

It's been King and Hazel for months now, always together. King found me just after I found the trailer park. Or maybe it's the other way around. Maybe the park found me and I found King. Chicken and egg.

Our best friends are Spiney and Sissy – they live just down the road from us. King and Hazel and Spiney are all earned names, but Sissy is a given name. Sissy exactly fits her, not in a bad way like what the word means, but more how it sounds: *Sissy*. Sissy's parents smoked a lot of pot, so maybe they picked the name for the sound and not the meaning. Her mom was dosed on acid when Sissy was born, so Sissy isn't exactly like everyone else. The main thing about Sissy is that she talks – a lot.

Spiney got his name because he's the exact opposite of Sissy: quiet. His quietness comes off to strangers as cool and tough, but the truth is that he's a real softie. He wouldn't want anyone to know that, though. If he doesn't know the exact right thing to say, he doesn't talk at all. He just stands there and looks at everyone until someone else talks, usually Sissy. It makes everything that does come out of his mouth even better because you know that he figured it was worth saying.

And King got his name because he just is, well, King.

What I love best about the four of us is that we're happy just hanging out and being ourselves. It's always a good time when we go on a tear together.

Old Joe's is the only bar in town that isn't depressing in that fading, alcoholic kind of way, so we always end up there and we have a blast.

The bar is country – there are country songs on the juke and sawdust on the floor that might really be just covering a lot of dirt. There’s neon beer signs hanging all over the place and a clock that runs backwards just to mess with your head. Country isn’t really our thing, but we do it up anyway.

The greatest part of Old Joe’s is Old Joe himself; he’s one of the best guys in town. When we come in all grinning and ready for fun, he rolls his eyes and says, ‘Here we go again,’ and he starts pouring the beer. We don’t have to order all night because when our glasses get low he’s there with another jug. Sometimes he charges us and sometimes he doesn’t. He says that we drink more in one night than the whole town does all week, so he can afford to share the wealth.

Old Joe says brilliant things like ‘When there’s no place else to go then you’ve found your home’ and ‘There’s always a bit of truth in a lie but only for the teller.’ He says the kinds of things that pop into your head later at the strangest times. And he tells us great stories about hunting and fishing and riding motorbikes across the country. King is all blown up about motorbikes – that’s what he does, fixes motorcycles and lawn mowers and any other thing with an engine that can break. So when Old Joe starts in on a motorbike story, we can kiss King goodbye.

It’s funny to see King and Old Joe talk to one another. You can tell by looking at them that they like each other. Old Joe tells me that King is a prince among men. King tells me that Old Joe is a sage and that you can figure out everything in the world just by talking to him about engines.

The four of us are great drinkers. We can drink anyone in town under the table. But King can top us all. He is always the last one standing, so he’s in charge of the night. I come in second, though – a fact I’m very proud of. Even though I’m

small, I can keep up pretty good. It's tough to drink like that. It takes diligence, concentration and daily training – not to mention the constitution of a Spartan soldier.

Sissy talks constantly whether she drinks or not. She is the most honest person I've ever met – you know she's really honest and it's not just a put-on because she says every little thing that comes into her head. You can't hide anything when you're running like that. I figure it has something to do with the acid birth. She talks so much that her voice is always low and raspy like a two-pack-a-day smoker. I've never seen her go very long without talking and I've never, ever seen her sit still. Most times I try and listen and say things back to her like 'Oh yeah' or 'Tell me about it.' But sometimes I get overloaded, and then I go into my own head for a while and just tune out and listen to the sound of her voice but not the words. She doesn't seem to mind.

I'm having a relaxing moment of tuning out when this drunk guy beside me stands up and yells, 'Wet T-shirt contest – yeehaw!' And sloshes a whole mug of beer down my front. I'm not sure if he meant to spill so much beer on me but I don't care. I stare at him, deciding on the best way to get my revenge, and then Sissy is back in focus, talking me down.

'And you know, Hazel,' she says, 'there's just nothing you can do with a person like that. You have to let it all roll because if you start letting those bad vibes come into your life, then you may as well give up now. You have to control everything around you so you can make your own life into what you want it to be.'

'Cheers, Sissy,' I say.

