

## Crabs

The residents of the Vida del Plata Retirement Community were divvied up into separate bungalows, which suited Evelyn Boyd very well. The other girls were gossips.

When she woke up next to Allen Miller that morning, Evelyn thought for a moment that he might be dead. His saggy eyelids were purple and still, and his mouth was clenched in a cadaverish type of way, unmoved by oxygen. This was why she made a habit of not sleeping over with dates: past a certain age, all men looked dead when they slept. Evelyn held her breath too, waiting to see if she'd have to call someone. But when he choked on an apnea'd breath and continued snoring, Evelyn gave herself permission to breathe and started gathering up her clothes.

As she slipped out into Allen's backyard, spotted Patricia Lowry down the way, who was out on her annoying morning speedwalk. The sliding glass door had caught on its tracks. Evelyn cursed under her breath and rattled it. Patricia was getting closer. She gave the door another final shove and it finally relinquished, squeaking shut. Evelyn hobbled through the grass, hoping to duck into her own bungalow just next door unbothered, but she was never that lucky. Patricia's voice rang out just as she reached her own back door.

"Good morning, Evelyn! Look at you out so early," Patricia called.

Evelyn glowered at her for just a moment before slamming the door shut. Storming up to the bathroom, she ran the water and splashed it over her face, red with effort. She looked up, shocked by the old woman glaring back at her in the bathroom mirror. Evelyn pulled at the loose muscles of her face, watching as the wrinkles

deepened as she scowled. As she took in the sagging lines and liver spots, she wondered how any man managed to get it up with her around. That's what the little blue pill was for, she supposed.

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At bingo that evening, she caught Patricia's eye again, who waltzed into the clubhouse with a brand new sweater and a horrible smile. Patricia beamed when she saw Evelyn. Patricia giggled over to the group of women waiting for her at the euchre tables. Evelyn watched them exchange a few words and, sure enough, the other girls all looked over and waved hello.

With a *hmpf* Evelyn turned back to her bingo cards. She had upped her game to nine cards at once. It was a lot to juggle. Maribel Acevedo took her seat next to Evelyn, who slid her a spare dauber— Maribel always forgot to bring one. The caller, a pastor from the local presbyterian church, began reading off the numbers.

"G-9!" he preached.

Maribel stamped three of her cards. Evelyn stamped none.

"What did Patricia say?" Evelyn asked, not looking up from her cards.

"Oh, just that her daughter bought her a new sweater." Maribel paused, pushing a frizzy curl of hair out of her face and smiled at Evelyn. "Allen Miller, huh? I heard he sleeps like the dead."

"I don't see how that's any of her business." Evelyn jabbed the dauber into her leftmost card and a thick glob of ink bled out. "And besides, they all do."

A nurse walked by and handed them each a little paper cup, the type ketchup came in. The ladies fished their vitamins and medication out from them and washed the pills down with sweet tea. The nurse moved to the next table.

She gazed out over the crowd. Most of the bingo-goers were men, the ladies tended more towards cards. Two tables down, a nurse administered a nightly injection into Robert Harwood's thigh while he made eyes at her from across the way. This was the real game.

"You shouldn't listen to that chatter. Especially not from Patricia," Evelyn said, clucking her tongue at her grid. The upper right corner was one away from a center line.

"They're just trying to be friendly. It's *chisme*."

"It's nonsense." Evelyn looked up, Robert's nurse was walking away. "You're my friend. What do I need her for?"

Though she was a part of Patricia's euchre cult, Maribel was indulgent of crabby temperaments and had also lost her own son a few years back. As a result, she was indeed Evelyn's only friend. Evelyn was too occupied to commiserate on her own loneliness, instead she watched Robert's nurse approach them.

The nurse handed Evelyn a folded note that Robert had asked her to pass along. Evelyn opened it. Maribel leaned over her shoulder, reading the note too.

"Classy," Maribel said, peering through her gaudy, chunky reading glasses.

A large pair of crudely drawn knockers stared back at them. Beneath the drawing were two checkboxes, one for yes and the other for no.

"Oh are those yours?" Maribel smirked at her.

“If that’s what he thinks, then he’s got another thing coming.” She looked up at Robert, he waggled his eyebrows back and winked. Evelyn scoffed and crumpled the note in her hand, Maribel laughing. The preacher called off another number and Maribel perked up, daubing two of her cards. When she turned away, Evelyn ticked the yes box and handed it back to the nurse.

