

***THE EXTINCTION OF  
SARAH CASSIDY***

*By  
Jenna Rutherford*

## THE EXTINCTION OF SARAH CASSIDY

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THE EXTINCTION OF SARAH CASSIDY

*for Mom, Dad, and my Lottie Jane cast*

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CAST: 3 Women, 2 Men, 2 Any gender

SARAH 40s, stubborn and lively; battling cancer

MARY 40s, Sarah's wife; sensible, melancholy

DR. ROTH 60s, animated, any gender

AVA 20s, anxious

JACK 30s, laid-back

CHRIS 30s, soulful; Jack's partner

ONCOLOGIST 50s, professional, any gender

# THE EXTINCTION OF SARAH CASSIDY

## SCENE 1

*A quiet November day in Huntsville, Alabama, in the Maple Hill Cemetery. A small path weaves through the gravestones dotting the landscape. A stone bench sits by the side of the path. On the far side of the stage is an old mausoleum just large enough to imagine a person sitting inside. In the center, overlooking the stage, are a podium and a structure entirely hidden by a sheet, neither of which are acknowledged by the two people walking the path. SARAH and her wife MARY are taking a morning stroll. Mary wears all black- dressed for a funeral. She is dressed for pleasant weather, but Sarah looks ready to brave the tundra with a scarf, a heavy coat, gloves, and a hat covering her shaved head.*

**MARY.** I was so certain we had a murder victim on our hands. I was already preparing to go to court.

**SARAH.** Well, it's not like we killed anybody. Those bones were definitely there before we moved in.

**MARY.** Could we prove that? I mean it, I had plans to flee the country. I got a new passport and everything.

**SARAH.** Can't say you aren't proactive.

**MARY.** At least mine was more plausible than yours. A dog? Really? Have you ever seen a dog? That is not what their teeth look like.

**SARAH.** It's a good thing neither of us decided to be dentists.

**MARY.** Maybe if we'd been dentists, we wouldn't have freaked out.

**SARAH.** Good point.

**MARY.** What would you have done if it were a person?

**SARAH.** Washed my hands. A lot.

**MARY.** So that's where you draw the line.

**SARAH.** At human remains? Yes, that's where I draw the line. People are gross.

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**MARY.** And yet you wanted to take a walk in the cemetery.

**SARAH.** Taking a walk doesn't require me to touch anything. All the germs are way underground, where they should be. And clearly labeled.

**MARY.** Well, some of them are. *(She points to an old gravestone.)* I hate seeing people's graves so neglected.

**SARAH.** I think it's cool. Gives you a mystery to solve.

**MARY.** Not everyone wants to be mysterious. Most people just want to know they're loved.

**SARAH.** Well, they don't know anything, Mary; they're dead.

**MARY.** But you'd want to be remembered, wouldn't you?

**SARAH.** It won't matter. Cemeteries are for the living. Everything is for the living. Graves, monuments, memorials- dead people don't care about those. They're for us.

**MARY.** You really don't care what happens to you after you die?

**SARAH.** Not at all. So don't spend too much money on me.

**MARY.** Sarah. Please.

**SARAH.** Sorry. *(She notices something on the ground and kneels down.)*  
Hey, check this out.

**MARY.** What are you doing?

**SARAH.** There's a bunch of ants here. *(Mary frantically searches the ground by her feet for any signs of insect life.)*

**MARY.** Where? Where are they?

**SARAH.** Relax. They're not going to hurt you.

**MARY.** Are you crazy? The one and only time I've been hospitalized was because of fire ants.

**SARAH.** They're definitely not fire ants.

**MARY.** Well, I'm not taking any chances.

**SARAH.** Come on.

**MARY.** If you had a peanut allergy, you wouldn't wait until you'd already eaten to check the ingredients in your food, would you?

