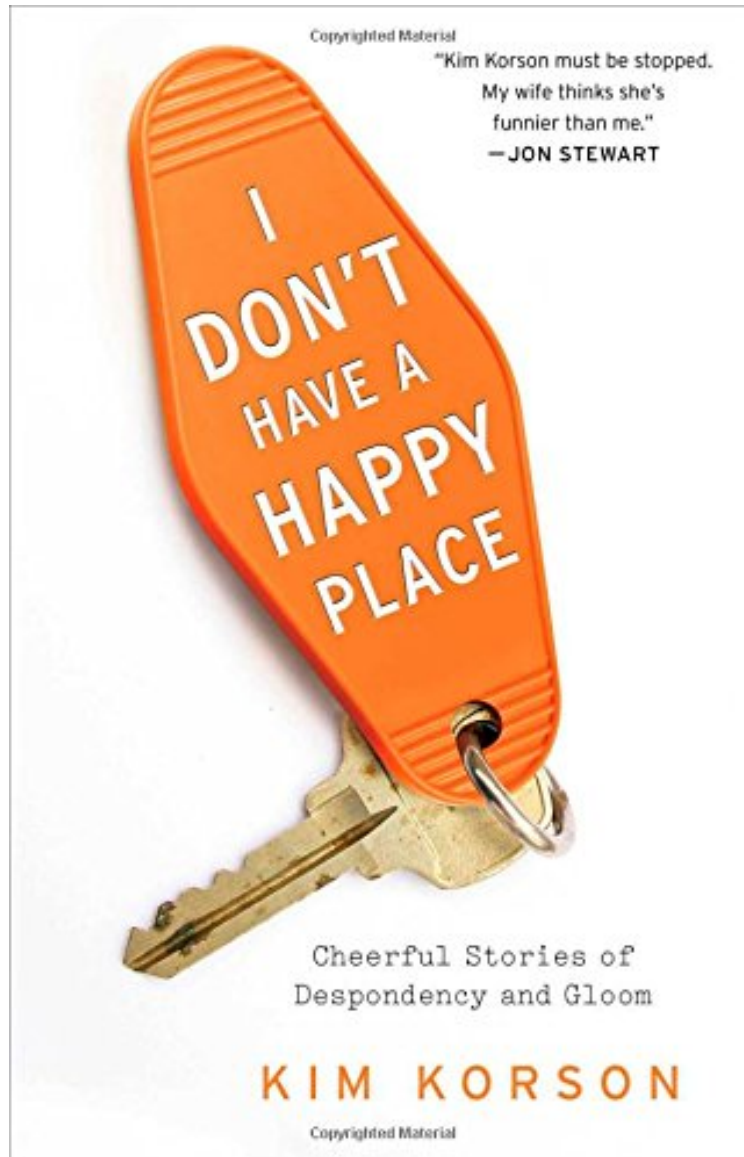


(Download) I Don't Have a Happy Place: Cheerful Stories of Despondency and Gloom

# I Don't Have a Happy Place: Cheerful Stories of Despondency and Gloom

*Kim Korson*

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**Kim Korson : I Don't Have a Happy Place: Cheerful Stories of Despondency and Gloom** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised I Don't Have a Happy Place: Cheerful Stories of Despondency and Gloom:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Book of the Year - Hilarious, Touching, and a Great Read!By

Jennifer - Reader in Boston For my taste, this is the book of the year, and one of the funniest and most honest books ever. I recommended this to my book club and shared it with my friends. It isn't easy for the written word to make people laugh. Even great comics often fail when it comes to print on a page. Not Kim Korson. She has the gift for laying a comic framework and then delivering cathartic laughs (and sometimes tears) through each of her related, semi-autobiographical vignettes. Her writing will leave readers laughing out loud, while at the same time cringing with self-recognition. And like any great comic, Kim Korson says the things we all feel but are too embarrassed to admit. For anyone who struggles with depression, Kim's honesty will shoot a sharp and pleasant ray of light into the darkness. For anyone who isn't depressed but knows what it's like to have a bad day (all of us), *I Don't Have a Happy Place* will provide the comfort of a sympathetic ally who is always just a little bit more annoyed and out of spirits than we are. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Not just a funny book By dAzl Funny books make me nervous. I never find them as funny as other people and this leaves me feeling like there's something wrong with me. But the title of this book made me laugh, and it also rang true in a way I liked, so I decided to give it a try. The good news is that this book is so much more than a funny book. Humor is a constant thread throughout all the stories, but it doesn't distract or mask what makes these stories worth telling. Kim Korson captures and lays bare the small details and fleeting observations that make up human relationships. Her observations are funny and insightful without being cruel. Her best observations are the ones that she makes about herself and her tenderness is what makes these stories so easy to relate to. Ultimately, this book made me feel like I'm not alone--even if I'm not that funny. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Okay, but not great By D. Roach This book started out a little humorous and the different things Kim experienced in her life were interesting, but after awhile I started to feel depressed. I felt like the author didn't want to be happy, and she kept comparing herself to other people and thought everyone had it better than her. I read most of the book but couldn't bring myself to finish it. It felt like a friend who came over to visit and she only wanted to tell you how bad her life was. There were a few parts here and there that were interesting so I gave it three stars.