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They made plans for lunch on Tuesday. Evelyn had written it down in her datebook, then added quotation marks around “lunch”. She knew by now what these dates really meant. Nowadays she rarely left bingo without a few in her book.

Come Tuesday however, Evelyn found her plans waylaid by the do-gooding of some local delinquents. At morning announcements, the nurses had reported that a few teenagers from the nearby high school would be dropping by to have lunch with some of the seniors.

Supposedly, the lucky few were randomly selected, but Evelyn knew better. Only the hags with no friends and no family visits got randomly selected. As such, she was now sitting in the administrative office, waiting for a fifteen year-old to take her to lunch instead of rubbing down Robert Harwood with arthritic cream.

The girl was named something ridiculous like Haley or Heely. She was sitting in the waiting room with a few other schoolkids. She’d given Evelyn a shy wave. Evelyn stared at the girl’s breasts which were unaffected by gravity and hidden beneath a chunky sweatshirt. Girls nowadays always wore such blocky, unflattering clothes. If Evelyn was their age, she couldn’t be convinced to wear a stitch at all.

A male attendant had been sent into the office to help the front desk ladies sort through all the paperwork. Except he was mostly just standing there.

Evelyn realized that he was staring at Heely. She felt first an indignant protectiveness over the girl, followed by a jab of bitterness. Back then, sex meant something. If someone wanted you, it meant you were someone worth wanting. Now, it was just a way to pass the time.

Heely's friend noticed the attendant's gaze next and Evelyn watched as she leaned in to whisper into Heely's ear. They both turned to glance at him, cautious at first. Realizing he'd been caught, he bolted away. The two girls giggled and shoved at each other, enjoying the joke that they'd made for one another.

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They went to a Waffle House nearby. Like Evelyn, the little tart couldn't drive, so the ogling attendant had been forced to escort them over in his sexless company van. Now in the diner, he sat in a faraway booth and refused to look over.

Evelyn gummed at her grits. The upside to these outings was the access to cholesterol-rich food. Heely picked at her waffles and huffed. The girl had run through all the easy conversation threads early on in the meal, and was now condemned to eat in silence. Evelyn sure as hell wouldn't talk unless she had to.

She looked over at the attendant, who ducked behind his menu. Heely noticed her looking that way and grinned at Evelyn.

"Did you see in the office? When he was staring at me?"

Usually on these trips, the volunteers were never bold enough to venture past the carefully scripted questions and overenthusiastic pity laughs. She shrugged at the girl, curious if she'd push it any further.

"Did guys ever stare at you? Like, when you were young?" Heely pressed.

"Naturally," Evelyn said, a small reward.

She wanted to point out that they still did, but that wasn't what Heely wanted. Young and beautiful girls didn't want to hear that men would still want them as wrinkled crones. They wanted to pretend that they'd be young and beautiful forever.

"When I was your age, I went with a lot of boys," Evelyn found herself saying, to her own surprise. "They couldn't keep their hands off of me."

Heely giggled, a sharp and genuine bark of laughter, and Evelyn felt strangely pleased that she'd gotten a reaction. Heely's eyes were bright with a youthful amusement and Evelyn felt like she should keep talking.

"I used to do all sorts of things. They'd take me to drive-ins and behind the bleachers, just to get a feel of these old things." Evelyn gestured to her boobs, dangling over the table. "The things I'd do if I was still young," she said, as if Charles Barrowman hadn't just gone to second with her the night before.

"So you're saying I should let my boyfriend put his hand up my shirt when he asks?"

Heely was still smiling, but the question felt real and important. For the first time in a while, Evelyn felt the weight of someone else's choices resting on her.

"Only if you want to."

Heely's shoulders drooped with disappointment and Evelyn felt it too. That was a nothing answer, the type a mother or a principal might give. Evelyn was neither.

"Sex is...good sometimes, it can bring you closer with the person." Evelyn paused, thinking about what her message should be. "But a lot of the time at your age, you won't get much out of it."

She hoped Heely caught her drift. Orgasms were inappropriate to bring up at lunch— this kind at least, without the quotation marks. Heely nodded sagely.

"What about at your age?"

Evelyn sipped at her tea.

"My age too."

