

A. D. NAUMAN
LOOKERS

JENNA SAT IN THE BACK ROW like she used to in high school and eyeballed her: *Luanne*, the original WRNL Good Looker, up front sitting straight-as-a-board with her glossy flowy mahogany hair down to her waist; *Luuu-anne*, all swishes and smiles, snug in a pink blazer, turning to grin encouragingly at the girls behind her. Born-to-be-pleasant *Luanne*, with no history of schizophrenia or alcoholism in her family. This was the kind of girl guys liked: beautiful but not too intense.

Jenna must have been chosen for a contrast. Jenna's hair swelled in loose curls and her lips took up too much room on her face, her jawbone so steep it cast black shadows on her skinny neck. Yet everyone said she was gorgeous. The other Good Lookers were all blondes, with dumb slow-blinking Bambi eyes and teeny noses planted in the center of valentine faces. Luanne and Jenna were the only brunettes, which was probably why they got paired up.

Big D sat on a metal desk up front and talked at them in his radio voice. The job was to ride around town in the WRNL Winner Wagon and give away free money. It was Big D's idea to hire luscious young girls and call them Good Lookers. They were to search for cars with men in them, as the Good Looker concept did not seem to apply to

women, pick a car, then radio in a description and the license plate number, which Big D would broadcast between oldies. Big D paused to ask if anyone knew how to work a CB. Only Jenna raised her hand, but it was the others' ignorance that delighted him. He continued: if the Lucky Driver was listening to WRNL, he'd know to pull over and get a free fifty bucks. The girls were to jump enthusiastically out of the Winner Wagon and run in their high heels to the Lucky Car. Big D demonstrated how they were to run—holding their arms out from their sides like ladies, not balling up their fists and jogging like guys.

Big D did not look like his radio voice. He was old and had that wormy kind of fat on him, with splotches on his face that went all the way up over the top of his cue ball head. When one of the blondes asked a question, Big D gripped his chest like her beauty was giving him a heart attack and pretended to faint. Then he hopped up and yelled, "Ask anyone, girls, and they'll tell ya—I am *one crazy dude*—" He never did answer the question. Jenna would have liked to get a long piece of cord like a clothesline and twist it around Big D's neck and pull it until his fat spotted head popped off. Probably it wouldn't pop so much as squish off, and splutter down his chest, with veins and other stringy stuff trailing down the nubby fabric of his shirt.

At the end of orientation Big D left the room walking backwards and bowing and wiping pretend tears from his eyes, and a secretary with lumpy legs brought in their schedules. No one got to work full-time—Big D had hired too many girls. The pay would be dirt—staying at the Pizza Hut would've been better. But working here, Jenna would get to wear nice clothes and hear her name on the radio, feel more real. Luanne slipped into the chair beside hers and murmured, "Listen. I say we *walk* to the Lucky Winner car and hold our arms however we like." Jenna squinted her face in a fake smile: Luanne was one of those girls who's assertive on the sly. Jenna would have liked to pluck the Bic pen out of Luanne's hand and jab it into her eye socket and watch the blood gush out of her dumb surprised face. Luanne leaned closer, peering at Jenna's copy of the schedule even though she had one of her own, and Jenna got a close-up of Luanne's faultless bronze Greek-looking profile. Luke would have called her stunning. Jenna tilted away from the flawless, flowery presence. *Stunning*, he would've said, not because he was a flirt, but because he always found

a compliment for people. His image flickered in her mind, smiling and nodding, hair flopping forward, perched on his car hood with his guitar, fingers stretched along the fret. Happy-go-lucky Luke, a guy who liked everyone and everything. *I'm sorry*, his voice said again in her head: the break-up was on instant replay, sometimes whispering, sometimes loud. *I have to move on. You're beautiful, but—too intense*. Even someone who liked everything couldn't like her.

