

Exuberance Is Beauty

by

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CHAPTER 1

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The car ride was somber. What else could it be? The world seemed large and I was drifting away from it. As much as I feared and grieved, I wondered how it was that I'd never before considered the fact that I could just leave. I must have seemed pleasingly simple to Jeff Lambert, living my life in Sellwood without a thought of any other way. Jeff. He had once told me about a poet, William Blake, and his songs of innocence and experience. "Ignorant Bliss," he had explained "It's naiveté, a little prison of complacency. Experience is much more painful," he'd told me, "but it's authentic."

It seemed most of the trip was through thick forests. Harry's car bumped along every mile encouraging the worst kind of morning sickness. The four-hour ride was interminable. At least there was Carmen, gossiping and joking. She couldn't have known that it hurt me to hear. I would no longer be in that orbit. I would no longer roll my eyes at Kitty's insinuations about some poor, unsuspecting soul. Even my memories of Nick were boxed up, in the trunk of the car. Despite my will, my thoughts of Jeff Lambert were ever present. I'd shoo them away and they'd return and linger. These were not the dreams of love, that ignorant bliss I had for those months. Instead, these were thoughts of truth, seeping in. His eyes on that last day. "All right then, I'll let you go. I can see you have things to do." No emotion. No apology.

"Here have something to eat darling, it will help your morning sickness." Carmen offered a small cookie. She looked into my eyes. I'd

known her all my life and as I reached over the seat for the cookie I examined her in a new way. I knew all of her, her bright emerald eyes, her red painted nails. I was losing her too. My eyes welled up.

"Oh sweetheart, don't cry. This is only temporary. Tell her she'll be back, Harry."

In his usual manner Harry nodded but kept his eyes on the road.

"Oh Harry, come on that's hardly assurance!"

Harry's eyes met mine in the rearview mirror. "You'll be all right Evie."

I put the cookie on my lap and put my face in my hands and started crying.

"Eve, you're going to get chocolate chips on your dress." I looked up at her, picked up the treat and put it on the seat beside me.

"Harry pull over. I'm going in back with Evie."

Harry pulled the car to the side of the road. When Carmen opened the door, there was a pungent earthy smell. The weather was drizzly and wet. It was cold, as it can be in Portland early summer. Carmen got out of the car and maneuvered herself into the back. She picked up the cookie I'd left beside me.

"Here Harry, put this in the bag." She handed it to him and moved closer to me. She put her arm around me and I placed my head on her shoulder and cried. Harry started up the car and we were on our way again. Carmen remained close beside me. What would I have done without her?

She whispered to me, "This could turn out to be wonderful for you Eve."

I dried my tears, "I don't think so."

"You told me yourself you were a little excited about the baby. Harry's sister is wonderful. I wouldn't say that if it weren't true."

"I believe you."

"I know it seems as though you've given up everything, but really you haven't. You just have to have the baby."

We sat quietly for a time and I moved closer to the window and watched the miles pass. The muted colors made me think of Jeff's paintings. All of those pictures of my garden. Of me. Even the one's he had never displayed, the nudes of me. Naked with impressionistic colors swirling around me. *The Gardener*. He'd sworn he'd never show those to anyone. I remembered his hands on my body and I could even recall what I'd thought back then. In the beginning, I'd told myself, "I deserve this. I deserve a love affair after all I've been through." That selfish thought might have been the opening line to some book. Some story about the wages of deception, selfishness. Once I'd let him in, he moved around my home --my life-- as if he were entitled to whatever he wanted.

As we drove on and passed little country stores here and there, my mind returned to so many of those moments. Just as we neared Bend,

my thoughts got stuck in one point in time. The art museum. The day I told him I was pregnant. How could a man who'd professed so much love for me, be so full of hatred? Carmen had said no, "not hatred. Fear. He's afraid of losing his job, his family." But she was wrong. I didn't believe he ever thought he would lose. He seemed full of revenge over the idea that I would challenge him. All those times, he'd asked me to confess that I belonged to him. To me it was love. Of course, one belongs to someone they love. But, looking back I didn't think that was what he meant. He'd said that because I was his muse and had been a source of inspiration. I had to remain that girl. The one who was so sad. The one who was so vulnerable. But things changed. I became pregnant I was different. I believed he hated me after that. Even that very morning we left for Bend, why would he have passed by my house? Why was he walking down my street? He added further insult to stop and try to small talk. He knew I was leaving. I was preparing my garden for my departure. A futile task, more of a ritual than anything else. I loved my gardens and I thought I could prune the roses, fertilize, tie back the jasmine. Somehow it would all be protected while I was away. I cried as the shears sliced through the hardening bark and then the tender flesh of the vines. I'd looked up to see him there. Why? He had already boldly proclaimed he wanted nothing to do with the baby or me. After all the things he'd said to me, why would he come by to make small talk just hours before I left Sellwood for good? Only a few sentences between us.

"I heard you were moving. I wanted to say goodbye."

"Goodbye." Had I even looked up at him, or just continued to prune as if he were a menacing insect, nothing more?

The familiar softness in his voice "Eve, I want you to be happy. Honestly."

Then, I did look at him; the sun bleaching out his features. To me he was a silhouette of a professor, the brim of his hat shadowing his face so I couldn't make out his expression. "Are *you* happy?" I'd asked. I didn't whisper or defer to him as he might have expected. No. Instead, I'd held his gaze. I was sure it had never crossed his mind that we were equal. That I had a life and a human substance with just as much value as his. I was sure it hadn't occurred to him that I had resources both financially and psychologically. I wasn't what he said I was. Although, if I'd been honest with myself, I'd have admitted that I pretended to be who *he'd* wanted. For before I *really* knew him, his attention was addictive. I had been insatiable. All I'd wanted was him. His tender voice, his promises and adorations flowing into me, infecting my blood. And, his touch. His artist's fingers on my flesh. All of that ended the day in the museum.

Outside my house that last morning in Sellwood, he hadn't answered when I'd asked him if he was happy. Of course, he was happy. Or perhaps, satisfied was the better way to describe it. Content in the

belief that he'd taken all of my life. It wasn't enough that he'd possessed me, that I'd surrendered to him. I'd let myself *belong to him*, but that wasn't enough. I believed he wasn't satisfied until he saw to it that I'd lost everything --my home, all of my friends-- to leave and have his baby. I would spend my life alone while his would be uninterrupted. He'd walk freely through the neighborhood, keep his home and family. After I left, he could close the book on our story; place me up on his shelf. Or, at least that's what I'd believed. What else was there for him to take from me?

Perhaps I should have left it at "Are you happy?" Let him shake his head disdainfully and continue on his stroll. But I couldn't. So I called back to him, "Jeff?"

He'd stopped and in that same conciliatory tone, the one he used when I had begged him to stay with me, to take care of me, "Yes Eve. What is it?" *Darling. My love. The perfect girl.*

That time I wasn't begging. I was cold. I was cutting any remaining tether to him. I was calling him for who he was. It had been a way of diminishing his authority over me. So I delivered the blow, "I was wondering...Have you found a new garden for your sketches?"

His blue eyes flashed a look upon me. I recognized it. Hatred.

When I'd retold it to Carmen's she assumed a look of worry. "Don't be silly darling. He's a coward not a criminal." She was asking me how I could jump to such conclusions.

I awakened to the bumping of the car as it navigated the dirt road to Mary and Frank's house. It seemed as if we were driving deep into the woods, but it was just the slow pace and the starts and stops of the unpaved rocky terrain beneath us. Carmen's arm was still around me. When I woke she pulled away a bit and I sat up.

"I'm glad you got a little rest. Look at how pretty it is here."

"Yes" I smiled. I had to be grateful. If not for Carmen and Harry what would I have done? That Harry would have a sister who would take in a pregnant woman spoke so much about the type of people they were. Carmen had arranged all of it and I'd have done the same for her. We were sisters in everyway except blood.

Harry finally spoke, "they're just up ahead. See the place, Evie?"

I leaned up towards the front and peered out the windshield. "Yes, I see it. It's very pretty." Perhaps pretty wasn't the right word, but I didn't know how to describe it. It was homey but it was hard to take in because a sinking feeling descended upon me. Fear mostly, I also felt relief because the place had a feeling of welcome and it was comforting. The white two-story house sat back on an enormous farm. I could see the cornfields full of bright green stalks. In front of the house were chickens and a good-sized vegetable garden. There were orchards for quite a ways. I began to feel a safety. A place to heal. Perhaps, start a new life. Just as Carmen had said.

"They're good people, Evie." Carmen said. "In fact, I'm a little jealous

that you and Mary will have so much time together. It won't take you two but a minute to become best friends. I love her almost as much as I love you!" Carmen's eyes twinkled and I could tell she was telling the truth about her sister in law. "Of course, Frank is like Harry. Doesn't say much, but when he does its—"

"Brilliant. It's just brilliant," Harry interrupted. Their humorous banter only made me cry, this time not hiding the tears with my face in my hands. I wasn't able to control my grief. They were the only family I had left. Carmen's arms were around me again. We pulled into the long dirt drive way and Harry turned the car off.

"Evie, look at me." Harry said softly.

I pulled away from Carmen and she wiped my tears with her small handkerchief. I looked at Harry.

"Do you understand we love you?"

"Of course," I whispered.

"You have my word that I'm going to protect you if it ever comes to that. I am a brother to you. You are part of our family. I'm not going to let anything happen to you. Neither is Carmen."

"That's right, darling." Carmen said.

The inside of the house was just as warm and inviting as the farm. The rooms were light and a slight breeze caught the lace curtains. The way the fabric swayed cast pretty shadows over the furnishings. The inside was clean, with glistening wood floors and woven rugs. As soon as we walked through the front door Mary ran to Carmen and they embraced, laughing the minute they saw each other. Mary's hair was salty brown. She was a pretty woman, even in her early 50's. She must have been stunning when she was younger. She said Frank was out in the fields working but would join us shortly.

"He's *working*." Mary said rolling her eyes. To me, the farm seemed like it would have been a lot of work, but I would come to know that it was just Mary's way. I'd learn that she was always affectionately teasing Frank, while it was obvious she loved him dearly.

After she'd finished her hello to Carmen, she moved to Harry. She gave him a hug too.

"I missed you Mary," He said.

"Well we're not so far from one another. What's wrong with us? Let's not let a whole year pass again."

I felt insecure and out of place. Why had I decided to come to their home? In my condition? I had some savings, even more than that. I could have gone anywhere, lived on my own. I felt so self-conscious but, not a moment after teasing Harry, Mary walked over to me. She stood in front of me and her gentle green eyes examined me. "You must be Eve. Hello darling. Thank you for trusting us during such an important time in your life. We are so happy you're here."

"Thank you," I said softly. "I feel as if I'm a terrible imposition."

"You do, do you?" she teased. Then she put her arm around my

shoulder and started leading us to the kitchen, "I suppose Carmen didn't tell you I'm in desperate need of a close friend. All I have is Frank and a meddling gaggle of girlfriends—sweet and well intentioned—but no one I can really talk to."

We entered the kitchen and she ushered us around the table and had us sit. She insisted on making us lunch. Sandwiches, canned fruit and lemonade. The kitchen was even more wonderful than what I'd seen of the house so far. It was the homiest place I'd ever been and it brought tears to my eyes. Not tears over losing my own home, the house I'd grown up in. I held back crying because of the lifetime I'd missed because my mother had died so young and left me alone. My father had always traveled after that. Long stays managing timber production. I had been practically raised by Carmen's parents. Despite how much they loved me, I was an outsider in her boisterous clan. I was secretly lonely as a young girl, even surrounded by such a large family. I was sad that my house had never felt like a home, despite how beautiful it was. After Nick and I were married it seemed for a time that the house finally had a life. We had so much joy there. I also had my gardens. Although I had such sweet memories out in the garden with my mother when I was a child, it was after Nick and I married that I became inspired. Everything was fertile and came to life. I learned all about the flowers and plants; I suppose I'd surpassed my mother's efforts. My gardens had been featured so many times in the Bee. I was asked to chair the garden club and of course, that's what led me to my small business designing floral arrangements. Well, honestly it wasn't such a *small* business after a while. I had more orders than I could fill.

My house in Sellwood became a tomb again after Nick was killed in the war. It felt like there was no longer any point in trying to go on as things had been. Nick was the only person other than Carmen who had known me almost my whole life; and Nick was the only one in the world to love me in the way that a family does. When I lost him, it sealed the tomb. I crawled inside after the news that he was killed. I'd hardly kept myself alive.

So, I'd only had a family two brief periods in my life. But, Mary and Frank's house—perhaps it was the pregnancy too—it was so filled with a feeling of home. In those first few moments, I could see that it was a place I would want to stay, not just during my pregnancy. I felt I would always be truly welcome.

Their old farmhouse gave the impression that children had worn the wood floors running in and out of the house over the years. I imagined little ones rushing into the kitchen for ice pops or out to the yard, spraying each other with the water hose. That had not been the case. Carmen had told me Mary and Frank never had children. They always missed it. They just couldn't for some reason. It was a shame because their home and the love of Mary were meant for lots and lots of children.

Mary sat across the table from me. Her green eyes grew serious. She was watching at me. She could see I was about to cry.

"Eve, would you like to rest for a while? Or just us girls could go for a walk through the woods?"

"My room would be wonderful. I'm so tired."

"I'm sure you are. Why don't I take you up, you can rest and I'll bring you some supper later? You can meet Frank tomorrow. He'll be so glad you've arrived." She stood up and smiled. "I'm so glad you're here too."

Mine was a nice sized room on the second floor. The lace curtains were open and the breeze blew through them. I could see the orchards through the window, through wavy panes of glass. The rows of trees seemed to go on for miles. I walked over and stared out. "Do you sell the fruit?"

"From the orchards?" Mary asked.

"Yes. Do you harvest it for sale?" I turned to her.

"Of Course. We're farmers. That's how we make a living. We'll harvest the pears and apples in a couple of months. You'll love it; it's a fun time. And in the spring—"

"I imagine spring's beautiful in the orchards. I had a few fruit trees in my garden in Portland. In the spring it was like snowfall, the delicate petals—"

"That's exactly how I describe it too. Isn't that something? It's so peaceful, I think. To walk through the trees when the petals fall. We'll walk together with the baby. Maybe in the mornings?"

I smiled at her. It was hard to believe in a less than six months I'd be a mother. "That sounds perfect. Thank you. Mary."

"So, will this room do?"

It was then that I looked around and noticed the beautiful furnishings. There was an iron bed and quilts covering the mattress, a wooden armoire on one wall. There was a caned rocking chair. I looked to another corner of the room, and there against the wall was a crib. This time, the tears came.

Mary walked over and said softly, "for the baby."

"Of course. Thank you."

"Eve, you and the baby are welcome here. I never had a daughter and certainly no grandchildren. I don't want to impose, but I want you to know that we want you for as long as you want to stay. You'll give as much to us as we give to you. I can promise you that. Please accept this as your home as long as you want or need."

I ran my hands over the wooden crib. "Its beautiful."

"Frank made it for you."

I dried my eyes. "Thank you for being so kind to me."

Mary gently patted me on the back and started for the door. "I'll see you at supper time." She stopped in the doorway and smiled at me.

"Eve, Harry and Carmen told us what a wonderful person you are. And, even if they hadn't I'd have realized it the minute I met you."

I smiled at her and turned back towards the window.

"In a little while should I bring something to eat up?"

"Yes, if you wouldn't mind. I would appreciate it. I'd like to rest and stay up here for the night."

Mary left and closed the door. I sat on the bed, afraid to move. Afraid to do anything because I knew when I did, that new life would be permanent. My old one would be over. As kind as Mary was, everything I had was gone. It wasn't regret. How could I regret having a child? I was almost twenty-four, a widow. It was likely I wouldn't have another chance if not then. As I sat on the bed not sure how to feel, the baby moved inside of me. He was like a little snake slithering against the inside of my skin. I loved feeling him. I had a sense in that moment I was going to have a boy. Somehow I knew he was going to be my *little Charlie*. As afraid as I was, I was selfish too. The more I came to know this person inside of me, the happier I was that Jeff had rejected me so harshly. That wasn't something I would have said two months before. Back in Sellwood, standing in my room, crying, reaching for him, begging him to forgive me for being jealous of his wife. I no longer recognized the girl who would have done that. I had never been that way before Jeff. I vowed never to be that weak and desperate again. I knew I'd always remember his blue eyes, the way they inspected me as I cried. I'd never forget my own pathetic words. *"Please Jeff, don't leave me. I don't want anyone else to leave me. I love you. Please. Please stay with me."*

He'd always seemed to devour my pleas; they empowered him. On that particular afternoon, he stood buttoning his shirt. "That's not a good idea. Control your emotions."

Carmen always asked me how I could have done what I'd done. She had hated Jeff from the minute she came to my house without notice and found us in the garden. It was one of our first days together. Earlier Jeff had been walking by my house. I had been out in the front yard pruning a large azalea bush. He didn't live far and he stopped to talk when he saw me. He asked me if he could see the gardens he'd heard so much about. At that time he was working on a series of botanical sketches. I had led him back and he asked me questions about the plantings and how I was able to create so many magical rooms, what I loved about being out there so much. In our small Oregon town, he was like a movie star. To me he was so handsome and sophisticated. We talked for a short time. His attention on me was so solitary and intense and I basked in it. At one point we'd stopped and for a moment there wasn't a word between us. It was awkward and I'd felt suddenly conspicuous in my attraction to him. Then he asked if I would do something for him. He said it wouldn't take long. He wanted me to sit on the stone bench under the grape arbor. "Why?" I had asked. I couldn't read his manner. His eyes examined me before he asked, "May I do a quick sketch of you here in your gardens?"

Instead of speaking, I had simply nodded. I walked under the grape arbor and sat.

He was gentle. "Could you remain like that for just a moment?"

The grape canes were still bare. All tangled together they created a canopy that filtered the sunlight. The spring flowers had just come up. Crocuses-daffodils. The scent of narcissus was in the air. It was as if all of my senses were heightened. I remembered feeling both afraid and yearning for his attention. He'd asked me to sit on the bench just for a moment. I remembered feeling naked in the weighted silence he'd created. His eyes had examined me. He was serious, almost stern. At that time we were strangers, having only met a few days before. He watched me as I nervously try to sit still, feeling so self-conscious, waiting to see what he would do next. That was when he had asked me if he could sketch a picture of me. He'd said I was so beautiful and I inspired him. He uttered it just like that. Matter-of-factly. "You're so beautiful Eve. I want to draw you in your garden." Then he asked, "May I do that Eve?" My eyes had met his. I must have looked so frightened. "May I?" He repeated. I nodded and waited. He pulled the small sketchpad and pencil from his pocket, looked at me for a long moment. Then he walked over to me put the paper and the pencil on the bench beside me. He stood above me and looked into my eyes. I'd felt as if he was going to take my hands and raise me up to him. I thought he'd take me in his arms and kiss me. I was breathless and felt I had no will power. But, he didn't take my hands. Instead, he reached slowly towards my hair.

"May I?" he'd whispered.

I didn't speak; I just watched him.

"Eve you have to tell me."

"What is it?"

"You have to tell me what I'm doing is all right."

"Yes."

"Say the words."

"Yes, you can touch me. It's all right."

"May I arrange your hair for my drawing?"

The blood drained out of me. That was the first time I'd become lost in a maze with Jeff Lambert. In that moment I'd felt certain he was making an advance towards me, but afterwards I'd found myself struck with the feeling that I'd imagined an innuendo or even that I'd been the one initiating it. I'd convinced myself that I'd colored the story with my own desire. Maybe it was because throughout his seduction, he'd ask me confess my desire each step along the way. I'd been complicit. I could have said no.

I'd never been the kind of girl to seek out that sort of situation. It was him. I didn't know then, but by the time I was pregnant I realized it was all his fault. He'd been doing it on purpose. That day in the garden with his hands carefully placing my hair around my shoulders, softly

grazing my neck. Standing above me, then backing away and looking serious. Examining me as if I were an object that he was slowly taking as his own. When he'd finished sketching that day, he was abrupt, not unkind just unfamiliar again. It had caused me such unease. I couldn't sleep most nights for the month between the day in the garden and when he returned. By then the next time I saw him, I had already surrendered myself to him. When he pulled away, I pleaded with him to stay.

Carmen had always said he could tell how grief-stricken and sad I was back then. She said everyone could see it. I knew it was true. I had hardly been myself. Just a ghost that year after Nick died. Jeff must have recognized it too. Unlike Carmen, I didn't care why a married man would seduce a woman in such a lonely and desperate state. The result was what I needed at the time. He'd brought me back to life. Before Jeff, I had left the house only a few times following Nick's death. I was dying too.

Just before I'd met him, for whatever reason, I had forced myself back to work, designing floral arrangements. He had commissioned me to arrange the flowers for his mother's funeral. We'd met at the funeral home, to talk about it. Just as everyone said, Jeff Lambert was breathtaking. He was tall and handsome. Carmen had once commented that he looked like Gary Cooper. He did. It wasn't just his appearance; his *way* was so powerful. From the start, he used the words I wanted to hear. I transformed myself into the woman he wanted me to be. I thought I was so happy and I kept the knowledge of his wife and child out of my mind. I left them marooned somewhere else. He and I were on an island together, meeting at my house, in my garden. From the start he treated me as if I had always been his lover. No, as if I was *meant* to be his lover. He wasn't afraid to touch me. Carmen couldn't understand, but in the beginning I had been so lonely and having this man's attention brought me back. I can't say it was back to myself. I suppose I became someone entirely different.

Moving into Mary and Frank's, that was because of Jeff too. My old life was destroyed. Starting over, as a new person was something I'd never had the opportunity to do before. As I grew accustomed to my new life in Bend, a secret began forming. I didn't know it until the baby, but I'd always wanted to be free of all of my past. The memories, the house, the "Evie" everyone knew. I had a path carved out for me. I could move in only one direction. I had been on it since I was a girl. I was the smart child, the virtuous teenager. I was obedient and did everything as I was supposed to. While Carmen would sneak off and smoke cigarettes, drink beer with Harry, I'd sit quietly next to Nick, holding hands. My cashmere sweater unruffled, my pearl necklace never disturbed. It wasn't that things went wrong with Nick. I would have married him all over again if I could have. Nick and I were real friends and lovers. He cherished me, but still we were blindly following

the same path as everyone else in our little circle of friends.

After he was killed I could no longer be what everyone expected of me; the strong, pious widow, returning to life with a patriotic fervor. I was dead. The war had killed me too. Living in that house, in Sellwood, as an impostor was torture. I resented the other women and grew to loath the provincial values. But what woman could admit that? Who would I have told that to? It wasn't my place to question the life that was handed to me. For all intents and purposes, the beautiful home, the inheritance, my standing in the community -- I should have been grateful not dissatisfied. I should have gotten dressed up, gone to parties, and married some old pal of Nicks. I should have started the whole thing over and gotten myself back on the right track. A housewife. A gardener. A school volunteer. It was true, I didn't know it but deep inside, I'd wanted to escape for some time but I was too afraid to even acknowledge it to myself. Really, I hadn't ever known that there was a way out. Jeff Lambert was a train going towards a brick wall. I could destroy that life by having an affair with him. I hadn't been thinking that, of course. I hadn't thought that I was wagering everything; but, perhaps, that's why a part of me had felt so relieved when I arrived at Mary and Frank's. For as much as Carmen said we'd rent my house in Sellwood to boarders and then I'd move back when the baby was old enough, I knew in my heart it was just a matter of time before I returned not to move back but to sell it to another family. They could pick the story up where I'd left off. A husband, wife and rambunctious children. The woman could tend the garden, serve lemonade and cookies. She could watch her little ones make mud pies. That was not going to be my life anymore.

I took a deep breath and let it out slowly. I ran his name over and over in my mind. My child's father. This baby's father. I was so glad he'd left us to ourselves. I was glad we escaped all of it. I told myself not to feel guilty about him. At one time I really believed we loved each other. He was the one who'd made me move forward in my life. If not for Jeff's rejection, I'd never have done anything so important all on my own. The more things changed, the more I knew that I didn't want his help.

CHAPTER 2

It wasn't even a month in Bend and already I felt as if my new life would be a good thing for me. My belly was growing large and there was no fear in letting it show; or in doing the necessary and silly things a woman does when she is going to have a baby. Mary and I were obsessed with making little clothes. I told her my strong sense that it was going to be a boy. She completely believed it too, so we spent our

free time designing and making tiny outfits, sewing blankets, and diapers. We planned out the baby's wardrobe for his first six months. We took to calling him *Little Charlie*. We also made maternity dresses for me. I felt so happy. I'd never expected to find a place where I would be as welcome as any respectable woman. Of course, Mary and Frank didn't know the truth. I didn't think I could ever tell Mary that Charlie was illegitimate, the product of an affair with a married man. In fact, I stopped letting myself believe it too. Instead, I took to the fiction. I just switched the timeframe. My husband had died in the war. That part was true as was his cause of death, an infection from a wound. He had died in 1943, but I started to convince myself it was two years later, in 1945. Mary introduced me to everyone in town and when her friends would come over to drink lemonade and gossip, I'd sit with them on her brocade couch. I'd watch her eyes as she listened to this or that about one of the ladies in town whom this group didn't particularly like. Most of the out of favor were wealthy wives of men in the timber industry, women who had recently moved to Bend and not grown up there. It wasn't as if Mary had been raised in Bend. Frank had, but Mary was so much a part of everything that it didn't matter. Besides, she was a farmer's wife, which gave her legitimacy with the other women who resided in the area. They all knew my baby was a soldier's baby and they'd shower me with attention. They would take my wedding band and hang it over my belly tied to a piece of fishing line. They'd all stand around me as if I were a thanksgiving turkey they were dressing. Then they'd watch as the ring spun in this direction or that. One would announce their prediction about the baby's sex. "A boy. Definitely."

"No, Lenore, you have it backwards, if it spins right it's a *girl*."

Then Mary would interrupt them both. "Eve and I both know it's a boy. It's settled. That baby in there is little Charlie."

"Oh you can't know that." Susan said waving her hand in the air.

"It'd better be. We've made him an entire layette. Besides just look at her hair, so glossy and healthy. It's a boy."

"That's an old wives tale." Then we'd all start laughing because everyone's predictions were based on wives tales.

I had all but forgotten Jeff Lambert. He didn't matter any more. Everything that had happened had led me to my new life. A part of me feared it would end; everything else I'd loved had been taken from me and with each loss more of me died. But, then with a baby growing inside of me --a baby that was mine-- I felt renewed. My own child couldn't be taken from me. Perhaps the larger imperative in my life had caused the memories of Jeff to fade. Of course, I still sometimes thought of the strongest impressions: desiring him, falling under his seduction. I remembered his power over me, his affection then sudden coldness. In leaving I had taken my life back, hadn't I? I'd stopped giving in to him. I'd left with dignity. I belonged in Bend.

Mary and I had grown so close. I had wanted so many times to confide in Mary, to tell her the truth. I tried.

One time we were alone together in the kitchen. "What is it, Eve? What are you thinking?" She had a softness in her voice that I grew to love. Pie dough and flower all over the farm table. Mary was an impeccable housekeeper but a terribly messy cook. I wiped my hands on my apron and sat down on the wooden chair. I mustered the courage. She took a seat on the chair next to me.

"You can tell me anything."

"I want to, but I'm afraid to."

She took my hand in hers. Her skin was soft and warm. I took in a breath and started. "I feel as if I'm a terrible person."

"How on earth can you say that?"

"I feel as if I've done something wrong."

"Why? Because you don't have a husband? Eve it's an honor to have your beloved's baby. Don't you know that? People think you are...I don't know the words. You are strong and brave and you're going to be such a loving mother. This way, a part of Nick will always be with you."

I wanted to interrupt her or respond with the truth but I couldn't. I didn't want to lose that status. With her. With everyone. She would tell me how much people liked me, how much she loved me; but it didn't matter. What I'd done was so wrong and shameful.

One day I was in my room, folding the baby's clothes and arranging his dresser when there was a soft knock on the door.

"May I come in Eve?" It was Mary.

"Of course," I walked to the door and opened it.

"The mail just came. There's something from Carmen. And, you have another letter too. Its from a man, addressed from the art museum in Portland."

She waited, not judging me, but curious. I felt as if I'd been caught. That would have been the moment to confess the truth to her. Instead, the lies fell out of my mouth.

"Oh yes. This man. He was thinking of buying the house. He's an artist, new in town. He knew my place in Sellwood was a boarding house temporarily. He'd asked me several times before I left. I just couldn't bear to let it go just yet."

"Of course not. You grew up there. What's the rush anyway? Perhaps you'll want to move back sometime. There's no hurry to sell."

I grew flush as she spoke. All of it seemed like such an obvious deception in that moment. Hearing her say that it was my house, that I'd grown up there. If the story I'd told her about my husband's early death was true, why then wouldn't I have just stayed in my little town? Why wouldn't I have let Carmen and Harry take care of the baby and me?

"Are you all right darling?"

I wanted so desperately in that moment to tell her. Honestly I did.

And, I should have.

"I'm just sad thinking about it."

"Here," she said handing me Carmen's letter and retaining Jeff's. "Let's just give Mr. Lambert's letter to Frank and he can handle this business for you."

"No!" I blurted. I had no idea what the letter said, but I knew it would be intimate. I was afraid of what he wanted from me. I felt myself grow queasy. Frank was a strong and virtuous man. He was kind, but I knew he wouldn't accept what I had done. I knew he would not want me to stay if he knew the real story. He wasn't like Mary—or at least I didn't think he was.

Mary looked down at the floor. "I'm sorry. That wasn't my place." She held out the letter. Finally, it was in my hand.

"No. You're probably right. I will let Frank help me. I'm not going to sell the house right now. I'll hold on to this. Mr. Lambert knows how I feel. I'll be down shortly. I just want to finish up putting little Charlie's things away."

"Good. Come down. The girls are coming over for bridge. They will insist on spending time with you and torturing you with their baby games. Lenore says she and the girls made something for you and little Charlie."

When Mary left, I closed the door. The room grew still. I looked out the window at the orchards; a misty fog had descended. It was a common occurrence, but to me the darkness was a shadow on my life. It wasn't going to go away. I placed the letter on the pillow and sat down. Instead of acknowledging it was there in front of me, I let my eyes trace the lines and patterns in the quilt. Once I caught sight of it again, it sent a shock through me. Even the curves of his script. I knew his signature so well. He had signed all of his paintings of me and my garden. The impressionistic sketches of the flowers. After we'd made love the first time, he returned the next day with a small painting of a single red rose. At the bottom of the canvas, in his masculine and neat script he'd written, J. Lambert, 1944.

I picked the letter up and it was a trap, a grenade that would go off in this new life. I tried to calm myself. I said it was probably nothing. I was having his baby. Perhaps, he wanted to apologize for being so cruel. Perhaps he wanted to continue his sketches in my garden and needed permission to visit in my absence. No. That wouldn't have been it. Carmen had sent me a copy of the Bee. I had seen pictures of his recent show at the museum. I'd read the article. He was on to something else altogether. Trains, train houses, tracks, shadows of people standing on the platforms. Waiting. Impressionistic paintings, detailed sketches. His fascination with my garden, with me, was over.

I carefully opened the envelope and removed the letter. It was folded neatly and even on the reverse side of the paper, where the ink had bled through in places, I recognized his familiar penmanship. My heart

sank deeper and deeper.

Darling Eve,

I could not anticipate how much I'd miss you. In just a month I find I can't sleep at night, and on the rare occasion I do, I dream of you. I wake remembering your skin, I remember making love to you, Mostly, I remember your beautiful face. Here we are now, in this difficult predicament, but it's our predicament isn't it? This is between with us. With regard to you, I've never been able to reign myself in—I find I do things I wouldn't ordinarily do. It's as if I'm intoxicated, I have no inhibition when it comes to my feelings for you. Eve, I've considered coming to see you many times. I have once or twice even gotten into the car, started driving. Of course as soon as I get near the courage, I realize your circumstances. The implications for you. But, Eve, if I were to come to you, would you forgive me?

I need the opportunity to speak with you alone. Please agree to meet me. There's a place between us. Eugene. It's beautiful. There's a university and homes that would be well suited to us, to you and the baby. There's a charming main road with a theater and a hotel. I'd like to see you soon. Meet me in Eugene. You could stay the night. That's my desire Eve. Please write me and tell me when you'll see me. If not Eugene, I'll meet you there in Bend whenever you ask.

*Yours,
Jeff*

A second page was included. A sketch on coarser paper. I'd never seen it before but it was a drawing of me, dated Fall 1945. In the picture I am lying in bed, the sheet just over my breasts. I could make out the outline of my nude body. My hair was falling over my shoulders. The pencil lines were intricate and detailed. I touched the page, ran my finger over his signature at the bottom, J. Lambert. His sketches were usually hurried; preparation for later prints or paintings. But, this one was so beautiful, he must have spent hours on it. I noticed he'd captured the small floral print of the wallpaper in my bedroom, the tiny roses in vertical rows. Seeing the likeness of my prior home --even more than seeing the drawing of myself as I was then, so in love with Jeff—caused me to mourn for what I'd left behind. It caused a tearing inside of me. Instinctively I placed my hand on my stomach and Charlie was kicking. I worried he could feel my anguish. All of the past rising to the surface. Suddenly there was fear where none had been. After a moment I allowed myself to examine the drawing again. I was beautiful when I was with Jeff. He had made me beautiful. I hardly recognized that girl. I didn't remember posing for that drawing but I did remember other times lying completely still as he sketched me. Sometimes in the morning after we'd made love or in

the dim candle light after I'd fixed him dinner. He would simply decide that he had to draw me that very moment. Just how I was. It was the same when he wanted to make love to me. There had been nothing I wanted more than his attention. The drawing he'd enclosed in the letter reminded me of the feeling I'd had, remaining motionless while his eyes examined me, while he crafted the woman he wanted. He'd come near me and adjust the sheet or my hair, almost touching me but instead fanning my desire. Looking at the picture I recalled not only that terrible yearning for him but also my restraint, waiting all those hours while he watched and sketched. Sometimes he'd stop deep in contemplation, just looking at me but saying nothing. One time I'd fallen asleep and I woke to him above me, his lips on my neck. He was whispering against my skin "You're mine. Eve, you're mine."

I stood and walked over to the armoire. I placed the letter in the pocket of a heavy wool coat. No one would bother with the coat, I wouldn't be needing it for months. There was also no danger of the letter getting mixed up with my other things. No one would know it was there. I folded it and tucked it inside so it was completely hidden in the deep wool pocket. I was about to close the cabinet when I noticed myself in the mirror on the inside of the mahogany door. My face looked older. I was different. I turned to the side and my stomach was large. Susan and the other girls had recently declared I was going to have twins. "What then, Mary? You would be doubly wrong." At that moment, seeing my reflection, I wanted to keep what happened with Jeff to myself all the more. I didn't want him. I didn't care what he'd written or the feelings those words stirred inside of me. I knew it was a sweet poison. The letter was so full of his seduction. His way of pulling me under, keeping me there until just before I drowned. I felt it. And, the drawing? It was his way of saying I was with him, in his thoughts, that he'd sketched it since we've been apart. It was not one of the pictures I'd posed for. It was *his* Eve, the one who said she belonged to him; it wasn't me.

As I caught the reflection of my own eyes in the mirror a chill ran through me. I wondered about all of those drawings of me, the ones just after we'd made love. There were so many. What would it mean if he ever showed them to anyone? Would it reveal what happened? Of course it would. A nausea overtook me. I held back the sickness and sat on the bed for a moment. When I felt all right again, I returned to the mirror. I pinched my cheeks until they were rosy. I straightened my hair and my dress. I would try to join the ladies before their bridge game. I closed the armoire and glanced out the window. The sun had broken through the clouds and a dramatic light shined over the orchards and the vineyard beyond. It felt glorious. I watched for a moment, trying to decipher a meaning for my future. I wasn't meant to spend my life with Jeff Lambert. Certainly, he would understand. After all, he was married. He had a baby of his own. Charlie was mine.

CHAPTER 3

The baby was so close. I started sleeping later and later. Less than a month left to go; my mind and body felt so ready. Some nights I willed him to come. I concentrated and rubbed my belly. Tried to coax him out. The excitement was building. I wanted to hold him in my arms. I felt that once he was born, my life in Bend would be secured. It had been two months since the letter from Jeff Lambert. It remained in my winter coat pocket in the armoire. I hadn't looked at it since the day it came. At first I was afraid that because I never wrote back he would be angry with me and do something vengeful. I didn't know what he could do from Portland, but I knew he could be cold and mean. As time wore on I realized that things were different. What could he do if I didn't write him back? I wasn't living in a house in Sellwood, having an affair with a married man. The worst thing that could have happened had already happened.

One day another letter from Jeff arrived. That day was like the others late in the pregnancy. I felt as if I hadn't slept at all, but I made myself get out of bed and get ready for the day. That morning I opened the armoire and removed a slip and one of the adorable maternity outfits Mary and I had made back when we couldn't have imagined I would be so big. I pulled the slip over my belly and powered my chest and neck. It was so warm those last days of my pregnancy. I pulled the skirt on and then the smock. The smock had barely any give. The skirt fastened with ties so adjusted to my size. Even pregnant, it was a smart looking outfit. Navy blue with tiny flower print, a white color and a red bow. It was simple but made me feel pretty and somehow suggested that at one time I'd had a girlish figure. Charlie was so big by then that instead of little kicks to my ribs, he seemed to fill up my belly, tightly secure in there. My skin around my stomach was like an inflated balloon. I could feel a little part of his foot just under my rib causing some pressure but barely moving. I knew that little round lump was his heel. I would rub it gently throughout the day. I was sure he was big enough to be born, but Mary's friend Lenore who had four children told me that the last month would take forever. "You feel ready, as if it will happen any moment. Then it takes weeks before labor starts." I had such a feeling of love and contentment when I ran my hand over my stomach. It was all I could do to wait for him to arrive. I picked up the hairbrush and bobby pins and started putting my hair up.

I turned when I heard a gentle rap on the door. The door opened slowly, it was Mary. "I thought you were sleeping. I just brought your mail. I'll leave it up here. You can take your time getting ready. No need to rush." She placed the letters on the dresser.

"Mail? From Carmen?"

"Yes. And, there's another letter from that man who wants to buy your house."

"Jeff Lambert?"

"Yes, that's what it says. Portland Museum of Art."

"He's a professor there. An artist. He teaches."

"Well, here it is." Mary started out the door. She lingered for a moment. "Do you want Frank to help you with your business affairs? Like we talked about? When you decide to sell the house in Portland. If you end up staying here in Bend? There's a lot he can do to help you Eve. He's a very good businessman. He's done a lot of work with the bank for the farm."

I was paralyzed. As much as I didn't want to let on that there was anything other than a letter from a persistent buyer, I felt almost as if I couldn't speak. I had to muster words to keep Mary from worrying or suspecting something else was going on.

"I do, Mary. When I decide to sell, I will have Frank contact Mr. Lambert."

She nodded. "I keep meaning to tell Frank about his letters and the man's interest in the house. I was going to ask Carmen if she knows him. Maybe she can talk to him for you when you decide."

"Mary," I tried to sound earnest. "Would it be all right if we didn't just yet, Can we just let the letters sit, not bother Frank or Carmen until Charlie gets here? The baby is all I want to think about. The house will be there. You haven't seen it, but its very lovely. There'll be no problem selling it. When I do, I'll need Frank's help. And Carmen's. I so much appreciate—"

"All right darling. I'm getting ahead of myself. I suppose I want you to stay here. Get you settled here. But, I know it's not that easy. You're right. Let's get Charlie here safe and sound. Should I bring you some coffee or orange juice?"

"I'll come down. I'll finish getting dressed then I'll be down."

"Oh good, some of the girls will be over for tea. Come sit with us for a while."

"I will. It'll be fun."

Mary left the room, closing the door quietly behind her. When I heard the metal click I walked over to oak dresser and picked up his letter. I moved to the bed and sat down. All I felt was anger at his arrogance. What if I hadn't been able to make up a story about him to explain the letter? What if Frank had seen it? What if he or Mary had opened it? I felt as if Jeff was controlling my life again, or trying to—even from so far away. The letters were a reminder that he once had so much power and that again mine was slipping. I feared I would lose everything all over again. I began crying. I turned and sobbed into the pillow, drowning the sounds but feeling a weighted pain consuming me. After a short time of imagining the worst possible fate --having to live as Jeff's mistress, endure a life of shame-- I began to panic. I thought of

packing my things and taking the train somewhere and settling there, telling my lies in complete anonymity. Suddenly, something descended on me, woke me up from my despair. Both fear and clarity causing a piercing calm. Were my emotions overtaking me? I sobered quickly, recognizing a certain danger in expressing such strong feelings. It must have been the pregnancy. I realized I needed to remain calm and in control of my emotions. I wished Carmen had been there to remind me that Jeff really didn't have any control over me. He was a bully. He'd never really had power, it was me. I was just too afraid to say no to him. It was true that I'd done something very wrong in having an affair and carrying on as if nothing had been at stake. I had been like a girl in the movies, behaving as if I lacked morals or integrity. I didn't know why I'd done it, but all of that ended with little Charlie. Jeff was not in a privileged position. He wasn't my husband or a part of my close circle. He was nothing to me. In truth, I'd grown to find him revolting.

I was already exhausted and couldn't imagine moving through the whole day. I didn't know how I'd muster the energy. After I composed myself, I opened the envelope. Inside was his letter. A photograph fell onto the quilt as I removed the stationary. I didn't want to look at the photograph just then. Not until I'd read what he'd written. I was afraid of everything. The letter. The photograph.

Eve,

You've surprised me. I've waited so many days for a response from you, but no letter ever arrived. Please write me so I know how you are. Eve, I don't want anything except to know that you've forgiven me. Although we have been lovers, we have never been correspondents. I look forward to reading your thoughts on paper. It would mean so much to me, becoming intimate with your handwriting, coming to know the lines, and loops and curves of your cursive. I want to see you through your words and how you compose your thoughts to me. Then, I will come to recognize you in your writing. I'm selfish. I want words you choose when you write to me. Ones meant only for me. I want to know what secrets you'll tell me.

As you know I'm not a believer in fate or luck but last night, I stayed awake for a long time, almost till morning. I was thinking about you and, just as if I'd summoned them, the next day I found photographs of you. I opened my desk drawer to retrieve my stationary and write you this letter, and there under my papers were the pictures of us at the beach last summer. I put one in my wallet and I keep it with me. You wouldn't believe me if I told you how often I look at it. It was one I took of you by the shore. Do you remember our weekend together? You were so lovely, Eve. You always take my breath away. I'm enclosing one of the photographs. One of the two of us outside the crab shack. Remember we asked that man at the restaurant to snap a shot with my camera? I always thought we looked like film stars, in that picture. The two of

us in front of the car with the building just behind us and beyond that the sea. Well, perhaps it's only you that resembles a film star. You were so lovely in your swimsuit, the scarf in your hair and the sunglasses I bought you at the beach shop.

Eve, I want you to take the train and meet me in Eugene. I've found a hotel for you to stay. I'll register you as your brother and I will purchase a second room for myself. I realize that you may not be well enough to travel, immediately. We should wait until the baby is a little older, but not too long. I'd like to take you on a tour of the town. I've traveled up there several times and driven through neighborhoods and looked at houses. It would be perfect. That way I can make sure you are taken care of. In the meantime, write me about you and your life in Bend. Please don't forget to tell me when you can make the trip. Once the child is old enough come and let me look at you. Let me see you as the mother of my child. I know that my coming to Bend would be full of complications, so I won't bother suggesting it.

Eve, please write something. Don't ignore my letters.

I love you.

Jeff

I rose numbly and folded the letter. I was about to place it in the old wool coat along with the first one, but instead, I put it along with the photograph in my skirt pocket. I retrieved a straight pin and secured the pocket so they wouldn't fall out. I knew I'd need to reread the letter; that there would be moments throughout the day when a panic would come over me. Or, I would question what I remembered he'd written.

I needed to go for a walk, maybe through the orchards or out to the woods. I wanted to contemplate this new development. I straightened the quilts on the bed and puffed the pillows. I tidied the room. I realized I was too tired and frightened to go sit with the ladies. I moved to the window seat and stared out over the orchards. I could see that the trees were full of apples. They'd be ripe and ready to harvest in a month or so. There was a man down below; he was raking around the trees, cleaning up the orchard. He had a wheelbarrow into which he was transferring leaves, sticks and early fallen fruit. As he raked, little parallel lines and grooves were formed. The lines followed the path of the trees and curved and looped around, a short distance between each curve the tracks were straight.

Coming to know the lines, and loops and curves of your cursive.

I returned to myself when I heard the sound of the ladies gossiping downstairs in the parlor. I didn't feel much like putting on my charade. I didn't want to be the heroine, the war widow with a hero soldier's baby. Doing my part for the country. No matter how they felt about me, I was filled with shame. My lies made it worse. Jeff's letter had cast a terrible curse over my life. All I could hope was that it would fade.

Perhaps he'd find another woman. All I wished was that I would forget about him and he'd leave me be, but after the second letter I recognized he wouldn't. His letters gave no indication that he would stop until he had me. What that meant, I didn't know. I opened the door and started down the stairs, I could hear Lenore and Susan going on about a lady named Mrs. Phillips.

"She really has some nerve! I wasn't three feet away with her going on about the bridge group!"

"It couldn't possibly surprise you—her rudeness."

"Well, she wasn't outright rude—"

"She wouldn't be, now would she? No, there's always a smile in her face and an insult in her eye. I 'v seen..."

I slipped on to the back screen porch. August was hot in Bend. It may have been the baby that made it especially unbearable. My heaviness, the heat. My back hurt so. The thought that a solid month of pregnancy remained made the whole thing seem unbearable at times. I kept my hand on the top of the pocket, feeling the stiff paper of the letter and photograph. I strolled out through the orchards, under the shady canopy of leaves and growing fruit. The worker was no longer raking. I walked over the loops and lines, parallel tracks in the earth. My mind was bubbling with a response to his letter. Not a word of his seduction stirred me. He wrote as if I were still in love with him. As if it would be a natural secret correspondence, just as our affair had been. As if I was still so thirsty for his slightest attention, that his deluge of words would fill my empty, lonely life. As if each of these letters would satiate me for a while, until finally I would run back to him. How could he know I'd changed and I wasn't that person any more? How would he ever understand how a woman is transformed when she is about to have a child? All of the months conceiving, not just a new life for my baby, but also a new role for myself. I didn't think he would even like this new person I'd become. I knew I didn't like him any more. I feared if I wrote anything to him at all then it would cause him to act. But, in not responding, it left me with a sickening fear that he may just show up in Bend. If he were to do that, I knew what Frank's reaction would be. I could imagine the two men talking calmly and with each word, my status lowering and lowering until I was nothing but a disgrace. I found myself panicking again. I stood under one of the large trees and looked up at the sky through the branches. As much as fear ripped into me, a maternal side was growing stronger. It was hopeful. It came in these unexpected dreams. Like looking up into the blue patches of sky through sturdy branches, I saw my son in the future. A little handsome face staring down at me. I could feel my heart rise and fall "*be careful darling.*" I imagined myself wanting to protect him, as all mothers want to protect their little sons from all any harm that could come to them.

I walked a bit further and found a spot under a large apple tree, one of the last in the orchard. An expansive field opened up before me.

Despite my aches and pains, walking through the orchards and gardens seemed to return me to my life there in Bend, at least a little bit. I managed to lower my heavy body to the ground and sit in the shade of the tree. I took off my shoes and let my swollen feet rest on the cool ground. Although I hadn't looked at the photograph, I couldn't get Jeff's description of that day on the beach out of my thoughts. I removed the pin and retrieved the picture from my pocket. I loathed myself when I looked at it.. I hated to think I had been the kind of girl to behave in that way. Looking back on the girl that I was, I felt as if I were dancing on someone's grave. Wasn't that what anyone else would see too? There I was with a married man, away for a weekend. Taking a picture in my swimsuit. He said I looked like a film star. That wasn't how I looked. I had the arrogant look of a woman who was sleeping with someone else's husband. It was plain as day. Jeff was the glamorous one, truly looking like a film star, celebrating his victory. I continued to stare at the photograph. If I had been a child, I might have convinced myself to rip it to pieces, bury the letter and the picture in the woods. Once it was out of my hands, hidden, I would have been able to tell myself, that it didn't exist. I would no longer be guilty of anything. There would be no Jeff. If I somehow destroyed the picture, then none of it would have ever happened. I ran my finger over the image. Then, I returned it to my skirt, fastened the pocket with again with the pin. Of course, the grown up me knew there were more letters, more pictures; more drawings. I couldn't destroy the evidence against me.

I looked up again at the forest and then at the little field just in front of me. This was the part of the farm Mary had asked if I wanted, in order to create my own garden, just like I'd had in Sellwood. This would be the only place on their property dedicated to flowers and garden rooms. The rest was farmland, orchards and a dairy farm. She had taken me to this spot on the edge of the forest, just past the orchards. It was sunny with a little slope. In truth, the plot itself was larger than my gardens in Sellwood. Mary and I had come out here with twine and little stakes. We sectioned off the part of the farm that would be mine to design and take care of.

I looked over the empty earth. It was the potential my life held. It was a beginning. It would be the start of a new existence. Realizing that, I came back to myself. I even found I had energy. I stood and walked around the perimeter marked by twine. I dragged one foot along the dry ground to mark how I might organize the outdoor rooms. I took steps to count my way from each corner to the center. I marked a large circle at the very middle of the space. Here I would place a sturdy round pergola, big enough to cover a table and chairs. Frank had told me he would build it when I was ready.

I'd planned to grow wisteria over the top of the pergola and lay a brick patio underneath. The circle of brick under the pergola would

create a lovely, cool space to sit and think. "*Contemplate life*" as my father used to say. That was to be the center of the flower gardens. I would create four rooms around the area. Little paths would lead to each. I had planned to use shrubs and topiaries in one section. I'd plant wildflowers in the area directly in front of the forest so that when you looked out towards the trees from the patio, it would be preceded by a natural field of poppies, daisies' brown-eyed susans and lupine. Pretty wildflowers moving with the wind. Of course I would create a rose garden, but this area would be farther back, through a curved path of hostas and ferns. I'd plant larger shrubs and trees to shade the path to the roses. Frank said he'd build a small picket fence to surround my rose garden. Once inside, it would be in rows of three semi circles, in the center a stone bench with lattice. Climbing roses. The fourth garden, the smallest, would be reserved for cutting flowers and shrubs. Bulbs: Daffodils, crocus, gladiolas, iris. Shrubs too: hydrangea, lilac, forsythia. It would be wonderful to have the baby near me in a bassinet. While he slept I could tend to the garden. It would be a wonderland for him once he was old enough to dig up worms and play in the mud. The little trees I'd plant would be tall enough to provide shade by the time he got to that age.

