

CONTINUED: (13)

RORI

Did you?

CAITLIN

Hell, no! And have my mother be able to find me whenever she wants? No thank you.

WINNIE

She wouldn't have given the number to your mom.

CAITLIN

Winnie. They're best friends. Gimme the phone.

WINNIE

Really, it's on my dresser at home. My mom knows where I am.

RORI

Where's our food?

LIZA

What's the rush?

RORI

I'm flying back this afternoon.

LIZA

Why did you come back at all?

RORI

My father wanted to celebrate graduation stuff here.

CAITLIN

My mom and Mrs. Mason were talking graduation block party again. I was like, "Mom. This isn't high school anymore." And we couldn't do the backyard thing again because. . . I mean. . .

LIZA

It's okay. I mean maybe we--

CAITLIN

(to Rori)

I thought your internship didn't start 'til next week.

RORI

Classes start tomorrow.

CAITLIN

More classes?

RORI

I figured I'd get started on the Pharm D stuff.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (14)

CAITLIN

You're already so far ahead!

RORI

But what am I waiting for? I don't want to work at a CVS pharmacy counter my entire life.

(to Liza)

Don't you have to go to work?

LIZA

Eventually. It's not like they pay me.

WINNIE

They don't pay you?

LIZA

God, no. Working for a state leader is a privilege. And besides, they whole thing is just one big favor to my parents. Particularly the part where they treat me to free cocaine in the private bedroom.

(Pause.)

LIZA (CONT'D)

I'm kidding! Oh my god, lighten up!

RORI

What're you going to do all summer, Caitlin, stuck here?

CAITLIN

It just makes sense, pre-move to Boston, fingers crossed. Though I miss Tom.

RORI

What're you gonna do?

CAITLIN

I don't know. Danielle Steele had, like, three books on this year's best-seller's list and I haven't read any of them yet! I hate how in college you only have time to read your text books, that's what so great about being done.

(to Liza)

And I'll get to hang out with you, right?

LIZA

My parents have me under pretty good lock and key.

CAITLIN

You're fine now. You're fine. I mean, you're the Liza you've always been.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (15)

(MARSHA arrives with the food. She places plates.)

MARSHA

Yours. Yours. Yours.
 (to Liza)
 All of yours.

(RORI stews, taking in LIZA's latest "quirk." CAITLIN is amused. WINNIE is oblivious to it, happily spreading the extra brown sugar into her oatmeal. MARSHA leaves.)

RORI

I'm telling you, they're not thinking this through, not having egg whites on the menu.

LIZA

You're right. Suburban women would eat that shit up. Winnie-bear, you've got to call that modeling agent. You know that, don't you?

CAITLIN

Absolutely!

WINNIE

Okay, I'll call. But honestly, I only mentioned it because I wanted to make Liza laugh.

LIZA

I did. Now call them.

RORI

A supermodel named Winnie? I don't think so.

(LIGHTS.)

SCENE 2: NOVEMBER 2000

(LIGHTS. RORI, 29, wearing a sweater set, slacks, pearls and a dark wool coat, hanging open.)

RORI

I'm already the one you like the least, aren't I? Well don't think I don't know that, and know that it's fine with me. I do what I want and I say what I want, which isn't to mean that I do and say everything. I think things through, the ramifications, the cost-benefit analysis, but at the end of the day, if I still want to do it or say it, I will.

(Pause.)

RORI (CONT'D)

My mother died when I was nine years old. That sounds pandering, I know that, but that isn't the point.

(She begins buttoning her coat.)

RORI (CONT'D)

We could launch into all sorts of pop psychology here, how having such a major life figure die at such a young age transforms who you are. Either, "a": You become more cautious, never risk, because you realize how precious life is, you've got to safeguard it with everything you've got, or conversely, "b": You constantly live life teetering on the edge, because-- fuck it-- it could all be over in the blink of an eye. The truth is somewhere in between, because the truth is always somewhere in between. I am what I am, and I'm not going to pretend that my mother's premature death doesn't inform that, but you know what? A lot of early developmental things have informed my life. Glasses before I could read. Tortuous clarinet lessons with Mr. Krevits. "Who's The Boss" starring Alyssa Milano. I'm not standing here saying they're all equally relevant, but you know what I mean.

(She pulls a scarf out of her coat pocket.)