THEIR FIRST DAY OUT in the Winner Wagon, Luanne drove. It was Fifties Friday, which meant every third song Big D played was extra stupid. The Winner Wagon was practically new—a '77 Chevy with an AM/FM radio—but the radio had to stay on WRNL AM all the time, and Big D was always on, telling dumb blonde jokes, selling discount furniture. "WRNL," sang a chorus of Black-sounding white women, followed by the babbling Big D, "Your oldeeees station innnnnnn Newport News, *Virgin-ya*."

They drove. Luanne began singing along with the radio, "*Ooh baby baby it's a wild world*—" Jenna had never heard worse singing. Her eyes landed on Luanne's hands gripping the wheel responsibly at ten and two, her nails sensibly short and coral. Jenna and Luanne had not been actual friends in high school, but Jenna knew all about her: Luanne lived in Riverside, in a huge brick Colonial with a second garage for her dad's boat. Jenna lived across Warwick Boulevard, behind the Burger King, where the homes were clumped up together like little green Monopoly houses. Luanne was an honor student and the president of the Keyettes. Her older brother was one of the guys killed in the car crash on graduation night, but the brave Luanne had come through it—knew how to do that—went around talking to adults, went to family counseling—with her *parents*; then went off to college and came back talking smart, with a boyfriend in *pre-law*.

"We have to find someone," Luanne said, flashing a smile, her bangs like a wood block on her forehead. "How about him?" They approached a Cadillac. "No," Luanne answered herself. "Already rich." She only wanted to give money to appreciative poor people. "Him? Hm, no." Jenna watched the ruffly yellow sleeve flap over Luanne's shoulder and was reminded that now she had to go buy fluffy dresses

like Luanne's. Big D had not liked the black miniskirt and sequined high-heeled sandals she had on today. His eyes went up and down her front and his throat gurgled, but then he frowned, declaring she was yummy enough for an afternoon snack, but they were after a more innocent look—feminine and cheerful—like Luanne's.

Luanne was Big D's favorite. She'd stood next to him after the meeting and spoke softly in his ear, which caused him to cock his head and pant like a dog. Luanne giggled, apparently taking this as flattery, and now Jenna had to be more like her—a proper little virgin type. Not a real virgin, of course, but the type who only sleeps with a long-term steady boyfriend instead of a series of three-week boyfriends, though Luke had stayed with her for six months. *Time to move on*, his cool voice cracked in her head. Big-hearted Luke, such an eager listener, nodding and spurting out sympathetic noises that encouraged Jenna to talk until she'd told him the whole entire story of Joe McKenzie, which she'd never told anyone, not even a part of it. *It's okay*, Luke kept saying, stroking her hair. *Go ahead and cry, it's okay*. But it wasn't okay. He'd gotten tired of her. Who wouldn't?

Luanne began calling in descriptions of cars. Jenna had to show her how to use the CB and tell her the models and makes of the cars; all Luanne could figure out was what color they were. It took a while to find a fool listening to WRNL, but they got one—a guy in an ancient Chrysler. Jenna made Luanne award the prize money, not wanting the bother of getting out of the van and walking in the weeds by the roadside. Luanne came flouncing back all pink with excitement: their first Lucky Winner was a fireman whose wife just had a baby! *God*.

THAT EVENING JENNA WALKED into her house and found no phone message from Luke. Luke was not going to call. She stood at the kitchen counter with a rusty screwdriver shoved up inside her chest and made herself a sandwich out of cheese slices. She carried it into the living room, where her mother was staring at *M*A*S*H* reruns, and tried sitting beside her on the couch. Her mother didn't drink anymore, but she was called an alcoholic anyway. "I should embroider a big red 'A' on all my blouses," she'd said after her first AA meeting. It was over a year ago but she wasn't any better as far

as Jenna could tell, just mean in a different way. Marla the Party Girl stripped off the front, now she was like a wall without wallpaper, the rough underneath part, pale and bumpy with old glue. Usually she only spoke to Jenna to accuse her of stealing change out of the flower-pot, but Jenna attempted a conversation. “Do you remember Luanne, that girl I went to high school with?”