There was only so much I could do in my condition but, as I always did, I'd brought a small pad and colored pencils with me on my walk. I stood for a moment and added notes to my sketched out plans for the garden. The colors, the rooms and even the most minute details. Slate paths or moss growing over rocks in the shade were coming into focus. Maybe even before Charlie was born, I'd have the whole thing conceived.

I felt the comforting feeling return as I started back towards the apple orchard. I loved the order of the orchards, all the trees evenly spaced in long shaded rows. I would have loved to run around there as a child. Even far from ripe, the apple trees had a sweet scent. Even in the heat, it was pleasant. I stopped and looked back towards the dry, empty field that would someday be my sanctuary. Once I moved to a home of my own, the garden would be my gift to Mary and Frank for their kindness.

I stood for a moment and looked around to see how the views might inform my garden design. The forest was in one direction, and directly behind the lot. The house was just past the orchards. The barn, the farm and the animals were not visible from where I stood. It was so quiet and private, far enough from the house that someone would have to come looking for me to find me. They knew I'd be here if they needed me and couldn't find me in the house. Often, after an hour or so out there, I'd hear Frank's tractor coming up the dirt throughway. He'll pull around the orchards and avoid the thin path between trees. For a time, he'd allow me to sit beside him on the large seat and taxi me back. As my pregnancy wore on, my size prohibited it. Instead, I'd

see him or Mary, small figures growing larger as they made their way to find me.

Even before I made it back to the house, Jeff's letter began haunting me again. I hated how he wrote to me as if we were still lovers. I didn't like how he forced me into intimacy just by reading his words. And, maybe worse was his suggestion that Eugene would be well suited to *our* family. It scared me. Why would I ever move to Eugene? I wondered if he believed I was still as vulnerable or gullible as I had been. I was sure that was it. Why wouldn't he think that? The first time he'd met me I was in a lesser predicament than being alone and pregnant with my reputation always in jeopardy. Back then I was sad and weak. I was his perfect prey and things weren't nearly as desperate as they had become. He must have thought I was even more vulnerable. He didn't know how strong I'd become.

I pulled my hair up and let it fall back down over my shoulders. I stood frozen in one place and I looked up at the sky. I wanted the large, dramatic clouds to move more swiftly. I wanted time to pass. I wanted life to go where it was taking me. Just get there. The afternoon was cooling off and a breeze had picked up. It felt lovely. I let my mind wander back to Jeff's letter. Just as fickle as the clouds I began to wonder if I did in fact, deep down love him. If for some reason things turned bad in Bend with Mary and Frank, I wondered whether I could I live with him in Eugene? His words always had a hypnotic quality. His wanting to know my penmanship seemed so intimate to me. A part of me wanted to give that to him. Something I would have never equated with love or intimacy. But, I realized that we do grow intimate with the way our lover speaks or how they write. I would still be able to recognize Nick's cursive if I were to come across an old letter. I'd recognize my mother's too. Of course Carmen's. These thoughts of Jeff and the possibility of love were just an ember and I knew they would go out before ever catching fire. I knew that if I believed Jeff, if I were to follow him to Eugene and we were to find a little house, for a time I'd believe he'd marry me. We'd be an enviable family from the outside. Then, the affair wouldn't matter. Charlie wouldn't be illegitimate. Or no one would know that he was. My mind entertained the fantasy, playing it out. Even imagining the small home. Maybe I wouldn't even have a garden. Perhaps I could have been happy just being a housewife. We'd have more children. As I started to drift towards Jeff, the image of the day at the museum interrupted me. That day drew the line between Jeff's words and the truth. He'd just made love to me in his studio. Which one of his seductions had he used that day?

"I don't know where I end and you begin."

"You must be akin to what inspired Shakespeare's sonnets."

"I'm crazy about you. Don't drive me crazy, Eve."

Afterwards, running his fingers through my hair, adjusting it around

my face. The way he liked it. Kissing my forehead. "When I first met you," he had whispered, "You looked so much like a girl. Now you are somehow a woman. It's just wonderful."

But not five minutes later, when I told him about the baby. He'd stood up, buttoned his shirt. When he turned to me, his eyes were steely. "What am I supposed to say to you, Eve? How did you let this happen?" Stupidly, I had apologized, and then I'd begged him. But, when he said he already had a family. I flew into a rage. I stormed out. Weeks passed and he never returned any of my calls.

That decided it. Sobered me up. I was angry again. I knew he would leave me in Eugene. Come and go as he wished. I knew I would be locked up, away from any kind of life. Of course, I would tell people that he was my husband and he traveled for business. But another lie? Another false life? As much as I looked forward to each day in Bend, to this new life, it was so lonely pretending to be someone more virtuous and to hold a secret that could destroy everything in an instant. And being alone in my secret made it unbearable.

As I walked closer to the house, I could see the ladies leaving. They were still laughing and chattering away. They were a ways in the distance otherwise I would have waved and yelled out "hello," despite my melancholic mood. By the time I got close enough to the house, their car was already half way down the little dirt road that led to the main street. I saw Mary go into the screened porch, the door swinging back and slamming shut. The door had a terrible habit of slamming whenever someone entered or left. It was the springs. Frank said there was some sort of stopper that could prevent it and it was on his list of things to do. As I approached the house, I could hear Frank and Mary talking. Mary must have sat down with Frank while he took a break from the heat. They must have been sitting out having an iced tea or lemonade. They often did. I don't know why, but I stopped on the side of the house and listened for a moment. Crickets chirped, I could hear Mary's rocker creak as she rocked back and forth. The air felt hot again. Frank was telling Mary that he felt I was hiding something.

"Why would the girl come all the way out here if there wasn't more to it?"

"I don't know Frank, what does it matter? You saw pictures of her husband. She's telling the truth about that."

"What did Carmen say about it?"

"Just as I told you. Eve was her friend and needed a place to stay while she had her baby."

"I don't understand," Frank insisted, "her in-laws were back in Portland weren't they? Why on earth wouldn't they help the girl? Or Carmen for that matter. Didn't she practically grow up with Carmen?"

"What's the difference? She's here now. You should be a little more understanding. Just let it be. She's a wonderful girl. I, for one am, glad she's here."

"I don't have any problem with Eve being here. If there is something more to the story, I don't want a girl who'd get herself into that kind of trouble. It isn't right."

"Oh what kind of trouble is that Frank? If its not one thing, it's the other. You're well respected. Nothing is going to change that. Helping care for a war widow and her baby would just raise you up."

"I like Eve. I don't trust her story."

I could picture Frank's long serious face. Deep lines around his eyes, places you could see he had been squinting. Years of questioning. Staring at something for a long time, thinking hard on a subject. Untangling the knot.

Frank was a tall man with an almost awkward gait due to his size. He was always kind to me and I knew he wasn't being duplicitous in the things he was saying to Mary. While he was polite, he hadn't accepted me whole-heartedly. From the first day we met, I could tell he didn't trust me. He had sat across from me, welcomed me. Then he had examined me for a long time, asking me about Nick and which company he was in. Where he was stationed. I told him, truthfully, I didn't know. I mentioned that he had sent me earrings from Italy but that was quite a while back. Soon after that Nick was hit by enemy fire. That wasn't what killed him though. His leg was injured badly. He was on his way home when he acquired a blood infection from the wound. He died in a hospital in England. Of course I couldn't tell Frank all of the details, because I was afraid my lie hadn't been that well thought out. When I showed him the pictures of Nick and I together, I was sure Frank recognized the genuine love between us. I was also sure he could imagine me as a wife, a young mother. It was plausible that our future had been cut short, leading me to to Bend and into his home. Still, being in their home often reminded me that really I was a stranger. Perhaps, it would have been better to have stayed in Portland. As horrible and impossible as it would have been to have a baby out of wedlock, with everyone knowing the father, I would have at least had Carmen and Harry. They would have remained my friends even if my life were destroyed while Jeff's stayed intact. At least if I had stayed, the truth would not always be looming in the shadows of my elaborate lies. I knew my lies were such a vulnerability and I don't know why I continued to indulge in the pretense. The night after my first conversation with Frank, I couldn't sleep. I had been afraid my timing was off and my story about Nick buying me earrings in Italy would give me away. That night, I had lain in bed, inhaling the scent of the clean, starched sheets. I'd stared out the window in to darkness, the moon casting a blue glow into the room. For a long time I stared at the crib, remembering Frank had built it for Charlie. Realizing somehow there must have been a hope in his heart that things were as I claimed. It was just that he wasn't as eager as Mary to let his guard down. As I stood by the side of the house, hot sun beating down on me, the light

so bright and the grass so dry and yellow, I could smell the scent of the abundant white roses that grew along the house. It made me hopeful remembering my own garden and how things always changed with the seasons.

The rocker stopped squeaking on the porch floorboards. A bolt of fear ran through me. Did Mary know I was there? I stood, frozen waiting to explain why I was standing there, listening.

"Can I get you more lemonade?"

"No. I've got to go out and see what they're doing out there. We've got to get the milk to town before it spoils."

The rocker started its rhythmic creaking and squeaking. Mary must have settled back down.

"Leave it be, would you Frank. You're snooping around and there's nothing to find. You trust my brother don't you? He'd know the truth."

"I'm not going to do anything about it. I'm just talking to you. What would I do anyway?"

"I don't see what there is *to do anything about.*"

"No I don't either."

Hearing him, a fear settled inside of me.

Quickly, I turned and headed around the back of the house so I could come down the long path in front. That way they'd see me and not suspect I'd been privy to their conversation about me. I walked past the chicken coops and then between the barn and the house. It smelled of fresh hay and manure. The goats were scattered all along the large fenced field that went up a little hill just to the perimeter of the woods. They were grazing and one of the farm hands was rounding them up for milking. Frank was making his way up the path towards the gate when he saw me.

"Lovely day. Isn't it Eve?"

"Yes. It's beautiful. I was out by the garden Mary wanted me to design."

"I see you've got some drawing paper there. Maybe you'll show me what you've come up with."

"I'd love to," I said.

He stopped in front of me. His straw hat cast a shadow over half of his face. His overalls were clean despite all his work outdoors. He examined me for a moment and then smiled a gentle smile.

"Eve, I've been meaning to tell you." He paused and shuffled his foot on the dry path. A little cloud of dust rose and then dissipated. "I'm glad you're here. Mary and I both are happy you're here."

"I want to do whatever I can to earn my keep."

For some reason that caused Frank to laugh. It was paternal and sweet. I think the idea of me at eight months pregnant earning my keep struck a humorous note.

"I mean repay you for your kindness—"

"Eve. Mary is over the moon. You've given her someone to dote on."

She cares deeply for you." Just as his attention on me was sudden and intense, so was his distraction when one of the workers shouted out to him.

He looked up abruptly, raised a hand to the man in the field.

"Hang on just a second. I'm comin' to help." He looked back at me, "all right, Eve. I'll see you at dinner and you can show me your drawings of the garden."

He turned and walked briskly up the path. I watched him as he reached over and unlatched the gate. He pushed his way in and locked it behind him. I could see that one of the goats had gotten out and was wandering on the hill on the outside of the fence. The man handed Frank some rope and he jogged over to the edge of the field. I headed back to the house. I was tired again, but I wouldn't have minded sitting in the kitchen and helping Mary chop vegetables while she prepared dinner. I never seemed to tire of Mary's company.

Mary was still in the rocker as I approached the house. When she saw me she let out a yell "there she is now!"

I decided, right in that moment just as I made my way down the front walkway, a path that was becoming familiar to me. The little rock gardens and petunias, overflowing. A stream of purple and white directing me up to the screen porch. I decided then and there I would tell Mary the truth and suffer the consequences. Frank was right. Carmen and Harry would have taken care of me. No, my in-laws wouldn't have. They would have shamed me like everyone else. They'd never acknowledged how much I'd suffered after Nick's death. It was their tragedy not mine. I was left little room to grieve around them. On the few occasions I'd seen them in the past couple of years, Ann ended up in tears and I had to comfort her. Make her tea and go through old photographs of their family. Pictures of the times they had before Nick and I were wed. I'd let her relive stories. Daniel was no better. He'd interrupt and abruptly end any time I broached the subject. After a few months I stopped going to their home. I stopped listening to Ann cry on the phone. Instead, I would close my curtains, gather the letters from Nick. I would keep them on the table beside me and fall asleep. Days and nights were no different. I couldn't remember know how long I'd grieved like that. Carmen would come by every day and force me to eat. She'd grown very worried about me, tried hard to usher me back in to my old life. At the time, I couldn't explain it to Carmen but I couldn't "return" to a life that's been lost. There was no road back. She had been unable understand it because she had Harry and a house full of kids. She had her loving but dramatic mother to contend with. Carmen had a full, normal life and as much as she wanted to me to model mine after hers, show me how to be a housewife, and fill myself with all the rituals of womanhood, I was not Carmen. I was the exact opposite of Carmen. When I'd tell her I felt this way, a worried look would descend on her face, her eyes would tear up and her voice

would falter. Then, she'd force herself back to time and place and act as if nothing were wrong at all. It all changed when I met Jeff Lambert. I'd been transformed into a flower in full bloom. When Carmen had asked me how I could do it --do something so indecent, have an affair with a married man, ten years older than me-- I had wanted to say, "What else was I going to do?" I supposed in the end she understood in her way. She wasn't ever going to stop loving me and taking care of me. She settled on an explanation that suited her *Screen Romance* and *New Love Magazine* sensibilities. Before I left, she'd confessed that she was a little jealous. That Jeff Lambert was so handsome and she'd never had anyone that handsome pay any attention to her. She said she deep down wished it would be like a movie star affair. That somehow our love would triumph.

My new life in Bend was something I wanted. Seeing Mary rocking on the porch, ready to welcome me into conversation, I needed to know if she would still care so much if she knew what had really happened. I'd hoped she'd offer me a lemonade, hear my story and understand. We could go back to sharing excitement about Charlie. I could fully welcome her as family, as Charlie's grandmother. Weren't these the things I wished for, childish dreams that had never been fulfilled? No one could understand what a child meant to me. I'd never had real family. I had no way of understanding the complete fulfillment that comes from nurturing a baby, being responsible for a new life. I didn't know that carrying a child would heal my sorrow. I wanted Mary to be a part of that. The possibility was sitting right next to me, extending a warm hand, offering love for only love in return. Unless she knew the truth and still loved me, I didn't want my dreams to expand any bigger. If there was going to be a bond between us then I wanted it to be honest. If it wasn't going to happen I needed that information too, in preparation for the day Jeff showed up in his aqua, fancy convertible. I imagined him walking up this same path in his impeccable suit. He'd stand before Mary and Frank in one of his felt fedoras, removing it, holding it behind his back as he flashed his perfect smile. His warm gaze, and his charm. Perhaps it was the heat, and my emotions, being pregnant, but I felt sure he would do it sometime. Mary needed to know so she could tell me what to do. If she turned on me, if I would be shamed here, then I would take the other path before me. The only one left open to me. I would meet Jeff Lambert and hear what he was offering. If I couldn't stay in Bend, I'd set up home with him, knowing it would be terribly unfair to me, but a chance for Charlie. I would keep secret that I wasn't his wife. I'd try to lie to myself knowing that he went home to her. That her children were legitimate and mine would never be.

Mary couldn't have known the abundance of fear in me that was rising to the surface. She just saw the girl she wanted to love and adopt into her life to share a mother-daughter bond. I started up the

stairs to the screen porch. I opened the door and it shut with a slam, startling me. I jumped and took a deep breath.

"Oh my, why are you so jumpy?" she teased. "Come in Darling, its much cooler in here." She stood and walked over to me. Placed a hand on my forehead. "You're warm. You've been out in the sun too long, haven't you? Let me get you a cool drink."

I was so tired and her touch caused me to break down. Frank's words were lingering, growing stronger in my heart. Tears flowed down my cheek. When my eyes met Mary's I could see her worry. "Eve, what is it? I've never seen you so upset."

I wanted to tell her the truth. The real truth. I wanted someone to know in case something threatened to spoil things. In the event that Jeff Lambert showed up in his fancy convertible.

"I need to tell you something." I said.

She grew serious. For a moment the way she looked at me, I thought Carmen and Harry must have already told her the truth. She, like Frank, would have had questions. How could she not have? She would never have blindly accepted some pregnant girl into her home. My moving to Bend in itself would have been a signal that something immoral was involved. If they'd shared the truth and Mary had known all along, then maybe she was protecting me. Maybe she had grown to love me in the four months I'd been in her home.

"Eve, let me get you a lemonade. Have something cool to drink. Then, let's get in the truck go over to Mirror Pond. We'll bring a jar of iced tea. We haven't left the house since you've been here, except to rush to the fabric store and back. Let's talk somewhere else."

When Mary and I walked out of the house, I headed towards the truck and she turned in the direction of the barn where Frank was working outside.

"I won't be a minute Eve. I've got to let Frank know where we're off to." With that she half ran down to the barn. I climbed into the passenger's side of the truck. I sat down in the sticky vinyl seat, rolled down the window and waited as Mary ran to the field to tell Frank. I looked back and they were conversing over the white corral fence. They looked like they were talking seriously. Frank removed his straw hat and looked up at the sky. I saw him take out his wallet, take out a bill and give it to Mary.

I noted how different Frank's truck was than Jeff's car. The inside was nothing compared to Jeff's shiny and new interior with an aqua blue dashboard in the shape of a triangle that extended towards the windshield. Jeff's car had a polished wooden control panel. A clock, radio, a row of white buttons along the bottom. The radio grill above the glove box was sparkling chrome. I remembered riding in the car with Jeff out to the beach. That was one of the few weekends we'd spent together. He had the top down and I had my hair up in a turban so it wouldn't fly around as we drove, so I wouldn't be a mess when we

got there. I remembered running my fingers across the row of white buttons under the radio grill.

"Don't pull those," he had said gently, taking my hand and pulling it back from the dashboard and lifting it to kiss it before he let it back to the seat.

"What are they?"

"This one's the throttle. Here's the choke. Headlights," he pulled the button out and back in again. "And this one here lights up the dash." He pulled it out and the controls were illuminated but barely visible in the bright daylight. He pushed the button back in.

"I'd like to see the inside of the car at night time with the everything lit up."

"You would, would you?" He smiled, lifted my hand and kissed it again. "Well that's not a very hard wish to fulfill. We'll drive out to an overlook tonight and act like teenagers."

"Are we staying the night?"

"Would you like to?"

"Yes. Very much."

"Come here," he said.

I moved closer to him in the seat.

"Kiss me."

I leaned into him and kissed him on the cheek, then on the lips.

"You're a silly, silly girl and you drive me crazy. I want to pull over right now and make love to you. I want you every minute."

I didn't object, but that was the last he said of it. Instead I moved in closer to him, leaning my head on his shoulder as he navigated the windy and hilly roads to Cannon Beach.

After a while of silence, he had said "Come to think of it, I've never seen you in a swim suit."

"Well there's not much to leave to the imagination," I teased.

"We'll see about that" he said then kissed me on the forehead.

The door to the old truck opened with a loud scraping sound. Mary hoisted herself up into the seat.

"You'd think Frank would keel over and die, the way he parts with a dollar."

"Do we need money?"

"You never know love, we may want to get some fabric or even an ice cream cone. All right. Are you ready? Up for the drive?"

"Of course," I said softly.

Mary put the key into the ignition and backed the truck out. She turned the wheel and started down the bumpy road from the farm to the main street. She was cautious in how she handled the truck. It was the way she leaned in close to the windshield as she pulled on to the main road, how tightly her hands gripped the wheel and when she put her foot on the brake there was a jolt each time.

"Oh Eve, you seem so upset today. Can you tell me what's the

matter?"

I looked at her and her intent focus on the road it made it easier. I mustered my courage and put my hand on my belly instinctively. I could make out my reflection in the rearview mirror as we bumped along. How much I'd have liked to rest my head on my arm and just watch my own expressions in the side mirror as we drove. It was something a young girl would do, but I wanted so much to understand what I should do and know who I was in that moment. I needed to study myself and figure out which life I should choose.

Finally, I opened up, "I heard you and Frank talking on the screen porch today."

I could see Mary's face grow flush and she turned to me for just a moment and looked at me. Then she turned back to the road. I watched her expression grow worried as we passed by a thicket of fir trees that looked like a blurred palate of greens as we drove past.

"Eve, I'm sorry about Frank. He doesn't know what he's saying. He's so darned concerned about his standing in the community. He always has been. He's a very honest man. He's panicked like this before over other matters. It's just an old man's worry."

"I know." I whispered. "May I tell you something Mary?"

"Of course."

The blood rushed out of my head and I felt terribly dizzy. I thought I might faint. I was jeopardizing all of this. The things I wanted. A life I hadn't ever imagined existed. Perhaps, I was placing too much weight on this life and on Mary. But, we did have an instant friendship, just as Carmen had said we would. On the other hand, at that time I'd only known her a few months. No matter what I wished, in reality I was not her daughter. As I looked at her, before I spoke, I realized there was no reason she should she accept what I've done. Even a mother might not accept it.

"What is it Eve? Whatever it is it doesn't matter to me. I'll help you."

My lips trembled and it was difficult to get the words out. "What Frank said was true."

She let out a little laugh. "Why would you say such a thing? There is nothing to be ashamed of. If anything you should be honored to have Nick's baby. Frank and I should be honored to be a part of it. I've told you that so many times, darling."

"No. He was right about me. I lied to you."

Mary bit her lip and pulled the car on to an overlook and turned off the engine. I could see a ravine not a few yards from where we parked. It was quiet and the air was thick. I could hear water rushing from some unknown location.

"Tell me what you're talking about, Eve." I couldn't tell if she was stern, angry or just impatient for the story.

"It's all right, no matter what you have to do." I said. "I have another option and it's not what I want, but I'll do anything to protect and care

for my baby."

She softened again, "Of course you would Eve. I know that. You'll be a wonderful mother. You're strong. How many women have your fortitude? Honestly? You practically raised yourself; you've lived through the war, your husband being killed. You had your own little business back in Portland. Eve there isn't anything you can tell me that would change my respect for you."

"Do you remember the letter from the man who wanted to buy my house in Sellwood? Jeff Lambert?"

"Yes. Of course."

"I lied to you about him. Yes, he's an artist and fairly new to Portland. He had moved there a few years ago with his wife and young child." I could feel whatever was in my stomach tightening, causing shooting pains into my abdomen. Through all of this I could feel Charlie's weight shifting, it was difficult to explain; perhaps he was dropping lower in my womb preparing for birth. I wondered if I was already subjecting him to the shame I felt.

"Well then who was he? If not interested in your house?" I could tell by the way the words slowed and quieted that the realization hit her.

"Nick died two years ago Mary. That's why I left Sellwood. He died in 1943. Everything else about Nick was true. The pictures, the house. I loved him very much."

"And Mr. Lambert. Is he Charlie's father?"

I nodded. She let out a heavy breath. Blew it out slowly and turned to look outside of her window. She stared out at the forest for a few moments. I couldn't find a word to say, not even one. There was nothing left to say. The next word had to come from her. I knew all along; it was a moral dilemma, but there was nothing else I could do. Once she knew the truth, maybe she would be a defense, just as Carmen was, should Jeff show up. I needed her.

Mary turned to me, again. She still had a softness and an affection towards me. I thought she looked so beautiful in that moment, the way the sun was lighting the trees in the afternoon hue just behind her. She had such a pleasant face with beautiful blue eyes. Her hair was always up but a few tendrils fell around the back. She looked pretty in her white dress with little daisies on it. The color contrasting against her slightly burned skin. "Summer skin" she had called it.

"Why did he write you?"

"I don't know. I'm frightened."

"Does he want to marry you?"

"I don't think he does, Mary. No I don't think that's what he wants. He has a wife."

She straightened her hair with her hands. I could see how nervous this made her. I also knew Frank would not have it. He'd make me leave. I was so frightened of the idea of staying in a house in Eugene with Jeff. I knew he would keep me there and come and go between

Eugene and Portland. I wouldn't have any life what so ever. Certainly not the life I'd started imagining in Bend. Not a week before, Mary had told me that if I ever decided to settle there, she knew of a small piece of land with a farmhouse on it. It wasn't three miles away from their place. A friend of hers from the bridge club owned it. It had been the woman's father's property and after he died, it had just been sitting there. Mary had taken me over once and when I walked through the house, I'd fallen in love with it. There were large paned windows that looked out on to empty fields. Mary and I had planned to harvest seeds while I stayed with her after Charlie was born. We'd have all the flowers I'd need to create an expansive garden. She said we could separate the bulbs and hostas and replant those too. She told me Frank would happily give me fruit tree saplings. Often I laid awake at night daydreaming about the house, how I would furnish it. Charlie's room. Mostly I was in the garden in my mind, constructing rooms. Imagining my baby out there with me in his carriage, sleeping peacefully in the shade of a grape arbor or a row of fruit trees. Mary and I had the whole plan figured out. That was how we were; we schemed and plotted and planned and it didn't take long before we believed we could accomplish anything we had set out to do. We both knew we'd have to tread carefully when considering any financial transactions. We decided Frank would buy the house with the money from the sale of the place in Sellwood. Once Carmen found a buyer, Frank could sign the papers and handle all of the legal papers from here.

Once the business of selling the house was settled and Charlie and I moved into the new place, I'd slowly start setting up a business selling floral arrangements. I'd give it a couple years of course, but maybe by the time Charlie was two or three, I'd do what I'd done in Sellwood, work arranging flowers from my garden. If I worked out of my home I wouldn't garner too much attention as a young mother trying to conduct business. There was no doubt in either of our minds that I would fall in love when the timing was right. We scoured pictures in the movie magazines to find my "type." Mostly it was just for fun, but I believed it all. Finally, I would have a home that wasn't haunted with terrible memories. The thought of returning to the house in Sellwood, no matter how lovely it was in appearance, caused a sick feeling in me.

After a few moments, I broke the silence. I was afraid of what Mary might say.

"Mary?"

She turned to me and the light was touching her face. She looked radiant.

"Oh Eve. What are we going to do?"

I felt a calm wash over my whole body. She was the first one in this whole predicament who'd said *We*. What will we do? No one else. Not Jeff. He simply said "I don't know what to tell you to do, Eve." Even

Carmen "What are you going to do?" But, Mary was different. She was extending a hand; it felt like a warm embrace. It was a feeling that was unknown to me and I was almost afraid to trust it.

Then, she slipped back into her smart, strategic Mary. "Well, we can't tell anyone else about this. Certainly not Frank. Not yet anyway. Besides why does he need to know? It's your business Eve. Who else knows about this?"

"Well anyone in Sellwood would know the baby was illegitimate. If I were to go back, it would be apparent. They all knew when Nick died. It doesn't add up."

"But they don't know now and if you were to marry in the next couple of years, it would be entirely believable. How would they know anything about the timeline then? Who else?"

"Carmen and Harry."

"They're not a problem."

"What about this man, this Jeff...?"

"Lambert."

"Yes, what about this cheating, horrible person? I honestly don't know how a man could do this to a young girl like you. "

"I did it too."

"I know but—Darling, I imagine he was quite a bit older than you. I also imagine you were still grieving the loss of your husband."

"Both are true. He was ten years older and I was very sad, but still Mary I was not an angel. I knew better. As the months with Jeff wore on, I chose to do what I did."

"Well it doesn't matter. What did he want in his letter?"

"He said he missed me. I think he said he loved me. He has this idea that he'll buy a house in Eugene and I'll move there with little Charlie. I suppose that way, it would look as if I were married to him."

"That's ridiculous. *Is* he going to marry you?"

"He may have implied it, but I really don't believe him."

"No. I wouldn't either."

"He wants me to meet him there soon to talk about Charlie. To talk to me. He said he would come here to see me if I didn't go."

Mary raised her eyebrows and a look of panic crossed her face. "That would be very bad, Eve." She looked back out towards the trees, thinking.

"I don't want to leave here, Mary. I love it here. I've always been a very good person. Honestly, I never broke any rules as a teenager. Then, I married Nick. He was my high school sweet heart. We wanted to have a baby of our own, but then he was left for the war. I was the chairwoman of the garden club—even at my age. I was very well respected in Sellwood."

"There is no doubt in my mind that that is true. No doubt. I love you, Eve. I love you very much. I know I haven't known you long but I feel a motherly affection towards you. I'm not going to let this man hurt you.

If you say you really don't want to see him, if you really mean that then I'll protect you. But, you have to think long and hard. If you do want to move away and try to start a life with him, then you have to tell me."

"I don't want to. I did think I loved him during our affair. As I said, I was selfish. I wanted his attention. He was so handsome and charming. I was so lonely and sad. Mary, I can't say I regret it. I think the pregnancy was a blessing. It doesn't make my life easy, but it led me here. It helped me get what I wanted in my life. I don't want to leave."

"We have to make sure he stays away. What did the letters say?"

I removed the pin that kept the letter and photograph secure in my pocket. I retrieved the letter and handed it to Mary. Her eyes looked up at me for a moment. "I don't understand what this man wants."

"Read the letter and tell me what you think I should do. What you think is going to happen."

"All right." She slowly opened the envelope and slid the letter out. The photograph was still in my pocket. I sat quietly watching her expression as she pulled out the linen stationary, gently opened it. She placed a hand near her temple and gently rubbed as she read. She turned her head to one side and bit her lip. She let out a heavy breath. There was quiet and I thought she must be finished with the letter. I could hear a ticking noise from inside the motor. We were so quiet other sounds began to rise. Birds calling, rustle of the wind through the trees. I looked out of my window at the ravine, the afternoon light was soft. A hawk or eagle swooped down.

"Eve." She said.

I turned and looked at her.

"Do you love this man?"

My heart dropped for a moment. "I don't think so."

"This is a love letter. I am not judging you, but it's hard to believe there isn't still an affair."

"But I haven't tried to contact him this entire time. I've tried to get away."

"May I see the photograph?"

I pulled the black and white picture out of my pocket and gave it to her. As much shame as I felt, it was also a great relief to have the secret out of me. The tightness in my chest and throat had softened.

"Oh geeze Eve." She shook her head. "Well he's right. You look like a film star."

It didn't seem so much like a compliment. It didn't seem like a judgment either. It was simply more of the problem. Who was *that* girl? Despite who I'd become or was before Jeff, the pictures and nude sketches of me told a different story.

"If you haven't contacted him, then I'm worried about his intentions."

I nodded.

"Eve. I'm going to ask you again. Do you love this man? He's offering you at least the appearance of legitimacy for Charlie. You would be

well respected in Eugene even if he was lying, I'm sure he would play the part of your husband—well, I think I'm sure of that."

"I don't want to do that."

"I know, but you have to consider it. I don't want you to go. I can tell this man is arrogant, but would he be so terrible to be with until Charlie's older?"

"Mary, he was so cruel to me in the end. He was always cruel. I was like a puppy. You'd have to know how sad I was back then. He came into my life and right away made advances towards me. He was the one who was married, not me. The second time he visited me, he put his hand on my face. He stared into my eyes and told me I was beautiful. I came back to life after that, but the more I loved him, the more affection I showed him the colder he was. The day I told him about the pregnancy we had just made love. The minute I told him he stood up and gave me the most horrible look. I begged him to help me. He just told me I wasn't his wife and he didn't have advice for me. He didn't want me to ruin his reputation."

"Could it have been his first reaction?"

"I stayed in Sellwood for more than two weeks, packing and putting things together. I called him at the museum so many times. He never returned my call. The day I was leaving, he walked by and made small talk with me. I was cold, of course."

"He sounds like a cruel person. But, sweetheart, I don't know why he's sending you these letters now. I do know this needs to stop. If you aren't going to Eugene, he needs to let you be." She looked angry. "And I don't understand all this baloney about falling in love with your handwriting or whatever he said." She gave me the letter back.

"What if Frank finds out?"

"He won't. We have to keep it from him. But, the important thing is to get this man out of your life. You'll have to call him on the telephone. I'll be right there with you. You have to tell him that you want nothing to do with him and to leave you alone."

"I can't. You don't understand. The minute I speak with him, if I were to see him, I get confused and childish."

She raised her eyebrows. "I don't completely understand Eve. I'm trying to."

"That's not all of it."

"What else?"

"I let him draw pictures of me."

"What sort of pictures?"

"In the bedroom, after we made love. He mailed one to me in the first letter. You can tell it's me. You can tell it's my bedroom."

Mary's eyes grew large. "We have to get this man out of your life. We'll call him. I'll have Harry talk with him. Shake him up a bit."

"Mary, I want to be here. I want you and Frank to be Charlie's grandparents. I want the farmhouse. I want to fall in love and get

married again, to someone who loves me."

"We have to make sure he stays away. If you can't call him yourself, Harry will scare him a bit."

"I don't think he'd be afraid of Harry. He's very arrogant."

"Don't underestimate my brother. He can see right through this Jeff Lambert. You're talking about a fast-talking man that hurt someone Harry loves very much--you. I wouldn't be surprised if Harry didn't knock his block off."

I couldn't help but laugh. A part of me wished he would. But even with all this trouble, I felt sympathy for Jeff. I ignored the feeling.

That night I prayed. I prayed that God would let the past be gone. That He'd make Jeff Lambert forget about me and I prayed that the truth would never come out. I sang a lullaby to my baby, my voice absorbed by the darkness of the room until I fell asleep.

CHAPTER 4

It started at midnight. I woke from a strange dream. I had a vague impression of it as I opened my eyes, but it disappeared and gave way to excruciating pain. I couldn't help but scream. I was covered in sweat and breathing heavy. I screamed again and Frank and Mary ran into the room.

"Call the doctor!" Mary yelled to Frank. Mary turned to me, "all right darling. Just breathe. I think your sweet baby will be here tonight. He's a little early, but he's coming."

The excruciating contraction stopped and I felt a wave of relief wash over my whole body. The abrupt end of the tightness and pain caused my body to go limp. For some reason, like with most hurt I thought it was done once it stopped, even though I knew it was really only starting. Mary propped pillows under my head and placed clean rags around the mattress. She reached under me, and whispered, "your water broke."

I felt it rising up again. I started breathing heavily as the cramp came on slowly like a wave starting to rise up from the ocean. "Mary hold my hand, I'm afraid Mary. It's happening again!"

She held my hand and I squeezed as the ocean rose, higher than last time. The pain caused me to scream again. And then go dizzy. It seemed to keep rising.

"Mary it's not going to stop! Something's wrong with my baby! Mary something's wrong!"

Mary wiped my face with a cool cloth. She leaned close. "Darling, your baby is fine. Just hold my hand until the doctor gets here."

The room was dimly lit and it seemed that the contractions had slowed or I had found a rhythm, breathing and closing my eyes in between. Then, when it started again, the dull pain rising, I had grown

accustomed to their predictable course. I cried and gritted my teeth and Mary wiped my head with the cool cloth. I was lucid for a moment and I asked her if having the baby with the doctor here would be like it was with Carmen in the hospital.

"I don't know sweetheart. I haven't had a baby. And the ladies I knew who had never talked about it."

The pain combined with fear and I started to cry again. "I'm afraid. I don't want it to be like with Carmen."

"Shhh. Whatever they do, you and the baby will be fine."

She continued talking to me but her words were canceled out by the tightening cramp, which unbelievably had intensified. I had just gotten used to it, and then it became worse than before. Instead of five minutes between each contraction, they were coming faster.

"Frank!" Mary screamed.

Frank rushed in but remained in the doorway. "I'm waiting for Dr. Pope."

"She's going to have this baby. She's in so much pain!"

I screamed and pulled hard on the quilt. "Something's wrong Mary! Something's wrong with the baby!" The wave of pain crested and then retreated, but I was so exhausted and knew another was seconds away.

"I don't want to." I cried. "I don't want to any more!" It was approaching. The agony was going to grow and I knew I couldn't do it. I wanted it to stop.

"You can't stop it darling. You're in the middle of it. Just tell me what to do"

"I want to stand up."

"No that's not a good idea."

Frank was still standing in the doorway. As I screamed again he shouted over my cries, "I'll go see if he's here yet. It's a ways and the roads are confusing in the dark."

"Yes, go see."

The eruption of another contraction ignited inside of me again and I begged Mary to let me stand up.

"Please wait until the doctor gets here. He'll be here soon."

After another bout of stabbing contractions, I panicked again, "I think the baby's coming out! Mary put your hand on my stomach. Is he coming out?!" The agony struck again, immediately and unexpectedly. There was no pattern for me to recognize anymore. It was nearly constant contractions and yet increasingly painful. I couldn't even scream I pulled the quilt between my teeth and bit down hard. Then a strong jolt ran through me and I screamed again. When I looked up, I saw a man standing next to the bed.

"Are you the doctor?" I cried. "Help me. Please help me. I think something's wrong with the baby!"

He was holding up a syringe with a long needle. Mary was now on

the other side of the bed. I arched my back again and cried out and just as I did he thrust the needle into my arm. I felt the wave approaching, but it was distant. I thought I would just go to sleep, instead it had deceived me. Another God-forsaken scream came from somewhere within me. I could hear Mary's voice, now distant too.

"What have you given her?"

"Medicine to ease the pain. She won't remember."

"Is the baby all right? She is in so much pain."

"Haven't you had any children? The baby's crowning, it'll be born in no time. It's perfectly fine."

Their conversation must have gone on longer, but in my mind I had left the room. I was awake but dreaming. The dreams were in the distance too. I recognized the ocean and warmth. That was all I remembered about the rest of my labor.

I woke to the morning sun lighting up my bedroom. The window was open and the late summer air was dry and heavy. It permeated my senses. I looked around and it was as it had been. I was still tired and feeling strange. I realized that I hadn't had the baby yet. I reached to touch my stomach and where there had been a balloon not a day ago, it was soft and hollow.

"Mary!" I screamed. I was so lost.

Not a moment later the door opened. Mary was not rushing in as though anything was out of the ordinary.

"Oh Eve," she whispered.

"I think its time to have the baby, my stomach feels empty as if he's moved down and is ready to be born."

"Don't be silly, Darling." As she spoke Frank entered the room holding a bundle. *'It must be Charlie,'* I thought as he handed the baby to Mary.

"Now most men would stay far away from a newborn. Not Frank. He was up all night rocking the baby."

She put him in my arms and I saw my infant child for the first time, "It's a boy" I whispered pulling the soft quilt down below his chin.

Mary sat on the edge of the bed. "It's our little Charlie."

Frank stood awkwardly for a moment. Smiled kindly and started out the door.

"Frank," I called to him. He turned and his expression suggested he'd softened towards me. As if the baby had sealed something between us. Not like with Mary but...something. "Thank you for protecting him all night while I was sleeping."

"He's an angel." Frank said and left the room, quietly closing the door behind him.

All I could do was stare at Charlie. He was fast asleep and his face was red. He wore the little knitted cap Mary had made for him and a soft quilt, a gift from the bridge club. As I examined him, his face looked somehow odd to me. His nose was pressed in and his head was

not symmetrical.

"Is he all right Mary? Why does his face look like that?"

"He's perfect. A baby has a difficult journey just as the mother. His face will mold back the way it should be in a few days."

"Isn't he lovely?"

"You both are."

I couldn't hear anything except a raspy breathing that I remembered from holding Carmen's baby. "Little Charlie," I whispered and kissed his small head. "I love you. I love you. I love you more than anything."

"Should I leave you be with the baby?"

"No. Sit with me a minute. Do you want to bring the rocker closer and sit beside us?"

A smile crossed Mary's face, a serene look. She pulled the rocker across the room and sat beside the bed. I looked up at her. "You're his grandmother." I said to her. Her eyes filled with tears. This was the first time I had seen her emotional at all. She had never cried in front of me. She was always strong and full of humor.

"You are. Mary, I can't image any one more suited to motherhood than you. He'll love you and Frank so much." That was the moment I decided I would make her and Frank Charlie's guardians should something happen to me. I rocked him as I cradled him in my arms. "He's so beautiful."

That was how it was from that moment on. I was no longer just Eve. I was Charlie's mother. His little blue eyes were like Jeff's. I could see that, but even that—evidence of his father—didn't matter at all. He was mine, and a part of him also belonged to Frank and Mary. Once he was with us, we were complete.

Some of Mary's friends had warned me that the first few weeks with a new baby was a hard adjustment, sometimes it would remain difficult for months. That wasn't the case with me. I'd moved into motherhood with ease. I loved it, comforting him gave me a sense of purpose. Nurturing him fulfilled me.

One night I held him sleeping in my arms. I watched him, trying to fully understand my feelings. After only a few days he retained little evidence of birth, his lop-sided features had filled out and his face was growing round. I couldn't look at anything but him. It was dark outside that night and the moon provided a deep blue-gray hue. Otherwise it was just Charlie, the silence and me. I kissed his head and watched his little chest rise and fall with each breath. He was a warm bundle and every now and then his eyelids would move, he'd yawn or make a funny expression, frowning his brow. "What are you thinking little Charlie?" I whispered almost inaudibly. A moment later his eyes opened. They were clear and alert. He was looking at me. At first it startled me. A little animal. Then the rhythm of his breathing began to match mine. He fixed his stare on me, a deeper intimacy than I'd ever known. He needed me and he already knew I was his mother. I was the

one who would protect him no matter what. "I love you," I whispered and then I started to cry. Still, he kept his gaze on me. His little forehead furrowed again, and it caused me to smile. "You funny little boy," I was mesmerized by him. His lips began to pucker and he squirmed a bit. He was hungry. My milk had just come in. Dr. Pope had told Mary that I should only feed him from a bottle, as it was more sanitary that way. The instructions were to give him a bottle at bedtime, avoiding any nighttime feeding. I was to give him formula again in the morning and be sure feed him according to a strict schedule during the day. That first night I'd been sleeping so he hadn't been with me. When I tried to follow Dr. Pope's instructions the next morning, my baby seemed so distressed to me. I pulled him close and kept him warm but my instincts had told me he needed nourishment. In the morning, Mary had prepared and brought a sterilized glass bottle full of formula upstairs to me. She had a grimace on her face but handed it to me anyway. I didn't know why she disapproved, but when she said, "the doctor says it's full of vitamins the baby needs," I knew she felt differently. I could tell the baby was hungry in the hours before I was scheduled to feed him.

The second night, when he stared at me, I pulled him to my breast. Unlike the bottle where his little mouth searched and attempted to suckle ending in frustration and screams, with me he knew how to find my milk. He turned his head to reach my nipple from the right angle and once he found it, his little cheeks moved in and out greedily drawing the milk. My body filled with warmth and a kind of calm. My breast began to tingle all over, like specks of silver suspended in liquid falling in random directions. That feeling gave way to a rush of what I'd come to know as milk being produced and when that happened, Charlie's suckling grew more rapid. After a short while, his eyes closed and his lips loosened from my breast. His tiny head rested on my chest and for the first time, his breathing became regular. I closed my eyes too, but only let myself half sleep so to be sure to wake if he needed me.

The next morning at 6:00, there was a knock at the door. "It's me, Mary. I've got Charlie's bottle."

"Come in" I said, keeping Charlie nursing on my breast. That was how it was with Mary. Ever since I had confessed the truth to her, we were confidants. I knew I could trust her. She had fixed things with Jeff. Harry did as Mary had said he would, he went to the museum and threatened Jeff. I don't know exactly what he had said or did. All Mary had said was, "I don't think that man will be bothering you anymore." I didn't know until later that Mary had spoken with Jeff too. She had telephoned him and warned that if he didn't stop, she would send a letter to the Museum Director, telling the whole story. She had further threatened to include the picture of us together at the beach. She'd warned him that his pursuit of a woman who was trying to save her

reputation and start a new life was far worse than my having an illegitimate baby.

I was genuinely relieved that Jeff was gone. I whole-heartedly embraced my new life in Bend. It made me realize that I really didn't love Jeff or want anything from him. At the same time, I kept his proposition in the back of my mind as an insurance policy. As crazy as it sounded, I had to always be thinking about my options should something have gone wrong. That was how it had to be, since beneath me there was just a foundation of lies. I had to remember that everything I'd built for myself, as beautiful as it was, was not secure. Still for Charlie, I would keep moving ahead. More than anything else, this new life was all Charlie. Every minute I lived was for my baby. I waited for time to blur the past until it didn't matter any more. Then I would exhale. I would let myself believe it was true, that somehow I'd survived a circumstance that many women couldn't have escaped.

When Mary entered my room with a bottle of formula and walked in on me nursing Charlie, a smile crossed her lips. "I'm so relieved that you are feeding him. I think it's better. Look at how precious he is. He needn't go hungry for hours. What does the doctor know? I didn't trust him at all. Charlie was almost out when he gave you the sho—" Mary stopped herself. I presumed that she didn't want to retell the events of the birth. In that moment, I didn't care about it at all. "He needn't go hungry." She repeated.

I smiled at her and when Charlie fell asleep again, I asked her if she wanted to take him from me for a little while so I could get some rest. She leaned over and gently lifted my precious baby. She walked over to the rocker by the window, sat down with Charlie and stared out towards the orchard. I fell in to a deep, restful sleep. Even in my dreams I watched over Charlie. I'd slept until early afternoon. Charlie's fussing had woken me up. I looked over at Mary and she was rocking him, singing a lullaby I grew to know well.

Go to sleep my baby close your pretty eyes.

Angels up above you looking at you dearie from the skies.

Great big moon a shinin come now don't you cry,

Time for little Piccaninnies to go to sleep

Go to sleep my baby close your pretty eyes,

Sandman is a comin time to say goodnight.

She had a soft, melodic voice. I had never heard her sing before, although she often hummed popular songs, *Paper Doll* or *You Always Hurt the One You Love*.

"He loves you," I said to her. She was lost in thought when I interrupted her.

"Oh you're up. Do you think you feel ready to come downstairs and sit with us out on the porch? Frank would love to see the baby."

"Yes. He looks like he's hungry. I'll nurse him and then put myself together and come down."

Mary smiled. "Oh and the girls are anxiously waiting to meet Charlie. They all think they're his aunties. They have gifts for you both. I didn't know, but they've spent quite a while sewing a new quilt for him. I guess they believed he'd be a boy too, they embroidered airplanes, baseball bats and trucks on it. In the center it says Charlie. I asked them to leave it for you, but they want to give it to you themselves. Really, they want to get their hands on Charlie and dote on him."

After I nursed Charlie, I lay him in the crib while I dressed. My maternity clothes now hung looser on my body. My stomach still looked swollen, but it was going back down. As I pulled a smock and skirt from the closet, my wool coat caught my eye. I remembered the letters from Jeff that I'd hidden there months ago. I wanted to look at the picture from the beach, compare it to Charlie. Did Charlie look like me or like his father? I retrieved the letter with the photograph in it. It was painful to look at myself, it was just as I'd felt when I showed it to Mary. I hated that girl. At the same time I realized that I couldn't wish she never existed. That was who I had been, and that person led to Charlie. Those indiscretions had led me to my joy. I took the picture over to the crib. Charlie looked up at me with those blue eyes, again clear and alert. I looked at Jeff in the photo and then back at Charlie. Charlie did resemble him and if Jeff and I were together and someone saw my baby, they would say he looks just like his father. How can a baby look like anyone? And so much so? Of course I didn't care. I just wondered if anyone questioned me, if Jeff came forward, would the truth would be apparent? There would be no way for me to deny his paternity. I didn't care, he was out of our lives. I went back to the armoire and placed the picture back in its hiding place, in the envelope and in the coat pocket.

As I picked Charlie up, I remembered what Jeff had told me about the poet, William Blake. There were the Songs of Innocence, the Songs of Experience. "Then," Jeff had said, "after that, there's ecstasy. Man is free from society's rules." With Charlie in my arms, my mind flashed on the night Jeff had described it to me. He'd been tracing my lips with his finger and then he whispered just before he kissed me, "Exuberance is Beauty."

CHAPTER 5

Carmen and Harry came up for Christmas with their children. The oldest was eleven and the youngest three. Through Carmen's family, I got a chance to imagine Charlie at all ages. I was so excited to watch this person *become*. Of course he was only four months old and so it was very hard to tell who little Charlie was. Mary was holding him and showing him off to Carmen who was delighted to play with him. Susan, her three year old, sat shyly beside her watching with enormous

curiosity.

"Want to touch Charlie's hand? Be gentle, Suzie."

The little girl shook her head and hid her face behind Carmen. Carmen smiled but rolled her eyes and mouthed to Mary and me, "my shy one."

"Unlike her mother," Mary teased.

"I've been known to be quiet" Carmen said.

"Not to me," Mary joked, "but Carmen darling, you are the most entertaining person I know. I love you to death."

Carmen sort of smirked and turned her attention back to Charlie who was smiling and showing off for Carmen. He reached for her hair and Carmen willingly let him put his wet baby fingers into the locks that were held up in her usual victory rolls. He loosed one side and it a long strand fell over her face. She made funny faces and said "Oh no!" and that turned Charlie into all smiles.

"He's very smart. To play like this at only four and a half months."

Mary interrupted, "All the excitement's got him sleepy. Why don't you girls go out for a walk or sit on the porch and catch up. I'm sure you miss each other. I'll put the baby down for a nap."

Carmen and I ventured out towards the orchard.

"Mary loves him." Carmen said.

"I know she does. Carmen, I wanted to thank you for helping me."

"There's nothing to thank me for. You look so happy Eve. And Charlie is skimpily perfect."

"Not just for helping me out of the situation with Jeff, but also for choosing Mary and Frank. I have grown to love Mary so much."

"Didn't I tell you? I can tell she loves you too and Charlie. Honestly I've never seen her like that."

"Its more. You know how much I loved your family. They were my family. But, still I was an outsider. Mary makes me feel like I belong. She's told me that she feels as though I'm the daughter she never had."

Carmen's eyes landed and stayed fixed on me. She stopped under one of the apple trees, its leaves gone and the gray sky visible through the crooked and bare branches.

She smiled then walked over and embraced me. "I'm so glad for you Eve."

"And, I want to stay here in Bend"

"Of course you do."

We walked on and didn't say anything for a few minutes. Once we arrived at the end of the orchard near the clearing, we stopped.

"They sure have a lot of land," Carmen said "I never realized how far back this went. And, you can see the mountain."

I walked out a bit further. "This area is mine. Mary and Frank would like me to design a garden. Flowers, and little garden rooms. Mary's marked the space, it's larger than my gardens in Sellwood."

"This is marvelous, Eve."