The only time Sissy shuts up is when you cheers her. She gives me a big smile and says, 'Cheers, baby,' and takes a drink. I cheers Sissy a lot. If I was as nice and as patient as Sissy, I

would listen to her all the time, but I'm not, so I don't. So I cheers her and use the pause while she's drinking to get away from the wet T-shirt guy and look for King.

Everyone loves King, and King loves drinking games. So when he says, 'Let's play caps,' you can bet that everyone is in for the fun. Right now there are ten people sitting on the hardwood floor engaged in a caps tournament to the death. The idea is that you and your partner sit across from each other and set a beer cap upside down on top of your bottles, and then you take turns shooting caps at each other's bottle to try and knock off the cap. If someone knocks off your cap, you have to take a drink and they get another shot. The game is stupid easy. I guess all drinking games have to be stupid easy.

There's a specific tech to caps, a certain way to flick so that you have the aim and the force to take out the other person's cap. I never bothered to learn it so I don't play the game. King plays, though, and he's also the judge of the whole floor. People in caps disputes are always yelling, 'Hey, King, I think I should get another chance.'

And he yells at the top of his lungs, 'Do-over, baby!'

King's in a good mood tonight. When he's not in such a good mood, he yells, 'All's fair in love and caps, baby!' And there's no do-overs for anyone.

King's caps partner is this chick I've never seen before. She keeps grinning at him and making a pouty face like a baby when she misses. He's giving her more do-overs than anyone.

I walk right into the middle of their game and look down at King. He grins at me and says, 'How you doing, light of my life?'

'Just checking in.'

'You're a star.'

'I am,' I say and turn to look at the girl he's playing against. I telepathically beam my thought into her head – *Don't bother, don't even think about bothering.*

King goes back to playing caps and I walk far enough away to be out of the picture but still able to see the chick out the corner of my eye. She is too busy being swept off her feet by King to notice that I exist – so much for my powers of mind control. King doesn't mean to do it, but chicks just dig him. He's honest-to-god picture-book beautiful and, to top it off, he has this cool lopsided grin that's completely cowboy. He's a chick magnet. The broad sitting on the floor is hardly even bothering to play caps.

I've been staring at her staring at him for ten whole seconds. Ten seconds is a long time to be staring at someone. She's still doing it. Still. I'm wearing my big army boots and I think about how easy and fun it would be to just take a couple of steps over there and kick. But then I think of Sissy and how upset she would be, so I just walk away.

I go over and talk to some people I haven't seen since last time we were here. We dare each other into a line-dancing contest, this being a country bar and all. Some old-timey song starts up and we stand in a line in the middle of the dance floor. No one knows what the hell we're doing, but we have this whole fabulous routine. Step, step, turn, clap, one foot out, then the other foot out, turn and begin all over again. Sissy is right in the middle of things yelling out the moves and getting everything wrong. Spiney leans against the bar and pretends he doesn't know us, which is pretty hard because Sissy keeps yelling, 'Come on, Spiney – you taught me this one!' We dance the song and then we start over. By the second time through, everyone is busting a gut they're laughing so hard.

I'm caught up in step-step-turning and realize that line dancing is the best thing ever invented. The song ends and everyone looks at one another and starts laughing all over again. We all bow and curtsy and the guys act like old-school cowboys tipping their pretend hats and hitching their jeans.

I come out of a twirl and focus my eyes. King and the caps girl are standing now and she has her arm around his waist. King is talking to someone else and balancing a beer bottle on the open palm of his hand. He's acting like he doesn't notice.

Sissy sees me and stops smiling as she follows my eyes over to King. She walks towards me quickly. She has her quiet voice on because she knows that big trouble could start right now. She grabs my arm and steers me out of the bar, my army boots half dragging along the floor.

Sissy hauls me to the parking lot. 'You can't do that, Hazel. No matter what the world hands you –'

'I really don't care about the world right now, Sissy. I care that that chick is in there hanging off King.'

'If you give in to the bad vibes then you will be in a territory where only bad will –'

'Okay. Okay. Let's just get the hell out of here before I see her again.'

'There you go, Hazel. Take the situation into control and deal with it in a positive way so that –'

I stop listening because I've decided to go to the quarry. A swim in the quarry is always a good fix. We find the Duster and hop in. I know I shouldn't drive after so much beer, but goddamn I love it. I take paths through fallow fields. The tall grasses brush against the car windows and we roll them down to stretch out our arms and feel the damp, dark tops. The night

air swirls in and around us and takes away the smoke and stale beer smells left over from the bar. We don't even turn on the radio.