When a trip to the therapist ends with the question "Can't Kim be happy?" Kim Korson responds the way any normal person would—she makes fun of it. Because really, does everyone have to be happy? Aside from her father wearing makeup and her mother not feeling well (a lot), Kim Korson's 1970s suburban upbringing was typical. Sometimes she wished her brother were an arsonist just so she'd have a valid excuse to be unhappy. And when life moves along pretty decently--she breaks into show business, gets engaged in the secluded jungles of Mexico, and moves her family from Brooklyn to dreamy rural Vermont—the real despondency sets in. It's a skill to find something wrong in just about every situation, but Kim has an exquisite talent for negativity. It is only after half a lifetime of finding kernels of unhappiness where others find joy that she begins to wonder if she is even capable of experiencing happiness. In *I Don't Have a Happy Place*, Kim Korson untangles what it means to be a true malcontent. Rife with evocative and nostalgic observations, unapologetic realism, and razor-sharp wit, *I Don't Have a Happy Place* is told in humorous, autobiographical stories. This fresh-yet-dark voice is sure to make you laugh, nod your head in recognition, and ultimately understand what it truly means to be unhappy. Always.

Kim Korson must be stopped. My wife thinks she's funnier than me. (Jon Stewart) *I Don't Have a Happy Place* is the book you'll beg your friends to read--for its pitch-perfect humor, scintillating wit, and refreshing depiction of life in all its extraordinary, and ordinary, absurdity. Kim Korson is certainly a new and exciting voice in nonfiction, unafraid to shout out loud the things you and I may only dare to think. I haven't laughed like this since David Sedaris. (Julia Fierro author of *Cutting Teeth*) I love this book. It's like 95 percent cacao chocolate – bitter but delicious. (A.J. Jacobs New York Times bestselling author of *The Year of Living Biblically*) In the razor-sharp, acerbic *I Don't Have A Happy Place*, Kim Korson—think: Jewish, female, Canadian David Sedaris—recounts her adventures as a true malcontent. (Miranda Beverly-Whittemore New York Times bestselling author of *Bittersweet*) Makeup-wearing dads, squirrel attacks, death, Phil Donahue, - there's something for everybody in Kim Korson's great new book. And if not having a happy place is what it takes to make writing so hilarious, smart, and honest, I selfishly hope Kim remains miserable within reason for many years to come. (Dave Hill author of *Tasteful Nudes*) Korson's preoccupations—checking crime blotters for neighborhood stats, being certain that her first child would come out crazy, avoiding chitchat at parties—may keep her firmly in her cranky cave but will strike a funny bone in readers. (Publishers Weekly) About the Author Kim Korson is a writer, originally from Montreal, Canada. Kim now lives in Southern Vermont with her husband and two kids. She doesn't get out much. Excerpt. © Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved. *I Don't Have a Happy Place* Paulette ••••• Samantha Narvey had all the good Barbies. They showcased the latest sold-separately fashions, traveled in their Country Camper (with vinyl pop-out tent), and sunned their twisty bodies, naked, on floating orange chairs in the Pool Party pool. Her dolls never lost their plastic heels or tall brown boots or mini hangers. Samantha Narvey knew how to take care of her things—and Samantha Narvey had a lot of things. Like a yellow Sit 'n Spin and a playground for her Weebles; a garden-themed bedroom, with grass green shag carpeting and painted flowers growing up the walls; a bathroom with two sinks in it. She also had a hyperactive brother who got blamed for

everything and a greyhound puppy named Gucci. If Samantha Narvey had to use the bathroom, she'd say she had to make in this hushed voice that grown-ups seemed to be crazy about. Her well-heeled grandparents spoke with elegant accents, like Count Chocula, and traveled overseas regularly, returning home with offerings of burgundy velvet culottes or sectioned chocolate orange slices. Samantha was darling and poised. When we took ballet together, she didn't look dumb in her elephant headdress, nor did she take the wrong turn during the recital and end up in that line of gazelles. Samantha Narvey was only five years old, and yet she had it all. And just in case the scales weren't completely tipped in her favor, just in case she didn't already have every single thing known to man, in the summer of 1973 it was her babysitter, not mine, who drowned in front of our eyes. I wondered what more the world could bestow upon her. It was