I took a deep breath and turned to Carmen, "It's cold, should we go back?"

She stood for just a moment. Not turning to head back, "Eve what are you going to do about the house in Sellwood? I'm happy to keep managing things if you want to hold on to it. But, it doesn't sound like you're coming back." Her black hair was back up in its neat yet somehow glamorous style; black victory rolls held up with silver pins. She held it back as she did on special occasions. Her eyes were the same emerald color I remembered. She was my closest friend. I'd known her since childhood. She was the one always goading me into doing things I wasn't supposed to, teaching me curse words, writing love letters never to be sent. Then, when she became a teenager, this beautiful and exotic girl appeared. It must have been her style. It was within the limits of respectable but she always had a flair that made her exciting and sophisticated. It was funny that she married Harry who was so much like Frank. Practical. It dawned on me as I saw her there, her wool coat wrapped tightly around her body, she had grown up. I had not, not until Charlie. I realized my carrying on with Jeff had been childish. Carmen, on the other hand, had accepted and shouldered the responsibilities of being an adult. I felt shame rush through me. That interminable hurt that couldn't be healed because it was the truth.

"Charlie looks just like Jeff." She said out of the blue. I felt my face grow flush and a panic rush over me.

"He does?"

"You know he does."

"I don't care."

"You shouldn't care. Why should you? You don't owe anything to the man. He doesn't have any claim on Charlie what-so-ever." She said "what-so-ever," in her emphatic Carmen way. *End of discussion.* She paused and let a breath of air out. A little cloud of condensation escaped and then dissipated. "I imagine he hasn't bothered you since Mary and Harry set him straight?"

"No."

"That's good."

I looked back over the land I'd soon cultivate. My garden plots were not for something practical like the rest of the farmland, but something created just for beauty's sake. I wondered if that too was more of my selfishness.

"Eve?" Carmen interrupted my thoughts, "That's good, isn't it?"

"What's good?" I turned to her and took a deep breath.

Her eyes were examining me with concern. "Look. I'm sure it's not as simple as I'm making it. I'm sure it's not."

"Of course it's good. I really don't want him in my life. It's been five months."

"No letters since Charlie was born. Truthfully?"

"No."

"Honestly Eve. That's a relief. He scared me. I don't know why but he really did. Maybe it's just that he was so different than everyone we knew. And, the way he treated you. Anyway, five months is long enough to know it's over." She paused and took my hands in hers. "Listen, I've been thinking about it. Don't come back to Sellwood. I don't think you should. Let Frank handle the house. Just stay away. Frank said he can manage the sale without going there. I'll list the house. Frank will be none the wiser about what happened in Sellwood and you'll avoid getting tangled back up with Jeff Lambert."

"What about my things, Carmen? I grew up there. I have to say goodbye to my old life. Besides, if I went back it would only be for a day or two. I wouldn't go out anywhere. Your house is right next door to mine. No one would even know I'm in town."

"Eve don't."

"Why Carmen?"

"If anyone saw you. Say Kitty stopped by my house? Everything would be over for you there. You know as well as I do, she'd devour a bit of gossip about Jeff Lambert and she wouldn't care if it was at your expense. Somehow he'd get wind of it."

"My life in Sellwood has already been destroyed."

"Eve. The other thing is that Jeff's very influential now."

"What do you mean?"

"For one, he's on the board at the Sellwood Moreland Improvement League. He's worked with the city on all sorts of projects for the neighborhood."

I couldn't help but laugh. "Really Carmen. I wouldn't call that influential. A position on a neighborhood board?"

"Well he's seen to it that money has gone into the community. Improvements to the parks, a pool at Sellwood Park. He's working to get the mayor re-elected."

"So, what does that have to do with me?"

"Eve, I just think it's better if you don't run the chance of seeing him. I didn't like the way he treated you and I don't understand the letters he wrote to you. I will never trust him. I'm afraid if he knew you were there, the whole thing would start over again."

She'd hit a nerve. "Oh Carmen! Is that really what you think of me?"

"He's so arrogant. Harry stood up to him, put him in his place. Now, Harry's run into him a few times in the neighborhood and I can tell you, Jeff's not intimidated anymore. That's not to say Harry wouldn't stand up to him."

"Really! Is that what you think of me? I made a mistake. I know it was wrong. But, do you really think I'd do that again?" We were still under an apple tree at the edge of the orchard. The weather had changed and a few raindrops were falling here and there. Carmen kept

her gaze on me and didn't disguise that what I was saying was exactly what she thought.

"Eve, be honest with yourself."

"Carmen. Mary and Frank know of a house for me, here in Bend. With Frank's help I can buy it. It used to be a farm with large space for a garden. I could start a flower business again. I want to be here with Mary and Frank. I've met a few friends."

"I don't know about living alone out here. Especially with a baby. I wouldn't want to, I know that much. But, I completely agree that Bend is your home now. I miss you like crazy but you can't come back. I've even come around to the idea of selling your house, although it breaks my heart."

"Maybe a nice family will move in. A new best friend" I joked.

Carmen's face remained serious, "He's walked by the house a few times. I've kept myself out of sight when I've seen him. I don't want anything to do with him."

"Whose house?"

"Your house in Sellwood."

"Well he lives nearby."

"Not that near. He'd have to go out of his way. I've seen him stand and look for a long minute or two."

"Carmen. I'm not sure what you're suggesting. But please forgive me and let it go."

"He makes me sick to my stomach. I've seen him walking by with his little girl on his shoulders. She looks about two now. And, sometimes he's even walking with his wife, the odd thing that she is."

I couldn't help but laugh. That's what our friend Kitty had always said about Jeff's wife. "I can hear Kitty now, 'That Mrs. Lambert, she is the oddest woman I've ever seen! Practically a girl is more like it, I'd say.'" Kitty would bat her long eyelashes and take a dramatic drag from her cigarette. Then she'd continue 'Really girls. How can a man that looks like that marry such a boring looking woman!' Of course Kitty had no idea that I'd been carrying on with him. Carmen and I would grow uneasy, not just because I was having an affair with Jeff but because our friend could be so cruel in her gossip.

But now, with Carmen herself repeating Kitty's opinion, she laughed at herself too.

I smiled at her, knowing a part of her was still sticking up for me. "You sound exactly like Kitty. That's funny. I remember her saying that about Mrs. Lambert too."

I had only seen Jeff's wife once. Actually, I hadn't seen her in person. I'd found photographs of her and their baby. Jeff had come over one morning, early before he went to the studio. By that time in our relationship he was sneaking into the house. "Like a Sherlock Holmes story" he used to say. For the life of me, looking back, I couldn't see how I had thought it was funny and clever. One morning, he snuck in

and woke me up. He had moved into bed beside me and was softly kissing my neck. I was dreamy and when I opened my eyes he was there. His gorgeous face, smooth shaven skin. He was in his teaching attire, a white dress shirt, thin tie and trousers. His hat was on my bedside table and his collar loosened. He had looked at me with the same blue eyes as Charlie's, holding my stare with such intensity that I held my breath until finally he whispered "Do you feel as if you're drowning when we look at each other?" I'd nodded but couldn't speak, then his lips gently kissed mine, "Beautiful Eve. I love you. Do you love me?"

"Yes," I had whispered.

"Say it to me. Say the words."

"Jeff, I love you more than anything."

Not an hour later, I noticed his portfolio where he'd placed it near the wall. He had always brought it with him. I supposed it was because he came to my house and from there to his studio at the Portland Art Museum. On that day, I had a curiosity about the contents.

I'd fixed a tub for him and as he soaked in the bath I sat on the floor beside him for a while.

"Come in with me," he had pleaded.

"I'm all dressed and ready for the day."

"What do you have to do that's so important?" At that time, I thought everything was as it should be and in no time, it would be perfect. I hadn't an inkling what perfect would be. Would it be him leaving Margaret and marrying me? Would it simply stay like it was, forever sneaking but madly in love with each other? Although after I had Charlie, any of those scenarios would have sounded like a prison sentence to me, back when I was in love with him, in the beginning, I would have been overjoyed over his offer of living in Eugene with him and Charlie. I had been so fulfilled by him, intoxicated as he'd often said. I was ignorantly satisfied with what ever he offered.

That day in the tub, he had rolled his eyes because I wouldn't take a bath with him. "You're driving me crazy Eve, come into the tub with me. It's warm and the bubbles feel so good."

"No," I said, playing on the little bit of power I had over him.

"You'll let me go crazy here in this tub? You're heartless."

When he smiled, I'd felt as I was the only one who made him feel that way. Maybe that was true.

"Why do you let me drive you so crazy then?"

He grabbed my hand and pulled me closer.

"No I don't want to get my clothes all wet!" At that he kissed me and then released me.

"Jeff?"

"Yes darling?"

"May I see what you bring in your portfolio?"

He submerged himself underwater for a moment to rinse out the

shampoo. When he came up again, all wet, his hair was almost black unlike his naturally light brown color. Even wet it looked clean cut and neat.

"Come in here."

"Jeff, really. I don't want to ruin my clothes."

"Just kiss me one more time. Then you can do whatever you want."

I'd moved towards him and kissed him. Then, I stood and walked back to the bedroom and retrieved his leather portfolio. I sat on the bed and pulled out sketches and a half finished painting. In the bottom of the case, there was a stack of photographs. I eagerly removed them. I'd shuffled through them quickly as they were mostly of people I didn't know and I was more interested in the pictures he had taken of me and my garden. As I shuffled through the photographs, it had dawned on me that many of the pictures were of his wife Margaret and their baby, Clara. Underneath the ones of his family was the stack of us from our weekend in Cannon Beach. I juxtaposed the two sets of pictures. His wife looked thin and young, a little frightened. She wasn't pretty. Even with her delicate features, she had a masculinity about her. I would have said her appearance was worse than just plain. Although, I wouldn't have gone so far as to call her homely. Her dress was longer than was the style and she wore an apron that despite being tied around her waist, seemed to hang on her in a way that gave the appearance of having no womanly curves what-so-ever. I held a photograph up next to the picture Jeff had taken of me at the beach. At first, I had felt pleased. The comparison had made me feel superior to her. In that moment I was taken with my own appearance. *Of course, that was why he loved me. Look at her! She could never have been popular and pretty as Carmen and I had always been.* But, then it slowly descended on me, first in my thoughts then my heart dropped and I couldn't breathe. I realized that in reality, I had looked like the opposite *kind* of woman from his wife. I was in my swimsuit, sunglasses. I was posing, not exactly like a pin up girl but something reminiscent of one. I had dropped the pictures on the bed and lay down and cried both for what I was doing but also for what I had become. I hadn't even been pretending to be a wife or a respectable girlfriend. I was becoming the kind of woman Kitty, Carmen and I would disparage. The kind that goes after another woman's husband. I had rolled over and cried into the pillow. A moment later I'd felt Jeff's damp hand on my back. He had sat down on the bed beside me.

"Oh darling, don't be jealous."

I couldn't speak. All I could do was cry.

"Eve, look at me. She doesn't mean anything to me. You're the only one I love."

A bolt of furious envy ran through me. I turned and glared at him.

"You're a liar."

He turned his head to one side and all of his affection drained from

his face. "What then, Eve, does that make you?"

I had been so angry that I sat up and screamed for him to leave. At that, he stood up and proceeded to get dressed. I didn't remember all I'd said to him, but as my anger grew, I threw the pictures at him. They'd scattered all over the floor.

He stood, staring calmly at me, shaking his head as if I'd lost my mind. His reaction then caused me to lose my temper. I stood and faced him. I was about to continue my insults when he grabbed me by my arms. "Stop acting like a child!"

Something in his eyes startled me and I softened my voice, "Please let me go Jeff."

He glared at me for another long moment before he released me. "You need to control your emotions, Eve. It's worrisome. You hardly act like a rational woman." He picked the pictures up off the floor and stuffed them into his case. He zipped it angrily and didn't say anything as he started out the bedroom. I stood and ran over to him. I had been suddenly so afraid of losing him. It was a panic that I'd never felt before. I would have been ashamed to admit it out loud but I was even more frightened of his leaving me that day than I had been when Nick was called to duty. It was the worst possible addiction. As our affair grew in intensity, everything else in my life lost color, became bleached out and faded. Then finally everything turned gray until there was nothing else but him. And where the light illuminated Jeff, it was such brilliance and depth that I was mesmerized. I knew it sounded insane so I never even looked for words to describe it to him, but, of course he could see what was happening to me.

On that day when I'd lost my temper over the pictures of his wife, I became terrified of losing him. When he grew cold towards me I turned desperate. I begged him. *"Please don't be angry with me. I'm sorry. I was jealous. Please don't leave."* When I reached for him, he stopped me by grabbing my wrist. He pulled me closer to him. I didn't care that he wasn't smiling or that he was looking down at me with anger.

"Please stay with me." I'd pleaded, "Let me touch you. Let me just kiss you good bye so I know you aren't angry with me any more."

His expression had changed. He was still cold and distant but not as angry. "Eve I don't want to." He released me and walked out the door. I had been so weak, I ran to the window and watched him leave. He didn't sneak out the back and try to be discrete. He walked right out of my house as if he didn't care who saw him. As I watched him, instead of being angry or worried about my reputation, I thought about losing him. I would have done anything to feel loved again by Jeff.

Carmen and I were still in the orchard. She tightened the belt on her jacket. "It's cold." She said tracing a frosty patch of snow with the toe of her boots.

"What are we doing out here on Christmas Eve anyway? Everyone's inside having fun, drinking cocktails."

"You're were showing me your garden Eve. Your new life and your dreams." She smiled her sweet sisterly smile. "I'm sorry I was judging you."

I thought of my baby. I hadn't nursed him in an hour and I missed him terribly. "Let's go back, I'm sure Charlie is hungry and being fussy for Mary. We'll have dinner soon." I walked over to Carmen and gave her a hug. It felt so good to have her with me over the holiday. As I moved closer to her, I smelled her perfume, Chanel number 5, and when I put my arms around her I missed her all the more.

Christmas day made me feel so much a part of a big family. Mary and Frank's house was warm and decorated top to bottom. The tree was enormous. A week before, Frank, Mary and I had trudged out to the woods and found a tall Douglas Fir. I'd brought Charlie with us. I'd bundled him up in quilts and held him close so he'd stay warm. Frank sawed the trunk until the tree fell to the ground. He'd called out "timber" in jest and we all laughed when it fell gently, coming down to rest on the snow with hardly a disruption at all. Frank tied it up on a sled and pulled it back down the hill to the house. Snow was flurrying and when a flake hit Charlie's face he twitched his eye and opened his mouth. He was a funny baby.

Mary's knack for homemaking always surprised me and the Christmas decorating was no different. Garland covered the hearth and stairs. The tree was adorned in tinsel and colored lights. She lit candles in the windows. There was a light dusting of snow late Christmas eve and when we woke in the morning, it felt like a miracle to me, a gift commemorating my first Christmas away from Sellwood, my first Christmas as a mother. The New Year promised a new life and I was ready for it to commence.

Carmen and the entire Tenino family spent Christmas with us, including Carmen's mother Denise. Denise was a lovely woman with the same exact temperament as Carmen. It seemed over the years Carmen had perfected her mother's sarcasm and extroversion. She and Carmen together always made things so much fun. They both doted on Charlie and he was always in someone's arms. Frank's sister drove up from Seattle and stayed the night as well. They had two children both under five, a boy and a girl. The house was full. Charlie and I were as much family as everyone else in the room. When I brought Charlie up to nurse him, I cried for a short time. Mostly from happiness. I felt as though these people could protect me from anything. I felt they truly loved me.

Christmas morning after nursing Charlie, I made it back downstairs in time to open presents. Everyone sat in the parlor. Frank fed the fire in the brick fireplace and it kept the room warm. Since the fall, the fireplace had been the source of heat for most of the house. As a result, we had spent most time there in the front of the house since the weather had turned cold. The kitchen was also warm too, especially

during the holidays or Sundays when Mary and I cooked or baked.

We sat in a big circle, adults on the upholstered sofa and chairs, the children on the floor while we exchanged gifts. Mary brought muffins and biscuits into the parlor while we sipped hot cocoa. That way the children would not have to wait for breakfast before opening their gifts. Mary and Frank gave me a beautiful locket with a little picture of Charlie.

"I love it," I said as I opened it up. "I'll treasure it." Mary came over and sat beside me. She put her arm around me, stayed next to me and held my hand. She took Charlie into her arms while Carmen put the necklace around my neck fastened the clasp. Mary bounced Charlie on her lap and he smiled while she made exaggerated expressions to him. After a moment, he began fussing and looked at me. This was how it went. He'd want to go back and forth between us.

Charlie's little fingers were tangled up in my locket, putting it in his mouth. Frank came into the room and we were all shocked to see the large package he had for Charlie. Frank carried it over to me and placed it on the floor next to where I was sitting on the sofa. I tore the paper open with one hand with Charlie still in my arms. It was a little ride on scooter in the shape of a duck wearing a sailor cap. The craftsmanship was wonderful and the toy was so cute the way it was painted with a goofy expression. It was small and would fit Charlie perfectly in no time, just as soon as he started toddling around. There was a length of rope attached to the front of the toy so I could help him along. Of course, I imagined him riding along the glistening wood floors of the farmhouse, the one I now dreamed of having for my own.

"It's just beautiful!"

Carmen's eyes grew wide and she shook her head in disbelief. "Frank it is so beautiful!"

Carmen's littlest, Suzie ran over and sat on it, bouncing up and down. "Beep. Beep." She said and Harry helped her bring it over to the foyer where she could ride back and forth.

"Is it all right Mary? For her to ride in here?" Carmen was watching the girl crash against the walls while the wooden wheels scraped against the polished fir floors.

Mary shook her head "Do you really have to ask? Of course it's all right. She can do whatever she wants."

Frank interrupted. "Suzie may want to come back over here. I've got a few more things for the children." Frank had built a toy for each child, appropriate for their age. He was such a fine woodworker. He'd made Suzie a little baby carriage and an ironing board. She immediately ran to the larger package draped in burlap. "Open. Open." She pulled the carriage out and placed her little baby doll in it. "Here baby," she whispered in her little cherub voice. The rest of the gifts included a tall scooter, a set of nesting boxes and four little wooden trucks.

I took Charlie upstairs for a nap.

"Can I help you put him down?" Carmen asked. "I want more time with you."

"Of course."

Before we got upstairs, Charlie was already starting to fall asleep in my arms. His little head was against my shoulder looking out with a dazed, sleepy look. I took him into my room and Carmen sat down on the bed while I changed his diaper and then lay him in his crib. He fell right asleep.

"I just want to tell you again that I think coming to Sellwood is a bad idea. Frank can manage things from here. He can co-sign and have the papers notarized and mail them back. Between Frank, Harry and me we'll do all the leg work. You know what you want, you don't need to be there."

"Carmen, I want to go back."

"People have asked where you've gone. When they see the house for sale, they'll stop in and ask questions."

"They think I've moved away and that's the truth."

"So suddenly? You left your house for boarders? Come on Eve."

"Come on what? It doesn't matter. In a couple of weeks I can take the train and you can pick us up. Or, why don't I ride back with your family on Wednesday? That way I'll only have to take the train one way."

"Did you hear what I just said?" Carmen was keeping her voice down but her frustration still came through. "God Eve you're so stubborn!"

"So what Carmen? So what if Jeff Lambert is influential in our small neighborhood? It's not like it's all of Portland. Even if he's helped the mayor, it's not like he has any power."

"He had power over you, Eve."

I turned around and looked at Charlie. I retrieved another baby blanket from the trunk and placed it over him.

"It's cold in here," I whispered.

"Eve?"

"He doesn't have power over me any more. But, if I avoid parting with my things without mourning their loss, then he really does have power over me."

Carmen looked down and pursed her lips for a moment. I could see she was about to say something, but she didn't. The room was dimly lit by the overhead light and despite our argument, it felt calm.

"It's a pretty room," she said.

"I like it." I sat down on the bed next to her. "Carmen don't worry about me. It's foolish of you to ask me not to see my house before I sell it. You know it was my parents' home and then mine and Nick's. Nick's journals and short stories are up in the attic. You say you could clean it out, but how would you know what I treasure? What I want for Charlie?"

"All right."

"I'll be very careful. When I get to your house, Charlie and I will stay inside, or in your back yard. I'll look through the things and make notes on what to keep. Everything is up in the attic, so I'll spend the afternoon up there and I'll organize it all."

"You're right." She conceded. "I guess we're lucky my mom came and drove her car. We'll have room to take you back with us."

After Carmen left, I walked over to the crib. I picked up my little baby and carried him to bed with me. He was warm and I knew having him next to me would keep him from getting cold. The windows had frost on them and there was almost no heat in the room. He breathed shallow, rhythmic breaths. My heart felt so much with him beside me. I let my fingers gently run through his soft baby hair. I loved the smell of him, a clean baby smell.

CHAPTER 6

Carmen was the old Carmen in the car ride back to Portland. In my mind, I compared the difference from that moment and the day she and Harry had driven me up to Bend eight months before. I had been so frightened and tired. But, things had changed. Being together with Carmen again I saw that the worst of my fears were over. Riding back in the car, I fell back into the old "Evie." I could tell when I saw Harry stare back at us now and again in the rear view mirror. His amused look brought me back. Their oldest child sat up front and Carmen and I sat in the back with Charlie and Susie. The other children rode with their grandmother in the car right behind us.

"Well," Carmen said, "I can't tell you what Kitty's been up to with the children in the car. I'd probably ruin them for life!" Carmen's expressions were exaggerated. Her face was made up perfectly, even for the drive home. She wore a wool skirt and a crew neck sweater with a red and blue scarf around her neck. I had forgotten how pretty she was. I'd forgotten how I hung on to her every word, anticipated what she'd say next and watch her expressions looking for clues.

"What?! What is she doing?" I practically screamed with curiosity. "What mama?" Suzie asked.

"Not for your ears child. Climb up front with daddy and Linda. You shouldn't be hearing this." Suzie put her hand on Harry's shoulder as he helped her over with one arm.

"Really Carmen it's not like she won't hear from up here." Harry pointed out.

"Well turn the radio on Harry. I've only got Evie for another day. I've got a lot to give her all the sordid details!"

The Pointer Sisters came on the radio and Carmen started in an

exaggerated whisper, "I told you Louis Stewart moved back to Sellwood didn't I?"

"No. I didn't know that. Where was he?"

"East coast somewhere." She bit a nail before she continued, "He is very well off now. Some kind of manufacturing business that he brought to Portland. He's bought one of those big houses on the bluff. Lives there with his wife, some society lady from Boston. She walks through Meyer and Frank with a clothing consultant!"

"Geeze. That is rich. I never even heard of such a thing."

"That's not the half of it—he looks pretty good too. Nothing like in high school—"

"God he was so lanky. And, crazy over you."

I noticed Harry look back at us in the mirror when I said that.

"Well he didn't stand a chance against Harry." She leaned forward and affectionately touched his shoulder as he drove. She took a deep breath.

"For heaven's sake, Carmen. Go on!"

She put her hand on mine and gave it a squeeze. "So, his wife is this beautiful, glamorous woman from one of those wealthy east coast families."

"I don't know if that's true," Harry chimed in.

"That's exactly what Kitty said Harry! You only know what I told you!"

"Well, they don't have one of the real big houses anyway and it's on Sellwood boulevard, not the bluff."

"Harry! You're ruining the story."

"It's getting less believable by the minute" Harry teased then turned the music up.

Carmen looked back at me, "Don't listen to him. Anyway, Kitty has decided that she wants an invitation to one of their big parties. I don't know why because no one we know goes to things like that. I love her but she's not of that ilk. She's convinced it will raise their *"status as a family"* as she says."

The conversation went on like that and it seemed, in no time, we were driving over the Sellwood bridge. For a moment, it took my breath away, being back. The sun was just setting as we drove up Tacoma Boulevard. We passed the Sellwood Theater and I remembered movies with Carmen, Harry and Nick. After Nick was shipped overseas, the newsreels of the war shocked me into imagining Nick's experience in Europe. We passed the bank and the drugstore. I looked out the people walking about. A part of me expected to see Kitty or Joan walking by with their husbands, out for dinner or a movie. Luckily there was no one I knew.

As the car made it's way down Spokane Street, I felt both saddened and disoriented. I'd almost forgotten my little life in the neighborhood. Of course, I hadn't lost my memories, but I felt like a different person

riding home in the back seat with my baby. Harry pulled the car into to the driveway of their big rambling yard. Carmen's mother pulled in behind us. All the kids lumbered out and immediately started hanging on Carmen begging for food.

"All right, it's just sandwiches. Why did I have so many children?"

The kids continued to whine and she picked up Suzie and whispered something in her ear. Their voices faded as I looked next door at my family home. There it was, the same brown paint and mustard shutters. The large gum tree next to the drive way looked the same as it always had in the winter, tall with bare branches. The spiky balls, containing buckeyes, that had fallen during autumn were scattered all over; no one had raked them up. Even at dusk I could see the front yard didn't look nearly as pretty as when I was tending to it. My heart sank at the thought of the gardens in back. I walked a little closer and even in the rapidly fading light, I could see into, at least part of the gardens behind the house. It was winter and nearly dark so it was hard to tell, but glimpses of un-pruned rose bushes and scraggly laurel hedges made me realize my life before had been taken over by weeds; it was no longer orderly and beautiful. It was no longer an expression of me. The next family to live in the house would surely take out most of the plants and put grass in. They'd likely build a garage on the lot on the other side of the house or maybe they'd separate the property into three lots and my family home would become just like the others in the neighborhood, squeezed in closely right beside other ordinary houses; other ordinary lives.. It wouldn't, in any way, be mine any more. That life was already gone.

I turned and Carmen was right next to me holding Charlie. "I think he needs a change," she said with a knowing look. "I'd do it, but the kids will be screaming for more food in a moment or two."

I looked at Charlie's chubby face, content and smiling. I leaned in and rubbed his nose against mine. He opened his mouth a half smile and half reflex. I could feel a heaviness in his diaper. I walked slowly into the house letting memories of my childhood surround me. I carried him inside. Carmen told me to take her old bedroom. The one we had shared as kids when my father was out of town, away on business trips. Her bedroom always had a pretty glow at night. A streetlamp was just a few yards away and it had an amber light. After I changed Charlie's diaper, I sat with him on the window seat and nursed him. I could see my house from the window. The lights were on in most of the rooms. I wondered what it would be like to go inside tomorrow, a stranger to all these people who came to inhabit my home. What had they done to it? The gum tree to the side of my house swayed in the wind. Flecks of rain hit the window and I thought there'd be a shower, but the night sky seemed to give up and just the breeze and the dark winter night remained in view. Charlie's breathing was a little gravely as he nursed. I could see his nose was running and he would release

from my breast and take deep breaths. I worried because he'd had the croup so many times in the past few months. Mary always helped me when he got like this. She said the best thing was to bundle him up and take him out in the cold, fresh air. It had always worked. I'd walk him around the large farm property, carrying him in my arms, singing his favorite lullaby. The one Mary sang him the first days after he was born and so often thereafter. Sometimes, his crying would stop in no time, but sometimes Mary would come relieve me and I would fall into the couch and into a deep sleep until I felt a tap on my shoulder, Mary above me with a sleeping Charlie.

"It's all right Darling." I whispered. His little eyelids began fluttering and his mouth grew slack. He stopped nursing, remained asleep against my chest. I imagined our two hearts beating as one. What was inside me, was inside him. I fell asleep that way with Charlie on my chest, my back propped against the wall of the window seat in an uncomfortable position so that he would be close and warm. I woke around 11:00. It was freezing cold by the window seat. I felt Charlie. His little body was warm but his face was cold as ice. I lifted him gingerly and carried him over to the bed. I heard a little cough. It was wet and I was familiar with it. I felt his forehead and he didn't feel warm. I laid him down on the bed and got in next to him. I pulled the heavy quilts over us and kept my arm around him. I couldn't sleep for his breathing had become so labored and I was beginning to worry. There was a wet sound with each inhalation. I became anxious and wondered whether I should take him outside. Everyone was asleep and I knew what to do. I wouldn't wake Carmen, it wasn't like she could offer me any advice. I already knew everything there was to do, short of taking him to the hospital. Still, he wasn't crying and it was so late and cold. His cough started again. It was a loud bark and he opened his eyes and it looked like he couldn't get air. He let out a loud scream and the cough continued.

Instinctively I lifted him out of bed and held him upright which allowed him to get some air. I wrapped him tight in a quilt and lay him on the bed. I put on my wool coat and gloves and rummaged through my suitcase for one of the little hats the bridge ladies had knitted for him. I had a stronger than nature maternal instinct, with the constant thought of waking Harry and Carmen and taking Charlie to the emergency room if need be. It had never gotten to that point before, so I bundled him up so he'd stay warm. I lifted him up and held him close. He was still crying and I was gently bouncing him in my arms. His cries were interrupted by coughing and gulps of air. I carried him down the stairs. I made sure to stay quiet as I ventured down. I noticed how silent the large house was after everyone fell asleep. I knew the house intimately and could navigate even with the lights out.

I carried Charlie out the front door and a burst of cold hit us. It felt good somehow. I supposed that was because I knew cold air always

helped Charlie. He continued to cry and I walked him up and down the street softly singing his favorite lullaby. His respiration was settling back to a less frightening rhythm. Shortly thereafter, he was breathing normally again, save for strong wet coughing fits that lasted a few seconds then subsided. His crying had stopped for the most part, but when his blue eyes looked up and caught my worried gaze, his little mouth would pucker, his brow furrowed. He would start screaming again and writhing in my arms. Once he was able to get air into his longs and he had tired himself out, I kept pacing and humming to him. I walked to the corner of 15th and Spokane, just past the Sellwood Community House where I'd chaired all the Garden Club meetings during my last year or so in the neighborhood. As Charlie nestled himself against me in a deep slumber, my mind drifted back to when I'd served as the chairwoman. It almost made me laugh, the thought of myself at 23, a garden club chairwoman! Nearly everyone was twice my age. I had been so certain of myself in that role. Standing there holding my baby, I realized that back then I was hardly more than a child. But, as soon as Nick and I married, I'd taken my job as housewife very seriously. I supposed I was competitive, wanting to be one of the ladies written about in the Bee for her gardens or prize-winning corsages. And I was, many times featured in our neighborhood newspaper, standing in one of my garden rooms. I shuddered at the thought of what would have become of me had Nick come back from the war and we'd resumed our life together. It was a funny thing having Charlie, it made me older. I'd never had expected that there would come a time when I would consider that a life with Nick could have been disappointing. After Charlie, I felt anything that would have prevented my bringing him into the world, would have been a mistake. I was meant to be his mother. He stretched his arm up out of the quilt. His tiny hand was close enough for me to kiss it and put my cheek against it. My cheek must have been cold because he reflexively pulled it away and put his fist back under the blanket, warming up against my chest. I didn't realize I had been standing in front of the community house for so long. When my thoughts came back in focus, I saw my reflection from the street lamp in the pane of the glass door. I turned when I heard footsteps coming around the side of the building. I was startled and turned to walk back to Carmen's house. I heard the footsteps stop get closer behind me as I approached the corner.

"Eve?"

I recognized his voice immediately. I thought to run, but that would have been foolish with Charlie in my arms.

"Eve, is that you?"

I turned and saw him. Jeff. It was the same him. He was impeccably dressed as always, even strolling in the middle of the night. He had a long wool coat, a fedora. He was smoking a cigarette something I hadn't remembered him doing.

"I didn't know you smoked." I remarked. Afterwards, I questioned why I'd said it. Why was that the first thing that had entered my mind? I realized I'd made things familiar, as if no time had passed, as if I had just seen him yesterday. My stomach dropped. I was stupid, Carmen had been right. I shouldn't have come back.

He laughed in his charming way. "That's what you have to say to me the first time I meet my son?"

The words cut through me. I had long forgotten that Charlie was Jeff's son. I knew it in a rational, logical way. But in the most important ways, I knew him to be mine and Mary's and Frank's. I couldn't find any words to respond. I grew afraid, seeing his confidence. He tossed the cigarette on the ground and it was immediately extinguished in a puddle. He walked towards me. Ever since we'd met, he had walked through the curtain of morals and standards. He had always acted so familiar with me that it set me off balance. I never knew how to behave with him. I'd always felt he treated me as though I was completely weak and willing, despite my ambivalence and occasional protests. This time I stepped back away from him.

"Why are you out here so late? Why are you back in Sellwood?" he asked. I looked into his blue eyes. Carmen was right. He did have power over me.

"I'm sorry." I whispered.

"Why are you sorry Eve?"

"I'm sorry I didn't answer your letters."

"I am too. Is that him? Can I see my son?"

"How did you know I had a boy?"

He turned his head to the side and pursed his lips, acting as if he were inspecting me. "You always were a bright girl," he joked. This time I remained serious. Of course a part of me wanted to slip back into my place with him. Say something clever and coy.

"How did you?"

"There are newspapers in Bend, Eve."

"How would you get a newspaper so far away?"

"May I see my son?" He walked closer and reached towards Charlie. Instinctively, I tightened my grip on him. Charlie squirmed a little.

Jeff's eyes softened "please Eve, let me see my boy."

I nodded and let out a deep breath as I handed Charlie to him. He held Charlie against his chest and kissed his forehead. Charlie pulled further out of the quilt so his head and arms were exposed to the air. Looking for warmth, Charlie wiggled himself closer to Jeff's shoulder and neck. "There you are little boy." Charlie settled in and closed his eyes again. Jeff kept his eyes on the baby, kissing his little hand that was now against Jeff's neck. With his free hand, Jeff adjusted Charlie's hat and pulled the quilt around tighter. He leaned in and kissed Charlie on the cheek. "Go to sleep little boy."

I started to cry, seeing Charlie with Jeff. I never expected that a

baby's father might have a natural affinity and love like that. I certainly didn't expect Jeff to. Jeff looked up to see me wiping my eyes with my handkerchief. Back when we were together, and things were good with us, he'd always comforted me when I cried.

Darling, don't cry. I'm here.

Shhh. why the tears, beautiful Eve? Come here silly girl.

This time was different. Jeff just looked up over Charlie and watched me as I tried to compose myself. I let our eyes meet. He remained expressionless.

"It's cold, "I whispered.

"Yes, you should get him inside. Do I hear a little wheezing?"

"I nodded. That's why we're out here. He's been getting terrible croup."

Jeff nodded and smiled, "I'm out here sneaking a smoke. Much less honorable than a mother caring for her baby. But that's always how it was, wasn't it, Eve? I was the one without scruples."

I felt myself grow flush.

"Don't be embarrassed Eve. I'm teasing you."

"I should go Jeff, the baby needs to sleep. I think he'll be all right now that his cough's settled down." Jeff gave Charlie back to me and once in my arms again, a wave of relief washed over me. I felt powerful again. Motherhood.

I started to leave but for some reason I turned back to Jeff. I inspected him, the whole of him. He *was* like a film star. He could have been Gary Cooper without changing a thing. Standing out there in the fog, in his coat and his felt hat. He could have been a film star and that could have been a film. I wasn't anything near to glamorous, but he was. He had the looks that anyone would pay to see on the big screen, regardless of who his leading lady was.

"Jeff, I loved the way you were with Charlie just now. Thank you for being so loving towards him."

He swallowed hard and started to say something. He took a deep breath and let it out. "Eve, why didn't you write me back?"

I was speechless. At that moment, I remembered the letters hidden away in my coat pocket. The very coat I was wearing. They had been there since summer. Forgotten. I shook my head and looked at the ground.

"Look at me Eve."

I looked back up at him, unable to apologize again for not writing back. Truly, despite some of the feelings I still had for him, I didn't want him in our lives. I was afraid to say it because I felt trapped in his orbit again. He had a power over me. Carmen was right. On the other side of the tension was Charlie, this imperative to have a happy life with my baby. Free of the spell.

"I meant what I said Eve. I want to meet you in Eugene. I've gone up there a number of times. If you were to move there and stay with me,

no one would know who you are or your predicament. That way I can help you and Charlie can live without shame."

"I don't want you to help me, Jeff."

"Don't be stubborn Eve. Are you going to raise the baby by yourself?"

"No. I have people who are taking care of Charlie and me. They are like his grandparents."

"Well, he has real family."

"Who?!" I asked raising my voice, then hushing it as Charlie opened his eyes for a moment then closed them again. "My parents are dead. Who are you talking about? You're mother's passed. Who then? Your father? Your sister? Do you think I would subject myself to that? You are so crazy Jeff! I don't even know why you're out here. How is it that the one night I'm in Sellwood and my baby's sick, who should be taking a midnight stroll but you."

"All right. I understand you're angry. That doesn't change the fact that I'm Charlie's father."

"What does that mean anyway?"

I could see he was trying to be patient with me. He raised his eyebrows and looked at me almost with a look of boredom.

I didn't care. I continued "Jeff. Stop it. Please, this is simply one thing you can't have. I know it's an exciting game for you to stake claim on what you want and then set out to get it. I know you did that with me and it was my fault too. I'm ashamed of myself and I always will be, but Charlie's life is not that. You cannot have him."

"Why didn't you write me?"

"Because you are a mean person. Don't you remember how you treated me? You're a liar. You tried to take everything away from me. No. You took everything I had here! I know you Jeff. You say these things and I get confused. I know what you're doing. Carmen knows. Harr--"

"Harry?" I could see I had struck a nerve. He looked up at the sky, let out a sharp breath. Then, his face softened again. He walked closer to me, but I pulled away. "Eve, I want to talk with you again. When are you leaving?"

"No! It doesn't matter when I'm leaving. I don't want you to keep contacting me. I don't want you in our lives."

"Why, Eve?"

My eyes filled. The tears were warm as they fell down my cheeks.

"Why is that Eve?"

"Because," I finally managed to whisper, "Because I'm afraid of you."

"What do you think I'm going to do you?"

"I'm afraid you're going to take everything away again."

There was a long moment and the street lamp flickered. I heard the sound of an animal, probably a cat, scurrying nearby. The streetlight glowed amber, but above there were clouds and in places where the

clouds were broken, there was blackness and stars. Jeff walked even closer to me and stood before me. I thought he would lean down and gently kiss me. I'd always thought things like that with him; it was the liberty he took with me. He would break through walls without apology. But, he didn't kiss me. He was close enough for me to remember his stature in comparison to mine. How it was when we had embraced. A part of me longed for that feeling. He glanced down at Charlie and then his eyes met mine. "Eve, I am going to see my son. You don't have a say in that."

I waited the few seconds it took for the charm to disappear again from his expression, his words grew stern. "I can if I want to and I plan to."

"How?" I whispered. "I do have a say about who sees my son."

"How Eve? You're not in such a safe nest up there in Bend. I was up there not too long ago. That's where I saw the announcement of Charlie's birth in *The Bulletin*. I saw that Eve Miller, widowed wife of Nick Miller gave birth to their son Charlie. They acknowledged your patriotism and strength. I believe you were admired by the community. From what I understand your shower was held at the Lawrence home and attended by the ladies of the bridge club."

I took a deep breath but couldn't get air. "Why were you in Bend?"

"Eve. Bend is not so far away from here."

"But why?"

"I want you to meet me in Eugene. As I said in my letter I will reserve a room. There's a place called the Eugene Hotel. It's very nice. I'll register as your brother so it won't look suspicious. I will book one room for you and another for myself. We will talk about this when our child is not subjected to the cold with a terrible cough."

I don't know why but I felt shame rush through me. I had Charlie bundled up warm, he was against my chest. I put my head down, feeling like a child, feeling powerless again.

"If you decide to ignore my letters again-- Eve, listen up, if you ignore me, I will find you at the Lawrence's farm and let them know who I am and why I'd like to talk with you."

"All right," I finally said.

"Look at me Eve."

I slowly looked up at him. "What is it?"

"Say the words."

"What words?"

"Tell me you'll meet me in Eugene."

I swallowed hard and tried to look away but I could feel his eyes on me. Finally, I returned his stare. "I'll meet you in Eugene, Jeff."

"That's good, Eve." He leaned in closer to me and kissed me on the forehead. Then he bent over and kissed Charlie. "Good night, my baby son."

CHAPTER 7

I woke early on Thursday feeling broken. I nursed Charlie went downstairs. I wanted to go over to the old house as soon as possible and finish up before we had to catch the train back to Bend. The thought of being separated from Charlie while I sorted through my things in the attic at the old house caused me great anxiety. It was a silly thought but I kept imagining Jeff arriving at Carmen's with police officers, boys I'd grown up with, now men. I envisioned them taking Charlie. Not because they wanted to but because they had no other choice. There would be nothing Carmen could do. I knew it wasn't really a possibility but I felt I had lost so much the night before out in the dark. I had given Jeff back what he had—or at least some of what he had. A mass of feelings had formed inside of me, mostly fear. Where there had been none, confusion existed. A part of me asked why he hadn't found another woman to take my place? I tried to consider the real possibility that he wanted to be with Charlie, but each time I imagined a future that included Jeff, an image of him walking down the street with his little daughter on his shoulders invaded. I hadn't thought much of it when Carmen had related it to me. Something about his walking by with his daughter, sometimes his wife. Carmen had sensed something that I now sensed too. Maybe he hadn't loved me. Perhaps, for some reason he had wanted to overtake me. If it hadn't been for Charlie perhaps he would have looked for another way to control me. Once our love affair was over, without the pregnancy, what would have had over me?

"The kids are still sleeping," Carmen whispered. She was wearing a long, satin bathrobe. Her hair was ruffled from sleep but still retained its pretty waves. She poured me a coffee. Charlie was fussing and twirling his fingers in my hair. He would let out loud squeals and then look at me.

"He's going to be very funny. He already has a sense of humor."

"I think he gets it from you and Harry."

She raised her eyebrow and pulled a cigarette from her pack. She lit it and inhaled deeply. Charlie let out a little wet cough.

"Is he getting sick?" Carmen asked, her eyes growing concerned. She walked over and put a hand on his forehead. "He's got a little wheeze. I hope you'll be all right on the train back today."

"He does. I think he's got croup again. He was up last night. I had to take him and walk him out in the cold—in the night air—until his breathing improved."

"You mustn't have slept at all."

She looked up over to the clock. "It's early darling, are you going

right over?"

I nodded looking down at the Formica tabletop. My eyes traced the burgundy stripe that ran down the center. I wanted to tell her about seeing Jeff, but I thought it would make things worse. My life was again on a precipice. Anything to disrupt it would make everything I was building topple. I would have nothing. I was so frightened on the inside, the anxiety was like waiting for bad news, but I had already received bad news. It was like a dream, the images of the three of us, in the dark outside the community house. I shouldn't have let him intimidate me. I could have stood up for myself. I felt so ridiculously weak. I hated myself.

As I sat with Carmen my mind lingered on this new development with Jeff. I didn't pick up my coffee, it sat in front of me. I had forgotten where I was. My emotions were so strong that I was almost paralyzed. As small and weak as I felt, maybe I *had* stood up to him. Maybe that was why he pushed back so hard. Jeff had always grown cold when I disagreed with him or argued with him. Isn't that exactly what happened last night? My feelings vacillated again. I knew he would follow through his threat. Would he really do what he said? I tried to piece his words together. What could he do to me? Then, it descended on me. The whole picture of his power. Just as he threatened, he could drive up to Bend—he already had before—he'd pull into the driveway and he'd walk past Charlie and me and ask Mary to get Frank. Mary would try to stop him, but he would be insistent. She'd run inside and look for Frank and try her best to prepare him and discredit Jeff. I knew in this fearful scenario that Jeff would not even look at me while I stood off to the side in the foyer, holding Charlie. I would ask him not to tell, but he would be determined. Things would be in motion and picking up velocity. Then, later Mary and I would wait in the kitchen while the men spoke, Mary straining to listen. I knew she would find a way to sneak out and get close enough to hear their conversation. I knew that Jeff would soften Frank, convince him. He'd find something to inflame Frank's worry for Charlie. I knew Mary would come back into the warm kitchen. Her face gone white, trying to find words for me. We'd both wait for Frank to come in and ask for Charlie, tell us that his father wants to see him.

"Evie, darling" Carmen interrupted my thoughts, "you look as if you've seen a ghost. What is it?"

"I just want to be on the train back to Bend."

"I wish I could go over to the house with you sweetheart and help you go through all those memories. I just don't think it would be a good idea to have the baby out where others might see. The last thing I'd want is for Jeff Lambert to get wind of your visit."

I looked at her, then towards the window. I had no feeling what so ever. It must have been clear to Carmen. "Evie. What's gotten you so upset? Maybe you didn't get enough sleep. Why Don't I take Charlie for

a little while and you go back to bed. It's so early and you don't need to be to the train until 1:00."

"No," I whispered. I hardly had any voice at all. The fear was so great that it was hard to swallow.

"Why don't you go over and get it done and then you can rest before your trip back to Bend?"

Charlie squealed. I put him on my lap and bounced him gently. He was laughing and making cooing baby sounds. He put his hands on the saltshaker and lifted it to his mouth. I didn't even notice him doing it.

Carmen put her cigarette in the ashtray and rose. "Now. Now. Little man. You can't eat Auntie's salt shaker." She lifted him into her arms and he immediately began reaching for her nose. She scrunched up her face and shook it gently close to his. He erupted in peals of laughter, his fingers covered in drool.

"You know Evie, I think he's teething." Carmen rubbed her finger on his bottom gum. "Yes, there it is, right under the skin. Maybe that's why he's been so fussy." Carmen moved to the drawer by the sink and retrieved a washrag. She ran it under cool water, squeezed it out with one hand and pressed it on Charlie's lower gum. "See there baby?" Charlie greedily chewed on the cloth and when Carmen looked out the window to my house next door, he pulled the rag out and dropped it on the floor. Carmen turned back, "oh he is a handful!" She picked the cloth up and put it in the sink. She retrieved another and prepared it. Charlie blew raspberries with his tongue and Carmen copied him. Then she put the corner of the cool rag in his mouth. She turned back to me with Charlie on her hip.

"He is one smart baby, Evie."

My heart did swell with pride when Carmen said that, but it was so heavy with dread that all I could do was stand and walk over to them. I gave Carmen a kiss on the cheek, and leaned in and kissed Charlie's forehead. His fresh baby smell lingered in my thoughts. It was so overwhelming, the love that just being near him evoked.

"I'll go over and get this done with."

"Let Harry walk you over. He's not leaving for work for a bit. That way he can tell the renters who you are." She bounced Charlie, holding him in one arm as she picked up her cigarette from the ashtray and took a drag. She blew the smoke away from Charlie's face. "Here put this out for me." She handed me the cigarette and I extinguished it in the ashtray.

She was right. It would seem strange to have an unfamiliar woman come inside the house and up to the attic. "Is he up?"

"Let me go see." She handed Charlie back to me, and he was still up to his impish tricks, reaching for my nose and then with an open mouth covering my nose.

"Oh Charlie!" I looked at his smiling little face as he gurgled and made sounds, and when he let out a squeal I could see the baby tooth

just breaking through his bottom gum. He grew quiet and let out a little cough. His eyes met mine and we looked at each other for a moment. There were these times when it felt as if he was older and wiser. I smiled at him and kissed him on the cheek. He cuddled up next to me, nuzzling up to my chest and blowing raspberries and chewing on his index finger. The image of Jeff holding him flashed into my thoughts. How Charlie took to him the same way as he did me. My little boy must have trusted his father.

"All right, Miss Evie." Harry said as he walked into the room.

"Don't you want a coffee first?" Carmen said as followed him into the kitchen.

"It won't be a minute. Save it for me." He kissed her on the lips.

"It's not going anywhere Harry," she teased.

"Ok, here you go again." I handed Charlie back to her, "I think he's quieting down again."

Carmen lifted him up in the air above her, "are you tired little man?" She looked up at me and smiled, "I don't know if he's tired but he needs a diaper change."

Harry and I walked out of their yard and into my driveway, "you all right Eve?" He said softly? I looked up at him and nodded.

"Harry?" I asked. "What did you say to Jeff back before Charlie was born?"

Harry stopped and we stood under the gum tree. The bare branches looked brittle and like a mass of gray spider webs crisscrossing under the early light. A gust of wind blew and the air felt icy as it hit my cheeks.

"I told him..." Harry stopped and looked down at the ground as if he were searching to remember the words. "That man is an arrogant ass, Eve. I know he's the boy's father. But, he's worthless."

I nodded. "I know. I just wondered what you said to him."

"Frankly, Eve. I can't remember the exact words. I can tell you, I went over to the art museum and asked to speak to him there. I figured that way he'd know I meant business. No man wants his problems tangled up in his work."

"How did he respond?"

Harry looked at me for a long moment. "I can tell you this, he didn't want trouble."

I looked towards the rose bushes on the side of the house. They looked like they hadn't been pruned since the day I left. I could see all the shoots and rosehips taking over. I remembered canning rosehip jelly, how tart I'd make it because Nick didn't like it too sweet. I'd tease him, "*How can you eat this?*" There he was. In my thoughts. Nick. How had I forgotten my memories of Nick for so long? When I thought of sorting through the things in the attic, finding Nick's old letters and journals, my unspoken intention was to preserve keepsakes for Charlie. Things about his father for him to look back on. I had somewhere deep

inside convinced myself that Nick really was Charlie's father. But, I never had let the real Nick back into my consciousness. Just the fictional Nick, the one Jeff read about in the Bend newspaper. The widow who announced the hero soldier's baby. I took a deep breath and let it out.

"It's cold out here," Harry said. "Let's go in."

"Wait." I said. "Did you tell me all of it?"

"Did I tell you what Evie?"

"What you said to Jeff? What you two spoke about. What did he say to you?"

"Eve I think its better left alone. He got my message. At least for a while. Why? Has he bothered you again?"

I must have furrowed my brow and assumed a worried look.

Harry raised is eyebrows and his face grew a little angry as if this might just be the excuse he was looking for to put Jeff in his place.

"No." I said.

"Eve, I've seen him a couple of different times around the neighborhood. I would just stay away from him if I were you. If he writes to you, just leave it alone. I think you made the right choice. Stay in Bend and don't come back here until Charlie's older. We'll visit you. You'll always have us. You'll meet someone else and all this business will be long gone."

I smiled and we started walking towards the front door.

"Could we go in the back way? I'd like to see the garden."

"Eve, we haven't kept it up. Carmen tried but she couldn't do what you did."

"It's all right." I led the way through the wooden gate. I prepared myself for the worst. That time of year, everything's dormant. I expected that. But, as I entered, I could see the gardens were dead. Frozen weeds clung to the earth, partly covering the paths. The shrubs in the back had stalks growing in every which direction. I could see fallen leaves had collected all over the ground. The overgrown grass was wet and rotting.

