

JAN ELLISON

A SMALL INDISCRETION *a novel*

PASSAGES FROM THE BOOK

“The scarf I was wearing had been hand-colored a blunt red. It was tied around my neck like a choker, like a noose. But it wasn’t me who was about to hang.”

“People say a mother is only as happy as her least happy child. But what if the state of that child’s happiness has become a mystery? What if that child is no longer a child but a young man who has removed himself to a great distance and encased himself in a great silence?”

“Denial, as any addict in recovery will tell you, is not defined as knowing something and pretending you don’t; it is failing to see it at all.”

“I suppose unrequited love is the hardest kind to shed because it is not really love at all. It is a half-love, and we are forever stomping around trying to get hold of the other half.”

“Perhaps blame is the way the universe organizes itself around tragedy and loss. Without blame, suffering is random, and that kind of randomness leads to madness.”

“It was so undignified and unnecessary, the way married people behaved. The indiscriminate airing of grievances, the incessant flinging of blame and complaint. Of course, I had no idea back then what a marriage required. How the resentments and oversights and misunderstandings could pile up, sometimes moving ordinary kindness beyond reach. Love piled up, too, if you were lucky, but it seemed to be locked away in a separate compartment, sometimes unreachable when it was needed most.”

“If, when I looked, I was not perfect, how could I be beautiful? And if I was not beautiful, how could I be loved?”

“I told him because I wanted what everybody wants—to be known. To know oneself, and to tell the whole story of that self, and to be loved anyway.”

“All of it was rushing together, making a psychedelic mess of my heart.”

“After all, experiencing something is not the same as remembering it. A memory is by its nature a revision.”

“They say the human body can lose 50 percent of its body parts and survive. But it depends on which parts, and which body.”

“The heart is large, and there is more than one material in the bucket we call love.”

“Watching you together—your hair and eyes, your flesh and bone, your three bodies so frank and solid in the world—gave me immeasurable pleasure. It was pleasure derived not from parental pride, but from gratitude. We had been blessed by the existence on this earth of our three particular children, and we had been assigned a blessed task in keeping you all safe in the world.”

