



Written on My Heart: A Novel

By Morgan Callan Rogers

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The marriage of Florine Gilham and Bud Warner is a cause for celebration down on The Point, the Maine fishing village where they grew up. Yet even as the newlyweds begin their lives together, Florine is drawn back into the memory of her mother, Carlie, who vanished when Florine was twelve. As unexpected clues regarding her fate begin to surface, Florine and Bud face the challenges of trying to solve an old mystery while building a new marriage and raising a family. Morgan Callan Rogers's *Written on My Heart* will delight readers who love feisty, poignant characters and the beautiful, unforgettable Maine coast.

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Editorial Review

Review

"Irresistible...Morgan Callan Rogers works magic on every page." —Mameve Medwed, author of the national best-selling *How Elizabeth Barrett Browning Saved My Life*

"What a rarity *Written on My Heart* is! You will fall in love with Florine and Bud, and when you finish the novel you will most certainly grab the person you love and make him or her dance with you, slow and close."
—Ann Hood, author of *An Italian Wife*

"I loved Morgan Callan Rogers' *Red Ruby Heart in a Cold Sea*, and I loved the chance to catch up with the magnificent Florine in the wonderful *Written on My Heart*. Florine's unmistakable voice, her approach to the challenges of raising a young family on the rugged coast of Maine, and her search for why her mother vanished years earlier make for an unputdownable novel about love in its many forms that will linger long after you've turned the last page." —Ellen Baker, author of *Keeping the House* and *I Gave My Heart to Know This*

"What a gift to be able to drop anchor at The Point a second time, to sit again at Grand's kitchen table, to cheer for the unforgettable Florine Gilham. *Written on My Heart* pens Morgan Callan Rogers' name in all caps on the short list of authors delivering the real Maine and the genuine souls found beyond the shopping outlets, lobster pots and millionaire's cottages." —Suzanne Strempek Shea, author of *Make a Wish But Not For Money*

"Engaging...Fans of Kristin Hannah and Debbie Macomber will embrace Rogers' emotionally satisfying story of female friendships and the unbreakable ties of family."—*Booklist*

"Richly peopled with memorable characters...[Rogers] is a naturally gifted writer and a superb storyteller."—Frank O. Smith, *Portland Press Herald*

About the Author

Morgan Callan Rogers, a generations-back native Mainer, grew up in Bath, Maine, a historic shipbuilding city located on the mighty Kennebec River. She has a BA in English from the University of Southern Maine in Portland, Maine, and a MFA in Creative Writing from the University of Southern Maine's Masters in Creating Writing program. Morgan currently lives in Portland, Maine. This is her second novel.

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About the Author

Praise for Red Ruby Heart in a Cold Blue Sea

Also by Morgan Callan Rogers

Title Page

Copyright

Dedication

Chapter 1

Chapter 2

Chapter 3

Chapter 4

Chapter 5

Chapter 6

Chapter 7

Chapter 8

Chapter 9

Chapter 10

Chapter 11

Chapter 12

Chapter 13

Chapter 14

Chapter 15

Chapter 16

Chapter 17

Chapter 18

Chapter 19

Chapter 20

Chapter 21

Chapter 22

Chapter 23

Chapter 24

Chapter 25

Chapter 26

Chapter 27

Chapter 28

Chapter 29

Chapter 30

Chapter 31

Chapter 32

Chapter 33

Chapter 34

Chapter 35

Chapter 36

Chapter 37

Chapter 38

Chapter 39

Chapter 40

Chapter 41

Chapter 42

Chapter 43

Chapter 44

Chapter 45

Chapter 46

Chapter 47

Chapter 48

Chapter 49

Chapter 50

Epilogue

Acknowledgments

The night before my wedding, my best friend, Dottie Butts, and I sat on my side lawn staring up at the sky. The soft blue of twilight mingled with the dark. All was quiet, save for the sound of Dottie sucking down Narragansett beer from a sixteen-ounce can. Beer and I had never gotten along, so I wasn't drinking. Besides, I was pregnant. The next morning, Saturday, June 12, 1971, I would get up, dress in a wedding gown once worn by my grandmother, and walk the short length of this very lawn to meet my husband-to-be, Bud Warner, the love of my life and the father of the baby soon to be born. Bud and I were both twenty years old.

Dottie said, "Not many people have a baby shower the night before they get married. You made out pretty good."

Until just a few hours earlier, the inside of my house had been strewn from hither to yon with baby presents and wrapping paper and ribbon. For almost nine months, I had been collecting what I would need for a girl baby, because I had a strong feeling that she would be a girl and I was going on faith. But the night's haul had given me enough for three babies of either sex. We were set, no matter what.

"Thanks for getting everyone together and doing that," I said.

"Just doing my maid-of-honor duty," Dottie said. "Ma's been keeping me straight on all the things I'm supposed to do. Don't come natural to me, being a maid of honor. Not much maid to be had in me."

"You're doing fine," I said. "No reason why you wouldn't. Besides, you're my best friend. Matter of fact, you're my only friend."

"You need to get out more, then."

"I won't be socializing much in a couple of weeks."

"Guess not," Dottie said. "You know, I got to thinking. Last time I wore a dress was in high school. Hasn't come up all through college. Can't say as I've missed it."

"You said you liked the dress," I said. "Your exact words in the store were that you thought it was 'some pretty.' You look nice in it." Suddenly, a lazy movement inside of me touched my heart and brought tears to my eyes. I said to Dottie, "Don't you want to be my maid of honor? You didn't have to say yes."

Dottie set her beer can on the lawn and sat up on the edge of the chair. "Florine Gilham, you crying?" she said. "Really? You crying?"

"No." I sniffed.

"Oh, for heaven's sake, of course I wanted to do this," she said. "Thick and thin. That's you and me. I'm thick and you're thin. You're the only person can get me to put the dress on, so cut it out."

"You think it's pretty, right? Because it is pretty."

"It's the prettiest dress ever made, anywhere, in the history of dresses," Dottie said. "It ain't its fault I don't

wear dresses. Don't get so worked up."

We went back to studying the sky.

Darkness had settled in as we'd been talking, but millions of stars had leaked through it. Three of them contained the souls of my parents and of my grandmother, Grand. One twinkling star contained the spirit of my joyful, lively mother, Carlie, who had vanished when I was twelve. I didn't know if she was dead or alive, but placing her in the sky with Daddy and Grand made sense to me, as she was as gone to me as they were. Daddy's star was one of the larger ones, because he had been a big man with a stubborn heart, set in his ways. Grand's star radiated rays of light. A practical woman, her faith in those on Earth and in heaven had been unshakeable. How I missed those three dear souls.