When we get to the quarry, we strip down, throw our clothes on the hood of the car and run to the edge of the highest cliff. The gravel bites against my feet and wakes me up. Moonlight hits the limestone of the quarry on all sides, making it glow silvery white. I curl my toes against the side of the cliff and look down – I can't see a thing. Somewhere below us is water.

I look over at Sissy and stick out my tongue. She grins back and I put my finger to my lips. 'Shhhh.'

We jump.

Falling through the air in the dark is one of my favourite things to do. There's a point in your fall when you think that there's nothing below you. Maybe you'll never hit the water. Maybe you've already hit and you're dead. Then, just when you believe that it's all over, you land. All of a sudden you're alive, and whatever was getting you down is gone.

The force of the fall pushes me deep, and I let myself torpedo under for one powerful moment. No one knows how deep the quarry is. There are rumours of Mafia cars, dead bodies and stolen treasure hidden in this water.

A million bubbles swirl around me. When you jump from great heights you have to use bubbles to orient yourself because you can get confused and swim the wrong way – deeper instead of up. I follow the bubbles straight to the top, burst through to the air and take a deep breath. And there's Sissy grinning.

Then Sissy and I float. We are really great at floating. We can float forever. Naked floating combined with blind jumping can take away any trouble in the world. My ears are

underwater and I can hear Sissy's muted words, her voice echoing softly between the limestone walls of the quarry. Sissy's voice, when you don't really have to listen, is a beautiful thing.

I came home in a great mood but now everything is wrong again. I'm walking around the trailer singing angry songs at the top of my not-so-puny voice, and I don't care who in this unglamorous place I wake up.

I don't make up words for songs very well when I'm drunk or angry, and now I'm both, so I'm singing 'What the hell is going on?' with 'It's all wrong, it's all wrong' as the chorus. Pretty stupid.

King's not home. That's what made everything bad again. I want to go back to the quarry, to be anywhere except here. I want to talk to Old Joe so he can tell me that something good will come out of this. But I can't think of a damn thing that Old Joe or anyone else could tell me to make this stupid situation even close to okay. I find King's guitar and take all the strings off, which is super-bad because it bends the neck. I twist the tuning heads and hear the notes go flat and then flatter and then wind themselves down to just plain noise. I look around for more destruction, but there's nothing else I can think to touch that would piss him off more. So I sit and try not to cry like a silly little girl.

I try not to think of King and the caps girl in some field somewhere doing god knows what. The more I try not to think about it, the clearer the scene becomes. I can practically hear every word they're saying from wherever they are.

I have to chill out, so I figure that this is as good a time as any to water the flowers. I go out to the back of the trailer, turn on the hose and get the spray gun. I think of the caps girl. I can't help it. I try to remember if she's pretty, if she's prettier

than me. I think of King playing caps with her and the one time I saw him look at her. I try to analyze his face. But there is nothing in my memory. Their features turn into expressions that I can't figure out, knowing glances that I never saw. I wish I wasn't so drunk so I could remember if the looks really happened. Then again, I'm glad I'm drunk and wish I was drunker because the fact, the real fact, is that King isn't here – again.

I even went for a float first, and I still beat him home. That's a lot of time to play with, especially on a drunken night. I yank the hose to the front of the trailer and think violent King thoughts. I stand in the middle of the lawn, press the trigger on the spray gun and start weaving in a too-drunk-not-drunk-enough circle.

And then there's the top of King's head popping out of a patch of waist-high flowers. I have the gun spraying right against his chest, and he's soaked.

His voice is sleepy. 'Hey, Hazel, hey, what are you doing watering at this time of night?'

'I heard it's better to water at night.'

'Yeah, I think I heard that too.'

I haven't turned off the gun or moved my aim. The water is still spattering full blast against his T-shirt. He must be sitting in mud by now.

'Why don't you come over here?'

'Because it's wet over there. And I don't want to wreck my dress.'

So he stands up and walks right into the water with it soaking him even more, and he takes the gun out of my hand. Then he picks me up and takes me to a dry part of the flowers. We lie down on our backs, side by side, and stare up at the night.

