

The Plumber

©Ellen Grabiner 1999

Elisabeth's hand slid expectantly along the cool, unwrinkled sheet. The blanket of dreamy peacefulness yanked away, she was left cold and naked with the insistent truth. Kenny was gone.

It was not days, or weeks but months since he had ambled into the kitchen that hot summer evening, vodka and tonic in hand, one of an assortment of ridiculous ties, his trademark, pulled free from his neck, his five o'clock shadow nearing eight.

"Els," he croaked, and she had turned from him, to the dishes, to anything rather than see the pain in his hooded eyes. It had been coming for days now. She tried to stave it off. She scurried around it; if she were quick and cunning she could outmaneuver it. But Kenny would have no more of her evasiveness.

"Please," he started, one last time, "look at me, Els."

She wanted to cover her ears and walk in circles uttering nonsense syllables like in a Woody Allen movie. Instead, she turned to face him.

"It's not working. We've tried, sweetheart, but it's no good anymore."

Elisabeth bit her lip. Silly, pleading, cloying words, pleasedon'tleave, I'lldowhateveryouwant, wecanworkitout, trying to leap out at him. There was nothing to say. They had hurt each other beyond taking it back, there was no point in going any further.

Collapsing into the their breakfast nook, which Elisabeth had designed years earlier, she tried not to think about how she had imagined her life would go. The Sunday morning pancake breakfasts Kenny would prepare, Bethany, delicious in her pj's with feet, sleep in her eyes, and cheeks rosy with contentment. Yes. But never this. Her chin in her palm, elbow drilling

into the swirly-patterned Formica of the table, she listened. She listened to her husband of twenty-two years tell her that he had rented an apartment on the other side of town, that he had packed up just a few things, three or four suitcases worth, that he would be back on the weekend for the rest of his stuff. As if from a great distance she heard the words divorce and lawyer and Mary Ann, his assistant at the photography studio and she heard no more. Months later he would tell her that she agreed to all his demands: for shared custody of Bethany, for the car, for the computer, the damned thing was too slow for her anyway, the large screen TV. Well maybe she had.

The divorce was still not yet final, but she had stopped pretending that it was anything other than over.

So when she unexpectedly reached for Kenny this morning, it hit hard. She was, at forty-five, alone. Completely, inevitably, irretractably alone. She stared at the empty space besides her. It was silly, but as if there was some inviolable boundary in the blue cotton of the sheets, she had not moved into the middle of the bed. This morning the emptiness was palpable.

“It comes in waves,” Miranda, three years divorced from Chuck, assured her over lunch the other day. With sage wisdom, Miranda was the one friend who knew what Elisabeth was feeling, didn’t try to cheer her up. Miranda just got it.

If this was one of those waves, Elisabeth decided she wasn’t going to let it knock her down. A good hard run and a hot shower would carry her safely into shore. She threw back the covers and padded barefoot into the bathroom. Still half asleep, she reached behind her to flush the toilet and heard only the cold, hard sound of metal clanking on metal. No stranger to toilet treason, Elisabeth jiggled and jangled the handle waiting for the whoosh of water to wipe away the long night’s residue. When there was none, she

cleared away the skin lotions, hair scrunchies, makeup basket from the back of the toilet and lifted the lid. The tank was empty. She grabbed one of the sparkling faucet handles that she and Kenny had found after months of antiqueing, just perfect for the porcelain wash bowl, and gave it a hard turn to the right. It coughed, sputtered and died. As did the one in the claw footed tub.

Crusty-eyed she peered at the fine print in the Yellow pages, holding them out to the far reach of her taut arm and further still until it came barely into focus. When had they started using such a small font? She found the number of the water department and wondered if the whole block was out. Had they announced some major construction that she had been oblivious to? Kenny would have known.

“Water department, can I help you?” Chirpier than he had a right to be at 6:15, Elisabeth thought, but she was grateful to share her consternation, even with an unfamiliar, perky, disembodied, male voice.

“I don’t have any water.” She explained.

“Where do you live?”

“Cambridge.”

“Apartment or house.”

“House.”

“Have you checked the basement?”

The basement. Why hadn’t she thought of that?

“No. Should I?”

“Sure. You have an extension down there?”

“I’ve got my remote phone, I can take you down there with me.”

“Great. Let’s go. Run down to the basement and tell me what you see.”