"They see you," Dottie said. How she knew what I was thinking was beyond me, but her ability to do that bound her to me. She and I, born one day apart, were more like sisters than friends. Thick and thin, she'd said. She was right.

My eyes filled again. "I don't want to cry," I said. "It's the baby making me do it."

Dottie laughed. "Mean baby."

I said, "I just wish so much they were here for everything."

"Well, you and that baby got them inside of you. 'Course, it ain't the same as having 'em here, I know that, but it'll have to do."

I smiled. "You sound like Grand," I said.

"Could do worse," Dottie said. She hoisted herself out of the chair and reached for my hands. "I got to get my beauty sleep," she said. I grabbed onto her and she groaned as she pulled me up.

"I'm not that big," I grumbled.

"Oh, yes, you are." Dottie laughed. "That baby is going to weigh more than my bowling ball. That's a good twenty pounds, right there."

"Oh, stop," I said, "most of it is water weight."

"Water weight, my ass," she said.

"Give me the beer can," I said, "I'll toss it out for you. Don't want the path to Pastor Billy strewn with empties instead of rose petals."

"Guess not." We stood there for a minute. My marriage would mark a distance between us. We would always be best friends, but my relationships with Bud and the baby would bump her a couple of notches in my heart. Dottie and I had been through everything together. But our paths, while still joined in friendship, would branch off to include other people and places. I wanted to say, *How could I have gotten through the last few years without you? Do you know how much you mean to me?* But that wasn't like us, so instead I said, "Well, thanks. See you tomorrow."

Dottie waved good night as she turned to go. "Don't thank me yet," she said. "We got to get you two married, first."

“That’s going to happen. Come hell or high water,” I called as she walked off into the dark. I listened to the steadiness in her footsteps as she covered the short distance down the hill to her parents’ house. The screen door squealed open, and then shut with a bang. Someone in the house spoke to her and she answered, but I couldn’t hear the conversation.

My ears pitched themselves toward the sounds in the harbor. The water exhaled in a continuous sigh as it traveled out with the tide. Small waves shushed themselves against the rocky beach. I closed my eyes and let the sounds come into me before I looked up at the stars again. “You hear me?” I said to the three that were listening. “Come hell or high water, tomorrow, I’m marrying Bud. Put a good word in for us.”

When I looked down, I got dizzy. I pulled on the handle of the screen door that opened into the hallway of what had once been Grand’s house. It was mine, now—mine and Bud’s, and soon, our baby’s house too.

The women and girls who had attended the baby shower had cleaned and stacked everything so that I wouldn’t have to deal with any of that. It made me grateful for the way we took care of one another. I hauled myself up the stairs to the bathroom and had a long pee.

Afterward, I looked at my face in the mirror over the sink. Usually, my features were sharp, all bones and shade, but my weight gain from carrying the baby had filled in the angles. I looked young and soft, something I’d never thought about myself. I smiled, and the tired, violet half-moons under my hazel eyes disappeared. A pinpoint of light glowed in the center of my pupils.

“Mrs. James Walter Warner,” I whispered. “Mrs. Bud Warner. Florine Warner.”

As if he had heard me, Bud walked through the front door and whistled his way up the stairs.

I met him in the hall and blocked him so that he had to pause on the top riser. We stood face-to-face. The residue of beer and cigarettes from his bachelor party clung to his clothing. His eyes shone from the booze. A crooked smile inched up the right side of his face and he gave me a slow wink.

“Hey,” he whispered.

“Hey,” I whispered back.

Bud put his hands on my belly, leaned forward, and gave me a soft kiss. Then he said, “Back up so’s I can get to the bathroom. ’Gansett’s gone right through me.”

I stepped back to let him pass and I went into the bedroom. I pulled the two window shades down against the night crowding in. I almost split myself apart with a belly-deep yawn and suddenly I was so tired I couldn’t move my arms to take off my clothes.

Bud came into the bedroom.

“Will you undress me?” I said.

Bud grinned. “That’s my girl,” he said.

He used his gentle, warm hands to tug and pull, unfasten and unhook, as I stood there, drunk with exhaustion and with the way he was touching me. Soon, I was naked but for my panties, which rested in a soft cotton puddle on top of my feet.

Bud stepped back and took me in, top to bottom.

“What?” I said.

“Just checking out my work,” he said. He stripped down and I got to admire his thin body. When he saw me taking him in, he shyly looked at the floor. “So much for not seeing the bride the night before her wedding,” he mumbled, trying to turn my attention somewhere else. He thought he was too skinny.

“I like it this way,” I whispered. I took his hands in mine and we looked into each other’s eyes. A rare blush of tenderness wrapped itself around us. No jokes, no rushing to bed, no wisecracks. Bud raised a hand and ran it down my full-moon face. “I love you, Florine,” he said. “Whatever happens, I love you.”

“I love you too. We’re in this, together.”

As far as I was concerned, that was our wedding ceremony. The next day would bring the formal vows with everyone cheering us on, particularly my soon-to-be mother-in-law, Ida, who was overjoyed that Bud and I were going legal. But in that moment, I had heard everything I needed to know.

Bud slipped into bed and I slid in after him. He spooned me and, like that, he fell asleep. The tickle of his breath against my neck was as comforting as a cat’s purr, but as was so often the case these days, I went from sleepy to awake.

I made the best of the hour I was up by thinking about Bud and me and how we had arrived at this place in our lives. I had loved him before I had even known what that meant. I had grown up on the hill above his place.

Four houses stood on The Point, houses built on slabs of granite by generations of fishermen almost as tough as that rock. Grand’s house had been the first one built. Daddy’s house stood across the road from it. Dottie’s house set across the road and below Grand’s house, halfway down the hill. Bud’s house hunkered down on a wide level ledge directly above the wharf and beach.

The Point was one of several fingers of rocky land carved by glaciers and the ceaseless pounding of the North Atlantic. Little harbors, such as the one in The Point, held boats relatively safe from most of the action. Independent types who loved the sea had settled this place. They could have lived in the town of Long Reach, about ten miles up the coast. Life might have been easier that way. But something in their natures chose the elements, and the freedom and challenge of hard work. Daddy, Dottie’s father, Bud’s father, and their ancestors had driven the prows of those boats into the roughshod sea day after day. If nothing else, we were resilient.

Bud was about six months older than Dottie and me. He lived through part of a fall and a whole winter before I barged onto the scene. “As soon as you could run,” his mother, Ida, had told me a short time before the baby shower, “your little legs carried you down the road to our house. You used to play in the driveway with Bud until one of you made the other one mad, and then we would walk you back up the hill.”

