

STEVE. — Couldn't bear it at home. Couldn't bring myself to look at her things — her hiking boots — her socks — her funny winter cap —

BECKY. It was hard, I know.

STEVE. (*Overlapping.*) — And then, when I went upstairs, there was our little hallway — the paint — the pictures on the walls — our bedroom door. (*A beat, we think he's done, then ...*) The door-knob — our bed — the quilt — the sheets — the pillowcases ... our little "Mister Dibble" —

BECKY. Yes, you told me.

STEVE. — So you know what I did:

BECKY. Yes, I do.

STEVE. I curled up under my desk and fell asleep. Spent three nights like that. Right here in the sales room.

BECKY. Yes, I know.

STEVE. I see her falling, Becky. My mind goes to this place ... and I am reliving that moment on that mountain and no matter how many times it happens: *I can't catch her* — my arms won't reach — and all I can do is *watch*. (*Pause.*)

BECKY. (*BIG change of subject.*) Okay, Steve, what have you got there for me?

STEVE. When did you get so cold?

BECKY. I'm sorry?

STEVE. You were always there for me — you and Joe and the others. You were such good friends — always willing to talk me down the mountain —

BECKY. We just wanted to help, Steve.

STEVE. — But then it changed. Like you turned the page in your calendar one day and said: Okay, time's up. Steve should be over it.

BECKY. No, that's not —

STEVE. We gave him X number of months to mourn good ol' Rita, we took him out for beers and listened to him tell the story of her fall for the two hundredth time —

BECKY. (*Trying to make a joke.*) Three hundredth —

STEVE. THAT IS NOT FUNNY. (*Pause.*) You don't know, Becky ... you and Joe, you're *set*, you're *locked in*, you'll have each other forever ... but some of the rest of us —

BECKY. I know ... I'm sorry ...

STEVE. (*Overlapping.*) — I want to get past this stuff. I really do. I'm sick of talking about it, and you must be *really* sick of hearing

it — (*Becky's desk phone rings, but — Steve lifts and hangs up the receiver, in one motion, and never stops talking.*) But it's like yesterday: I'm getting a coffee, and this little boy and his mom are in line behind me, and they have this puppy. So, I'm standing there minding my own business, and I hear the mom say to her son: Why don't you go show the puppy to that sad man over there — maybe the puppy will cheer him up! — and I am really trying to ignore this, but now the puppy is sniffing at my boots and the little kid is saying: Hi, Mister, you look sad — do you want to pet my puppy?

And what I THOUGHT — what I didn't SAY, even though I wanted to — what I THOUGHT was:

You bet I do, sonny boy — I want to pet your little puppy — and then I want to take him for a nice walk, a little hike in the mountains with you right by his side — and as we approach the rugged vista which is our destination, I want to let go of his leash for just a *second*, just an *instant*, right when the path beneath his little paws starts to give way — and I want you to watch your puppy's desperate eyes as he tries to grab at that ground — but his little paws touch nothing at all, nothing but *air*, nothing but you and your screams and you might as well *scream your heart out*, sonny boy, because THERE IS NOTHING YOU CAN DO for that puppy of yours who is falling DOWN DOWN DOWN into a dark abyss that will NEVER EVER GIVE HIM BACK. (*Pause.*)

BECKY. At least you only thought it.

STEVE. I only thought I thought it. Turns out I *said* it.

BECKY. Oh my god ...

STEVE. It was ugly. The kid cried till he threw up. His mom dumped a Frappuccino on me. (*Steve sits down. Becky is looking at a printout of a driving route.*)

BECKY. You ever driven out to Cedar Cove?

STEVE. You don't drive to Cedar Cove, Becky — you *achieve* Cedar Cove. Or marry into it.

BECKY. Looks like it's an hour to the ferry —

STEVE. Depending on traffic — then forty or fifty minutes on the water — and once you dock, another hour's drive to the far side of the island.

BECKY. People commute from there?

STEVE. People have seaplanes. What's in Cedar Cove?

BECKY. Oh, just something for a client.