'You know, Hazel, when you lie down here and all you can see is the top of the flowers and the stars, it's like we're the only two people in the world.'

'I wish we were ... I wish the caps girl didn't exist in the world.'

'Ahh, the caps girl.'

'Why do you do it, King?'

At first, I think he's not going to answer or that he'll pretend he doesn't know what I'm talking about. I think if he does that, I might have to hit him. I've been waiting a long time, all night almost, to let the violence reign, and now I have the person who makes me the maddest in the world right here. But I have no chance.

'I don't know, I don't know anything. You just get so mad. Sometimes the biggest thing I do is make you mad. Sometimes I feel like I'm trying to exist and the only thing that reacts to my trying is you. Maybe you are the only one who knows that I'm here. I need to see that sometimes. You know?'

'Over and over?'

'Maybe.'

We lie there for a while. King smooths the hair from my forehead, and I can feel the anger leaving me with every stroke. I remind myself that he was here all the time. I remind myself that my anger is really all because of me. I relax and let King hold me and make me feel comfortable again.

'Hey, King, you know that girl who lives three doors down, she's kind of slow?'

'Yeah.'

'Well, she has a friend now.'

'Oh yeah?'

'They ride their bikes together. He comes by her house, waits in the driveway and rings the bell on his bike until she

pokes her head out the front door. And then he says to her, “Want to go for a bike ride?” And she runs right out the door with two cans of pop that she’s been holding behind her back since she heard his bell. She gives one to him, and they take off down the road together.

‘That’s beautiful, Hazel.’

We look at the tops of the flowers and the stars for a while.

‘You know, Hazel, there’s this girl who wears flowered dresses all the time, even in winter, because she wants to bring a little something magical into the trailer park where she lives. Only, I want to tell her that there’s always a little something magical following her around whatever she wears. And sometimes when I look at her, I can’t believe that she’s with me. It’s like I have to shake it into myself. And when talking to her and touching her doesn’t make her any more real, I have to wreck shit up so that I can watch the fury and know that she cares about what I’m doing. It’s a shitty way to go, but sometimes I think it’s the only thing I’ve got.’

‘Does that mean you’re sorry?’

‘Only if you’re sorry for whatever it was I heard you do to my guitar.’

‘I don’t know if I’m sorry for that yet.’

‘Close enough.’

He laughs and holds me tighter, and we fall asleep in the flowers.

King and I live in the Evening and Morning Star Trailer Park. There is a sign above the entrance of the park that spells out EVENING AND MORNING STAR TRAILER PARK in wooden letters. Or used to spell it out – half of the letters have fallen into the ditch so that now the sign just says EVEN MOR T ARK. The creepy thing is that if you know a bit of French then you can see that the sign says EVEN DEATH ARK, which makes me think of a Noah and a million doomed animals. But I don't want to think of a Death Ark every time I come home, so we just call it EVEN MORE, as in even more fun and even more life.

King is not King's real name and Hazel is not my real name, but that's what everyone calls us. We live in a trailer park and not a real nice one either. But this is the park that found me by fate so this is the park that belongs to me.

I remember exactly what happened the day I found Even More. I was driving down the road in my '71 Duster. I had nothing to do and nowhere to go and I was getting a full dose of that real and true freedom. I had been driving around for two weeks already looking for I don't know what, and I was getting kind of tired and excited like I might be close to the end of my trip. I had a feeling that anything could happen and I was ready for it. Do you turn at the next crossroads or go straight? And then what? You turn one way and you become one sort of person, turn the other way and you become another. Who knows? The freedom is that it's all up to you.

And that's how I found this place. I stopped here. I was tired of driving away from things and not towards anything in

particular and I was ready to take a break and then there it was: Even More. Right in the middle of nowhere, just sitting there ready to be found. And in front of the park was the trailer, my trailer, with a For Sale sign stuck on the door. Well, how can you turn your back on that?

There's some cool people here but there could be more flowers on front lawns, if you know what I mean. I wear a dress every day to combat the lack of glamour, and I have a fantastic repertoire of hairstyles. Last week I discovered liquid eyeliner. Much better than the crayon kind, so every day I wear a little bit more. I can't help it. It's an unstoppable beauty progression.