“Did I just run loose? Where was Carlie?” I asked Ida. I called my mother Carlie because she had wanted to be called by her first name. “Mama sounds weird to me,” she told me when I asked. I didn’t care what she wanted to be called. I knew who she was to me.

“Your mother was right with you,” Ida said. “You think she’d let you run down the road alone?”

“I don’t remember,” I said. Carlie had taken with her any stories she might have told me. “But I remember playing with Bud.”

Something about him, even then, made me feel strong and protected. He was a calm little boy who had grown into a quiet and easygoing man, unless something really riled him up.

He was the leader of the four of us. Besides Dottie, Bud, and me, our little gang included Glen Clemmons, who was also our age. Glen's father, Ray, ran the general store, close to the road that led to Long Reach. When we got together as a foursome, each of us contributed to whatever mischief we might decide to get into. Glen had the bad ideas, Dottie complained but went along, I thought Glen's ideas were fun, and Bud was the voice of reason that no one ever listened to until it was too late.

I might not have tuned in on his advice, but I heard his heart in my heart, always. His presence took root in me. I looked for him, even when we were with other people. Four years after Carlie went missing, I lost Grand to a stroke. My life took a header even as Glen, Dottie, and Bud found ways to get along in the world. Bud hooked up with a pretty, popular girl named Susan. I quit high school and took up with Andy Barrington, the son of rich summer people. At seventeen, I gave my virginity to him and learned how to smoke pot. I also almost died when Andy and I got into a bad car accident.

Bud's was a welcome presence as I healed. Armed at this point with a real understanding of how short life could be and how fast things could change, I fought for his love, and his own restless heart chose mine.

When I was eighteen, my father died of a heart attack on his lobster boat, the *Florine*, on a beautiful July day. Bud moved in with me a few days after his funeral. He took a job as a mechanic at Fred's garage, up on the road to Long Reach. He wasn't a great cook and he left his dirty clothes on the bedroom floor, but he saved my sanity. He held me close when the dark tried to slink into my soul through the cracks in my heart, and he brought me back into the land of the living.

We lived together for a year. We loved sex, so we shouldn't have been surprised when we made a baby in the early fall of 1970. When I told him, Bud blinked a few times, shrugged, and said, "Well, we'll manage."

We were both only nineteen at the time, but we were made of sturdy stock. It helped that Grand's house was paid for. Bud and I managed to take care of the taxes and, so far, the day-to-monthly bills, but a new baby would up our spending in a big way. To help with finances, I struck a deal with Ray at the general store and he started to carry more of the bread that I baked from Grand's recipes. Ray also took orders for my knitting and crocheting, and for Christmas wreaths. Only a few years back, I'd considered all of this a chore. Grand had been determined to make me useful, and I had found it a pain in the butt. But after her death, I began to appreciate what she had taken the time to teach me. Doing these things reminded me of her. I came to love creating something warm, beautiful, and lasting, or something that tasted of comfort, or helping The Point women put together wreaths for the annual Christmas season craft fairs.

As the baby claimed its space inside of me, I thought about whether Bud would ask me to marry him. As long as I had loved him, I had dreamed of being married to him, but after all that had happened, it was enough just to have him with me. I was content with that. But in May, maybe at the urging of his mother, who said nothing with her mouth but everything with her eyes, he had asked me to marry him one night at supertime.

"Wondering," he'd said, as I was easing a forkful of peas over my big belly.

"What?" I said.

"Want to get married before the baby comes?"

Several peas jumped ship and tumbled down the slope of my stomach.

Bud scraped his chair back and walked around the table to me. He knelt down beside me and folded my left hand between his own hands. "Florine Gilham," he said, his dark eyes just as dead serious as I'd ever seen them, "you're a keeper. I can't think about my life without you. Will you marry me?"

Could he feel the pulse of the hand cradled between his own? My heartbeat picked up so, the baby turned over. "Of course I will," I said.

We kissed for a little while and then he broke it off. "Don't have a ring," he said.

"Wait," I said. Bud hoisted me to a standing position and I waddled upstairs to our bedroom.

I headed to the bureau, to Grand's wooden jewelry box. Her husband, Franklin, my grandfather, had made it for her and carved her name, Florence, into the top. The hinges creaked as I lifted it up and looked inside. Grand never had much use for frippery, as she called it, but a few choice things were tucked inside. I plucked her diamond ring out of its velvet holder, pushed it over my swollen finger to see if it fit, took it off, and then squeezed it tight in the palm of my hand. Once downstairs, I handed it to Bud and he slipped it back onto my finger. Then Bud went back around the table to finish his supper.

In less than twenty-four hours, we would be married.

My husband-to-be turned over in bed and faced the wall, wriggling his back and butt toward me so that we touched. With the effort a whale must make to breach so it can breathe, I shifted my bulk so I was on my back. I draped my right arm over his hip and drifted off to sleep.

2

Our wedding day started with a visit from my late father's girlfriend, Stella Drowns. No one locked their doors on The Point. She barely knocked before she charged in, hollering, "Yoo-hoo!"

Bud shot straight up in bed. "You fucking hoo?" he said to me. "Is she for real?"

"We're in bed, Stella," I yelled at the top of my lungs. "Come back later."

"Oh, I'm sorry," she called from the bottom of the stairs. "I'm just so excited about today. I brought you a coffee cake. Figured you could use the sugar and the energy."

"Could have used the sleep too," Bud shouted.

"Hope you're not that cranky all day," Stella hollered. "Happy wedding day!" She slammed the front door on her way out.

"What did Leeman ever see in her?" Bud said. "She's out of her mind."

"Coffee cake," I said. "He liked her, um, cake."

Bud rubbed his hands over his face. "You want cake and tea?"

"That's a great idea."

He climbed over me and stood naked in the early morning light. He scratched his butt and went across the

hall to the bathroom. The baby did the twist in my belly. I put my hand on her to calm her down, but she kept it up, as if the prospect of coffee cake for breakfast and a wedding for lunch excited her as much as it did me.

The front door downstairs opened just as Bud flushed the toilet. I tried to catch him before he headed downstairs, but I was too late.

“Jesus, Mary, and Joseph,” he yelled.

“That your wedding suit?” I heard Dottie say.

“If people don’t stop barging in, it might be,” Bud said.

“Where you going to put the rings?”

“Glen’s supposed to have them.”

“I say, wear what you got on, then. Supposed to be hot this afternoon.”

“Come on up, Dottie,” I called.

“Why? The entertainment is down here,” she said.

“Wait here,” Bud said to Dottie, and he took every other stair to the bedroom. His face was scarlet. “We’re going to start locking the damn door,” he said. “Right after Dottie leaves.”