"I'm all right Harry," I said. "I'd like to be alone."

"Shouldn't I introduce you to the boarders?"

"No. I'm all right."

"Ok honey. I'll be back at the house then Carmen and I will drive you to the train station." He walked over and gave me a big hug. "Evie you are such a wonderful mother. But, sweetheart, I'm worried for you. I don't know why I just get this feeling this mess with Jeff Lambert isn't over."

I nodded and smiled. "I love you all so much."

"We love you too." He pulled a handkerchief out of his back pocket and walked out the back gate.

That morning was my last time back in my Sellwood garden. I realized that the things in the attic didn't matter. Carmen would be

able to sort it all out, figure out what was important. She'd told me so many times that she wouldn't mind going through my things for me. The garden was my home. It had weathered over last few months just as I had. It showed the damage of hardship. I bit my lip and ventured deeper. The stone bench was covered in matted, wet leaves and there was still evidence that the nasturtium must have gone wild last summer. There were dried, rotting nasturtium vines covering the area under the arbor. It looked like a mass of white threads curled up around each other. I had planted the seeds in the spring. For some reason, the abundant flowers always loved my yard and formed swaths of yellow, orange and green. Waves of color. I removed my gloves and wiped the bench. It was still damp but I sat down anyway. The grape arbor was a tangled mess above me. After such neglect, there would have been no way to separate the branches and train them to stay on the arbor without severely cutting it back. It would take at least a year after that to produce as many grapes again. I let out a breath and watched the condensation escape. I put my head down. Maybe when I left my garden, all those memories would evaporate. Maybe then that old life would be released. I would be free. I wiped tears from my eyes. That was such a childish thought, but I wished it were true. I reached and touched a vine that hung down from the arbor and curled its way along the side of the bench. A few yellow, brown leaves clung to it. The stem of one leaf was nearly rotted. I could see how fragile the attachment was. I would just need to disturb the vine slightly and the dead leaves would separate, fall to the ground and decompose.

I looked around. It was so cold, but I wasn't ready to leave. I remembered all the hours Jeff and I had spent in the garden together. On those days Jeff would be more relaxed than usual. He didn't wear a tie and the collar of his shirt was unbuttoned. His shirt would be untucked and hung loose around his waist. I had thought he looked so handsome that way; that was when he seemed most like an artist to me. We'd set up a blanket in the shade and he'd study a plant or a flower, sketching uninterrupted. I would tend to another part of the garden or read a book. Sometimes I would lie on the blanket beside him and just daydream. When he finished drawing, sometimes hours would have passed. He'd come sit beside me and open his book. Then he'd show me what he'd drawn in lead or colored pencils. Mostly they were studies for larger works that he would later create in his studio. I remembered a page with many renderings of the same hydrangea sketched from so many different angles, lined up across a page, each a small study of the flower's overall architecture. He'd scratch little squares of color on the bottom of some pages. Each one capturing a different effect of light on the same hue, all within one flower. Some of his drawings were detailed renderings of an unexpected perspective on a place in the garden. One of my favorites was a depiction of the space under the arbor. Even though I wasn't an artist I could see the piece

was a study in shading and light. The grape leaves seemed translucent in places, with light on some grapes coming from one direction compared to those where the sun was obscured by the foliage above.

I couldn't imagine anyone else ever sharing something so personal with me. He wouldn't tease me or flirt while he talked about his art. He was so focused and would sometimes look at me for a moment while he paused. I'd felt he was reading my emotions, the effect his art had on me. I'd watch his fingers, stained with pencil lead, as he turned the pages of his sketch book and told me what the garden made him feel, why certain images had inspired him. He offered a rationale for why he was so focused on botanicals for the series he was putting together. Sometimes he'd ask me questions about the plantings and the garden design. Then, after we'd talked, often he would lay back and close his eyes, I'd move beside him and he'd take my hand in his and that would be the rest of our afternoon.

It was getting too cold to stay sitting there in the garden, but I really didn't want to let it go. It wasn't just Jeff although my thoughts kept returning to him. My heart had been in that garden even before him. It reminded me of the people I'd loved most. The only people who'd really known and loved me: my mother, Nick, Carmen. The garden had been a part of my life with them, all of those years. Sitting there I could see and feel that my garden had died too. It was the most terrible feeling. That magical place had become part of the tomb that was the rest of the house, the life I had lived there. As rain began to fall, I stood and started walking back to Carmen's. All I wanted was my son and to return to Bend, back to my new life.

When we got to the station, we saw that the train to Bend had already left. Somehow there was a mistake when I had looked at the train schedule that morning. I had read 1:00. The man behind the ticket counter looked at me, at first with blank look. "Sorry miss. There's nothing I can do about it." He was indifferent. That must have happened all the time. He was younger than Harry, thin and he wore a mustache. He was in his uniform and it looked wrinkled, as if he'd been working all day, hadn't ironed it before putting it on. He looked back down, counting his money and doing something with the tickets. I stared at the metal bars and at the clock behind him. It was just 12:45. I would have been on time.

Then, Carmen handed Charlie to me and moved past me. She tried talking with the man on my behalf. When he saw me holding the baby, his eyes turned sympathetic. He looked at my hand. I was still wearing Nick's ring. It was part of my web of lies.

"She needs to get back tonight, isn't there another train?"

"Not to Bend. Not until tomorrow."

"Well is there anything she can do?"

"She may be able to go through Eugene." He looked down for a moment.

Carmen turned to me flashed me a look of disbelief. Her beautifully shaped, arched eye brows were raised as high as they could. She moved closer to me, "Why don't you just leave in the morning?" We moved to the side and let a couple of other passengers get through. Suddenly the train station filled with people and the loud murmur of the crowd became deafening and echoed up into the high ceilings of the station. A whistle blew.

"Darling stay with us," she insisted raising her voice over the commotion.

"I want to go home. I don't want to risk it, be in Sellwood another day. We were lucky Kitty or Joan didn't show up unexpectedly."

"You're lucky you didn't encounter Jeff Lambert."

"How could I have?" I lied. "I was confined to the house. There's no possible way--" I was over compensating for my lie.

"All right. All right," she said.

The ticket man interrupted, "Ladies?" He pursed his lips, more on one side, squinted his eyes and looked back down at the schedule as he spoke. The line to the ticket booth was free again. "The one for Eugene leaves at 1:15. If you hurry you can catch it. You'll get to Eugene at 4:45 Then," he referred to his schedule again before looking up at me, "there's a train from Eugene to Bend at 6:30. You'll get in at 10:00."

"All right," I said before Carmen could add her opinion. I walked over and handed the man the money.

None the less, Carmen objected. "It's a long trip. Adds about 2 hours. It's up to you. You won't be home until 10:00. But, what about Charlie's cough?"

"Thank you, sir. I'll take the ticket." I exchanged the money for the tickets.

"Is there a sleeping car?" Carmen asked. I hadn't thought of it, but I'd need to nurse Charlie. That way we could sleep too if we needed.

"Why didn't you say so in the first place? Ladies you're going to have to make up your minds."

At that Harry walked up to the counter. "Excuse me, is there a problem here?"

"Sir, I can help you when I've finished with these ladies. Seems they are having a problem making decisions."

"I'd prefer it if you used a more respectful tone with my wife and sister." Sister. I felt a wave of love for Harry and Carmen all over again. I looked at him, his large build and his intimidating stance towards the man. I realized, I could ask him to talk to Jeff again if I needed to.

"I'm sorry sir. Here you go, Miss."

"All right I'll need to hurry."

Carmen reached for Charlie and took him out of my arms. "You be a good little boy for your mama. I know you're a rascal, you sweet baby." Charlie reached for her Victory "Roll. Oh, no. Not again, funny boy."

She handed him back to me and carefully embraced me so as not to squeeze Charlie too hard. She kissed me on the cheek and had tears in her eyes. I'm going to miss you Evie.

Then it was Harry's turn. His hug was briefer, but his eyes met mine. He said softly, "I'm sorry Evie. I'm sorry for all your troubles."

I took a deep breath, "It really isn't so bad. I love you both. I'll write as soon as I get home."

I think Carmen and Harry knew that I couldn't extend the goodbyes any longer. I needed to get back and let my emotions settle. Neither of them knew the new burden I carried. I just held it in my heart until I could get home to Mary and tell her what had happened.

The day was gray and raining. The scene, as we pulled out of the Portland station, was a blurry black and white photograph. The rain on the glass formed rivulets that ran sideways as we pressed on. There were moments during the ride when I felt as if we were in a train and racing against time. Whenever I started to doze off, I imagined Jeff's fancy car passing the us, gaining distance, arriving at Bend before we got home. I imagined Frank at the platform, arms extended reaching for Charlie. Taking my baby and giving him to Jeff. I would wake with a start, sweaty and breathless. Each time, Charlie remained asleep in my arms, a little wheeze at the end of each of his exhalations. We mostly stayed in the passenger portion, sitting amongst other people as they slept or read. Couples chatted quietly. I barely made out any of their comments. The din was a comfort to me. I didn't feel so alone and I could look out the window and let my thoughts wander. We had purchased a ticket for a sleeping car, but I only used it when I had to nurse Charlie. When he woke or became fussy, I would leave my wool coat in our seat in the passenger car and take him to the sleeping car and nurse him.

When Charlie was bored during the ride, I'd walk, carrying him up and down the aisles, bouncing him with each step. He wasn't quite ready for peek-a-boo, but I tried. When I hid my face in my hands and popped back he'd stare at me quizzically. It made me laugh and sometimes he'd smile and I'd think he was catching on. When he smiled I could see the little tooth had broken through. It was no wonder his mood had improved. He seemed much more comfortable. Sometimes when he was fussy, I'd rock him in my arms and sing Mary's lullaby to him. I'd sing softly and his eyelids would grow heavy. If I stopped he'd squirm and look up at me. I would raise my eyebrows and pretend to start singing again and wait. I'd open my eyes really wide. A smile would curl around his index finger, which was constantly in his mouth. His blue eyes would grow brighter and then I'd start the song again. He'd close his eyes and nestle against me but he'd look up at me once in a while to see if I was playing one of our games. I rubbed his head. His hair was beginning to reveal its color. It was the same as Jeff's, a chestnut brown. Charlie's was still light and thin.

At one point, Charlie's eyes closed and his breathing became rhythmic, his little hand fell from his mouth and rested on my arm. I gently lay him down on the seat beside me and covered him with a blanket. I studied his face. Having just seen Jeff, the likeness seemed even stronger. *"His little son."*

Since Charlie, I was always trying to incorporate my new perspective on the world. Once Charlie fell asleep, this reasoning seeped into Jeff's offer. I'd been looking at it as if it were all about me. Wasn't Charlie, really, all there was? What difference would it make if I did what Jeff wanted? Why was I fighting it so hard? I realized that Jeff would keep his word and pretend we were married. I believed that he'd see to it that my reputation was preserved. Besides Charlie, what else would there be for the next many years? Wouldn't it all be Charlie anyway? And, maybe there would be another child. And another. I felt a wave of guilt. I realized I was saying no to Jeff because I was being selfish. The things I wanted in Bend were mostly for me not my child. All the dreams and plans Mary and I conjured. It was a plan for *my* life. It included Charlie but it wasn't *for* Charlie. As much as Frank and Mary loved us, they would adjust if we moved to Eugene, they'd still be in Charlie's life. They'd continue to love me, or at least Mary would. I couldn't predict Frank's reaction if he found out the truth about Charlie. If it appeared as though I were married to Jeff, then Charlie would be legitimate and that was the most important thing. Jeff wouldn't keep Mary and Frank from Charlie. Besides, Jeff was the child's father. Who was I to take that away?

As I mulled over this new argument, I pushed my doubt to the back of my mind. Why should any woman be thinking about the things I wanted and not about family? As we drew closer to Eugene's train station, I was convincing myself that maybe it was a possibility. And what of Jeff's power over me? He was wonderful as long as I didn't go against him. That's not so different from other men. I told myself this, but, I also knew that wasn't entirely true. Harry would never speak to Carmen the way Jeff had spoken to me. Carmen disagreed with Harry all the time. And, Frank, even with his worrying and fatherly ways, he always proved to be kind to Mary and us. I brought my hands to my lips as if in prayer, I breathed warm, slow breaths and then whispered to myself, "Let it be. The truth doesn't matter anymore."

The train attendant gently tapped me on the shoulder. I had fallen asleep. "Miss we'll arrive in Eugene in half an hour." Charlie was still asleep in my arms. My arm had gone numb and I gingerly switched him to the other. His face looked so peaceful.

"Thank you, I think I'll go to our sleeping car and change the baby. Prepare for the stop." He started to walk away, but I called him back. "Excuse me Sir, will I have to change trains again?"

"Where are you going after this?"

"Bend."

"Then, yes, ma'am. You can talk with the station manager. He'll tell you which one to get on next. Do you need help with your luggage?"

"Yes. That would be very helpful. Do you know if I could catch a taxi during the stop over?"

"Of course. There'll be one out front on 5th avenue. There is usually a few parked outside 5th and Willamette when the train from Portland pulls in."

I carried Charlie through the narrow isles. I pulled one door open that connected the two train cars. A loud pealing of the metal wheels on metal tracks below startled Charlie and he started crying. A gust of air hit us as I reached for the door to the sleeping car. Once inside, the little hallway was walled off by sleeping compartments. Charlie was still crying when an older man opened one of the doors and made his way out. It was a tight passage and as we maneuvered around each other, he smiled at me. Then he looked at Charlie.

"There. There. You'll be all right little man." He patted Charlie's head.

"Thank you," I whispered.

"He's a beautiful boy. You must be proud."

"I am."

"Have a good night, Ma'am."

I pulled open the small door to our compartment and entered the tight quarters. A single cot was attached to the metal wall and my suitcase was on the floor next to it. I could hear the thunderous rhythm of the wheels on the tracks, somewhat muted but creating a predictable vibration under my feet. Charlie opened his little eyes and yawned. He looked around and his eyes took on a frightened look, his body grew stiff for a moment and he started to cry.

"There, there baby." I held him in my arms and unbuttoned my shirt. I let him nurse and, as he did so greedily, my milk rushed in. I looked out the small window, visible through a partially open gray wool curtain. We were still following the Willamette river. All that way, I thought. At different points along the way it had been obscured by trees or a house here and there. The sun was beginning to go down and the orange hue and dramatic skies of Oregon dusk were just emerging. I felt as if we were moving faster than the clouds. Perhaps we were.

It was easy enough to secure a taxi once we arrived in Eugene. I had decided that while I was there and had a couple of hours I would have the taxi driver take me through downtown and some of the neighborhoods. The driver seemed a bit surprised when he saw a woman alone with a baby. He opened the door and helped Charlie and me into the car. Then he picked up my suitcase and put it in the trunk. It was already dark outside, and the streets where we were, near to the train station, looked empty. A short distance away I saw the city lights.

"Is that downtown?" I asked as he got into the front seat and closed the door.

"Yes. Would you like to go downtown?" He started the meter. The driver was a small man, or he looked small behind the wheel. Shorter than myself I thought. He had gentle eyes and was probably quite a bit younger than me, hardly a man at all. He turned to me. "Downtown?" he repeated.

"Well, maybe you can help me" I said. "I just arrived from Portland. I'm stopping through on my way to Bend, my next train isn't for a couple of hours. My husband's traveling on business so I'm going up to Bend to stay with my parents. We'll be moving to Eugene soon. He says it's a wonderful place, but I haven't ever visited. I thought since I had time it might be a good time to get acquainted with the area. Maybe tour a couple of neighborhoods."

Charlie was alert and watched my lips as I spoke to the man. Even though he was just a baby, I wondered if somehow he could tell I was lying, feel it somehow? Charlie lifted his finger and put it in my mouth as I talked. I gently pulled it back down and smiled at the man.

"Sure. That makes sense. Do you know which neighborhoods you'd like to see?"

"Eugene doesn't look very big."

"It isn't. But there are some places more suited to families, I'd say. Newer homes just built since the war. I personally think it's a nice place to live." He pulled the car out from the curb and started towards town. "But, coming from Portland I imagine it will feel very small to you."

"Yes," I uttered.

As I half tended to Charlie and half studied the surroundings, a horrible guilt descended on me. How easily lies fell out of my mouth. I was beginning to lose track of the truth and my fabrications. All of it was a lie. I felt a terrible headache coming on and I just wanted to be home. Charlie squirmed around in my arms and kept reaching for my lips.

"All right little boy settle down." I rocked him as I held him. He let out a squeal and when I looked down at him he was smiling his mischievous grin.

"Happy baby. Which one of you does he look like?" The cab driver turned a corner leading away from the downtown strip.

"The baby?"

The man nodded and looked at me in the rearview mirror.

"Like his father"

"They say that's the way with babies. They always resemble their father at first. Maybe that way there's no question about who's the father."

I looked at him, I was sure it was disdainfully which was how I would have reacted even if my circumstances were as I was pretending. Despite having heard that same claim over the years, I said, "I've never heard that."

"I'm sorry. I don't know why I said it like that. Sometimes I can be so

stupid." He pretended to hit his forehead with his palm.

At first I didn't want to respond at all. His casual comment had upset me, but it wasn't his fault. "No. His father would be flattered, I'm sure." It wasn't a lie. We drove into what looked like downtown Eugene, "It's not all that small, is it?" I asked now craning my neck to peer at all the shops and restaurants.

"Not at first sight, but really it is. There's a lot of things happening around Broadway and Willamette but beyond that I'd say it's pretty sleepy." The driver and I went back and forth like this for about an hour. He seemed pleased to act as the ambassador of Eugene. As we drove through the quaint neighborhoods filled with new ranch houses, my heart sank. The fenced yards were so tiny and offered no privacy. I told myself that I wouldn't need to garden and that if I were to move with Eugene and stay with Jeff when he was home, then I would be busy with domestic responsibilities. I ignored the fact that I had always been able to maintain my homemaker obligations and spend hours out in the gardens. In addition, Charlie wouldn't be a baby forever; where would he play? These homes were nothing compared to the plot of land at Mary and Franks, as well as the one at the farmhouse I wanted to buy. Besides, Mary and Frank would take Charlie. Jeff wouldn't be around to help and besides why would he anyway? There I would be often alone in a ranch house, no life outside of my family. I'd likely have more children. I couldn't even be sure Jeff would stay with me once his infatuation wore off. Once I couldn't refuse or reject him anymore, it would likely extinguish his feelings for me. A part of me believed his obsessiveness over me was driven by the intense challenge of drawing me back to him. Surely, in no time I would be less desirable to him and then where would I be? People would still talk once he stopped coming around. It was exhausting, going back and forth with those feelings. Being convinced one minute that I would be happy with him and then not a moment later finding the idea revolting. But, wasn't that my relationship with Jeff, two extremes? Passion and anger?

When we got back on the train, I was exhausted. Charlie was still awake but getting fussier. I could hear the grumble starting up in his lungs again. There was no place to get him into cold air so I went into our little room changed his diaper and nursed him. Once he was comfortable I took to walking him up and down the aisles again. He stopped fussing but still his breathing had that familiar wheeze. It would be a few hours before Bend and I was worried about what to do should he have trouble getting air again. I took him back into the passenger car as there was more room in there to walk him and it seemed less stuffy. Again, we walked through the connector between the two train cars, the unbearable sound of the wheels against steel. I pushed open the door again and we were inside the next car. I was exhausted, hardly able to keep pacing. I hadn't eaten and I was

hungry, but more than anything I was tired. Charlie's head finally felt limp on my shoulder. I could hear the air as it traveled through his wet lungs. We sat down in a seat and I layed him down next to me. I covered him with one of the little blankets Mary had made for him. One of his Christmas presents. I also took off my wool coat and covered him up with that too. It was chillier than I expected. I closed my eyes and leaned my head back on the roomy upholstered seat. The car wasn't very crowded, maybe twenty passengers. All going from Eugene to Bend. I turned towards the window; it was mostly dark and I could make out faint silhouettes of trees, but they just looked like black against black. Just a suggestion of what was outside.

I missed Jeff.

I closed my eyes and gave in to a daydream. A little excitement had risen in me after my tour of Eugene. It was smaller than Portland and larger than Bend. I liked Broadway street and I could picture myself pushing Charlie in a pram. I even imagined Jeff and I going to one of the theaters or sandwich shops. I remembered that there were times in Sellwood during our affair when we were perfectly compatible. I looked back down at Charlie and ran my fingers through his soft hair. I kept my hand resting on his little, warm body. The bond with him was so great that even getting lost in my thoughts for a moment caused me to instinctively touch him or watch over him again. I noticed a corner of one of Jeff's letters in the pocket of my coat. I reached over and pulled the two of them out. I re-read each one; Jeff's words were so romantic and loving. There was that side of him, it was true. I removed a pen and stationary from my purse. As Charlie slept, I composed a letter. I had full intention of agreeing to his proposal, but as I wrote my feelings changed again.

Dear Jeff,

Please accept my apology for our argument last night in Sellwood. It was so late and I was surprised to see you. I was so happy that Charlie took to you and for a moment, it opened my mind to the possibility of your offer. If I understood it correctly, you said that you'd like for Charlie and me to move to Eugene? I thought long and hard, honestly I did, but I've come to a decision. I can't do it. I feel strongly that it is unfair for you to ask me to choose between what I have now and something you want me to do. Isn't it selfish for you to even ask? After we spoke, I felt as if what you're really saying is that if I don't, you'll ruin things for me in Bend. Is that what you're threatening to do? It makes my heart ache to imagine Charlie mistreated because you've told people about me. To avoid that, I would do anything, but I hope that isn't the choice you're giving me. I hope you wouldn't come to Bend and tell people the truth. I know you don't want Charlie to suffer like that. I hope you wouldn't want me to either.

I cared so deeply for you at one time but my feelings have changed. I hope

it doesn't make you angry to hear me say it that way. I don't love you anymore. I want you to know that during the train ride back I thought of you. We stopped in Eugene and I had some time before leaving for Bend. Jeff, I hired a taxi and took a tour of the town. I agree it's a lovely and if I'm honest, if things weren't a lie, if there was something more you could offer me... I guess I'm saying if you would marry me, I know I'd like to live there with you as my husband. I would let myself fall in love with you again. I could. It wouldn't be that difficult, because those feelings are still there, hidden but close to the surface. But, you won't promise me anything. You want me to live with shame and jealousy and sit and wait for you. Why would any woman agree to spend her life under such circumstances? You have not promised me anything except a way to preserve my reputation. I've already done that for myself. Anything you can offer me, I already have.

My answer is no. I'm not moving to Eugene. I have a new family and I am very well loved now. Please have compassion for me and understand how much damage it would cause if people in Bend knew the truth. If you told Frank... You know I don't have any family and Mary and Frank feel so much like one to me. Aren't you relieved that I've done so well for your son? Please write to me and tell me you understand. I'm not moving to Eugene. You have to accept that once and for all. Jeff you have to leave me alone now.

Eve

CHAPTER 8

I expected a letter from Jeff. Three weeks since I had mailed mine, and no word. January had nearly passed. And, as before I felt content with Mary and Frank. I was ready to make my own home and for things to become permanent in Bend. The house in Sellwood had sold, Frank handled all of the paperwork, and I insisted on signing it over to him and putting it in his name rather than co-sign. That way I avoided any problems with the bank giving me a loan. I trusted Frank completely. When I told him, he nodded his head and his expression grew soft. He had allowed himself to love me, I thought. I knew he loved Charlie. He'd taken to calling him "*my baby boy.*"

Charlie was able to do so much. He was eating some solid food and drank from a bottle. The bridge ladies came over one afternoon and taught Mary and me how to prepare and can baby food. Lenore was the expert, of course. Her graying hair in a tight wave. Lenore had never let go of the roaring twenties, Mary had joked to me when were alone. Lenore had all the jars lined up and instructed each one of us to let the jars cool before we ladled the purred fruit and veggies into them. We transferred the baby food into bowls on the table. It was pretty, in a way with the bright colors of carrots, squash and blueberries. That January afternoon, the light coming into the kitchen

was a cheerful yellow and snow fell in heavy flurries outside. I could see the scene from the sink as I filled pots to boil more of the glass jars. As I waited for the water to reach the right level, I thought of the snow and how Charlie might like to experience it. When Mary came over, wiping her hands on her apron, she stared out with me.

"Maybe when the ladies leave, we should bundle Charlie up and take him outside," I said turning to her.

"Yes, I'd like to see his expression when the snow flakes tickle his nose. Let's do that." she gave my arm a little squeeze and kissed me on the cheek. I looked out a little longer and watched the snow coming down hard and already accumulating on the barn and the grain shed. Everything had a silent peace. I felt that peace too. Just then, the back door opened and Frank entered and began removing his scarf and coat.

"Have you lost your mind Old Man?" Mary asked rushing over to him.

We all turned to look at the comedy before us. Frank was covered in snow. If Mary had let him come in and remove his coat and scarf, the kitchen floor would have been soaked. We were all laughing at the silliness. I walked over to the table and gave Charlie a kiss as he sat in the high chair Frank had made for him. My baby took in the show with amusement. All of the ladies fussing over Frank. Charlie seemed to understand the humor too, and he looked back at forth at the ladies and then Frank and Mary. Then, he looked at me and smiled again. Just then the phone rang.

Frank started for the phone. "I'm waiting for a reporter. He's writing about farmers in Oregon and wants to come by and talk to me about the farm, take some pictures too."

"Oh no you don't," Mary said, "Eve go and answer the telephone please."

I was intrigued by the idea of a reporter covering a story about Frank and the farm. I picked up.

"Hello?"

"Eve?"

It was Jeff. A bolt of fear ran through me. Immediately I regretted sending him that letter. Of course it would rouse a most intense anger in him. I'd never stood up to him like that before. That's why he called. He knew the risks to me. What if Frank had answered the phone? What if the ladies could hear as I talked with him?

"Jeff, please. May I call you later?"

"No. Eve. I need to settle this now."

I whispered, "Settle what?"

"I received your letter Eve and I read it very carefully." My heart was pounding and I felt as if I would faint. It was too much. Why would he call the house? Why couldn't he leave me alone?

"I'm sorry I said things the way I did. What is it Jeff? Do you want me to meet you?"

There was a long pause of silence. "Yes, Eve that's exactly what I want. Why would you write those things to me and not tell me in person?"

"Jeff, the house is full right now. Please. I will come. I promise. Will you just write me and tell me when? I promise I'll take the train with Charlie."

More silence. I was breathing heavily. I couldn't stand the possibility of one of them walking in on me.

Finally his voice returned. "It will be in two weeks."

"I'm sorry." I whispered. I didn't know why I apologized to him so much. I felt so helpless and I didn't want him to be angry with me and call the house or drive up to Bend and talk with Frank. The letter was a stupid mistake.

"It's all right Eve. I'll send the details. I won't wait for a return letter from you. I will plan on meeting you in Eugene the date and time I indicate in my letter to you."

"All right Jeff. I 'm sorry."

"Good bye Eve."

I hung up the phone. My hands were shaking and I walked over to the couch and sat down. I knew I couldn't sit for long because everyone would understand that who ever was on the phone had bad news. It was so hard to hold back the tears but I managed. I looked out the window of the parlor. My bedroom was just above on the second floor. The view of the orchards had a different perspective from ground level. I walked to the window and examined the orchard trees, remembering the fall harvest. Mary was right when she had told me it would be fun. There were so many farm hands picking apples and Frank would fill the truck and rush them to town. Mary made pies and canned apples. She'd give Charlie little tastes of sweet cider on her fingertip. I remembered him back then, he would put everything in his mouth. He loved the cider so much; Mary had soaked the end of a washcloth and gave it to him. He chewed and chewed on it.

The snow sat heavy on the branches now, and began to accumulate on the little paths between the trees. I had the strongest urge to walk through the orchard and leave my footprints on the untouched snow. For some reason the thought was soothing. Then I realized that my footprints, my mark, would disappear before I returned back through the orchard. Even if I disrupted the pristine snow, the new flakes would cover up where ever I had walked; it would be as if I hadn't been there at all. Mary came into the room and walked over to me.

"Who was on the phone darling? Was it that reporter? You'd think Frank had been discovered as a film star the way he goes on about it." She rubbed my back, "The ladies are ready for you to seal up the jars." I turned from the window and looked at her for a long moment.

Her tone changed, "who was on the phone, Eve?" We both had known since my trip to Sellwood, perhaps even from the beginning.

From Jeff's first letters. I believe that Mary and I had already pieced it all together, but never had spoken it. I would have to leave. I wasn't even so resistant any more. I was tired of the lies. I was tired of letting myself feel happy and hopeful with this always lurking. Carrying my shadows with me everywhere I went.

"It was Jeff," I whispered.

"It was?"

"Yes. I'm going to meet him in Eugene in two weeks."

"You talked all about that in those few minutes?"

"Mary I just told him to tell me what to do. What he wanted me to do."

Mary nodded. "Eve, I think this may be a good thing. You can always come visit, stay with us whenever you want or need to. In fact, when he *travels on business* you take the train up here and spend time with us. You can have both worlds. I honestly don't like the idea of you having to endure a man like that. But, you're not the only woman in the world who cares for a childish man or a cheater for that matter. I don't like that he's threatening you either."

I nodded again.

"We should go back," she said. "We don't want the girls to get suspicious. It'll be all right. I really think so. We'll talk more later."

I let out a deep breath and smiled. I knew it was a weak smile, but it was resignation. A decision was made.

We walked into the steamy kitchen and someone had put a bowl of mashed peas in front of Charlie. Of course he couldn't spoon it himself, but it appeared he didn't have to. He had peas all over himself and the chair. He was bent forward, putting his face in it.

"Now now," Frank said, "don't teach the boy bad manners."

Lenore laughed. "Frank don't you understand babies?"

Mary chimed in, "of course he does. Charlie is his little grandbaby. I know I told you he stayed up all night, the night Charlie was born. Frank was the first one to rock the baby to sleep. How many men understand babies like that?"

Frank looked at Mary and she smiled at him. Despite all of her teasing, he knew Mary was loyal and would defend him at all costs. He'd do the same for her. Besides, it was true that Frank had a very tender side and that he nurtured Charlie.

That night, as Mary rocked Charlie in my bedroom, under the dim light of the bedside lamp, I sat on the bed near to her. The room had an amber glow and in places where the wallpaper was shadowed, the room seemed larger. The lace curtains stood still with the windows closed.

"Not too bad in here tonight. Warmer than usual."

"With all the cooking today."

"Yes, most likely."

Charlie slept peacefully in Mary's arms. I knew he had grown to know

her body, the curve of her arm, her sweet scent.

"It's all right, Eve." She said and her eyes stayed fixed on mine. "It really is. Something had to be decided."

"But it's the way he said it. Why would he—why would any man go to such lengths to be with a woman with his illegitimate son?"

"Charlie's not illegitimate," she kissed him on the top of his head. More of his hair had grown in. It made him look all the more like Jeff.

"No, of course not." I played with the chenille bedspread. I traced the lines of the soft floral pattern. "I just mean, why does he want this? Why is he pressing so hard when he knows I don't want to? When he knows that I've created a good life for his son? Besides, he's married and has a child."

Charlie was asleep. Mary stopped rocking. Her face was relaxed, softer. I could tell she wasn't worried about the situation any more. She pulled back her hair with one hand.

"Here let me put the baby down." She carried Charlie to the crib and gently placed him in. He was precious to her. A treasure. More and more I was so happy for her relationship with Charlie. She covered him with a blanket and then a quilt. I was so relieved that he seemed to have outgrown his croup.

Mary sat down next to me on the bed, took my hand in hers.

"You asked me why a man would do this?"

I nodded and watched her. She swallowed hard and squeezed my hand.

"Eve you are so beautiful. Striking. Most women don't have beauty like you do. He was right when he said you look like a film star. Not just when you were in love, in a swimsuit, glamorous. Every moment you are so pretty. You are so lovely to look at. Sometimes I watch you and I think, how can she not know what an absolutely lovely creature she is?"

"Oh Mary." I was embarrassed. "Of course you would say that."

"I'm not saying it to compliment you Eve. I believe that's only one of the reasons Jeff won't let you go. But, I'm sure he's rarely met a woman like you. Despite how handsome you say he is, you're the special one."

I bit my lip and thought about my circumstance. Bend was my home. These moments were in my heart. Everything there with Mary was what belonged to me. What I belonged to. This room felt like it had always been my girlhood bedroom. I was beginning to believe I really was a widow who had returned home to my family. That Charlie was Nick's, not Jeff's. In fact, Jeff didn't exist. Not in my mind. I would have been fine with letting the lie become the truth there in Bend. It could have been a new life for me. I started to cry because it wasn't fair.

"Eve." She waited, I thought what she was about to say would carry weight and it did. She frowned a bit "Eve, the other reason, perhaps the more important reason. is that you are a spirited woman. Men like

Jeff want to control a woman like you. Or at least I think they do. I wish you had never tangled yourself up with him, but you did. He's not letting you go because you don't want him any more."

I felt my heart fall and a shame rose in me. I knew I turned flush. I looked down at my skirt, one that I had made. It was a little more sophisticated than it needed to be. I had taken to pencil skirts and sweater sets. Mary lifted my chin and turned her head slightly. "I don't mean you're promiscuous. I mean you're strong."

"I don't think so."

"You really don't? What woman would have the fortitude to endure what you have? To care so much for your baby to move to a place where you knew no one?"

I let out a deep breath. "I love you Mary, but before I knew you, I thought this was my only choice."

"That may be, but it wasn't your only choice. You could have gone to a home, had the baby and given him to a family to adopt."

"I wouldn't."

"That's what I mean. How many women dream of owning a home and garden without one thought of a man to take care of things?"

"I've lived alone since Nick died. I know how to take care of myself. A lot of widows are in the same position."

"Well, be that as it may. You are different. I believe most women would have accepted Jeff's offer, particularly with his threats to your reputation. The truth is, he's offered to take care of you and Charlie. But you dream of more. I believe in my heart that Jeff Lambert may have always known that about you and try as he may, he couldn't ever make you give in. Then, came Charlie. "

I didn't have anything to say. I'd never thought about things that way. Although, one way to look at it was that he'd used so many tactics to change me. At first I let him. I was selfish. As much as Carmen says I was vulnerable because I was grieving, there was more. I wanted to take from another woman what had been taken from me. I wanted a sort of justice. I was angry and felt trapped. There would be no point in admitting that to Mary. She believed in me too much.

She took a deep breath and looked around the room. "Eve, I want to tell you something. May I?"

"Of course."

She lifted her hand and straightened her hair, which was up in a soft bun. "My own mother. She was like you. She was very spirited. Back then things were even worse than today...Well I suppose in most ways. When I was a teenager she began organizing and protesting for suffrage."

"Oh. I hadn't realized. That's very brave."

"Well yes. But, at the time I didn't understand and I resented her so much. I said horrible things and she always reprimanded me for rejecting one of the opportunities women had to *change* things for all

women, as she put it. But, I didn't care."

"Well, of course, you were a young girl."

"One day she came home in the early evening. I had made dinner for my father and me. We had eaten alone because she was out with the other women. My father loved my mother very much and he was a lot like Harry. Or maybe Harry was like him."

She looked at me and smiled. I smiled too. "Harry has quite a handful with Carmen, but he adores her. I do too. So she came home that day and her face was covered in blood. Her clothes. I looked at her and I thought she had been beaten. Her eye had swelled up and her lip. My father ran to her and ushered her in to the kitchen where he tended her wounds. She explained that she and the other women had tried to interrupt a meeting. Mother said they marched into the hall and demanded a chance to speak. The men mocked them and told them to leave. When they didn't, they dragged the women out. When they dragged my mother, she had fallen down the stairs. It was such chaos that she didn't see which man was responsible."

"That is so horrible and frightening, Mary."

"She nodded and looked down. Eve, I was never as brave as you and my mother. But, I also never forgave her. Ever. Even now I feel angry and I know that is still a way of saying she brought it on herself. The town knew she was involved in the uprising—if you could call it that. As a result, all of my friends shunned me. I was mocked too. All I wanted at that time was to fit in."

"Of course, you were a teenager."

She nodded. "Eve if you moved to Eugene with Jeff, you and Charlie would be safe from that. Jeff's promising to take care of you."

"Not marry me."

"Eve what's the difference if everyone thinks you're married? You'll wear Nick's ring."

"I want someone to love me. Be my husband. I want the things that I can have here."

"Society doesn't look kindly on women who... I don't know how to say it...act like men."

"Well, plenty of women worked during the war. They had jobs just the same as men."

"Eve. See? This is what I mean about you. I know you often feel weak and frightened. But deep down you challenge things. I'm not saying you shouldn't challenge a married man who, in some ways is acting crazy. But, you have a child with him now."

"I don't mean to be cruel, but isn't this just the same as your feelings for your mother?" I wish I hadn't blurted it. I can tell my words hurt Mary.

"I suppose a part of me believes that women *should* be happy managing the home and children. I admit I may feel that way because Frank and I couldn't have children. Maybe I make being a housewife

out to be something less complicated. But, I love making a home for Frank. Baking and sewing. I really do now with you and Charlie here—well, that only strengthens my feelings on the matter."

"All right. I agree with you. It's worth it for Charlie. I realized that on the train home. I don't know if I can take the jealousy. Carmen always said, unless there's love in a marriage, then over time there's only hatred."

"Well, what does Carmen know? She's never been in this position. She's happy. You will be too."

I didn't feel sad. I just felt less like a child, more like a mother. All I wanted was my child. I could come back to Mary and Frank's when Jeff went out of town. Besides, as horrible as knowing he was with another woman was, I could play the part of a housewife. I'd already practiced the role with Nick. Although, that was back when I was practically a child with great ambitions. I wanted to run the garden club, and I had. My status in Sellwood society and community group had been rising. Back then I was confident and embraced the things that a young wife embraced. I too had a husband like Harry or Frank. As I started doing floral arrangements and spending more and more time in the garden, Nick had said he was very proud of me. My thoughts froze. I would never be able to visit Portland with Jeff. He was married. I was quiet for a while, and Mary sat with me not saying a word either. I supposed she knew that now was the time to make up my mind and stick with it.

Finally, I conceded. "Yes. You're right. How would I manage that big farmhouse and garden anyway?"

"Maybe Frank can build you a pergola at your house in Eugene."

At that thought, I felt a horrible sinking feeling. It would be a prison with Jeff. I didn't love him any more. In fact, I hated him. I let out a long breath. I smiled at Mary and leaned over and hugged her. She held me in her arms and rocked me gently. She kissed me on the head, "beautiful Eve," she whispered.

I pulled away slowly. "Please don't tell Frank yet. Let's wait until I'm ready to go. I couldn't bear living with his disappointment."

Predictably, Jeff's letter arrived within a week. I had checked the mail every day and the day it came, I carried it up to my room. Frank was sitting on the porch, "A letter from Carmen?"

I nodded, didn't even pretend to smile.

"When you write her back will you tell her I miss her? Tell her to send us a letter once in a while."

"Of course."

Dear Eve,

Eve, what is there to do but let me take care of you and Charlie? Honestly what else is there? I can make a family with you. Come home to you. I know it's not the same as being married, but in our situation this is what we need to do. I can see your point of view, but look at the situation you've gotten yourself into? Eve, you're a complicated woman and I often worry about your

decisions. For that reason, I am deeply concerned about Charlie. What if he were older and somehow the community you love so dearly found out that the story about Nick didn't add up? Bend isn't so far away, everyone in Sellwood knew precisely when Nick died. It very well could happen, but you don't consider that. You are impulsive, a quality I love in you and also one that worries me. The more you protest, the stronger my conviction.

This is why I insist, grow firm. Eve, I am frustrated with you. This is the reason I spoke so harshly on the telephone with you. I'm growing weary with the nonsense. I am holding you to your word. I expect you to meet me in Eugene on March 14th at the train station. There is a 4:00 train from Bend. It's the last one. It'll arrive at 8:30. I'm sorry it's so late but that is when I can get there. You will stay the night and I will make arrangements with discretion.

*Yours,
Jeff*

I crumpled the letter and threw it on the ground. I had a few weeks to think about things. I was sure there was another way. I picked up the letter and flattened it on the bed. I folded it again and returned it to the envelope. I held it in one hand. I stood and walked over to the window. Anger was burning through me. I let out a breath and stared out the window. I could see it was still cold outside. The ground took on the whitish appearance even in the places where the snow had melted. The branches looked so brittle; I couldn't imagine them budding in the spring. And further, beyond the orchards, the forest had a layer of fog hovering over it. The scene was austere. Mary said the snow would hang on till early spring. Then there would be rain off and on till summer. But, she said the most wonderful part about living there was the glorious sun breaks punctuating the dreary gray. The idea of it made me hopeful.

I wanted to throw it out or set it on fire it but I kept the letter so I could remember his instructions. But I didn't have to. Practically every word letter had burned a place in my memory. His words had made me feel as if I was a child being scolded. Regardless of what he, and I suppose what Mary had said, I knew myself well enough to know I was a reasonable woman. I was from a good family and completely capable of caring for my son by myself. I knew Jeff's controlling and arrogant sentiment would intervene in all of my thoughts between then and when we met in Eugene.

March 14th at the train station 2:00 train from Eugene. Arrive by 6:00...I'm growing weary of the nonsense.

As March 14th neared, my panic increased. Frank knew nothing of my plans to move to Eugene and now that the house in Sellwood was sold, he grew more and more interested in buying the farmhouse for me. Not because he wanted me to leave their home, but because it would insure Charlie and I stayed in Bend. The lovely, rambling place was close by. I didn't want to cause suspicion so I often went with him to look at it and take measurements for the garden. Each time we

entered the large wooden door and into the foyer with the pretty gold and light blue striped wallpaper, I wanted to die. I wanted to run out of the house and never see it again. I knew I'd never live there. Those dreams were dying.

One afternoon he took me over to the house to make some decisions about renovating. "Eve," he'd said, "This may be a good room for Charlie. We'll need to paper it in a more masculine wallpaper. What do you think of cowboys?"

I nodded and feigned enthusiasm.

"I'll have to build the boy his own bed."

When we walked into the large room with a sleeping porch attached. He'd said "and this, of course will be yours. And my future son in law's." He give me a wink. "I'm looking forward to that too."

"Frank," I protested. "Maybe we're moving too fast."

"I know it's a big step, but you want to live here in Bend, don't you?"

"Yes. Very much."

"Well, it's not like you'll be out here all alone. Is that it?"

"No. Not really."

He smiled and stared at me for a moment. "Let's go outside and look around."

"OK."

He took me out to the large fields. To one side there was evidence of an old cornfield. I could see where there had been neat rows and here and there a few frozen stalks stood tall, frozen but still there. "If you married, you could consider a working farm here. Plant corn to one side. We could plant apple trees. It may even be an opportunity to combine orchards."

"Yes."

I walked with him all around.

"Why haven't you started sketching your garden with your colored pencils?"

"Oh I will. Charlie's keeping me busy now that he's crawling."

"He's a devil isn't he?" Frank said with pride. I realized Frank was a different man than one I had met almost a year before, while I was still pregnant. Perhaps, I should have confided in him. Maybe if Mary and I sat down and talked with him, he'd understand. He'd make sure my reputation was salvaged. As I looked up at the gray sky, I realized that I couldn't let myself disappoint him like that. Maybe there was something I could make up about Jeff. We could tell Frank that Jeff and I had courted a while back in high school, before Nick. I could say that we had always been in love. I shook my head at the thought. What a ridiculous lie. No man like Jeff had grown up in Sellwood. Carmen, Harry, Nick and me. We were of a different ilk. Jeff looked entirely different from us. His manner was polished. A rich city man, well educated and arrogant. There could have been no boy at Cleveland High school like him. I couldn't imagine any of them growing up to

recite poetry and spending evenings pontificating about art and philosophy. No lie existed that could cover up the truth about my affair with Jeff. It seemed Frank noticed my frown.

"Yeah, it does look like rain. It's pretty cold too. I imagine you'd like to get back to Charlie.

I nodded and smiled at him. I no longer had any words. They were gone.

Chapter 9

It was 8:45 at night when the train pulled into the Eugene station. I looked through the window, but didn't see Jeff waiting there. Maybe it had taken him longer than expected to drive down from Portland. A part of me wished he had changed his mind. But, then I wondered about the other part of me. The one who chose an outfit that I knew looked nice. A straight wool skirt and a cashmere sweater. I'd also set my hair the way he liked it, waves that framed my face. I suddenly felt embarrassed for wearing the jade bracelet he had bought for me the Christmas before. It was so beautiful with its gold Chinese coins and jade beads. Still, I hadn't worn it since I'd moved to Bend. Before I left to meet him, I'd debated whether to put it on. Pulling into the Eugene station I recognized my own intentions, Jeff would too. I was wearing my wool coat, his three letters remained tucked in my pocket.

As we left our seat to disembark, I started putting away the wooden stacking toy I'd been using to distract and entertain Charlie. I placed all but one of the rings into my small suitcase. I gave him a large red one to hold. He didn't like that I'd taken his playthings from him so abruptly; he let out a loud cry in protest. Then another.

"All right," I whispered and gave him a second ring to play with. He immediately focused on placing one ring on top of each other, then smashing them together. His brow furrowed in concentration. I lifted Charlie up and held him in my arms; I placed the strap of my purse over my shoulder. Somehow, I managed to pick up my medium sized overnight suitcase. I felt awkward and out of balance as I walked down the metal stairs, exiting the train through a narrow doorway. As I stepped onto the platform, Charlie threw the largest wooden ring on to the cement walkway. I could have screamed with frustration. It was hard to manage him and the bag and I looked around for an open space to put my luggage amongst the crowd while I looked for Jeff. When I turned around Jeff was standing in front of me holding the wooden toy ring. He gave it back to Charlie. My heart dropped when I saw Jeff. I didn't know if it was fear or my old feelings rising to the surface. He always made me feel self-conscious; he was so handsome and confident. When Charlie saw him, he dropped the toy again and he reached out his arms. Jeff took him from me and held him with in the crook of one arm and then reached down and lifted my bag with the

other. I picked up the wooden rings and put them in my purse.

"I can carry it, you have the baby." I said to him.

"Don't be silly," Then he leaned over and kissed me on the cheek, "you look beautiful Eve. Very, very pretty."

It was as if we were a family. It was as if he was my husband meeting me at the train station after a visit with out of town relatives. And, Charlie, the way he took to Jeff. It was all like a dream where everything is a little off kilter. Things *looked* normal and happy, but a haunting feeling purported doom.

Jeff led us through the crowd then outside of the small train station. He stopped at the curb in front of a shiny silver sports car. He put the luggage down for a second. Charlie was hiding behind Jeff's shoulder and then looking at me, smiling. Jeff lifted him up high and then when he pulled him down he kissed Charlie's belly. Charlie squealed with laughter. Then, Jeff handed my baby back to me.

"He takes to you," I said, kissing Charlie on the cheek.

Jeff gave me a knowing look as if to say, "I'm his father after all."

"It's cold," he said. "Let's get into my car and we'll go back to the hotel so you can freshen up." Jeff stopped and looked at me, Charlie was reaching for him again. "Did I tell you, you look very pretty?"

I felt myself grow flush. I wanted to cry but instead I nodded.

He moved closer, enough so that I thought he was going to kiss me. Instead, he unlocked my car door and opened it for me; then he stepped back. It caused a rush of desire to rise in me. I climbed in and held Charlie in my arms. After putting my small suitcase in the trunk, Jeff entered on his side and sat behind the wheel.

Immediately Charlie reached for the buttons and I pulled him closer to me so he couldn't reach them. I gave him the wooden toys again and settled him on my lap. I tapped the wooden pieces together. Charlie examined me, looking at me with a mischievous expression, a smile and curious eyes. I tapped the rings together then hid one on the side of the seat. He laughed as I pulled it up back into his line of vision. I had forgotten I was with Jeff; I was so focused on Charlie.

"Look at how smart he is. He's so funny," I blurted as if I were sitting with Frank or Mary. Realizing where I was, I looked over and Jeff had been watching us. He was smiling at the baby.

"He's so beautiful, Eve. May I hold him again?"

I lifted Charlie and handed him over. Charlie was intent on playing with the row of buttons that ran under the radio grill. Jeff let him pull them in and out.

"How is it that you let him fuss with the buttons but never let me?" I had softened a little with him. I was teasing.

"He's a baby. And you're a grown woman. You should know better, shouldn't you?" I could never win a sarcastic banter with him. "But maybe you're right. Maybe he shouldn't be doing that. How about you play with the steering wheel, Charlie?" He said in a soft, loving voice I'd

never heard before.

"Jeff I'm sorry about being so indecisive. I know you love Charlie." I looked down at my hands. I had forgotten to remove my gloves. I pulled them off, and placed them in my handbag. When I looked up at him, his blue eyes were fixed on me. As I had before, I felt as if I were drowning. Charlie had pulled himself up to the steering wheel. He had his mouth on the steering wheel.

"He may chew the leather. I don't want him to ruin it." I warned.

I felt as though Jeff was examining me. He looked down for a moment. I saw that he'd noticed I was wearing the bracelet he had given me. He reached over to me and ran his fingers over the charms. Then, he felt the top of my hand and traced my bare skin. "May I kiss you Eve?" I was breathless and this was just how it had been when we were together in Sellwood. He would find me, see inside of me and my feelings would grow to the point that I couldn't contain them. I had hoped this time would be different. But, it wasn't.

"No Jeff. I don't think that's a good idea."

He smiled and narrowed his eyes, flirting with me, "Why isn't it a good idea, Eve?"

I pulled my hand away and placed it on my lap. I turned and looked out the window. Although the weather was cool, it was a sunny. The light outside reminded me of a spring day. "Because you're married," I said. I didn't look back at him. For a time it was quiet but then Charlie started making sounds as he mouthed the steering wheel. "Ba. Ba. Ba..."

"Eve, can you take the baby while I drive us to the hotel?"

Finally, I turned around and took Charlie in my arms, but I didn't look directly at him. Jeff started the engine. Then he touched my shoulder. "Eve," he consoled, "You'll get used to this."

I turned to the window again and closed my eyes. I took shallow breaths and I could feel twine wrapping around me. The feeling of being bound. He started the car and pulled out of the parking spot and on to the road. I opened my eyes and we were passing a busy center of town. The same one I'd driven through in the taxi. Back then Eugene seemed so large, but this time I could see that it was incredibly small.

When he spoke to me, I was so lost in thought, his voice was far away. "There's a movie theater. A sandwich shop. Look, there's a dress shop Eve. Won't it be great?"