Today I'm doing my magic on the flowers since I didn't really get to water them properly last night. I have the most flowers in the park, which isn't much of a challenge, but I have *by far* the most flowers in the park. I like the wild kind.

I found these wildflower seeds that come from Newfoundland. Newfoundland flowers grow everywhere, they're not picky – they'll even grow in ditches and other places where they should never be able to survive. I admire them for that, so I bought fourteen packages and scattered them out front. So now the whole yard looks like a Newfoundland ditch.

You have to walk right through the flowers to get to the door – I never thought of a path. The flowers are almost three feet high so you can't step around them – you have to walk right through. But you don't have to worry that you're going to crush them, because they'll just keep on living no matter how often you go to the door.

My favourite thing to do is sing and water the flowers. I love how the sun hits the shoots of water from the spray gun and makes little rainbows. Everything is shiny. The spray

gun is one of the best things around the house. I've got a sprinkler, the kind that goes back and forth and makes little waterfalls, but I love the gun because it gives me total control. I can get every last flower and not worry that the sprinkler has left anyone out. King got me the sprinkler and the gun. Every time he's in the hardware store he looks for a new water toy for me. I've got about ten different kinds of sprinklers in a pile out back. That's the kind of guy King is: if he knows you like something, he can't stop himself from getting it for you.

Sometimes I water too much. I can't help myself. I just kind of zone out and go somewhere else for a while. I get lost in all that water. It's like almost remembering something – like that feeling when a name is on the tip of your tongue or like you are just one teensy mental jump away from a really great discovery. It's that feeling exactly. The great idea hovers in front of you like a bubble and if you are ever going to understand it properly you have to climb on inside. And that's where I get lost.

One time King came home and found me standing in a lawn full of mud. I was just turning around very slowly, watching the spray. He said he waded through the lawn, eased my fingers off the water gun, unwound me from the hose and carried me inside. I was soaked and covered in mud and humming some tune. But I don't remember any of that. He said I just smiled and touched his face and went to sleep.

We figured out later that I was watering for two hours. The next morning, I was sad because I had trampled some of the flowers and also because I lost the discovery and the day. The losing-time thing happens now and then. Once I went out for a walk and never turned around to come home. King found me on the side of the highway. It was no big deal, but I

wish I could remember those big ideas that I get stuck inside – you could change the world with a discovery like that.

King said that when he found me on the lawn soaked and humming, standing in a pile of mud and hose, it was the most beautiful thing he had ever seen. So I guess it was okay to lose a couple of flowers and some time.

Some people would freak if they saw their old lady soaked and whacked out in the front yard or on the side of the highway, but that's why I love King like I do: when everything in the world is crazy he's just like the water – shiny.

My neck won't move so I can't look left, and right isn't much good either. That's what I get for napping on the couch. But the neck thing will go away. The thing that won't go away is that King didn't sleep here last night. Not on the couch or anywhere else in the trailer. I sit for a while not thinking about the caps girl.

And then, before I have time to do much more worrying, King is at the door looking godawful, half walking half stumbling into the trailer. He slumps down on the rocker to tell me the whole story. Last night he was in jail. Nothing serious, a B & E that was more like trespassing.

King likes to go to this old gravel pit with Spiney. King and Spiney used to be in a rock band together. There's great acoustics in the pit, so they climb over the fence and scream their heads off, making the sounds of all the instruments and singing the mostly forgotten words to all their old songs.

I heard it once. In a small town you can hear just about everything. Listening to them in the pit going off like banshees made me want to scream along with them, scream out loud for all the times I couldn't make any noise at all and scream for the times I thought it would be better not to – there are a million reasons for screaming once you get going.

When King and Spiney are on a rage in the pit, it doesn't take long for the cops to collect them and throw them in jail for the night. So if they don't wrap up their screaming and get out pronto, then that's what always happens, and they end up in the drunk tank. But they've never had to stay the whole night before. King is a natural charmer, so usually when they

get thrown in jail King starts talking and convinces the cop on duty to let them go. That's another small-town thing, I guess: eventually you meet all the cops. They start talking about the old days and the band and next thing you know King is a free man.

That's how it usually goes, but last night they had to stay. No amount of charm could get him home.