early July, and my family, along with my parents' best friends, the Narveys, were off to the Laurentians, a lake and mountain region an hour away from our home in Montreal. I was gung ho to leave the city—even at five years old I knew it never fit me the way it did others. If Canada was America's pleasant yet wishy-washy cardigan-wearing aunt, then Montreal was the aunt's annoying daughter—the one who returned from a summer abroad kissing everyone on both cheeks, wearing a foulard, and answering only to the name Sylvie. My parents had bought a small brown Monopoly house from a ripe old lady eager to wrap things up before she expired. Shortly after the deal was done, the sexy A-frame next door went on the market and the Narveys snatched it. Our house came assembled with the dead lady's old-fangled furniture. Marilyn Narvey hired a decorator to fill their three-storied triangular home with the latest everything. We weren't rich like the Narveys, just solid middle class. My father had a fledgling company in the shmattah business, manufacturing inexpensive and unfortunate-looking ladieswear. "What can I tell you?" he would say when my mother turned her nose up at the samples he brought home, "The ugly stuff sells." If we were a TV family, we'd be the token Jews who move in next door to the Cunninghams on Happy Days. We'd eat supper at six p.m. but the similarities would end there. Mr. C was a proud lodge member, owned a hardware store, and tucked his short-sleeved button-downs into his sensible pants. My father wore a turquoise Speedo with the words Designed by Bill Blass embroidered across his private parts. "Macaroni and cheese for lunch," Marilyn Narvey said to their live-in housekeeper, Paulette, who traveled with them on weekends. Oversized tortoiseshell sunglasses held back Marilyn's strawberry blond wedge. She smoked a pack of menthols a day but smelled like Chloé perfume. Turning to Carmen, Paulette's sister and my keeper for the next few weeks, Marilyn added, "Popsicles if they behave." There were ten homes on our side of the lake, with a slice of road connecting them. Our house was separated from the Narveys' by four old pines and a tangle of pricker bushes. We all had lake views out front and a mountainy forest out back. A forest I was convinced, and my brother confirmed, was home to Bigfoot. "Do we have to go to hockey camp?" Neil Narvey said, whacking the hood of my father's car with his Evel Knievel Stunt Crash vehicle. My brother—let's call him Ace—was nine and a hockey fanatic. Neil preferred burning things. However, the camp was close to our house, so the grown-ups could wander through the small shops in town or drink wine, plus it would give the frogs Neil liked to mangle with his BB gun a deserved break. Samantha and I were only five, so we stayed back with the hired help. "In the car, loser," Marv Narvey said to his son, pulling up in his brown Cadillac. He grinned at his own joke and his mustache straightened into a line. Marv Narvey was tall and reedy and could easily be mistaken for Burt Reynolds's Jewish cousin. He was bawdy and relished inappropriate jokes none of us appreciated, but he also had anger problems and could snap like a frozen Charleston Chew without warning, so we all pretended to laugh. In future years, he'd divorce Marilyn, pants me at a Passover seder in front of fifteen people, and die of lung cancer. "We'll be back after lunch," Marilyn said. "Don't worry, Mrs. Narvey," Paulette said, hands loose on Samantha's shoulders. "We'll be fine." My mother didn't offer any parting words or instructions to Carmen, just waited in the idling car, air conditioning blasting, eyes straight ahead out the windshield. My father leaned on the driver's side, raking his hair with the oversized pick he kept in the back pocket of his ironed bell-bottoms. His hair was naturally curly but not curly enough for his liking, so he'd rake and fluff until it mushroomed to satisfaction. Only after it reached optimum height would he slide into the car and wave goodbye with the hand that supported his heavy turquoise ring. The Narvey Cadillac pulled out first, my father's car following. Their wheels crunched into the gravel, leaving a puff of dust hovering, like Pig-Pen's dirt. "All right, girlies, what do you all want to do?" Paulette said as we walked over to the Narveys' (bigger) yard. "Popsicles," I said, even though I'd just finished two bowls of Sugar Smacks. Paulette ignored my suggestion, as did Carmen, and I decided then and there that they were lousy at their jobs. I pined for our Swiss au pair from last year, the one I convinced that it was Canadian to put Coke on Fruity Pebbles instead of milk—that was the kind