

There's the doorbell, so Donna's mother opens the door to Mary-Margaret holding a dish covered in tin foil. Donna's mother takes this casserole she doesn't want, says, "Thank you," two or three or seven times, and Mary-Margaret says, "Oh, it's just a little thing. We're all so terribly worried about Donna." She peels back the foil to reveal macaroni and cheese that's pale, made with macaroni shells, not elbows.

There's one of those pauses where no one's sure who's supposed to speak next, so Donna's mother says, "Thought I'd clean out the closets," because she just knows Mary-Margaret won't miss the tangle of mittens, cluttering the floor three days later. The boys leap over them, and Donna's father kicks them aside.

"Wish I had the time for that," Mary-Margaret says, then slaps her hand over her mouth. "I'm sorry. You know what I mean."

"I know what you mean," Donna's mother says automatically.

Mary-Margaret leans close and whispers, "You know, it could have happened to anyone. It's not your fault. Could be any of us. Any of my girls."

Donna's mother says, "But it's Donna."

"It's Donna," Mary-Margaret repeats, backing away.

Funny when people's exact same words come out different, Donna's mother thinks. She's too beat to plow through another round of "thank you," so she nudges shut the door with one foot and carries the casserole to the kitchen. Such a nice Pyrex dish, no scratches or chips along the rims, and you know what? She'll keep it—and the others. Let people dare ask for them back.

They won't, the way Mary-Margaret won't gossip about that mess of mittens. Not now. Now she can do whatever she wants. Whatever *the hell* she wants. But what's that exactly?



*This is how to disinfect, deodorize: Glade Blossom. Air-Wick Evergreen. Renuzit.*