I grinned. “What’s done is done. Now she knows why I’m marrying you.”

Bud pulled on a pair of jeans and hauled a white, holey T-shirt over his head. He was still sputtering when he left the bedroom and bounded down the stairs. “That coffee cake is for us,” I heard him growl at Dottie, who was more than familiar with our kitchen and could smell a baked good from miles away.

“Just testing it out,” she answered him. “I approve. Here, I cut a piece for you.”

“Going down to the folks’ house,” Bud called up to me. “See you at the wedding,” and he was gone. I hauled myself and the baby out of bed, shuffled to the window, and pulled up the shade. Dust motes sifted through shafts of sunlight.

“Coming up,” Dottie said from the bottom of the stairs.

“Bring me some coffee cake and some tea. With milk,” I said.

“Hope you’re not going to be this bossy all day,” she grumbled.

“Not promising anything,” I said. I waddled over to the rocking chair and grabbed an old green sweatshirt hanging off the back of it. It had been my father’s once, and he had been a big man. I plunked down on the rocker and tugged my pregnant-lady shorts to just underneath my breasts.

By the time Dottie got upstairs, I was standing in front of the mirror, looking at the blond, red, and brown frizzled curly mop I called hair.

“What the hell am I going to do with this?” I asked her.

She set my tea and a plate mounded with Stella’s coffee cake on the bureau. She stood alongside me at the

mirror and ran her hands through her brown pixie cut. “Cut it off,” she said. “That’ll take care of that problem.”

“It’s a serious question,” I said. “What do you think I should do? Up? Down?”

“You’re asking the wrong person. Evie knows about that shit. She’ll fix you up.”

Evie was Dottie’s younger sister. At fourteen, she was a handful. “Evie wants what she wants when she wants it,” Dottie had said more than once, “and the only time she doesn’t want for something, she’s asleep.” What mattered about Evie that day was that she would have good ideas. I changed the subject.

“Stella dropped by with the cake and woke up Bud. He wasn’t awful pleased.”

“She probably just wants to be part of the wedding,” Dottie said.

I sighed. “Oh, I know,” I said. “But I don’t want her fussing around while I get ready. She’ll get weepy about Daddy not being here, and then I’ll get weepier than I already am, and I don’t need that today.”

“I guess not,” Dottie said. “Anyways, Evie’ll be over soon, with Madeline. You don’t want to see either of them before they have their coffee.”

Madeline was Dottie’s mother. For money, she worked at the post office up the road. For joy, she painted seashore and ocean scenes in watercolor. Some of them brightened the walls of our house. Once in a while, she’d sell a painting to a tourist Ray sent down to the house. I loved Madeline. Every time I’d gone to Dottie’s house—and I’d gone there thousands of times—she acted as if I were a long-lost friend who’d just come back from somewhere far away. On my wedding day, she was going to pick flowers from Grand’s side garden to decorate the food and drink tables, and then fashion a bouquet out of peonies and beach roses for me to carry.

“I’m so lucky to have you all,” I said to Dottie. “Hey, leave me at least a piece of that cake, please.”

“It’s all yours,” she said, grabbing a last nibble.

I slipped the remaining piece of coffee cake into my mouth and took a sip of hot tea that coated my tongue with melted, brown sugar-crumble topping. “Mmmmm,” I said. Stella really could cook. She had reeled Daddy in by bringing him a coffee cake and making him a couple of dinners. She drove me crazy, but sometimes she touched my heart and on this day, I loved everyone.

Dottie and I puttered around for a couple of hours, making sure the house was to rights and then suddenly, it was ten o’clock, only three hours away from the wedding. I rushed upstairs for a bath. When Madeline and Evie showed up, I was standing in the bedroom combing the tangles out of my wet hair. Right away, Evie took over.

“Let me do that,” she said. “Wait. Let’s sit you down first. No, not the rocking chair—I need to work on your hair from the back and sides. *Dottie!*” she hollered downstairs. “Bring up a kitchen chair.” I braced myself against the possibility that Dottie would holler back that Evie could just fetch it herself or else go to hell, but to my surprise, she carried a chair upstairs and set it in front of the mirror, exactly where her sister told her to put it.

“Anything else, Your Highness?” Dottie said.

“Nope,” Evie said. “Go away.”

"I'm the maid of honor. I got rank over you." Dottie set her solid self down on the mattress and settled in to watch over me as only a best friend can.

I said, "I got rank over both of you. Dottie can stay."

Evie shrugged. "Well, whoever stays, you got to take off that sweatshirt first. It'll mess up your hair and we're only fixing it once."

I whipped off the shirt and we all admired my swollen boobs and bloated belly, along with the strange line of reddish-brown hair that had sprouted down the center of my stomach during my pregnancy. Dottie took my fancy lacy bra from the wedding-wear hanger and hooked the back for me while Evie scared up some towels from the bathroom. I sat down, and she began wrestling with my hair. I closed my eyes while she worked. I loved the light feel of her quick hands as she gently pulled, brushed, braided, and twisted my hair into shape. She hummed some tune I didn't recognize in her husky voice as she worked.

Down in the side yard, I heard Bert Butts, Dottie's father, working with Glen as they set up tables and chairs in the backyard. Madeline's voice entered the mix, along with the clatter of Grand's silverware, plates, glasses, and cups. I'd suggested paper plates and cups to her, but she said, "We can break out the good stuff for this day, Florine. Your wedding day is worth it."

After a while Dottie got restless and wandered downstairs and outside into the side yard to "see if there was something I can do."

I half dozed in the chair. I jumped when Evie said, "There."

"You done?" I said, opening my eyes. She stood in front of me and I looked up and into her beautiful blue eyes. A forest of dark lashes surrounded them.

"Looks good," she said. "But you're not going to peek until we make you up."

"I don't know as I need much," I said, and Evie rolled her eyes.

"Let's bury the freckles," she said.

"I like my freckles."

"Just for the day," Evie said. She tilted her head and studied my face. "Humph," she said, and reached for a bag filled with enough makeup to beautify the seven women living on The Point for a year.

She smiled at me. "You got bones to die for," she said. "Let's bring them out."

"Aren't they okay where they are?"

She rolled her eyes again. "Blush," she said. "We're putting blush on them. You should take this seriously. I'm good."

"If you say so," I said.

She grinned. "I do," she said. Her curly black hair framed her pale, heart-shaped face. Her nails were pearly pink and her mouth, made for kissing, matched the color of her nails.

"She knows she's pretty," Dottie had said to me, more than once. "Well, she may have the looks, but I got

the brains and the personality.” Sometimes, I wondered if Dottie might be a little jealous of Evie, but I never brought that up. Evie was the pretty one, but Dottie had my heart.