Was this guy for real? What happened to all those surly, miserable creatures who shoveled the snow and collected the trash, and repaired the asphalt? This helpful man walked Elisabeth down the stairs and held her electronic hand when she gasped, cold water, three inches deep, lapping at her ankles. The water guy knew that sound, knew just what to do.

“Flooded, eh?”

“Yeah.” All Elisabeth could imagine doing was closing the basement door, trudging right back up those stairs, pulling on her running shorts and taking off. Forget the whole thing.

“M’am, listen. You need to shut off the water. Do you know where the valve is? M’am?”

“No, I, uh...” she used to know. When they built Kenny’s darkroom, she had been the one to call the plumber, she had gotten the water and the electricity run to the little lightproof space they built in the front of the house. He had found his true calling, photography, before he sold out, before he started to shoot prepubescent girls in too-tight tees, before he began to rake in the cash. Before Elisabeth lost him.

“Wait, I remember,” for it was not that long ago that she had moved the stack of boxes from one side of the basement to the other, trying to sort through the years of things, his, hers, ours. Now the cardboard world was soggy and flagging, the surging rush of water racing to engulf her feet. She reached down and grabbed at the red plastic handle and the water slowed to a running to a trickle, to a dribble, to a drop.

“It’s off” she sang into the phone, sounding for all the world like a five-year-old that finally managed to tie her own shoe lace. “Now what?”

“Now you find yourself a plumber. I’ll send a road crew over to turn off the water from the outside, so your plumber can fix whatever it is that’s leaking.”

“That’s it?”

“That’s it.”

“Thank you.” Elisabeth took the stairs two at time and headed straight for the study. Kenny kept all those numbers, electricians, plumbers, carpenters in the rolodex on his... Kenny’s desk. Well that was long gone. She had given it to him for their tenth anniversary. A custom-made, mahogany, roll top desk. The top slid back to reveal all the slots and cubbys he could desire, into which he placed his pens, paper clips, rubber bands, push pins. Kenny had ordered and reordered those stationery supplies like a kid lining up his toy soldiers for battle. He had to get it just right. He loved that desk. Loved her for giving it to him. Then. But not enough to make a difference.

The desk and the rolodex now sat in a study in an apartment that Elisabeth could not imagine because she had never set foot in it, although he lived less than a mile away. How bizarre that her husband of twenty-two years now lived in a condo that she had never seen with a woman half her age. That desk was the first piece of furniture he moved.

Elisabeth flailed around in her bag to locate her new glasses, the ones she bought at Walgreens, the ones that brought the Yellow pages into focus, the ones that dangling on the delicate chain Bethany had given her for her birthday, made her look like Mrs. Caux, her ancient third grade teacher.

There were twelve pages of plumbers. T Brothers, S and Son, Ferraro’s Fix-it Fast, Goldman and Goldman, and no joke, Free Flow plumbing. Free Flow appealed to the hippy in her, but in the end she went with the T Brothers,

Terry and Taylor Teague, because she liked their graphic, a strong fist wielding a wrench like a saber, because she felt like a damsel in distress.

In all her years with Kenny, she was adamant about holding her own. She did all the minor repairs around the house, when the toilet wouldn't flush, she replaced the flush arm. When they got track lighting in the kitchen, she installed it. When the answering machine was on the blink, she fixed it with one of the rubber bands from Bethany's braces. Elisabeth was anything but helpless. Her graphic design business had soared when she taught herself HTML and switched to Web design instead of print media.

But today she wanted to be rescued. A nice hot shower, her coffee and the Times would be just perfect while she waited for one of the Teague brothers to show. She had waited until seven before calling, even though their ad said twenty-four hour service, and one of them, answered her call brightly.

"T Brothers Plumbing."

"Hi. I have a flooded basement, I think the valve on the water meter went, and I wondered if you were available."

"Well actually, I'm married." This T paused and waited patiently to be appreciated for his rapier wit.

"I meant," the joke was lost on Elisabeth, "can you come and fix it?"

"Has the water company turned the water off yet?"

"They are on their way."

"Okay, then, I'll be there as soon as I can."

She almost asked him if she had time to take a shower, when she remembered. Shit. She needed some coffee.

Elisabeth climbed into her faded jeans, threw on her cranberry sweatshirt and ran the three blocks to the Store 24. She grabbed two cups of coffee, a

jug of bottled water and two chocolate covered crullers. No telling how long this would last.

