THE BEACH

763 E 14th St, Los Angeles, CA

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Life Is With People
Presented by The Beach, Los Angeles

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The inn has dark wood walls and white window panes. It's been around since before cars could drive up this old highway. I point out an orange orchid growing by the side of the building. The property is full of pristine pink roses and trimmed lambs-ear bushes with yellow daisies. Moss everywhere. A huge camelia tree bends over the staircase to our room. Big purple blooms of wisteria hang from the roof. Their room is tiny.

Our two twin beds rest under an A-frame white ceiling. An iron wood-burning stove, delicate wallpaper, a patinated mirror—are all there in full charming subdued grace. The bed posts are wooden, the comforters are encased in white linen. Nothing here has changed, nothing will change.

"It's like…"

"Esther's house," I say.

"Exactly," says Mom, and we sit for a second, resting against our bags, thinking of Mom's second cousin. She died in a mudslide five years ago, after months of wildfires and then a particularly heavy rain. We always admired her way of decorating. Esther really appreciated the value of patina. Her house, with its wooden beams, faded paintings, and copper vases, was right in the line of a tumble of rocks and rain that had gathered up the speed of a million cars roaring down the highway. Her body was missing for almost a week before it was found, miles away from her home.

As we slowly unpack, I realize enough time has passed since the tragedy that Esther's name can be mentioned without invoking the abject horror of her fate. We don't think of being choked by mud. We don't think of its wetness and heaviness. We just admire the finish of the wooden drawers and the ingenuity of the closet, tucked delicately and unobtrusively next to Mom's bed.

Out the window, there's a silvery line of smoke floating from the restaurant's brick chimney. Fog moves into the canyon with invisible feet. A misty chill settles into our surroundings. I sit on my bed and stare out at endless redwoods. The positive associations with rain are obvious, making it seem benevolent and peaceful. Green looks better with gray skies. Unfortunately, there's nothing inherently good about raindrops. They don't have any kind of discernment or logic.

We lay down on one of the beds and look through a red leather-bound journal left on the dresser. It's full of guest signatures from the past four months. I read the entries aloud, some written in spiky, angular handwriting, others in fluid cursive. One guest writes about returning here after her father's death, commemorating his love of the forest. Another writes about bringing her daughter here, to spend time together before she leaves for college. Another writes about a honeymoon, starting in Mexico and ending in Washington.

The trip across the gravel pathway to dinner is slow. That's fine. There's no need to hurry. The destination will still be there. The restaurant will still have low ceilings and be cluttered with strange teapots and watercolor paintings and fake flowers. There are tall, dripping candles on every table.