

T  
H  
E  
E  
N  
D  
O  
F

S  
A  
N  
F  
R  
A  
N  
C  
I  
S  
C  
O

“Mattilda is a dazzling writer of uncommon truths, a challenging writer who refuses to conform to conventionality. Her agitation is an inspiration.”

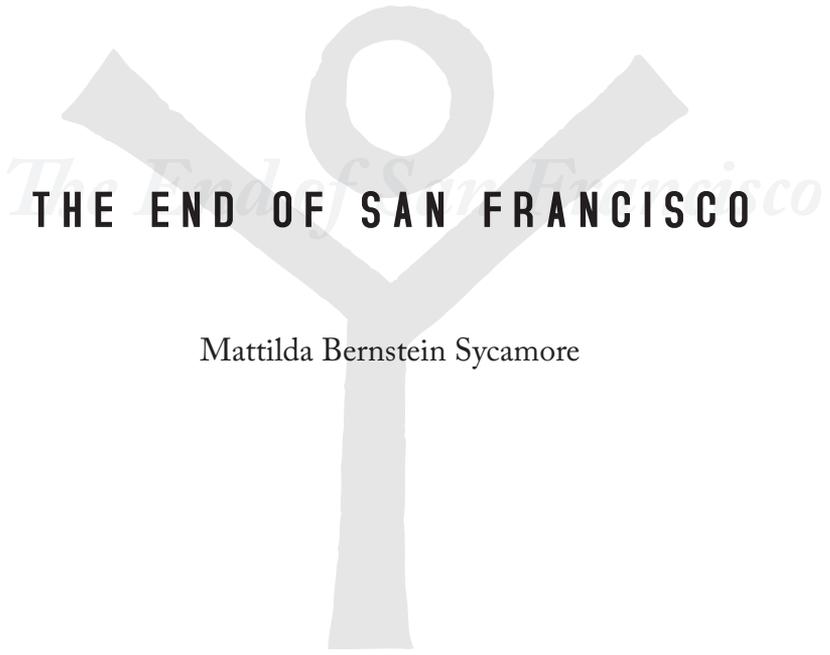
— JUSTIN TORRES, author of *We the Animals*

MATTILDA BERNSTEIN SYCAMORE



**THE END OF SAN FRANCISCO**

**City  
Lights**



*The End of San Francisco*  
**THE END OF SAN FRANCISCO**

Mattilda Bernstein Sycamore



City Lights • San Francisco

Copyright © 2013 by Mattilda Bernstein Sycamore

All Rights Reserved

Cover photograph by Florencia Aleman of Brian Goggin's artwork: "Defenestration," located at the corner of 6th & Howard Streets, San Francisco, CA, 1997 – present.

Cover design by em dash

*Although this is a work of nonfiction, many names have been changed.*

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data  
Sycamore, Mattilda Bernstein.

The end of San Francisco / Mattilda Bernstein Sycamore.

pages cm

ISBN 978-0-87286-572-3

1. Sycamore, Mattilda Bernstein.
2. Lesbians—United States—Biography.
3. Lesbians—United States—Identity.
4. Gays—United States. I. Title.