of administration I could get behind. Paulette suggested we go inside and play board games, which was code for Let us watch the small color set in my room, Carmen, while the children entertain themselves. Samantha and I had on matching shorts, as we often did. Marv Narvey manufactured children's clothes and sometimes brought home doubles. I was wearing my number-one pair: the navy polyester knee-lengthers with fake frayed edges and a mother-of-pearl snap that was smooth to the touch and made a satisfying click every time I opened or closed it, which was incessantly. Sam wore the olive ones but didn't use all the functions the way I did. We were shirtless that day, by choice, but still spent most of the time hugging our torsos so no one would see our mosquito bites, as Marv Narvey called them. Sam wanted to play our hundredth game of Snakes and Ladders but I had other ideas. We had an arsenal of made-up games, and the best ones always happened on her turf due to the thriving

toy industry she had going over there. At my house, we had to use our dumb imaginations, enlisting ceramic ashtrays as swimming pools and my jacks and checkers pieces as makeshift swimmers. Homespun games could really flourish with the proper trimmings, and those trimmings were at Samantha's place. I had secret plots to overthrow my mother so I could move into the A-frame and engulf myself in plastic. Part of me believed my mother had outlawed the good toys so I'd want to be friends with Sam. It would be easier for everyone's weekends and holidays if I got along with her best friend's kid. The good news was, my relationship with my own sibling was relegated to noogies and mental torture, so Samantha Narvey was the sister I didn't have. Which meant not only could I use her stuff whenever I wanted, I could treat her any way I liked and she'd most probably still like me. Of all the goods in the Narvey household, for my money dolls were tops. My mother was crabby about dolls—my mother was crabby, period—and they were not welcome at our place. All I wanted that morning was to get my hands on Baby Alive. Even with the doll packed up in the box on the shelf at Silverberg's toy store I could smell her plastic face, but I imagined that out in the sun it would be ambrosial. Lucky for me, Sam was a blue-chip sharer and had no problem splitting the tasks of stirring water into the powdery flakes or feeding the baby by jamming the Special Spoon into her O mouth, and she always let me spank the baby when she misbehaved. However, as good at sharing as Samantha Narvey was, I had no interest in being part-time owner of Baby Alive. I wanted sole custody. Who divvied up a baby? Marilyn Narvey had a rule about not letting toys leave the premises, something about her house not being a library, but every now and again I would squirrel goods up my shirt or in my sleepover bag without anyone seeing. I spent hours in bed at night masterminding ways to kidnap Rub-a-Dub Dolly or smuggle out a sleeve of their Dixie Riddle Cups. Those kinds of rules just begged you to pinch stuff. We packed a plastic sack with the tackle we'd need for our game, Babysitters at the Lake. As it turned out, somewhere between dice rolling and trying to find Baby Alive's diapers, our own real live babysitters had left the house and gone down to the water without telling us. I could see Carmen through the living room's floor-to-ceiling window, sunning herself on the dock with her feet swirling the water. Paulette, who couldn't swim, was loafing on an orange sheet she'd smoothed on the grass to face the sun. I wondered how long they'd been out there relaxing without a care in the world or a job to do, like rescuing us when the house suddenly burst into flames. "There are eels in there, you know," I told Carmen when we got down to the water. "Nuh uh," Sam said. "Yuh huh. I saw them. You weren't even there." She pretended not to care but I saw Carmen's eyes flick toward Paulette, who gave a quick shake of the head, which was code for Don't listen to the brunette—she doesn't know what she's talking about. Sam unloaded our supplies and Carmen continued her aggravating toe plinking, assuring me without words that she was from Trinidad and not bothered by our Canadian eels. "There are only small fish in the lake," Samantha said, like she was a kindergarten teacher all of a sudden. "Rainbow trouts." "How's about a nice Hawaiian Punch?" I said under my breath, but Carmen heard and pinched my leg—my mother's signature move, which she probably gave Carmen the A-OK to use on me whenever she felt like it. "Should we move her to the shade?" said Sam, pointing at the trees. "I think it's too hot for babies." My polyester