“Oh, yeah,” replied the faraway voice, “that girl who took the Sears class with you.”

“No, Mama, that was *Di-anne. Di-anne*. I’m talking about *Lu-anne*.”

“Oh.”

“I said *Lu-anne*.” Jenna snorted at the thought of *Lu-anne* bothering with the Sears modeling class, where you learned things like never wear mascara just on your top lashes or you will look *off-balance*. Girls like Luanne did not need to be told such things—they were naturally balanced. It was only girls like Jenna, saving up their Pizza Hut money to pay for the class themselves, who had to trot after someone like Miss Judi, a real former Miss Virginia, and suck in every word she said because otherwise they would know nothing at all. After her year as Miss Virginia, Miss Judi married into old Tidewater money and had a son, and now she taught modeling part-time to teenage girls at Sears, cheering as the girls came down the runway outside the main entrance in the mall, “Look at you!”—her eyes jacked open wide for an imaginary camera—“Miss America!” Even when they were only rehearsing, a crowd gathered to watch them teeter up the runway. “Look at you! Miss America! Jenna honey, *smile!* Smile, Jenna, smile!” *Fuck you, Miss Judi, fuck you!* Jenna hated her. But she had to go every Wednesday to learn the tips and feel the crowd look at her and feel visible again after Joe McKenzie.

She finished her sandwich except for the crust. “*Lu-anne, Mama, I’m talkin’ about Lu-anne.*”

“Well how am I supposed to know?”

Someday, Jenna realized, Luanne would be Miss Judi, prinking around in tan pumps, married to an up-and-coming Virginia politician, attending important luncheons. Who would Jenna be? She got up and crossed the dining room toward her bedroom. At the table sat her father reading fishing magazines, which he did every night, though he never went fishing. His eyes snapped onto her as she

passed but she didn't bother speaking. The schizophrenia was on his side—in a sister and a girl cousin, who'd seemed fine until their late teens—and now that Jenna was almost twenty, her father regarded her as a source of imminent problems. She was getting older, more *female*; she had to be scrutinized for bizarre behavior, delusions, hallucinations. “Don't be oversensitive,” he'd bark. “Don't overreact.” The day she came home crying after her first time with Joe McKenzie, November of her ninth-grade year, her father was furious because she couldn't say what was wrong. “Pull yourself together!” he'd commanded and she'd tried. She'd pressed her legs tight together and her arms hard against her sides and stood lifeless, thinking of their Thanksgiving bird, trussed and muscled into the oven, roasting with a muffled squeal as people peered in at it.

Safe in her room, she shook her Fleetwood Mac album out of its cover, dropped it onto her turntable, set the needle, shut off the lights, and lay on her bed. Across the short patch of brown grass was Joe McKenzie's former house, and in the room that used to be his, a single lamp was lit. She imagined suddenly seeing him there, his rugged face gazing back at her. A hard breath caught in her chest and made her skin hot. Hadn't he been her true love? For two whole years she thought so. “You were my true love,” she said to the house and smiled at how it would hurt Luke to know she'd said it.

THE FOLLOWING WEEK Luanne drove again, up and down the peninsula. Jenna sat watching the smooth blue stripe of river, the green stripe of lawn, broad white sidewalks, blacktop parking lots: the flatness of the Tidewater terrain made her mind fold up on itself. Her brain had nothing to do but make lists of everyone she hated: Luanne, Big D, her father, her mother, all the blonde Good Lookers, and especially the Lucky Winners. Why did they get to be so lucky? She pictured herself in a frilly dress flouncing up to the next Lucky Winner's car, whirling a shotgun round and blowing off his Lucky Winner head. The head like an exploded melon on the hot car seat. “Have a nice day! From Double-*You-Are-in-Hell!*” Over and over she saw this, her eyes squinting through the windshield.

