

*(The scene takes place after an accident.)*

Late afternoon sun filtered in through the living room sheers. Susan turned on the air-conditioning and walked through the silent house, and paused to press her cheek against the cool plaster of the upstairs hallway. She saw a warren<sup>1</sup> of three bedrooms and two bathrooms, whose normalcy was so extreme she felt she had  
5 magically leapt five hundred years into the future and was inside a diorama recreating middle-class North American life in the late twentieth century.

The bathroom was large and clean. Susan drew a bath, disrobed and entered the tub, submerging her head in the chlorinated gem-blue water, and when she came up for air, she began to cry. She had emerged flawless - unpunctured and unbruised,  
10 like a Spartan apple fresh from the crisper at Von's. [...] She splashed water on her face, rinsing away her tears. Her teeth felt gluey, and she spritzed water into her mouth and rubbed her tongue around them. She no longer felt she might be dead or a ghost.

Her chest stopped heaving. The sky was darkening, and she towed herself dry, put on Karen Galvin's terry robe and returned to the kitchen, where she heated a  
15 can of cream-of-mushroom soup. Once the soup was ready, she took it and a box of Goldfish crackers into the living room to watch TV. Would the neighbors see the lights and suspect an intruder? She pushed the thought away. [...]

The local news teams were out in force, and Susan wasn't surprised when an  
20 old news service head shot of herself appeared on screen behind the anchor's head. She remembered the day she'd posed for that particular shot. Her husband Chris, the rock star, had stood behind the photographer making quacking noises. She was happy to be away from Chris and auditions and mean tabloid articles. Wait - where was she? Ohio? Kentucky? She got up and went to check mail on a small credenza  
25 by the front door. Seneca, Ohio. Good.

She returned to the couch to hear more about her supposed death, wondering how long it would take the authorities to reassemble the bodies and dental fragments and realize she wasn't there. She wondered if her unbuckled seat belt in 58-A would be a giveaway<sup>2</sup>.

30 She fell asleep on the couch, and woke up the next morning hungry and curious. The TV was still on, and as she surfed its channels, she learned the truth of the axiom that the last thing we ever learn in life is the effect we have on others. She was also able to calculate with disheartening precision the exact caliber of her rung<sup>3</sup> in entertainment hell:

35 "Forfeited a middling acting career for the trash of rock and roll."

"Small-town girl makes it big and then small again."

"Smart enough, but made some bad decisions."

"Long-suffering wife of philandering rocker hubby<sup>4</sup>."

"A recent small brainless part in a small brainless movie."

40 She saw her mother and stepfather being interviewed on CNN on their lawn in Cheyenne. Marilyn held a framed photo of Susan up against her stomach as though hiding a pregnancy. It was an early teenage photo taken about three minutes before she became famous, just before her world expanded like an exploding spacecraft in

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<sup>1</sup> warren : a sort of labyrinth

<sup>2</sup> giveaway : a clue or a hint

<sup>3</sup> rung: place or position

<sup>4</sup> philandering ... hubby : unfaithful husband

45 a movie. Her stepfather, Don, was cross-armed and stern. Both were speaking about  
Susan's death, both uttering "No comment" to the prospect of suing<sup>5</sup> the airline.  
Following them was a ten-second clip of Susan in her most remembered role as  
Katie, the "good" daughter in the long-running network series Meet the Blooms.  
Following the clip, the newscaster added gravely, "Susan Colgate - beauty queen,  
50 child star, rock-and-roll wife and devoted daughter. Her star now shines in heaven,"  
at which Susan took a deep breath and said, "Ugh."

[...] On CNN there was no real news footage to add to yesterday's. By  
tomorrow she figured there would be no mention of her, and by the day after, the  
nation's memory scar would be healed over completely. The world would forget her  
and she would forget the world. Whatever trace she'd left on the world would vanish  
55 as quickly as a paper cut. All that work and time and spirit she'd spent trying to  
become a plausible Susan Colgate - for nothing. [...]

Later that week, Susan caught a snippet of her memorial service on  
Entertainment Tonight [...]. Her mother and stepfather, interviewed again after the  
service, had become key figures in the class-action suit being launched against the  
60 airline. "We'd sacrifice anything we might gain from this suit just to have our precious  
Suzie back in our fold." Suzie? Marilyn had called Susan many things before, but  
Suzie had never been one of them.

Abridged from Douglas Coupland, *Miss Wyoming*, Harper Perennial, (2004)

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<sup>5</sup> to sue : to take legal action against someone