shorts were trapping sweat and heat and I was sure one more minute in the incinerating sun would cause them to combust, but I'd already gone through the rigmarole of begging Sam to do our work close to the water so we could make the food and dunk the baby if she got dirty. I'd won that battle, and it had been vigorous work negotiating with Sam because Neil had reported that if you did not take proper care when drying Baby Alive, she would rot, with mold around her face and maggots in her belly. "Plus we can dump the poo," I said, my final argument to seal the deal. "If she makes." The lake was small, about three miles long and half a mile across. It wasn't much of a good-time lake. No motors of any kind were permitted, which meant no waves or music or happy people whizzing by waving hello and pretend-toasting us with cans of Fresca. If boating was your leisure activity of choice, you cruised around in a pedal boat, which was basically a raft with bike pedals and didn't even go fast enough to catch a breeze. All the houses on the lake seemed to have one. Ours was white, shaded by a faded red vinyl canopy with teeny yellow-and-orange flowers on its underside and dangly white fringe around the perimeter. My mother didn't do bathing suits, so my father took me out on the water, sometimes allowing me to drive. My legs were too short to pedal and steer at the same time, forcing me to pick one or the other. I always went with the steering option. I liked pushing the silver tiller and being in charge of which direction to float, plus it was less taxing. Most of my boating hours, however, were spent splashing out the daddy longlegs that took up residence on board. I heard Marv Narvey tell Carmen and Paulette they were allowed to take us out on the boat but we all had to wear those orange life jackets that were scratchy and rode up to your neck when you sat in the bucket chair, so we never went. Sometimes we put Sam's dolls in and pushed them out to sea, pulling back hard on the thick white rope that was tethered to the dock, tug-of-war style. We once thought Gucci might enjoy a trip on the high seas, but it turned out greyhounds didn't really like boating, and his sharp nails scrabbled on the fiberglass seats, causing him to fall overboard, and Marv Narvey had to jump in, fully clothed, to rescue him. Once the dog was safe on land, Marv kicked it in the stomach, even though it wasn't Gucci's idea to go for a ride. Gucci remained ashore after that. "Let's feed her," Sam said, tying the bib around the baby's neck. "You fill up the bottle." As she ripped open the packet of food, a puff of banana-scented dust took flight. I leaned over on my belly, stretching my arms toward the lake as the sun broiled the backs of my knees. We busied ourselves with the meal preparations and Carmen meandered off the dock, standing ankle deep in water. She pretended to be casual by resting her hands on her hips as the sand swallowed her big feet, but I knew she was really

surveying for eels. The lake was cool and clean and clear to the bottom in the shallow end but still it irked me to wade around. I knew creatures took cover under there, most notably the Loch Ness Monster and the child catcher from Chitty Chitty Bang Bang. “Girls, you hungry?” asked Paulette, who, moments before, was snoring, eyes covered by those buggish sun goggles the Narveys kept in a bowl next to the baby oil and sun reflectors. But we were too busy to stop for lunch. The baby took forever to eat. Her O mouth gave her a constant look of surprise but also didn’t accommodate the amount of food we were determined to shovel in. Plus, we wanted her to make. “I’m going in,” said Carmen. Marv Narvey had hired a lake guy to rope off a swimming area, making his section look like a summer camp. There were a series of ropes and buoys letting us know where the water got deep. “Come, girls.” Carmen slapped her hand on the water’s surface, trying to entice us. We were pleased to have a babysitter who was seaworthy, but our allegiance was to Baby Alive. We weren’t budging until she filled that diaper. “Maybe she’s too tired to make,” said Sam. She held the baby by her foot, carrying her over to the grass where Paulette was now sitting up and watching her sister cool off. “Why are you moving her?” I said. “The sound of the water will make her go.” “Nuh uh.” “How do you even know?” I said, preparing to fight. “Because.” “Because why?” “Because I’m the mother,” Sam said. “And she’s mine.” I wanted to push Samantha Narvey and her stupid baby deep into the water and watch them be swallowed up by eels, but I chewed my thumb instead. I waited for Paulette to “girls” us but she was no longer stretched out on the