

At Auction
Items Offered by Hannah Elise Montgomery

1. *19th Century wood-carved Stollenschrank. Estimate: 6,000 - 9,000 USD*

At the time, it seemed like a remarkable wedding gift, and Hannah knew her mother-in-law intended it to be overwhelming, an indication of what she had suddenly become a part of. It had been moved into the Westchester house even before Hannah and Michael finished bringing their belongings up from the city. There it hulked in the entrance hall, the carvings in its front wooden panels too ornate for her eyes to follow. The glass on the cabinet door reflected her pursed lips, her flushed cheeks, her eyebrows like the strokes of Chinese letters. She rubbed one of the iron mounts on the door with her finger, disliking instantly the roughness of its age, how irreplaceable it seemed, that it would sit there greeting her guests before she did. It was older than her mother, older than this house. It had outlived its creator and become vindictive for it.

2. *French mahogany and gilt bronze portico mantle clock, c. 1830. Estimate: 1,000 – 1,200 USD*

Hannah's mother Delores demanded to be taken home in the end. The nurses set her up in her bedroom with the IV standing tall and silver beside her, its tube snaking into her hand atop the brocade bedcover. For hours she would lie on that bed, staring at the single knick-knack shelf and following the motions of the clock with her eyes. Such a splendid clock, her father's prized possession before he'd died and left it to Delores. She loved its grand mahogany supporting columns and filigreed details like sketches. The bronze flower pendulum hypnotized

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her and she forgot, for minutes on end, the burn around the needle. But in her peripheral vision, she could see the flatness of her torso from the double mastectomy, and she would close her eyes tight until she fell asleep.

She took some comfort in knowing that her children were all grown and unbound, exulting in their own lives. But sometimes it surprised her that it was Hannah who came to her side. It was Hannah who left her husband every weekend to drive down to the city and stay with her, watching her rot, watching her watch the clock and wait for its chimes to remind her that she had survived just one more hour.

3. Regency style oak bookcase with graduated tiers. Estimate: 160 - 240 USD

It wasn't the words but the way they smelled: her father's books in the extra bedroom he'd used as a study. After he died when Hannah was four, her mother kept the room locked. Hannah had few memories of him, but she remembered the smell of the books when she stuck a hairpin into the lock and snuck inside: the faint musty odor of them on his hands when he picked her up, the dryness of it clinging to his sweaters. She sat on the cold parquet and flipped through one after the other, her ten-year-old body cradling each volume of his *Encyclopedia Britannica*, his leather-bound collection of Shakespeare's sonnets, and the small black journal with its silver lock and unreachable pages. She wanted to stick her hairpin into the lock's delicate mouth, but she knew her mother would notice. Her mother wore a tiny key around her neck on a gold chain and sometimes went into the study for hours.

4. *“The Sound of Music” French vintage lobby card. Estimate: 60 – 90 USD*

When Hannah asked, Michael told her he got it at a used bookstore for fifteen bucks. The first time she went to his apartment the night of their second date, it was hanging over his bed, the embracing silhouette of Julie Andrews and Christopher Plummer in a sunny glass room. In the afterthought of that night, she decided that she could easily see herself slipping into a romantic life with a man who had “La Melodie du Bonheur” and the tentative almost-kiss of new lovers on his wall. After they slept together for the first time and she took his penis into her mouth like a promise, he gave her the poster. “I know you like it,” he shrugged shyly, and she felt his eyes lingering on her bare breasts as he rolled it up into a rubber band. When she visited him after that and the wall remained empty, she insisted they begin spending the nights at her apartment.

5. *Early 20th Century porcelain fluted vase by Lenox. Estimate: 145 – 200 USD*

Delores knew the slanted shape and the smoky color of Hannah’s eyes, the particular curve of her chin. She knew the dark curling hair and the sighing bow of the baby’s lips. Seven months after giving birth, she finally knew. When she picked up the phone, the receiver took a while to warm in her hand. She never dialed this number from this phone – only from the payphone on the corner – but her trembling hands forgot in that moment their normally careful secrecy.

She hadn’t heard his voice in weeks, and his greeting surprised her, like the recorded voice of someone long dead. “She’s yours,” she whispered, and the baby in the bassinet beside

her whimpered softly as if she understood, as if her blue-cloud eyes could see her mother's skin blushing beneath the fingers of a man who was not her husband.