**SARAH.** Are you planning to eat the ants?

**MARY.** No, I'm afraid the ants are planning to eat me.

**SARAH.** Well, if you're not going to look then I'll just describe them to you. There's two anthills over here. You can tell they're different; The ants from one are more brown, and the other guys are red. And- Oh, look over

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there! Watch this little guy.

**MARY.** You'll have to be more specific.

**SARAH.** He's carrying this other one, and... Whoa. Look at that! They've got an ant cemetery!

**MARY.** What?

**SARAH.** Yeah! He's carrying away a corpse. They've got a whole pile of them over there.

**MARY.** Ew.

**SARAH.** Oh, come on! We're already in a cemetery. You draw the line at dead ants?

**MARY.** I don't want to imagine stepping on all those insect corpses.

**SARAH.** You're already stepping on them. Think of how many things have lived and died right where you're standing. There are billions of years of life under your feet!

**MARY.** You sound like Dr. Roth.

**SARAH.** Maybe he's gotten into my head a little bit.

**MARY.** You know, he called me yesterday.

**SARAH.** What'd he say?

**MARY.** There's some kind of big paleontology conference that meets every three or four years. He said he and his research partners are going to present their findings, and the council will vote on whether to adjust the time scale.

**SARAH.** Really?

**MARY.** Yeah.

**SARAH.** Hard to believe it could actually happen. I guess he's been busy this past year.

**MARY.** Very. He told me all about it. *(Blackout.)*

**SCENE 2**

*One year earlier. An office in a museum with a desk and a large chart of geologic eras decorating the wall. Sarah and Mary, one year younger, sit together. Sarah has a full head of hair. DR. ROTH, a paleontologist, bursts in.*

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**DR. ROTH.** Ladies, I have good news! You did not find human remains!

**MARY.** Thank goodness.

**SARAH.** That's a relief. What were they, then? Dog teeth? Shells? Were they just really shiny rocks?

**DR. ROTH.** No. What you actually found were conodont elements.

**SARAH.** Conodont elements. What on earth are those?

**DR. ROTH.** Well, they're not on earth! At least, not anymore. *(Mary and Sarah share an exasperated look.)* Conodonts were a group of fish that went extinct millions of years ago. You see, early fish were jawless, so rather than using a mouth to bite down on prey, the conodonts most likely used tooth-like feeding structures to filter plankton into their mouths. The fossils you confused for human teeth are actually those structures, which we call "elements." Of course, there's evidence from other fossils that at least some conodonts used these elements to crush food, so there's some debate as to whether or not to call them "teeth." It's an ongoing thing.

**SARAH.** So we're helping scientists continue their debate on the exact mechanisms by which dead fish ate. Isn't that lovely?

**MARY.** At least we don't have to get the police involved.

**DR. ROTH.** You've done much more than that. Here, look at this. *(He gestures to the large poster on the wall depicting a timeline of geologic eras. He points to the portion of the chart labeled "Triassic.")* Conodont fossils have been dated from as early as the Cambrian period to as late as the Triassic. The prevailing theory is that conodonts went extinct in the Triassic-Jurassic extinction event. However, you just found a fossil in Northern Alabama. Based on my knowledge of the local topography and geologic history, any fossils uncovered near the surface here should be much younger, dating back to the Mid-Paleocene. *(He points to the appropriate places on the chart as he speaks.)* If I'm right, that means conodonts had to have survived millions more years than previously thought. Which is exciting on its own, but what's more... *(He rushes to his desk and pulls out a binder which he quickly flips through while talking.)* Some of my colleagues and I have been working on a hypothesis based on fossil evidence unaccounted for by current models of the geologic timescale. We think there was an extinction event sometime in the mid-to-late Paleocene era that shaped life as we know it today. This is a collection

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of all the evidence we've found so far, with other fossils like yours.

**SARAH.** You think this could be the missing piece to your theory?

**DR. ROTH.** One of the missing pieces, yes. And it's not a theory yet- A theory is something proven, and right now this is just a hypothesis. But not for long! I'll get your fossil dated as soon as possible, and then we can see if our hypothesis has a leg to stand on. Then we can organize massive archeological digs near the site where the fossil was uncovered! If we find more fossils from the same time period, we'll know this fossil wasn't a fluke.