orange sheet. Carmen was lolling around in the deep end, doing some made-up stroke that involved stretching her neck so her head remained above water, like my nana. I made a mental note to tattle on our babysitters, since one was out having a leisure swim and the other had gone missing. Just then, Paulette emerged from the house wearing Marilyn Narvey’s best bathing suit, a yellow towel hanging off her shoulder like she was Malibu Barbie. She walked into the shallow end. “You can’t swim,” I said. Paulette balled up her towel and threw it onto the dock. She dug into the sand to steady herself. “Not to worry, girlies. I’m just gonna stay right here in the shallow end.” I knew Paulette couldn’t swim, didn’t even bring a bathing suit with her on weekends, but she was a grown-up, so if she said she was allowed to stand in the shallow end, we believed her. Sam and I didn’t want to be alone on the grass so we moved our operation one more time back to the dock. Paulette watched her sister treading water by the far rope—the one for intermediate and expert swimmers, if this had been a swim test at camp. “She’s making!” Sam said. “She’s making!” We hugged, we squealed, then ripped off the diaper to see if there was a poo. As we checked for evidence, another voice snapped the air. “I’m swimming!” said Paulette. “Look at me! I’m swimming!” The babysitter who was not fit for sea, the one who promised to stay ankle-deep, was now loose in the open water. “I’m swimming!” Paulette kept insisting, but it no longer sounded like an achievement. Her voice was gurgly. Her head popped out of the water like a Whac-A-Mole at the fair. Carmen flutter-kicked herself over at high speed, trying to hold on to her sister while shouting, “Yes! Yes, you are!” But Carmen didn’t sound proud or happy about it. Both their heads were dipping, bodies tugged under as if the Loch Ness Monster had them in its clutches. I covered Baby Alive’s eyes so she didn’t see the wrestling or the splashing. Or when Carmen came up alone. There was one unruffled second, a tick of calm. Then Carmen propelled herself out of the lake. Instead of using the dock to get out of the water, like you were supposed to, she hopped up and over the small rock wall that lined the length of the Narveys’ property. Her mouth was open but no sound came out and Samantha moved closer to me, linking her fingers into the belt loop of my shorts. I squeezed the baby. Carmen ran in small circles, like Gucci chasing his tail, still not making a sound until she banged into the edge of the picnic table, flicking some sort of internal switch that caused strange animal howls to spew from the deepest part of her guts, weird cries that bounced around our ears and across the lake all the way to the neighbors’ houses, the ones we always had to be quiet for. Halfway up the steep stairs to the house, Carmen changed her mind, darting back toward the lake, along the dock where Samantha and I stood. Not noticing we were still there, she plunged back into the water, only to hoist herself right back out and up the stairs again to the house, leaving us alone by the water that had just swallowed up the babysitter. In her frenzy, Carmen kicked Baby Alive’s spoon—the Special Spoon—into the lake and the Bitey Banana packet stuck to her ankle. This is when our parents returned, lazy with wine and hamburgers and laden with hockey gear. This is how they found us. Marv Narvey and my father jumped into the lake with their jeans on, looking for the body. Samantha, scooped up by Marilyn, was now a rumpled heap on her mom’s lap, facing away from the action, being rocked and shushed and poor-baby-ed. The boys stood behind me, watching our fathers attempt superhero status, and I heard Neil say “Cool,” then Ace’s hockey glove thwacking Neil’s stomach, which made Neil say “Whaaat?” I stood alone, gripping the baby, tingly with the thought that a body might pop out of the lake at any moment. I wondered where my mother was. When our dads came up with nothing, no one spoke. They just holed Sam and me up in the house for the next few hours. We were supposed to be resting in her room but we escaped into her parents’, pressing our faces against the wall of triangular windows at the tip-top of the A. There was a flashing blue light and a policeman asking questions of Carmen, who was wrapped in the sheet and shaking her head. I hoped the Mounties would come on horses wearing their tall hats, but it was just a regular old police cruiser like on *The Rockford Files*. I wondered if Marilyn Narvey knew that Paulette was dead in her very best swimsuit. It was orange. “What do you think she looks like now?” I said, but Sam didn’t answer, hadn’t made a peep since the incident. Samantha liked to keep herself in a jar with the cap twisted on tight, but I handled my business differently. I wanted to spill my contents all over the floor to see what was in there, but we were at Samantha’s house,