Charlie started trying to bounce on my lap, and then he reached for Jeff again.

"No. No. baby," I whispered and pulled Charlie back on to my lap. I tried to distract him with the wooden toy again.

Jeff was enthusiastic, "Eve how about we go and drive through some of the neighborhoods? Just look?"

"No Jeff. I don't want to," I snapped.

He pulled the car over. I turned again to look out the window.

"Eve look at me."

I turned and faced his direction him but looked beyond him out the window.

"No. Look at me."

"I looked up and into his eyes."

"Stop it. Eve, I'm growing weary of this."

"So, you stop. Don't do it anymore. Stop telling me what to do! Don't tell me I'll get used to it."

"Haven't I been kind to you? Aren't I being kind to you right now? Kind to our son?"

"I don't like you saying that. I don't like you calling him your son" I countered.

He raised his eyebrows and assumed an expression of hurt and anger. "Well Eve, I'm sorry you have such big ideas about who you are and what you want. But, the fact is that you don't make all the decisions here."

"I'm only here because you've threatened me."

"Is that so?" he said.

"What do you think?"

He pulled away from the curb again and I stared out at the little downtown. Eugene was like a miniature city with mountains and farmlands in the distance. On the train ride, I had seen forests turn to trees then to farms and then a small city. I'd followed the Willamette River as far as the train pushed along parallel to it.

When we parked in the hotel parking lot. He turned to me. "Wait here."

I sat uncomfortably in the vinyl seats. I was growing too warm in my long wool coat and I put Charlie again at the steering wheel where he held himself up. I wiggled out of my coat and threw it in the back. Charlie had squirmed down and was playing with the handle that rolled down the window. I smoothed my cashmere sweater and adjusted my skirt.

"Come here you busy baby," I said and pulled him over to me. I held him on my lap again, facing me and helped him jump up and down, something he could do for hours without growing bored. I blew raspberries into his face as he laughed. He reached for my pearls and twisted them up in his fingers. I untangled them and blew another raspberry.

Jeff returned and removed my overnight bag from the trunk before he came around and opened my door. He helped me step out of the car with Charlie in my arms.

"We're all checked in," he had resignation in his voice. I could tell he was frustrated with me.

"You checked us in as brother and sister?"

"No. They only had one room when I called and we look more like a family anyway."

"So we only have one room? Are you leaving tonight?"

"I wasn't planning to." He assumed an authoritative position. I knew he would act as if everything I said were hysterical or irrational. But, my objection wasn't irrational, I knew that.

"Jeff, why would you do it?"

He remained silent and raised his eyebrows, kept his jaw tight. "Are we going to keep the baby out in the cold?"

I wanted to call Mary or find another hotel. I could make up an excuse and get myself out of this situation.

"Try to act like a wife," he whispered as we entered the lobby.

As soon as we entered the hotel a woman behind the desk called out to us. "Please let me know if you need anything Mr. and Mrs. Lambert. Oh wait a minute. I just have to get a look at your beautiful child!" She walked around the desk and came over to us. She was one of those young women who had the air of an older woman. More like a grandmother than a woman of childbearing age.

"Mr. Lambert, his resemblance to you is striking. Don't you think Mrs. Lambert?"

I nodded but couldn't feign a smile. I grew warm in my sweater and wool skirt. I wanted it all to be over and I hated playing along.

Jeff tipped his hat "That is the greatest compliment, Miss. If you'll excuse us, I'm going to take my wife upstairs to freshen up. She's had a long trip."

"Oh of course. You really are a beautiful family!"

Finally, I smiled at her and followed as Jeff led me to the elevator. I stepped in and he pressed the button for the 6th floor. Charlie squirmed in my arms trying to touch the buttons.

"No sweetheart," I whispered to Charlie, but Jeff took him from me and held him over the buttons.

"We'll stop at every floor now, Jeff!" I couldn't stand this side of him.

"I never get to see him, let me indulge him."

I waited in frustration after Charlie pushed all the buttons and the elevator stopped at each floor, doors opening and then taking a long moment to close and started up again. Just hearing the mechanical sound at each interruption hit on every one of my nerves. I stood against the wall of the elevator shaking my head. Watching Charlie laugh with delight.

"Here we are," Jeff said putting his hand on my shoulder, leading me down the hall.

I stopped before we reached the room. "This feels terrible Jeff." I had softened.

"Why?"

"I don't want to stay in a room with a married man."

He put his hands on my shoulders and stared into my eyes. He adjusted my hair around my face. "Eve, we know each other. Until a few months ago we loved each other. I still love you."

I turned away. "I don't want to do this!"

"Eve please, it hurts me when you act like this. I won't ask you to do anything you don't want to, but, please try to be at least cordial with me." At that, he put his arm on my waist and led me short distance into the room. At the door, he turned and put the key in. Even the lock's quiet, metal click startled me. I was afraid to walk through the door. I didn't know how I would make it through the night. The room was a suite with a small sitting area to one side; it was a de-facto baby's room. The hotel staff had set up a crib with blankets and a colorful mobile with flowers and blue and white stars. There was a sliding door separating the two rooms; Charlie would still be close enough that I could hear him cry if he needed me. Jeff must have arranged for these adjoining quarters, I thought. Rather than the awkwardness of discussing who would take the bed, I decided I would sleep on the couch in the room with the baby.

It was a fancier hotel than anywhere I'd ever stayed before. The bed was neatly made with puffed pillows. There was a small table to one side of the bedroom with upholstered two chairs. There was a large paned window with drawn gold and green tapestry drapes. Jeff walked over and pulled open the fabric revealing the city right there below us. We were high enough that our room allowed us to down over the main street. It was lit up with neon signs and street lamps. The glowing kaleidoscope of colors made a sentimental glow. Further beyond the lighted town there was mostly darkness. I noticed clusters of white lights here and there across the blackened landscape outside the city. I knew they came from houses in the small neighborhoods nestled around the outskirts. Further in the distance I could see one or two flickering spots.

"I'll take the baby while you freshen up." Jeff walked over and lifted Charlie out of my arms.

"I have to feed him and change his diaper." I said.

"I can do that."

"All right. I usually nurse him, but I packed some bottles with formula. There's one already prepared."

He smiled, "Where's is it?"

"Honestly Jeff, you can feed a baby and change his diaper?" I asked with exaggerated disbelief. I removed the bottle from my overnight bag and walked over to where he was standing, by the window and handed it to him.

"Is that so hard to believe?" He took the bottle and shook it gently and removed the top. He held out the cap for me to take it from him.

I couldn't help but smile at him. He looked so vulnerable. I could tell he really knew how. "It's a little hard to believe, that's all. I wouldn't take you for the type."

He was holding the bottle for Charlie and cradling him in his arms while he fed him. Jeff didn't look up at me. "Don't forget I have

experience with my own baby."

My smile faded and I walked over to the bed and sat down. I put my face in my hands. Seeing him loving towards Charlie was suddenly tainted with the thought of him at home talking with his wife in the same way, holding their child. *His own baby*. I had the image of him doting on and caring for their baby. I started crying. Jeff placed Charlie in the crib and sat down next to me. "Darling," he whispered. "Don't cry. Sweet Eve, please don't get so upset." He straightened my hair and rubbed my back. I turned around and faced him. Holding the rail of the crib, Charlie had pulled himself to standing; he was content to watch us. Then he let himself fall back on his behind. He busied himself with a blanket.

"Eve. Please give me a chance to prove how much I cherish you. Don't cry, I don't like seeing you unhappy."

I nodded.

"Very few men would offer you what I'm offering you." He wiped a tear from under my eye. "You know that don't you?"

"What are you offering me Jeff?"

"I'm offering to take responsibility. I'm doing it because I love Charlie. But, Eve I love you too. I want to live with you as husband and wife."

"Are you asking me to marry you?"

His expression was so tender. I felt like I was the only woman he could possibly love. I felt as if he were proposing to me. "Would it matter?" he said.

I nodded and tears came to my eyes again. I covered my eyes and lay back on the bed and cried in to the pillow.

"Shhh. Please talk with me, darling."

I turned but didn't face him. I kept looking down at my hands, at Nick's ring. "I'm so sad Jeff. It's been so hard."

"Then let me take care of you."

"If we didn't get married I'd be hurt all of the time. It would be too hard. I'd be too jealous."

He turned his head to the side and smiled. "Don't you know?"

I looked up at him, "What?"

"There's no one but you. What do you have to be jealous of?"

"Well then marry me. If I'm the only one you love."

"Suppose we were to get married, why would you want to be married to me?"

"To make Charlie legitimate."

"He will be. We're his parents and for all anyone will know --even without getting married-- he will be legitimate. You saw how the girl downstairs acted towards us." He moved a loose strand of hair from my cheek, "Is there any other reason you want to to marry me?"

I looked in his eyes. I didn't want to hurt him but I couldn't lie. I shook my head and whispered "No."

His shoulders relaxed and he looked down. I knew I'd hurt him. "Oh. God Eve. I can't take it." He stood and walked over to the window. Charlie had pulled himself up again and was making repeating "Ba. Ba. Ba!" He was saying it loudly as if he was yelling for Jeff to come to him.

"I think he wants you," I laughed, drying my eyes and sitting up again. I knew I shouldn't keep hurting Jeff, but I didn't like longing for a man I knew made love to another woman. It discredited every compliment, every promise he made to me. No matter how much I wanted to believe him. Besides, he knew how I really felt about him. He didn't need to make me confess it. He knew I loved him. It only grew deeper seeing him with Charlie.

Charlie's babble turned insistent and louder. He was facing Jeff and clearly yelling out for attention. He let out a loud scream "Ba!" Jeff turned to me, and smiled in amusement over Charlie's personality. Jeff kept his gaze fixed on mine for a moment and I examined him. He looked so handsome with his tie loosened. Such an intimate way he had, as if we were a family at home together. I knew that it would never seem that way with any other man. Jeff was Charlie's father and besides, there was no one else like Jeff. It was the same, back in Sellwood when he was casual around me, in those intimate moments when we were friends and confidants. I'd felt privileged that he showed me that side of him when ordinarily he was so impeccably dressed and in control of things. Back then, when I was around him, it didn't take long for me to lose my sense of everything but him. I'd felt it happening again when I saw him standing on the railway platform at the train station. The moment I saw him holding the toy Charlie had dropped. Always catching me by surprise, doing the right thing.

Once I'd slipped into that frame of mind, I felt that Jeff's attention towards me was an honor. I revered him. It was an exaltation that stirred such a deep passion that I felt I couldn't control my emotions. It sounded foolish, but it was as if I were under a spell. It wasn't an hour together in the hotel room before I'd decided to relocate to Eugene and be with him in whatever way he designed. At the same time, I recognized the power shifting again. It was always subtle at first. I was aware of it while he watched me with adoration in his eyes and spoke to me with flirtation and affection. I felt myself slipping and I believed he must have felt it too. Perhaps that was his intention because in all the time I knew him, once I surrendered, our situation always turned against me; I became the one pleading for him while he controlled our intimacy. Sometimes it took longer than others to hypnotize me and although I succumbed willingly, that time in Eugene it was so tenuous. Somewhere embedded in the seduction, I recognized his desire for me to beg him for whatever he'd give me. That was how it had always been with him. I was ashamed because in the past, I'd abandoned self-respect and had pleaded helplessly for him to love me or to be with

me. To give me anything. Every single time, he'd become firm and look down on me as if I were a child. "*I've made my decision. Get control of yourself.*"

Charlie increased his pitch even further and he was yelling, "Ba.Ba.Ba!"

Jeff raised his eyebrows. "My little boy knows what he wants. "He walked over and picked Charlie up from the crib and Charlie gave him a mischievous smile. "How did this little baby get so smart?" He began feeding him again and Charlie settled in the crux of his arm.

"You really don't know?" I teased. I stood up and walked to the mirror.

"Likely it's your side." He said while keeping his eyes on Charlie.

"Don't be modest," I said. I powered my face and applied lipstick. "You're the genius."

He walked over and stood next to me, still holding Charlie. "Is that really what you think?"

I looked up at him, the lipstick still in my hand. "That you're a genius? Of course, I know you are."

"Thank you Eve." He had that same earnest, serious way that he did when he'd sketched in my garden and then talk to me about his art. Letting me into some private place. He paced across the room comforting Charlie. Again, I came to doubt myself. I was so enamored with him that I chastised myself for even thinking he was manipulating me and trying to restore his power. I felt a weight of shame descend. When I looked back into the mirror, I could see them the reflection. Charlie was pulling on Jeff's tie and starting to put it in his mouth. I loved seeing him with my baby.

Instinctively I went over and took Charlie from Jeff. I spoke softly to him, "Don't do that to daddy's tie." I pretended to scold. At that Charlie reached for my hair and pulled down the side I had put up.

Jeff moved closer. I hadn't thought of him as Charlie's father until that moment. Jeff stood very near to me. He walked through that curtain of propriety. He straightened my hair and leaned down and held his lips an inch from mine. I surrendered. Charlie was ever present in my thoughts, beyond that there was only Jeff.

"I like when you say I'm his father." His lips finally touched mine. I let him kiss me.

"Shall we take a walk and get a sandwich? Or we can go somewhere else? I'd like to show you Broadway and all of the things we'll do there."

I shifted my weight and backed away from him a bit. "Maybe we should stay here. We could have room service?"

He moved closer to me. "Why should we do that Eve?" He whispered as he kissed my neck. "You always have such good ideas, darling."

He looked at me again and smiled. I was too embarrassed to acknowledge that I wanted to be alone with him; maybe I hadn't even

realized it until it the suggestion came out. I pulled away and I carried Charlie over to the bed, sat down and laid him on his stomach. He was trying hard to scoot towards the headboard.

I didn't look at Jeff; I kept my eyes on Charlie. "I'm just saying that because it may be easier for Charlie than going out. I didn't mean--"

"You didn't mean?"

"That's why I suggested staying in the room. Honestly. Please don't embarrass me, Jeff."

"No. I think staying in the room is a brilliant idea. See I told you he gets it from his mother."

I felt so elated again. I sat against the headboard with Charlie on my lap. I held both his hands and played a game with him of lifting his hands and holding them and dropping them down fast. After a moment, his expression changed and he didn't like the game any more. I could see he was getting fussy. He was tired.

"He's tired," I said. "He'll sleep well tonight. He always does on busy days."

"Let me order the food while you put him to bed. I was thinking maybe we should order a couple of bottles of beer too?"

"I only remember having a drink with you once before and it turn out so well did it?"

"Eve, that was because you insisted on a glass of my scotch. Besides you weren't too drunk. I remember -- even if you don't."

I remembered that night. It was the night he had given me the jade bracelet. He'd been so nervous, clasping it on my wrist. He had told me to always wear it. So I would think of him every time it jingled. It was so different then. There was no anger or disappointment. I simply wouldn't let it surface. I didn't think about his wife and as a result he usually treated me as if I were on a pedestal. That night back in Sellwood I'd had a glass of his scotch to celebrate. I became very silly and felt so embarrassed the next day.

"A girl's not supposed to like scotch. *That* was the problem. But you were awfully cute even with your silliness."

"Don't remind me of it, all right? I hated the way it made me feel and how it burned my throat."

"Don't tell me you never had a drink before that night?"

"Of course I did." Charlie was nestling up to me, starting to grow drowsy. I adjusted him on my shoulder.

"All right, when?"

"I don't remember but I'm sure I have."

"I think you've only had one drink in your life. You should have a beer with me tonight. I like seeing you loosen up." He was still holding the phone waiting to call room service.

"I don't need a drink to—" I smiled and I could tell from his expression that it was one of my old smiles, adoring and ready to match his flirtation.

"You aren't being coy are you, darling?"

I kept smiling. "No I'm a mother now. It wouldn't be proper. Besides, I wouldn't know the first thing about being coy."

He hung up the phone. "Put the baby down."

I walked over to the sitting area, and gently lowered Charlie into the crib. He was already fast asleep and when I kissed him I heard his rhythmic breathing, "I love you," I whispered. I closed the door all but a crack and walked back into the hotel room.

"I put the baby to bed," I announced. "Just as you requested."

Jeff moved next to me and held me. "Don't drive me crazy anymore, Eve. I don't think I can stand it."

"Why do you let yourself go crazy over me?"

He leaned down and kissed me. "I wouldn't if I could help myself. Don't you know that? If I didn't love you so much, I'd have let you let you leave the first time you rejected me. But you've rejected me so many times. I just keep wanting you every minute. God, look at you." He kissed my neck.

I pulled away for a moment and teased him, "I think I'm being seduced. I feel as if I'm going to faint."

"Do you really? Faint?"

I nodded. "You always make me feel this way."

"I think you'd better lay down until it passes."

Everything else disappeared. Having his attention focused on me. All of his seductive words. In that moment, I didn't feel any shame at all. Just as I hadn't all those months in Sellwood. Once he had his hook in me, I was under his spell. He held my hand and let me to the bed. I sat down and he sat next to him. He removed the clips and let my hair fall. He touched my face, moving a strand of hair and running his hand over the rest of it. "Do you remember that first time I sketched you in your garden? We hardly knew each other and yet you let me in. Do you remember? You did that because you loved me, isn't that right?"

I nodded and put my head on his shoulder. I closed my eyes and felt his strength.

"Eve, I was already in love with you by then."

I looked up at him and touched his hair. I kissed his cheek. "Why won't you marry me then?"

"Eve." He was so serious and his blue eyes looked so full of love for me. "Sweet Eve, just trust me."

I kissed him and he put his hand on my neck and moved my hair before he bent over and kissed the tender skin. "Eve take off your clothes," he whispered kissing his way up my neck, back up to my mouth.

I stood and removed my sweater and skirt. I was about to remove my slip when Jeff pulled me to him. He held both of my hands and gently guided me back down to the bed. He kissed me.

I was lost in him.

"Eve," he quietly implored. "Do you really love me?"

I stopped and looked into his eyes while he waited. Then, I nodded.

"Say the words."

"I love you Jeff."

"Then why do you tell me you don't?"

"I'm jealous."

He pulled the strap of my slip over my shoulder, he kissed the tender area. "Eve, I'm going to make love to you."

"I want you to."

"Tell me you belong to me." He was on top of me. He held my stare. I felt a rush of fear run through me. Not fear for my safety but fear of falling into the endless well. Of being alone in my feelings. Of giving everything to him. Of giving myself to him, belonging to him. But, knowing he belonged to someone else.

"Eve. Say the words. So I know it's true."

He waited. It seemed I was more important to him than anything else.

My eyes filled with tears, he waited and watched my expression.

He lowered his voice and seemed so vulnerable. "Please say it. For me."

I looked away and felt so embarrassed. "I belong to you Jeff. I'm yours."

After we made love, Jeff and I talked about all the things I had forgotten we had in common. Or maybe they were the things we admired about each other. Charlie slept through the night. Being in the hotel suite, with Jeff and our baby, it felt like home. It seemed as if I had forgotten the things that frightened me so much about Jeff. It wasn't that I pushed them aside; they simply just didn't exist any more. Eugene was going to be my home and even in the hotel room, I could feel the difference in me.

After a little while he fell asleep. The marquees and the shops cast red and yellow hues as I lay beside Jeff and watched his peaceful sleep. His face was so relaxed. He was a strong, brilliant man. He loved me. I realized in those early hours that *was* love and his words were not lies. The way he touched me and looked at me. And what he said was true. He didn't *have* to take care of us. Most men wouldn't. I knew that. I hadn't realized it. I also came to see that what he said about my reputation was also accurate. It was a matter of time before people in Bend found out. No matter what I chose, I was living a lie. I leaned over and softly pressed my lips against his cheek. I touched his face. I felt so overwhelmed being back with him. I thought how we had been together less than an hour before. I had always felt it was unfair of him to make me say I belonged to him. Not that he made me, but I was so intimidated by him and wanted him so much, always. But this time when I looked into his eyes and he told me to say the words, I released myself to him.

He opened his eyes and looked at me "Eve, darling. Why are you still awake?"

"I'm watching you, I can't stop looking at you. I'd forgotten what you do to me."

He was sleepy but he pulled himself up and leaned against the headboard. "What do I do to you, my sweet girl?" he pulled me closer and I kissed his him.

"I worship you. I always have. I haven't been patient or - I have been very unkind to you since I left. I don't know why I do these things."

He pressed his lips against mine. "You always surprise me. You always make me crazy. Every minute."

"I'm sorry."

"Eve, one of the reasons I love you is that you're a spirited girl. You are like a velvet hammer."

It made me laugh. "What's a velvet hammer?"

"You're so womanly and soft. You seem just like any other woman."

"But I *am* like any other woman." I held my arms up and turned to the side for him to inspect me. "Look me over. I'm just the same make and model. Really, have a look."

"Don't be silly right now. Eve you're not like every other woman. You are so stubborn, and strong willed."

"I'm not." I said kissing his lips. I moved on top of his lap. I put my arms around his neck. He gently removed them and held them.

"I know you can take care of yourself. But, what I worry about is how you come to your decisions."

"I know that now. But, I felt I had no choice."

He softened and leaned close to me. He rubbed his hand on my cheek. "You *are* unlike most women. That's all I'm saying. And it's the reason I've loved all this time and so deeply. But, it also keeps me awake at night."

"Don't you think you're exaggerating? Making me out to be someone I'm not? I think you have this idea of me. I'm afraid I could never really live up to it. Once I move here, one day you'll wake up next to me and find you're with an entirely different girl than the one you thought you loved. Then you won't want me any more. You'll find another and then turn her into the person you idolize. Where will I be then?"

He tightened his jaw and narrowed his brow. "Do you really think that?"

"You make me feel that way sometimes. Often you do."

"See that's what I mean. You're not afraid to speak to me this way."

"I'm not spirited because I disagree with you. Most women disagree with their husbands. Carmen bosses Harry around all the time."

"Well I'm not Harry. And, besides this isn't an attack on you. I don't even know how we started this." He looked around the room. "Here hand me my watch, darling."

I reached over and picked his up his watch the bedside table beside

me. I held it just out of his reach.

"What are you doing?"

"Being spirited."

"You are? Are you?"

He reached for it and I pulled it away.

"You have to kiss me first." I said.

He reached again. And when I pulled the watch away and he grabbed me around the waist pulled me closer. I was still on top of him but I could hold my hand far enough behind my back that he couldn't get to the watch. He stopped and frowned at me. "You treat me horribly." I brought the watch from behind me and held it in my palm in front of him. He looked at the time.

"Its four in the morning. You woke me up at 4 o'clock to torment me?" He pulled me to him and kissed me passionately. He pulled away then kept his hands on my shoulders preventing me from leaning in and kissing him again. I could only get so far as inches from his face. He kept turning away every time I leaned forward to kiss him.

"See how it feels?" he whispered.

"Please don't leave me this way. Kiss me. I'll do anything you ask."

"See, how can you say you're not rebellious? Most girls would wait for a man to make the advance. Not make the first move, not ask a man to kiss her."

"Kiss me." I struggled to kiss him. "I don't care about my pride."

He pulled away again.

"Admit it." He teased.

"Admit what?"

"That you're a complicated woman and I'm a very patient man."

I laughed and struggled free and moved across the bed. "I don't feel like kissing you any more."

He took my arm and led me back to him. He guided me down and positioned himself on top of me again. He looked into my eyes before he kissed me passionately before he made love to me.

"I love you," he said softly. "I love you Eve Miller."

After we'd made love again, we both relaxed beside each other, Jeff lying on his side, tracing the lace of my slip.

"I'm sorry I'm so much trouble," I said.

"You're not that much trouble," he gently straightened a piece of my hair. "You're really not."

"Do you really love me, Jeff?"

"I do."

"Are you going back to sleep?" I asked.

"I don't know."

"I'm not tired." I said.

"Why is that?"

"I'm too happy."

A big smile crossed his lips. "About?"

"You. Living in Eugene with you."

He smiled and laid on his back, settling in for more sleep, I thought.

"You know, maybe I should just get myself ready for the day and prepare Charlie's things? I mean, he'll be up shortly and then I'll have to feed him and order our breakfast." I looked around the room, thinking. "There's a iron in the closet, should I press your shirt and pants?"

Jeff's blue eyes filled with affection. He moved closer to me and kissed my neck, it ticked. "Jeff what are you doing?" I laughed. He pulled me closer and I tried to squirm away, "I just said I have to start getting things ready."

"What a wonderful wife you're going to make me," he said acting as if he were going to devour me while I let out a little squeal.

"Shhhh." He said affectionately, holding me in place, "you'll wake the baby."

We were looking into each other's eyes and the smiles faded. It was as close as I'd ever felt to him.

"When should I plan on moving? I have a lot to do, but I want to as soon as possible. Now that I've decided, I don't want to be away from you a minute longer. I can't be. I'll die." I smiled at him. "Maybe we'll have time to look at the neighborhoods before my train leaves? Who knows? Maybe we can even find a house for sale!"

He rolled back on his side and looked at me, propping his head on his hand, tracing the lines of my stomach over the silk of my slip.

"Well, let's see. Hmmm. We'll have to think about that."

"About what?"

Then he grew serious, "Just think through the arrangements." He had a reserved tone.

I laughed. "Why are you being so mysterious all of a sudden?"

"I'm not." He touched my hair and tucked it behind my ear. "It's just that..."

I waited and it was so silent in the room; I heard the ticking of his watch from where I'd placed it back on my bedside table. The sun was coming up, the neon colors fading. There was a dark blue sky becoming lighter each moment.

"I didn't realize this would be so complicated." He said. "I honestly thought it would take a little more convincing."

I touched his face. I felt my heart drop as it always did after I'd given myself to him. This was part of it. Making me surrender to him, followed by his cruelty. "I thought you had it all planned out." I was beginning to stiffen. "That you'd already started looking."

He held my hand. "I did, darling. But it's more complicated than you think. Even it's not like it can happen tomorrow."

"If we aren't going to do it now, when can we do it? I want to be with you. I've gotten my hopes up."

"It's just complicated, that's all" He kissed my bare shoulder. "I want

to be with you too."

"Have you changed your mind? Do you still want to get a house and be together?"

His response was blunt and unapologetic. "Eve, of course. Why would I be telling you to make arrangements if I didn't want you to? It's just complicated because I will be gone for three months, but, after that, we'll --you and me--we'll look for something. Early June. You'll have to be patient."

"Well, where are you going for three months?"

"I'll be in England."

He got out of bed and put his pants on, not looking at me.

"Jeff, I don't understand. I'm sorry. What are you doing in England?"

He put his shirt on and sat on the bed next to me. He looked down at the floor and then finally he turned to me. I pulled the sheet up to cover my body. He reached to the table and put on his watch. "Eve, Margaret's mother is very ill. We're going to England for three months. We'll bring Clara. I'm taking a sabbatical."

I didn't say anything. All of the blood rushed from my body. I truly hated him. I rose from bed and put on my long robe. I walked over to Charlie's crib and he was still fast asleep. I thought of how tired he must have been to stay asleep for that long. Packing, the train ride, all the excitement of seeing Jeff and my carousel of emotions. I felt Charlie was his own little being and at the same time, still a part of me. When my heart raced or I grew frightened, I imagined it weighed on him.

"He was tired, wasn't he?" I whispered to Jeff although I didn't look at him. I continued to stare at Charlie.

"Eve? Does this upset you? It's not something I could avoid. I don't see how it changes anything. I suppose I should have told you yesterday."

The truth was, as much as I had let myself drift away --or more than drift away--as much as I'd surrendered, I never forgot who the real Jeff was. I had let myself drift into that sea of ignorant bliss again, a complacent place where I had no mind of my own. No wishes. A place where I began to doubt the value of the things I wanted. In a few short hours I had existed in that place with him. A little bubble. But, no matter how wonderful it had felt to have his undivided attention and adoration, the illusion that he would really love me wasn't difficult to shatter at all.

"Upset? No, I understand perfectly. I really do." I stood up and fastened my robe tighter. I turned and faced him. I knew I had an impatient look on my face. Suffering his childish excuses.

"Then why does your voice sound like that?"

"Jeff," I said sweetly, "you can't expect me to always have a loving tone towards you when you're such a colossal liar."

He sat on the bed; I was certain that he was unsure of himself after

my comment. I was also sure he was thinking of a way to bring me back into that orbit. That was it. I looked at him for a long moment. I didn't say a word, but I thought of what he had said about me. What Mary had said about me too. That I was spirited. I knew I wasn't. Rather, I recognized lies and no matter how hard I tried to accept them, they invaded me. Cancer. I wouldn't fool myself.

"Eve, that was very unkind. You're angry. But, what do you have to be angry about? Didn't you want more time with Mary and Frank?"

"Shh, darling." I whispered in my same saccharine tone, "our baby is still sleeping." I retrieved my overnight bag and placed it on the chair. I opened it and threw my clothes and Charlie's things into it. I was so furious I was roughly shoving my belongings into the luggage. That was the first time I hadn't crumbled with his rejection, cried while he comforted me. Him growing larger and stronger while I became weak. My new resolve changed everything.

Jeff walked over to me and stood next to me. "Look at me Eve."

As much as I felt capable of controlling my emotions, I couldn't obey him. "I don't want to look at you," I said not softly, not a whisper or deference, just calmly. I didn't expect it, but he took me by my shoulders and turned facing him. His grip was firm.

"We are settling this now."

"Please take your hands off of me." I said, glaring at him.

"No." He tightened his hold and pulled me closer to him. "Eve, I never know what to say to you. Your moods shift so suddenly."

"Let go!" I pulled away from him, "That isn't true. Stop saying I'm hysterical when you just made love to me and neglected to tell me you're spending three months with your wife. How much do you think I can take?"

"Why do you fight me all the time?"

"Do you really want me to be a woman who you keep on the side, while you go to Europe with your wife and child? While Charlie and I sit in an empty house? And you. You've taken everything from me! You and Margaret get to stay in Portland! In my neighborhood. You've taken everything that was mine! You're a thief. A terrible man. I'm not the kind of woman you want me to be. I'm not going to become one either"

"I beg to differ." He said and walked to the bathroom, buttoning his shirt.

I ran to the doorway and shouted, "you beg to differ what?!"

"You're not so much the woman you think you are." He said. His face lacked any expression.

"Get out of my life!" I screamed. Charlie let out a shriek.

"Now look what you've done!" He sneered and pushed hard past me towards the crib.

I followed closely behind. "Leave my baby alone!"

He stopped in the middle of the room before he got to the sitting

area where the crib was. He looked at me, "You're in no condition to tend to him right now."

"How dare you!" I yelled and I walked towards the crib to get Charlie. As I tried to pass him, he caught me and then pushed me hard in the other direction. I lost my balance and fell to the floor. As I did, he leaned into the crib and picked up Charlie. He held him in his arms and calmly rocked him as he walked towards the window. I picked myself up off the ground. A horrible feeling descended on me. I sat on the edge of the bed. I was so stunned to see what this whole thing was turning into.

No matter how Jeff tried, he couldn't soothe Charlie; the baby was screaming and crying. His face was red and he was reaching for me, pulling away from Jeff. Jeff turned in my direction, "See what you've done?"

I stood and rushed over and took Charlie from Jeff's arms. "You're ridiculous. See what I've done? You should know a baby wakes up screaming every day. He's hungry!"

Jeff remained across the room, staring out the window, fuming.

"Don't ever lay a hand on me again!" I yelled to him. "Do you understand me?"

He sat on the chair and took several deep breaths.

"I'll get a taxi back to the station. You should leave." I said.

His expression softened. He let a breath out and looked out the window before looking back at me. He rubbed his chin. "No Eve." He gripped the arms of the chair and stood up. He didn't walk towards me. "You're not taking a taxi. I'm sorry I pushed you down. I don't know how I could do such a thing to you, but I'm taking you to the station."

I fumbled through my over night bag and found the box of formula and Charlie's bottle. I went into the bathroom and let the water run warm. As the water rushed down the drain, I felt myself melt into sadness. It wasn't over losing Jeff; it was just the intensity of the morning's events. I filled the bottle and put the top on. I shook it up and tested the temperature on my wrist. Charlie was rhythmically saying "ma. Ba ma. Ba" and reaching towards the bottle. As soon as I put the nipple into his mouth, he began greedily sucking the milk. His eyes followed mine and with the nipple between his lips, he stopped drinking and smiled at me. When he did, he looked like an old man speaking with a cigar in his mouth. He started laughing still holding the rubber nipple between his teeth. I couldn't help but laugh. When I looked up Jeff was standing in the doorway. His tie was loose around his partially buttoned shirt. He had both arms up, hands resting on the doorframe. Had we not been fighting, I would have walked over and buttoned his shirt for him. Then I would have tied his necktie. How many times had I done that before with him looking down on me with an expression of love?

"I'm sorry." He said.

I nodded. "He's funny, isn't he?"

"I'm sorry I pushed you, Eve."

I didn't say anything else or look at him. I made my way past him, Charlie in my arms and as I walked by Jeff, the baby reached for him again. Jeff motioned to take him, but I maneuvered away from him.

"I have to change his diaper." I said and left Jeff standing there looking useless.

We arrived at the train station just fifteen minutes before boarding. We would have gotten there much earlier but Jeff insisted we drive through the quaint little neighborhoods of Bend. He tried to reignite the dream. The day was still bright and the town was pretty. The sidewalks were shaded by large over hanging trees. I could see that some of the houses had modest gardens. It made me sick to think I would have settled for one of those little prisons. I looked at Jeff and shook my head then I turned back to the scene out my window.

We passed a park and he insisted on stopping. I sat in the shade, under a tree and Jeff spent time with Charlie. Although we were at the park quite a while, the two of them didn't cover much distance because Jeff stopped so often to let Charlie reach for something or drop pebbles into puddles. We were in the park over an hour and they hadn't covered more than ten yards. Charlie laughed and played. He looked up at Jeff every few seconds and waited in that way he does for acknowledgment before he sets off on the next activity in his busy baby agenda.

I wasn't moved despite the times Jeff looked back at me for the same sort of acknowledgement. Where before, his paternal behaviors had warmed my heart, there was nothing. My heart was cold. I sat under a tree and watched Jeff hold Charlie above him, as men do, playing airplane. In my mind, this world with Jeff, the time together was finite. There was precisely an hour and a half until the chapter was over; I'd close the book. I no longer feared him and I think he sensed it. I didn't take the scenario further in my mind. I didn't imagine what he would do if I executed my plan and rejected his. I didn't care if he accused me of being spirited or rebellious or even crazy for wanting something other than his revolting offer. I was also sure he was confident in his ability to intimidate me. But after the events that morning, wanting him again and then seeing it turn out the same as always, there was nothing but an empty, arid space between us. Things would be fine in Bend. All I had to do was talk to Frank, tell him the truth. I needed to muster the courage, which had been so difficult for me. Then, Jeff could perish for all I cared.

Charlie removed Jeff's hat and was holding it, crumpling the brim in his little fingers. I could see that Jeff was so taken with Charlie that there was nothing the boy could do wrong. The trees shaded the path they were on. They walked further towards the pond. A moment later, I heard Charlie crying. I stood and looked around for them. I didn't see

the two of them anywhere and immediately my eyes frantically searched. A surge of protective fear ran through me. But, not another minute later Jeff appeared from the other side of the path, walking quickly towards me, Charlie's face was red; he was screaming.

"I think he wants you."

I could see that Charlie was hungry and tired. That was all. I should have recognized the cries but I my nerves were so on edge that I hadn't realized it. I took Charlie in my arms without acknowledging Jeff. I soothed him.

"Should we walk back to the car?" Jeff asked. His tone was gentle and loving.

"I can feed him on the way. I'd like to get to the train station. To have a little time to rest before we leave."

I was gently rocking Charlie in my arms but he was squirming and screaming. His face was growing red out of frustration. Jeff put his arm on my waist and led Charlie and me to the car. I was keenly aware that, like the day before, things must have looked very normal to the outside world. From that perspective, we looked like a young family. Jeff's manners were respectful, husbandly. How could anyone know the complete lie, the torrent of dishonor and rage that always seemed to surface between us? The rotten sediment floating around in anything we shared? That was sin. I remembered Sunday school as a child. Sin haunts you, and it destroys your life. No matter how elaborate the lies you tell yourself; sin is very simple. It's a curse.

Jeff opened the car door and helped me inside.

"Is the bottle in your overnight bag?"

"Yes." It was terrible to have to make conversation. There was no way around it; we had to talk about the baby and about the arrangements at the station. But that's where it would end. Despite what Jeff believed or thought he could enforce, there would be no more of his plans.

He opened the trunk and returned with a bottle. I took it from him while he stood awkwardly. I shook the bottle and removed the top and fed Charlie. He began drinking and I kept my eyes on his little face. His brow was sweaty. I stroked his hair into a part to one side. Jeff closed the door so it hardly made a thud when it was shut. A moment later he was in the drivers side.

"Eve," he asked gently. His attempts at tenderness were getting under my skin. "Can I get you something to eat? Your train doesn't leave for a little while? You didn't eat any breakfast. I don't want you to be hungry all the way back."

"No. That's nice of you, but I'd just like to get to the station to have some time to ourselves."

"Why are you so angry with me? Is three months such a long time?"

"No. I'm not upset at all." It was a new tactic. Nothing I had tried with him before. Complete detachment and sarcasm. "Now that I hear you

say it, three months is practically no time at all. I'm sure you're right about that. Don't they say that time flies when you're having fun? I'm sure it will zoom by for you and your wife."

"Oh God, would you stop being so damned glib? Please? If you think I enjoy even a moment with Margaret you're crazy."

I didn't say anything for a long moment. I just looked out through the windshield, but then I turned to him. "I could care less about your relationship with Margaret." Charlie furrowed his brow more with curiosity than fear; he kept drinking. His eyes were alert. I tilted the bottle up higher so he could get more.

I let out a sarcastic laugh then stared at him hard for a long moment. "Honestly? Do you think I care about the tedious details of your boring marriage?" I could see he was growing angry with me. "You're ridiculous." I blurted and then rolled my eyes. I knew exactly what my comment would do to him; it would infuriate him. I also knew he was bound and tied; our little baby was our witness. We were out in public.

"Watch it, Eve. Watch how you speak to me."

"I don't belong to you. I don't have to obey you."

"Eve. I don't allow anyone to speak to me like this."

"Or what? What will you do if I don't do as you say?"

I shook my head and looked back out the window. I squinted my eyes so the colors would blur, so I could see life as a palate of muted hues and shapes and not distinct contours and lines. I wanted this part of my life to dissolve. I knew pressing Jeff would incite rage in him, but hiding from his anger had never set me free. That was the first time I wasn't weak with him.

"Eve. I'm not putting up with this behavior. Do you understand me?"

I felt strongly that he and I both knew it was an empty threat. Or at least I thought that was the truth. I'd called his bluff and the control I had over my own life would take root. It would grow stronger than the shallow foundation of our relationship.

"Drive me to the station, this moment." I ordered. "Do you understand me?" He turned and slammed the car into gear and pulled away from the curb, speeding off. I was nervous for Charlie who was lying on my lap, his glass bottle near empty. I kept the bottle steady and made sure it wouldn't be ripped from Charlie's mouth as Jeff angrily navigated the streets. I kept my arm around the baby so he wouldn't be thrown against the dash. Luckily, the park was near to the station so we I only had to endure Jeff's reckless driving for a few blocks. I'd never seen Jeff so angry. He pulled into a parking space in front of the train station.

I took the bottle from Charlie's mouth and wiped his tiny lips. I sat him up on my lap as I returned the bottle to my purse and began to gather my things. I reached inside my purse for my gloves. "You can leave us here. I can manage," I said not looking up.

When I leaned down to pick up my purse, Jeff took a strong hold of

my wrist and pulled me back up, preventing me from gathering my things. I struggled and pulled away from him but his grip tightened.

"What are you doing?" I was so startled by the change in him.

He held me forcefully and twisted my arm so I was leaning to one side. He said, "we will leave when I say. Don't you dare get out of this car."

I tried to pull my arm away but then his grip tightened even further. I lowered my voice and tried to reason with him. "Please let go of me, Jeff. You're hurting me and I can't hold the baby." The more I struggled to get out of his grasp, the more my wrist hurt. There was nothing I could do with my other arm because I was holding Charlie. I had to control how much I struggled so I could keep hold of the baby. I felt the fearful girl rising up in me again. I didn't want to give him back his power, but he was hurting me.

"Do you understand me?" He pressed.

"Please. All right. I won't get out. I'm sorry."

"Tell me you understand me, Eve."

"Understand what? I understand. I said I won't get out of the car. You're hurting me. Don't you even care?"

He pulled my wrist hard, "No. Tell me that you understand that I expect you to start behaving more like a woman. Say the words. I'm not letting you go until you do."

Something about his phrase, "*say the words*," renewed my strength. I was not his servant. He was acting more like an angry boy than a powerful man.

I calmly spoke as he continued to squeeze my wrist. "Jeff there is a man standing right there, I'll call out to him and tell him you're hurting me. He'll call a police officer. He will see, my wrist is already turning red."

"He would just think you're hysterical."

"Well, I'm not hysterical, Jeff."

He didn't answer but also didn't release me. I tried to pull my arm away. I couldn't help it; I started crying, "Please, Jeff, let me go. You're hurting me. You pushed me down this morning and now you're hurting me again."

"Say it."

"What?"

"That you will start behaving as you should."

"No." I whispered, "You're acting crazy." Charlie pulled himself up to my shoulder and had his arms around my neck. He held himself with one arm and was putting his fingers in my mouth. He was giggling as if it were a game.

"Please, the baby is right here."

"This is far from over." He released my arm and he collapsed into seat. He let a breath out and shook his head. He ran his hands through his short hair. "I don't know what's happening to me." He looked at me.

"I don't know why I just did those things. Eve, you're making me act crazy."

I pulled my arm back up and with the other around still around Charlie's waist, I rubbed the bright red ring around my wrist. Jeff retrieved my bag from the trunk and came around and opened my car door. I looked down towards the ground as he took Charlie from me in one hand and carried my bag into the station with the other. We walked on to the platform and the train to Bend was boarding. He held Charlie to him and kissed his cheeks. "I love you little boy." For some reason, Charlie didn't want Jeff as he had before; he kept arching his back and reaching towards me. Finally, Jeff relinquished him.

"Eve, let me say goodbye to you." His voice was absorbed by the sounds of the busy railroad station. A gust of wind passed us as another train left. "I don't know what's happening to me. You're right I'm acting crazy. I've never hurt a woman before. I didn't think I was capable of it. Especially not you."

I looked at him and shook my head. My wrist still stung from his grip.

He continued. "I'm sorry I hurt you," He tightened his jaw. "We'll work things out, ok?"

"I have to get on with my life. I don't want this. Any of it. Not some small house in Eugene. Not you--That's it. I don't want you anymore." In a gesture of defiance I raised my eyebrows and stared at him longer than would have been expected.

He let out a breath and seemed to examine my intent. I knew he wanted me to do as he said. I was certain it was because he thought he loved me. Perhaps he really was stuck between two lives. The one he had with his wife and this other with me. Or maybe he wanted both, a calm predictable life with his boring wife and this indulgence with me. I realized as his eyes pleaded with me that morning on the train platform, he didn't have the rights to me that he claimed he did. Even if I had been his wife, he still wouldn't have. What he was asking for was not reasonable.

"The plan hasn't changed. I won't hurt you again, but when I get back you'll move here just as I told you." He didn't seem as strong to me.

I didn't care about his words. I shook my head and scoffed, "Good bye." I turned to walk up the stairs into the train.

He gently held me back and pulled my arm so I was facing him. "When I return I will make time and we will find a home here. You have no right to be upset with me."

"I'm not living here in Eugene. I'm not your whore." I moved my shoulder and he released his hand.

He spoke softly. "No Eve. No, you're not a whore. I never thought you were." He tipped his hat and walked out of the station.

I stopped fearing Jeff.

Just as soon as I stepped off the train from Eugene. Mary put her

arms around me and took Charlie from me.

"Oh thank you, my arm is so sore. He's heavy!" I felt so good. I felt free and released from ambivalence over the choices ahead of me.

"How are you my little baby boy?" Mary cooed in the sing-song voice she used with Charlie. "How are you sweetheart?" she kissed my cheek and smoothed back my hair.

Frank was standing beside Mary and took my bag from me. "How was Carmen? Was it nice to see her?"

"Of course." I lied.

Frank went on. "I'm glad you're back. I talked with Mr. Sanford about the farmhouse. He's ready to sell it to you. Any time. I think we should go ahead with it. Get you settled."

Mary changed the subject, trying to buy some time until we could tell Frank I was leaving to live in Eugene. Clearly she hadn't thought out the excuse yet. I'm sure she knew it had to be delivered carefully. "Frank really, the girl hasn't left the train station yet. Let's get her home and fed. I've made a meat pie for you and the baby. You can talk about the house tomorrow."

I turned to Frank, "I'd like to have you purchase the house. Let's talk with Mr. Sanford tomorrow."

Mary's eyes flashed a look of shock at me. She squinted and tilted her head a bit. She must have assumed I'd convinced Jeff that Eugene wasn't a good idea. That I should stay in Bend. She gave me a sweet smile.

"Well, darling that's wonderful news." She took my hand and gave it a little squeeze then she lifted it, touched her her cheek then kiss it. When she did her eyes fixed on my reddened wrist.

"What happened here sweetheart?"

"Oh, I don't even know. I think my purse strap got tangled." It felt like a bold lie. How could I possibly have done that to myself? She flashed me a look of worry and tightened her face. It seemed she understood that something serious had happened between Jeff and me.

I shook my head as if to say, *its nothing*. I smiled at her because in my mind I had just been released from prison. I felt so happy. She looked relieved and delighted. "Eve, I think your visit with Carmen was very good for you. I don't know if I've ever seen you so happy."

CHAPTER 10

It was late April. I'd been in the new house for a little over three weeks. When I first purchased the property, Mary had asked me if I should arrange for Harry deliver my furniture from the house in Sellwood. I told her I didn't want any of it and that I'd let it go with the sale. She

gave me a confused look. I told her I didn't want any reminders. I wanted to fully embrace my new life in Bend.

"You know I have all my mother's old furniture in the barn. I never knew what to do with it. It's very old fashioned but you're welcome to it. It would be more than enough to fill your house."

"That would be wonderful. Mary. How is it that you always help find my dreams? How come it doesn't matter what I think or do, you listen and never criticize? It seems like you always think my ideas are good ones and I know that not all of them are."

She stood up and leaned over me and kissed me on the forehead, "Don't you know by now that I love you?"

I did know it, but the way she said made me want to cry; it was so motherly, so protective.

"I think we need to go out and see how the pergola's coming."

I had sketched the design for my garden and it was time to put all the plants and trees in the ground. Frank was building the wooden structure and it was almost finished.

We walked out back. "Mary, I'm still going to finish your garden." I said to her.

"I know you will. I'm in no hurry. Let's get your place together first, all right? What'll you plant to climb over the pergola?"

"I don't know. Wisteria or grapes?"

"Maybe you should use grapes, you could take some starts from the vineyard." Mary and Frank grew champagne, green and concord grapes. I agreed. It would be lovely to see the large, light-green leaves creating a filtered shade. And then when the grapes were ripe, I could hold Charlie up to pick handfuls and watch him devour them. After he'd eaten his fill, I'd carry him over to the garden hose to wash his sticky little hands.

I felt so blessed to have saved myself from a life of pain and jealousy. Why had I acted like a child with Jeff Lambert? And for so long? My life all came together once I was able to free myself from him. I had a house that felt like a home, just like Mary and Frank's. Maybe it was also the furniture that gave it that homey quality. Unlike Mary's opinion, to me her mother's furnishings weren't old fashioned at all. The mahogany hutch fit perfectly against the wall in the dining room. I kept my table linen in the drawers, along with my mother's silver that I'd brought back with me. Frank had helped me hang a large, stained oak mirror over the hutch. It reflected the light from the windows facing the side of the house with the view of empty fields that, at one time, had been full of rows and rows of corn.

The kitchen table was my favorite. It was a big farm table with wooden, ladder-back chairs. This house had such a lovely kitchen. Once the garden was mature, the window over the sink would look out on to an herb garden and further in the distance a pergola covered in bright green grape vines and colorful fruit. I had planned the flowers so

they would erupt in a choreography of colors. I'd planted jasmine around what would be the stone walkway to the pergola. I knew the jasmine would provide a sweet scent all through summer. I didn't mind that the garden was still mostly barren. I knew the seeds were there under the earth and would someday be mature plants. I didn't mind because the garden would grow up with Charlie. I didn't need what I had in Sellwood; gardens that had been established back in my mother's time. At my farmhouse, I wouldn't have to fight trying to transplant 40 year old shrubs to make the garden mine.

I was so happy. Even when a letter came from Jeff in late April and another in early May, I didn't care what he had to say and I wasn't afraid of him. I didn't even read them; I tore them up and threw them in the trash. He was still sending them to Mary and Frank's, which I didn't like. I knew he was aware of the risk of Frank finding the letters, but even that didn't intimidate me. I had planned on telling Frank, being honest with him. Even if he were to grow disappointed with me, I was like a daughter to him. Charlie was his grandson, legitimately, since I had named he and Mary guardians. At the same time, I had to tell him. I knew that. Mary and I practiced what to say and how we'd say it. She was sure he would come around. It worried me that she was so hesitant to tell him the truth but she reassured me, telling me we'd softened him up. I saw so much love in his eyes and if it weren't for him, my house wouldn't be so beautiful.

Each time they arrived, Mary carried the letters over in her apron pocket. Each time she had a worried look, but my confidence in myself reassured her. The day she brought the second letter over, we were sitting in the kitchen. The windows were wide open and spring air filled the room with an earthy, pine smell. Charlie was sitting on the floor playing with sticks we had brought in from the yard. We'd also give him some of my pots to play with. He was making a racket but Mary and I sipped our iced tea and talked over his loud ruckus. She pulled the letter out of her pocket and placed it on the table between us.

"I don't care." I said.

"The man was physical with you, Eve. Read the letter. Have an idea what he's up to next."

I picked up the letter and ripped it into pieces. I took it over to the garbage pail and tossed it in.

"Oh Eve. Why do you have to do things like that?"

I felt like a child and looked down at the table, traced lines in the condensation on my glass.

Mary's voice was serious. "I want us to tell Frank the truth about everything. I don't know why it has taken us so long. This has gone too far. I think I should write Jeff Lambert and give him this address. I think we should tell Frank right after that."

"I don't want Jeff to know where I live."

"What if he wants to see Charlie? After all, you said he took to the

boy, I'm sure that's why he's writing. But, if he's threatening you again, then we need to know that too. No matter what we have to get to Frank before he does."