**MARY.** Sorry, you lost me. What exactly are you trying to prove?

**DR. ROTH.** Hmm. Okay, think of it like this. Generally, geologic time is broken up by extinctions. The Permian Period, along with the entire Paleozoic Era, ended with the Permian extinction. The Mesozoic Era ended after the Cretaceous Period with the catastrophic Chicxulub Impactor- that's the meteor that killed the non-avian dinosaurs, along with nearly everything else.

**SARAH.** Non-avian?

**DR. ROTH.** What I'm saying is, we decide when a new stage of Earth's history has begun based on the major extinction events that happened during the time period. Massive events like the Permian or Cretaceous-Paleogene extinctions lead to the creation of entire new eras. Mass extinctions don't just happen in the middle of periods. But I believe we've missed a major extinction event in Earth's history. My colleagues and I have been studying "misplaced" fossils, those that can't be connected to any currently living species and those that seem like anachronisms in the fossil record, and we've come to the conclusion that sometime around 59 million years ago, almost 80% of all species on earth went extinct. A hidden mass extinction.

**MARY.** Pardon my ignorance, but how is it possible you just... missed an entire mass extinction? Surely something like that would be obvious, wouldn't it?

**DR. ROTH.** You'd think. But the history of paleontology is filled with massive oversights and widely-accepted leaps of logic. We didn't even know about the massive diversity of life in the Ediacaran Period until the late 40s!

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**SARAH.** The what period?

**DR. ROTH.** Exactly! It's such a recent discovery, it's not even on the chart!

**MARY.** I wouldn't describe the 40s as recent.

**DR. ROTH.** On the time scale of Earth? That's nothing. If you compressed all of Earth's existence into a day, human history would only last two minutes! Geologic time is unfathomably large.

**MARY.** So, you're saying you want to keep the fossil?

**DR. ROTH.** That's the thing. Since you found it in your backyard, by the state laws, it's your property. I'd be overjoyed if you would donate it to the museum, but ultimately, it's your choice.

**SARAH.** I don't imagine fossilized fish teeth would sell very well.

**DR. ROTH.** You'd be surprised.

**SARAH.** Alright, Dr. Roth. I'll give you the fossil, and you can do whatever you want with it. On one condition.

**DR. ROTH.** Of course.

**SARAH.** You said they define eras by the mass extinctions that happened before them. Right?

**DR. ROTH.** Yes.

**SARAH.** So if your theory-

**DR. ROTH.** Hypothesis.

**SARAH.** If your hypothesis turns out to be correct, do you think they'll create a new era on that chart?

**DR. ROTH.** It would be a period. Right about here. (*He points to the Paleocene Period on the chart.*) But yes.

**SARAH.** If you turn out to be right, and a new era or period or whatever gets added to the chart, I want you to name it after me.

**MARY.** Are you serious?

**DR. ROTH.** Well... It's not entirely unreasonable. Although most periods are named after the locations where their fossils were first discovered. And the scientific community generally isn't too keen on naming things after people who are still alive.

**SARAH.** Well, you'll just have to wait until I'm dead, then.

**DR. ROTH.** I'll do my best. Maybe in a few years we'll add the "Phippsian" Period to our chart.

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**SARAH.** Actually, it's Cassidy. Well, it's Sarah Phipps for now, but it'll be Cassidy in a few weeks.

**MARY.** I didn't know you were taking my name.

**SARAH.** I wanted to surprise you. And doesn't the Cassidian Era have a nice ring to it?

**DR. ROTH.** Period.

**SARAH.** Fine. The Cassidian Period. Doesn't that sound nice? *(Mary is frozen.)* Mary?

**MARY.** I... Yeah. Sounds good.

**SARAH.** You're still on the name?

**MARY.** I just didn't...

**SARAH.** Come here. *(Sarah pulls her close and kisses her. Suddenly, Sarah's phone rings. Sarah lets go of Mary and pulls out her phone to answer it.)* Hello? *(Listens to the other side of the line.)* Of course. Two o'clock, right? Okay, thank you. *(She hangs up.)* That was the doctor's office.

