

# 1.

I grew up in what some people would call a mobile home and what other, snobbier people might call a manufactured home, but I was always fine with calling it a trailer. That's right, I said I grew up in a trailer. Fuck you.

I lived with my mom in East Trawley, Missouri, until I was seventeen. My mom weighed almost four hundred pounds and you're probably thinking that she was lazy or everything that's wrong with America, or that she belonged on one of those stupid cable TV docudramas called stuff like *Jumbo Mama* or *I Weigh More Than My House*, but you're way off base because my mom was the sweetest person and the best mom ever. But she did have a problem, because from as far back as I can remember I only knew one thing for sure: My mom was terrified of something, and as long as she kept eating she'd never have to go outside and face it. Whenever I asked her about my dad or about what she was so scared of she'd just sort of smile and say that I was talking crazy, and so after a while I stopped asking, because I was pretty sure that my dad, whoever he was, and her fear were the same thing.

On the morning of my eighteenth birthday, just as I was about to leave for work, my mom grabbed my hand. She'd been sick for almost a year and she could barely leave our couch, but being my mom, she wouldn't see a doctor.

“Oh, baby,” she said, “I know it’s your birthday and I can’t buy you anything, but I have something to tell you, and that’s going to be your present.”

“Mom, I don’t need presents. . . .”

“Hush, just listen. I know that I haven’t been the sort of mom you deserve. . . .”

I rolled my eyes because she knew this wasn’t true.

“I just wish that all sorts of things were different. And I know that lots of people think I’m gross, or a freak, or they feel sorry for me. But they shouldn’t, and you really shouldn’t. Because I’ve had the best life, because I’ve had you. But Becky, you have to promise me something.”

“I know, I remember, I will pick up more laundry detergent, in the Mountain Spring scent. . . .”

“You have to promise that — you won’t be me.”

I wasn’t sure why she was talking like this but her voice sounded urgent.

“Things have happened to me, all sorts of things, grown-up things and I just, I got overwhelmed. I let myself get overwhelmed. And I don’t think that’s been fair to you, not one little bit. But something is going to happen to you. And it’s going to be magical.”

She was gripping my hand very tightly and looking right into my eyes. “And it might be scary and you might not know what it means, not at first. But it’s going to change your life, forever. And Becky, I want you to swear to me, because I love you so much, and because you deserve everything, you deserve the whole world, so Becky, when the magic shows up — I want you to say yes.”

Later that afternoon when I called to check on her, she didn’t answer her phone, so I called 911 and I ran for my car. By the time I got to the trailer a police car and an ambulance were already parked outside but everyone was too late. A policeman asked if I

wanted to see my mom's body, instead of just asking did I want to see my mom.

My mom was lying on our couch with her eyes open, and one of her hands was slightly raised, as if she'd just thought of one last thing she wanted to say. I knelt beside her and part of my brain told me to say good-bye, but instead I just touched her hand and said, "Hi." I wondered if her soul had flown upward, grateful to be leaving her difficult body behind. I stayed like that for a while, just watching her. But then my knees started cramping and when I stood up I got dizzy, so the cop dragged me outside for some fresh air.

A bunch of people had gathered from the nearby trailers, and they were discussing the whole deal.

"That poor woman," said Mrs. Stangle, who was wearing a kerchief over her head full of curlers and dropping cigarette ashes onto her nylon housecoat. "She certainly was large."

"Large?" said Emmett, the guy with the gun collection from two trailers down. "Hell, she was huge. If they want to get her out of there, they're gonna have to take that door off its hinges."

"I will pray for you," said Cheryl Gann, clutching my arm. Cheryl weighed about ten pounds and was always handing me pamphlets about abstinence, with drawings of screaming fetuses. "Your mother was such a sad woman, so perhaps this is truly a blessing."

I looked at her. I looked at all of them. "Excuse me," I said. "On her worst day, my mom was still a million times nicer than all of you put together. And if you want to stand here and talk about her body, why don't you take a look at your own. Because, Mrs. Stangle, if you're going to have a fake tan, you should remember to spray your neck. And, Emmett, maybe my mom was fat but at least she never exposed herself to a cross-ing guard."

“She’s possessed!” cried Cheryl, stepping away from me. “Please, Jesus, don’t listen to this girl!”

I was about to say something to Cheryl but instead I just howled like a demon and lunged at her, which made her shriek and run back into her trailer, while Mrs. Stanglely lit another cigarette and Emmett mumbled something about me being a whore.

Then at least four guys from the volunteer fire department began maneuvering my mom out of the trailer and I yelled at them to be careful and then I apologized for yelling, and then I started crying. Which was when I knew for pretty much 100 percent certain that no matter what my mom had promised me, I was never, ever going to believe in magic.