so it was Samantha's rules. I knew no one would talk about it at my house either. Where was Paulette and what did she look like? All I could come up with was the time my nana made oatmeal cookies and had to soak the raisins in a cup of water for thirty minutes but left them in for two hours. I imagined bulgy, puckered raisins wearing orange bathing suits, floating along the water's edge. Neil heard me talking, so he opened the door and whipped backgammon pieces at us, then tattled that we were out of Sam's room, so I had to go home and ended up missing the part where our neighbor landed his seaplane on the water to drag Paulette out. We never saw Carmen again. When they shipped Paulette's body back to Trinidad, Carmen sat in first class. For the next few days, as expected, no one was talking. But I had questions. Why go swimming if you didn't know how? What actually was a "death wish," because no matter how many times Neil offered that up, it never made sense. And would someone just please tell me if they saw the Special Spoon, because I didn't know if the doll even worked without it. What would happen to the baby now that Sam couldn't even look it in the eye? Probably get all crusty and the maggots would come. I'd bet anything that Samantha would just get a new one. She'd probably get a truckful of new stuff. As soon as word got out that her babysitter drowned she'd be special, branded as the one whose babysitter ("who really was part of the family") died. There was a reserve of attention and sympathy and tokens for victims like Samantha Narvey. There were select head tilts and looks of sorrow, the likes of which I'd never see. Samantha was about to be marked. If your goldfish dies or your cat has leukemia, the general public doesn't really care. If your great-grandmother flatlines in a chair, people might say that she had a long, happy life (even if she didn't), and then they'd carry on with their shopping. But when the real stuff happened, you hit the pity lottery. Conversely, if your babysitter's sister drowns, your mom makes you stay in your room a lot, and if by accident you try out shouting the word fuck when sequestered in there, you don't get any kind of pass, you just get your mouth washed out with a fresh bar of Irish Spring. The Narveys left town, went to recuperate at their grandparents' place in Palm Beach. I had nothing to do so I wandered the dirt road a lot, waiting for someone to be outside to offer up a head tilt or sad eyes or even a sorrowful tsk. I hung around the Melnicks' driveway for a spell, hoping the grandmother might come out. She liked to walk the road with a giant stick and had crazy green eyes, intricate as marbles. Plus, she always had Kraft Caramels in her pocket. Her grandson had killed himself, just like his mother before him, and so Mrs. Melnick knew a thing or two about hard times. It hit me that out of the ten houses on the road, tragedy had struck two of them, leaving me wondering if the street was cursed. But as I spent the next few weeks alone, waiting for someone to notice me, I knew full well who was probably cursed. Some days, I'd end up at the Narveys' front steps, making a snorkel mask of my hands and peering into their vestibule even though I knew they were poolside drinking Anita Bryant's orange juice and getting presents, probably about to go to Disney World. But even though I knew Marilyn wasn't in her walk-in closet selecting today's caftan and Neil wasn't trying to fry a toad with his magnifying glass and Samantha Narvey wasn't at the table waiting for me to play Fuzzy Pumper Barber Shop any more than Paulette was vacuuming, causing Gucci to hide under the couch, I looked in a handful of times anyway, because you never knew. Plus, maybe there were clues or at least a pair of Paulette's shoes. Something. My father continued to take Ace to hockey camp, while my mother cranked up the window unit and watched the Today show, then The \$10,000 Pyramid, and then The Young and the Restless. One night when I was supposed to be sleeping I heard her tell my father that Marv Narvey was making the kids swim every day so they wouldn't be scared of water for the rest of their lives. Ace was already scared of the water, just born that way. Not to mention that the following year he'd almost drown at summer camp during free swim and then, after that, Jaws would hit theaters, leaving my brother landlocked for the rest of his life. I was scared of all kinds of