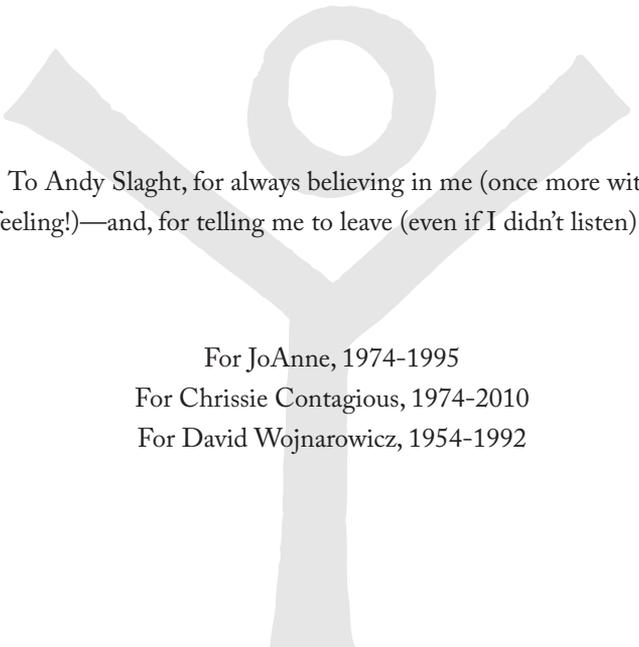
HQ75.4.S93A3 2012

306.76'63092—dc23

[B]

2012046897

City Lights Books are published at the City Lights Bookstore  
261 Columbus Avenue, San Francisco, CA 94133  
[www.citylights.com](http://www.citylights.com)



To Andy Slaght, for always believing in me (once more with feeling!)—and, for telling me to leave (even if I didn't listen) . . .

For JoAnne, 1974-1995

For Chrissie Contagious, 1974-2010

For David Wojnarowicz, 1954-1992

# City Lights

# CONTENTS

The First Time 9

Together 27

The Texture of the Air 35

Anyone You Come into Contact With 47

The End of San Francisco 79

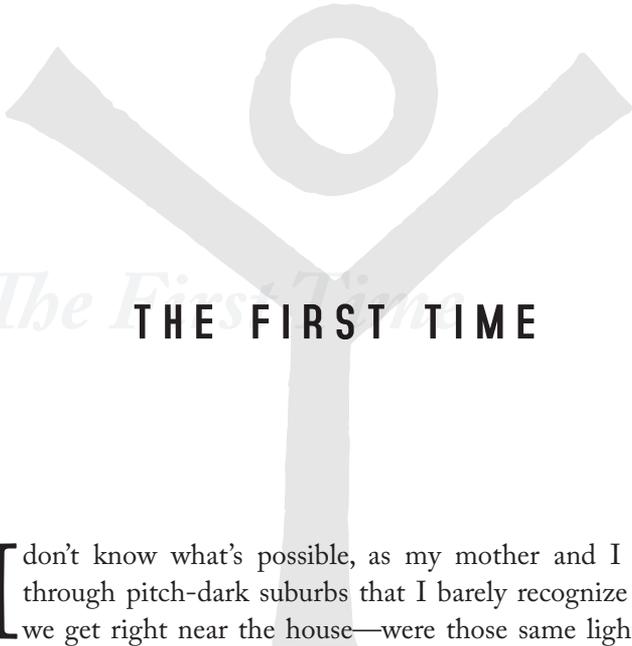
Wide Awake 107

What We Were Creating 127

Unlearning the Safety 157

The Beach 163

City  
Lights



*The First Time*  
**THE FIRST TIME**

I don't know what's possible, as my mother and I drive through pitch-dark suburbs that I barely recognize until we get right near the house—were those same lights always at the end of the driveway? The trees are even bigger than I remember, driveway cracked in even more places. The kitchen has discarded that '70s greenish yellow for cobalt blue cabinets with sleek white counters and illuminated glass tiles. I can't go past the kitchen, to that bed in the family room where my sister sits with her boyfriend and the attendant, talking to my father. I walk around the other way, through the living room with the marble café table that I treasured as a teenager because it reminded me of New York, next to the piano and a newer Persian rug with a smaller, more elegant sofa. The hallways look brighter, wood floors almost pulsating—the paintings glow. Only the bathroom is identical—pink and green tiles, green tub and toilet, chrome towel holders—now it almost looks vintage.

Back in the front of the house, my sister and her boyfriend come into the kitchen to hug hello and then I'm accidentally looking right at my father, so I go into the family room to stand there kind of frozen with my hand on my right hip—I can see myself seeing him, looking at him like I'm daring everything. The attendant looks tense. My sister isn't breathing, her boyfriend looking up then down. My father opens his eyes, closes them. Opens them, closes them. After it's clear that he's not going to say anything, I sit down on a leather recliner with a wooden pedestal, an updated version of the one they used to have. It's actually comfortable.

