

Constant Love

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U.S. 99 in Josephine County, Oregon, by Dorothea Lange

The way I speak

Sheila

The way I speak, you get used to it after a while. After you talk to me for a while you don't even notice it. It used to bug my father. When he called me into his office and told me the news that day, at the end he said, *and by the way, she has that funny little accent, just like yours.*

He told me she lived in Montana. I could go to Montana to see her right away if I liked. He had no idea, no idea at all, that that's exactly where I'd planned to go. I'd taken a two-week leave of absence, without pay, from my job at the radio station. For no reason at all I'd just got the idea to go to Montana and I was getting ready to go when I got the phone call. *Come home*, he said, *I've got important news.*

San Francisco to Seattle is not a long way when you've got my father waiting for

you at the other end. He's a lawyer, he doesn't show his feelings much, so when he does you know something's coming. You just never know what it is. He's like a stiff board, you step on one end, the other end might spring up and slam you in the face. But he's nice, I didn't mean to say he isn't nice, just not someone you can get real close to. My mother? She's like that too, but without the brains, just sort of cold and reasonable all the time, but without that command that makes the train ride from San Francisco to Seattle just fly by.

I went into his office. It's got a lot of mahogany in it, the kind of furniture that makes me feel like I'm eight even though I'm almost twenty-eight. My father was walking toward me with his hands in his pockets. Your birth mother has contacted me, he said, she'd like to meet you. He had a crooked smile on his face, puzzled, sort of, watching me watch the heavens open up, and then close again. I couldn't believe it. So he said it again, and told me he'd actually talked to her on the telephone. She had a regular family in Missoula, he said, and wanted me to come see her. He got on the phone again when I told

him about my two-week leave of absence and, yes, I should come right away, right away. But I have to tell you, after waiting so long it's hard to come right away.

...

A young woman meeting her birth mother for the first time, an elderly woman attending her dying husband, a boy dealing with his father's shame; these three stories about love examine in exquisite detail what it costs and how we pay.
— from *The Bindery at the Well*

Léa Calegaris Park lives and writes in San Francisco, California



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