**MARY.** Oh, God, are we going to be late?

**SARAH.** We'll be fine.

**DR. ROTH.** Well, I won't keep you any longer. If you find anything else, here's my number- *(He jots the number down on a scrap of paper and hands it to MARY.)* -And I'm here at the museum Mondays, Tuesdays, and Thursdays from ten to seven. I'll keep you updated.

**SARAH.** Thank you. *(Blackout.)*

**SCENE 3**

*The cemetery. One year later- The present day. Later that morning.*

**SARAH.** Every surgery is risky, Mary.

**MARY.** I know. But a 12 percent chance and a 90 percent chance are two different things. So which is it?

**SARAH.** I promise you, my odds of dying are incredibly low.

**MARY.** What about being paralyzed?

**SARAH.** Also very low.

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**MARY.** How low?

**SARAH.** I don't know. I'm sorry. The tumor's stuck between a lot of vital nerves, so if it's bigger than they expect they might have to sever some of them. That's all they told me. But hey, it'll only be one leg. *(She taps her leg.)* From the knee down. That's not too bad.

**MARY.** Let's hope for the best.

**SARAH.** Of course.

**MARY.** And you won't be able to eat anything the morning of?

**SARAH.** Nope. Screws with the anesthesia.

**MARY.** Well, let's make sure you get a good dinner tonight.

**SARAH.** There's a new Italian place that just opened up. Want to make it a date?

**MARY.** I'd love to. *(Beat.)*

**SARAH.** Did I ever tell you the story of how my uncle died?

**MARY.** What?

**SARAH.** Sorry, that just reminded me of him.

**MARY.** How?

**SARAH.** My mom's side of the family is aggressively Italian.

**MARY.** Oh. I didn't even know you had an uncle.

**SARAH.** I think he was more like my great-uncle. Actually, he might have been a cousin. Second cousin, once removed? Something like that. I don't know; I saw him at the family reunions, so that meant he was family.

**MARY.** I'm sorry for your loss.

**SARAH.** Oh, forget about that. I barely knew the guy. Neither did anyone else. He probably wasn't that interesting, since all anyone ever talks about is his death.

**MARY.** That's sad.

**SARAH.** Yeah, it is. To have your whole life be just a lead-in to your death. I hope I'm not like that.

**MARY.** Of course you're not.

**SARAH.** Thanks.

**MARY.** So... How did your uncle die?

**SARAH.** I'm surprised you actually want to know.

**MARY.** You brought it up.

**SARAH.** Yeah, but I figured I'd have to do a lot more persuading to get

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you comfortable with the idea of...

**MARY.** Of death?

**SARAH.** We're in a cemetery. I sure hope you're comfortable with death. What I meant was... Well...

**MARY.** The idea of laughing at someone's death?

**SARAH.** Yeah. It's a tradition in our family, you know? It's how we make sense of it all. If you treat everything as one big joke, you never have to face all that... other stuff. But I know you're not like that.

**MARY.** No. But I want to see things from your point of view, I guess. Growing up, I never really lost anyone. My grandparents had both died when my mom was a teenager, but that didn't affect me, you know?

**SARAH.** I'm sure it affected her.

**MARY.** She never really talked about them. I learned not to ask. But you could tell it was always weighing on her. We never talked about death, but every year she'd leave me and my sisters at home for a day. I always wondered where she went. Finally, when I turned sixteen, she brought me along.

**SARAH.** To the cemetery?

**MARY.** To the lake. My grandfather wanted his ashes scattered in the river. That was illegal, so my mom did the next best thing. Every year she'd go to visit him. That trip was the only time I heard her talk about her parents.