RORI (CONT'D)

I had read all about cancer from my parents' *Newsweek* subscription, but when my mother slipped out of remission, I didn't know how bad that really was until the morning my father told me it would take a miracle for her to live. I knew not to hope for the best, because he didn't invoke the prospect of a miracle with any sense of conviction.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

RORI (CONT'D)

And then he put on his shoes and went back to stay with her in the I.C.U. and I went to my room. And cried. All I wanted was to be alone, to know what "alone" felt like. But my grandmother wanted us to go out for brunch. I would have been fine never eating again, but even at the time, I knew what she was doing, starting a climb back towards normalcy. Life goes on, so distract yourself with carefully flipped omelettes and hearty wheat toast. But that morning at the Four Corners Luncheonette, nothing felt normal. Not the well-worn leatherette chair I sat in, not the creamy chipped formica tabletop in front of me. Not the heat of the summer sunlight streaming through the window from my left, not the way my sandals strapped around my feet. And certainly not the perfectly flipped Western omelette and the crispy wheat toast, which, despite all my pragmatic, rational efforts, I could not will myself to touch.

(She wraps the scarf around her neck.)

RORI (CONT'D)

I was caught in an enormous bubble, a bubble somehow sinking, sinking under water. And as I felt myself drown, what struck me the most-- no, the only thing that struck me at all-- were the people who weren't drowning with me. Mothers and daughters, co-workers, best friends. . . Mothers and daughters. Chatting, laughing, lavishing the maple syrup, none of them remotely aware of the gravity of it all. And I thought: It's over for me before it's begun.

(Pause.)

RORI (CONT'D)

I was wrong, of course. You sand down the gravity by living every day. Point A to Point B, Point B to Point C. You force yourself to keep ordering the Western omelette, because it's always been your favorite. You focus only on what lies directly ahead, and it helps you forget that the omelette, that the Four Corners Luncheonette, that the very idea of brunch ever had bad connotations in the first place. You make sure not to wallow in the fact that you understand all of this by the time you turn ten.

(She pulls gloves out of the other coat pocket and puts them on.)

RORI (CONT'D)

You always do "well" but never stop to enjoy it, or ask why "doing well" is important. You go to college and get one degree. You go straight through to grad school and get another. You get the job the degrees were meant for, and you're rightfully promoted for your work. You meet a man who fits the bill and you marry him. You keep moving.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

RORI (CONT'D)

There are no wrong choices, no right choices, just choices, and you keep making them, keep having them to make. The speed of two middle-aged women out for their brisk morning walk-- as long as life keeps moving at the appropriate pace, you'll be just fine. My ten-year reunion, and I'm here at full stride. I never anticipate slowing down. And, oddly, given my early exposure to events outside my control, I never anticipate it slowing down without my consent. But give it two years, and that's exactly what happens. My husband will leave me because I'm emotionally inaccessible, a convenient catch-all if ever there was one, but he'll mean it, and he'll move all his stuff out to prove it, and suddenly the microwave will be gone. When Caitlin calls two days later to tell me that Liza was on that train headed to New York, I'll realize the cordless phone is gone too. I'll be forced to slow down.

(Pause.)

RORI (CONT'D)

If only I wasn't forced to slow down, I would have never had to remember the brunch of my almost-dead mother, not ever, ever again.

(LIGHTS. The Four Corners Luncheonette, 6 1/2 years later. The same nook with the same table, the formica more chipped, the wobbly side's extra leg now reinforced by duct tape. CAITLIN, 29, and LIZA, 29, sit at the table, LIZA wearing a pink waitress' uniform. RORI hurries toward the table.)

RORI (CONT'D)

Winnie says she's coming. It's too fucking cold outside to wait for her any more.

(RORI unbuttons her coat, takes off her scarf and gloves.)

LIZA

I only get half an hour.

(RORI drapes her coat over her chair, careful that the bottom of the coat isn't touching the floor.)

RORI

Hey, this whole thing was your idea.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

LIZA

My god, if we're gonna pass judgement on all the ideas we had eleven years ago. . .

RORI

Are you kidding me, I've never had a bad idea in my life!

(CAITLIN and LIZA stare at her.)

RORI (CONT'D)

That was a joke.

CAITLIN

Sort of.

RORI

(laughing)

I passed about twenty people from our class on the way back here. At least we're out of view. Amen for the crappy back table.

(RORI sees the duct tape on the table leg. She sighs, then sits.)

CAITLIN

Where is Winnie-bear?

RORI

Win is outside signing autographs for her young teenage fans.

CAITLIN

Boys or girls?

RORI

Boys. Why would girls want her autograph?

CAITLIN

She's a role model.

RORI

A role model for who? Celery sticks?

CAITLIN

You're the one who talks all about the virtue of egg whites.

RORI

That's for health. Not for the fashion-forward trend of see-through ribs.

(RORI looks to LIZA for support.)

(CONTINUED)