



## Uncertainties



I ARRIVE TOO EARLY, SO I PULL TO THE CURB, OUT OF SIGHT OF Beth's house, and wait.

A little girl comes to the end of her driveway and stares at me without compunction. An older couple out walking along my side of the road head straight for me, veering at the last minute, almost smacking into my side mirror, an odd game of chicken. I wave and smile to show I'm not a stalker or someone shilling for an unworthy cause. The woman turns sharply and keeps her eye on me in a way I haven't felt since I was seven and walking alone on the back street of our small village.

As I wait, I think about the conversation Beth and I are about to have. We've given up setting topics in advance; we go where the words take us. I will have to listen intently. Her voice is soft, whether by habit or by nature, and recently an extra measure of quietude has crept in, whether from a stiffening of her throat or from some ongoing congestion no one seems to know, but the result is that her voice is stilled now almost to a whisper.

I try to imagine Beth shouting, but it's such a ridiculous picture I laugh out loud. I'm still smiling when I press her doorbell.

The day is warm and all the houses, it seems, have emptied outdoors. As we walk down the road, Beth is greeted like a celebrity.