Out of maybe twenty priests I had personal dealings with along the way, I’d say eighteen were decent, three or four of those outstanding, with a couple of real clunkers thrown in, of course. One perceptive Franciscan (Harper and I met him on our first retreat) finally told me what was wrong with me. After I went to him for confession he said: *None of those things you just confessed are sins, Molly. Your sin is the sin of scrupulosity.*

When I looked it up, I was mortified because it seemed so close to the granddaddy of sins: pride. It meant I thought I was too perfect to take a chance on committing real sins—the seven deadlies, for instance. Take lust. What the hell was that, I often wondered. I kind of still don’t know. Or take sloth: absolutely not. Over-achiever. I think I came pretty close with gluttony. I ate a pound of raisins once, right out of the box, to replace the sugar in the wine I
was trying not to drink. That was my biggest binge ever, and it was
definitely my first and last dried fruit binge.

Then there was envy. That comes around once in a while, but it’s
always canceled out by genuine happiness for the other person. I
can’t help it. I’m happy with things like stones and sand dollars.
Then I began to think that maybe scrupulosity was a lot of people’s
problem, not just mine. I noticed that some of the women at my AA
meetings were what is known as “good girls.” That means they err on
the side of never erring, which could be a way to try to feel safe.
(Safety, by the way, might be the eighth deadly sin.) Grown-up good
girls take care of their families, eat the part of the chicken no one else
wants, don’t buy a raincoat for themselves when they need one. It’s
an ad nauseam list. The payoff is three-fold: occasional kudos from
the taken care of, that safe low profile, and a resulting self-satisfaction
that borders on nutzo. I myself was the model wife—you would
never catch me nagging, whining, bitching, shrewing, emoting, fart-
ing, belching—as long as I drank enough in the evenings to com-
pletely anesthetize myself.

Another priest who was important to me was not a priest yet.
He was a Maryknoll seminarian preparing for missionary work in
Africa. He looked like Howdy Doody, who had been a childhood
favorite of mine. He was the supreme listener. His orange head
nodding at me made me feel visible.

Harper was already burning up his sorrowful Johnny Cash al-
bums in our last year together when Bradley became my spiritual ad-
viser and, okay, maybe there was some kind of lust going on, but it
felt like love to me, and I was in awe that I could feel that for some-
one besides Harper. Brad went off to Africa and our little band of
Charismatics cried at his going away party. No one more than me,
although I kept my secret and went home and detoxed from Brad
for about two weeks, praying each day to have my unrequited love
removed.
Harper left soon after. I’d guess he was tired of my ongoing God affair and his needing sex. In just a few weeks I’d proved myself unsuccessful at both lust and love, and I looked in the hall mirror one day and realized for the first time in my life that I was beautiful.