When she got home the orange Public Works truck was waiting in front of the small colonial house she and Kenny had fallen in love with the year that Bethany was born. Unusual for Cambridge, it sat back on the property, there was actually a lawn, and it abutted a large recreation area with ballfields, a playground and bike trails. From the back porch in the spring they could watch the sun set behind the new growth on the trees that rimmed the park. They had loved it because like a country house, it was settled on the ground and open to the sky. Now it struck her that the house looked as lonely as she felt.

Several large men, in various degrees of disarray with their supply, too, of the Dunkin's legendary brew, were clustered around what appeared to be a divining rod. They were speaking a language that Elisabeth did not understand, comprised of monosyllabic words and peppered with grunts. She approached them deferentially as one does when one is in a foreign culture.

"Excuse me, hi, this is my house and I, uh, wondered, is the water turned off yet?"

These Water Department men, smiled, for indeed they did speak English, though it required considerably more effort than their native tongue, and answered.

"Uh, well, gee, uh, you see, here, lemme show ya."

The long silver rod with a little box on the end, was in fact the equivalent of a divining rod: a device which locates the switch that turns the water supply to the house off and on. They already had dug a small hole in the center of the street, and one of the gentlemen was about to power up his jack hammer and decimate the original brick walk that approached the

entrance to Elisabeth's house. If she paid extremely close attention, she could make out snatches of their conversation.

"Nopow." The short one with the red hair murmured.

"Fukin genratr. Wilson haddit. Shithd ddnt gassit." Tall blonde guy ran his fingers through his hair.

"Azzol." The red head adjusted his crotch.

The built Latino tossed his head around like a high strung stallion straining against the bit.

"We gotget mor gaz. Sheeyit."

Now she was getting the gist. There was no gas in the generator, someone named Wilson didn't refill it, they would have to go back to the Water Department and get gas to break up her walk to find the valve to turn off the water.

"There's a gas station just down the street?" She offered helpfully.

For some reason this suggestion landed squarely on the crew's funny bone. They climbed into the orange truck, chortling, slapping each other on the back and repeating,

"Gaztation down street. Sheeyit." Like the punch line of a terrific joke. Over and over.

Elisabeth wasn't quite sure why they couldn't just go buy a gallon of gas. She shrugged, adjusted her crotch, took a swig of coffee, bent down to retrieve the papers, burped loudly and headed into the house. Men. Sheeyit.

She had barely scanned the Business section when the doorbell rang. The sound of the jackhammer had broken whatever peacefulness surrounded her morning read of the paper, and now they were at the door. This was a bad day getting worse by the minute. Men with jackhammers and divining rods, flooded basement, no shower. Now what?

Sliding the deadbolt, Elisabeth pulled open the door and stood face to face with the prince to her damsel. A great hunk of indeterminate age grinned at her. His teeth sparkled, and the dark bangs carelessly crossing his forehead accented a pair of steely blues. Hands planted in the rear pockets of his jeans, his grin was steady. Elisabeth just stared. Did she know this man? Why was he so happy to see her? Why didn't he say something?

Finally catching her breath, she managed a proper "Yes, can I help you?"
"You rang?"

A nightmare. That's what this was. A badly scripted nightmare. You rang? As ridiculous as this specimen sounded, she had to laugh. This guy was as bad as the plumber on the phone this...

"The plumber! Shit. I forgot. Of course. You're the plumber. Oh, but they can't find the valve, so the water is still on does that mean you can't...?"

"Exactly. I can't do a thing until the water is shut off. But why don't you show me what the problem is and then I can come back with whatever all I need, once the water goes off."

Elisabeth led the plumber through her house, down the back stairs to the cellar. The water had receded and the cement floor was slippery and damp, but no longer flooded.

"Here." Rendered inarticulate by the closeness of this strange man and her suddenly racing pulse, Elisabeth pointed to the water meter valve. The plumber squatted at her feet and fiddled with the pipes connected to the valve.

"Mm-hm. I got just what you need."

That was for sure. Elisabeth leaned over the plumber, feigning interest in the meter valve, but finding her attention drawn to the fit of his jeans, the

contour of his back muscles against his pea green tee shirt, the fine dark hairs on his forearms.

When he unexpectedly straightened up, Elisabeth fell back quickly, stepping in a soggy box of Kenny's old photos. She carefully lifted up the dripping box so that the bottom wouldn't fall out.

"Here's my card." The plumber held it out to her. She couldn't take it in her hands for fear of dropping the bulk of dripping photos she carried, so he carefully place it between her teeth. Again with the grin.