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The next week passed and Evelyn still hadn't had her date with Robert. She spent her days as usual, watching birds from her balcony and reading unfulfilling romance books, interspersed with the occasional round of pool or puzzles with Maribel. Evelyn had learned in the first few years that the only way to pass time in Del Vida Plata was to keep your hands busy. And she had found plenty of uses for them. She'd had a few more dates in the meantime, but Robert hadn't followed up on their postponed lunch yet. This didn't bother Evelyn, it just stayed irksome and itching at the back of her mind.

The day of Evelyn's next community service lunch, a new arrival came to break up the morning routine. Judith Cashmore had come just that morning, dropped off in the company van with a few suitcases and a kiss goodbye. Evelyn had watched from her

bungalow, remembering the polite handshake her nephew had left her with. Judith sat now in front of the big clubhouse windows, watching the dreary day unfold.

Evelyn was in the clubhouse now too, her hands playing solitaire while the rest of her tried to ignore Judith. Across from her, Maribel crocheted a bright green granny patch. Evelyn wanted to tell her the color was horrifically ugly, but decided against it. No reason to hurt her feelings.

New arrivals were always interesting to watch as they acclimated to the environment. Most of them started out bitter and hurting. They ached at losing their freedom, but Evelyn found that you were really only as free as your joints would allow, and the Florida humidity was especially brutal on the bones.

And it wasn't just that. Most of the time, they were angry about losing the last sliver of hope that their children might take them in. That someone might still want them around.

Evelyn supposed she was lucky in that regard. When she'd broken her hip seventeen years ago, it was the natural next step for her nephew to put her in the home. Nobody else was going to do it. It worked fine for the both of them; she would be back on her feet and out of his hair. One estate sale of everything that she owned and then she was a Vista del Plata resident.

It wasn't a bad place to wait for death. Evelyn wanted to say that to Judith. *Hey, the food is soft and the men can't chase younger tail*, she wanted to say.



Before she got her chance, Patricia Lowry came flouncing over. The clubhouse was quiet during the day, and Evelyn heard her inviting Judith over for a game of euchre.

Judith let Patricia lead the way back to the card tables where her lackey, Betty Molina was waiting. They took their seats and Patricia looked around. Seeing Evelyn and Maribel, she waved at them.

“Yoohoo, we need a fourth! Be a dear, won’t you?” Patricia gestured to the seat across from her. Evelyn glanced at Maribel, whose nose was still buried in her yarn.

“She’s calling you,” Evelyn said, trying to nudge Maribel.

“No she’s not,” Maribel hissed. “She knows I’m behind on my quiltwork.”

Evelyn whipped back to stare at Patricia, who was in fact looking directly at her.

Nothing sounded worse than being euchre partners with Patty Lowry, but besides them, there was no one else in the clubhouse— they’d have to abandon their game without her. Evelyn took in Judith’s moonish expression and felt the still-there urge to convince her that this place, her home for over a decade, wasn’t actually so bad. She took the seat across from Patricia.

Betty immediately started shuffling the cards. The arthritis seemed to melt from her knuckles as she arched the cards into a deft riffle and began dealing them out.

Halfway through the game, it was clear that Patricia and Evelyn were blowing the other team out of the water. Evelyn was rusty on the rules, but Patricia seemed to anticipate her moves and played seamlessly into her hand. She was a begrudgingly gifted player, probably the result of being such a *people person*.

“Patricia tells me you’ve been here longer than any other resident— that’s quite the achievement,” Judith said brightly. Evelyn grimaced at Patricia.

“Yes, I’m very accomplished.”

“I hope I get the chance to be here as long as you have,” Judith continued.

“Why?” Evelyn snapped. She had wanted Judith to like Vista del Plata, but these were different terms. She wasn’t some herald of its virtues, she’d just broken a hip in an empty house.

“Well, it’s better than the next place!” Judith said, and the other women laughed.

Drawn in by the sound of women having a good time without them, a gaggle of men walked by. Robert was leading the way, he rested a pool cue on his shoulder.

“Ladies, can I interest any of you in a game of billiards?” he offered.

Patricia smiled at him. “Sorry, but we’ve got our game going here. It’s 9-4.”

“Ooh, match point,” Robert smiled. Evelyn hated to admit it, but he was charming. She wasn’t sure at what point seventy-four and only somewhat bald had become attractive, but she was here now.

“We’ll leave you ladies to it,” he said as the group started to go. It was then that he placed a hand on Patricia’s shoulder and squeezed warmly. “And Patricia, thank you for last night. I had a lovely time.” As he spoke, his eyes met Evelyn’s and he waggled his eyebrows. Then he was off.

