On the day I met Peter I saw two boys and their father wrestling at the other end of the pool, splashing and laughing. One of the boys was very handsome. He was the smaller of the two, maybe about 9 or 10, skinny, with longish brown bangs. He wasn’t just handsome; he exuded happiness. There was brightness in his face and skin, supple quickness to his legs and arms and hands, and a gentle quality to his eyes and face that was rare for a boy. His older brother looked happy too, but not with that same vividness.

Their father had bowl-cut sandy-silver hair with Sixties bangs like a Beatle. He had full lips, a long, pointy nose that might have looked unattractive on someone else, but not on him, and a strong, pert chin. When he looked in my direction, I saw that his eyes were vigorously aquamarine. He smiled at me, his face full of lines – on his forehead, by his eyes, and around his jaw. I knew he must be old, to have lines and greying hair and loose skin on his neck, but he had so much energy and brightness that he didn’t seem old. He didn’t even seem adult in the sense of that natural separateness adults have from children. Children understand the distance between themselves and adults the way dogs know themselves to be separate from people, and though adults may play children’s games, there is always that sense of not being alike. I think he could have been lined up with 100 men of similar build and disposition and I could have pulled him out from that line, and asked, “Can I play with you?”

I crossed the length of the pool and asked just that. He answered, “Of course,” and then immediately splashed my face, frolicking with me as though I were his own child. I splashed the boys’ faces and they mine, for these boys didn’t seem to mind playing with someone so much younger and a girl to boot. At one point the handsome boy gently dunked my head, and when I rose, I laughed so hard that for a moment it seemed all I could hear was my own laughter. Then the father lightly took me under the arms and whizzed me around, laughing like a big kid. When he stopped, the world was off balance and a strange burst of white flooded his features, like a corona.

Later, when the lifeguards called everyone out of the pool for closing, the father, whose name was Peter, introduced us to a sweet-looking Hispanic woman named Inès, who had been wading by herself in the shallowest part of the pool while we played. Peter teased her about her need to be close to the pool’s edges and joked to my mother and me that Inès was nervous about things no one thought to worry about, such as going on carousels or riding a bicycle. Inès had an awkwardly pretty face, drowsy, sun-lined eyes, long curly hair that started out dark but midway changed to a dyed apricot shade, and the mild, disoriented look of a wild fawn. She had purple press-on nails; two had gone missing, and the rest had tiny black peace signs painted on them.

Peter told us everyone’s names: the older boy, Miguel, looked about 12 or 13 and the younger boy, Ricky, only a couple of years older than I was. By the end of the day I’d forgotten all the names but I remembered the first letters of the parents’ names: P and I. I kept thinking of them,
P and I, and their promise to invite my mother and me to their house. A few days passed and nothing happened, so I forgot them.

I might have permanently forgotten, except for some vague stamp of joy that the incident left on me. We were in Poppa’s 1979 Chevy when Mommy said they had called her up, or, rather, Peter had called.

“We’re invited to go to their house. Isn’t that nice?” When Poppa said nothing, she continued. “Peter and Inès. And the boys, Ricky and Miguel. Miguel and Ricky. Such nice boys. Well-behaved boys, not rough at all. Such a nice family.”

“Their house? It is around here?”

“Not far. On the phone, Peter said Weehawken, right where it meets Union City. I just wanted to run it by you. See what you think?”

“About what?” “Going there. On Friday while you’re at work.” “I don’t care.” “Well, I thought I’d run it by you.” “I don’t care. These people are not axe murderers, right?” “They’re a very nice family. Very nice people. A lovely family.”

“Everything is so nice to you. Everyone is so nice. Everything is so lovely.”

“So it’s set, then,” said Mommy. “For Friday at noon.”