"Page me when they get the water turned off. I'll come back with the new ring for the valve and you'll be all set."

Was she nuts or was he flirting with her? It didn't matter. She saw the heavy gold band on his left hand, but she didn't care. She hadn't been this hot for someone since, well not in a very long time.

The plumber left through the basement door and Elisabeth trudged upstairs with Kenny's box of photos. She had asked him over and over to get his stuff out of the basement, but he was dragging his feet about the photos. There were boxes of prints, boxes of newspapers clippings from the Phoenix, the Guardian, the local community newspapers. His idealistic days. Demonstrations, rallies, the KKK. Kenny had politics, then. Before he found out how much he enjoyed money and nice things and how easy it was to get them if he just compromised here, cut corners there.

It all had started innocently enough. A part-time job processing film. It would pay the bills, he said, allow him to do the work he really wanted to do. For years Elisabeth cleared away those posing prepubescent girls from the shower where they dripped dry, before he took over the business, before he built himself a state of the art darkroom downtown.

His boss, George, wanted to retire, wanted to stop stealing from ambitious mothers who thought that maybe, just maybe, their little girl, who everyone agreed was beautiful, would be the next Ivory soap, the next Cheerios, the next Pillsbury muffin icon. They had a feeling their kid would make it big and George was just the guy to help them. The deal was this: Mary Ann, George's barely adolescent assistant, dressed kids up, taught them to walk and smile and strike an oh so perfect pose, while Meryl, George's photographer wife, shot them every which way until they a portfolio that was sure to knock the socks off of even the William Morris agency. For a small fee, he could do all this and more. But now he was tired and rich and ready for Miami and Meryl more than ready to go with him. Did Kenny want to buy the business? He'd been handling the developing and printing for years. The shooting would be easy for him, and Mary Ann, now of age, was willing to stay on and whip those young girls into shape. Bethany was two and Kenny was scared, so he said yes.

He stopped shooting demonstrations, gave up freelancing altogether and his new business took off in a way neither he, nor Elisabeth had ever expected. She couldn't really complain. They bought their dream house, they traveled. Bethany went to private schools, had her tennis, piano, gymnastic and swim lessons, and all the Playmobile her little heart desired.

But as Kenny spent more and more time with his clients, their anxious mothers, and Mary Ann, he became less and less the man she married, the man she had loved.

Elisabeth gently lifted the photos out of their collapsed cardboard cradle and peeling them apart, one by one, set them out to dry. If I had half a brain, she thought, I'd burn the lot of them. But instead she laid them end to end across the dining room table, the back of the couch, the coffee table, and

down the long hallway into the foyer. Her life with Kenny compressed into soggy black and white 8 x10's.

There they were on the Mall in DC in '69. Stoned out of their gourds on that country road in Vermont, surrounded by Holsteins. And the year before their wedding, celebrating Christmas in Florida City-Santa's and lighted palm trees galore. There was a series of Elisabeth in the back yard, wearing just a pair of overalls, tan shoulders and a hint of breast peeking out from behind the straps. She was so young, then. There was a progression of pregnancy photos and sadly, none of the birth. Bethany refused to come out and after almost twenty-four hours of labor, they were forced to do an emergency section. Kenny was useless, scared and distracted and all the pictures he had taken were dark, out of focus and underexposed. He had grabbed the wrong film.

As if to make up for it there were countless baby pictures. Bethany in each new outfit, at every season, through every stage. At first. Then Kenny became too busy to bother, and Elisabeth had taken over as family documentarian. Now, instead of black and white glossy art shots of their lives, there were neat little albums with Kodak snapshots to remind her that Kenny was no longer invested in preserving their lives together on film.

Gingerly stepping around the drying photos, Elisabeth felt lighter. Here it all was in front of her, the good, the bad, the annoying and the touching. She would wait till they dried, then pack them up in a neat little bundle and send them to Kenny, and be done with him. It was way past time to move on.

She glanced out the window and noticed the orange truck was back. The men from the city were breaking for lunch. Taking advantage of the mild April morning, they camped out on her lawn with their Subway sandwiches

and conversed in their native tongue. Why was it taking them so long to find the shut off valve?

By the time she galloped down the stairs, they had inhaled their food and were packing up the truck again. She hollered to be heard above the sound of the motor.

“The water? Is it shut off?”