"All right give him my address."

The wind blew through the yellow flowered curtains I had sewn just a week before. We didn't speak for a moment, then Mary let out a deep angry breath, "I'm not a religious woman, but if I were, I'd hope that man goes straight to hell!"

I was so stunned, and I think Mary was too. That was so out of character for her. We sat in shock for a moment, just looking at each other.

"Is that what a religious woman *would hope for?*" I joked.

After that, we couldn't stop laughing. I don't know why it was so funny to us, but Mary was holding her stomach and I was wiping tears from my eyes. Whenever we'd catch a breath we'd look at each other and start all over again. Charlie pulled himself to standing and cruised as far as he could down the row of cabinets. He was bouncing himself up and down and laughing too. Mary rose and picked him up. We were still laughing, and then Charlie started too.

Two more letters arrived at my house. And, despite Mary's advice. I ripped them and threw them away. It made me nauseous to see them post marked 'air mail from England.' He sickened me. I'd never been to England but read Bronte novels in high school. I imagined that British culture was aristocratic and sophisticated. In my mind, Jeff was in a well-appointed home with his wife serving him tea and cakes on porcelain china. With his young daughter on his lap while he read her a storybook. I imagined his kindness towards her mother. When I had these thoughts I ushered them out of my mind; I did so because while I imagined him in England with his family, I imagined myself as his woman on the side. It wasn't that I was jealous of their life; it was the deep shame I felt about myself. The way we had cavorted; the way I had been with him when we made love. I had been so open with him, teasing and affectionate. I knew from my marriage to Nick that those sorts of relations with a man -even one's husband-- were not proper. I supposed, despite my protests, my emotions for him were still raw. Even with all the time that had accumulated between us, I still felt slighted by him. Those sinking feelings disappeared as soon as I ripped his letters up and threw them in the garbage. Sometimes I'd smile to myself remembering how angry with me Jeff had been that afternoon Charlie and I took the train back to Bend. Jeff had been forced to concede that I had won. Not even against him. I had won the things I wanted in life. The things he wanted me to relinquish.

Mary had told me once that when you make the right choices, doors open. They had. Once I had freed myself from Jeff, everything fell into place. Mary and I felt like magicians. We were very proud of ourselves for having executed our plan. She even admitted I was right. That it

wasn't so dangerous for a woman to make a life for herself and not depend on a man like Jeff who had wanted to hold me captive.

One day I was in the kitchen at Mary's. We were family and went in and out of each other's homes freely. I had needed flour for pies I was making for the garden club. I had become an active member. The meetings were held at a different member's house each week. During our meetings we'd discuss how to expand the club and conducting meetings in the basement of the local church. After refreshments we'd tour the gardens, look at designs. We were all becoming close friends.

"I rather like the coziness of meeting at each other houses," Laura had said at one meeting. She and I were growing very close.

"I agree." I had chimed in.

Some of the other ladies looked at each other and pursed their lips. The current chair, Elizabeth Lewis, had big ideas and plans for the club. Those did not include continuing to meet at private homes. It was wonderful. In the two months since Jeff Lambert I lived in a different world.

I was scooping several cups of flour from the bin into a large bowl when there was a knock on the door. Mary and Frank had gone into town and taken Charlie to Mirror Pond for the day. The weather was nice and they had started getting him a little bowl of ice cream after playing by the water. I stepped away from the bin and wiped my hands on my apron. I had the strangest fear that it was Jeff. In fact, I was sure of it; I was white as a ghost as I walked out of the kitchen.

When I approached the door, I could see through the window it wasn't him. I let out a breath of air; it had been a long time since that fear had surfaced. Instead, it was another man. He was about my age and was carrying an envelope.

I opened the door, wiped my hands on my apron again. "Hello? May I help you?"

He removed his hat and smiled. "Yes, I'm here to see Frank Lawrence."

"May I ask what this is about?" I squinted my eyes and looked at him with a hint of suspicion.

"I had come to see Frank a couple months back. I'm a journalist with Life Magazine. I wrote an article on farming here in the Pacific Northwest. I've got some pictures of the farm."

"Oh yes, I remember Frank talking about it. Going on and on actually." I smiled and he smiled a polite smile back at me. "We've never met, but you're Tom Billings. Isn't that right?"

"Yes, that's right. "

"I'm Eve." I said.

"Oh are you Frank's daughter?"

I became flustered. "We're related," I finally settled on. "Would you like to come in? Have a cool drink and wait."

"Well, I don't know. When will he be back?"

"I suppose you're right. They won't be back for a while yet. They've taken my son down to Mirror Pond. They'll likely spend the whole afternoon there."

"That's nice." He bit his lip and he looked like he was considering my offer. "No I won't trouble you. Would you give him this? My telephone number's on the envelope. I'm here in Bend for a while. He can call me anytime."

I smiled at him, "I'll do that."

He kept popping into my mind the remainder of that afternoon. I knew from experience that sometimes that happened. Meeting a handsome man, becoming a little preoccupied with him and letting your mind wander back to the interaction. Carmen and I would do that with film stars in her magazines. Tom Billings was handsome, almost like a film star.

By the next day, I had let it go. But, he must have felt the same way about me; he must have asked around because not three days later he called Frank and asked if it would be all right if he invited me on a date. Frank and Mary drove right to my house after the call. They were more excited than I was. I could see in Frank's expression that he had already jumped ahead to Tom as his son-in-law.

"I don't know, Frank." I said. I felt embarrassed for some reason.

"Why on earth not?" Mary interrupted. "Darling, Frank has spent a lot of time with him. He's a very polite and kind man."

"Why isn't he married?"

Frank said, "Listen sweetheart. You're not married. You're widowed. Maybe it's the same with him. Or, maybe he's been too busy with work. He's traveled all over. He reported from Europe during the war. He's about your age, couldn't be thirty yet. It makes sense to me."

I was both nervous and excited. One afternoon the phone rang. Before I answered it, I took several deep breaths. Charlie was on my hip, and now that he was crawling, I had to keep an eye on him at all times. He wanted to get back down on the floor and get into something. He had already mastered holding on to the couch and pulling himself up to standing. As I picked up the receiver, he kept squirming and pointing to the floor.

"Hush Charlie. Let mama talk on the phone." He quieted for a moment. "Hello," I said, trying to act natural, like I didn't expect it to be anyone special. There was a long pause. "Hello?" I repeated.

An operators voice came on the line, "Mrs. Miller? A long distance call is on the line. I have a Mr. Jeff Lambert on the line from London, England."

I hung up the phone without saying another word. I waited in the quiet of the house, looking out at the garden. It was starting to come to life; little seedlings shooting up from the earth. The call scared me; it scared me to think of Jeff on the line while the operator was connecting us, he was hidden in the silence as she said his name. He hadn't gotten

the message when I never responded to his letters. I was so angry that he still wouldn't leave me alone. It was good to know he was still in England. Maybe his stay would be extended.

Charlie had almost completely maneuvered himself out of my arms and I was holding him half way down my body by his armpits. He was pointing and his face was growing red with frustration. He let out a scream. I gently guided him down and he immediately began crawling around the room. His plastic diaper cover looked heavy like he needed a change. I loved him to death but changing him was enough work for two days. He hated laying still and half the time, I had to crawl around following him with his diaper half pinned as he squealed with laughter. When I caught him he'd start crying again. I took a deep breath. He'd be ok for a moment with a wet diaper. I picked up the little wooden toy trucks Frank had made for him, sat down on the floor and played with him. I knew it would only distract him for a short time. He'd bang the trucks together and sometimes roll them. He'd tire of them quickly preferring to find trouble in the worst places of all—under the table, pulling on the phone chord, under a lamp, behind a chair where he couldn't maneuver himself backwards to get out.

As I watched him on the floor, there was a knock at the door. I felt like I couldn't take talking to another person that day. I was too drained from the thought of Jeff, which lingered. I could not understand why he wouldn't leave me alone. This was the first time he'd called, but four letters had come since my trip to Eugene. There had been two sent to Mary's; he sent another two to my house even after Mary mailed him my address along with a note telling him to leave me alone and that he should be ashamed of himself. I had asked her to be formal and provide as little information as possible, but she confessed that she had wanted to let him know he wasn't welcome any where near us. Since he hadn't desisted, she kept urging me to read them. She also urged me to tell Frank. She said it was going too far. There was too much to lose now.

"How can I lose anything? Honestly, Mary. There is nothing he can do except scare me. We'll tell Frank soon enough. Then what?"

She had shook her head. The more I ignored his attempts to contact me, the more worried the look on her face became. Frank even expressed concern about her, asking me if something was wrong whenever he came over to help me with the house or garden. I was avoiding the conversation with him. It wasn't so much I feared him telling me to leave; I didn't want him to think less of me. I didn't have any parents and I loved how highly he regarded me.

I picked up a squirming Charlie and walked over to the foyer and to the front door. Tom Billings, the reporter was standing on the other side the screen door. He was a gentle looking man, handsome but something about his manner was so respectful and caring. I hadn't known then that he got permission from Frank to ask me on a date. I

opened the screen and asked him to come in.

There we stood in the foyer. He looked as I imagined a reporter would. He wore khaki pants and a dress shirt but no tie. His hair was short but longer than Jeff's. It was dark brown, parted to the side. His eyes were hazel. I inspected him thoroughly but had no inkling that he was at my house to invite me on a date. I could see he felt very awkward.

"Hello Mr. Billings, can I help you?"

"Oh hello Eve," he stammered as if he had just bumped into me at the store.

I couldn't help but smile. "Can I help you? Would you like to come in?" He looked at Charlie. "No. I can see you've got your hands full. I won't be but a minute. I don't want to bother you."

"All right." I waited.

He looked up at the ceiling then back down at me. "Well, Eve. After we met the other day—I'm not married." He blurted.

I raised my eyebrows. "Oh I hadn't realized that." I said.

"Well, I talked with Frank a few minutes ago. He's on his way over here."

"Yes. I know. He's building a bed for Charlie."

Tom nodded. It wasn't that his shyness made him any less masculine; it made him respectful and caring. Tom was unlike Jeff who had already reached over and touched my cheek by the second time we had met. We hadn't even been on a date. Jeff had just been seducing me, knowing how lonely and sad I was; using his good looks and charm. It took Jeff no time at all to draw me in. Even that night in Eugene, it hadn't taken him two hours for me to become that girl again. His possession. I wasn't that kind of person anymore and even if I had been, I couldn't imagine Tom Billings ever doing that.

"What did Frank say?" I inquired.

"I asked him if it would be all right to see if you'd like to go to a movie or out somewhere."

"Oh. A date?"

Finally, he loosened up and smiled. "Yes. I sort of screwed it up. Believe it or not I did practice on my way here. It really was a good speech. I mean you wouldn't believe how debonair I was in my truck driving from Frank and Mary's."

"What did Frank say?"

"He seemed really happy. I think he likes me."

"He does. He couldn't stop talking about you the whole time you wrote that story." I stopped and adjusted Charlie to relieve some of the pressure on my arm. Charlie seemed entertained by the exchange between Tom and me. He had a finger in his mouth and his blue eyes switched back and forth between us. "I'd love to go on a date with you Mr. Billings. You know this is silly, standing here in the entry. Frank will be over in just a few minutes. Why don't you come in and I'll fix you an

iced tea."

That afternoon Tom and I talked for a couple of hours. He was so respectful and told me about the stories he'd written for Life Magazine. He was solemn when he shared his experiences about the war and all he had witnessed. It was such a relief to talk with someone about the casualties. I told him all about Nick. It had been so long since I re-acquainted myself with the first man I had loved. Tom naturally assumed that Charlie was Nick's baby and I didn't correct him. How could I, really? In some ways Tom reminded me of Nick. Interested, but not fascinated with me as Jeff Lambert always pretended to be. I could tell Tom liked me but did not have secret plans to control me. I could tell he'd never tell a woman to say she *belonged to him*.

I told him how I'd moved to Bend and how Frank and Mary had taken me in as if I were their own daughter.

"I thought you were their daughter. Well," he smiled, "really, for all intents and purposes you are. And you couldn't convince them that Charlie wasn't their own flesh and blood."

I smiled at him. After a while, Frank came down from Charlie's room where he had been working; he announced that was going home. He suggested it was about time for Tom to head back too "Don't you think, Tom?"

Tom stood up and nodded. "It was so nice talking with you Eve."

Then Frank chimed in. "Tom, we're making our Sunday dinner tomorrow. Would you like to join us?"

He looked at me for approval. I smiled.

'Eve, would that be all right?" Tom asked me.

"Yes I'd like that."

"All right son, I'll walk you out." Frank flashed a sly smile at me before the two of them left.

Tom and I saw each other often over the next three weeks. The more time we spent together, the more I found out about him. He was good with Charlie too, but also admitted my little boy was a handful. "It's the crawling stage," he said, "Then comes walking. I guess it just keeps getting trickier, doesn't it?"

My heart sank. How would he know that? Did he have his own children?

"Oh" I said and looked down. He must have wondered what I was thinking.

"I have a whole bunch of nieces and nephews."

When I asked him why he never married, it was just as Frank had said. He was originally drafted as photographer for the army. When he finished serving, he sent some of his photographs to Life Magazine and they were interested. He'd always been very drawn to personal stories, real life experiences like farming across America.

"How long will you be here?" I asked after knowing him a couple weeks.

About a year. Now that they've built an airport, it's easier for me to be closer to my family.

I felt a happiness rise in me. I wanted to know Tom better. I wanted to have a man like that in my life again. Of course I wasn't even thinking about marriage at that point. I noted how he responded to my lifestyle. He never questioned my living alone. Although I hadn't started the floral business, he thought it was a great idea. He had told me a story he'd written about the female workforce during the war. "Maybe its heresy," he whispered, "But it seemed to me, the women were happier when they had jobs."

"Don't you think they wanted to be mothers?"

"Of course I do. I respect that. But, you know during the war when women were out in the workforce, there were so many programs to help them with their children. The government even provided hot meals for dinner when they picked the children up after work."

"I hadn't realized that," I remarked.

"Oh yes," he said as if I was a newspaper editor he was selling his story to.

I nodded. "I like your opinions on these things."

"Well the other thing is, a lot of women *have* to work. They don't have enough money. This whole idea about the all American family. They aren't talking about everyone."

"I did know that. That many women have to earn a living."

"Here we go again," he laughed. We were sitting in the parlor, on the couch Mary had given me that had belonged to her mother. It was a Duncan fife. upholstered in fading cream fabric with silver brocade. Charlie was over at Mary and Frank's place. Tom placed his iced tea down on the coffee table.

"Eve. I know its only been a few weeks, but--"

"What is it?"

"I like you very much."

"Thank you."

"May I kiss you?"

I grew flustered, fearing it would lead to making love. That it would be the same as Jeff all over again. Being treated like that kind of woman. Maybe even being that kind of woman.

"Tom. I don't know."

"You're right. That was rude of me. How could I ask you here, now? Sitting here alone in your house?"

"I want to."

"How about I head home?"

I felt a little deflated. Had I scared him away? "All right. Tom, I'm sorry."

"No. Here's our plan. You'll walk me to the door. That way I can kiss you on your porch. Nice and safe, see?"

I smiled and I felt wonderful.

"Ok." I said softly.

"If you want to."

"Yes. I think it's about time for you to leave."

"Oh yes, its getting late."

He put on his jacket and I walked him to the screen door. We entered the porch and stood there with the beautiful empty fields around us illuminated by the bright moon. A cool breeze passed. He walked closer to me. He looked me in the eye. "I'm so glad I met you," he whispered then he leaned in close to me and kissed me on the lips. It wasn't a passionate kiss; it felt more like an expression of admiration and affection. It told me he genuinely liked being with me. That was all I wanted. I didn't want things to move quickly. I loved being around Tom and talking with him.

He leaned in again and kissed me again. That time a little more passionately.

He stood up and he was back to his old self. "All right. I'd really better go." He reached for my hand and held it for a moment. "Thank you, Eve."

"For what?"

"Thanks for today."

CHAPTER 11

Two more calls came from Jeff. I did the exact same thing. As soon as I heard the operator trying to connect a call from England, I hung up. One more letter came. I ripped it up and threw it away as I had the others. After that two weeks passed with no word. Then three. It was the end of May, by then and the orchards were abundant with white and pink petals. They had blossomed two weeks before and it was just as Mary and I said; the petals fell in little, soft snow flurries whenever we walked under the orchard. I had hoped for the same at my new house, once my garden matured. I had spent the morning with Mary and Frank. I was planning on seeing Tom in the afternoon. My feelings for Tom were growing and I loved going into town and walking the perimeter of Mirror lake with him, holding hands and talking. I thought maybe I was falling in love with him.

Mary and Frank were having so much fun with Charlie now. He'd try to escape from Frank, holding on to the sofa and cruising around, laughing hysterically as Frank pretended to try to catch him. In Frank's eyes there was nothing Charlie couldn't do. That morning we had been at the table with Charlie in his high chair. He was eating little pieces of fresh bread with grape jelly spread on top. His little cheeks were sticky purple as he devoured the food. Frank was beside him drinking coffee, having toast and reading the newspaper. Suddenly, Charlie began

babbling. At first it was to himself, but then he stared at Frank and raised his voice babbling different consonants and sounds.

Mary turned from the sink where she was washing dishes. She laughed. "Frank, I think you're boy is talking with you."

Frank folded the paper and put it on the table.

"Yes, little boy what is it that you need?"

Charlie stopped babbling, looked at Frank with a serious expression. Then he changed the tone of his babble to match Frank's intonation. Frank pretended they were in a conversation and listened intently, Charlie gestured and then stopped babbling. Mary and I stood watching and laughing, but Charlie was not distracted. He waited for Frank's turn.

"Well, it's going to be nice today little boy, should we go out to the farm and pet the goats?"

Charlie smiled and his eyes twinkled. Then he babbled a short stream of consonants. They went on like this for about five minutes until Charlie looked at me and did a sideways wave "bye-bye." I walked over and kissed his sticky cheeks. Mary had a wet washcloth and as she tried wiping him clean, he squirmed and fussed and started crying. Once she finished he was back to his twinkle-eyed self. He raised his arms to Frank to pick him up, as if to say "I'm ready grandpa, let's go out to the farm." We were all so delighted with him.

Frank teased, "well your boy and I have some work to do. Just us men." Charlie kept waving by to me.

I went over to him and kissed him "bye—bye sweetheart."

He watched me over Frank's shoulder as they walked out the yard. He waved his little *bye bye* the whole way while Mary and I waved exaggerated waves back and said "bye-bye" over and over.

"That boy has us around his finger," I said to her.

She smiled, "what time are you seeing Tom?"

"Later this afternoon. I'm going to work on the garden before we go out."

"It's coming along so beautifully. I'm surprised at how much is coming up already. You're such a talented gardener."

"Well, thank you. What time should we pick up Charlie?"

"He's welcome to stay here. You know he does very well overnight."

"I don't want you to think—"

"Eve, you're relationship with Tom is perfectly respectable. I know that. I wouldn't think anything."

"But, it would look..."

"I supposed you're right."

"We'll get him at eight." I said.

"All right, dear."

It was warm out in the garden, but I could see rain clouds in the distance. I turned the soil in preparation for planting the rose bushes. I marked the semi-circles in the rose garden with stones and it took

some time arranging them so that they were spaced right to accommodate their eventual size. It took quite some time and I stood and thought about how to select the colors and whether to mix bushes so there was a randomness or to keep them in order. I was leaning towards one color per row. I couldn't decide.

Then I moved to the wildflower garden. The little flowers were coming up, especially the daisies. I loved the random order of them and knew that I would have a pretty swath of land full of bright colors. Poppies, daisies, lupine, cosmos. I stared out at the field for a long time. I was content in my life. It was everything Mary and I had predicted. I smiled when I thought back on those early days. Just getting to know each other. My relationship with Mary was one of those relationships like I had with Carmen, trying to have some restraint but really wanting to talk to each other every minute. Just as with Carmen we gave into it and kept talking. Even after all the time together we still have so much to discuss. I also found it so fulfilling to have people to share in my love for Charlie. To be as proud, sometimes prouder. Like earlier, that morning in the kitchen. He ate it up, and I knew all our love made for a happy baby.

Little raindrops hit my face here and there and so I carried the tools to the shed and put them away. As I walked around the side of the house, I saw Jeff Lambert's car in the driveway. I stood frozen, in shock. He wasn't inside the vehicle so I realized he must have been at the door or walking around the house. I felt as if lightning had burned through my whole body. My urge was to run. I questioned myself. Run to where? Why run, he won't hurt me? It'll just be another fight. It would just force me to do the thing I had avoided. Tell Frank. But, it was time to tell him anyway. Then what could Jeff do?

I walked into the house and I saw him; there on the other side of the front door screen. I went to the door and spoke to him through the screen.

"What do you want?" I said flatly.

"Let me in Eve."

"I don't have to."

"Yes Eve, you do."

"Why are you here?"

"Didn't you read my letters?"

I raised my eyebrows as if I didn't care at all about what he had to say, "No, I ripped them up and threw them in the garbage."

"Just like you hung up when I tried calling you from England?"

"From your mother-in-law's house."

"Yes. As a matter of fact." At that he opened the screen door, pushed me aside and walked in.

I was so shocked by his brazen act that I conceded a little bit. "Tell me what you want. Tell me why you keep threatening to destroy what I have. Why you drove all this way and invaded a town that I've made

my home? Tell me and then leave! Don't come back!"

"Eve, why are you so angry? We had a wonderful time in Eugene."

"That's what you think. That's what you say."

"We're at the end of the line here. My offer is about to expire."

I couldn't help but laugh. He seemed so weak to me. Desperate almost. His handsomeness was fading with his confidence.

"Are you still with Margaret?"

"Of course."

"Of course." I rolled my eyes and shook my head. I walked over to the window and looked out at what was mine. "Of course you are." I whispered. "And you always will be." I turned to him. "Please get out of my life. I no sooner believe you love Charlie than I believe you love me."

He walked closer but stayed a reasonable distance, "Eve this is the last time I ask you to do the right thing by Charlie. My son Charlie."

I felt so much anger and disregard for him. "Well, that's a relief. Then this will be the last time I have to say no to your ridiculous offer."

"That's the third time you've called me ridiculous Eve. Is that what you think? You're entitled to speak to me that way? You think I'm ridiculous?"

"I don't want you. Can't you understand that?"

At that he took a few steps and approached me. He stood very close to me. So much so that I was backed against the wall. I could smell his spicy scent and it was close enough to feel his breath on me. "Jeff. What are you doing?"

"I'm tired of it Eve."

I tried to move out of his reach, but at that he took me by the arms and held me, pushed me against the wall. He bent forward and kissed me. Not passionately but this other way that scared me. I kept trying to turn my face, but his body was crushing me. Finally, I pulled away enough to get some room in between us.

"Let go of me Jeff. " I struggled but he held me there against the wall. "Jeff why would you do this?" I tried to push my arms to make room between us. I was crying and his expression didn't change. It was the same one I had described to Carmen over a year ago. It was hatred.

Finally, I managed to get out of his reach. I ran upstairs and he followed. He didn't run. He just walked behind me. I went into my room, closed the door and grabbed the key from the jewelry box on the dresser. I tried to put the key into the lock. My hand was shaking so hard, I couldn't keep it still enough to fit it in the keyhole. I knew if I could get it locked he wouldn't be able to get in. If I couldn't get it locked, he would enter my room and take me against my will. My mind was racing. It was like a terrible dream where I couldn't believe what was happening. I finally got it into the hole, but just as I did, I heard the doorknob turn and I started crying. I tried to hold the door shut but it

didn't take much for his strength to overpower me.

"What are you going to do to me? Jeff, please don't. Please. Please."

"Go lay down on the bed Eve."

"I won't," I yelled. "I won't ever do what—"

I couldn't finish my sentence because his hands were on my shoulders again, this time squeezing hard. He pushed me backwards towards the bed; I lost my footing and fell to the floor. He pulled me up so violently by my arms that I let out a cry in pain. "You're hurting me."

I struggled to get free again, but once he had me standing, he pushed me hard on to the bed. As I tried to sit up, he pushed me down and got on top of me.

"Please Jeff. I'm sorry. Please don't." I kept struggling to get myself free from him. "I'm sorry I didn't read the letters. Let me make you some coffee and you can tell me what they said."

Still he didn't speak.

"Please Jeff" I was crying hysterically and struggling against him. He held me and pressed his body down on me harder. "Please say something to me."

"You're a whore." He whispered and at that, still holding me down with one arm over my chest almost across my neck, and with the weight of his body on me, his elbow pressing so hard on my upper arm it ached horribly. I realized that it was going to happen. That I couldn't stop him from forcing himself on me. "You're a whore," he said again. This time glaring at me.

"I'm not," I whispered.

He was so intent on what he was doing he didn't say anything. He pulled my dress and slip up high enough that he could penetrate me. As soon as he did I felt a tearing pain, my body didn't want him and it wasn't prepared for intercourse. I screamed and turned my head to the side. He took his hand and turned my head back so I was facing him. Held it firmly in place as I struggled against him, crying in pain. He was clasp my face so forcefully, that he caused bruises around the bottom of my face. He watched my expression as he hurt and humiliated me so much. When he finished, he moved off me, stood up and pulled his pants up. I turned and wept violently into the pillow.

"Eve, get up" he ordered.

"What more do you want?" I cried my face still buried in the pillow. My body feeling a pain I'd never felt. I had so much shame. I felt battered and later I would see my arms had deep red finger marks that turned to bruises, and my face was bruised under my chin.

"I said get up. We need to talk."

I turned and looked at him. "I have nothing to say to you. I hate you!" I screamed the words.

"Get a hold of yourself and come downstairs so we can talk."

"Why should I listen to anything you say or tell me to do? Ever again?! Why should I?!"

"Because I'm going to get you help. Eve, you are prone to these fits of anger and melancholy. It's getting increasingly worse. I'm not the only one concerned about your emotional state."

"What are you talking about?" I couldn't stop shaking or crying. I pulled myself up and pulled my skirt back down below my knees. I sat up on the side of the bed, my head in my hands. I was keenly aware of his position, standing while I sat, meek and frightened.

"You hurt me, Jeff." I cried and looked up at him, "Why did you hurt me? Why do you hate me so much?" I whispered, "Why do you hate me?" over and over. He didn't answer. Finally, I looked at him, I knew my hair was wet and matted around my wet cheeks. My dress was pulled out of shape and the top buttons undone revealing my slip. I tried to button my dress but I was trembling. "I feel so much shame. Please answer me, do you hate me?"

"You have always been spirited and after our argument in Eugene when you became violent and hysterical—

"I didn't—You were the one. You pushed me down, you twisted my arm in the car. And today. Just now you forced me—"

"I forced you?"

I shook my head in disbelief. All I could do was cry "I'm so ashamed."

"Eve, You need some time to get your emotions in control. To recuperate and become more mentally competent."

I stood up and faced him. The anger was spilling over again. "You're the one who's crazy. You're not my husband! You think you've so much power over me, but what power does a married man have over his mistress? You're not even on Charlie's birth certificate!"

He grabbed me by the shoulders again and roughly led me to the vanity. "Look at yourself in the mirror. Don't tell me you are a woman in control of her emotions. "

"You did this to me! It's because of you! You made me look like this!" I started sobbing again and ran over to the bed and cried into the pillow, "Why are you doing this?" I asked in muffled cries.

Jeff walked over to me and sat beside me on the bed. For a moment I thought it was going to be one of the times that he comforted me; I thought he would stroke my hair and gently turn me towards him. I thought he'd lean down and kiss me softly. Say "*It's all right, beautiful Eve.*" I felt so crazy and my body felt so battered, I was shaking and in that moment I wanted him to. I wanted him to touch me and tell me he loved me.

"Eve, look at me," he said.

I turned and I must have looked at him with such vulnerability that for a moment I saw a deep remorse in his face. It was like the moment in the car after he'd held my wrists when he was asking himself, what was he doing? Had he gone crazy? I waited for him to comfort me.

"You're right. I'm not your husband, but I'm Charlie's father and I can't have him raised by a woman who was so melancholic that she

didn't leave her house for a year. Don't you remember when we first met?"

What he said hadn't caught up with me because my expectation for his compassion had been so great. "Of course, but I got better."

"You haven't made good judgments since I met you. And now you're in no condition to fulfill your obligations as a mother."

I sat up. We were close to each other on the bed. If not for the gravity of our conversation it would have seemed like any other time we'd been together, except for what he'd had done to me. "What are you saying, Jeff?"

"I need to think about what's best for Charlie right now."

"I don't understand."

"I spoke with Frank Lawrence a little while ago, showed him the pictures and explained your wildly vacillating states; he was worried for Charlie too. I told him that you're having another episode. That things have fallen apart again."

I shook my head. I appealed to our history together. That we'd loved one another at one time. That we have a child together, "but you know that's not true."

"You named Frank as Charlie's guardian should something happen to you. Frank thinks it would be best for Dr. Pope to talk with you."

I could feel my myself becoming a child. I closed my eyes and let tears stream down. "Why would you do that? Why do you hate me so much?!"

He started to stand. I don't know why but I grabbed his shirt and held him there next to me. "Please stop doing this to me. Please help me. Don't leave things like this."

Jeff removed my hands from him and stood. "I want you to do as I say, fix yourself up and come downstairs."

Frank would hate me because it wasn't me who had told him. "Did you show him the sketches? The pictures you have of us?" I couldn't help but plead with him just like I used to. He remained cool. He'd completely changed. Where before I had only seen the hatred in his eyes on a rare occasion, it was there now a permanent response to me. I had made him hate me.

"How else could I impress upon him, your emotional fluctuations? He's spoken with Dr. Pope. I don't know what they've decided." He checked himself in the vanity mirror, started to adjust his collar then stopped, left it the way it was.

My mind raced to Charlie over at Frank and Mary's. Regardless of what Frank felt about me. I had to go get to Charlie. I knew I'd have to leave Bend that moment. I had no place to go after I left, but I had no choice. My only thoughts were to get out of the house and run away.

It was as if he could read my mind. "They're on their way over now."

I knew there was so much evidence against me, even if Mary and Carmen and Harry said what a nice girl I'd always been, the pictures

told something different. My melancholy after Nick died went on too long. Everyone in Sellwood knew it. And I had been so angry with Jeff every time he rejected me. I took a deep breath and stood up. My only way out was to do what he told me, to act as he wanted me to. I softened and stood up. "You won't let them take me anywhere will you, Jeff?"

His eyes grew tender for a moment. My feelings were vacillating so wildly. When I looked back on that afternoon years later, I could see I had been terrified, but in that instant I wanted him to love me again. Then, I hated him. I wanted him to stop what he was doing. I couldn't really comprehend all of the information he dispensed. My body was still reacting to what he'd done to me. A constant panic ran through me, a reflex to run or get him out and close the door, succeed in locking it even if it was too late. I was confused, one moment understanding that he'd convinced Frank who *I really was*. Then next moment wanting him to comfort me. Shame overtook me.

"Jeff. I don't have anywhere to go now. Please take me with you."

He walked over to the window and stared out. The view through the wavy glass was my new gardens, my new life. It was all mine. The house was surrounded by forests. He scanned the yard, put his hands in his pockets and turned to me. He looked so much older, weary. His face told me that I'd worn him out.

"Eve, you're never going to love me."

"I can pretend." I said without thinking. He looked like I'd slapped him in the face. He took a deep breath, his expression changed to resignation.

He raised his shoulders and let them fall. He started to say something.

"Or at least let me leave before they get here. Please let me go now." I begged him. "I don't want Dr. Pope to talk to me. Please, you've known me a long time. You know I'm not crazy."

He shook his head and looked up at the ceiling. "I tried so hard with you. I don't want you to pretend to love me. *You* made me act crazy. Kept pushing me."

I walked over to him. I didn't love him. There had been a seed inside of me that was pure hatred. No love at all. Maybe that's why I'd acted the way I had. Putting everything he said down. Disrespecting him. But, hearing him say that what he did to me was my fault, burned through my body. All I'd done was asked him to leave me alone. The fear of what he was promising was so great. I didn't care about any of it, certainly not justice. I was afraid.

"Please. I'll go with you now." I went over to him and tried to touch his arm. "I will. Just like you wanted me to."

He pulled away. He didn't answer.

"What is it?" I started crying and reached for him, but he wouldn't let me touch him.

He grew cold again. "Don't you realize?"

"No. What is it?"

"Don't you realize? I don't want you any more? I'm not taking you anywhere."

"Why?" I was so stunned, in a state of shock. I couldn't speak or move.

"You won't be gone forever, Eve. I think they'll help you at the hospital. They certainly aren't going to hurt you. Maybe we can talk when you get back."

"Jeff please. Don't do this to me. To Charlie. You know they'll hurt me. Of course you know they will. Can't you please stop them? Tell Frank something? Or just take me." I hardly had any voice. Left. I became a zombie and somehow I couldn't stop myself from repeating the words in an empty monotone "Please Jeff. Take me with you. Please forgive me." I sat back down on the bed and looked out at nothing. "I know that I need to change. I will listen to you."

"Stop, Eve. That's enough. I've already made my decision."

Just then I heard the front door open. And someone walk in to the house.

I snapped out of my stupor for a moment, "Who's that?"

He raised his eyebrows and shrugged his shoulders. "I doubt it's Tom Billings."

"What do you know about Tom Billings?"

"Eve, after Frank and I spoke, he was very concerned about his family's name. The last thing he needed was for a girl like you to start up with Tom as you had with me. He went over to Tom's after I left."

I couldn't move. I was in a state of shock. I just wanted Charlie. Just then I heard Mary's voice. "Eve? Eve where are you?" Relief washed over me.

Mary knocked on my door. And Jeff loosened his tie and untucked his shirt.

"What are you doing? Are you making it look like—"

"It looks like what it is."

I ran to the door. He moved out of my way and Mary pushed open the door. I fell into her arms and started crying. When she did she saw Jeff Lambert standing there looking disheveled, she pulled away for a moment and inspected me; my hair was a mess. I'm sure my face was red from crying. My throat was horse from screaming. My dress remained partly unbuttoned. She pulled me back into her arms. I felt safe and warm. I felt like I had a mother who was going to protect me.

"Mr. Lambert?" She said with such contempt, I didn't know what she'd do.

"Mrs. Lawrence." He smiled one of his charming smiles as Mary looked him up and down.

"I know you spoke with my husband. Got him all riled up over Eve, over nothing. Can't you understand she is loved and all you've done is

hurt her? What's wrong with you that you can't leave her alone? I can tell exactly what you've done to her here in this bedroom. I am not afraid of men like you! Get out and don't come back!"

For a moment, I thought Mary might have convinced Frank of my value, my virtue.

Jeff looked at me and then turned to walk out the door. "I'll wait in the car for Frank and the doctor." He left. I pulled away from Mary and sat on the bed, put my head in my hands and cried.

Eve, I've got to get you out of here. We've got to get you out of here somehow."

"There's no where for me to go."

"Where's Charlie?"

"He's with Lenore. Frank is beside himself. I would have never thought he would be so upset now that he loves you and Charlie both. It was the pictures Eve. That was when his resolve broke. That man, he had Frank convinced that there's something very wrong with you. He said he came by and you were hysterical. Frank couldn't put the *you* he knows with the girl in the pictures of you with Jeff. Or the nude drawings. He couldn't accept what he saw. "

"But you know me. Everyone here knows me. I'm not bad." I started crying. I couldn't stop. My whole body was shaking.

"Eve, what have you done up here with him?"

"He forced me," I said. "I tried to lock the door." I started crying hysterically. "He hurt me Mary." I held out my arms where he had bruised them. Then I looked at her for a long moment. "He hurt me."

She looked at me closely. Her green eyes stayed fixed on my face. "Your face is bruised here Eve." Mary's eyes grew furious then worried. She came over to the bed and sat beside me.

"Harry and Carmen are on their way up, but it will take them a few hours--when Harry gets here I'm telling him the whole story."

"No. Mary please don't!"

"Eve. This has to stop once and for all. I know you're embarrassed and want to keep it to yourself which I would advise in any other situation—"

"No. don't! Jeff will take even more revenge on me. He'll take Charlie from me. I can't bear it. I don't want Charlie with him! Please Mary."

She sat down next to me, put her arm around me and I fell into her arms and wept.

"Charlie is staying with us. Jeff Lambert wasn't out here to get Charlie. He was out here to get you. That's all. It had been too long since you responded to him. I'm sure he knew you had gotten over him. Eve. I don't know what's wrong with that man. But, he doesn't want Charlie. He told Frank he couldn't take care of him given his circumstances. Frank had told him we were Charlie's guardians should anything happen to you. He didn't even ask to see Charlie when he was at the house."

"Let me speak to him again." I begged, "Convince him."

"Eve, why would this man be so heartless? Why would he want to hurt you this much? What happened between the two of you?"

I started crying again and through sobs I pleaded, "please bring Charlie to me. He and I will go. Somehow."

"I want to but I can't think of how. Frank went to fetch Dr. Pope. They'll be here. Even if not, we'll pass them on the way out. I'll go out and tell that man to leave your property. Then we'll try to get you out."

"He won't listen." I wiped my nose and just looked at her. I couldn't stop crying.

"Eve. Listen to me. As hard as it is, they can't come in here and just take you to the hospital. How could they?" I looked at her and her worried green eyes filled with tears. "I don't know how they could."

I thought of the story she had related about her mother. Why hadn't I listened? Just did as she advised?

"Eve if anything happens, I'm going to get you back home as soon as I can. And, Eve the only people that know about this are Frank and Tom. Once Frank cools down, once you're back home, it will all be normal. No one will know."

"How long will they keep me?"

"Eve, I don't know much about this. I've only heard stories from the newspaper and those are hardly reliable. Eve, I don't know. Maybe a few weeks. I'm going to find out how to protect you and get you home."

"A few weeks without Charlie? He'll cry for me. How can I go knowing my baby is crying and I can't comfort him?"

"Sweetheart, listen to me. I will take care of Charlie for you. I'll bring him to see you. The instant he cries I'll hold him. We'll make sure he is taken care of. I'll put his crib in our room so I'll know the moment he misses you and I'll comfort him.. We're going to get you home."

"I don't want to go. I didn't do anything."

"Darling, stop crying. Try to freshen yourself up. If they see you like this, they'll believe Mr. Lambert. I'll talk to Dr. Pope. He'll see you're fine."

It made me sob harder, I couldn't help it. She buttoned my dress and straightened my hair. "Adjust your slip so your dress looks neat," she instructed. I did my best to straighten my clothes.

The sound of a car door closing seemed to bellow through the house. Then another. I looked at Mary and I started screaming. She was trying so hard to settle me down, she put her hand over my mouth. I could hear her words but couldn't control my body. "Please," she kept saying. "You can't act like this when the doctor gets here. He'll be certain you had a nervous breakdown. Stop Eve."

I stopped screaming and she removed her hand.

Frank and Dr. Pope entered the room. I'd never seen the look in Frank's eyes that he had that day. He spared no disgust when his eyes

met mine.

"Mary leave." He commanded. I'd also never heard him speak to Mary that way.

"I will not!" I could tell that they'd had a big fight over it. "You should be ashamed of yourself! This woman has been like a daughter to you!"

I tried to calm myself. I imagined I must have looked deranged. Tears still flowed down my cheeks even though I had stopped sobbing and screaming.

"That man forced himself on her! She has done nothing wrong. My husband made a mistake!"

"Mrs. Lawrence, please let me speak with Eve. Mr. Lawrence please escort your wife out of the room."

Frank reached for Mary's arm to guide her out. "Don't you ever touch me again."

"Mary!" I screamed. Then a calm came over me. She turned and her eyes were gentle. She was broken too. "Please don't let anything happen to Charlie. Don't let Jeff take him." I said.

"That man's gotten what he came to get. He won't so much as lay a finger on Charlie. I'll cherish your baby and take care of him for you. I'm going to speak with Carmen and Harry, darling. We'll get you back home."

Mary pushed past Frank and exited. Frank followed and closed the door.

Dr. Pope stood at the door, looking at me for a moment. I must have appeared completely crazy. My hair was a mess, my eyes swollen from crying. My clothes were wrinkled and disheveled and the bed sheets were crumpled. It was just an impression; I knew that and perhaps, with the help of Mary, I could have provided some evidence for my sanity, but it was too late. I wasn't able to stop the waves of terror and anguish. I was just so frightened of losing Charlie. I was so shocked from the events of the last hour that I couldn't stop shaking. I tried to reign in my emotions while the doctor watched me. When I finally looked up at him, he stood expressionless. It seemed to me, he couldn't believe his eyes.

Dr. Pope was about Frank's age, but they looked so different. Where Frank was tall with a square jaw and a full head of dark brown hair, always in farmer's overalls and a plaid shirt, Dr. Pope was medium build, not much taller than me it seemed. He was bald and had a short beard. He wore glasses and my mind flashed on a brief memory of him at Charlie's birth. Standing by the bedside in a white apron, a large needle above me. Then, he had faded with the wooziness, in and out of my dreams that finally gave way to a warm beach scene until that gave away to nothing. No memory. I hadn't spoken with him afterwards. I had remained in the twilight sleep until the morning when Mary and Frank brought Charlie in to me. Placed him in my arms.

I started crying all over again. I couldn't control it. I turned over and

wept into the pillow. At that Dr. Pope walked over and sat at the end of the bed.

"Eve," he said softly. "I want to help you."

I couldn't stop crying.

"Will you talk with me for a moment?"

I couldn't look up at him. I found no other escape than into my pillow.

"Eve, please. I need to talk with you."

I sat up and looked at him. I kept crying and when I wasn't letting out sobs, the tears continued to stream.

"You've had a hard time of it haven't you?"

"No. Not until today."

"What do you mean, Eve?"

"I was happy but Jeff wouldn't let me be."

He nodded.

"He's always wanted to take everything from me."

He nodded again.

It was a deluge of realization and pain and fear. I had been ignorant until that day, until Jeff forced himself on me and then degraded me with no concern at all for my life, for the things I loved, for everything that gave me worth, purpose and dignity. "I can't explain it to you Dr. Pope. Please let me see my baby. Please. I need to see my Charlie."

"Eve, when Frank and Mr. Lambert called me, they said you were in an acute state of distress." He said, "Do you know what that means?"

I shook my head, letting out some soft cries. I placed my hand over my mouth.

"It's not even a year since you gave birth. Very often women go into a state of melancholy after. That is particularly the case when the birth is very complicated like yours was. It can take a long time to recover. Do you understand what I'm telling you?"

"No. Why was Charlie's birth complicated?"

"You lost a lot of blood Eve. You almost lost your baby."

"I didn't know that."

"Of course not, you were medicated. But, this melancholia, Eve... It's like a sea rising. You don't see it until it is as bad as it is here with you. Then Eve, you drown."

"No!" I yelled. "Jeff Lambert has been threatening me for months! Then, he came here. I didn't respond to his letters or calls. I was the one who cared about a life for my son. I'm not unhappy."

"He was threatening you?"

I nodded and cried harder.

"How?"

"He sent me letters and told me he'd come here at tell everyone he was Chalice's father."

"Why would a prominent professor with a wife and child do that Eve?"

"He did. I don't know why."

He furrowed his brow, almost in an exaggerated gesture. As if to say *that's a little hard to believe*.

"It was mostly letters. Then he tried calling me. From England. He was away. He wanted me to move to Eugene and he would come and stay with me as much as he could."

"Where are the letters Eve?"

I started crying. He thought I was lying. "I ripped them up and threw them in the garbage."

"Eve your behavior with Jeff Lambert is but one part of the problem. Moral control is one thing, but--"

I raised my voice. "He came in and forced himself on me today. I couldn't stop him." I was shaking and tried to hold still. My whole body was shaking, my legs and hands.

"It's all right. I can see you're upset." He stopped and paused a moment before he began again, "Before today, Eve. When was the last time you had intimate relations with Mr. Lambert?"

I dried my eyes and wiped my hands on my skirt. "I don't know."

"You don't remember?"

It was descending on me. Jeff had already painted the whole story. He explained every detail. Even right now, even my fear and heartache over what he did and the threat of losing Charlie. Even his visit to my house. His disgusting behavior. All of it was orchestrated to make me so distraught that there would be nothing I could say to convince the doctors or Frank that I was mentally fit.

"I do remember. Three months ago."

"This was in Eugene?"

"Yes. Did he tell you and Frank?"

"And you had intimate relations then?"

"We did. He told me to move there with him. To protect Charlie. It would be like husband and wife."

"I see. Did Mr. Lambert force you to have intimate relations then?"

"No."

"But you knew he was married. And you lied to Frank Lawrence about where you were going? Eugene isn't so close that I would think a man could force a woman to take a train all that way, unless she wanted to."

"He did force me today," I whispered, "I'm not lying. I took to breathing deep breaths. I reached up and fixed my hair, straightened my skirt. But, the deep breaths gave way to hyperventilation."

Dr. Pope nodded. "Eve, try to keep yourself calm for just a moment longer, I'm not the one to make the final decision. I am one of two doctors. In the morning we will bring you to the Oregon State Hospital. There you will be evaluated and placed under observation. I do think you need some time to rest and to gain control of your emotions. And, so we can treat you for your melancholia. I think once you're rested

your moral judgment will also improve."

He walked back to the room and picked up his case, brought it over to the bed and stood above it, rummaging through it.

"Dr. Pope, Mary and Frank can take care of me. I just want to be with my baby. Really, I'm not unhappy. I'm not immoral, please. I'm not. I can stay with Mary and Frank."

Finally he retrieved a syringe and looked at me gently. "Eve, this will make you feel calm, then it will make you sleep. You're in a very excited, agitated state and this will help you."

I was crying again, my words were barely intelligible, "I just want to see my baby. Please ask Mary to come."

"Mary can stay in the house with you here tonight. Would that make you feel better?"

"Will she bring Charlie to see me?"

"I'll ask Mr. Lawrence what's best."

At that he placed the syringe into my arm and the instant that I felt a pin prick, the colors softened. I looked at the tall oak dresser and it became a muted brown. Everything did. The yellow curtains had softer edges. I thought about those changes for quite a while. Then, I realized that I wasn't thinking about the events of a few hours ago. I wanted to sort them out, I wanted to try and decipher what might happen next. How I might change what was surely coming ahead. But, each time my mind landed on those particular emotional or strategic thoughts, it moved like liquid back to this placid place. This went on for a while, and then the sky turned bright pink and blue, as it will do in Oregon at dusk. It was dramatic and the colors grew deeper and deeper. Then, I fell asleep.

The next morning, Mary came into my room carrying breakfast and coffee. She opened the curtains and softly whispered my name. I woke, at first forgetting everything that had happened. Then, the realization struck me and I started panicking again. I started to cry and beg Mary to help me. Mary had Charlie with her and she sat down on the bed. He squirmed out of her arms and crawled on top of me.

"Darling, please don't upset Charlie. I know how terrified you must be and I am too."

I was studying his face, his round cheeks and his smile. He leaned into me and 'kissed me' which was just an open wet mouth on my face. I held him in my arms and cried.

"We are going to get you back home, Eve. See, he'll be all right. I'll bring him to see you as often as I can."

"Frank let you bring Charlie to see me?"

"Frank has no authority in that house any more."

"Does he hate me?"

"Eve, he never hated you. Jeff Lambert painted a very convincing picture. And, Frank had a weakness, which I'm sure Mr. Lambert took advantage of."

"Mary, I should pack an overnight bag and leave with Charlie before the doctor gets here."

She frowned and looked at the ground. "Frank and Jeff Lambert are downstairs."

"How can he be here? He's not my husband!"

"Darling, he's Charlie's father."

"Why will they let him tell his side of the story!"

"Darling, you have to listen to me very carefully. You have to. You must control your emotions. You mustn't cry, or scream or grow angry. No matter what they say at the evaluation and hearing today. Promise me Eve."

Charlie was crawling towards the end of the bed. I reached for him and he giggled. I couldn't help but smile at him and he laughed, trying to poke my eye.

"Charlie, what did grandma tell you?" she affectionately scolded. She reached for him, he laughed and then tried to poke her eye. She looked at me with a warm amused smile.

Seeing her and Charlie, made me cry all over again.

"I can't do it, Mary."

Mary sat with Charlie and me for about an hour, but that was such a short time to be with my baby. I couldn't take my eyes off him and when he squirmed to get on the floor and play. I crawled down with him and put this out of my mind for a few minutes.

"Eat some breakfast Eve. You need to be as strong as you can."

But I didn't want to lose a minute with Charlie.

"Eve, get dressed and fix yourself up. Act like you've calmed down and yesterday was just a fight with Jeff. The more calmly you behave the more he will appear as a liar."

I was hardly listening to her. I believed it was over, that they'd walk through the door and I didn't know what they would do. But, I knew from the way Dr. Pope spoke with me and how he described me that he was going to go through with it.

I heard a car pull up and two doors open and close.

Mary picked up Charlie and firmly told me to get dressed. I stood and went to the armoire.

"Pick out something lovely. Eve wear one of your straight skirts and sweater set. Put your pearls on and fix your hair and make up."

I numbly did as she asked. I couldn't see myself as beautiful and the little bruises around my chin were a red-blue and black. They weren't large at all and unless I lifted my head they were barely visible.

"Why does he have to be downstairs?" I turned to her from the mirror. My hands shook as I tried to latch the clasp of my pearl necklace. Mary was bouncing Charlie in her arms to keep him calm.

"Ma ma," he said loudly, frustrated and persistent. He was holding out his arms and reaching as far as he could while Mary tried to sooth him. That was the first time he said "ma ma" and I didn't know if it was

just more babbling, but I felt it was a sign from God, telling me *what*, I didn't know. It was a miracle to me, I would keep that with me in my mind so I could know that he wasn't going to forget me. I took a heavy breath and shook my head.

"Darling, I wish I could put Charlie down and brush your hair. Here hold him while I clasp your necklace and zip your sweater. I reached and took him in my arms. Kissing him over and over on his cheek, rubbing his soft hair and inhaling his scent while Mary got me ready. I started crying again.

"Eve, you have to do as I say. Get a hold of yourself." She had genuine fear in her eyes.

I brushed my hair and put it up in pins. I powdered my face and applied make up.

"There darling. You look sophisticated and beautiful."

I knew I looked put together, but it felt strange to be dressed up for such an occasion.

"Please Mary, I don't want to walk past Jeff. I'm too ashamed after what happened yesterday."

Mary nodded. Charlie was sucking his thumb and growing sleepy. "I'm glad he's settling down and falling asleep. I don't want to frighten him."

"What will they do at the examination?" I asked.

