

SAVE ME A SLICE OF RAISIN TOAST, MAYBE A YELLOW TULIP,
AND A SEAT CLOSE TO YOURS ON THE RED VELVET COUCH

In heaven the chemistry teacher's gangling roommate will bake pies they'll share openly, licking the juice from each other's fingers and tumbling like bear cubs drunk on late summer berries. That dog you abandoned when you fled Baltimore will move shyly around your knees as you rinse her bowl at the rusted tap, and the fat girl you mocked in fourth grade? She's a slim pretty thing in an apricot sheath, waiting to show you her prom pictures. Even the storekeeper you teased, then cheated, even the exhausted salesgirl you cursed and hung up on: all's forgiven. Remember the time you wished your grandmother dead? She died, of course, and now she's in heaven waiting to laugh it off and serve you a steaming plate of baked lasagna or some homemade raisin bread.

In heaven your kids will text you the best possible news from earth, where they are happy, and their father will still love you the way he did that sweltering summer the youngest was conceived: bringing cups of lemon ice and asking questions about your boss - except in heaven, you won't have one. In heaven, you lent your brother the money the first time he asked. You never flirted with your daughter's boyfriend, and that thing at the drugstore in 1996? Never happened! So what if heaven's not real? There's a special room for non-believers, and your seat is on the red velvet sofa, beside that kindergarten teacher who knelt to knot your laces so tenderly. There's the fledgling bird you kept in a shoebox, there's the clumsy sneakers your dad bought at the discount mart; now they fit, and the vamps are stitched with valentines. You're pretty. There's that guy you glimpsed from a cold city bus, the one who should have chased you, bold with longing, trailing yellow tulips. In heaven, he'll catch you if you want him to, flowers falling all around. You will hear your mother's laughter, coming ever closer. Let's sip cool tea. No more aching for the polar bears, cubs slipping from their bony chests - here they slide from pristine cloudbanks to seal-rich waters. Sweet-faced cows graze in fragrant pastures, and in heaven every bird keeps her feathers. Don't fret. It's heaven. Now close your eyes.

We're about to begin.

We're always
about to
begin.

-Anna Scotti