Evelyn felt cold. Judith started dealing the final hand.

When she asked Patricia if she'd had sex with Robert, Patricia laughed and shared a knowing smile with Betty.

"Goodness no. He invited me over and we fooled around for a bit but..." Patricia trailed off and glanced around. Then she leaned in. "Between you and me, Robert has a bit of a crabbiness problem." She winked at Evelyn and the other two girls giggled.

Evelyn felt blood rushing in her ears, barely hearing them mock her. Despite her being several years Patricia's senior, Evelyn felt like she was in junior high, surrounded by the older girls. She tried to focus on the game as Judith put down a card.

"I didn't realize you and Robert were going together," Evelyn said.

"Oh he's just one of my callers." Patricia played her card, the king of hearts. She was winning the trick for their team. It was Betty's turn to play— she had nothing

"That's surprising to me," said Evelyn. "I didn't know you got up to that sort of thing."

"Oh we all do," Patricia said, smiling. "Everyone gets a little lonely, right?"

Evelyn's dentures clattered in her mouth. She didn't need this and she didn't need Patricia's stupid clique. She played her card, the ace of hearts. They were a team, but she had beat Patricia's winning card. Evelyn looked smugly at her.

Her victory was cut short by the arrival of that creepy male attendant, come to tell Evelyn she had a visitor.

"Oh that's a shame," Patricia crooned. "I'd hoped you would stay for another."

"Fuck you, Patricia." Evelyn banged her hip into the table as she shoved her way past, clamping her thin lips tight to keep from yelping in pain. She stomped to the

attendant, feeling the heat of every eye watching her. She passed Maribel, who was clearly about to speak up.

“That’s an ugly color.” Evelyn snatched up her sweater from the chair and followed the attendant out.

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“I didn’t know old ladies fought like that,” Heely said, slurping mustard from her fingers. They were sat two booths down from their previous table. Evelyn watched, somewhat grossed out by the girl’s table manners.

“Some women don’t stop being petty with age,” Evelyn said.

“Are you sure they’re the ones being petty?”

Evelyn grimaced at her.

“I mean,” Heely continued, “It seemed like they wanted to hang out and you totally blew up for no reason.”

Evelyn had been admittedly excited for this lunch, but Heely was not turning out to be the ally that Evelyn needed. Evelyn bet that Heely was popular at school, with her pretty blonde hair and outgoing personality.

“What’d you do to get punished into this?” Evelyn asked.

“Like why am I doing community service?”

“Yes.” Evelyn stabbed at her boiled egg with a fork.

“Drinking under the bleachers. A bunch of us were, but they let me take the fall.”

“Why you?”

“I was the one with the liquor. The rest of them managed to run first.”

“That doesn’t seem fair.”

Heely shrugged. “I don’t mind, plus I get to have lunch with my friend.” She smiled teasingly at Evelyn. Heely’s smile was boyish and pretty. Her teeth were crooked in places, some of her alignments shifted— clearly the girl had a retainer she wasn’t wearing. In another life, Evelyn professionally reprimanded kids like Heely for not keeping up on their dental care. Philip hadn’t worn his retainer either.

“That was stupid of you,” Evelyn snapped.

“Hey, don’t be a bitch to me just because you don’t have other old lady friends.” Heely punctuated her retort with a gulp of Mountain Dew.

“Has nobody ever told you to respect your elders?”

“Well you’re not exactly respecting me,” Heely frowned at her. Then she brightened up. “Oh speaking of elders, I meant to ask last time— you said you don’t actually get anything out of sex, right? Why bother with it then?”

Evelyn could tell Heely was excited to have an adult who would talk about sex with her. This was probably not the intention of these community service outings, but Evelyn guiltily enjoyed having someone to talk about it with.

“It’s a way to pass the time, I guess.”

“Oh c’mon, that’s it?” Heely threw her hands up. “Why not just spend your time quilting or something?”

“I hate quilting,” Evelyn said. “There’s more to it than that...” she felt it hard to find the words to describe it.

“You’re young, so you probably won’t understand this but- it’s hard at my age.”

“Like cause of your bad backs and stuff like that?”

Evelyn rolled her eyes. “No...although that *does* come up.” She traced her fingernail along the faded design of her coffee cup. “When you’re young and pretty, people notice that. Perhaps more than you want them to.” Evelyn threw her chin over at the male attendant in the corner. Heely grinned at him.