“Are you okay?” asked Luanne. Considerate, caring, well-tuned Luanne.

Jenna croaked, "I have to pee."

Luanne pulled into the Hardee's and waited in the van while Jenna stood at the restroom mirror brush-brush-brushing her hair, adding more lipstick, powder, lipstick. She never looked right. She went into a stall and sat. Two weeks and one day since Luke had *moved on* and no word and where was he now? Holding the car door for some other girl, looking interested in some other girl's problems. She thought how "Luke" and "Luanne" both started with L-U and imagined him meeting her at a party and falling in love, because who wouldn't fall for the lovely untroublesome Luanne? Luke and Luanne riding in his Mustang, Winner Wagons pulling them over to give them money. The Mustang driving off a cliff, their bodies like crash test dummies hitting the windshield.

And wouldn't Joe McKenzie laugh if he could see her now, hiding in a bathroom stall, her fingers creeping up the sides of her face and squeezing her skull. *You're nuts*, his voice said again in her head: *Crazy bitch. God, you and Cindy. Women—you're all nuts*. In the woods, her skin ripping, bits of earth rubbing in, his weight crushing. His face smiling over the chain-link fence, *Whoa!*

She started to cry: Luke had been a kind of levee, standing shocked and righteous between her and these memories of Joe McKenzie, and now Luke was gone and Joe McKenzie was coursing through her mind like flood water, filthy, overflowing the creases in her brain. *Brain chemicals*. "The females have bad brain chemicals," her father's voice informed. Then came the sound of her mother's harsh laugh: "Thank goodness for bad brain chemicals! No one to blame!" Her mother had looked directly at her, uncharacteristically, and said: "All anyone wants is to not be bothered and not be blamed. You remember that." Jenna hadn't remembered it. She'd been a bother to Luke; she'd blamed Joe McKenzie.

Suddenly Luanne's voice was in the bathroom: "Hello hello?"

"Just a minute!" Jenna hollered, and sat in the stall for another five minutes.

When she climbed back into the Winner Wagon, Luanne had an announcement: "I feel we need to talk. I feel angry having to sit here and wait for so long." She must have learned to speak like this in family counseling.

Jenna stared at her, unblinking, wishing she could send laser beams out of her eyes and explode Luanne's brain right inside her skull so that bloody brain slime oozed out of her eye sockets and nostrils. Then Jenna proclaimed, with a dramatic little catch in her voice, "Oh, Luanne! I'm sorry! Things are really awful at home—my mom's an alcoholic and my aunt's in the mental hospital!" Luanne's eyebrows flew up into her bangs. "And my boyfriend—last week he just went nuts! He thought I was with this other guy who used to live next door to me and he's been coming round every night with a shotgun!" Luanne gasped. "His name is Luke Freeman. If you ever meet him at a party don't go out with him."

"Oh no, I never would! Oh, *Jenna*—"

Jenna. The sound of it reverberated in her head—her name on Luanne's lips, elongated, oval. Luanne made it sound like something with substance that was connected to a person who was real. Luanne made it sound as though she cared about Jenna. "Is there anything I can *do*?"

Oh, now she had to *do* something. Jenna looked into the stupid pretty face—so trusting, undisturbed, the eyes like comic book character circles. What could Luanne *do*? What *possibly* could this girl do? Bake brownies? Jenna managed, in her best sweet Luanne voice, "It's good to know you're . . . *here*."

"Oh, I am!" Luanne exclaimed, "You can count on me!" ecstatic at this apparent breakthrough between them. But Jenna liked hating Luanne. Jenna smirked with hidden teeth: she'd get her, she'd get them all—Big D, all the Good Lookers, the Lucky Winners—everyone, somehow, and in the end the Winner Wagon would blow up in a column of red and orange flames.

