

# A Night in Montauk

**Trent** says we should go night swimming. Says he wants to. So he's prying open the sliding-glass door, pulling me through the opening, across the damp oaken deck, down the stairs, through the tall grasses, shape-shifting in the breeze, toward the place where land meets water to go night swimming. Trent is a little ways ahead of me, now and again reaching back for my hand, mock-tugging me along with his left, lighting the joint wedged between his lips with his right, smirking.

As far back as I can remember Trent, I see that smirk. Crooked upper lip enveloping the lower. The way it makes his eyebrows perk. His cheekbones pop. How it's cute. How it's not. It embodies everything I've ever known about him—every habit, like, dislike, the sound of his voice, his taste in clothes, the birthmark on his inner right thigh, the fact that his mother is unstable, couldn't afford a private school, is in debt, will remain in debt, shouldn't have sent him in the first place, he doesn't want to be there, I don't know if I want him to be there, I don't know if *I* want to be there. I'm thinking about these things when the water, sharp and salty, stings my nostrils.

"What a night," Trent is repeating between drags, turning in circles, arms outstretched. I'm nodding, I think. He looks beautiful without a shirt. Skin tucked tightly around the peaks of his abs and chest. Triceps flexing every time he grasps for my hand. I'm in my underwear and an oversize T-shirt. Neither of us are wearing shoes.

I hear the bay boat before I see it, a silhouette against the graying horizon. It spits water as it skirts the shore, continuing out of sight. Now it's just Trent's voice and the insects, both consistent, droning. The house lights are fading behind us. Inflated clouds hang heavy overhead. The beach

is more stone than sand, all caked together from rain showers that came and went earlier this evening. We were inside then. I took a few Lexapro, drank some cabernet, was gazing at my bedroom window—the pane, speckled with water—and Trent kept asking if I wanted to have sex. He was kissing me, but I didn't kiss back much. He climbed on top of me, opened my legs, whispering, "Oh, Callie, baby," and I thought about what I could whisper back and was so caught up in that that he had my underwear off and was thrusting himself inside of me and, honestly, it was over before anything came to mind. After, lying next to me, running his fingers through my hair, saying he liked it better last summer when it was short. I was thinking about the metallic aftertaste of the cabernet, about how unexpected it was.

Earlier today we had lunch at a place in East Hampton called Salon. I drove Mom's Range Rover; she and David haven't been around, and Trent rode the train to Long Island. I had the dry-aged duck breast with the gratin dauphinois. It was fine. Trent had a cheeseburger, well-done. We talked about one of our professors, Professor Bartram, and how he was probably a pervert and earlier this year, on two separate occasions, overturned both of his S-Classes because he was supposedly stoned on woolie, and depressed, which is kind of besides the point. I wondered if his non-tenure-track contract would be renewed, and Trent said he heard it would be, and I said, "Oh, OK," and we left the restaurant and, half-way back to the house, realized we didn't tip, which made Trent smirk. Today is our six-month anniversary, or close to it. Jessie came over after we got back. Mom and David still weren't home; Trent had to "take a call." She and I opened two bottles of David's cabernet from the cellar and smoked a couple joints and basically laughed a lot and had fun. Jessie's really despondent, even suicidal, she said, about having to spend another summer out here with her parents. I told her I know, it's a drag, I'd rather be in the city, summer's almost

over, thank Christ; she agreed, cried a lot about Stephen who apparently hooked up with her one friend, a girl from Stony Brook, not somebody I know, and how Stephen hasn't told her yet, but she's imagining how the whole thing's going to go down when she goes back to school in two weeks, which is going to suck, because public universities suck, and she's pretty embarrassed about being there in the first place, and might transfer to Bard. I told her I'm thinking about not going back to school altogether, maybe moving to live with my cousin in Santa Monica, maybe not, probably not because David already paid fall tuition; then again, I think Mom has been seeing someone else (taking calls/leaving at odd hours, wearing new clothes, all designer brands/etc.), and you never know how much longer David will be around. Jessie said that sounded nice and drove home.

I'm hitting the joint—it's skunky and poorly rolled—telling Trent that, most of the time, I feel like a bug in amber. He's saying, "That's pretty deep," skipping rocks along the water, or trying to, telling me to take my shirt off. I tell him I'm not wearing a bra; he says, "Your point being?" and I say OK and take my shirt off. I lay it on a weathered log nearby, and when I turn around Trent is on top of me, eyes beaming. His hand is going down my underwear, two fingers hooking inside. I'm buckling, fumbling the joint, doubling back onto the log. He follows, dropping to his knees in the sand, smirking.

The water is stronger than I expected. Wind is picking up, carrying waves, clouds, dandelions, birds' wings. Pale light from the waxing moon breaks through tiny holes in the sky. Everything outside of me smells alive.

"I love you, baby," Trent says, wiggling out of his shorts, hoisting me from the log, hands wrapped around my waist. I'm nodding back eagerly, wishing I had taken one more Lexapro, drank one more glass of cabernet. Trent's wading into the black water, me with him. It feels like bath

water on my skin. Almost nostalgic. But the waves are coming in walls. I can't get steady. I can't brush the bottom with my toes. Can't make out the house lights at all. Can't even tell which way is the house.