They've painted the knotted pine walls a gray color that my grandmother always called putty, the color she saw as the neutral-yet-sophisticated answer to too much white. Everything looks more contemporary, the ceilings higher and I realize it's because they've replaced the track lighting with recessed lighting. I'm studying my father, gray hair receding but not as much as it could be, considering his age and condition. He has the same pillow as I do—the extra-soft foam one my mother found—his even has a black pillowcase like the one I borrowed from a friend. Every now and then, my father gets agitated and his hands move around like they're part of a different person, and my sister asks: Are you okay? Do you need something to drink?

My sister, her boyfriend, and the attendant are watching *Survivor* and I glance over to glimpse various almost-naked athletic male bodies and women in bikinis—someone just lost something, and I guess people like this show because it's like porn. Then my sister switches the station and it's *Deal or No Deal*, she says have you seen this? A bald-headed guy with a diamond earring says something and then twenty or thirty model-type women in identical blue dresses and heels

give serious synchronized runway while carrying silver metal briefcases down a flight of stairs and the announcer says Hi ladies. Hi Howie, they all say at the same time, modeling pin-up compliance for a new generation. My sister tells me how some show about end-of-life issues came on earlier and she didn't know whether to change the channel. She didn't want to be too obvious, even though they were talking about pulling the plug, so she decided to leave the show on. As if on cue, a bald woman flashes on screen, something about how cancer is beautiful.

My mother comes in and brushes my father's hair back with her hand, a gesture of intimacy I've never seen before. Then she's standing at the foot of the bed rubbing his legs, and his hands start moving around again, his face looks pained and my sister says what are you doing? He likes this, my mother says—I'm massaging his legs to stimulate him. Then she says: Matthew's here. And he looks around more animated: Oh hi Matthew, how are you?

I don't know if I start crying right then or if it's later, but really everything is crying, I'm sobbing softly then loudly then softly again, another burst and then my mother comes over as if to comfort me, I say please don't touch me, she goes back to the other side of the room. Later, somewhere in this sobbing, my sister comes over too and I hold her hands and say thank you, but please don't touch me.

If I'm trying to establish a narrative here, crying is that narrative and everything else is around it. *Elemental* is the word I'm thinking of—crying is elemental, the rest is important too but I can't reestablish the order with all this crying. I say what did you think of my letter? He looks confused: I don't think I read it. Would you like me to read it to you now? Yes.

Can I say something about my father's voice? Feeble is not the word I would use, though I can see others invoking it. Can

I possibly choose innocent? Softer and almost childlike. I say to my mother: Could you get the letter?

My mother, standing at the head of the bed, eyes squinting from panicked determination: That is not possible.

Me, standing at the foot of the bed: Karla thinks I'm going to give you a stroke.

My mother: There are other things to talk about besides the letter.

Is this when I start sobbing? It makes more sense here, if here is about sense. This is the moment made for the movies, I can feel my chest arching forward, head back—this is the fight-or-flight reflex, I mean the fight part. I say: You're just trying to control his death because you couldn't control your life with him. And the tears pouring down my face are like armor—I'm cold in the the way I learned to survive as a kid except now I'm also crying, it's both at the same time and my father says: Is that true, Karla?

The attendant is the first one to excuse herself from the room and then my sister's boyfriend, and then my sister asks if I'd like her to leave, yes, and eventually my mother leaves too but I can hear both of them lurking in different places, trying not to make any noise. I want to say that the words aren't important it's the feeling that matters, except the words are important and the feeling matters. I'm crying and my father's crying and are we crying together?