“Once you get to my age, that fades. When men get older, they get more respect. When women get older, it’s like we’re already ghosts. People only see you when you start knocking shit over.”

Heely nodded, thinking. Evelyn appreciated that she was a young person who could think.

“So sex is like, a way of getting noticed?” Heely mused.

Evelyn shrugged.

“That’s stupid of you,” Heely said somberly, then added, “with all due respect.”

Evelyn’s eyebrows flew up her wrinkled forehead.

“I mean, I get it,” Heely continued, “But why do you care what they think?” She pointed openly to the attendant, who was trying to sink into his booth. “Do you care what that guy thinks?”

Evelyn scoffed.

“Exactly,” Heely said, smirking at Evelyn. “Find some friends. Get a hobby.”

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Back at Del Vista Plata, Evelyn stopped off at Maribel's bungalow on the way to her own. Maribel's door was unlocked as usual and Evelyn let herself in. She hated coming here. The place was warmly decorated with knick-knacks and crafts, Christmas cards and pregnancy announcements. That was what really separated the two of them. When Maribel was dropped off for the first time, it was in two U-Hauls that her children had rented to heave all this crap in. Maribel had lost her son, but she still had a family.

Evelyn found Maribel in the kitchen, still working at her quilt squares. Maribel barely acknowledged her when she walked in. Evelyn took a step closer and Maribel shuffled around to avoid looking at her. Evelyn felt annoyance prickle at her neck, Maribel could be so petty at times. She looked at Maribel's yarn and noticed she had switched away from the ugly green.

"It's not *that* ugly," Evelyn said.

"Yes it is," Maribel said without looking up. "And my hair is frizzy and my house is tacky and my friends are all crones."

Evelyn didn't know what to say. All those things were certainly true, but they felt cruel hearing it in Maribel's words and not her own. Then, Maribel made it worse. She sighed, setting her crochet hook down and looking back at Evelyn.

"How was your lunch?" she asked.

Evelyn was still frozen. Maribel rolled her eyes and gestured to another kitchen chair across from her.

"I know who you are, Evelyn. No need to apologize for it now."

Evelyn had come specifically to apologize, but she felt cut off at the knees. She took a seat.

“The lunch was good,” Evelyn said. “The girl is funny.”

“Yeah?” Maribel picked up the crocheting again.

“She asked me about my geriatric sex life.”

Maribel barked out a laugh and Evelyn smiled.

“So you’re enjoying the pity lunches for once,” Maribel said, and Evelyn nodded.

“She reminds me of Philip,” Evelyn said, taking herself by surprise. She’d been avoiding making that connection before, but it didn’t hurt as much as she’d expected.

Maribel nodded, looking over at a framed photo on her buffet.

“It was hard at first, but I’ve come to love those moments. It gives me a chance to remember my son. We forget to do that, sometimes.”

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Over the next few weeks, Evelyn stopped hustling for dates during bingo. It actually improved her game, when she focused on the numbers getting called and not on the prospect of getting bedded. One night, she even won the grand prize— a pasta pass to Olive Garden, which she split with Maribel on Sundays after church. She even went for actual lunch with some of her previous lovers and found they occasionally had interesting things to say outside of the bedroom. Things were going well.

One Thursday night, she and Maribel howled in laughter as Bernard Hughes tried to shoot a pool ball with the cue between his legs. Bernard and Maribel had been quietly



going steady for a little while, and though Evelyn had once given him a handy behind the pool concessions, the three of them had acknowledged it and were happy to let it slide. Bernard jabbed at the cue ball and it miraculously sailed into the fifteen-ball, sinking it. Maribel whooped and threw her arms around him, giving him a wet kiss. Evelyn averted her eyes, avoiding the PDA but accidentally settling on Patricia, draped over a chair by Robert Harwood's table. Patricia had kept her distance from Evelyn since their euchre encounter, and though Evelyn was on a betterment journey, she was nonetheless grateful to not deal with the skank and her crones. Robert seemed to notice her suddenly and beckoned her over. She met him hesitantly, but was wrapped in a tight hug.

"Evie! How have you been?" He squeezed her firmly. Nobody had called her that since Nixon was in office but goodness he gave a nice hug. Over his shoulder, Patricia peered at her.

"I've been good, uh." She wasn't sure how to follow.

"Great!" Robert beamed. "Hey, whatever happened to that lunch date of ours?"