**SARAH.** Wow.

**MARY.** All this to say, I guess I grew up with a more... "Heavy" idea of death. It was this big scary thing in the background, and you weren't allowed to talk about it but it was always there. And then you come along, and you're... Well, you're you. I'm still trying to adjust.

**SARAH.** Sorry to screw up your worldview like that.

**MARY.** You're not sorry.

**SARAH.** No.

**MARY.** Well, shatter my worldview even more. How'd your uncle die? Give me the gory details.

**SARAH.** Alright. So it started when he and his wife bought lottery tickets... *(Sarah ad-libs and exits with Mary as AVA, a mourner, enters the cemetery and stands at another grave.)*

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**AVA.** So my grandmother had Alzheimer's. I always thought that was normal; When you get old enough, you get Alzheimer's, and everyone patiently waits for you to die. That's what I was doing. Waiting. I wasn't looking for an inheritance or anything. I didn't hate my grandmother. I just didn't know her very well. I knew my mother. I knew she was suffering. Maybe things were different when I was younger, but for the part of my life I can remember, every time my grandmother was mentioned, things got worse. My mom got stressed. She spent late nights on the phone with my uncle or a lawyer or the doctor. She burst into tears. She asked for a drink. Then when you brought it to her, she'd turn it down, embarrassed at the suggestion. The thought that her own mother was driving her to drink. My grandmother died when I was twelve. I was sad, but mostly I was relieved. I thought that, after the initial burst of grief, things would calm down. My mother would be able to breathe again. When I was fifteen, I went to my mom's funeral. You know, they're not sure what killed her? On the death certificate it says heart failure, but a nurse admitted that's a catch-all for a lot of "difficult" deaths. The ones where people just fade away. Where it isn't a surprise when their heart gives out because really, they were already gone. I went to my mom's funeral when I was fifteen. But I think she died when I was twelve. With my grandmother. There's so much work when someone dies. So. Much. Work. It's unfair, right? You don't even get to wallow in the worst moment of your life. You've got lawyers to call, estates to take care of, houses to sell, people to tell. You have to do so much talking. And on top of it all, you have to do something with the body. Since I was a teenager, it wasn't my job to file any paperwork or make any calls. I moved in with my uncle and focused on the one task I was trusted with. I was going to find her grave. I could've given the job to someone else. But really, I needed a distraction. A task. Something to keep me busy and away from the idea that my world was collapsing and it was somehow my fault. I'd wanted my grandmother dead, hadn't I? I thought my mom would recover. I didn't think I'd kill her too. I made calls. "No, she didn't want to be cremated." "No, she wouldn't care what kind of pastor did her funeral." "Please, let me bury her next to her mother." Please. I didn't get what I wanted. I can't remember the reason they gave. I remember screaming over the phone, at my uncle, at

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the sky, at myself. But I don't even remember the funeral. Truth be told, my mom wouldn't care. She always told me that people put too much effort into gravestones. No matter where I put her, she'd return to the earth. But... I wanted to bury her with her mother. I wanted to fix my mistake. I wanted one thing. Maybe that grave wouldn't mean anything to my mom. But it would've meant everything to me.

**SCENE 4**

*One year before. Mary and Sarah's house. Sarah sits alone. Mary enters.*

**SARAH.** How are you holding up?

**MARY.** I can't believe you're asking about me.

**SARAH.** It's awful being sick, but it's awful being on the other side, too. At least, that's what I hear.

**MARY.** I don't know what to do. I don't like not having a plan.

**SARAH.** I know you don't. I just wish they would've told us before the wedding.

**MARY.** Why? So we could be depressed during the reception?

**SARAH.** So you'd be able to think.

**MARY.** About what? *(Sarah doesn't answer.)* About what? I've already told you, this doesn't change anything.

**SARAH.** It changes a lot of things.

**MARY.** It doesn't change that I love you.

**SARAH.** It changes what that means.

**MARY.** "In sickness and in health." I meant what I said when I married you. You know I'm not a liar.

**SARAH.** I know.

**MARY.** We'll get through this. I don't know how, exactly, but we will.

**SARAH.** My appointment with the oncologist is next week. We'll figure things out then. Or start to, at least.

**MARY.** Okay. *(Blackout.)*

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**SCENE 5**

*The cemetery, present day. Late afternoon. Sarah and Mary are walking on the path. Meanwhile, JACK and Ava, two tour guides, are telling a story by the mausoleum to an unseen audience.*