When there was no response and the phone line went dead, Delores replaced the receiver. Her eyes fell upon a pair of vases she had just that morning overflowed with budding lilies, the powder blue funnels of each vase wide-mouthed and always receiving. In a sudden screaming motion, she grabbed the one nearest her and smashed it to the floor. The shards of porcelain held orgy with the water and flower petals, the vase suddenly silenced the way she would keep her secret. She reached for the other, but the startled cries of the baby pulled her back, and she left the lonely vase there unharmed as she moved her hands through the baby's dark hair.

6. Malachite glass box and cover. Estimate: 150 – 200 USD

Michael knew it was getting late. He could see the diamond-like headlights heading up and down Third Avenue as he walked, the old, ornate lamps glowing on some of the small buildings around Gramercy Park. Something in the window of a small antique shop on 21st Street caught his eye: a petite hexagonal box, its malachite cover carved with the faces of two young girls seemingly about to kiss and surrounded by leaves. He felt voyeuristic somehow, as if he had happened upon lovers in the forest, the foliage opening window-like before him onto a scene he would never be a part of. When he stepped down into the basement-level shop and bought the box, he stood holding it for a long while before he took it home. Inside, he placed a small piece of paper with his hasty letters and the smudge of his thumb across the last 's': "To

hold all of your secrets and dreams." He wrapped it in silver foil and set it on the table. He knew Hannah was waiting for him to propose and hoped this would hold her off until then.

7. Mid-19th Century Biedermeier secretary desk. Estimate: 2,850 – 4,000 USD

It was a 60th birthday card for her Aunt Bridget up in Maine. From the front of the card, small pink roses outlined in glitter winked at Hannah, their green leaves wispy with watercolor. She looked up from the card to see herself in the small mirror set back beneath the carved overhang of the desk, a pale ghost staring out at her from its recesses, and she slid her eyes from the image, unnerved and lonely. The fold-out writing surface creaked as she leaned on it to write, but she was soon stopped in the middle of "Mom's doing bet – " to answer the phone. When she stood, the corner of the desk jabbed deep into her hip, and she cried out and cursed at the sudden sharp throb as she hobbled across the den to the phone on Michael's desk. It was Dr. Patel, her mother's oncologist. She was out of remission; a lump had appeared beneath her left armpit and was spreading rapidly. She was back in the hospital and would undergo a second, immediate mastectomy.

Hannah heard all of this, thanked him, promised to drive down from Westchester that evening, hung up the phone. She realized that her left hand was still rubbing her hip rhythmically, the pain unceasingly sharp and thudding. She lifted her hand away and let the ache spread slowly across the bone. She winced almost immediately, though it was really such a small pain. Such a small, small pain.

8. *Pair of cabochon emerald and diamond ear clips. Estimate: 2,000 – 3,000 USD*

Hannah glanced into her mother's bedroom. The light was out, and all she could hear was her mother's slight snoring and the ticking of the clock on her shelf. Guilt coiled through her stomach at leaving Michael behind this weekend, but the nurses said her mother had been complaining for days and had to have her morphine upped. As she sat there in the living room listening to the traffic three stories below, she decided to call him and make sure he was okay. She glanced down at the watch he had given her a few weeks earlier: 11:43 p.m. She went to the kitchen and picked up the wall phone, pulled her right earring off, and dialed. Ring, ring, ring, ring, ring, ring.

Hannah hung up, slightly worried, and dialed again, twirling the earring in her hand as she waited. It was shaped like a flower, smooth round emeralds alternating in two circles with diamonds that winked at her if she turned them toward the dim living room lamp. The center emerald stared at her like a wide-open eye. When her grandmother passed them down to her for her sweet sixteen, Hannah had thought them bawdy and oversized, too garish even to wear to a party.

"H – hello?" Michael's voice wavered in and out as if he were stifling a giggle.

"Sweetie, are you okay?"

"Yeah, I was... I was sleeping. What time is it?" He coughed loudly, a forced sound, and Hannah suddenly felt as if something was wrong.

"Are you *drunk*?"

A laugh came bursting across the phone line, and she yanked the receiver away at the sudden static of sound. "No, no, no... I'm... noooooo... Just... just tired. How's mom?"

Through clenched teeth, she answered, "Sleeping. I'll see you tomorrow." And she hung up the phone.

9. Christian Dior Boutique black taffeta cocktail dress, c. 1950. Estimate: 300 – 400 USD

Delores lifted the gown from its garment bag and held it up to her body. She could remember the first time she'd worn it: the night she met Edward, ten years before. Her hair had been up in curls, the dress more revealing than her mother had appreciated. But she'd worn it anyway; she loved the black shoulder straps, the way her arms and shoulders were naked and curving, the bell pouf of the skirt with its delicate black velvet trim. She had twirled up to him, laughing.

