

## The Blessing

try to discover an interior dimension. My mother's attention had no obvious emotional component. She could be impressed or even approving, but her approval never reached a level of intensity that demanded expression in hugs or kisses or any other form of physical contact. Even a direct word of approval was rare.

Ever since the hunting accident, I had hoped to communicate to her my agony over Peter's death. I knew she was a fundamentally reserved person, but I needed to believe she'd listen and respond. Shortly after our arrival in Haiti, I thought I saw my opportunity. The family seemed to have stabilized sufficiently—we were all living under the same roof again, the simple routines of our life were reestablished. It was February 3—my birthday—surely this was an auspicious moment to risk seeking the acknowledgment and forgiveness I desperately needed.

We were having a family dinner, all of us seated at the dark, elongated table that was set in the central room to catch whatever cross-breezes the open windows on either side might create. Even Dad was there, the hospital's proximity allowing him a half-hour dinner between afternoon and evening clinics. When my cake was brought in with its fourteen candles, I got up and ran into the room I shared with my brothers, threw myself down on my bed and sobbed. After awhile, Mom entered and sat down on the mattress beside me. I kept crying, my face pressed down into the red-ribbed cotton coverlet.

"What's the matter?" she asked.

"It's Peter," I said, looking up at where she sat with her hands in her lap. The sad, serious set of her face didn't change at his name—I'm sure she already knew. I hid my face again and my crying was tearless now, a series of small moans that was all I could manage though I had been desperate before to speak urgent, clear words to her. It was as if all my misery had clotted in my throat with the taboo syllables of my brother's name. She sat there next to me for a while, near me but not touching me or saying a word, and then finally she stood up and left the room, closing the door quietly behind her.

*The agony of  
distance in proximity*