IN THE DARK SHE LAY, her knees to her chest, Fleetwood Mac droning, images and sounds washing up on high tide in her brain. *Whoa!* He stood at the chain-link fence between their backyards, shirtless, a spray of black hair down his chest to the waistband of his shorts. *Whoa!* *I just moved next door to Miss America!* She was out in her backyard to get a tan so she wouldn't be such a pale-white ghost starting high school. Her bikini top had gotten way too tight, and his eyeballs could not keep still. *You could use a Coke*, he'd said, and she thought he meant he'd bring her one; then she saw he

expected her to come inside his house. She hesitated. Her parents were home, but they never watched out the windows. *Come on in!* He was so eager, and she wasn't sure what to do, so she went into his house and sat at the table in his kitchen which was so hot and crowded with sealed-up boxes. He handed her a bottle of Coke, small and voluptuous and frosty-cold. She rolled it against the insides of her sunburned arms.

The next day and the day after, every day all summer, she had a Coke in his kitchen. He taught evening classes at Christopher Newport College; he was the smartest man she'd ever met. He had a master's degree in geology and a rock collection: *Look at this one*, he said, a deep pink shard held loose between his thumb and forefinger. *Isn't it gorgeous?* She nodded, because he expected her to. *It's not a gem stone. It's quartz. It's gorgeous, but it has no value at all. Isn't that remarkable?* Yes, she agreed, *quartz*, and the word took on a weight and sank to the bottom of her stomach. He wanted to pin up her gorgeous long curly hair like Miss America's, so he got some of Cindy's bobby pins. Then he got a pair of Cindy's high-heel shoes and they nearly fit Jenna, and he posed her in front of a full-length mirror and she saw how he looked at her, every inch of him enthralled. She realized: he was in love with her. Their reflections stood together, his no taller than hers, his face ready to explode from the sight of her. *You are so lovely*, he couldn't help but say, and he couldn't help but put his thick lips on her bare shoulder. She was so beautiful, she had this power—she'd *made* him love her—made this smart man love *her*—more than he loved his own wife.

LUANNE WAS SINGING AGAIN, “*She said look, what's your game?*” Tone-deaf. Jenna imagined stabbing Luanne with a butcher knife at a traffic light, gobs of blood splattering around the dashboard and ceiling and Luanne's pink blouse. Luanne's lifeless body draped over the steering wheel and Jenna calling in, “Big D! Big D! Good-Looker Luanne don't look so good no more!”

They started to follow a Ford Monarch with a “Jesus Is Coming” bumper sticker. Luanne called it in. Over the radio Big D's voice bellowed, “Mr. Blue Ford Monarch, the Good Lookers *are looking for you!* Are you tuned in?” He was. His back started to bounce and the car pulled over.

“Why don’t you go this time?” said Luanne, smiling all her right-sized teeth. “It’ll cheer you up!” Jenna hesitated. Then she grinned, climbed out, and hurried toward the car like Luanne, waving and flouncing. The guy’s long dumb face was eager behind the glass, his window going down in jerks, “Ah *won!* Ah *won!*”

“Yes sir you did!” Jenna burred, sounding as idiotic as she could. “You won *fifty* dollars! *And*, specially for you—a blow job from *Good-Looker Luanne!*” He kept smiling and nodding, smiling and nodding, then: “Pardon?”

Jenna passed him the check. “Have a great day!” and sprinted back to the car.

“Look at you!” Luanne exclaimed. “You’re beaming!”

“Look at me!”

“Listen. You give away the money from now on. It makes me happy to see you happy.”

Jenna heard herself laugh, high-pitched, staccato, far away.

THE NEXT DAY she climbed into the Winner Wagon with a brown lunch bag: “I hope you don’t mind. I’m taking this salami to my aunt in the mental hospital after work. It’s kinda smelly.”

“Oh I don’t mind,” Luanne replied. “Gee, it smells like dog doo.”

All afternoon it smelled like dog doo, made the whole car smell like dog doo, baking in the sun on the back seat, until they found another Lucky Winner.