Delores closed her eyes and swayed with the gown against her robe as she remembered the band music, the way it had bubbled through her skin. She had fluttered her fingers against his chest, beckoning him to dance. She'd known he'd be startled but would like her forwardness, the way her neck rose long and bare and flushed.

She had felt guilty when she married him, as if she were hoarding something precious and sweet, something she didn't deserve or know how to hold. He was so much like a flower, with a delicateness that sometimes infuriated her. There were nights when she wished he'd leave his study for just a little while, come up the stairs and flood her with himself. But it was always, always his books and the articulate, gentle fingers in bed, the quiet breathing. For him it wasn't

excitement, it wasn't loving the body so intensely it burst with the sheer impatience of it all. She knew this and was afraid to touch him sometimes.

Listening for the footsteps of her two small children Mark and Pauline, she tucked the gown back into the bag, zipped it up, and closed her closet door. Then she tightened the belt of her robe and left the room to make breakfast. Somehow, she felt as if she had never truly been that girl in the black taffeta dress.

10. *Early 20th Century French commercial perfume bottle. Estimate: 550 – 650 USD*

"Hannah, come quick!" Pauline whispered, grabbing Hannah's arm. Hannah stumbled behind her, unable to keep up with Pauline's long fourteen-year-old legs. They entered their mother's bedroom silently so as not to wake her napping on the living room couch. Pauline knelt in front of her mother's vanity and opened the bottom drawer, her long red hair falling into it as she reached inside to pull something out.

"Look what I found. I couldn't believe this." In her hand sat a tiny glass perfume bottle whose handle was shaped like a nude kneeling woman, her arms up in her hair, a beaded necklace sliding down between her breasts. Hannah reached out and touched the glass woman's delicate face tenderly, biting her lip. She had never known her mother owned something like this, something so erotic and lovely Hannah didn't have words for it. In all of her eight years, she had never seen anything she'd wanted to hold, to form her hand around, more than this little bottle. She pulled her hand away and shoved both into her lap.

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“Pretty weird, huh?” Pauline chuckled and wiggled her eyebrows. When she placed it back in the drawer, Hannah remained kneeling for a few minutes. She imagined the glass figure uncoiling, opening her hands, dripping the perfume onto her mother’s neck like a kiss.

11. 18ct gold and diamond wristwatch by Omega, 1965. Estimate: 500 – 600 USD

It wasn’t that he didn’t love her. In her own quiet, determined way, Hannah was perfect. He didn’t even know how to justify it to himself and rarely tried. But when the weekends came and Hannah began leaving for her mother’s, he started working overtime with his assistant Teresa on their latest magazine cover design to fill the silences in the house. When she slipped her hand across the crotch of his pants and laughed at his reaction, he didn’t try to stop her. It was as simple as her jade eyes and her mind that spoke in fractals and the slender index finger snaking, snaking.

His mother had always told him that classical gifts were best for apologies. He found it at an estate jeweler on Madison Avenue before heading to the parking garage for his car. The watch face was surrounded by star-like diamonds, the bands thick, ridged gold fashioned into braids the way Hannah so often did her hair, two long hefty black plaits falling behind her. When he gave it to her at home that night, her eyes opened as wide as seashells. “I love surprises,” she said smiling, and kissed him with articulated lips.

12. George III Period bow-fronted chest of drawers. Estimate: 4,000 – 6,500 USD

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“I met someone. His name is Michael.” Hannah kept her words vague while she tapped the top of the chest with a knuckle. Her mother’s eyes glanced over once as she finished folding a cashmere sweater and placed it into the chest.

“Really. Well, how did you meet him? How long have you been seeing him?”

Sunlight winked off of the brass key sitting atop the dresser beside Hannah’s drumming finger. She picked it up and flipped it over and over in her palm as she answered her mother’s questions – at work, three weeks. He worked in the graphics department, two floors up from editing. And so on and so on. The key became warm, and Hannah didn’t want to put it down. She never knew where her mother kept this key or why she kept the chest locked; she had always simply figured it was to keep her and her brother and sister away from her mother’s best clothes. But now they were all grown. There was no need for protection.