They looked at her as if she were an alien. The stallion clinging to rear of the truck seemed to understand and nodded at her, pointing to the fourth in a series of depressions, this time upending her favorite rose bush, along side the brick walk. There in the garden path was a crooked wire, topped with a day-glo flag announcing the location of the valve. On any other day she would have been on the phone in an instant, complaining of the unfilled holes in her street and sidewalk. But not today.

She raced upstairs and punched in the T Brothers’ pager number, leaving her own at the sound of the tone. She practically skipped into the bedroom, dragged her sweatshirt over her head and climbed out of her jeans. She stood in front of the full length mirror, considering the shape that her body was in. Not bad, she murmured, for forty-five. She had always been lean, never had to worry about gaining weight. Running kept her healthy and thin. She was not twenty-five anymore, but perhaps for the first time, she liked the older, more voluptuous turn her body had taken. She was not a skinny kid, she was a woman, and she liked it.

Grabbing her wash cloth from the spigot in the tub, she carefully moistened it with the water from the jug she picked up that morning. She scrubbed her armpits, and under her breasts, her thighs and crotch. It was all she could do. Choosing Bethany’s apricot skin cream, she slathered every inch of her skin, until she felt herself to be as smooth and fragrant as the

fruit itself. The phone ringing startled her as if someone had walked into the room and discovered how much she was enjoying her body at that moment.

“Hello?”

“T Brothers plumbing here. You rang?”

Did this guy think he was Maynard G. Crebbs or something? With those eyes, she figured he could be as clichéd as he wanted.

“Yes, this is Elisabeth Young? You were here earlier? They’ve turned the water off finally?” Why couldn’t she end a sentence without it sounding like a question?

“Great, Liz, listen, I am just finishing up here, so I should be at your place within the hour. How’s that?”

“Great. Just great.”

“Great. Bye now.”

Great. She was as tongue-tied as a teen on a first date. Which was exactly how she felt. Well, maybe not exactly. The teen she had been would never have fantasized meeting this T brother at the door in a flimsy negligee, or better yet one of those fluffy bath towels she’d bought herself after Kenny left, wrapped around her with just enough cleavage-how did those women get that cleavage look? Elisabeth’s breasts were average, lovely even, but they never got close enough to each other to cleave.

Pull yourself together girl, she chided herself, and yet she couldn’t stop smiling. This was just the plumber. He was just coming to fix her pipes. Every fleeting thought made her blush with sexual innuendo. She had been alone too, too long.

Ransacking her drawer she pulled out an old cashmere sweater, she had since college. Deep navy, it was soft and very sexy. It was perfect. She squeezed into her tightest black jeans, and as silly as it was, a pair of black

clogs. They were clunky and casual, but she knew they gave her strong calves just the tautness they needed. Walking in them gave her just the right sway. Kenny always said...

She dashed across the strewn photos and into the bathroom to do her face. Just a little mascara, a little blush was all she needed. Grabbing one of Bethany's day-glo scrunchies she pulled her hair up into a pony-tail that splayed wildly behind her, her sleek, dark hair dancing as she moved. And that perfume. Where was that damn stuff?

Miranda had given her this special scent, ResistMeNot, on Christmas morning. They had laughed and cried together, without their kids, it was a bittersweet day, but she had not been ready to even consider a time when she might want to try it out. The scent was rumored to disperse pheromones. It was supposed to make you irresistible. Suddenly, she was miraculously ready to see if the dams stuff worked. A little spritz behind the ears, rubbing her wrists together and voila!

Now what? It had only been minutes since she spoke to "T." She didn't even know if he was Taylor or Terry. She didn't care. Worse than a dog in heat, she just wanted to dive into his eyes again, inhale his scent.

What would they talk about? What kind of conversation can you expect from a plumber? Fixed any good pipes lately? She knew she was giddy with fright, she knew plumbers were people, they read and went to the movies, had kids, made love, god she hoped so. But it had been so long since she had even dated anyone. What? Twenty-two years? Really? Had it been that long. Everything was different now. There were "Rules" and AIDS, and what if he had some weird part of his body pierced? Ohmygod, Elisabeth grabbed her wash cloth, drenched it again and began scrubbing behind her ears and the inside of her wrists to dissipate the ResistMeNot.

Just then, the doorbell rang. Like a skunk in the headlights of a speeding sports car, Elisabeth froze. She could just not answer the door. She could pretend she wasn't home and then later, she could call another plumber, a fat, beer-bellied, red-headed, pasty-skinned, freckled plumber, with light eyelashes, the kind whose crack showed when he stooped to tighten a valve, the kind she would never, in a million years have been attracted to, never have even given a second thought.