“Congratulations!” Jenna said to a laughing chinless man. “You won *fifty* dollars *and* this lovely complimentary salami!”

“Thank you!” blathered the idiot, reaching out a piggy hand for the check and the bag. Back in the car Luanne asked, “Did I see you give your aunt’s salami to that guy?”

“Huh? No.”

Long pause. “Then where is it?”

“Huh? Oh. I threw it out. It musta been rotten. It smelled like dog shit.”

But she couldn’t just keep doing dog shit. That evening she left her room and walked to the woods at the end of her street, hesitating at the edge: she hadn’t been inside since her second summer with Joe McKenzie, when finally she’d complained, “Can’t we just use the house?” Cindy was never home until 5:30. In the woods, with his

weight on her, twigs and thorns and other debris tore at her skin and dirt rubbed in. She didn't want to go anymore. He smirked, in surprise maybe that she'd made a demand: *What are you, a prude?* "I am not a prude," she replied, because that was a thing he didn't like. He smiled: *Prove it.* She smiled, too: this was the game, this was her power—her willingness to please him, because Cindy never did. Cindy was not daring; Cindy only wanted to do it in the bed with the lights out at night. Jenna had figured out that doing what he told her to do made him love her. So she bent over his kitchen counter, her face pressed into cracking Formica layered with crumbs, and a pain like a butcher knife up her butt sliced her in half. She wailed. The whole room wailed. He let out an incredulous laugh and she screamed, *stop stop stop*, which made his fingers dig deep into her hair and his voice overflow with contempt: *Shut up, Miss America. You're beautiful, shut up.* She tried, but she couldn't stop the sounds that shuddered from her chest. So he cupped his hand over her mouth and nose and she gasped in the last of the air. She was suffocating, she would die, she was sure, and her brain went black.

Barefoot, Jenna stomped into the woods. The familiar puncturing of her skin propelled her on. There was plenty of disgusting rot for people like Luanne and her Lucky Winners.

DAY AFTER DAY, JENNA CLIMBED into the Winner Wagon with another lunch bag—a dead sparrow, a squashed squirrel, a chipmunk butt. Weeks passed. Luanne smiled and said nothing. Jenna kept expecting Big D's voice to come over the phone: "Hey, girls? I just got a weird call from one of our Lucky Winners . . ." but it never came. No one called to report her. Nothing happened. She had no effect. *Why?* She was powerless, invisible, nonexistent. *Stop, stop, stop, don't leave me.*

Composed and pristine at the wheel, Luanne examined her. "Are you all right?" That voice—that Luanne voice—sugary sweet and oozing down like slow syrup. "What's wrong, Jenna? Jenna?"—oozing down Jenna's forehead and eyes and nose and mouth until she couldn't breathe—"Stop!" Jenna gasped. "Stop the van, I'm gonna be sick."

Luanne swerved onto the roadside and Jenna flung open her door, plopped out, and dry-heaved. She tried wrapping her arms around

herself in a hug but it was no use: without Luke's soothing, her thoughts would burn up her brain.

"Oh, Jenna," Luanne's disappointed voice dropped down from above. "Are you hung over? Come on, I'll take you home."

Luanne maneuvered the van through the streets of Jenna's neighborhood, flustered by the potholes. "They ought to repair these streets!" she complained like an adult. Jenna was delivered back to the pit where her parents were, and she entered her house, unexpected. Her father was in the dining room with his fishing magazines. "What's the matter with you?" he snapped. She pushed through the airless rooms and into her own, shut the door tight, lay down, and covered her ears with a pillow: it didn't help. She still heard the whoosh of the toxic chemicals filling up her head, drowning her. *See, you're nuts. You and Cindy*—he hissed her name—*you're just nuts and you blame me*—

"I didn't mean to blame you," she said out loud.