Today, after jail, King must have gone over to Spiney's trailer and tried to drink away the night. He's home now, but it's only four in the afternoon and he's already on a rant about being the victim of crazy mindless rules and how it all sucks. This is the ten-beer rant, so I figure he's been drinking for a while. My guess is that the boys went straight to the beer store as soon as they got let out this morning. So right now King is sitting on the rocking chair in our little trailer living room, but he sure isn't rocking.

'Hazel,' he says, 'you know there's only so much a person can do to have fun, and when you run out of ideas there's only trouble.'

'There's only trouble everywhere, King.'

'Yeah, you're right, but sometimes you can stay out and it's all okay. It's times like this that come around and ruin everything.'

'You crossed into trouble way back, and sometimes you jump back to the normal and somewhat boring side of things, but then you always go back to the crazy side.'

'I have to go back, Hazel.'

'I know you do. You just have to keep testing that line.'

'Yeah.'

'Can't let it get too far away.'

'Like you.'

King can hardly see because the cops maced him. I'm surprised about the police using mace on him but I don't say

a thing. So while we're talking down the night, he's kind of crying. He keeps telling me it's just the mace. There's a tear on his cheek, and I wipe it off with the bottom of my dress. King puts his hand on my hair and pulls me into him.

I try to imagine my King in jail. Not jail where he probably knows the guards, but real jail. The Big House. Even one night seems impossible. He is so huge and free. I can't picture him in a little room made of concrete and bars like you see in the movies. In my mind, King couldn't possibly fit in a space like that.

Sometimes, like now, it feels as though even the whole big world isn't big enough for King.

I close my eyes and lean against him for a second, and when I open them again I see the blood. 'They got you good, King.'

'Absolutely shit-kicked,' he says and grins.

'What did you do?'

'They said I was being aggressive.'

I shake my head and look to the corner of the kitchen at my fish mobile. It's a ratty thing at first sight – little coloured glass fish tied to chopsticks with fishing line – but if you take the time to look at it and see it in just the right way, you can believe that you are underwater so completely that you hold your breath.

I go to the bathroom for peroxide and bandages to clean him up. The cuts are on his head, elbow and knees and down his leg. I wipe as gently as I can. There's lots of dirt and tiny pieces of gravel mixed with the dried blood. I start to worry a bit, wondering how much damage the cops did and how much he did himself. I wonder how serious a B & E can get, but I don't say anything out loud. It wouldn't be right to bring out my worry, not now. King would just tell me it was

nothing, no matter what, and that everything was going to be okay. Even with his previous charges piling up on top of this new one. But the previous charges and the piling are another thing not to think about. The mobile spins slowly, and the fish swim and swim.

I use the bubbly peroxide and a cotton ball to wipe carefully, not wanting to cause more hurt. Maybe it's because I don't say my thoughts out loud that the worry settles in me. I can feel it deep in my chest and somewhere in the bottom of my stomach.

He reads my mind. 'I don't think this is all from the cops, Hazel. I was doing some damage before they got us.'

'Ripping it up,' I say and I smile because I can tell he's kind of proud of himself.

'Damn right,' he says. 'So now I have to go to court.'

I close my eyes and swallow down the bad thoughts.

'Damn,' I say. 'Court is always so early in the morning. No jail, though, right?'

'Nah, they won't put me in jail.'

'Because, you know, I can deal with a lot of things ...'

'Yeah, I know,' he says. 'You can deal with anything but jail.'

I stand up and sit King straight in the rocking chair. I bow to the invisible judge sitting on the couch and pace the courtroom. 'Is this the kind of person you want to lock up, sir? Sure, he was screaming at the moon, but if this guy wants to throw himself down a gravel pit, why should we care? And besides, Your Judgementalist, he'll keep it down next time.'

I curtsy to the judge and smile at King.

'Hazel, you're hired.'

'Better than the guy they'll give you anyway,' I say.

'Better than anything.'

He pulls me into his lap and we rock back and forth for a while and talk about the fun parts that happened last night. King and Spiney always have a good time together – they can hang out for days on end without getting sick of each other. King tells me about how he almost wrote a song while they were in the pit. He was singing something that could be a really good bass line and wishes he could remember it.

And then we fall asleep. We sleep despite the cuts and the worry and the mace and the worry. When we're together we can sleep anywhere, at any time, under any circumstance. That's the kind of people we are.