“Well, I must say he sounds interesting. Will I –” Delores was interrupted by the phone, and hastily put down a silk blouse to go answer it. The scent of lilac floated up to Hannah as she stuck a hand into the drawer her mother had left open. Nothing but fabric softer than cloud dust. She crouched down and jammed the key into the small top left drawer, catching a glimpse of her wild-eyed face in the chest’s shiny, curved mahogany front. A click, and she slid the drawer open.

Inside were envelopes, old envelopes that still had letters in them. On top of the neatest pile was a photograph of a man with thick black curls, sunlight angling into his eyes and making them look feral, the small grin of his mouth a seductive twist. Hannah opened the letter beneath it, scanned it quickly. “My sweet Delores... smell of your sex... as if the sky had opened up and

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swallowed us..." She heard her mother laughing a good-bye on the phone and turned the page over, her eyes swiftly dropping to the bottom. It was signed, "In body and soul, Your Vincent." Beneath it, he had written the date – April 14, 1964. Two years before Hannah was born.

She managed to place the blue and white stationary back into the ivory envelope and lock the drawer, her palms moist as she placed the key onto the dresser. Her mother walked into the room, still laughing. "Your Aunt Bridget is something, let me tell you."

Hannah watched her mother's arms as she carefully resumed folding the dry cleaning into the drawers, the way the gold bangle on her right wrist hung loosely down the back of her hand. The bones and tendons worked creakily, like gears that needed oiling. It seemed as if her mother had dried up somehow. Although she was only in her late fifties and still had that poised, elegant grace in her long neck, Hannah could hardly recognize her. Those arms that had pressed Hannah to her body had been so soft when she was a child, like the satins and silks her mother kept locked away in the chest, rounded and perfect. But at that moment, all she could picture were those arms goose-bumped beneath foreign fingerprints, sliding around a man who was not her father.

13. *Persian Shiraz rug, 5'6 x 8'4. Estimate: 600 – 900 USD*

Hannah looked around her, at the walls with their discolored squares where she had taken down her picture frames, at the hard wood floor she had almost forgotten was there beneath the rug she'd had over it. The rug stood in the corner, its extravagant geometry hidden away in a tight coil to be shoved into the moving truck. Hannah was determined to find a place for it in the

house; she had always loved its lush redness, like something out of *Arabian Nights*. Once the movers came up to take it out, she would truly be leaving the city to move to Westchester with Michael. With her husband. The word seemed foreign to her, uncomfortable on the edges of her tongue, but she said it out loud anyway, to the empty studio she had lived in for six years.

"Husband. Husband!" She laughed and shrugged her shoulders, giddy and afraid, the floorboards creaking beneath her movement as if asking her not to go. She had treasured this space, loved it like a child, because it had been hers. The single large window overlooking Third Avenue, the one spacious room where she conducted each aspect of her living, where nothing was hidden from her or secret at any moment. It was small and simple, undivided. But now she would have to learn the interpretation of space, the furtive dance of many rooms.

14. *Gold and ruby filigree style cufflinks. Estimate: 500 – 700 USD*

Michael slipped the cufflinks from their black velvet pillow, tilting them from side to side to watch the lamplight laugh off of the circle of tiny rubies. He could hear Hannah in the shower singing the national anthem and almost laughed at her odd choice of music. But he loved her suddenly, painfully for it.

As he set the first cufflink in place, he could remember when his father had given them to him, the day his parents filed for divorce. He sat back on the bed and forced his eyelids shut, forced back what he could feel rising pointed and wet to his eyes. "Marriage is like a song," his father had told him, the gold filigree circles sitting between them on the kitchen table. "If every part of the song works together and sounds fantastic, it stays in the Top Forty for a long time and

gets played on the radio forever. But if parts of a song don't work together or sound unpleasant... well, it's not going to get much airplay, now is it, Son?" He remembered how his mother hadn't even cried when his father moved out, how the lines of her face tangled themselves into a web, how she didn't speak to anyone for a week afterward.

Michael opened his eyes and looked through the blur as he set the other cufflink in place. He could still hear Hannah's shower voice, cracked and uncertain, fading out on the high notes.

15. *English enamel etui or message case, 1785. Estimate: 600 – 800 USD*

Hannah's reflection was a dark cloud except for her skin: the white face hovering above the black dress's high neckline, her forearms like swords beneath the sleeve cuffs. There, in the darkness of the bedroom, alone and silent, she slipped the small pink etui out of her purse and held it up to the sliver of light sliding between the curtains. Only four inches long, decorated with delicate bouquets of flowers against the blushed background. Her fingers trembling, her eyes sore, she pulled the two halves apart to see what Erik had put inside. On a piece of parchment-style paper, he had handwritten John Donne's "A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning." Hannah knew it was as much about her mother's death as it was about his leaving.