Finally, Evie was done, and just as the sun hit the far wall of my bedroom I stood up and stared at an unfamiliar creature who looked back at me.

My hair was a mass of sprayed-stiff, strawberry-blond whipped cream, winding in and out of its own coils as if playing hide-and-seek. The freckles on my face had been blotted out by a blizzard of powder and blush. My startled greenish eyes peered out at me from behind shutters of thick, brown mascara. My long mouth sparkled with a smear of glitter slashed across the top of a spicy pink-brown lipstick.

“Well, what do you think?” Evie said.

“I’m afraid if I talk, my face will break.”

Evie frowned.

“Just give me a few seconds,” I said. “I have to get used to it. I think I look pretty, but I don’t really know what that means yet.”

“You look beautiful. You are anyway. I just brought it out,” Evie said.

Someone walked through the house and stood at the bottom of the stairs. “Can I come up?” Maureen called in her sweet voice. My heart smiled. I loved Bud’s younger sister.

“Maureen, come check out Florine!” Evie yelled, and Maureen rushed up the stairs and stopped in the doorway of the bedroom. Her light-brown eyes widened and her mouth formed a perfect *O*.

“What do you think?” Evie asked.

“Florine!” Maureen said. “You look so pretty. Wow!”

Maureen was thirteen, a year younger than Evie. Whereas Evie looked like a grown woman, Maureen was a gangly work in progress. Straight light-brown hair flipped and flopped over her shoulders and down her back. Her legs and arms were a tangle of knobby joints and long, thin bones. Her eyes took up most of her face, her nose was long and narrow, and she had yet to grow into her mouth.

She and Evie were not friends like Dottie and me. They liked each other, but they didn’t have much in common. Maureen, like her mother, loved all things that had to do with church, while Evie tended in the opposite direction. Evie was a force, while Maureen radiated light from someplace inside herself.

“I don’t know where she came from,” Bud said about his sister once, after I had commented about her “glow.” “The rest of us are gloomy as hell.”

“Ma said to give you this,” Maureen said to me. She held out a clothing-size box wrapped in silver paper and tied with a white ribbon.

I took the box from her and placed it on the bed. “Thanks,” I said.

“No, you have to open it now,” Maureen said. “It goes with your wedding gown.”

“Maureen, you do it,” Evie said. “Florine might chip a nail.”

Maureen looked at me for further instructions.

“Go ahead,” I said. She tore the ribbon and wrapping paper off the box. Before she lifted the lid, she said, “Ready?” I nodded and she lifted the top and parted the crinkly white tissue paper. I caught glimpses of silk material before she gently raised the garment from its resting place.

“Oh my god,” I said, and gasped.

Ida, who made beautiful quilts, had already performed a miracle by taking Grand’s old wedding gown and stitching in a lace and flowered panel that gave the baby room and made me feel almost pretty. But this new thing was beyond beautiful to me, and yes, precious. The patchwork petticoat was totally made from bits and scraps of my parents’ clothes.

“Don’t cry!” Evie shouted. “Your mascara will run.”

But cry I did. “Who made this?” I said.

“Ma,” Maureen said. “She said it would give you something old, borrowed, blue, and new, all at once.”

“Oh my god,” I said again, and my trembling hands reached for the thing she was holding. “It’s precious. Just precious.”

“Bud snuck Ma into the house while you and Dottie were shopping for Dottie’s dress,” Maureen said. “She went through the storage boxes you have. Stella gave her some of your father’s things.”

I saw bits of Daddy’s hankies and parts from one of his summer shirts quilted throughout the petticoat. I fingered each star-shaped patch, which were the colors of summer and memories.

“It’s beautiful.” I sniffed. “Oh, Ida.”

Maureen said in a quiet voice, “So, you like it?”

“She’s ruined her face.” Evie sighed. “I’d say she does.”

“See the blue patch toward the bottom?” Maureen said. “Ma sewed your names and the date in it. See? It says, *Florine and Bud, June 12, 1971.*”

“I wish she was here so I could hug her. Where is she?” I asked.

Maureen laughed. “She’s got Bud and Dad to deal with,” she said.

“They’re a handful, I guess,” I said. “How’s Sam this morning?”

“He’s okay,” Maureen said. “He’s ready.” Bud’s father was a lifelong alcoholic, and near the last stages of cirrhosis of the liver. But that hadn’t stopped him from drinking.

I wondered how sober Sam was that morning. He was standing in for my father, and I hoped he would be able to walk me down the aisle.

“We have to fix your makeup,” Evie said. “Thanks for nothing, Maureen.”

Maureen ignored her. “Bye,” she said. She hugged me and clattered down the stairs, meeting Dottie on her

way up.

“Jesus, what did you do to her?” she asked as she sashayed into the room. I shot her such a look she said, “You look nice, Florine,” and shut up.

After Evie repaired the damage, we got ready. Dottie hauled the blue dress over her head, and then helped me step into the beautiful petticoat, which swished against my bare legs. She called Madeline upstairs to help lower the tent of a wedding dress over my hair and face without touching either of them. As a last touch, Madeline perched a circlet of daisies and clover on my hair. The three Butts women stood back and checked me over.

“Probably the best you’ll ever look,” Evie said to me. “Do not cry. I mean it.”

Madeline’s smile wobbled as she said, “You take my breath away, Florine.”

Dottie pursed her lips and said, “You’ll do,” and then she walked over to the window and looked down onto the side yard.

White lace swirled around me as I turned toward the mirror, but I didn’t see me in the reflection. Instead, I saw someone who looked much like her grandmother must have looked at twenty. Carlie had blessed me with ginger highlights in my hair and in the freckles on my face, and Daddy had blessed me with his height, but it was Grand who showed up in the mirror. She was right there with me. I heard her say, *Heaven’s sake, you didn’t turn out so bad. Now, you go get yourself married to Buddy so’s you can have that baby.*

“I will,” I whispered, my eyes shiny.

“Well?” Evie said. I looked at her and nodded.

“You did good, Evie,” I said. “Thank you.”

“You’re welcome,” she said.

We got ourselves downstairs and Madeline handed Dottie and me our bouquets, and then she and Evie joined the small crowd on the lawn. Dottie and I went out the kitchen door, away from the onlookers, to join Sam, who stood waiting for us. I kissed him on the cheek, trying not to be shocked at the yellow tint of his skin and by the fact that his eyeballs were yellow too.

“Christ almighty, you look just like Florence did,” he said, seeing Grand, just as I had seen her. “Don’t she look like her grandmother?” he asked Dottie.