Evelyn hesitated. It still bothered her that he had never followed up on their promise of a date, but she was trying something new. Robert was handsome and all, but was it worth it to throw away weeks of progress on his charming bald spot? Patricia cleared her throat, robbing Evelyn of the chance to decide.

"Robbie, is that really the best idea?"

"Let's do it," Evelyn said. "I'm free this evening, actually."

“Great!” Robert leaned in and kissed her cheek jovially. Evelyn basked in his sharp cologne and Patricia’s pouting face. Robert sauntered back to his game of pool, but Patricia stayed behind. She opened her mouth to speak but Evelyn whipped around, flipping her hair over her shoulder like she’d seen Heely do once, and walked away.

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That night in the bedroom of Robert’s bungalow, Evelyn sat in an armchair as a nurse went through her nightly routine of keeping the old man running. He smiled at Evelyn as she waited, as if this was a bit of foreplay, building up the tension before things really got going.

After the nurse was done, she packed up her medical kit and started for the door. As she scooted past Evelyn, she gave her a meaningful look, but Evelyn avoided it. Instead, she glared down at her orthopedic shoes, chunky and ugly. In a past life, she would’ve never worn this kind of shoe to a date.

Once the nurse was gone, Robert sauntered over to a record player waiting in the corner of his room. He fiddled with the needle and an incontinent stream of crooning jazz trickled out.

Robert snapped his fingers and wiggled to the rhythm, edging closer to Evelyn with every quiver of his hips. She let herself be moved by the natural flow of these things. A wet kiss here and there, shimmying out of her shirt and brasserie and laying back on the bed. Robert really was handsome, but she couldn’t help but be reminded of the fact that Patricia had been here before. These things didn’t normally bother her. People slept around, so what? She was by no means trying to court these men.

Either way, Evelyn was determined not to let Patricia ruin this night any further for her. The sex progressed as usual for Evelyn, if somewhat distracted. Thankfully, it didn't seem to bother Robert who exhaled deeply when he was finished and collapsed over at her side. He caught his breath for a moment, then pressed a nice, soft kiss against her neck. She sighed and Robert scooped closer to her and began caressing her hair and neck. She appreciated the effort.

As they were necking, Evelyn took notice of a weird movement that Robert was making. Every couple seconds or so he'd do a strange shimmy of his groin. It kept throwing Evelyn off her rhythm until eventually she was just anticipating every shudder.

Finally he snaked a hand down there and just began outright scratching.

Evelyn scooted back at this. Looking around the room, she zeroed in on the medicines the nurse had left there for him. Among the many pill bottles were prescription shampoo and other ointments. Patricia's words clicked in her brain.

Robert Harwood had crabs.

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It wasn't the end of the world. The trip to the nurse was embarrassing and the ointment smelled like sulfur, but that wasn't too bad. The worst part of it all was that Patricia had tried to warn her. As Evelyn walked into the clubhouse the next morning, she reflected on the conversation they'd had during euchre, and then their exchange from last night. She'd been thinking about it all night, as she scrubbed her skin raw in the shower and lay awake in her bed. Patricia Lowry had tried to stop her from getting crabs. Evelyn was horrified.

For once, the girls weren't playing euchre. Instead, they had arranged their chairs into a circle and were crocheting patterned squares of varying colors. Patricia was among them. She saw Evelyn and smiled, beckoning her over. Evelyn braced herself, ready to be humiliated for last night's encounter.

"Join our quilt circle?" She said instead, offering a spare hook and skein of yarn to Evelyn.

Evelyn didn't know how to crochet, but she accepted them anyway and sat down. She looked around. Everyone had their own square, but she could see how they'd fit together eventually. Maribel whispered in her ear.

"I can teach you eventually, we're mostly just chatting at this point."

Evelyn hated chatting. She glanced at Patricia, who was already looking her way expectantly. Patricia smiled and winked. Evelyn cleared her throat.

"What's the topic for today?" she asked, a small offering.

"Endowments," said Betty, and the group giggled. Evelyn was happy to see Judith was in the circle too. She nodded her head thoughtfully.

Patricia leaned in.

"I hear you've been with Walter Fitzsimmons," she pried. "What's that like?"

Patricia's perfume was cloying and heavy and she leaned in way too close when she talked, but she had a glimmer in her eye that made Evelyn want to say something.

Instead, she held up her hands, approximately seven inches apart.

The circle of girls erupted in hoots and giggles.