"Fix yourself up Eve."

I turned back around. In the large round, dressing table mirror and saw terror in my own eyes. I started shaking violently. Then, I felt a strong wave of nausea.

"Mary I'm going to throw up."

She hurriedly grabbed the wastebasket and brought it over to me. Just as she did, I turned and retched. I was gagging and crying when there was a knock at the bedroom door.

"Please don't let Jeff" in I kept saying over and over.

"It's not Jeff sweetheart. It's likely Dr. Pope."

"Please tell Jeff to leave."

"I have to open the door Eve."

"No. Please don't." I reached for Charlie and held him close. He stirred and woke for a moment. Let out a sleepy cry and then nuzzled into me. His fingers finding my hair and twirling it. He put his other thumb in his mouth and fell asleep. That was all in the time it took Mary to answer the door. When she opened it, Dr. Pope was standing in the doorway, dressed as if he were going to church. There was another man with him in white pants and a white shirt.

I started crying uncontrollably.

"Is that hers?" Dr. Pope asked, referring the small suitcase Mary had packed with enough essentials for a week.

"Dr. Pope," I begged, "please let me stay with Mary. I promise I'll -"

"No. Eve. You're going to need to come with us."

"Who's downstairs?"

"Mr. Lawrence and Mr. Lambert are downstairs. They will be at the hearing later today."

"But why is Mr. Lambert going to be there?"

He walked closer and spoke softly to me, as if I were a child, kind but firm "Eve, we are going to go downstairs now. There's an ambulance to take you to the hospital where you will have an evaluation."

"No!" I started to struggle. I turned towards Mary who was crying.

The man with Dr. Pope grabbed my arm and began walking me towards the door.

"I won't struggle," I whispered, "Please don't make me walk down like this."

Dr. Pope nodded and the man released me and stood close as we walked out the bedroom door. I was so terrified but somehow I kept myself calm enough to convince them they didn't have to restrain me. I wanted to leave with dignity. I wanted to be calm for Charlie.

We stopped in the kitchen before exiting through the parlor. Mary asked Dr. Pope if I could have another moment with Charlie. She handed him to me and tears streamed down my face. My cheeks were raw from crying and from Jeff's hands the day before. Charlie leaned into me and nuzzled against my chest. He put his thumb into his mouth and closed his eyes. I could tell he wasn't tired but rather wanted assurance that I would be there to hold him and comfort him. I looked up at Mary. She was crying too. She was holding a handkerchief and crying.

"All right, Eve. It's time to go." Dr. Pope was again paternal and gentle but firm.

Mary reached for Charlie and took him from me. I released him because I didn't want him to be frightened and I knew if I held on any longer he would have sensed my fear and the danger. He continued sucking his thumb, his blue eyes examining the scene.

When we entered the parlor, I saw there was a second man in white pants and a white shirt. He was standing near Frank in front of the fireplace. Jeff Lambert had been sitting on the couch, but stood up when I entered the room. He was smoking a cigarette and his blue eyes fixed on me. I felt a rage well up inside me. I felt nothing mattered but to hurt him as he had hurt me. I kept my emotions in check by looking straight ahead. The other man in the white clothes joined our entourage. Frank's eyes looked less angry. I didn't know what to make of them. He looked worried and kept wiping his brown with his handkerchief. As I passed Frank, Jeff walked towards me. He was staring at me. When he got close enough for me to hear, I stopped.

He gave me a gentle smile, but his eyes revealed satisfaction. "Eve, this is going to help you get better."

It was instantaneous; a bolt of lightning sent the power of rage

through me. I hated him more than I've ever hated anyone. My reaction was so sudden, so unexpected that it took a moment for Dr. Pope and the attendants to respond. I rushed towards Jeff and pushed him hard. "I hate you! Leave my house. You're trespassing! You're trespassing. Get out of my house!"

Immediately the attendants had both my arms and I was breathing heavily as Jeff backed away and straightened his suit. Charlie began screaming and at that the three men ushered me into the ambulance, which had been sitting in the dirt driveway with the back door open waiting for my departure.

CHAPTER 12

It was in and out, day and night. When I was awake I was far away from myself. I could hear Charlie crying and then he was calling me "*ma ma*." I could hear him, but really his voice couldn't reach me. Sometimes, I would wake with a terrible headache, and Jeff's voice was there. His eyes just above me; he was holding me down. My feeling and thoughts made me weary and most of my experience was tired or unconscious.

One night I woke, really woke. I came to my senses and I felt alert. I remembered my name and then my mind immediately turned to Charlie. My arms felt so empty and the aching in my heart was unbearable. Being separated was a slow draining of my blood. I was going to die. I cried into my pillow and called his name over and over.

"Eve?" a voice whispered. I was in a room with eight beds. They were all metal framed, painted white. The mattress beneath me was thin and flat. I was covered with only a scratchy wool blanket. I moved to roll over and face the voice that had called my name. The floor was shiny tile and there were no rugs. I could see two large windows with metal mesh covering them. It was dark outside. It was nighttime. The lights were out in the room, but the bright light from the hallway flickered and caused the room to take on alternating dim white then a sickening blue hue. It was a predictable rhythm and it left me uneasy.

"Eve?"

I turned and looked at the woman. She was in her 30's. She had dark brown hair, tied back. She looked strong and healthy.

"Yes?" I whispered, now trembling again, my voice soft and hoarse.

"Eve, you have to stop crying."

"I wasn't crying."

"Eve, every time you wake you scream and cry."

"I don't remember."

"Eve, the nurses are giving you medication. They won't stop until

you stop crying."

"I can't." I whispered and started moaning, louder and louder.

"Stop!" she said harshly.

Her manner with me surprised me and stopped me from continuing to cry louder.

"Eve. When you wake up and are calm, I will tell you what to do. But, if you keep crying and screaming. It will get worse. They'll start other treatments. Once they think you're emotions are managed, the doctor will meet with you. You have to impress upon them that you are getting better. So manage your emotions."

"I can't see my baby."

"I know," she said.

"No you don't. There was a man who hated me. I tried to do what he asked, but I couldn't so he made this happen. He did this."

"Eve. Look around you, every woman in this room, every woman in this ward. Everywoman in this hospital was put here by a man. Some of the women were dropped off by their husbands who didn't want them any more. They're never leaving here."

I looked up at her then I turned and cried into my pillow. My cries turned to sobs. In no time I heard footsteps on the hard tile floor. Two nurses entered the room. Their white dresses and nurses' caps reflected the white-blue flickering light.

"You can't get a hold of yourself Missy. What is wrong with you?" The other nurse pushed hard on my shoulders while the other tried to put the needle in my arm.

I turned towards at the woman in the bed next to me, the one who had spoken to me. She was pretending to be sleeping.

"No!" I yelled as the nurse tried to medicate me. I screamed. I sat up and syringe went flying. As I did the other nurse rushed out of the room and returned instantly with two attendants, large men in white uniforms. I was struggling and screaming "No. I want my baby! Give me Charlie!" The two men approached the bed, one on each side and held my arms while a nurses held my legs. I felt straps around my wrists and the more I struggled, the more they cut into my arms. Then they strapped my ankles.

The nurse lifted my chin and looked at my sternly. "Stop being such a stubborn girl!" She then took my jaw, just the way Jeff had and squeezed hard. "Do you understand me, Missy? Keep still!"

At that I opened my mouth to say something but didn't, tears streaming down my face. The other nurse handed her a new syringe. I kept still while she administered the drugs. I felt the pinprick, the cool liquid feeling and the near immediate wooziness. They all pulled away from my bed. My arms were still secured with straps. I panicked again, remembering Jeff on top of me, holding me down. I yelled out a hollow plea, "Please untie me! I'm sorry. Please help me!" My voice grew louder. "Help me!" and other patients in the room started to moan; one

called out for help.

The same redheaded nurse came over and held my chin again. "Shut your mouth, you're waking up the whole ward."

My body trembled but I stopped making any sounds, instead I lay paralyzed.

"That's a good girl." She said released me. Then, she walked out of the room. Her entourage followed. I turned back to the woman in the other bed who opened her eyes and spoke to me again.

"You have to stop, Eve. Can't you pretend for a little while? That will get you home. Eve you don't want to be sent to the back ward. If you calm down they'll let you have visitors sooner... It's not the...they are just..."

Her voiced drifted off. I could hear Charlie crying in the distance.

"Do you hear him?" I whispered into the air. "Do you hear my baby crying? Please bring him to me."

I didn't know how many day's I'd been asleep. When I woke again, my thinking was clear. A bright yellow light was visible through the large window, but it was so blurred by the frosted glass and wire mesh. A sad thought that had a morbid feeling attached to it crossed my mind *'It looks like sunshine but its not really sunshine.'* It didn't have any meaning, but sent a tearing longing through my chest. I looked away to avoid becoming upset again. I had learned that if I were to so much as shed a tear, I'd be given medicine and lose more time. After that I'd have no recollection, just a grogginess and a terrible headache emerging as I navigated the rising undulations back to consciousness.

I sat up There was no one else in the room. The seven other beds were made up neat. The eight small metal dressers were also clean and their surfaces with hardly more than a brush or mirror each, were meticulously orderly. I looked to the dresser that must have been mine. It too was neat with the standard brush, comb and mirror. But two leather straps were also on top, placed as neatly as the rest of the items. These were the restraints they'd put around my wrists the last time they gave me medicine. Or maybe it was every time.

I looked down and saw bruises on my wrists. They were of varying colors: red, brown, blue. I wondered if any of them were remaining from Jeff's force. I couldn't recall much of anything since the day at the house when they took me away. I traced the bruises on my wrists. Instinctively I lifted arm of the scratchy cotton nightdress I was wearing. The bruises were still on my shoulders from where Jeff had forced me on to the bed. They were a yellow brown. Instinctively I reached down for my locket with my little picture of Charlie. It was gone. It had been removed from around my neck. My eyes darted to the dresser, to see if it was there. A panic ran trough me. That little token was all I had from my life with my baby. I started to cry. And just as if it were slapped on my face, I remembered. There had been a woman in one of the beds. She had been looking at me in the middle of

the night. *"Just pretend. Don't cry anymore. Stop crying. They'll let you have visitors."* I took a deep breath and closed my eyes. I was so tired and my mouth was dry and my throat was sore. I wondered where everyone had gone. Why they would have left me alone, unrestrained. Certainly they knew my medication schedule. They knew when I'd wake up.

I fixed my eyes on the hallway where I could hear some metal echoes. Maybe some faint voices. The light was bright. It seemed it was always a bright white, making my eyes sore even just looking in that direction for a few minutes. I could see two nurses turning the corner. One went to the right, the other kept walking down the long corridor towards my room. She started to enter and stopped at the doorway with a look of surprise.

"Look who's up!" she said with an Irish accent.

"Good morning." I whispered.

"I should say it is! Are you feeling better?"

The pit in my stomach was growing. I knew if I let my true feelings out, the excruciating emptiness inside me would continue to grow and then rise and then I would not be able to contain my grief. It was as it had been with Nick. Such darkness. I didn't want to let it show on the outside. A part of me knew, if I could get through that day, pretending as much as possible, then I would have a chance to talk to the woman who had been in the bed next to me.

I smiled at the nurse. "Yes, today I'm feeling better. A little tired from the medicine, I think."

"I'm sure you are. Who wouldn't be?"

I reached to straighten my hair.

"Oh I wouldn't worry about that lovie. I'm about to take you for your bath. We'll comb it out nice after that."

I felt myself shudder. The idea of a bath in that place was inconceivable. Based on how sterile and utilitarian everything looked in my room, I feared what a bath here might be like.

"Do I have to have those on?" I pointed to the restraints.

"Oh dear me, love. How on earth would I get you into the tub with those? I think you'll be fine dear. You don't seem a bit agitated to me."

A faint smile was all I could muster.

She sat down on the edge of the bed and took my hand in hers, "I don't want to get you crying all over again, but I want you to know I understand how hard it is for you."

Tears started to well up.

She looked at me with her pale green eyes. She looked tired too. She was about my age and yet, she looked as if she'd lived more life than I had, a more difficult one. She had a kindness about her.

"Hush up dear. You can't start it again; they'll run right in and give you more medicine. Then we likely won't see you for another day. You've got an appointment with the doctor today."

"I do? For what?"

"They haven't been able to interview you to evaluate you. They're going to talk with you. That way they'll know what your treatment will be. Figure out why things are so hard for you."

"They weren't hard. I'm just frightened. Things were fine. I was very happy."

"Miss, you don't seem like someone who's fine." She kept a serious expression and squinted at me, examining me I supposed. Her dark brown hair reminded me of Carmen's. In fact she reminded me of an Irish Carmen.

"We should get you going love. I don't want you to be late." She stood and removed a dress from my dresser. It was one of the calico ones Mary and I made. It fit me well.

"Would this be all right, Miss?"

"Yes," I whispered. "Thank you."

She draped it over one arm and placed a pair of slippers at the side of my bed. I felt weak, almost too weak to stand up. She let me take hold of her arm to steady myself. We walked very slowly down the hallway. I was more shuffling, trying to lift my feet but they were heavy like lead.

"Isn't that awful?" she said softly as we passed a nurses station with a large glass window. Two nurses were sitting inside, one smoking. Neither looked up at us. I wondered if they could hear us. Maybe because I could hear their muffled, garbled talking. I recognized, at once that they were gossiping.

"You're Eve, isn't that right. I'd forgotten to introduce myself." She said, "I'm Eileen."

"You're a nurse here?"

"Yes." She laughed and pointed to her hat. "How'd you know?"

I laughed a little too, "I'm glad you're with me today."

She nodded and looked at me sympathetically. "Some of them aren't so nice."

We walked through two swinging doors. This hallway was very much like everything else I'd seen so far. Long and lit with a series of bright lights hanging from the ceiling. Everything was the same pale cream color. And, in a predictable pattern, we passed doors that looked identical.

"Are these more rooms for the patients?" I asked.

"No love, these are treatment rooms. Let's try and keep you out of those."

I nodded but fear started overtaking me again. My hands began shaking and tears streamed from my eyes. For a moment, Eileen didn't notice. She continued to stare ahead of me, as we approached a wide-open room, which I could see were full of bathtubs. She turned to me, presumably to introduce me to the bathing quarters. She saw that I was crying.

She led me into the room. "We've got to get you ready for the doctor. You'll need to see him at 10:00. You've only got half an hour. I want to fix you up nice."

I put my hands over my face and began crying again. She gently guided my hands down and looked at me.

"Eve, dearie. Can't you find a way to stop yourself? It makes all the difference."

I shook my head. Images of Charlie were overtaking me. "My son," I cried, "my little baby."

She shook me a little. "Eve, think of seeing him again. If you keep crying they'll take you into one of those rooms. There's all sorts of things they'll try. You just agree with them and pretend the time here resting has gotten you back to your old self. Try to imagine seeing your baby. They'll let you have visitors if you show them that you've calmed down."

That gave me courage. "When do you think?"

"I don't know. Maybe a week or two."

I felt terror rush through me again.

"That's a long time," I said.

"But it will be much longer. Is there someone caring for your baby?"

I nodded and thought of Mary's promise. "Yes. I trust her very much. She's my boy's grandmother."

"You see. He'll be fine. Two weeks will go quicker than you think. All right, let's get you in the bath."

The large porcelain tub was already filled with water. She must have run it before she came for me. It was lukewarm. "Do I have to get undressed here, out in the open?"

"Yes, I'm afraid you do, Evie? Is it all right if I can you Evie?"

I smiled. It was what Carmen called me. "Yes, I'd like that."

Sitting naked in the tub made me feel horrible. When I immersed myself in the water, I tried to picture taking a bath at my own house. The shuttered windows open with the smell of springtime wafting in.

Eileen reached down and washed me with a sponge. She gently went over my shoulders. "Look at this, you're all bruised. These bruises are old."

I just nodded. The memories of the day with Jeff Lambert invaded me. Not so much my thoughts but all of the feelings. Being off balance falling to the floor. His hands pulling at my skirt; my trying to move but fully restrained by the weight of his body. Then his eyes. The thought of him watching me returned in fast paced repeated thoughts. I closed my eyes.

"How long have I been here?" I looked up at her.

"Just two days."

"That's all?"

She nodded and had me lean back while she washed my hair. She rinsed it by repeatedly filling the sponge with water and squeezing it

out. A layer of suds began to accumulate around me. It felt like a blanket, like my body was being protected.

"What day is it?" I asked.

"It's Tuesday, June 4th. You should know that when the doctor interviews you."

I was happy that only two days had passed. "There was a man who hurt me—" I started.

"You'll tell me another time, all right? We want to keep you calm."

She led me out of the tub and wrapped a scratchy, small towel around me. She dried my hair with another. I felt like a child. While she cared for me, I counted the tubs in the room, organized in two rows. There were ten tubs and I imagined that often women washed together, at the same time. Or maybe they also used this room for something else. I couldn't imagine what. There were large glass windows against one wall. They too were frosted and covered in wire. The light that came into this room wasn't as bright. We must be facing west, since Eileen had said it was morning. My room must have faced east. When I gardened the direction of light was important for choosing plants and flowers.

"Don't tell the doctor about this man, Evie."

"But why?"

"Just don't."

I felt so lucky that Eileen was the nurse I woke up to. I could have fallen into another hysteria. It would have been very easy despite what the mysterious woman in the bed next to me had cautioned against. I tried to remember her eyes; had she looked insane to me? Eileen walked me back through the long, spotless tiled hallway, past the treatment rooms. I noticed in one of them, a skinny woman was being wheeled on a gurney. Her body was contorted and the sheet covering her barely fit over her rigid knees. One arm was frozen out to the side, extended. As they pushed open one of the metal doors, one of the nurses lifted the arm to make it through the doorframe.

"What are they going to do to her?" I whispered.

"Shh." With each step, Eileen's feet made a loud thwack on the tile floor. When we got to the end of the corridor, we passed the nurses station again. I could see two nurses again sitting together and smoking. One was reading from a magazine to the other.

"Hello, Eileen" one called out as we passed.

"You got Miss Eve there with you?"

Eileen waved and smiled. Then turned to me, "You look pretty and put together. Try to stay like that with the doctor. Some girls get very upset, naturally, after they're picked up and taken here. And don't forget, it's Tuesday, June 4th." We reached a set of large metal doors, painted a pale cream color too. The whole place was the color of tapioca pudding, and for some reason it was very hard on the eyes. It left me with a tired feeling. Eileen unlocked the door and opened it. We

walked together down yet another hall, but this time it was short and it gave way to a large open space that must have been a recreation room. The floors there were wooden, glistening and clean. There was a woman, I was sure was a patient, washing the floor. Another woman was polishing it. There were tables and chairs, benches around the walls. It was such a large room, the size of a music hall. Some nurses were milling around appearing to be overseeing the patients. Others were sitting and talking quietly with some of the women. Still others were playing cards. There was a very thin woman talking loudly. She was standing facing a window, her legs terribly bowed. I couldn't tell if she was still wearing one of the white cotton flannel nightgowns or if that was just a dress that was so worn and dirty from years of being here. Her hair was plastered straight down and went just below her ears. I couldn't make out what she was saying but from the cadence and volume, I knew it was nonsense. My insides were expanding; the fear was interrupting my breathing.

Eileen looked at me as we neared another corridor. "Are you all right Eve? Your face is bright red."

"I can't stay here," I started to cry again.

She rubbed my back. "Do the best you can with Dr. Maynard. She led me to a long bench and had me sit down. I looked at my black shoes. They were clean and I had just polished the leather. I noted how different I looked than the women there. I wondered how long it would take until I resembled them.

"I'll be back. I have to let Dr. Maynard's nurse know you are here. Her name is Nurse Gail."

I nodded. I kept unconsciously feeling for my locket. I realized I'd have to picture Charlie in my mind. Missing my son was a terrible physical pain. It was so powerful and relentless.

Nurse Gail came out of the office and Eileen looked at me and smiled. "All right Eve. I'll see you tomorrow."

"Won't you be there when I return?"

"No. I'm leaving shortly, but I'll see you tomorrow all right?"

Nurse Gail turned to me. "Eve Miller? Is that right?"

"Yes, I said softly.

"You'll have to speak up dear, we are not going to tolerate mumbling."

"All right. " I said raising my voice a little.

"Come along. The doctor is ready. We've been waiting for you to calm down enough to do your examination."

I stood and followed her past a small room with a desk and a shelf full of books. She knocked gently on the wooden door. I kept my eye on a brass plaque attached to the center of the door, '*Dr. Ronald Maynard.*' I took a deep breath and exhaled. I tried to remember Eileen's advice. Stay calm. Don't cry. She was the third person with this advice. Mary. The woman in the bed next to mine and Eileen. Did I seem so

crazy to all of them? How was I supposed to feel when they've taken me from my little baby?

Once inside the room, Nurse Gail immediately went over to a wooden chair to against the wall, a little away from the doctor's desk. Dr. Maynard's office was good sized. Enough to fit his desk, rows and rows of books, and several chairs. He had a large wooden desk with stacks of paper off to one side. In front of him was an opened file. He was a round man, older looking with a very paternal way about him. He wore a white dress shirt with a black tie. His business attire was so different than Jeff's. Where Jeff had always looked impeccable, wealthy and rather like a movie star; Dr. Maynard had a tired look about him, his clothes-if they had been pressed-still appeared wrinkled. I imagined when he stood up, he had a bit of a belly making his shirt tighten against the buttons around his stomach.

As soon as I entered, he motioned with his hand for me to take a chair directly in front of the desk. He held a cigarette in between his lips as he looked over my papers. Before he took it out of his mouth to speak to me, he inhaled deeply and then exhaled a stream of smoke.

"Mrs. Miller? Is that right?"

"Yes."

I noted that he squinted periodically, both eyes closing and then opening. It seemed involuntary and it made me curious as to why he'd do that.

"What is your first name?"

"It's Eve. My full name is Eve Miller."

"Tell me, Eve. Why do you think you're here?"

I played with the fabric of my skirt. I knew what Eileen had told me, but I was still so angry and Jeff. I thought perhaps this doctor would understand the injustice. The mistake.

"There was a man who was very upset with me. He threated me. He" I began to cry, "He hurt me."

"Is this the married man, the father of your child?"

His tone was not sympathetic. It was matter of fact, tinged with doubt.

"Yes, sir." I said softly.

Nurse Gail interrupted "Eve, I told you to speak up." Dr. Maynard raised his hand as if to say to her, "*it's all right.*"

"Tell me about your childhood Eve. Was it a happy one?"

"Yes, it was."

"What about your parents? What was your relationship with them like?"

"My mother died when I was 12."

He nodded and made a note.

"That must have been very hard for you?"

"Of course."

"What happened after that?"

"My close friend's family cared for me."

"What about your father?"

"He traveled for work; he worked in the timber industry. It took him out of the area."

"He traveled so much after your mother died that you had to live with a neighbor?"

"Yes, that's right."

"Is he still alive?"

"No. He died some time ago. Six years ago."

"So you've lost both of your parents. But, still you carried on."

"Yes, that's right."

"Then you married. And your husband was then killed. Is that true?"

"Yes."

"Afterwards you became very sad. You were grieving but then it became more like extreme melancholy than what one would expect during mourning."

"I don't know if you could say that."

"How would you describe it, Mrs. Miller?"

"I suppose it was."

"Were you able to carry on with your daily life?"

"Mostly. Yes. I was."

"Did you go out of the house, go shopping, socialize with friends?"

My mind returned to the dark house. Carmen bringing food. I spent most days crying. How long had that continued? I realized -it was something I always recognized, but realized again as I sat across from Dr. Maynard—my melancholy ended when I'd fallen in love with Jeff.. His advances were what had elevated me. Our affair rescued me.

"I'm sorry, doctor, what was the question?"

"I asked if you were able to carry on your daily life."

"I don't remember."

He nodded and pursed his lips, wrote something down.

"Do you know why you're here?"

"No."

"You're here because you've suffered from melancholy in the past. Not to a normal extent. Not like others who lose someone they love. But, more pathological."

I was listening closely; I was trying to predict what he was going to say next. I was trying to figure out what he'd decided to do with me. I knew it wasn't going to be good so I tried to convince him of my sanity. "I have been very self-sufficient. I have people who love me. If you just spoke to them. You'd know I'm a good mother. I've done very well by my son."

"Yes, tell me about this period following the melancholy. You had intimate relations with a married man."

"Yes, he pursued me. He complimented me and treated me as if I was special. He told me he loved me."

"Mrs. Miller, you are aware that you are very attractive? And even sitting here with me, you have a way about. I can see how you draw men in. Certainly, I'm an old man, and not of much interest to you. But, a handsome man, or a man you're age -- what idea do you suppose they get from a beautiful young widow being so familiar with them?"

"That's not how I behave."

"But you had a married man's child, didn't you? How did that happen?"

"I was very respectable. I had good friends and held positions in the community. In Portland."

"But this was all before your husband died?"

I moved to Bend and have a good relationship with the community there. I have people who love me."

He nodded and looked at your paper. "You've been here under observation for two days. In that time, you have gravely concerned us with your melancholic, wildly unpredictable and violent behavior."

I could feel it spilling over again. All of my emotions. All I could think about was Charlie. "Please doctor Maynard. Let me stay with Mary and Frank Lawrence. I have a young baby. Please don't keep me here any longer. You're a doctor. You must understand how much a child needs their mother."

"You love your son but it wouldn't be in the best interest of your child to send you back to him right now. You'll need to receive treatment and we'll continue to observe your progress."

"No!" I cried and put my head in my hands. I started weeping, "Please," I screamed over and over with my face in my hands. "I want my child! I don't want to stay here. I haven't done anything. Not a thing! I'm here because Jeff hates me. Because I wouldn't live under his command --as he told me to!"

I heard Dr. Maynard raise his voice above mine. "Nurse Gail, please get two attendants and bring Eve back to her room."

Nurse Gail stood and walked out. I composed myself quickly. "No I'm all right." I took a deep breath and wiped my eyes. I could feel that my hair had fallen down on one side. "I'm all right."

The nurse returned with two male attendants. They were about my age. And again, being in such desperate position made me feel humiliated.

His cigarette was in his mouth again and the ash had not fallen. He was looking down at his paper, writing something.

I stood and spoke to Dr. Maynard. "Please let me show you that I'm well. For the sake of my son. I will go crazy here. I can't do this. I honestly can't."

He looked up again, "Eve. I'm concerned about your unpredictable moods. That is what concerns me. Along with your moral judgment. You're in a second bout of melancholia in three years. It is very likely that the birth of your son is the reason this time. You conduct yourself

without concern for discretion or restraint. While you are an attractive woman, other women do not behave the way you do."

"No. Please." I began crying again. When the attendants reached for my arm to guide me out, I kept trying to pull away to explain to Dr. Maynard. The tighter their grip the more panicked I became. Finally, I broke free and rushed to his desk.

"May I have visitors? May I see my son?"

"As soon as you've stabilized. Once you've improved. Most certainly. That's an important part of treatment. You'll also have time in the gardens to convalesce and even find a job here. All this is part of rehabilitation."

"When can I see my child?"

"It depends, a few weeks. A month."

I had abandoned everything I was warned about staying calm. A complete breakdown over took me. I fell to my knees and began screaming. I didn't stop. I couldn't. I was separate from myself, staring at the floor.

"Take her in to her room." The two attendants bent down and lifted me under my arms. They pulled me out of the office and started walking back towards the ward. I couldn't keep their pace, and stumbled as they half escorted me, half dragged me. I felt one of my shoes fall off and when I looked down, I saw just my stocking on one foot and the a shoe remaining on the other.

My eyes were dry when I opened them again. My throat was parched too. I wasn't in restraints but sleeping in the same bed as I had the previous nights. I turned to the window and the night sky was a pale blue/ gray as it does when the moon is full. I touched my hair, still up in pins. I ran my fingers over my face; my lips were dry and cracked. It felt as if I had a bruise on my cheek, but I didn't know for certain. My eyes scanned the room. There were women asleep in various positions. As I emerged further into consciousness, a subtle symphony of guttural human sounds rose. An almost imperceptible whimper came from somewhere towards the back of the room. It had that quality of crying in one's sleep. The timing of her cries matching some dream, some horrible dream that must be repeating itself over and over. Another woman was talking, but it was mostly garbled and only infrequently punctuated the rest of the noises. She sounded like a wife in a butcher shop bartering for the price of meat, "No. No. Try again." The worst sound was a hollow moan whose location I couldn't identify. It was a guttural expression of insanity. It was nearly continuous and even during the pause that must have been for air, the low drone continued. A wave of nausea rose inside of me. I felt at that moment, that I was drowning. I couldn't swim any longer. That I would be pulled or pushed deeper and deeper until, I was one of them. Not one of the women in that room had rest or peace. I turned and stared at the ceiling. The metal lamps also were uniform, three hanging on each side of the

room. I wasn't familiar enough with the place to know what sort of light they cast on the room at different times of day. For most of my time at the hospital had been drugged or asleep. Or screaming so wildly that there was nothing but an animalistic drive to escape. To free myself.

"Eve," a quiet voice came from the bed next to me. I turned on my side, faced the same woman I met the other night in between medications. The one who had warned me. "Can you hear me?" she whispered almost inaudibly.

"Yes," I said.

"Shh." Speak very softly. It's early yet. We have time to talk.

"You're not crazy are you?" I asked. I knew from her voice but mostly I could tell from her eyes. She was unlike so many of the other women who I'd passed on my way to Dr. Maynard's office. Strange clay figures molded on the benches that lined the recreation room, and then the hallway to his office. Mouths in unusual shapes, shouting words. And when their eyes met me, a bolt of fear had struck me. I shuddered when I heard their taunting tone as they rambled incoherencies. She was also different from the women who seemed all right. Their eyes were dead. The place was death.

"I'm not crazy." She said, "I can tell, neither are you."

It made me cry to hear it. After the things Jeff said, Dr. Pope and Dr. Maynard. To think there was some sanity. Someone who could see who I was. I had begun to doubt myself. Thinking that perhaps all the things they had told me were true.

"Eve stop it!" she whispered; it was a harsh reprimand. So much so that I silenced myself instantly. "Why can't you listen to me?"

"I don't understand."

"You have to stop crying and screaming. You have to."

"But it's not fair," I whispered back at her.

"Tomorrow. If you can prevent yourself from being medicated again, you'll likely go to the cafeteria and recreation room so they can observe you. If you do get to go, watch me. Watch what I do."

I heard footsteps slapping against the tile. Instinctively I closed my eyes and controlled my breathing making it sound like rhythmic sleep. The footsteps stopped. I knew that one of the nurses was looking in, counting us. Her walking resumed and then her footsteps faded down the hall. I wondered if it was Eileen.

I opened my eyes again and examined the woman closely. She was petite. One of those small women who despite their delicate features and stature, exuded power. She was a little older than me with dark hair. "Watch me tomorrow. Then, you'll know what to do. You have to stop showing emotion. Don't act too happy. But don't act willful, Eve. Ever."

"What's your name?" I felt somehow relieved to have someone I could turn to in this horrible circumstance.

"It's Nelly Green."

"That's a nice name," I whispered.

"Eve, I'm leaving in a week."

"How do you know?"

"Eve, please believe what I tell you. I'm not really a patient here. I'm a journalist."

I examined her again, watched her mouth as she spoke, her eyes. Was she crazy? Had I just been fooled by someone who had mastered the appearance of sanity? I didn't believe Nelly Green was any more journalist than I was a movie star.

"Oh," I whispered into the scratchy pillow. I lay back down and closed my eyes.

"Eve!" she was even more determined than before. I couldn't muster the energy to talk with her any more. It seemed she'd offered me hope, but now I was falling again, back into this horrible fate.

"You don't have to believe me. But, you have to know that most women never leave here. If they do, it's not for years and after what's done to them, they never lead normal lives again. Some of us, those of us here on the front ward have a chance. We are the ones with people who visit and write. We're the ones that are deemed competent. But the way you act, it won't take long before you'll find yourself in the back wards. You act the way they want you to."

I was frustrated with her. I was tired of people telling me to control my emotions as if my behavior was so unusual, so un-ladylike. "How am I supposed to feel? Tell me that, how would you act if you were ripped from your child?"

"Lower your voice Eve. If they hear you they'll hold you down give you more medication and you'll lose another day."

I started crying softly.

"Practice" she urged. "Right now. Practice not crying."

"They are keeping me here for at least another month. I can't have visitors until then. I won't be able to see my son."

"All right. Well those are the facts that you know. A month is much better than years isn't it? Once they see that you are not schizophrenic or whatever they say—"

"Melancholic."

"Well, that's better for you. Whatever it is, once you show them that you are calm, then you'll have visitors and then you'll have a chance."

"I don't know if I can."

"Think of your baby. Whenever you get angry, imagine him. Look to when you'll see him, don't live here and now. And, Eve, they will push you; make it hard to remain calm. Even when you start acting as if you're cured, they'll still treat you as if you're acting crazy. Watch me tomorrow."

"All right. " our eyes met and I felt her strength. Her dark brown eyes were clever and somehow I knew that she was right. I didn't know if I'd be able. I'd never been able to before. Not after Nick died, not when

Jeff made me so angry. As much as I feared what he'd do to me, I hated him. I can't remember reigning in my feelings. Never. I was always a girl who behaved like any other girl, until a strong emotion struck me. Then, I suppose, I behaved more like a boy. "Nellie, are you really a reporter? It sounds crazy."

She nodded and pulled the wool blanket up to her chin. She was illuminated by the white lights in the hallway. She looked like a Life Magazine photograph of a mother who'd survived something horrible. "I am. I work for the Chicago Tribune."

"Why are you so far away, here in Oregon?"

"I know a girl who lives here. I had to go somewhere where the judges and other reporters didn't know me. I'd covered so many stories and it would be easy to recognize me if I acted insane and got myself into Blackwell Island which was our original plan."

"Our?"

My editor and me. It was his idea. I was worried I wouldn't be able to get out, but he'll get me released next week."

"Honestly?"

She nodded again. "It's terrible here Eve. But, you shouldn't be here. And don't think they can't keep you here even if you're not insane. There was a woman a long time ago from New York. It was a pretty famous story. She was very wealthy and owned a cosmetics company. I went back to some old papers before I got myself committed. She was in a position of power until her ex-husband decided to have her put in an asylum against her will. He took all her money and lost it in the stock market. She was released on a technicality. Otherwise she would have been left to die even though she had many influential friends."

Her story made me realize that what she was saying was true. My chances of being believed by the people at the hospital were very small. They had control over who visited and when. Despite having Mary and Frank and also Carmen and Harry; despite how much they may want to help, it was up to me to control my behavior. "What happened to her?" I whispered, "the woman with the cosmetics company?"

"She got out. Then she traveled around and held speeches to teach people about how women were treated. She dressed as the well to do woman she was and described her story. Then, half way through she'd change into the cotton, flannel dress they made her wear. By then after a year in the asylum, it was dirty and torn. When she came back out to lecture, she looked like a peasant. It was very moving from what I understand."

"Is that why you're doing this? Put yourself in this situation?"

"I write stories about forgotten people. The conditions of women in factories, the poor."

"If what you're saying is true, I admire you."

"I want to show you what to do before I go. To give you a chance."

I was grateful for her kindness. Between her and Eileen I felt I would be able to convince them.

"No matter what they do to you, Eve. Do you understand? That's the hard part."

"What might they do to me?"

"There are things that are frightening, even painful. But, there's one thing you don't want them to do to you. It's a surgery. The only way to avoid it is to stop acting this way."

A bolt of terror ran through me. "I'm frightened."

"Yes. But you're equipped with information. Watch me tomorrow. I'm getting sleepy Eve." She turned and faced the well-lit hallway.

"Nellie?" I whispered; My voice was almost drowned out by the moans and cries.

"What is it Eve?" She said with her back still to me.

"Do you know a reporter named Tom Billings? He works for Life Magazine. Mostly a photographer. He's in Bend writing a story about farming."

"No."

"He was a friend of mine."

"I don't know him."

I turned and let myself get sleepy too. It was hard with the harsh light always on. And, the moaning which frightened me more than anything. I was worried about what Nellie had told me. Being put in the back wards, never seeing Charlie. I was worried about the treatments and how to control my emotions. Just then I heard a loud scream and crash. Incoherent yelling. Instinctively I looked to the hallway and saw two male attendants running past my room. I heard the scuffle from somewhere down the clean, sterile hallways, then loud screams that only could have come from pain being inflicted. Was that what they had done to me while I was medicated? Was that what caused the bruise on my face and those on my wrists?

I woke to a loud commotion early the next day. It was the routine I'd missed the past few mornings when I was medicated. Women were being prodded out of bed by two nurses, one a red head I thought I'd recognized and another who was short and stout. Her blonde hair was greasy and held back tightly underneath her nursing cap. Both of these women shared the look and attitude that most other asylum staff had. They were disrespectful, degrading to the patients and generally sadistic. They turned us all into little children and any attempt at having an opinion or self-respect was immediately mocked or chastised. It made me realize why so many of the ladies here were more like little girls, coming into the activity room holding a bunch of dandelions they'd collected on their walks from the gardens and shyly holding them out to one of these frightful care-takers. It bothered me so deeply that I could hardly contain my contempt.

"Oh I see Missy here, has decided to join us today." The red head stood above my bed and stared down at me. "Come on pretty girl, you're no better than anyone else. Get your behind out of bed!" With that she tore my blankets off of me. "Now!" I stumbled to my feet. I still felt sluggish and dizzy. I turned to Nellie who was already up and fastening her dress. She was combing her hair and then stood out in the hallway against the wall to wait for the rest of the ladies from our room.

I hurriedly dressed and fixed my hair. "Don't she look like a *real* lady," the blond stout one mocked. "Where you off to today? Bridge club?" I could feel anger rising in me. I would never have let someone speak to me that way, especially not some small-minded woman such as her. I felt a hand on my arm, pulling me into the hallway. It was Nellie. I could see her clearly now that it was daytime and we were dressed. She looked pale and sickly under the lights. She was very petite, maybe only 4 foot 5 inches. She wore her hair back in a bun and had pretty straight bangs. She looked almost like a child.

She examined me up and down. "You're different than I thought."

"You too." I looked her up and down. "You look well-to-do"

"Do I? Well, I was at one time, but not any more. It's just me." She kept her eyes on me for a moment. "You are very pretty Eve."

I smiled, "Thank you."

"Try not to look so pretty." She looked down the hall and I realized it wasn't a compliment at all. It seemed everything I was, everything I did was a liability.

"Watch me today. Eve. These two nurses are the worst. So, it'll be good practice for you. Just a moment ago, back in the room, I could see the defiance in your eyes. So can they. Don't be docile like Gerty there," I turned to look and there was an old woman half dressed standing on the bed doing a waltz by herself. The two nurses were laughing hysterically and Gerty smiled a toothless smile back at them.

"Well, I wouldn't behave like that."

We stood for a few moments and as I inspected Nellie I wondered if she really was a reporter. She did seem so intelligent and somehow there was a protective glow around her. Even the jabs the nurses gave her were tempered with a kind of respect or intimidation. It was as if Nellie could do something to get them in trouble. She had some authority. Maybe it was her own knowledge that they hadn't *really* taken all of her rights away. She was pretending, gathering information. Everything they did would end up in a newspaper story. Maybe her glow was the power she had over these ignorant women. She would get out and reveal them. Of course, they couldn't have known that, but maybe they sensed it.

"Ok, Girls!" the redhead yelled once we were all lined up against the tile wall. Three patients dressed in aprons pushing mops and buckets passed us and went into our room and began scrubbing the floors. We

walked slowly, a motley crew, to the cafeteria. I wondered what the plan was for me, but I kept it in my head, waiting. When we entered the large room, there were hundreds of women sitting at benches before long tables. The room had at least ten tables and they were each at least 10 feet long. When I sat down a tray was placed in front of me. It was dried fish and oatmeal. A weak coffee was also given to me. Nellie was next to me and she ate the oatmeal and then picked up her coffee.

"I can't eat this." I whispered.

"Eat something. If you don't, and a couple of days go by they'll force feed you."

"How?"

"Just eat something Eve."

Voices rose and echoed about the room. It was truly hell. The room had the stench of body odor and while some people ate normally, with some table manners, most were drooling their food. Some rubbed the fish and porridge over their faces and heads only to receive a whack on the back. Nurses paced the aisles between the tables and made comments or corrections. One woman had crawled under the table and there was a scuffle trying to pull her out. Women moaned and cried. And many, many of us sat expressionless staring into a void, fully detached from life.

The recreation room was where I spent the rest of the day. I watched Nellie's behavior carefully to understand what she was expecting of me. How I should behave in order to keep my place in the front ward, in order to avoid treatments? I was learning a new way to live in order to avoid some horror I couldn't imagine. Nellie sat with a group of ladies playing cards. Two of them were clearly out of their minds. The other three seemed sane enough. One was friendly, and gossipy and seemed as though she could have been going on about a neighbor at a ladies' bridge club. The two others were more melancholy but still participated. Nellie did not take over the game; instead she kept herself inconspicuously involved. The two that were out of their minds would take turns talking nonsense and when they raised their voice, Nellie did her best to keep them calm. If she failed and one of the nurses or attendants came over, she'd remain uninvolved regardless of what happened. I noticed one time, the woman next to her began ranting. She was raising her hands and shouting about the Nazis. She threw her cards in the air. At that, two attendants came. The insane woman reached for Nellie, but Nellie gently untangled the woman's hands from her dress. Despite the desperate woman's screams Nellie remained in the game.

I was sitting alone at a table watching Nellie. I had intended to do more, but I felt out of place as if I were entering a new middle school and uncertain where to look for friends. I was looking around the room, taking an accounting of who may be sane and which women were

mean. I also tried to gauge whether any of the other nurses were kind like Eileen. I saw a man walking towards me; he was dressed smartly. He was young and handsome in a way.

He sat down beside me and smiled, "You must be Eve."

"Yes,"

"I'm doctor Norse. I'm one of the psychologists here."

I nodded. I remembered what Dr. Maynard had said about being attractive. The way he said I looked at men. I didn't believe I was promiscuous, but I didn't want to give any indication that I was friendly towards this doctor.

"How are you today Eve?"

"I'm doing very well thank you." I wish I had asked Nellie how to answer the questions. The only thing I knew was not to cry.

"That's good to hear. You've had a couple of hard days, haven't you?"

Finally, I looked up at him. He had tender eyes, but he I also recognized an edge of arrogance, a charm like with Jeff Lambert had.

"Do you suppose, now that I'm feeling better I could have visitors?"

"I don't know Eve. I'd like to talk with you for a few moments. Get a sense of how you're doing. You haven't had a hearing yet, have you?"

"I don't think so."

"No. I don't either. You'll meet with three doctors and we'll discuss our observations and give you a better idea of what your treatment will be."

I nodded. I could feel tears welling up. I missed Charlie so much.

"Are you all right?"

"Yes." I composed myself before looking at him again.

"Were things getting hard for you before you came here?"

"No. I wouldn't say that."

"But you got tangled up in an affair that didn't go so well didn't you?"

"Yes. I suppose that's one way to put it."

"How would you put it, Eve?"

I looked down at my hands. The bruises on my wrists were fading some. In that moment I wished I could tell him the whole story. Tell someone the whole thing, no lies. No parts left out. I realized I hadn't told anyone the entire truth. I had kept little pieces from everyone in a futile attempt to cover my tracks.

"You really can trust me. It's better to talk things out, Eve."

I was about to tell him about Jeff when my eye caught Nellie's a few tables over. She had a steely gaze and I could see she was slowly shaking her head no. It was almost imperceptible. She bit her lip and looked towards the cafeteria. I followed her gaze and there was Eileen. I smiled and Eileen started walking over.

"Eve? Do you want to talk to me about it?"

I turned back. "I would, yes. I would like to at some time. May another time?"

Just then Eileen came over and smiled. "How is she doctor? She's been a very good patient for me."

He gave Eileen a very charming smile and it was a little off putting to me. I felt as if he were Jeff Lambert and Eileen was me, less than a year ago.

"I can see that. Eve is a very fine lady. All right, I'll let you girls sit for a bit."

Dr. Norse stood and walked over to another table and sat down with two women who looked very melancholic.

"He's a looker. Don't you think?" Eileen said with a bright smile. "Very charming."

I smiled. "I'm so glad you're here. Are you here all afternoon?"

"Until 11:00 tonight. We'll have some time after supper. When will you be able to go outside? The grounds are so beautiful."

"I don't know." I said, "This is the first day I haven't spent on medication." I looked at Eileen, but now her attention was back on Dr. Norse. She had a glow about her, and her green eyes were sparkling.

"I should go check on the ladies at the next table. We'll see about taking you outside Evie." She squeezed my hand then rushed off.

CHAPTER 13

Nellie left the day of my hearing with the medical board of the hospital. She packed her things up; the nurses were in a rush to get her out. A police officer came into the room with a man who seemed to be collegial with Nellie. It struck me from the way they were treating Nellie that the hospital may have done something wrong in her case. Even the wicked red headed nurse was helping Nellie collect her belongings when, not just a day before, she had smacked Nellie in the face for not moving fast enough. As she gathered up her things, Nellie stopped and turned to the redhead. I watched her defiant stare, her raised eyebrows as she took on an expression that promised justice. That was the look Nellie had kept to herself during her time in the ward; it was what she'd taught me to suppress. Seeing Nellie stand up to them gave me hope that maybe one day I too could reveal the truth without being accused of insanity.

The nurse backed away and fumbled while helping Nellie gather her things. Nellie's eyes kept finding mine. I had just woken up and the stout nurse was trying to herd us all out of the room. This time, because the men were with Nellie, they were sickly sweet about it. That made it easy for me to take my time.

Nellie came over to me just before she left. She gave me a hug and handed me a small piece of paper. "Here is my information. Call me when you can. Or write to me. If you have visitors, give them this

information I'm going to try to help you. Do what I've taught you, all right?"

The paper said:

Nellie Brown, Chicago Tribune 435 North Michigan Avenue in Chicago, Illinois

With that Nellie was escorted out. Just as the three of them left, the stout nurse smacked me hard on the back. "Give me that paper, what are you conspiring to do! Missy you aren't going anywhere for a long time."

I kept a neutral expression as she tore the paper and threw it in a dirty bedpan. She thrust the soiled container into another patient's hands and sneered, "Go empty this waste."

Her words of torment didn't even penetrate me. The redhead threw a dress on my bed, "Get yourself ready there Missy. You've got your big hearing today." She turned to the stout one and laughed. "What'll you think it'll be Suzanne."

A big grin grew on Suzanne's face. Her yellow teeth were horrible to look at, "I don't know she's awfully pretty. Maybe Dr. Norse will take a liking to her. Maybe have pity on her."

"Naa, I'd wager my mother's soul-- it'll be shock therapy."

The stout one was pulling sheets and tossing them on the floor for the patient custodians to carry down to the laundry. She nodded her head reflexively. "That's true. That's about right."

Terror rose inside of me. It was of the kind that I'd have never been able to contain before. I had been so prone to screaming and crying in the past. I certainly would have broken down just hearing them say the words and knowing all along what the treatments behind those doors were even though Eileen would never tell me. I had experience watching women go into the rooms screaming and then coming out unconscious or worse re-entering the ward, looking around numbly with their heads wrapped in bandages, nothing at all alive in their eyes. I had seen the lady in the bed next to mine shake all night long from freezing baths or sheets lined with ice; left there all day, alone and cold. I wanted to scream as loudly as I could. I felt it rising.

In my short time there I'd seen many women come back from shock treatments. Returning from the treatment rooms in comas; afterwards lying in bed with open eyes. They'd remain like that for a couple of days until life returned to them. That's what Nellie was warning me against. I knew it was worse for the women who had surgery. After they recovered were really like little children, pleasant and calm but really no mind of their own. These fears spun around me, but they weren't like childhood myths—monsters and ghosts—they were possible, even probable, fates.

The little stout woman's teeth made me sick. Yellowed with a sticky white film around the gums. As she laughed I grew nauseated. My feelings escalated as the red headed nurse pushed the other poor

women; I felt as if I couldn't contain it any more I felt my arms tingle with desire to strike them both. To strike them until they were dead.

"What's that dearie?" The stout one asked.

I must have said something. I was afraid of my rage; it had blinded me. But what had I said? I took a deep breath. "Thank you," I whispered.

"You got nothing to thank me for--Get ready there dearie, don't keep us in suspense. We want to know what they have in mind for you. It's better than my soap operas." I pulled on my slip and then my floral dress. After only one wash it was bleached and faded. I could see how in no time, it would be threadbare. I fixed my hair as they were herding the rest of the women into a line in the hallway.

"Keep her here," the redhead, Suzanne, said to the stout one. She was referring to the old woman who she was holding by the shoulders.

The woman was stamping her feet and screaming "No!" She was the same one with the contorted face out of a fairy tale, her mouth always in the shape of a scream. She was very upset. Suzanne held the woman's shoulders, while I walked out to the hallway and stood in the line with the other patients from my room. A moment later, the redheaded nurse returned with two male orderlies. The orderlies were carrying metal buckets of ice.

I'd wished Nellie were there so I could ask her what they were going to do to the naked old woman. I realized I could see into the room well enough to make out what they were doing. They pulled down the top sheet and poured the ice over the bottom sheet. I looked to the woman next to me for validation, but she was picking her ear and rocking back and forth. Her eyes were set on nothing. I looked back into the room and they had covered the bed of ice with the top sheet, and then tied knots in the sides so the ice was contained between the two sheets. Then the two orderlies picked the lady up, she looked as though she weighted nothing. They placed her in the bed and the redhead, Suzanne, and stout little restrained the woman's arms to the bedrail with towels they'd rolled up and tied. The lady was screaming.

"That'll teach her to shut her mouth when she's told." The redhead said, then she motioned for them all to leave the room.

She walked into the hall and closed the door to the women's cries of agony.

The redhead looked at me, "You should mind your own business dearie. Wipe that look off your pretty face."

That scene alone would have sent me into tears just a week ago. Despite maintaining my composure, the woman's contorted face and the terror in her eyes, stayed with me all day. It would enter my thoughts and cause a searing pain into my stomach.

During the long walk to the room where the hearing was to be held, I repeated Nellie's words over and over in my head. No matter what they said to me, I was to be gracious and pretend to be fine. I could not

--would not-- scream and cry. I had practiced with Nellie the night before. She had played the role of the doctor and handed out the worst possible decisions. She presented the worst possible scenarios. I practiced maintaining a calm demeanor, regardless of what they were promising to do to me. It was all in whispers into the dark room, but still our rehearsal had terrified me.