“I guess,” Dottie said, too busy tugging on her dress to pay much attention to me.

I buried my nose in one of the giant peonies in my bouquet. The smell of June filled my heart as the warm sun spun melted honey over my head. A seagull laughed and I turned my head to see the water in the harbor winking diamonds at me.

Someone on the lawn lowered a needle onto my old record player. The first notes of “Here Comes the Bride” sounded, and I hooked my arm through Sam’s. He kissed my cheek. “Glad to have you aboard,” he said. “You and Bud be good to each other, now, you hear me?” I nodded. Whiskey perfumed his breath, but we held each other steady as we began our march toward Bud and Pastor Billy Krum.

Since we were holding the wedding on the lawn, I had decided to go barefoot, and the grass was smooth and

cool beneath my feet. The baby rolled over just as my eyes lighted on Bud, and I smiled. He answered my smile with one of his own as he told me he loved me with his eyes. As Sam and I closed in on him and Pastor Billy, I saw that he was shaking.

I may have been walking past people who had known Bud and me our whole lives, but that didn't calm my nerves. The lawn seemed twice as long as it was, but finally, Bud and I stood face-to-face in front of the dusty pink fireworks display of peonies in bloom. I handed Dottie my bouquet, careful not to meet her brown eyes, as I was afraid I might cry or burst out laughing for nervousness.

Bud's dark eyes danced with tears. "You look beautiful," he whispered.

"It's okay," Pastor Billy murmured, "it'll be over in a minute." His blue eyes twinkled and he winked. "Dearly beloved," he began in his deep pastor voice. When asked, Sam gave his permission for me to marry his son, and then he walked over to where Ida waited for him.

Pastor Billy heard our vows to love, honor, and cherish each other until death did us part. Glen fished two gold rings out of the pocket of a gray suit that fit like he'd probably borrowed it from someone. Bud's trembling hand shoved the smaller ring over the knuckle of my swollen left ring finger. I did the same for him with the bigger ring. We kissed soon after that, a dry kiss that sealed our vows, and we were pronounced man and wife. We turned to face our families and friends.

"May I present Mr. and Mrs. James Warner," Pastor Billy announced, and everyone clapped and whistled. "Now, let's party," Billy added, and everyone clapped and whistled some more.

The reception was held about two yards from our wedding. Everyone grabbed something to eat or drink, and the party commenced.

Dottie's father came over and hugged me. He grinned and said, "So, when you two thinking about having kids?" I smacked him and he grinned and guzzled some beer. Stella, who had followed him over, grabbed both of my arms and said, "Oh, honey, you look so pretty. Your father would have loved to be here, and I'm sure Leeman wouldn't have minded that you're so far along."

She didn't let me go right away. As always, I couldn't help but stare at the scar that ran most of the length of her right cheek, the result of a car accident when she had been a teenager. She squeezed my arms and I locked onto her gray eyes. "We miss him, don't we?" she said. Gin tickled my nostrils. Since my father's death almost two years earlier, Stella had gone on several drunken benders. I nodded a little before pulling away from her as gently as I could. I missed my father like crazy, but it was my wedding day.

Dottie did her maid-of-honor duty and stepped between us. "Now, Stella," she said, "don't insult the pregnant bride on her wedding day. Let's go toast all the virgins we know. I'm thinking it will be a half a shot-glass-full, at least." She threw her right arm over Stella's thin shoulder and walked her over to a makeshift bar set up on a folding table in front of a couple of sturdy forsythia bushes.

"Hello, daughter-in-law," Ida said from behind me.

"Oh, Ida!" I cried as I spun around. "The petticoat. The petticoat is . . . it's . . ."

Evie sauntered by. "Don't cry," she muttered.

Ida smiled. "I'm glad you like it," she said. "You look absolutely lovely. It's time for your first dance. Are you feeling up to it?"

I nodded. "Might as well get it over with." Neither Bud nor I was a dancer in private, let alone in public. We'd practiced a few times, but the size of my belly, and our own clumsiness and giggle fits, had blocked our progress.

Maureen ran up to Ida and me. "All set," she said. "You nod, and I'll put on the record for you."

"Thanks," I said, feeling a rush of goofy love for all of Bud's family. Maureen tried to wrap me in a hug. When the baby kicked between us, she jumped back. "Whoa!" she said.

"Saying hi, Aunt Maureen," I said. Maureen dashed over to the record player.

My eyes swept the side lawn for my husband and found him downing beer with Glen over by the beach-rose bushes. I nodded his way and he joined us.

"Ready?" I asked him.

"Ready or not," he said.

We both jumped when Maureen shouted, "And now, the bride and groom are going to dance their first dance."

Bud blushed, the twenty-odd people in the yard clapped, and Maureen set the needle on the old 45 rpm record. It scratched and popped its way onto "Love Me Tender," by Elvis Presley. Bud took my right hand with his left and threaded his right arm around my bulk. The minute Elvis started to sing, I was gone. "I shouldn't have picked this song. It was my parents' song," I choked out between sobs.

"Hush," Bud said, "it can be our song, okay?" He wiped away my tears with his fingers. "It says what I think about you. I'm happy you picked it."

I blinked the tears back into the box of sorrowful keepsakes I kept inside my heart. "I remember Carlie and Leeman waltzing in the kitchen to it. I miss them so much, Bud."

"I know you do," Bud said. "But you got me and Junior. No one's going to take us away from you."

"Okay if I cut in?" Glen asked.

"I don't know as you're supposed to cut in during the first song. But you timed it just right. Glad you're here," I said. He had a knack for doing and saying the wrong thing at the right time.

Glen was about four inches taller than Bud, who was my height. It felt nice to look up into his snapping black eyes. He was only a couple of months younger than Dottie and me. He and Bud were like mismatched twins, so different, but as close to each other as Dottie and me.

"Glad I'm here too," Glen said. "Wish I could stay longer." Right after high school graduation he had joined the army and had gone through basic training. In less than a month, he would head for the war in Vietnam.

Bud wasn't going near Vietnam or anywhere else, for that matter. His number had come up in the draft lottery and he had gone for his physical, but he had been declared unfit for service. As a baby, he had developed near-fatal pneumonia and his lungs were scarred. He also suffered from asthma from time to time.

Although he had dreaded being picked for the draft, his 4-F status had bothered him. "Thought that might happen," he told me. "Didn't want to go anyways. Stupid to go fight someplace I have to look up on a map."

After saying that, he had taken a long walk, which was something he did when he had to think.

“You like the army?” I asked Glen as we shuffled through our clumsy dance.

Glen shrugged. “It’ll keep me off the streets,” he said. “When I come back, I’m going fishing. You hold Leeman’s boat for me, maybe?”