He'd complained to Jenna, "Cindy's a jealous person. She doesn't trust me. She wants to know where did I go, who did I see. She always thinks I'm going to cheat on her." By then Jenna was nearly eighteen and didn't stop herself from saying, "You *are* cheating on her." He sprang off the bed and glowered, stood with his whole body hating her. *You're saying it's my fault? You're blaming me?*

Then he left. After two years, he just left. He was moving to Pennsylvania, he said, with *Cindy*—he emphasized, taunting her with the name. He and *Cindy* were buying a house, he and *Cindy* were starting a family. Jenna watched the moving truck pull up and the movers load boxes and chairs and the bed and she thought she would die. She wanted to die. Why wasn't she dead? The truck drove off and she did not just want to die. She wanted to chop open her wrists, blow off her head, crash her face through a windshield—anything to escape her boiling body. Month after month, trying to live in the scalded body, trying to walk down the street, sit in a chair. Enrolling in that stupid modeling class so she could feel visible again—and Miss Judi, that stupid bitch, telling her to smile. "It's important to be cheerful," Miss Judi admonished and Jenna started to cry—the other girls waiting in a fluffy bunch at the head of the runway—while Jenna cried and said her boyfriend left and Miss Judi clucked, "Oh, come

on. Pretty girl like you will have a new boyfriend next week just as good as the last one.”

THE NEXT DAY Jenna was late to work. Luanne was already in the Winner Wagon, window cranked down, singing along with the radio, “*And I think to myself, what a wonderful wer-er-erld,*” soft and sappy, grateful and sincere. Jenna pulled open the driver’s side door and blurted, “I want to drive today.”

“Oh! Sure!” Luanne was pleased, thinking—what? She’d been a good influence? She slid across the bench seat, folded her hands demurely, turned amicably. Jenna climbed in, wrenched the key in the ignition, and punched the accelerator to the floor. The Winner Wagon leaped forward.

“Oh, hey! Kinda fast!” Luanne said, her voice in a singsong as though she was trying to be helpful. Jenna accelerated across the parking lot and bumped out into traffic without looking. “What are you doing? What’s wrong?”

“Oh, what’s wrong, what’s wrong.” Jenna mocked, then shot her a dark look. “What’s the worst thing you can imagine?” Jenna spun the van onto Warwick Boulevard and pretended to aim at the anchor on the Mariner’s Museum lawn. Luanne screamed, helpless and yippy; Jenna couldn’t help but laugh. Here was the power at last—in her hands. The steering wheel, laced up in a cushioned leather cover, whirled to the left. “Wheeeee!” Jenna sang out happily—and she was happy: finally she would be free of herself. She would crash and die and take this insufferable Luanne with her.

“Jenna, Jenna,” Luanne was repeating like a parrot.

“Yes, Luanne Luanne?” Jenna smiled at her.

“You’re going way too fast, you’re going to, to—”

“Kill us both? That’s right, Good-Looker Luanne! I’m gonna flip this fuckin’ Winner Wagon over five hundred times and you and I are going up in flames!” Jenna laughed loud and maniacal, a little like Big D.

Luanne said, “Oh my god I’m going to die in a car accident,” and Jenna was momentarily sorry for her, remembering the brother killed in the graduation night crash. Unconsciously, her foot eased off the accelerator. Then Big D started another tune—a desperate female voice singing, “*My world is empty without you, babe*”—and

Jenna's foot jammed the pedal down again. She caught glimpses of Luanne, sitting very still, very quiet, and by degrees realized that Luanne's hand was crawling across the seat toward the CB receiver. Jenna grabbed for it but too late: Luanne got it first. "Big D!" she cried into it, "Help me! Big D!"

Big D's voice came back singing, "*Oh help me Lu-anne, help help me, Lu-anne.*"

"Ha!" Jenna grabbed Luanne's wrist to twist the receiver out of her hand and the van weaved across lanes.

"Watch out!"

"Give me that." Jenna snatched a handful of Luanne's hair, dragged her over, and wrenched the receiver from her grip. "Big D!" she yelled into it. "Good-Looker Luanne is racing back to the station to suck your dick!"