But what are the words? I'm trying to re-create the letter, saying: When I first heard that you had cancer, it surprised me because even though for so long I'd wanted any trace of you to disappear from my life, I found myself wishing that I could save you. I started thinking about different health care modalities I could suggest—acupuncture, guided visualization, meditation. I realized I still had some hope that you'd come to

terms with sexually abusing me, that you would acknowledge it and then we could have some mundane conversation about publishers or something else from my life I thought you might be interested in.

I see his face tense up into a grimace when I say sexually abuse, but where I'm really crying, probably the most except for at the beginning, is when I say: I wish you could acknowledge sexually abusing me, because it would make it easier for me to go on living. I'm asking for something that he could give me. He's crying too, a few tears dripping down his face and he says thank you for sharing your letter. And then there are so many layers to my sobbing: there's holding the chest while spasming anyway; there's tears gliding smoothly down skin; there's tears in eyes, in face, inside everything.

What I want to do is to touch his arm, softly, his skin. It feels intimate and nurturing and dangerous, and right now I'm okay with all these sensations. I tell him I've learned there are other ways to be strong besides holding everything in—and of course here there is more sobbing—sobbing is the texture of the air, sobbing is the feeling of this room, sobbing here it feels like strength.

At some point he's choking and I ask if he's okay and then my sister magically appears to ask if he needs anything to drink. My father looks confused, holds his hand up and it swings in the air. Can you get something for Matthew, he says? Allison asks him if he wants ginger ale. I ask for a bottle of water, if there's one that's warm, and Allison returns with a glass of ginger ale and the water. My father pushes away the ginger ale—Matthew, he says. Oh, I have water, I say. My father pushes the ginger ale away again, Allison says I'll just leave it here for you.

Did I mention that I can see my mother standing in the

doorway of the dining room, eyes narrowed while drinking a beer, and at this point she emerges with the postcard for my new book in her hand, that's what she wants me to talk about. I hand it to him—at this point, why not? He reads the title, or part of it—I can't tell which part—I think he says he likes the cover. I ask if he wants me to read the blurb, since the print is so small and he's having difficulty seeing, although then I'm not sure if he understands what I'm reading. At this point I'm talking softly—I can't tell if it's because of intimacy or because everyone's listening—I think they've moved farther away, but I'm not sure.

There are moments of silence and then there are points where I'm talking about more distant topics, even though I'm not sure if I should, since it's not like my father has acknowledged anything. I'm describing the gentrification in the neighborhood where he and my mother are buying a condo, the displacement to make way for richer people's leisure activities. At one point he says something that I don't understand, it sounds like: You're a very compelling liar. But he doesn't look like that's what he's saying. I ask him to repeat himself but he doesn't—talking is difficult for him, a lot of the time we're together his eyes are closed and I ask if he's tired, he says no. I say is it because of the drugs, and he doesn't say anything. I say your eyes are closed, but you're listening, right? He nods. This might be the first time he's ever listened to me.

At one point there's a single tear dripping down his cheek—I touch it with my finger, then brush his hand softly. It feels almost sexual in this moment, even if it's scary to acknowledge that. My mother enters the kitchen to ask the attendant if it's time to give my father his meds—the attendant asks him if that's what he wants, and he tightens his face and hands, not yet. Even though earlier his whole body became

one large spasm, fighting the pain, and I asked if he needed anything. I didn't expect to want to care for him.

I tell my father I'm leaving, it's time for them to give him his medication—or at least that's what they think, what the doctors think, even though the medication takes away his ability to express himself clearly. Though it's hard to tell what's the medication and what's cancer. I say I'm glad that you asked me to share the letter, he says I'm glad too. He says will you be here when I wake up? I say no, but I will come back tomorrow night.

When I leave the room, I don't feel afraid of the house anymore, I can go downstairs where so much of everything happened. His office looks much cleaner, the carpet newer—no stains of mold or come, images of the past or even fear really. The door to the rec room is scarier, especially when I can't find the light right away, but even behind the bar, in that moldy sink where I was a broken toy—I don't know, it's harder to feel all that while also feeling everything now. Like the chimney where I'd imagine myself floating away, away from him splitting me open, right now it just looks like a chimney.

