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I was born in a laundromat in Paris, Ontario. If you knew Gina you wouldn't think it was that weird. Gina is my mother. She says she's a dancer. What that means is she's a stripper. Sometimes she says exotic dancer if she's really comfortable with you. Sometimes she goes all the way and there's another word for that. But I'm not allowed to say it. Not when Gina's around. Sometimes late at night when Gina's at work and I can't sleep and I'm lying in bed in whatever crap-hat motel room we're in, I whisper it up to the ceiling, *whore, hoo-er, hoaaar*. And sometimes I think that word sounds kind of beautiful.

Gina has a condition. It's not her fault. She had it before me and it got worse after she had me. It's called narcolepsy with cataplexy. The doctors took a long time to figure out what was wrong with her. Some people thought she was lazy, some people thought she was severely depressed, some people thought she was a drug addict, but Gina's not any of those things. What happens is she falls asleep a lot. Then other times, she gets a sleep attack where she conks out and can't move, but she's not *actually* asleep, she can still see and hear. That's the cataplexy part. Sometimes she falls asleep while driving and that's how I learned to drive when I was seven and why we mostly take the bus now. Sometimes she falls asleep when we're walking down the sidewalk, and I have to stay beside her and make sure nobody steals her purse. Sometimes she falls asleep when she's at work but the managers don't know about narcolepsy with cataplexy and they think Gina's messed up on drugs so she gets fired and then we have to get our skinny asses the heck out of Dodge, as Gina says. Other things happen to Gina too because of the narcolepsy. She can't sleep at night like regular people do. She sometimes has dreams *while* she's awake and when she has nightmares, she thinks they're

really happening. She has medicine for it but it's really expensive and it doesn't always work and sometimes she runs out and doesn't get more for a while. The medicine is called GHB which is the same thing that's in the date rape drug. I've heard Gina tell her friends that she's the only person she knows who gives *herself* roofies, and then they all bust a gut laughing like it's the funniest thing in the world.

I'm eleven years old and I've been to sixteen different schools. Last summer we rode the Greyhound from Penetanguishene to Prince George and stopped in all the dumb little towns along the way so Gina could work. Gina says I've seen more of the country than most adults.

It's not so bad, I guess. Sometimes if I start making friends with kids at school, or if I can tell a girl has a crush on me or something, I'll wish we didn't have to leave so soon, but sometimes if I don't like my teacher or the kids are mean, then I'm glad we get to leave, so it's good but it's bad too. Mostly, I keep to myself and read books at lunch and recess. I used to figure, what's the point of making friends since we're just going to leave in a few months anyways? But recently, I realized that even if you have a friend for one week or one month, and you're super sad when you have to leave them, it's worth it.

So one night I'm sitting around in my underwear in our room at the Prince Motel, eating salt and vinegar chips, watching *Late Night with David Letterman*, and Gina comes in, looking tired 'cause she always looks tired, 'cause she doesn't sleep properly on account of her condition.

"Hey, Tucker."

"Hey. How come you're home so early?"

She sat down on the bed and took a chip out of the bag and ate it. Then she took another one. "How do you feel about Niagara Falls?"

“I don’t know. Have I been there before?” I kept watching *Letterman*, but I could see out of the corner of my eye that she was looking at me with that mushy face she sometimes gets when she’s sad.

“No, you haven’t.”

I shrugged. “Okay.”

Gina figures there are more people in Ontario so there’s more married businessmen there and married businessmen are the best tip-pers. Also, a woman named Daisy that she worked with in Edmonton told her that Niagara Falls was a goldmine. So the next morning we packed up all our stuff then went for breakfast at Denny’s. I got the Lumberjack Slam and Gina got what she always gets, the Moons Over My Hammy because she loves saying it and thinks it’s hilarious.

“Give me a sip of your chocolate milk.”

I slid my glass over to her.

“Do you want a bite of my Moons Over My Hammy?” She started to laugh. Then it happened.

Her head hit the side of the plate as she slumped over the table. Her eyes were open and she was looking at me, sort of, but she was totally paralyzed. The waiter came over, flapping his arms around like a startled pigeon.

“Oh my God! Is she okay? Do you want me to call 9-1-1?”

“No. Don’t worry.” I reached across the table for the ketchup and squirted a pile of it onto my plate. “This happens all the time.”

He stared at Gina and looked like he might start to cry.

“Do you have any hot sauce?”