No one knew about them; not even her mother had known. He had come to the funeral even though she'd asked him not to. He was polite and unsuspecting, formally kissing her cheek – he could have been a coworker, the son of her mother's friend, the florist – as he slipped the etui into her palm. She had hated him and loved him at that very moment, for his brashness, for his disobeying, for his green eyes that somehow conveyed an understanding she had searched for

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everywhere and hadn't been able to find. Unlike Michael, he didn't say, "I'm so sorry, God, I'm so sorry." He simply tilted his head to the side and nodded at her as if reading behind her face. "You need this time while I'm in Europe to recover. Take care of yourself." She had watched his wool-coated back retreat down the cemetery's tree-lined path and fought back the urge to call after him, to cry out his name in the harsh sunlight.

"Mother," she finally confessed to the darkened room, her hand shaking the etui at the ceiling, "look at this. Look at this. I've done it."

16. *Silver-plated Vasiform table lamp. Estimate: 300 – 400 USD*

Delores patted Hannah's bottom as she climbed up onto her brocade-covered sleigh bed, the girl's knees sinking into the plush, her face bright with this new, exciting allowance. At seven, her hair already reached the midpoint of her back and curled like molasses rings.

After pulling the chain on the bedside lamp to flood their corner of the bed with light, Delores collected her brush and hairpins off of the dresser top and set them on the bed. "Okay, now between mother's legs. There you go." Hannah settled down into the space between Delores's knees, the brush sliding toward them as the mattress sloped with their weight. Delores began to stroke the brush through her daughter's hair carefully, the curls and waves softening into a fluffier cascade.

"I'm going to make you look like me. Would you like that?"

"Yes!" Hannah wriggled with the thrill of having her hair done grown-up style, and Delores began the task of pulling her black hair up into a French twist. The light that shone

through the lampshade's patchwork form of iridescent shells haloed Hannah in an almost surreal light. With each lift of her hair, the slender girl-neck was revealed, the narrow shoulders drawn straight across, the inward slope of her lower back. When she finished styling and Hannah hopped off of the bed to turn to her, Delores saw, not Vincent as she always did, but herself, young and mischievous around the eyes, the sculpted lips ready with a mouthful of thoughts. Here was the child who had come unannounced and who, Delores somehow knew, would always be a surprise.

17. Pair of Louis XVI style rosewood-veneered side tables. Estimate: 650 – 850 USD

Hannah unlocked the front door, weary from the drive home. Her mother had sent her off early, urging her to spend Saturday night and Sunday with Michael. "You've given me so many weekends already. Go, go spend time with him. It's important to keep him company."

She dropped her bag in the foyer and headed up the stairs, ready to surprise him. She imagined he would be working at his desk in the den or maybe lying in bed watching TV. At the top of the stairs she turned left and walked into their bedroom. Michael wasn't lying on the bed, but she did hear the shower running and Michael singing loud and carefree. She stood still a moment to smile at his uneven voice, his off-key rendition of some popular song she had forgotten the name of.

And then she heard another voice. A woman's laughter, glittery as bell chimes. Cold came to Hannah's face, her neck. Her hands went numb. She looked around the room and backed into the door. A strange black purse was sitting on the bed. A lacy red bra that was not

hers was flung haphazardly onto her bedside table, a delicate shoulder strap across her malachite box. She backed away and away, down the stairs with something large and hard caught in her throat, away to the door, to the car. To the car, where her numb hands managed to turn the key and steer out of the driveway. Her mind knew where to go, how to turn the hour's drive back to the city into an unmemorable blur of lights and dimming sky.

When she opened her mother's apartment door, she saw her mother sitting at the kitchen table with the IV stand wheeled up beside her. She was eating cheese and crackers. "What are you doing here!"

Hannah dropped down onto one of the chairs and forced a smile. The hand she took into hers was warm and dry, too brittle to squeeze. She said simply, "You need me more right now," and took a cracker off of her mother's plate.

18. *Jerry N. Uelsmann gelatin silver print, "Equivalent." Estimate: 1,500 – 2,500 USD*

It was not that she wanted vindication or revenge or to throw it back in his face like a cup of cold coffee. In an almost subtle way, it was to see if Michael was worth keeping. She did not know how to forgive him. She did not know how to approach him about it. She did not want to be the only lonely one.