“We’ll keep her for you,” I said, hopeful that my father’s lobster boat, the *Florine*, might get to do what she’d been built for, once again. As of now, she sat in her cradle on dry ground in Daddy’s yard across the street.

When the song ended, Glen bent and kissed me on the forehead. “You send me pictures of the baby? It’s almost like it was mine.”

“How do you mean that?” I asked with a grin.

He blushed. “I mean . . . Well, you know what I mean. All of us have been so close.”

“I know,” I said. “I’m teasing you. I’m glad you’re going to be in this baby’s life.” A touch of nausea made me dizzy and I grabbed Glen’s arm. “Sit me down, would you?” I said to him.

He led me over to a line of metal folding chairs set before the peonies and I plunked down onto the warm metal surface of one of them. Bees buzzed and wove their way through the garden. A flower brushed my cheek and I buried my nose in its silky folds. The baby kicked me a couple of times and then settled. Maureen put “Going to the Chapel” onto the record player and almost everyone started to dance, except Dottie, who stomped her way across the lawn, tugging at her dress as she came toward me.

She sat down beside me and we watched the dancers for a few minutes. Pastor Billy hopped and bopped with Maureen, twirling her in circles as she giggled and tried not to get jumbled up in her legs.

“Ain’t that cute,” Dottie said. We turned our attention to Evie, who was dancing with Glen. The red dress she wore was so tight it might as well have been body dye. Her little butt wriggled its way up to the tips of her fingers and down to her toes. “Looks like she’s been practicing,” I said.

“For what, I’m not sure,” Dottie said. “Whatever it is, it’s packed with trouble.”

“Think Glen notices?” I said. He grinned like a fool as Evie spun around him like a curvy tornado, laughing with her mouth open wide.

“Have to be blind not to,” Dottie said.

“Speaking of Evie, how’s my makeup?” I asked.

Dottie produced a crumpled Kleenex from the pocket of her dress. She dabbed it here and there on my face, pocketed the tissue, and squirmed in her chair.

“Take off the dress if you want,” I said.

“Nah. I’ll wear it for a little longer. Someday, you’ll owe me a favor, and I can use this to remind you of all I’ve done for you in my life.”

“I do appreciate everything you’ve done,” I said. “By the way, I might need you to babysit sometimes.”

“That’s something else I get to do for you,” Dottie said. “What you doing for me?”

“Making you an unofficial aunt,” I said. “Something happens to me, you take the baby? You okay with that?” When she didn’t say anything, I looked at her. “You crying?” I said. “Are you crying?”

“Jeezly flowers stink to high heavens.”

“So, if something happens . . .”

“Well, yes, but it better not,” she said. She suddenly stood up. “I can’t stand this dress no more,” she said. She walked quickly toward Grand’s house, head down.

The wedding guests danced and drank. We all ate hamburgers, hot dogs, and some of the platters Ray had put together for the day. “Free of charge,” he’d told me, which let me know he held me in high esteem. Ray was famous for pinching the green out of a dollar.

Sometime during the afternoon, Glen remembered that he was best man and he decided to toast us. He cleared his throat and raised a Champagne glass. “These two people are my best friends,” he started out.

“Hey!” Dottie shouted.

“Dottie too,” Glen added. Then he frowned. “Now you made me forget,” he said. He looked at the sky as if the words might be written somewhere up there. After a minute, his face lit up and he said, “Oh, yeah! I wish them and the baby all the happiness in the world and I hope they’ll remember to keep a beer in the fridge for me. Glad to see that Bud got smart. He couldn’t do no better than Florine.” Everyone clapped and Glen looked so relieved that I laughed.

Bud pulled the garter from my leg without much ceremony, much like the way he undressed me at night. The three single men at the wedding all looked content to stay that way. Ray looked down at the grass just as Bud threw the garter. Glen ducked behind Pastor Billy, so Billy had to catch it. “Not fair,” he said with a laugh.

Dottie wouldn’t even stand with the single girls. Evie couldn’t reach up with her dress as tight as it was, so Maureen snagged my side-garden flower bouquet. “I’m so happy I caught this,” she whispered into my ear. “I’m going to marry Billy someday.”

I grinned at her. “You are?” I tried to do the math in my head, but the Champagne from the toast had made me woozy. Billy had to be at least fifteen years older than Maureen, though I didn’t know his real age.

“It’s a secret,” Maureen said.

“I won’t tell,” I said.

She sat down on a folding chair in the middle of the lawn as Billy knelt before her with the garter. His face went pink as he pushed it above her bony knee. Maureen’s blush matched his own.

The day melted into a pale orange sunset and the tide in the harbor turned, showing us its other side as it flowed along. Glen spun records, drank beer, and sang out of tune to almost every song he lowered onto the turntable. The girls and women danced together, or with Billy and Bert. Ray sat off to the side with Sam, who refused to go home, although he looked as if he could knock on death’s door and be welcomed in anytime.

I did my best to keep up with my own wedding. I danced a couple of times, ate some wedding cake, and

drank a little more Champagne. But finally, my body and my baby were ready to call it quits. Dottie and I stood together on the lawn as I looked around for Bud. I finally spied him walking a tipsy Stella across Daddy's driveway toward the house.

"I owe you more favors," I said to Dottie, who now sported shorts, flip-flops, and a T-shirt that read, **BOWLERS NEVER STRIKE OUT.**

"How come?"

"You rescued me from Stella," I said. "Thanks."

"She wasn't that bad. Talked about Leeman most of the day to anyone who might listen. 'Bout how she wished they'd gotten married. Seems to me she ought to get some kind of hobby, so she could think about something else and not be so sad."

"She doesn't want to think about anything else," I said.

I watched Bud walk back to me, admiring the way the westerly sun hit the side of his face. It shone on his dark hair and sparked his eyes into lit pieces of coal. As he reached me, he took my hands and said, "Well, Mrs. Warner, it's about time for our honeymoon."

Dottie said, "This shouldn't have nothing to do with me. If it does, there's something wrong." She walked off toward her mother, who was beginning to clean up, alongside Ida. Madeline handed Dottie a tray of dirty dishes. "Don't you dare drop any of this," I heard her say as Dottie walked toward the house.

"Our honeymoon suite is right over party central," I said to Bud. "What kind of time are we going to have with the tunes and the talk going on all night?"

"We're not staying here tonight," he said. "Ma and Dad booked us a room at the Stray-Away Inn down the road." The look I gave him made him grin. "Your bag is packed," he said. "Let's go."

"I'm going to change first," I said.

"Hurry up," Bud said, and headed for the bar.