The bell rang again and in some lust induced trance, Elisabeth went to the door. But when she pulled it open, instead of her tall, dark, plumber in shining armor, there stood a short, red-headed, pasty-skinned freckled guy in a red-flannel misbuttoned shirt, with matching wrench sticking out of the rear pocket of his low-slung jeans.

"Y-yes?" Elisabeth wondered if just wishing had brought this other plumber to her door.

"You rang?"

Oh no. Did they learn these bad jokes in plumber school?

"T'Brothers. I'm the plumber. Terry was here earlier. He couldn't get away. I'm his brother, Taylor. Valve in the basement?"

Every hopeful cell in Elisabeth's body deflated. This was the brother? Yes, she could see it. Same blue eyes. Same silly open expression. But on Terry it was sexy, boyish, beguiling. On Taylor, it was smarmy.

As Taylor followed her first up and then down a flight of stairs, Elisabeth wished she had her baggy sweatshirt back on, her flip-flop slippers.

"Something smells mighty good in here. Were you baking?"

Taylor made small talk. Elisabeth was silent. Spurned by her plumber lover, relegated to this lesser man, she wanted to lash out. But she also wanted her hot water. So she bit her lip and showed Taylor where the valve

was. She ignored the way he looked her up and down, wondered why he was staring at her sternum, knowing she had no cleavage, and wished him gone.

When he squatted to replace the damaged valve, his jeans slipping just below where she would have liked them to be, she abruptly announced that she would be upstairs when he was done.

She raced up to her room, kicked off her clogs, and slid her feet into her beat up slippers. It was barely past midday, but she grabbed a cold Amstel from the fridge, pulled her sweatshirt on over her sweater and went out onto the porch. She was half-done with the beer, when Taylor emerged.

She looked at him from across the porch and realized she had been harsh. He was very sweet looking, in a Woody Allen-ish kind of way. Just not her type. He must have sensed her softening, though, because he took this opportunity to speak.

“Well, all done, m’am. Is it M’am or Miss? I couldn’t help but notice you’re not wearing a wedding ring and well, I don’t usually do this, I am a professional, after all, but there is something, I dunno, irresistible about you. That beer looks damn fine. I guess guys are always coming on to you, huh?”

Ohmygod. ResistMeNot. Was he asking her out? With all the restraint she could muster, she said,

“How much do I owe you? My husband will be pleased that it was fixed so quickly.”

“Yeah. Right. That’ll be a hun’red and sixty. M’am.”

Elisabeth went inside, wrote Taylor a check and brought it out to him on the porch.

“Thank you very much Taylor. Good-bye.”

“Enjoy that beer, now. Oh, and don’t forget...”

Was he going to remind her that, if she ever changed her mind, he was available?

“You’ve got to call the water department, get them to turn the water back on. Bye now.” And he disappeared down the back stairwell.

Elisabeth sank back into her chaise and began to laugh. She laughed until her eyes teared, her sides split, her shoulders shuddered and her face ached. When she was finished, she changed back into her sweatshirt, scooped up the still damp photos from around the apartment and placed them in an old film box. She wrapped them in a brown paper grocery bag and, after calling the water department to come and turn on her water and fill in the holes they had made, she walked the photos to the Post Office and mailed them to Kenny, book rate.

On her way back, the warmth of the early sun was gone and a damp wind had picked up. Pulling the hood of her sweatshirt over her head, she took a short detour to the Walgreens to buy the newest Mary Higgins Clark mystery, the latest Danielle Steele trash, and a pound bag of peanut M&M’s. When she got home, the water department had come and gone. It would be weeks before they filled in the holes they had made, but at least she had water. Elisabeth took the longest, hottest shower in recorded history.

When she was dry and warm, she grabbed her books, her candy and climbed into bed. She plumped the pillows up behind her, pulled the comforter up under her arms and tucked her self in. Ripping the M&M bag open with her teeth, she smiled. Although the sun hadn’t yet set, Elisabeth was ready to call it a day. A ridiculous day. An absurd day, perhaps even a momentous day. Her M&M’s by her right hand and her books to her left Elisabeth sank into her pillows, folded back the cover of the Higgins paperback, and contentedly

faced the empty night sprawling ahead of her. Things indeed did look different from right there in the middle of the bed.