On the toilet in the downstairs bathroom are seashells that I arranged fifteen years ago: I used to like decorating the bathrooms. The shells are actually beautiful, furrowed green and mother-of-pearl swirls, I put one in my pocket. The dark closet we called the wine room is the eeriest, the floor tiles crumbling and mold exposed, but the basement looks clear of most of the mold: the tiles have been removed, and the cement floor painted tan. I wonder where they moved all of my grandmother's paintings that they use to store here, the ones they didn't like. The refrigerator with an icemaker that I battled my father to get—a teenage consumer victory—it's now in the basement, outdated, holding bottled water and sodas.

Back upstairs, in the room where I used to sleep—I'm

resisting calling it my room, like everyone else calls it—the bed is the same, the comforter from before, the same gray walls. A gray I chose, different from my grandmother’s putty. Then there’s the black lacquered desk I got at IKEA when it first opened, the display case with the minerals my grandmother gave me, a glass panda on the bookshelf, a clay bird, wooden eggs. I didn’t expect these things to feel comforting, but I actually want to take some of them home. Especially when I discover the stuffed animals still in the drawer underneath the bed—all the mice who were my friends, even the little pigs I’d forgotten about—all arranged just as I’d left them.

In my sister’s room, she and her boyfriend are lying on the bed and I join them. My sister asks how I’m doing. I can’t tell how you’re feeling, she says, you hold everything in. She’s the one who’s holding everything in—I resent her so much more in this house, holding on to my father as if he gave her what she needed.

My sister shows me another of my stuffed animals—Henry the hippo—she has him in her room. He’s much larger than the rest and I hold him: I ask my sister to take a picture, back in my room on the bed. I’m smiling like a little kid—this is when I love her and then my mother comes in to show me a protest sign I made that she’s kept in the closet, from the first Gulf War. Isn’t that so perceptive, she says.

Suddenly my mother’s in nurturing mode. She says she’ll send me anything I want, these are my things, of course I should have them. Do you want to stay here tonight, she says—I think you’d like the Spring Air mattress. The mattress she and my father were sleeping on, because he couldn’t sleep in their bed—I saw it leaning against the wall in the living room, and it did look kind of comfortable. But I’m not staying here, even if it feels okay right now. So we’re gathering things to bring back

to my father's office, the apartment where sometimes I slept on drunken teenage nights, missing some essentials—pillows, sheets, plates, a glass, fork, knife, spoon. I snap a few photos of the backyard in pitch dark, though the camera I bought at the drugstore doesn't do anything wide-angle enough to capture the trees.

I dream about the Holocaust like I used to as a kid, except that back then I always woke up just as I was about to die—this time, I escape into Sweden with my mother, she says we're Swedish and I wake up as they're about to let us in. I'm trying to appreciate the symbolism, but it's way too early in the morning and I feel horrible, my whole body imprisoned by that fibromyalgia ache, sinuses twisted. I make it up to the roof to sit on the sundeck, huge and empty with only a few plastic chairs although at least they don't hurt my body like metal chairs would. I'm staring at the sun, then out at all the fall trees and no skyline because none of the buildings in DC are allowed to be taller than the Capitol. It's freezing, but the air is so fresh, fall air—this is my moment, and then I crash into another exhausting day.

On the phone, my mother's talking about whether she wants to move into the condo, she says when I bought it I never dreamed I'd be living in it—there's a whirlwind of changes in my life and I don't know if I'm ready. Then Allison says: It's so hard to see him like this, I don't want him to be in pain—I feel like he's a little bird, and I need to protect him from everything. This morning I handed him a bagel and he was holding it like a napkin, he wanted to spit in it. I think last night he said it was nice to see you, Matthew, and I felt like you were connecting and it broke my heart.