**JACK.** This was back in the 1800s... *(Jack continues to speak as Sarah notices the story. She grabs Mary.)*

**SARAH.** Mary. Hold on.

**MARY.** What?

**SARAH.** It's a third-grade field trip!

**MARY.** To the cemetery?

**SARAH.** Yeah. I remember going on it when I was a kid. It's supposed to teach kids about the history of the town. I just remember the ghost stories. Listen. This one's my favorite.

**AVA.** At the time, brides would drink Epsom salts to help their complexion. So she sent her servant to get some. But her servant couldn't read, so she ended up giving the lady the wrong jar, and instead of Epsom salts, she drank carbolic acid.

**MARY.** Why did she have that in her house?

**SARAH.** I don't know. It was the 1800s. People did weird things.

**JACK.** Now, Mary knew as soon as she tasted it that she was going to die. So she wrote to her fiancé, and they had the wedding early.

**MARY.** Her name was Mary?

**SARAH.** Yeah. Mary Chambers Bibb. She's a local legend.

**MARY.** Really? *(Sarah catches what she means.)*

**SARAH.** It's such a common name!

**MARY.** And my name being Mary has nothing to do with why you like this story.

**SARAH.** What? No! Just listen.

**AVA.** Poor Mary died a few weeks later, only 19 years old. She was buried in her wedding dress and laid to rest in this mausoleum, still sitting in her rocking chair. They say that if you knock on the wall, you can hear her rocking back and forth. Creak, creak. Listen. *(Jack knocks on the*

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*mausoleum three times. Mary leans in to hear. There's a long pause. Suddenly, CHRIS, another guide, jumps out from behind the mausoleum. Mary screams.)*

**SARAH.** Got you!

**MARY.** I can't believe I fell for that.

**SARAH.** Hey, I did too. Then again, I was eight. You have no excuse. *(Jack, Ava, and Chris exit. Mary and Sarah approach the mausoleum.)*

**MARY.** She must have been pretty small. I don't see how a rocking chair could fit in here.

**SARAH.** Yeah, she's probably just buried like normal under there. But that doesn't make for a good legend, does it?

**MARY.** Do you think she'd be happy with her legacy?

**SARAH.** As a ghost story used to scare third-graders on their field trip to the town cemetery? I'd love for that to be my legacy.

**MARY.** You want to be a ghost story?

**SARAH.** One hundred percent. Make sure you leave out a few key details in my eulogy, just enough to make people suspicious. Oh, and when Dr. Roth is done with them, get those bones back from the museum and bury me with them. I want to confuse future archeologists. *(Mary is quiet.)* Oh, come on. It's my death, I should be allowed to talk about it. *(Mary refuses to answer.)* I thought we were making progress. Getting comfortable with death. Being irreverent towards the afterlife. I thought things were getting better.

**MARY.** I thought so too. I just... This is different. It's different when it's about you. You say all these things about monuments and legacies and how it's all one big joke and I want to believe it, but then I imagine you in- *(She points to the mausoleum.)* -In there and I can't! I can't pretend like it's okay. It's not. I can't imagine what it's like for you. I can't even try. But you know, Sarah, sometimes it feels like I'm the one dying. Like when you go, there won't be anything left of me. And I can't laugh about that. And I can't find anything profound in that. There's nothing to say. Nothing except you're dying, and I don't want you to. You know, Sarah, I don't get it. This trip. These stories. Your uncle, the local legends. It feels like some kind of farewell tour. And what about the "Cassidian Era?" You keep telling me you don't care about being remembered. "Monuments are for

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the living” and all that. So what’s this?