Trent is floating on his back, smirking, asking if he can borrow Mom's Range Rover tomorrow.

"What for?" I say.

"Huh?"

"What *for*?" this time louder, over the lapping waves.

"Well, if it's *that* big of a deal," he says, not finishing the thought.

"Trent... Trent, I'm really tired."

"You're *fine*, baby."

"No, really, I don't feel well. I think I—"

"It's the weed and the wine."

"Trent, I—"

"Baby, come *on*." He's splashing water at me, smirking. I think about splashing back but don't. I remember I have a "phone appointment" with my therapist tomorrow at 3 p.m. I remember I decided, earlier today, to not take the call.

Steadily, we're being whisked away from shore, water hissing all around us. Trent is unbothered, cresting then crashing, weightless, sort of side-stroking, sort of letting the water carry him farther out. "What a night," he's repeating. Several waves surge between us. I'm trying to follow, but there's mist in my eyes, slowing me, exhausting my shoulder and leg muscles.

"Callie!" Trent says from somewhere.

I'm idling, thinking about pedaling toward his voice, about trying harder, but a wave swells under me, and I rocket. My stomach drops out of my body. My skull empties, all but for a dull ache. I imagine going higher and higher, cutting through the cloud ceiling, still higher, East End shrinking and disappearing entirely from view. But the wave gives out, and I plummet at least ten, twelve, fifteen feet, jettisoning un-

der water. Liquid shoots up my nose and down my throat. It might as well be fire. I open and close and open and close my eyes but it makes no difference. Flapping my arms. Turning over and over. I get my bearings. I sense the magnetic pull of the surface and flail toward it.

As I breach, another, smaller wave explodes nearby, lurching me forward. I feel pebbles below my feet again and use energy I didn't know I had to trudge onto the beach, collapsing onto my backside, pulling my knees into my chest, coughing and rocking.

At some point, my vision returns. Focuses. I'm looking out at the water. I'm looking out at the water but can't see any farther than about thirty feet out, where the ocean and horizon blend into a canvas of night. Hungry waves fold into one another, infinitely receding. No sign of Trent.

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I had a dream last night about the dog Dad bought for Olivia and me when Olivia was seven and I was five. It was dinner time, Dad was late, Mom was worried, then in he comes with a box, and out of it, before he's hardly through the kitchen door, hopped a tiny German Shepherd—sort of ruining the surprise, I think is what Dad thought at the time, but I think, in hindsight, made it better. We named the dog Butch. Butch was a very nice dog. Butch got hit by a Jeep when Olivia was ten and I was eight. In my dream, Butch came to this house, David's house, and was trying to get inside. He pawed every door knob, every window latch. I couldn't let him in, was

resigned to a bird's-eye view of the whole scene. Eventually, Butch gave up and trotted to a small tree in the front yard, where he buried the burlap sack he had been carrying in his mouth. At 4:26 a.m., I woke and went out to the front lawn, finding my way with the flashlight on my iPhone. I reached the tree, dropped to my knees, rested the phone against the trunk and started clawing into the dirt with my hands. Tears streamed down my cheeks. My nails cracked and bloodied. In the dream, I found the sack; it was full of Butch's teeth. This morning, I found nothing.

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**I'm** sitting on the beach, perched atop jagged stones, peering into the distance. I'm telling myself, out loud, I'm OK. I lie back, but the rocks hurt my head, so I sit and then stand. I pace around a while, thinking about my bed, thinking about sleeping, thinking about where Mom and David are, if it even matters. I think about the night I met Trent, about the stupid movie we saw, the way he looked at me in the dark, images from the screen, action scenes, reflected in his eyes.

A couple gulls screech by, gliding over the water and into the night. If only I could join them. I wonder where they're going, why they're going where they're going, long after they've disappeared. I think about shouting a boy's name. That's when the clouds unfurl, and rain pummels the beach. So I find my shirt next to the log, scan the waves once more, see nothing, turn back for the house.

The sliding-glass door is still open. I squeeze through, hesitate, then shut it, lock it, and draw the blinds. Photos of David and David's kids are framed along the hallway leading to the kitchen. I've never noticed them before. A bottle of cabernet is still setting on the island, uncorked, next to a wine-stained stemless glass. I empty the bottle into the glass, hyperventilate, turn off the kitchen light and head upstairs, dripping water and wine everywhere. I close my bedroom door. I walk over to the vanity and shake the last Lexapro from the translucent orange bottle on my nightstand and wash it down with the cabernet. I check my phone. A few unread texts from Jessie, Zora. I text Mom, "Where are you," and I turn up the ringer and walk over to my bed. I sit down on the bed. I turn the ringer back down. I imagine getting in the Range Rover and just driving west, driving until it runs out of gas. I look out the open window above the headboard. I look at the grassy backyard. I look at the empty beach. At the weathered log down by the water's edge. I look into the ocean. I think about shouting a boy's name. I don't. And before I lie down and fall into a deep sleep, from which I will not wake until noon tomorrow, I hear the bay boat, invisible all but two headlights cutting through the black. It spits water as it skirts the shore, continuing out of sight.