I can't help thinking that when Allison says she wants to protect my father from everything, she means from me. But then

we're talking about his death, she says she wants it to be peaceful, and I'm wondering how people usually die from this type of cancer. She says: Sometimes your body organs fail and your mind fills with toxins—or you get pneumonia—or seizures.

So much pain from sleeping on my side—the body pillow doesn't help on this hard mattress. I go on a walk, but what a horrible decision—I turn the corner and there's some sort of new strip mall-type thing on Wisconsin. It's almost hard to believe how posh the stores are: Tiffany, Jimmy Choo, Louis Vuitton, Gucci, Bulgari, Max Mara, Dior, Barneys Coop, Cartier, Ralph Lauren. Down the street, I attempt to tour the bathrooms where I used to cruise, on the way from high school to my father's office: one is gone and the other now looks like a bathroom you'd buy in a box from Home Depot. No more old-fashioned urinals or teal stalls—even the gorgeous old tiled floor has been replaced with shiny granite. And I don't even want to talk about all the security guards roaming the halls in uniform, looking for action. There's even a security desk.

But can I really be upset that Mazza Gallery, the shopping mall with Neiman Marcus where I used to follow and later direct men into the upstairs bathroom, the parking lot, the underground stairwell—that formerly posh mall has lost its atrium to make way for an AMC theater? I'm so hypoglycemic that I've made my way to Giant, in back of the faux-Fifth-Avenue mini mall, a brand new grocery store with mountains of potato salad stacked in small, medium, and large plastic containers. Is this what the people who shop at those stores eat?

In DC, people look at me like I'm from another planet—their eyes open wide or they start pointing, or their mouths just hang open, or they look up and then down and then up and then down. My mother's talking about how my father leaned over to her and said: There was an announcement about satellite forces

on TV. She said: I haven't heard anything about that yet. But his colleague didn't know how to act, she says—I had to shake my head a few times at inappropriate things he said. You're not the only one I try to control, though it's a good thing you're here now because I think there will be more changes.

By changes my mother means dementia, then death. She decides not to pick me up because she needs to talk to the new aide when she arrives, so I take a cab with a driver who won't speak to me. I assume it's because I'm a faggot. I ask him to turn the heat down; he turns it up. Why do I tip him anyway?

Back at the house, Allison has just microwaved popcorn and my mother says don't you like the smell of it? I don't. Allison says do you want some? My mother says no, I just ate half a piece of chocolate cake. Allison comes into the dining room and puts three pieces of candy on the table: a sour ball, two Now and Laters. My mother goes googly-eyed, looks back at her bills.

In the family room, my father's yelling for Helen, the attendant, in a dry, demanding way while Helen asks are you in pain, Mr. Bill, are you in pain? And already I'm afraid again. My mother says: I'm sorry you have to see him this way. I'm sorry I have to see him. I look at the postage stamps on the dining room table, shades of blue and purple with yellow handwriting. I look closer—the writing says STOP FAMILY VIOLENCE.

My mother says did you use everything in that package I got you from Bloomingdale's? She means the bedding and the towels that were waiting at my father's office when I arrived. I shouldn't even answer, but instead I say I used the sheets, but I didn't wash them. I used the quilt, but I left the tag on it so you can still return it. How much was the quilt, my mother says.

I wonder if it was the explosion with my mother last time

that helped to dispel my fear. My mother says do you want to go on a walk around the house while he's getting ready? I line up all my old stuffed animals on the bed where I used to sleep, an extended family. My mother says: I'd be afraid if I saw that one out on the street. My sister says: I guess you liked mice. My mother says anything you'd like me to send you, just let me know, and I spot one of the minerals my grandmother gave me in the dining room—diopase, a sparkling emerald green that was my favorite jewel. I ask about the small piece of art by Roy Liechtenstein, discreetly hanging in the hallway, an abstract unlike his famous cartoons, it's just the background—I used to stare at the 3-D games it plays, my eyes going somewhere. My mother says: I'll think about that.