"Such a nice day," Madeline said as she helped me out of the dress. "Bud looked so handsome and you, well, you . . ."

"I had a lot of help," I said. "Thanks to you."

"My pleasure. May be the only wedding I ever get to help with. Don't know what either of my girls will end up doing. I can't see Dottie marrying anyone, and I'm just hoping Evie doesn't get pregnant before she's out of high school."

I didn't know what to say about that, so I hugged her, holding on maybe a few seconds too long, but Madeline didn't seem to mind. When she left me, I dressed in a honeymoon ensemble consisting of a pair of shorts and a huge T-shirt. Then I went into the bathroom and washed what makeup would come off from my face. I hoped the Stray-Away had a shower so I could wash the gunk from my hair. I lumbered down the stairs. In the kitchen, Madeline, Dottie, Evie, Maureen, and Ida were busy coming and going with glasses, plates, silver, and food. "I feel funny not helping you out in my own kitchen," I said. "Do you want me to—"

"We want you to go honeymoon," Ida said. "We'll get this." With that, she turned her back and ignored me.

So did the rest of them.

I looked out onto the porch, where several rocking chairs sat facing two wide windows that looked over the harbor. Glen sat in one of the rockers, taking in the quiet movement of water and the aftermath of sunset.

I walked through the kitchen, onto the porch, and sat down in the rocker beside Glen. When he looked at me, I saw new lines around his eyes and setting on either side of his mouth. I hadn't noticed them while we were dancing. He was only twenty, like the rest of us, way too young for those lines.

"You okay?" I asked him. He turned back to the water.

"Yup," he said. "I'm good. Trying to remember how this looks so's I can picture it when I'm over in Vietnam."

We rocked for about ten seconds, and then he said, "I don't want to go over there. I don't want to be in the army. I don't know what the hell I was thinking about when I did it."

A lone seagull flew across the harbor and toward the ocean, drawn toward a nightly resting place known only to itself and a few thousand others.

"I'm sorry," Glen said. "Christ, it's your wedding day."

"That's okay," I said. "I can sit for a minute." We rocked in unison. "I wish I had something that would make you feel better," I said. "I guess I could say that everything will be okay, but you're the one has to do it."

"Dumbass thing to do," he said.

"You sound like Ray," I said.

"Hah. Funny thing is, I think I did it so's he won't think I'm such a bonehead."

"You're not . . ."

"Hell I'm not," he said. "Big, dumb Glen."

"He related to stupid-ass Florine?"

Glen smiled.

Another seagull glided past the windows toward the sea and sleep. I pictured it settled down, yellow eyes closed, head tucked under its smooth gray wing.

"Love this time of day," Glen said. "So damn quiet."

"They have this time in Vietnam," I said. "Got the same moon and the same sun too. And stars."

"Might have different stars."

"Same sky."

"Different sky."

“Same sky. Different place.”

Behind me, I heard Bud ask his mother if she’d seen me.

“We’re out here,” I hollered to him.

“You ready?” he said behind me. “Oh, hell, here you are with another man already. We ain’t even had a honeymoon yet.”

Glen stood up. “You better get going, before you have that baby,” he said. He helped me out of the chair and I reached up for a hug. “You’ll be all right,” I whispered into his ear.

“Yup. She’s a good one,” he said to Bud. “Not too many of them around.”

“Oh, there’s plenty,” I said. “You’ll find the right one when you got the time.”

“Doubt that,” he said.

“Cheer up or I’ll kick your ass,” I said.

“She will,” Bud said. He and Glen did that clumsy back-slapping hug that men do, and then he took my hand and we walked through the kitchen, turned left, and walked down the hall and out the door.

If I were to write about my one-night honeymoon for the local newspaper’s society pages, it would read something like this:

Mr. and Mrs. James Walter “Bud” Warner left for their trip down the coast to the Stray-Away Inn, where they dined on lobster and steak—Champagne compliments of the house—and watched the stars from the balcony connected to their suite.

Mrs. Warner presented Mr. Warner with the keys to her mother’s 1947 coupe, Petunia, which caused Mr. Warner to gasp and hold his bride of less than 24 hours and swear that he would love her for the rest of his life. Mr. Warner presented Mrs. Warner with a ring containing a tiny emerald in the center of it to replace the one she had tossed overboard during her father’s burial at sea. Mrs. Warner cried and kissed him so hard they both almost passed out. They attempted to consummate their marriage, which was tough because the baby took up most of the room needed to do that in any proper way. They smiled themselves into sleep.

What I wouldn’t write is what happened sometime in the night when I woke up in a sweat, fear spreading its fingers outward from the center of my heart. Something was wrong. Or was it? Bud slept heavy beside me. My hand slipped to my belly. All was calm there. Still, I couldn’t throw off the feeling and I needed to move. I hoisted myself out of bed, slipped through the balcony doors, and looked out over the clear June night.

The seagulls had long gone home and the dark was thick with silence. Night spread a soft glove over the water. The horizons blended so well, I couldn’t see where ocean ended and sky began. My heart slowed down as I sucked in the sea air. My shaking lessened eventually. The baby kicked out and turned.

Oh, how much of my soul did I owe to that sea! What ever would I have done without the water nearby to soothe night terrors? How many times had I walked down to the lobster wharf, or picked my way along the path to the little beach to immerse my feet in the cold salt water for comfort? Just looking out at the never-ending tide untangled the knot of grief and confusion I held inside, smoothed it out with liquid fingers, and floated it downstream.

Bud knew I was afraid I would lose him. Knew I was afraid that, at any given moment, I could lose anything. That's the way things had gone for almost eight years, ever since Carlie's disappearance. What was to stop time and circumstance from taking away this baby or my husband?

I heard the bed creak back inside our honeymoon suite and then Bud was behind me on the balcony. "You're all right," he said, wrapping his arms around me from the back. "We're all right. Junior is doing okay too. Nothing will happen to us."

"How do you know?" I said.

"I don't. But the odds are on our side. Pretty soon, you ain't going to have time to worry about things that probably won't happen."

We swayed in the darkness on the balcony, listening to a school of fish jump until my eyelids drooped and I whispered, "Let's go in." Bud and I lay on our backs in bed, held hands in the dark, and slept.

3

My fear of something awful happening started when I was twelve, during the summer of 1963.

Carlie loved to travel but Daddy didn't like to leave The Point. To satisfy her need to see something new, every year Carlie and her friend Patty, a waitress at the Lobster Shack where they both worked, traveled three hours north up the coast to a motel in Crow's Nest Harbor. That summer, while they were there, Carlie walked into town one day and was never seen anywhere, by anyone, again.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

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