things: my bedroom spontaneously going up in flames, pink strep throat medicine, riding my bike. I feared seeing people eating dinner alone, Sweetums from the Muppets, saying "I love you," and birds. I was terrified of birds. For a year after the babysitter sank, Samantha and I added a new game to our repertoire. We'd play it every time I was dropped off, and it would turn out to be my all-time favorite game. It was called Paulette. Sam and I would inevitably fight every time to see who'd get to be the star player, but in the end we decided we could each get a turn. On the bright side, if you weren't the dead babysitter, you'd get a chance to be everyone else. Eventually, we'd mess with the history, adding new characters that never even showed up that day, like Mrs. Melnick. Sometimes, I'd add accents. It all depended on my mood. If we're being honest, my drowning was far superior to Samantha Narvey's. I took my time going under and my gurgles were just that much more believable. If Sam was Paulette first, the game ended faster, leaving me ample time to take the stage and really do the drowning justice. Sometimes, just when you thought I was dead, I'd pop back up. Sam's bed would be the dock and we'd leap onto the grass green shag, yelling out the requisite I'm swimming! I'm swimming! I'd perfected the flailing arms overhead, doing it just like Kermit the Frog cheering. I could milk that scene for an hour. I wanted to be Rich Little when I grew up and this was a great way to hone my craft. Samantha played along, but she didn't do the voices like I did. Her heart wasn't in it. Whenever we'd play, I'd make sure to include a mention of the Special Spoon in some creative way. Sam would raise her tiny blond eyebrows, but I knew deep down she was as mad about that spoon as I was, no matter what her eyebrows said. She swore her mother threw away Baby Alive after the drowning, but I wasn't convinced. I would bet anything that she was stashed in a dresser somewhere, brown crusty death water sloshing around in her belly every time someone opened a drawer. I should have taken her home that day. Popped her head off and hung her outside to dry properly. I would have loved her even if she were filled with

maggots. Sam never said another word about our baby and I never got over it, even when she got the fully poseable Bionic Woman Doll with Special Purse and the Bionic Beauty and Repair Station with Scenic Backdrop. Months after Paulette died, I'd still see her arms thrashing around in my head before I fell asleep. I wanted to ask Ace if he saw anything in his mind at night, or if he thought Paulette swallowed half the lake water and rounded out like a giant balloon, but then I remembered lying in bed the night it happened, and how when I asked him if he saw the body pulled out by the seaplane, instead of answering me, he launched pellets from Neil's target practice rifle at my head, assuring me that if they made contact, my bed would blow up instantly, and also did I hear that crunching outside, because it sounded an awful lot to him like Bigfoot loping around our window. The Narveys got themselves a new babysitter from an agency. Elicia was also from Trinidad and had asthma so bad they had to keep an oxygen tank near Sam's Barbie Dreamhouse in the basement, just in case there was an incident while vacuuming. She had a small color set in her room, and on Sunday mornings she'd let us watch church with her on TV. When Neil acted up, she'd pinch his neck skin with a maneuver she called the Clinch. I wondered if she swam. The following year we got a sitter of our own to live full-time in the basement of our modest three-bedroom Spanish Tudor. Her name was Hortense. She was French-Canadian and wore this complicated hairdo, the likes of which I'd only see a few years later on Mrs. Garrett in *The Facts of Life*. Hortense was not winning any popularity contests with me, not only because she spoke in clipped bossy tones and didn't like me, but also because she made me drink glasses of milk no matter how many times I tried to convince her it was against my religion. Hortense didn't believe in television and wore a dental-hygienist-blue uniform even though no one asked her to. Eight months into her stay, when the phone rang at three a.m., I bet my mother fumbled for her glasses just before she picked up the receiver to hear the news that Hortense's sister had been murdered, somewhere near St. Joseph's Oratory, a landmark Montrealers called the Shrine. There were no screams or seaplanes or first-class tickets to the Caribbean. Just a starched uniform left on the bed, like a police chalk outline of a housekeeper, and a call to the agency for a new sitter.