Downstairs are all these reports I wrote from fourth to sixth grade, or maybe even earlier—each one has a colorful cover decorated with Magic Marker designs and illustrations: Marco Polo; Artemis; The Countries of Central America; Washington, DC History; Six Tales of Nulijuk; the Federal Republic of Nigeria; Stalin's Russia; Mrs. Frisby; and the Rats of NIMH. I used to get so excited about each assignment—I don't see my report on the Mormon temple, but that's the one I remember the best because I took photos from the front but you couldn't go inside unless you were Mormon. They would only let you go to the visitors' center, where they tried to convert you. My mother says she wants to keep the reports, but she'll make me copies. In my father's files, there's an autobiography he started to write while doing his psychiatric residency in New York—it mentions that he grew up living with his grandparents and his uncle, as well as his parents. I don't know much about my parents' history—they weren't interested in sharing it.

Back in the dining room, my mother says: Dad's asleep because he was in a lot of pain, do you want to come back

tomorrow? I don't want to come back tomorrow, but I say that's okay. I go into the room with the computer—that same room I could still call mine if I wanted to. I hook up my laptop to the DSL cable, so I can use the voice activation software. My mother comes in every five minutes and fucks up what I'm typing—are you ready? When I'm sort of done, I go into my mother's room—she and my sister are lying on the bed in opposite corners, chatting—they look kind of cute and I start to sit in between them but then I'm not sure if that's what I want, so I sit on the sofa.

My mother and I are getting ready to leave; I go into the family room to say goodbye to Helen and there's my father sitting straight up, staring right at me. It startles me and I ask him how he's doing, he swings his hands in the air like how could I be doing? I tell my mother he's awake, I'll talk to him now, and I ask Helen to leave the room. My mother asks her to stay in the kitchen, but she goes in the living room, and my mother says oh, okay, then comes into the family room to ask if I want her to drive me home. I say I can take a cab, that's no problem. Do you want me to call you one? No, I would like to talk first—could you please leave?

Then I'm talking so quietly, I feel like a child. I ask: Have you thought about our conversation? My father's answer: No. But you remember it, right? He nods his head.

I figure I might as well say what I want and get it over with, so I start: I wish you made different choices after I confronted you about sexually abusing me. You're a psychiatrist—you could have done so much to come to terms with it. Instead you went to someone who specialized in false memory syndrome, and he gathered the whole family together to figure out how to convince me I was wrong.

I talk for a while and whenever my father looks over, his

eyes look sad and huge and I think about how scared I used to be of those same eyes but now it's not overwhelming: I stare right in; he looks away. I say I'm much more nervous tonight, and right then my mother comes back in the room: Are you ready to go?

No, why don't you go to bed? I can take a taxi.

I can't go to bed until I know you're safe.

She goes back into the dining room, loudly opening her bills. I say can you please go into your bedroom? Why can't she just leave us alone, I say to my father. What is she afraid of? I think maybe she's just as invested in your denial as you are. You know—one of the things you've actually been successful at doing is saving a ton of money so she doesn't have to worry about anything, but you've created this false sense of emergency for so long and now she doesn't even understand that you have money. I wish you would just tell her that. He looks at me. I say: Can you tell her that?

I feel fumbling and stupid and inarticulate. I'm not even sure what he can say any more, these moments with me might be his most engaged. I say it's still so hard for me because I locked everything in my body—it hurts to carry a bag, to type, to walk for more than a few blocks, to sleep the wrong way. And then I say what I'm thinking but I'm not sure that I want to say but then I say it anyway: Even though you've caused me more harm than anyone else in my life, I still love you and I don't want you to die and I wish we could have a relationship. And right after love is finally where I'm sobbing, not as loud as last time but with as much intensity. I'm looking right at him so he can see it all. He closes his eyes and I keep staring in his direction.

