

SPAR SISTERS

My friend Kay and I both think our judgment is superior to the other's in what we prefer. She drinks blush wines; I like white. She likes baseball, football and ice hockey; I like poetry. She knows math and can do her own income tax; I'm a good speller. She reads John D. MacDonald; I read MacDonald Harris. I ride my bike 5 miles a day, while she walks 2 on a treadmill reading Woman's Day and People and waves at me from her window as I ride away. She has 2 dogs the size of motorcycles whose fleas only bite me. Kay smokes Carltons and when I sneeze, allergic to cigarettes, she gets me a wad of scented toilet paper for my runny nose. Kay's a Republican, and even though I'm apolitical, I know not to trust Reagan. If Kay and I didn't have so much in common, we'd fistfight.

ON THE WAY TO HEAVEN

She nearly died the year before she really died. I saved her, gave her mouth-to-mouth, pounded her chest, like they do in the movies — bruising her — until she finally came to, and like in the movies, smiled, looked around, and asked, "Where am I?" When I told her, and that I'd brought her to, she said, oh, no, you ruined everything, I was on my way to heaven, heard angels singing, I was dressed all in white and had no more pain. She wept all morning.

In the afternoon she called me into her room and sternly told me that if that ever happened again, not to save her. I told her I couldn't help trying to save her, that something stronger than me made me do it, a reflex perhaps from

the womb like when she'd yank my hand in time to save me from being run over by a car. She screamed at me all afternoon from her room how I'd ruined it for her, and would again, and I screamed back how sick I was of all this — the bedpans, the morphine, my keeping her alive for her to wish she'd die. Such ingratitude! We both wept till dinnertime.

While I fed her dessert of ice cream, she cleared her throat, letting me know more was to come, but she apologized instead, thanked me for saving her life. "I know now how much you really must love me," she said, "to save this old bag of worthless bones." Then she laughed for the first time in a long, long time. I wanted to hug her, but I couldn't for her pain. I'd never hug her, I knew, ever again, but it felt good to both of us when I cooled her bruises with a little witch-hazel-soaked cotton swab.

ME AND MY MOTHER'S MORPHINE

Deukmejian and the DEA, my mother's doctor says, keep close tabs on Californians' medical morphine use, so I must drive five miles once a week to fetch in person The Triplicate, a beige, crisp piece of paper, as dear as a cashier's check, to take five miles the other side of town to the only pharmacy that carries my mother's liquid morphine. On the way, I stop at Trader Joe's for mine, the California kind: green syringes of sauvignon blanc, chablis, chardonnay, Sebastiani Eye of the Swan I later sip from a plastic cup to blur Life while I spoonfeed my bedridden mother her supper.

"Now I know why you drink wine," she says, a teetotaler, a good Christian woman who's never approved of my drinking. "Being doped up brings you closer to God," she says, seeing Sistine things now upon her ceiling, fidgeting and licking her lips, the one-half cubic centimeter of morphine, the same color blue as Windex,