**SARAH.** It’s not about me.

**MARY.** Then who is it about?

**SARAH.** Mary, what did you think I meant when I said “Let’s spend a day in the cemetery?” Did you think it would be fun? I wanted you to see, Mary. I wanted you to see things the way I do. I thought it would help you. That’s all I want. And the “Cassidian Era?” That was for you. I thought it would make you happy. I wanted you to have something to remember me by.

**MARY.** I don’t want to remember you. I want you.

**SARAH.** There it is, isn’t it?

**MARY.** What? Did I figure it out? Is that what you were trying to tell me? Memories are worthless and when you die there will be nothing left? Is that what you wanted me to learn?

**SARAH.** No.

**MARY.** Then what? Why are we here, Sarah?

**SARAH.** I don’t know! I don’t know anything. I’m just as helpless as you are, Mary. I thought that if I nudged you in the right direction, maybe you’d come to some profound conclusion that would make this all hurt less. *(Sarah sits on the bench, defeated.)* When I lost my dad, I leaned on all of this. We had a huge funeral, and I visited his grave every day. I kept bringing him flowers. And then at some point I realized it wasn’t helping. He was gone and I was hurting, and a fancy slab of marble and a 50-dollar flower arrangement weren’t helping. I guess I decided I’d been grieving the wrong way. And I didn’t want you to go through that. But I’m pretty sure I just wasted your time. I don’t think there’s a right or wrong way to do any of this. There’s no ten-step program to make it stop hurting. If there was, we would’ve found it by now. *(Mary sits on the bench. Beat.)*

**MARY.** I don’t think you wasted any time.

**SARAH.** Really?

**MARY.** I got to spend a day with you. I like hearing your stories. Even when they’re about dead people and ghosts and the futility of it all.

**SARAH.** I never said anything was futile. Nothing’s worthless.

**MARY.** No. Nothing is. *(Mary leans into Sarah. Sarah puts an arm around her. Meanwhile, Chris enters.)*

THE EXTINCTION OF SARAH CASSIDY

**CHRIS.** People don't actually want you to be happy when someone dies. They don't want you to be sad, either. They want you to be convenient. When my uncle died, I wasn't broken up about it. I'd only met him twice. I knew he was part of my family, and I was upset that he died. But I didn't grieve. Not really. People didn't like that. They asked me how I was doing; I told them the truth. "I had a great day today! I got a raise, my friend bought me lunch, and I saw a movie. Things are looking up." That was the wrong answer. They kept reminding me that my uncle was dead. I was supposed to be in mourning. See, they didn't actually want me to be happy. How dare I be happy? No, what they said was, "I'm sorry for your loss." I'm sorry that bad thing happened to you. I wish it hadn't. But now that it has, I expect you to be suitably depressed. I felt like one of those Victorian widows, forced to wear black for a year. Was this what my uncle wanted? Would he even care? A few years later, my mom and I were in a car crash. She didn't make it out. And I was devastated. This wasn't a random family member; this was my mom. Every time I closed my eyes I saw the highway, I smelled the burning tires, I felt the impact. My whole life was over. I was a wreck. You'd think people would like that better. And they did, for a while. I sobbed and I took off work and I went to counseling and everyone nodded gravely and brought me casseroles and told me they were praying for me. But after a few months, people got tired of me. They told me, "Maybe you should see your counselor more often?" They stopped inviting me out. They started asking for their casserole dishes back. They just wanted me to get over it. Trust me, I'd love to.  
*(Chris exits.)*

**MARY.** Do you want the fossils back?

**SARAH.** Oh, no, that was a joke. I mean it; I don't care what happens to my body.

**MARY.** What do you want, then?

**SARAH.** I want you to be happy. *(Blackout.)*

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