After a few minutes, my father starts to grimace and I ask: Are you in pain? Then my mother comes in: Does he need

something? My father pushes his hands out in exasperation like he wants my mother away and she says oh, okay, I'll leave, and goes back into the other room. Do you have anything to say to me, I ask my father. He shakes his head no, and then I'm sitting there focusing on my breath while looking at his closed eyes. With his head tilted slightly down I can see that the hair is gone in the back: His face looks so long, long but still tan—he must have started out incredibly tan, since I'm sure he hasn't been out in the sun in weeks. He always did sit out a lot in the summer.

I touch his hand and he opens his eyes, a tear clinging to the outside of the eye closest to me. I say: I don't know if I'll see you again, so if there's anything you want to tell me, you can tell me now or you can also ask Karla or Allison to bring the phone. I wonder whether, if he said something about sexually abusing me, they would even tell me.

I want to ask if he's afraid of death, but instead I say: Is there anything you want that you don't have? He shakes his head no, and that's when my mother comes back in and he gets angry, flailing his arms. My mother calls for Helen: Do you think we should give him more medication? Helen says: We have to ask him, he has to say yes. He shakes his head no, clasping his hands together. I say to my mother: You don't need to be here—she looks at me and says you're right, then to him she says: Should I leave? No, he almost yells. Then Helen's moving my father around on the bed, trying to adjust him so he's comfortable. I'm pushing the buttons so the bed leans up and then down, I'm not sure why I'm helping. My father's trying to pull his body up by grasping the bars on the side of the bed and Helen adjusts them so they're higher, she says we don't want you falling off the bed, Mr. Bill. My father looks out at me and my mother: Who is that, he says. I say this is Matthew,

I'm still here. He looks satisfied. Helen says that is Karla, and my father looks at my mother.

Then it's just my father, my mother, and me. My father keeps saying CLOSER, CLOSER—in that dry angry voice, and my mother looks like a little kid inching toward me, her leg brushing against mine, and I think of moving away. My father's trying to pull himself up, maybe so we can all sit on the sofa like a family is what I'm wondering. But he's also grabbing his dick through the hospital gown. We can't fit in bed with you, I say, and he seems to understand. My mother quietly leaves the room.

Then my father looks at the watch on his wrist like he's trying to read the time, except he's looking at the watch band. I turn the watch around and he stares at it. I say do you want me to tell you the time? He nods his head. It's 12:30 a.m. Then he looks me in the eyes and says: Can you help me get up? I say no, I can't help you. He asks: Because of your weakness?

That's when I could get angry, but I decide to save it. I tell him I can adjust the bed, and then I'm pushing the buttons until it's clear that he won't be satisfied with anything, just like before. I can get up, he says, with a very confused and sad look in his eyes like he's already leaving this world, or this room with me anyway. Anyway, I say, I want to say goodbye. He closes his eyes. I love you, I say, and kiss him on the forehead. Still he says nothing.

When I leave the room, I feel calm and light, like I've said everything and I don't need to get dragged into nostalgia for something I never had, to watch my father die and hold his hand. I can hear my mother telling him I'll be back tomorrow—don't promise him that, I say, and she says: Oh.

Backing up in the driveway, I hear the wheels of my mother's car in the grass and I say Karla, the car is slipping off

the driveway. She says I know. Then the car starts to scratch against the brick base of one of the lampposts and she says oh, you were right.

The roads are so quiet. It's way past my mother's bedtime and I'm studying the streets for familiarity. We get to River Road, the same route we used to take on the way to school, and I see a small deer bound into the road—stop, I say, STOP. My mother swerves but almost not enough, I'm thinking that hitting a deer would be a terrible terrible way for this night to end. I spot another deer on the opposite side of the road, killed by an earlier vehicle, and a police car is stopped in front of it. My mother says what is a deer doing on River Road? I say it's because there are all these houses, there's nowhere left to go.

# City Lights