



Everclear  
"Wonderful"

*Songs from an American  
Movie Vol. One: Learning  
How to Smile*

07/2000

Capitol

# Wonderful, Somehow

KPT

I am nine and it is a hard year, but I won't understand why until I'm older.

When I'm bored in the tub, I sometimes pick up Dr. Atkins' book and read all the foods my parents can't eat. My dad sometimes dips string cheese in peanut butter and calls it a snack. My mom takes Ephedra, and I don't know anything about it except sometimes it means she'll stay up late with me, even if she has a midnight shift the next day.

Sometimes my mom and I stay up late watching TV and eating Cheetos, and then she throws them up.

I know this because of my dad, but it's not his fault.

It's the kind of hot day where I am drunk on the awareness that we do not have air conditioning when my dad pulls me aside and tells me about bulimia and how my mom has it.

He says *Mom is sick and I need your help. She will lie to you. She will say she's brushing her teeth, but if you hear her throwing up, I need you to tell me.*

I say her birthday is coming up. *Let's make her a feast that she can't resist eating.* He says that won't help in this situation.

This is maybe the first time I truly understand that my parents, only in their twenties, are vulnerable to illness and death. This gives me a chill that I've never known before this moment, but will get to know a lot more over the rest of my life.

My dad tells me this secret because he is afraid. He called my grandma, my mom's mom, before talking to me. Instead of offering her concern, she told my dad what to say to my mom to help her throw up *better*. As if purging is an art that takes practice. It is not my grandma's fault. She has her own history of eating one apple slice a day and fainting on the kitchen floor so nonchalantly it almost looks scripted. Like a Victorian woman, whalebone thin, cresting over a velvet sofa. A director somewhere calls cut, and my grandma foggily gets back up, re-applies her lipstick, checks her weight on the bathroom scale, and continues to prepare dinner.

I am a last resort, here.

I wonder if my dad wishes he could call his own mom to help. I wonder if it hurts to know he could have just three months ago. I wonder if the freshness of that loss makes his heart beat as hard as mine does in the middle of the night.

I do as I'm told and I listen outside of the bathroom door. My mom doesn't know I do this. Every time I pretend to be playing in the hallway, she comes out and says something about how it's good to brush your teeth after you eat every meal. Her sickness becomes an aphorism for dental health. I know she is lying, but I don't know how to call her a liar. It isn't her fault.

I tell my dad what I hear, but I also want my mom to know I know what's going on. I think maybe this will help her stop.

I concoct a scheme. I place stickers, sticky side up, around the toilet. I imagine my mom kneeling to purge and then emerging from the bathroom with Lisa Frank unicorns bedazzling the knees of her jeans. I imagine saying, *if you were just brushing your teeth, how did my stickers get all over your legs!?* It would be a perfect GOTCHA moment. I try this plan a few times, but it never works. I don't completely know what it would accomplish, anyways.

My dad and I go on knowing that my mom is sick. And we don't do anything about it. We don't know what to do. I don't think it's our fault at the time, but maybe it really is. She gets better sometimes for long periods of time, and I breathe out and think *see, it's all worked out!* The truth is I just don't know what I'm doing. The few times I've searched bulimia on Ask Jeeves, the internet takes me to sites that offer similar advice as my grandma. Many of those sites make me consider throwing up, too.

On a later summer evening of this same year, my dad sits me on his lap in front of a gigantic Dell computer in his mom's old bedroom. Mp3s are getting popular, and he plays the song "Wonderful" by Everclear for me. He tells me the song is for me, my own anthem, and that he's sorry for treating me like an adult when I'm not. He says everything will work out okay. He says it isn't my fault.

*Everything will be wonderful someday.* Though, I don't think he really listened to the last verse, but it's okay because by the time the song gets to it, he's already crying.

In the future, my little sister and I talk about how sometimes all that dark body-sad sneaks up on us, too. How we sometimes only eat one tomato sandwich a day or we break down in tears when we see a photo of ourselves where our jeans look too tight.

We sit in the backseat of my car, and "Wonderful" comes on the radio. She knows that this is a song my dad gave to me, and she also knows why. I told her once because, in a way, I guess it was an albatross on me. I still wonder if I should have though. I grab her hand, and we both start crying.

*You're beautiful,* I say.

*You're beautiful,* she says.

We say how beautiful our mom is at the same time like a spell, hoping she really hears it like a truth.

We smile at each other through the tears, and for the moment, things feel somehow better, somehow they're getting *wonderful*.