

at her forearms, stiff against the cart handle and sees the worn, white flannel of her ragged winter nightgown. “In the car,” she lies.

Mary-Margaret has a pretty, heart-shaped face, which makes everyone think she’s so sweet.

“I’m just picking up a few things,” Donna’s mother says.

“Let me get what you need,” Mary-Margaret says. “Bring it right on over. Help clean up a bit. Clear the dishes from the sink, wipe things down? I know you’ve got that house full of boys. And how easy for me to throw together a casserole so you don’t even have to think about dinner. How about that?”

“It’s not a funeral,” Donna’s mother says sharply. “She’s not dead.”

“No, of course not. She’s fine. You’ll see. We’re all praying just as hard as we can.”

“That’s a great big help.” She knows Mary-Margaret’s Catholic. Could be her god’s more useful than this Lutheran one.

Mary-Margaret drills a stare into her, like she’s a two-headed calf. (Which Donna’s mother saw once as a girl, at the county fair. Poor deformed thing.) Mary-Margaret must be remembering her own girls walking to Drug Fair. “You know we’re never shopping there again,” Mary-Margaret says. “None of us. The least we can do.”

Driving farther to a worse pharmacy for prescriptions and a bottle of Bayer does nothing for Donna. “That’s a great big help,” Donna’s mother repeats. She stares right back at Mary-Margaret, at her heart-shaped face, her puckered kiss of a mouth. Her cart’s loaded with chuck roast and rump roast and pork roast and a king-size box of Tide detergent, as if what’s going on over there across the street is running the washing machine and everyone ripping through hunks of meat.

“How are your boys?”

“At school.”

“Oh. Guess I just saw the walk not shoveled.” Mary-Margaret looks away, fiddles with the buckle on her purse. “If there’s anything I can —”