Luanne screeched, "That is so *foul!*" and flailed around for the receiver. Jenna yelled, "Oh my god she's so horny she wants to suck off the CB!" The Winner Wagon veered across the center line into the oncoming traffic, drifted back again. Big D's voice could be heard sounding almost normal. "What?"

Luanne gouged the receiver out of Jenna's hand, yanked its cord from the console, and flung it into the back seat. Jenna seized her wrist and screamed, "You know what? You are the stupidest girl I ever knew!"

"Hey! I am not! I'm a National Merit Scholar!"

Jenna shook Luanne's hand around. "You think Big D doesn't go home every night and wank himself off thinking about you?"

"That is so *disgusting!* Are you *nuts?*" Luanne gasped, wiggled out of Jenna's grip and flew back across the seat. "You *are* nuts. Like your aunt in the mental hospital."

"That's right chicky! Just ask anyone and they'll tell ya—I am *one crazy gal!*" The van careened into a subdivision. Jenna jerked down her window and whooted at a fat man watering his grass. They tore round and round and flew back out onto the main road.

"Listen," said Luanne. "I know a very excellent family counselor. I can give you the number right now—"

Suddenly calm, "Oh, *can* you Luanne? You'd *do* that—for *me?*"

Luanne stared, suspicious.

“Okay,” Jenna said, making her voice sound calm. “I’ll try counseling, but only if you promise at our next meeting you’ll suck off Big D.”

“God, what is *wrong* with you?”

Jenna eased off the accelerator, slowed to the speed limit, and looked at Luanne. “No, Luanne. What is wrong with *you*? What is it you don’t see?”

Exasperated, “What?”

Jenna set her eyes on the road ahead and said, “I *hate* you.”

“Why!” Luanne shook her head around, hair flying everywhere. “I’m a nice person!”

Jenna didn’t speak. What people want is to not be bothered and not be blamed. She pictured a silent semi-circle of people—Luanne and Luke, Joe McKenzie and Big D, her mother and father, all the Lookers and all the Lucky Winners—peering at her with mean hard eyes. She was a pile of dirt. She was a clump of earth breaking apart and sliding down the side of a cliff. She was dust settling in the grass, waiting to be stepped on. She just wanted to die. She sped up.

They flew down J. Clyde Morris Boulevard toward the overpass where the road curved. Jenna tightened her hands on the wheel. Luanne was dead silent. When the road curved, Jenna kept the wheel straight, shut her eyes, and heard Luanne scream one more time. The Winner Wagon bumped over the shoulder and down the plush slope. It did not roll over a hundred times and burst into flames. The terrain was too flat. But they went crunching into a large bush, and Luanne bonked her head: “Ow. Damn.”

The engine stalled but the radio kept playing. Big D’s prerecorded voice was going extra fast, doing a disclaimer. Jenna pitched forward and changed the station, and for a moment they sat listening. The DJ on this station called himself Tony Z, and in his contest, you had to call when he said the magic “Z” word, and if you were the nineteenth caller and could name the last nine songs he’d played, your name was entered in a drawing for ninety-nine dollars. Luanne turned off the radio. “Are you all right?”

Tears oozed into Jenna’s eyes. “I don’t know what I’m going to do.”

Luanne sighed. “Well, maybe you could get your job back at Pizza Hut.”

Jenna clutched the wheel, kept the tears contained in closed-tight eyes. “You still don’t understand. There’s no love in this. We’re trapped.”

“What are you talking about? No we aren’t.” Luanne popped open her door. Footsteps crunched around the back of the van, and Jenna’s door squealed open. Luanne’s voice was impatient and restrained: “Can you get out? Do you need help?”

Jenna released the wheel and gave Luanne her hand—there was nothing else to do—and Luanne led her through the tall scratchy grasses up the incline toward the road, where people had already gathered to get a look.

