

*Navigation*

Jane could chart the map of her thirteenth year down that street to school. First, the corner where Billy Irwin liked to throw her to the sidewalk, making her knees scrape hard across the rough pavement, planting a pebble she still carried in the dimple of one knee, leaving pieces of her skin behind. She'd cry out "but I don't even *know* your sister" as if his words were answerable, as if he'd listen to reason, as if his complaint meant a thing. Then past the Ryans' house with the scrawny unwashed German shepherd, stinking of dank dogness and the rust of raw bones. She'd walk quickly, but never run – not prey, not her, or at least she hoped so to fool him – making fists with her hands to protect small fingers, a lesson she'd learned in Girl Scouts, the only one that seemed to have any application to her life. Next by the house of her parents' friends, the Dolans, where she had to babysit, where they never offered her food so she had to sneak grapes from the back of a bunch and drink water from the tap without a glass, where she dreaded the walk home with Mr. D., small-eyed and large-mouthed, perfumed with gin, creeping his hand from her shoulder down her spine. She'd cross the street to avoid the last corner, the one where Marilee's big sister was raped. Everyone knew about it, except Jane's parents it seemed, but then they barely seemed to live on this block.

So really, Jane figured, it was a question of simple navigation: ease back at the first corner to check for Billy, walk briskly to get past the dog, run past the Dolans' house, cross the street at the rape corner, march past the hecklers on the steps up to school, never use the smokers' bathroom or walk alone behind the gym, never say anything when they ask "What you lookin' at?" and never tell your parents. Never. Tell them this whole thing is made up.