Erik knew strange and wonderful things, knew how to possess them. She met him while looking for black and white art photography to decorate her office walls. After they slept together for the first time at his apartment, he told her he had realized the perfect print to give her. It was not one of his own photographs but a combined image by Uelsmann: a woman's

curled torso above a clenched fist, their sizes equal, their symmetry beautifully the same. "You lie like this afterward, when you sleep. And I wish sometimes you were this big, the size of my hand, so I can fit you whole in my palm and take you with me."

She hung it in her office, directly above her desk where she could stare at the ghost of herself, at the shape her body knew how to make without her. It was her most popular print. Even Michael had commented on it when he came by one afternoon to pick her up for lunch. "Strange, isn't it? How everything is somehow mirrored by something else."

19. *Gucci handbag with hand-painted medallions, c. 1950. Estimate: 1,000 – 1,500 USD*

Delores reached into her handbag and plucked a tissue from the small packet inside. Her eyes were swollen, and she could feel a tender puffiness around her mouth and nose as she dabbed with the tissue. The church was dim and echoing, and though Edward's funeral was going on around her, she could pay attention only to her children beside her. Mark in his suit already looking like a man, his broad shoulders rigid, his mouth a tight line. Pauline leaned against Delores's right arm and sniffled into a tissue, her face like a bruise between the two red braids. Delores stroked her cheek and Pauline closed her eyes, exhausted. And to Delores's left stood Hannah, not quite tall enough to see over the back of the pew in front of them, her hair already disheveled. She was staring so intently at the medallions on Delores's purse between them that Delores began to get worried. It was as if the child could see Edward in the scenes of lovers depicted in each oval. When Delores picked up the purse and placed it down between herself and Pauline, Hannah turned her small face up at her with a look that seemed, for the

smallest fraction of a second, like pure hatred. Then the look dissolved into quiet sadness, and Delores turned her face toward the altar, her lower lip caught between her teeth.

20. Late 19th Century Victorian fire screen. Estimate: 750 – 1,000 USD

"There's something I have to tell you." Hannah could hear the tremor in his voice as he sat her down on the living room sofa. They faced each other for a moment the way they hadn't in many months, and it was Michael who first turned away. She followed his gaze to the screen standing in front of the fireplace, the brocade fabric stretched taut within its walnut frame as if hiding something, a secret, like a hand pressed clandestinely over a mouth. "I'm having an affair."

Hannah raised her eyebrows at him, and his face immediately became confused. And then, unable to control herself, each nucleus of grief and dishonesty and guile came bursting forth, and she began to laugh uncontrollably. "So am I!"

She bent over, forehead to knees, when the laughing became an avalanche of sadness down her face. She stayed hugging herself that way for a long while, flinching at his attempts to touch her. When she sat up and looked at him, she knew she did not love him right then and felt she might never again. But she knew him at that moment, and it seemed as if he understood and felt the same, as if they somehow truly *knew* one another, at last.

"So what now?" His voice was small but unhurt. Hannah knew it would be a swift contest – who would decide to leave first, who would take that first plunge into the cold water of statistical marriages that don't last past the first five years. She did not know who it would be or

when or how. But she saw it in his face, in the surrendering downward cast of his mouth, the flare of his nostrils. She had played his game and they had both won, they had both lost. The truth of love seemed like such a fragile, wayward thing.

21. Pair of English carved wood mirrors, c. 1880. Estimate: 3,000 – 4,000 USD

Hannah stood between the facing mirrors in the entrance hall, turning back and forth to see her reflection endlessly tunneling. The house was unnaturally quiet now, though she had had the television on all day since Michael moved out the night before. It made the house a little less lonely, a little less empty, a little less like something she felt swallowed by.

In the mirror she was ghostlike, her hair unraveled and dim, her face bruised with shadows. There were so many of her, an army of Hannahs, two corridors of smoky eyes and lips. And in the center, herself, her body like a collection of secrets, like a shell of clay. She wanted nothing more than to hunt through the rooms and empty them of their belongings, leaving nothing behind except the dusty outlines of each shape. She decided to wait for sunrise to illuminate each shadow, each corner, so she'd know what she was dealing with, so she'd have to interpret nothing inside the walls of each room except her own breathing. She would shed her skin like a snake, slide out of it and leave it behind her on the floor to be trampled, tossed, broken. She would call an appraiser in the morning.