



according to Thomas, beautiful much-younger women slept in their father's bed. Jarrett had met some of them when he visited at his Christmas break and in summer. His father had told him about Finland.

Do you want to go hear her? asked Nick. I think I'm gonna go.

We've got work, pal, said Jarrett.

No, said Nick smiling and doing funny things with his lips, You've got work. My work is here, remember? I'm on duty tonight. There's a floor party and I need to make sure no one dies.

Sophie laughed.

Nick went on, the party doesn't start till eleven, and the performance will be over by then — she's playing in here and wouldn't want to stick around after then — her manager must have thought this place was a lot classier than it is.

Sophie and Jarrett looked at the wooden chairs with assorted rails missing, and the carved up tables which smelled like beer no matter how hard you wiped them. The piano in the corner always seemed like a miracle. The black baby grand never had a scratch. No one seemed to know why it was there, just that it had always been. And infrequently there were good concerts, sponsored by the alumni, who, said Jarrett, must have wanted to make sure we don't have as rowdy a time here as they did. And then he'd say, that's what happens when you get older, you get cultured, and settle down.

Sophie thought she could understand why he might not be eager to settle down. And she was pretty sure she understood why Nick never said much about his family in front of

Jarrett. Nick's parents seemed very contented with each other. Maybe it was because they only had Nick. Maybe unity was easier with three and no more. But what do I know, she'd think during these conversations. Maybe Jarrett's mother was unhappy when there was only Jarrett. Maybe Thomas had been an attempt to balance something. And Mickey, so much younger than the other two, sure seemed like a desperate and serious attempt at holding something together.

I'd like to hear some music, said Sophie, not looking at Jarrett.

And after, while listening to the album Nick bought and had autographed by Saffron, Nick had stood up Sophie to dance with him. It hadn't seemed weird to her, to be dancing in a dorm room. The door was closed, only one light was on, at the far end of his room, over the desk piled with library books. It didn't seem strange when Nick kissed her. And when she didn't go back to the apartment that night.

But it did seem strange the next morning, when the three of them met at the club before the match.

How was the music? asked Jarrett, untying and retying his shoe.

Sophie had seen players do this during important play and knew what it meant.

She was wonderful, said Nick quietly.

Sophie looked at him.

I bought her album, he added, you can borrow it anytime, Jarrett.

Jarrett looked up and shrugged and a small smile started to appear. Thanks, he said, maybe I will.