"Eve, we think you'll need to be confined in a more therapeutic ward"

"Eve, we're going to try electric shock treatment several times a week. We'll monitor you for a few months. If not, there are surgical options."

We practiced each one of the many scenarios. We also went over questions the doctors may ask. We did it until I could respond to them without as much as a quiver in my voice. The most difficult role plays were the ones where she pretended to be a doctor asking about Charlie and my capacity to mother him.

"Mrs. Miller, did you find it difficult to care for your little son Charlie?"

"How did your moods and behavior affect your son? How will you behave differently were you to be rehabilitated?"

It had been well into the night before we'd finished practicing. After I'd heard Nellie's faint snore and I knew I was the only one awake in the room, I let the silent tears fall on to my pillow. I cried without making a sound for a short time. I heard the clacking on the tile up and down the hallway. In the midst of that rhythm, the sound of nurses walking while I slept, I stopped myself. I decided that I wouldn't cry at all, any more until I was free. For even allowing myself to in the deepest moment of privacy, I was weakening my resolve. I had to grow completely numb.

I sat alone across from a table of three men and two women. Dr. Maynard was there, still smoking, squinting periodically as he wrote. Dr. Norse was also there, looking dapper and with a fixed, charming smile. There was another man I would come to know about later. He was a psychologist who performed testing on the patients; his job was to determine if the treatments and rehabilitation were improving our mental states. A female nurse was simply there to take notes and another woman, Mrs. Lange, was a social worker.

The proceedings were very short. They had conducted their observations. They reported that although I had definitely demonstrated periods of impressive control over my emotions, it was their unanimous impression that I had exhibited a chronic pattern of unpredictable melancholia and had a history of lax moral behavior. In it was their opinion that these sort of patterns, particularly after going on for years and exacerbated by grief of losing my husband and melancholia following childbirth, would --without a doubt-- grow worse if left untreated. "The outcome in these cases is very poor," Dr. Maynard announced looking only at the two male psychologists.

"I find Eve charming and very easy to talk with," Dr. Norse stated matter-of-factly, "but she did display forgetfulness when we spoke in a casual setting." The three doctors nodded.

"Eve, we have developed a treatment plan for you." Finally, Dr. Maynard addressed me. In fact, all of them had their eyes on me and it made me feel small and worthless.

I nodded. The pain in my stomach was increasing and it had begun to spread to my shoulders. I felt as if it would rise to my neck and I would become unable to speak.

"We won't know if you've stabilized for a couple of weeks. We're going to have you undergo electroshock therapy. This treatment has a very high success rate for melancholia."

I nodded. I wanted to cry and resist. I wanted to scream, but I held on to the belief that perhaps Nellie was who she said she was. The way she left certainly indicated something. I didn't know what she'd do for me. I had a sobering thought; I could make it three weeks of treatment if I knew that would help get me home. So I told myself they would. In that moment, I'd convinced myself that Mary and Nellie were going to get me out.

"Thank you for helping me," I said just as Nellie and I had practiced. "The time I've had to rest here has already been very good for me."

This was the first time I saw Dr. Maynard smile. He nodded his head. "I'm so glad Eve. I know it isn't easy to try and carry on with all the duties of motherhood with so much pain all the time. You are a very good candidate for treatment."

I felt dizzy and forced myself not to faint.

"Eve, is there anything else?" Dr. Maynard asked.

"I would love to see my son and my friends." I said.

The board all looked at one another. Dr. Maynard turned to the social worker. I don't know why this was her domain but it was. Mrs. Lange was skinny and tall. She had an Adam's apple and wore a mustard colored shirt with a straight black skirt. Her hair was up in a fashion meant for older woman, yet she could only have been little older than me. She was smoking; red lipstick smudges were around the filter when she removed her cigarette, looked up from the paper and spoke to me, "You mean your son and those caring for him in your absence?"

"Yes, that's right." I said politely, avoiding any desperation.

She nodded squinting from the smoke that wafted right into her face. She waved the smoke away and looked at the doctors. "Yes. I think it would be good for her. She poses no harm to herself or anyone else. Her violent behavior may have been caused by the shock of leaving her home so suddenly. She is melancholic not violent. Yes, I think family and some occupational therapy time outdoors would aid in Mrs. Miller's rehabilitation."

The doctors all nodded their heads. Nellie's advice had been right. I felt elated over the thought of seeing my baby, but I only allowed a

subtle smile, "thank you. "

The lanky social worker stood and walked me to the door. I kept my gait calm although on the inside I was trembling. She wore a charm bracelet on her wrist and when she turned the doorknob, it jingled. The sound the metal charms made reminded me of the bracelet Jeff had given me before I'd become pregnant. That seemed like years and years ago. I remembered how much I'd loved it. It was jade with gold Chinese coins. I remembered his blue eyes watching me as I opened the box, examining my reaction. Then he spoke to me with paternal affection, as if I were his child not his lover, "You'll wear this every day and whenever you hear that lovely sound, you'll think of me."

Her long face formed a look of compassion. I could see that she and I were just the same, neither more sane than the other. I also knew she recognized the irony too. If she had been in my circumstance she'd be the one beginning the interminable wait for electric shock therapy. She'd would have been the one to hold back screams from unparalleled fear and grief. She'd have to learn to pretend to feel something she didn't, against a deluge of natural emotions and self-protective reflexes.

I smiled and nodded.

"You'll be all right. I'm looking out for you," she whispered. "I won't forget you."

When she opened the door, I expected the stout one to be there, eagerly awaiting an opportunity to continue with her schoolyard taunting. She was the easiest to ignore. She was the idiot. It was Eileen waiting outside of the room for me. I was so happy to see it was her. Pretty Eileen. She looked even rosier than usual. Her black hair was in a short wave, and her cheeks flushed.

"Eileen" I said, almost falling into her arms, as if she were Carmen.

She took my hand as the door to the boardroom closed. "How are you love? Everything's all right isn't it?"

I shrugged my shoulders. As much as I trusted Eileen, Nellie had made it very clear that I shouldn't really trust anyone. "I'm fine."

"Listen Evie, I shouldn't say it, but I heard there's been a letter about you."

Even more than the treatment I knew I'd soon have to endure, this news terrified me. My legs grew weak and gave out. I fell to the floor. Eileen helped me back up. "What happened to you Evie?"

I felt like I was falling down the rabbit hole, I was dizzy and breathless. Somehow I managed to pull myself up. I made a foolish excuse. "This shoe. Is there something wrong with the heel?" I was trembling so hard that she must have known how frightened I was she held my hand to steady me.

She laughed her carefree laugh. It was clear that there was always something else on her mind. She was in love or maybe just infatuated. "Evie dear, there's a letter and all the doctors are buzzing about it."

"Who's it from?"

"Don't know. Whoever it is, it's someone important though."

I felt my heart sink. I knew it was from Jeff Lambert. I knew it. Somehow there was something more he could do to harm me. I walked forward, a zombie, the things I had suppressed were evaporating; all of me was gone except one short film clip in my mind. A black and white newsreel with Mary, Frank and Charlie. In the thought I'm with them; we're sitting under a tree that has grown large in the back yard of my house in Bend. It doesn't matter what Eileen was saying, I was watching the movie in my head over and over. I passed hallways with women crouched as far in the corner as they could be, their hands over heads rocking. I passed others pacing in wildly irregular steps and yelling out obscenities. I saw women in straight jackets, tied to benches. Nurses, moving amongst them.

"Want a game of cards?" Eileen asked me as we entered the game room. I was able to hold the little newsreel in my thoughts and also sit down with her. Not a few moments later, I saw the debonair, confident Dr. Norse enter the room. He waltzed from table to table, sometimes sitting and talking with the patients. Eileen's green eyes followed him from place to place, and it was clear to see that there was something between them. When he finally made it back to my table, he sat down. Eileen and I were already engaged in a game of rummy.

"How are you girls?" He asked with a charming lilt in his voice, meant for Eileen I could tell. Her face grew even more flush. He lifted his hand and smoothed his hair to one side, when he brought his hand back down, I saw a wedding ring. He reminded me so much of Jeff, I wanted to warn Eileen, but anything I said might have made me look crazier or caused me more problems. As Nellie said, "*keep yourself from being noticed at all.*" Not too nice, not too emotional.

Dr. Norse asked me if he could steal Eileen from me for a moment. I smiled and nodded as if I were none the wiser. I looked around the hall, a picture of hell. I thought of Jeff Lambert and I realized that it might have been worse if I'd done what he'd said. If I had done what he'd wanted and left Mary and Frank to move down to Eugene with him. He might have somehow done had me put away either way. He might have grown bored with me or become more violent and one day just to punish me, do just the same as he did that afternoon at my house in Bend. The letter to the doctors came back into my thoughts. What else was there for him to use against me? Every time I thought he'd gotten what he'd wanted, it seemed there was more he could take from me. Could he have known how much he'd already destroyed my life? If not for the thread of that dream, the movie reel had taken place of my reality, if not for that I'd be insane. There was no other way to make it through my time there, but to pretend. It was as though I was keeping myself just on the edge of insanity, until finally I broke loose and went crazy. I knew they would lock me in the back ward, or they'd make me

a zombie with a head bandage bumping into walls, drooling and slurring incoherencies. The letter terrified me. Each event, each piece of new information was a weight on my back, I didn't know how much more I could endure before I broke.

Eileen and Dr. Norse returned to the table. Eileen was very excited and Dr. Norse was smiling paternalistically, nodding for Eileen to go ahead and tell me some news that they had between them. She stood a little too close to him and looked up at him beaming, while he looked down on her with a look of amusement as if she were the apple of his eye. She straightened her skirt and squirmed a bit. I couldn't figure out how, at one time, I thought she was like Carmen. She was nothing like her; Carmen was strong and defiant. Sarcastic. So pretty, coy but not naive or foolish. Eileen, a girl I once felt was an ally, was sweet but she was indeed foolish. It bothered me. I pictured the film reel in my mind, my dream of seeing Charlie, my garden. I kept my opinions and feelings boxed up tightly and I moved through the asylum as if I were a recovering woman; as if I were feeling much much better.

Dr. Norse's eyes caught mine. I wondered if they were going to tell me I'd be having the shock treatment. But, why would they be so pleased with themselves if that were the case?

"Go on and tell her Eileen," He placed his hand on her shoulder for a moment, then back down into his pocket.

"You have visitors!"

I looked up to Dr. Norse for confirmation. He wore a wide, affectionate smile. I could hardly contain my joy. I allowed a smile of joy and I kept my eyes on him.

"I do? Who's here?"

I could imagine it was no one but Charlie and Mary. Maybe Carmen. Maybe everyone. But Charlie. It was Charlie. I knew they were going to let me see my baby. I stood up. "Who is it Dr. Norse?"

"All right, Eve. It's all right. Calm down a bit." I felt the other part of me return, the one Nellie had trained. *'Calm down a bit.'*

"Oh, you're right. When can I see my visitors?"

He had a twinkle in his eye. In my periphery I saw a bit of a frown on Eileen's face. I felt as if I were walking on a razor edge. What would I do if Dr. Norse, were in fact, like Jeff? What would my choices be then? And if I were to return his advances, which I didn't believe I would, would I be punished harshly by the nurses with Eileen leading the way. And what would be my fate when Dr. Norse grew tired of me. He certainly had made no movement to stop the shock treatments. He was one of the men in the room, in agreement about my insanity.

"Eve?" I must have been lost in thought for a moment, he laughed a little, "Silly girl. Come with me." At that he put his hand on my lower back and led me to the reception area.

The metal doors opened to a large serene room with a conservatory to one side. Wooden rockers lined the long hallway and unlike in the

ward where women lay in contorted or fetal positions on hard wall-length benches moaning and shaking, the women seated in the rockers in the front of the hospital looked pleasant and content. The long hallway had wooden floors; they glistened as the light cast through high arched windows with no bars. A glass octagonal conservatory constructed of glass windows was opposite the hallway that opened to this room with long mahogany tables and beautiful bouquets of flowers. Velvet settees and upholstered chairs were tastefully arranged for accommodating visitors. It reminded me of a fancy hotel, not unlike the one Jeff and I visited in Eugene. The ladies in the rockers were patients, but well dressed and all appeared mentally competent, truly at the asylum for rest.

Dr. Norse kept his hand on my back and it caused me great embarrassment. I looked around and there to one side of the room I saw them; first I saw Mary, dressed in her nice clothes, a pressed calico dress and a Sunday hat. My heart sank and tears came to my eyes, Mary was following behind Charlie who was walking in a labored stomp, balancing himself as he navigated the small seating area. I couldn't breathe and felt an overwhelming love. I turned to Dr. Norse and Eileen and said, "there's my baby!" Both had a smile that conveyed genuine happiness for me.

"My I go see them?" I asked Dr. Norse.

He nodded.

"Eileen will stay in the room. In case—in the event that you need her or feel overwhelmed."

"How long can I spend with them?" His brown eyes contemplated. I imagined he was contemplating the value of this gift he was giving me. "How does the afternoon sound? We'll have you return for dinner."

Three hours seemed like forever. I walked not rushed over to Mary and Charlie. As I did, Tom Billings stood up from one of the couches and I felt immediately ashamed. But really, all I cared about was Charlie. When he saw me, he tried to run but fell. He was yelling "ma ma!" And he pointed to the corner in my direction at a blue rubber ball "Ma. Ma. Ball." I couldn't help it, tears fell down my face. Eileen was sitting too far to see me and I was still walking with a calm demeanor. Besides, she was reading a magazine, a title I didn't recognize. I picked up the ball as Mary rushed towards me. She was holding Charlie and she lifted him up, he reached and stretched himself for me to hold him. I nuzzled my face in his shoulder and I could feel his warmth, his heartbeat, his love.

"Ma Ma, ball" he said and smiled at me. His face was the same. I could never forget his beautiful blue eyes and light brown hair. I felt he no longer looked like Jeff. In fact, there was no Jeff in him at all. "Ma Ma, ball." I held up the ball and he held it and laughed. He threw it again on the floor.

"Gam Gam. Ball"

"Oh my word Eve, this boy is so smart, but he's tiring me out."

She walked over and had tenderness in her eyes; she gave me a long embrace. Tears filled her eyes. She pulled away and looked at me. "Oh my God Eve," she whispered. "Darling."

I cried too. "You have to help me stay calm. I so much want to cry and tell you every horrible thing. But—"

"For Charlie. Yes, I agree."

"Yes for Charlie, but also to protect myself. I have very little I can do to prove my sanity here. Please let me ask Eileen if we can walk the grounds. It looks so lovely outside. I haven't been outside in three weeks."

Mary couldn't help hold back the pity and sorrow. I saw it in her expression.

I picked up Charlie. "Let me see if we can go out and walk. I'll ask the nurse." I walked back toward Eileen and she looked up. She was still a bit of distance away. "Eileen," I said when I was close enough for her to hear, "I'd like you to meet my son, Charlie."

"Oh Evie, I would be so honored." She stood and my fondness for her was renewed. She straightened her skirt and her nurse's hat and met me; together we walked back through the beautiful room. I stopped just enough to keep her from the sitting area where my family was. It would be too embarrassing for them to hear how people there spoke to me.

"Oh Evie! He's perfect! May I hold him?"

She reached for him and he went to her easily. She stroked his hair and spoke to him in a sing-songy voice, "Hello little man. Aren't you a handsome little man!" She made a funny face and he let out a giggle.

He held up his ball and then looked at me briefly "Ma Ma." Then he looked back at Eileen.

"Yes, that's right darling. Ma Ma." Eileen lifted her head and genuinely looked impressed. "He's a smart boy."

I felt so elated and full of so much joy.

"Eileen would it be all right if we went out for a walk on the grounds and I can play with Charlie on the grass."

"Of course. I'll have to go outside too, but I'll sit on a bench and let you have your privacy." She handed Charlie back to me. "Eve, don't do anything foolish, try to run off or—"

"No, of course not."

"It will be much worse. You're doing so well."

I walked back to Mary. Tom stood up again and put the newspaper down.

"Hi Tom." I whispered.

He looked at me with sympathy but also with a distant demeanor.

"Hi Eve. How are you?"

I shrugged my shoulders.

"Let's walk," Mary said and put an arm around me. Charlie threw the

ball again and Tom walked over and picked it up.

Being in the fresh air was such a reminder of what I wanted, of what I'd had. We walked amongst the well-manicured grounds, through paths that meandered through trees. The lilac petunias were flooding out of the beds. The air was dry and hot. Even the sweator seemed lovely after having been confined in a hospital that reeked of urine, body odor, many chemical smells. The natural sounds outside --trees, rustling birds singing and even the sound of cars that occasionally pulled into the hospital drive way—caused a sadness in me. Even after a short time the comparison between feeling free and the experience in the ward was almost unbearable. The moans and cries, the sound of feet on tile. The babbling of those unfortunate souls returning from surgery. All of it had found a permanent place in my senses. It was a soft drone that didn't go away. Pushing it aside was difficult; even being with Charlie and Mary didn't squelch it completely. It seemed to me that the melancholia that struck with Nick was killed had returned, but worse. It seemed a blackening mood was moving in quickly. It wouldn't be much longer that I could hide it. The fearful anticipation of the shock therapy was adding even more weight. I didn't know when they would initiate it but when they did, I knew from observing the others in the ward that it would be twice a week. I didn't know how long it would continue, but from what I'd seen it didn't seem like the regimen would stop. Still, visiting with Charlie was invigorating. He had me following him as he practiced waling. He would look up and point to the sky. His eyes would turn and fix on mine. He held a curious expression, his brow furrowed as if to ask, "what is it?"

I would lift him and hold him up as he pointed and reached. "That's the sky darling. Look how high up the clouds are." We would do the same with the flowers. Some of the time we sat in the grass and he pulled a few blades and gave them to me. I'd hold his pile of grass and say "thank you!" He'd come back over with a serious look and take it back. These sorts of games went on for over an hour. I knew watching him all day would be tiring. But, I longed for that sort of tired. The tedium, love and fixation on him, all an intense experience. I longed for the afternoons washing clothes or ironing after he finally fell into a deep, baby sleep with a sweaty forehead and rhythmic baby breathing. I longed for all of it.

After a time, Mary walked over and stood beside me. "Darling, Tom needs to speak with you."

I felt a pit in my stomach. "Over what I did?"

"No sweetheart. He has some news for you."

I took a deep breath and walked over to the bench and Mary resumed my place with Charlie. I felt self-conscious as I approached Tom. I looked so ugly. I knew I was pale and my hair dry and straw-like from the horrible soap they used to wash it. I'd pinned it up haphazardly, trying my best to make myself decent with so little time

to fix myself up and my hands too shaky to hold a hair comb. My dress was worn and faded. Worse, I had been following Nellie's instruction, to avoid looking too pretty. Although, it seemed it wasn't working with Dr. Norse. He promised trouble for me.

"Hello Eve." Tom stood up from the bench off to one side of the lawn where I had been playing with Charlie. He waited to sit back down until I was seated.

I looked down at my hands as he spoke.

"I came to speak with you. I have some news." Our location overlooked a small pond; in the center sat stone cupid sculpture spouting water from his mouth. I turned to Tom as he handed me a copy of a newspaper, *The Oregonian*. He had folded, revealing an article about Oregon State Hospital. It was written by Nellie Green. The story chronicled the horror in the ward. She really had been a journalist pretending to be insane. Although there was never a moment when she seemed insane to me. Towards the end of the article, I read about myself. She had left out the infidelity and instead said it was my husband who had me involuntarily committed.

I looked up at him. "She found you?"

He nodded.

"Eve. Honestly, I left Bend after I talked with Frank and Mr. Lambert. Then, when Nellie called, she said you may not get out for a long time."

I nodded and looked down. I bit my lip to prevent myself from crying. I clenched harder.

"You have a family that cares about you."

I didn't have anything to say. It had been so long since I felt I had a real family. Even then it was too far back to really remember the safety of someone loving me in that way. Just hearing Tom say it, caused me to hold my breath and suppress the pain. I looked away, towards Mary and Charlie. It seemed unreal to have them at the hospital. To see Charlie running around on the grass and Mary chasing after him. I knew that Mary was family to me. Just her and Charlie. I had them but I didn't have faith in anyone else. Charlie was laughing his impish laugh and then looked at me. He stopped and stared at me for a long moment. He raised his hand in an awkward wave and then started towards me. Mary caught up with him and lifted him up, distracting him with raspberries on his cheek. His image lingered. In just that moment before as he stared back at me, his resemblance to Jeff was shocking.

"Eve?" Tom's voice brought me back to our conversation.

I turned to him. "I'm tired."

"Frank and I talked to a lawyer. He sent a letter asking for the circumstances of your commitment. The attorney looked into it and they didn't follow the rules."

"Who didn't? I don't understand." For some reason I felt fear rising and the desire to run. To find a place and cower, hide.

"The thing is, we got the hospital notes and the order to commit you. The attorney reviewed it. Dr. Pope doesn't have a valid medical license so they only had one doctor with a valid signature."

"He's not a doctor? But, he delivered Charlie. Certainly he's a doctor-- he knew so much about--"

"He is a doctor. He just hasn't renewed his medical license in years. So there was only Dr. Maynard."

"Oh." I whispered.

"If it makes you feel better, Dr. Norse's notes from his evaluation of you said he found no signs of insanity."

I realized I was wringing my hands. My body relaxed but in doing so I felt so much pain in my muscles. My whole body felt battered.

"Then there's Nellie's article. I don't think the hospital wants any more controversy, nor do I think Dr. Pope wants his credentials questioned. I'm a journalist, Eve, with a major magazine. The lawyer and I both told him so much. They don't want any more problems."

I felt hope welling up inside me I could hardly let myself believe it. I wouldn't let myself feel it or entertain the possibility.

"So when can I go home?"

"It's still in the hands of the court. Mary and Frank wrote a statement about your competence as did Carmen, Harry and myself."

"When can I leave?" I wanted to cry but held it in and waited for the desire to pass.

"Maybe in a week we can get you home."

I felt myself deflate again. "Will they do the treatment before then?"

"What treatment?"

"The electric shock treatments."

Tom's green eyes looked out above me, I imagined he was thinking what he could do to prevent it. He looked away for a moment, then back at me. "I honestly don't know Eve. I'll speak to the attorney. I'm sorry."

"Are you sure they will release me?"

He furrowed his brow. Ran his hand through his hair. "I just don't know."

A long moment passed. I knew it was about time to go. A breeze had picked up and it felt good. It was a break from the heat. "Thank you Tom." I said and looked at him. I suppose I wasn't really thinking about anything more with him. My sole purpose was to get home to Charlie but I wanted to ask anyway. "I wanted to..."

I could see he grew uncomfortable immediately. He looked away for a moment and turned his head. Why hadn't I met someone like him instead of Jeff Lambert? But then I had a conflicted feeling. Without Jeff there would have been no Charlie. Charlie was my life. Nothing more and nothing less.

"What is it Eve?" He clasped his hands and placed them in his lap. He turned his head slightly and squinted a little. He took a deep breath

and kept his eyes on mine.

"I'm wondering what you think of me."

"I respect you Eve. Jeff Lambert was...He was..I don't have the words. I don't know why he did what he did to you" He looked down at his hands.

"Would you ever consider trying again with me?"

He shook his head before he answered. "Eve I can't *un-see* what I saw."

I felt tears come to my eyes, "I'm so ashamed." I looked down at my cotton dress. It was already bleached out and threadbare. The calico flowers all looked muted brown fabric when once they had been tiny roses with a yellow background. My hands were wrinkled and dry.

"Eve?"

I looked back up at him as traced the wooden grain of the wooden table. "It's all right." I said, "You don't have to say anything."

"It's not that. I respect you very much. I don't think you're immoral in anyway. Honestly." He took my hand and looked at me with such a level of compassion that I felt wounded by it some how. His words and his love seemed to be in opposition. "Eve, I've never loved a woman. But, I was starting to feel that way for you. But, Eve, I don't want to love a woman who posed for pictures like that. Or behaved the way you appeared to behave in the photographs with Mr. Lambert. I just don't. I can't erase what I saw. I think that was the reason Jeff Lambert showed those pictures to Frank and me."

"What about Frank? Does he feel this way too?"

"What I'm trying to say isn't coming out right and I know it hurts your feelings. Eve, if I didn't care about you, I wouldn't be trying so hard to get you out of here. I do care about you."

"What about Frank?" I repeated.

"Eve, he has been a mess since he did what he did. He was too ashamed to come today."

"But why? It wasn't his fault. I should have told him a long time ago. It was wrong to lie to him when I knew how he felt about his family's honor."

"He knew when he saw Jeff Lambert walk up to you and taunt you at the house that day when they brought you here."

"What do you mean?"

"Do you remember? Jeff walked up to you and said something softly to you like *'you're very sick--I know the hospital will help you.'*"

"I don't remember."

"Well, you went after him and the attendants restrained you and dragged you out."

I put my head in my hands. I could feel my face going flush, embarrassed by how I must have looked.

"I wasn't there Eve. I didn't see it. But, Frank said after that he realized he'd made a mistake. He loves you and Charlie very much.

And since that day he's tried to get you back."

"Well I love him too."

"What about Jeff Lambert. What if he tries again?"

Tom shrugged his shoulders. He pursed his lips and let out a long breath. He shook his head.

"What is it?"

"Mary should tell you."

If felt as though the clouds had turned dark. The sky was still bright, but I was worried over what Harry might have done. What else could it have been?

The time came. Charlie was sleeping in Mary's arms as she rocked him in a metal glider chair under the shade of a large pear tree. They both looked so peaceful and it gave me enormous comfort knowing he was safe and loved. It also filled me with joy to know he remembered me and loved me. Tom stood up and walked over to Mary. I could see Eileen waving from the top of the expansive lawn that led down to where we were by the fountain and adjacent seating area. I just wanted to get into the car with them and go home. When it was time for them to leave, I was more terrified than ever. Mary gave Charlie to me. He was so much heavier, asleep in my arms.

"Mary, what happened with Jeff?"

"Darling, Harry and Carmen came up to Bend as soon as they heard what was happening. Dr. Pope wouldn't give us any information about where you were being taken. Certainly, we didn't think they'd bring you all this way. None of us knew what was going to happen to you. We were all going crazy. That night. Frank and I told Harry and Carmen the whole story."

"Everything?" I asked with a sick feeling in my stomach remembering the day Jeff barged into my home, threatened me and forced himself on me. It seemed my body couldn't forget that day. I still felt the pain of his force even though I knew there was no way it could still physically hurt me. So much more harm had come to me since then. Bruises on my face, my wrists. Being held down against my will and forced to take medication. I'd been mocked, laughed at and now I had somehow caught Dr. Norse's attention. I knew from my experiences with Jeff, that kind of attention would only lead to final damnation. Even with all of that, it was Jeff's degradation of me that killed a large part of me. When I heard Tom say he couldn't be with a woman like me or "*un-see*" what he saw, it made Jeff's violation public. There was no way of changing that. As we walked I felt ashamed all the more; Mary was telling me that everyone in Sellwood knew too.

"I feel so ashamed." I said. Mary stopped and lifted my chin.

"Eve. No one in Bend knows except Frank, Tom and me. Everyone thinks you were infirmed with pneumonia. We told them you went back to Portland to be with your family while you recovered. As far as Sellwood, Harry only told the boys part of it. The last part." I felt sick to

my stomach. I would be shamed forever. I would never go back there.

"Why would he do that?"

"They went out and found Jeff Lambert. They beat him."

A bolt of terror ran through me. "But he'll just get revenge on me. And, I'm sure Harry is in trouble."

"Jeff Lambert ended up in the hospital."

"Is he all right?"

"Eve, he's fine but why should you care?"

"I wouldn't want anyone to be beaten Mary."

"You're such a good girl," she wrapped her arms around Charlie and me. "And just so you know. Harry's fine. Did you think any of his old friends in the police force would do anything but turn the other cheek on a man like Jeff Lambert?"

"What if he comes after me? I'm afraid he'll kill me now."

"Eve. It's over. He's taken a job at the Chicago Museum of Art. He's leaving Sellwood. He's not coming back to Oregon." She looked me over and kissed me on the forehead, "and his wife's had another baby."

"Who told you that?"

"Carmen."

I started to cry. "Why would he try to force me to be with him then? If she was pregnant the whole time?"

"Let it go. Let us get you home. He was the one who was insane, Eve. He's a man who beats women."

"Can you get me out now? Please try to take me home with you." I wanted to cry and plead but I knew I was being watched. I just couldn't go back. I didn't know how I would be able to.

"No. It will take a little time."

I nodded but I felt another moment was too long.

That evening, Suzanne, the redhead came in and ordered me to get up. It was nearly eight o'clock and everyone was in bed. Lights were out at 7:30.

"What have I done?" I asked her.

"You need to get yourself cleaned up." Dr. Norse has ordered it.

"But why?"

"How am I supposed to know? Can't you do as you're told!"

I stood numbly. What did Dr. Norse have to do with me getting cleaned up? Why was he here so late? She gave me a towel as I put on the grimy cotton slippers that had been neatly placed under my bed. I felt so ugly and dirty.

I wanted to protest but I thought of the news. I didn't want to go with the nurse, but I remembered Nelly's words and how close I was to getting out.

"Are you sure it was doctor Norse?"

I was confused, but when I entered the hallway, there he was. He didn't look at me.

Suzanne didn't look at him either. Could it have been that despite her cruelty he disgusted her as much as he did me? She walked me to the room with all the bathtubs. It was dark when we first arrived. She turned on the switch and there was an electric buzz before the lights came on fully. They blinked once and then stayed on. Dr. Norse was now leaning against the tile wall watching me. I felt faint. I prayed Suzanne wouldn't leave.

"I'll need to see how you respond to hydrotherapy." He was matter of fact. He retrieved a cigarette from his white coat pocket. He lit it and kept his eyes on me. I grew flush and I began to tremble. Was this it? Was this the thing that would break me down? Keep me here. When the police came for me like they had Nellie to release me, would they see me in the same condition that I was in after Jeff forced himself on me? I remembered what Nellie said, *"No matter what they do. If it hurts, if it humiliates you. Don't show enjoyment, don't show resistance."*

Still, I was shaking. Suzanne ran the water in the tub. I could see she had turned on only the cold.

"Do I need to get ice, doctor?"

He shook his head and took a drag. "No this is fine."

I wanted to ask what I'd done for such punishment? Why should I have to have this treatment in the middle of the night? A part of me knew as my mind returned to our walk out to see my family. The visit. He'd had his hand on my back, my lower back as a husband might as he walked his wife through a crowd or on to a train. Would this be the barter? Suzanne removed my cotton nightdress and there I stood naked in front of Dr. Norse.

"All right, get in missy." She said. "How long doctor?"

"She's not in such a manic condition, maybe just half an hour. Have her lay flat in the tub."

The water was freezing cold and Suzanne pushed me down so the water was up to my neck. "Did you hear that? Lay down flat in the tub." She pulled up a chair and opened a book. Dr. Norse walked and stood above me watching my naked body shake. He must have stood there for five minutes.

"I'll be back in the morning to check on her." He smiled a charming smile and gave me a wink. "This will help you, Eve."

I couldn't think at all. I was so cold. Suzanne didn't look at me or ask me how I was, not that I expected her to. I kept my eyes on the tiles and tried to count the rows. Top to bottom, side to side. I tried to multiply the number of tiles. My teeth were chattering loudly. Finally, Suzanne looked up at me and shook her head. I didn't know if it was because she knew what was happening to me or she was just disgusted by my weakness. I lost count every time, but it was the thing that kept me planted in my determination to act sane. Nellie had also told me that even if I acted sane they would still treat me as if I were mad. I couldn't remember his words exactly but I thought Dr. Norse had

said the cold bath was a treatment for mania.

When Suzanne lifted me out of the tub, my body was blue and numb. I looked at the tall windows. Despite the nighttime the black bars were visible through the glass. I could see a faint glow in the sky from stars rising in a slow ascent. I realized that I hadn't seen the stars or moon rise since the night that Tom and I walked through Frank's cornfields. He'd held my hand and smiled shyly while I told him my opinions on things like the news or the ladies garden club. He asked me detailed questions about the gossip. He told me that being a photographer in the war was considered prestigious and it was difficult for him to see other men leave, risk their lives with many never coming back. He said that war was living hell, unimaginable to those who have not experienced it. The moon had risen that night and it was so bright it illuminated the paths between the rows of corn. He had stopped and looked at me. "I think I'm falling in love with you."

My sleep had not been restful. I couldn't get warm no matter how much I curled my body up and pulled the covers up above my chin. I shook from the chill. It had only been half an hour in the tub and no ice. I knew some women had been kept hours in the cold then, the nurses transferred to scalding hot water. It was to calm their nerves. I knew exactly why I had been told to take a bath the night before. It was so Dr. Norse could see me in the nude. In my dreams and even as I lay awake, his brown eyes became Jeff's blue eyes. The memory had fused and if an image of the bathtub returned to me, it was followed by the feeling of Jeff watching me as he lay on top of me. I would try to shake the thoughts, but something about my freezing body kept me in a state of rapt fixation on it. The sounds returned to me. The echo of the bathroom, the running water. My naked body felt marked and bruised and I would have preferred a beating to the humiliation.

I felt I could no longer pretend to be calm. I was in a deeper grave than the melancholia I had been in Sellwood after Nick died. I had no desire to wake or get dressed for the day. I hadn't had that inclination, really, since I'd arrived three weeks before. But, that day, it was a weight on top of me. It was true darkness. Eileen entered the room first thing in the morning. She glared at me as she walked past me to rouse the other women. Two other nurses followed her into the room. I hadn't seen them before. Then Suzanne, the redhead entered the room. All three of them jerked women out of bed; those with contorted bodies jolted up and forced to sit while the nurses yanked the nightdresses off them. I turned to get up and get myself ready for the day. Suzanne rushed over to my bed. "No need for you to get dressed today."

"Why?" I whispered.

"You're having you treatment this morning."

"What treatment?"

"Just stay in bed and keep your mouth shut."

I knew I couldn't do it. It was over. I would give in to my rushing

emotions. I *would be* a crazy person. If they wanted me to be insane, that was how I felt anyway. I had no dignity left and I was so tired of being pushed and mocked and taunted.

Eileen walked by again to put a bedpan out in the hallway for patient attendants to empty and clean.

"Eileen, "I said, "Can you tell me what's happening?"

"Ah shut up!" she said with her Irish accent. Her tone, one I had never heard from her. She had always been like a giddy, happy child. I felt the scratchy sheets below me.

"Nurse Suzanne." I called.

She rushed over and gritted her teeth. She gave me the look of an angry mother. "What is it?"

"I'd like to speak to Dr. Maynard about the treatment. There is some new information that I know he's received."

She rolled her eyes and looked at her watch. "You'll be seeing him in ten minutes. You can tell him all about it then."

Some of the women screamed and moaned while they were getting ready for their day. Most of them were thin and looked half starved. When they put their threadbare dresses on them, they hung like fabric on a skeleton. Their hair looked wiry from the soap and their shoes looked big and clunky on them as they shuffled their feet and wandered towards the doorway. Two of the nurses were in charge of escorting the patients out to the hallway. They did it by pulling at them or holding them with a tight grip on the fabric of the back of their shirts. The room grew quiet except for the sound of Eileen stripping the beds.

"Eileen," I said, "If you're angry about the water treatment last night..."

"Well I heard Dr. Norse got an eye full, all right."

"What could I do? You told me yourself to just cooperate."

She rushed over and stood next to my bed, "Did I now. Well, the way you were looking at him in the activity room gave him permission to do what he wanted. You knew what you were doing. Trying to get yourself out of here no doubt. That's not going to get you out! They're saying you're manic now. Are you satisfied?"

"How can you say this?" Just at that moment, I pictured Nellie's face looking into my eyes. I imagined her in the bed across from me. I quieted myself and turned over. Eileen continued to angrily pull sheets off the beds. Two male attendants entered the room, carrying a stretcher on wheels.

"Come on up, Mrs. Miller," one of them said. I couldn't tell if it was compassionate or not. It no longer mattered. It seemed to take nothing for them to lift me up and dump me on the stretcher.

I couldn't take the fear. I started crying. This was the moment that all my effort to pretend was lost. I didn't want them to do this to me. I was supposed to leave. They were supposed to let me go. That's what

Mary had said. That's what Tom had told me/ Why weren't the police there with Mary and Frank to escort me out? Why didn't I have the opportunity to give Suzanne and Eileen the same disgusted look Nellie had given them? I couldn't hang on to her words any longer. I screamed "No!" and the attendants immediately twisted the end of the sheets and tied them around my wrists. I began kicking my legs. They twisted the bottom corners of the sheet and did the same to my legs while Eileen held me still. I was panicking and they just pushed the stretcher down the hallway with me screaming with terror. I passed the treatment room where I had been left in ice-cold water while Dr. Norse had watched me shiver. I couldn't take it. There was no way to free myself. I couldn't stop the stretcher from rolling. It pushed through two swinging doors, metal with little square windows. Once inside the lights were stark white and my stretcher was positioned just below the two brightest lights. I could see machines of some sort to one side. One looked like a short wave radio. It had buttons and a gauge on it. There was a coiled wire and then a metal piece that looked like earmuffs. Four nurses stood at my feet and legs and the two attendants were positioned at my shoulders. Why was I awake? Why wouldn't they give me the medicine they had given me when I'd first arrived?

Dr. Maynard walked to the side of me and held my restrained hand. "Eve. Are you all right? I can see you're very upset. I know you're frightened." His paternalism was all I could hold on to. I became a child and in Dr. Maynard's face was my father's. I was trusting him and I nodded like a child.

"Well this is going to help you. It has helped a lot of people with melancholia. And, in your case bouts of mania."

I nodded. I could hardly see through the tears that streamed down my eyes, "Did you receive a letter about my release? Why do we have to if I'm being released?"

In that moment, I realized I maybe they weren't going to released me at all. Maybe that was why he was able to do the procedure with me. Maybe he'd convinced them that I should stay longer. Maybe Dr. Norse said I'd done something indiscrete again. Or maybe Eileen had accused me of something.

He lifted his glasses and looked at me with glassy, old man eyes. Now that the black frames were removed I could see deep wrinkles. "Eve. You *are* being released. There were too many technicalities when you were brought here." He motioned for one of the attendants to flip a switch.

I couldn't take it. I was so terrified and I didn't want him to do it.

"Then why do you have to do this? If I'm leaving? Please don't'."

"Eve. You should be here. You have many mental problems, which will only progress. You'll be back here in not too long. I wouldn't be an ethical doctor if I didn't at least try a week of these treatments. That way I can have some peace of mind that you won't go home and do

something awful to your son."

At that, one of the attendants pulled my head backwards and placed a wooden cylinder in my mouth. Something wet was swabbed on my temples. I felt the cool air of the treatment room and then I felt the metal ear muffs being placed over each temple. They were covered in terry cloth and were very damp as well. I watched Dr. Maynard as he looked at one of the nurses and nodded. There was a loud buzzing sound and that was all I remembered.

When I woke, I didn't know how long I'd been asleep. I felt that since Eileen was finished with me, I had no one to ask to find out what had happened. I found myself very confused as to where I was and how I got there. I had a terrible headache and my muscles ached. I saw bruises on my wrists and I had a very faint recollection of being tied down. I didn't know when that had occurred. I didn't remember much of anything else. At first, I didn't know how I came to be in the hospital and I wondered if perhaps it was during childbirth. Then, my mind returned to Charlie and the train to Eugene and I realized, put together somehow, a crude timeline of his age. It couldn't have been that something had gone wrong in childbirth. When I looked around at the women in the beds around me rousing, I realized I was in an asylum. There was a familiarity to it and yet, it was hard to understand how I'd gotten there. The women were moaning. One was curled in the corner of her bed weeping. I could see one of her wrists was loosely tied to the metal bedframe. It looked so easy to release herself that I wondered if she had tied it herself. I heard footsteps and turned to see Dr. Norse entering the room. "How do you feel today Eve?"

"You look so much like someone I know." I reached for him, but my arm felt like lead.

"Are you having a little trouble with your memory, Eve?"

"Yes. I think I am."

"Do you remember what happened yesterday? You had treatment. You slept most of the day and through the night."

"Oh. I don't remember."

"No. Well that's all right. You'll be fine. It'll take a little while for you to get back to yourself. But, not long at all."

"You really do look familiar." I said, trying to place him.

"We've spoken a number of time Eve. I'm one of the doctors here. Dr. Norse."

"No. That's not it." It was Jeff I was seeing and I knew it, but once I placed him, I had forgotten his name again.

"Are you sure you're not from Sellwood? Isn't that where I know you from?"

He took a deep breath and looked down at me. He smiled a very tender smile and took my hand. "You're still confused. You'll feel better later today. Can I get you something?"

Somehow I knew he really was Jeff. But, I wasn't afraid of him. I

remembered his letter and how he'd wanted me to move to Eugene. That's why was there. To take me to Eugene.

"Have you come to take me to Eugene?" I asked as I tried to sit up.

"Lay back down, Eve."

"Are you taking me with you?"

"That would be lovely," he smiled. "I wish I could."

"I'm awfully thirsty," I said.

Dr. Norse returned with a nurse. He held a glass of water to my lips and I took a sip. I forgot what I was doing and stopped drinking but didn't motion to pull away from the glass.

"Are you finished?" he said to me as though I were a child. He nodded to the nurse and she approached me holding a syringe. Dr. Norse put the glass of water on the table, and then pulled the sleeve of my nightdress up and held it there, his eyes soothing me. I was unable to switch between his eyes and the needle so I simply focused on his gaze. He seemed so kind and then I noticed something else about his eyes. He was fooling me.

"Your eyes," it hurt my throat to speak. It was still so dry. "They aren't blue. What happened to your eyes?"

The needle must have gone into my arm and the medicine started working. That was all I remembered.

The next time I woke, there were voices above me. I felt a little more myself and when I opened my eyes, I saw a police officer in my room. Carmen and Mary were there. Carmen rushed over to me, holding a dress while Mary packed my suitcase.

"Is this new?" I asked Carmen. It was a lovely navy dress with a sailor collar.

"Of course, sweetheart. Mary made it for you. Hurry up now. We're taking you home."

Carmen turned to Mary. "Leave those clothes here. They're ruined them!" she napped and glared at Suzanne and Eileen who stood dumbfounded by the doorway. Dr. Maynard was there and he had a look of sheer fury on his face.

Eileen rushed over to me, "Here you go love, here's your shoes."

"Don't touch anything of hers!" Carmen commanded the nurses.

"Back away and don't speak to her."

Mary was surprisingly quiet and in no time I was up on my feet. The muscles in my arms and legs hurt, but I felt steady and my mind was clear. I still had a hard time piecing all the recent events together. I didn't remember so much of it, yet the feeling of horror persisted and an unbearable heartache was rising inside of me. I didn't have any desire to prove anything to the nurses as Nellie had. Her departure was full of contemptuous looks and intimidating gestures. I didn't have the desire or courage to do what Nellie had. Mary stood to one side of me holding my arm while Carmen took the other. "Move out of our way!" Carmen practically shouted and pushed past the two nurses.

When we entered the beautiful receiving area I saw Frank and Harry. Frank was holding Charlie. As I walked towards them Harry met me. He put his arms around me and held me for a short time. "I love you Eve," he whispered. "Jesus Christ, how did we let this happen?"

Frank then walked over to me. He handed me Charlie who was laughing at some game he and Frank had been playing. Charlie reached for Frank for a moment then seemed to realize it was me. His arms went around my neck and he began sucking his thumb and looking around at everyone. I kissed him on his head and then handed him to Mary. Frank was silent and he examined me apologetically.

"Don't you want to hold him, darling?" Mary asked. "He's missed you."

"No. You keep him with you for now. Is that all right?"

Carmen kept shaking her head. "Let's get you out of here. You're never coming back." She put her arm around me, "You'll ride with Mary and me and we'll let the boys follow us, ok? I'll sit in back with you and Charlie."

I looked at Frank again. I wanted to tell him how sorry I was for lying to him, for bringing all of this into his home. "If it's all right, I'd like to ride with you, Frank. Mary can Charlie ride with you and Carmen?" I don't know why. I didn't want Charlie.

Frank nodded and smiled awkwardly. "That'll be all right Eve."

I looked out the window as we made our way out of the asylum grounds, down the curved roads. I watched with deep sorrow as we passed ladies doddling and shuffling through paths that implied rehabilitation, peace. Really it was a façade. Maybe the small number of women in the very front ward, those rocking impostors that lined the halls near the entrance, or those in the main reception area. No one but the patients knew what was beyond the locked, white doors. The irony of the ivory glistening walls and floors. Why wouldn't it be black; why not the hell that it was?

"I hate this damned place." Frank slapped his visor down.

"Me too." I whispered.

He let out a deep breath. The truck left Salem and we were making our way through the forests towards Bend.

"I don't know why I asked to ride with you, Frank. We never really talk. Just us. I don't even know what to say."

"We did some. We talked, Eve."

"If you want me to leave Bend, I understand. I can't lie anymore. I know there's no way to explain it all to you. I know what you think of me."

"No ya don't." He said, continuing to stare out. A light rain hit the windshield in random dots but not enough to warrant turning on the wipers. "No Eve, there's no way to explain any of it. Your behavior or mine. Mostly mine."

I was the thinnest vine about to separate from everything. I hardly

had a breath or a heartbeat.

"I don't care about the lies, Eve." He turned and looked at me then back to the road. His expression was caring. It reminded me of the times when he'd come to my house to build something for Charlie. Or when he had looked at my sketches and plans for the garden. Teased me about his future son in law. That was never really mine. At its center was a lie where nothing really could flourish.

"Eve. I've always been a kind person. Or at least I wanted to be. I won't ever forgive myself for what I did to you. You're not my child, I know that. So it wasn't my place. Even if it were..."

He was just what he was. A farmer who had worked hard to establish himself. He was the husband to a wife who was loving and kind and whose affection he returned. He was a nice man. I had never been sure why he had that one side of him that was so self-righteous and indignant. It seemed to me such a black spot on someone who was otherwise so honest and empathetic. Mary and I had known all along that once he found out that I was lying he would change completely.

"People repeat the things they swore they wouldn't. Sometimes we get so determined not to commit the same crimes that we push back so hard without seeing--" He cut himself off and looked at me. His wrinkles around his eyes were deep; it made him look sorrowful. "Do you understand what I'm trying to say, Eve?"

"I don't know," I said "I'd have to think about it. Maybe I will."

"I don't want to talk about some of the things I witnessed as a child. Just as I'm sure you don't want to say what happened to you in that place. But, I saw horrors and even as a young boy, I knew it came from pure hate. People had been poisoned. I thought I knew what it meant to be respectable." He shook his head and stayed silent for a moment. He looked over at me. "I'm sorry, Eve. I don't know how to say it." He stopped talking for a bit. I wondered what he was thinking. I wondered about what he'd seen as a child. What could have been so horrible? What was he comparing my experience to? Or, was he comparing himself to someone hateful and cruel? Someone like Jeff?

We had been driving for miles and all we'd passed were trees. It seemed we would be traveling through forests until we returned to Bend. I didn't care if he spoke to me or not. I had grown comfortable in a calm, distant place. In the hospital, I'd kept a newsreel of the life I wanted back. It was running in the forefront of my thoughts. But, after it was all over, there was simply numbness. Nothing. No feelings what so ever.

"Eve, look at me for a moment."

I turned and met his glance. "Eve, I'm not saying any of this right. I am not a talker like you and Mary. You know that." He turned back to the road and shook his head. "I hate myself for what I did to you. I always will. There's no way to tell you how sorry I am."

All I could think was how I'd lied. I'd tell people I was a patriotic

widow, and that Charlie was legitimate. I played the part and as I grew to know Mary and Frank I elaborated on the parts of me I knew Frank would love. The girl Frank knew would have never carried on with a married man. I wished I had really been her instead of myself.

"You're not spirited, you know that?" He turned to me again and squinted a little, "No you're not. That's what they said wasn't it?"

"Who said?"

"Eve, are you all right?"

I shrugged my shoulders, "That's what Jeff said. Yes."

"You're not. You're hard working. You're loving. What was a girl in your situation supposed to do? If anything you were brave. I want you to know I see that."

"Thank you for saying that." I felt a wave of panic. "I don't have anywhere to go anymore. I can't go to Sellwood. I can't go back to Jeff."

"Jeff? That man is never getting near you again."

"I have no where to go."

"I don't want you to go anywhere. I know you don't want to live a lie, Eve. But so what if some of your life is a lie? Mary and you and me. So we know the truth. Let people think what they want. Everyone loves you here. People have always respected and loved you."

"People will find out." I whispered.

"Nobody's going to find anything out. Besides, what are you going to do? Send out an announcement to the bridge club or to the ladies from the garden club?"

I shook my head.

"Things pass, Eve. Time just moves on and someday you'll meet someone, Charlie will be the Charlie everyone loves. He'll get older. Nobody's going to get hurt, Eve."

There was more silence and while I never liked the awkwardness that often descended in conversations between men and women, it didn't bother me that day with Frank. A silent detachment took its place. I couldn't even feel something as insignificant as the unease of a stilted conversation.

There was a moment in that car ride. Just a fleeting memory of how I had wanted him to be a father to me. Looking at him driving the old truck, his honest face and spirit, I almost felt sorrow breaking through.

"It's all right, Eve." He patted my hand. "I don't know what happened, but I know they hurt you, pretty bad. It's going to take a little while." He held my hand for a moment and gave it a squeeze. "We're going to get you better. Mary and I are going to take care of you and your little boy."

"I'm sorry I lied to you."

He turned and smiled at me, "You're like the daughter I never had. Did you know that Eve? You're my daughter."

CHAPTER 14

I stayed at the house with Mary and Frank for a few weeks. I was so tired and I was frightened most of the time, horribly so at night. I found I couldn't sleep. I wanted so much to remember some of the time I'd lost in the period surrounding the electric shock treatment. I did remember some of it, but it never surfaced as a complete memory. I remembered my one visit, maybe it was two days before the treatment. That was when Tom and Mary came to the asylum. Seeing them in the reception area. How we all walked through the grounds, but the events just before, during and a day after the shock treatment turned black in my thoughts if I tried to summons them.

One evening I woke and it was late at night. The sky was the blue, black. I sat up in bed and looked out the windows towards the orchard. Everything was a velvety darkness, but still I could see silhouettes of the branches well beyond the window, they looked darker than the night. Something about the scene reminded me of the hospital, bars on the windows and the muted liquid black opening to the grounds. That night, the memory didn't fully form; nonetheless, it caused me to gasp for air. I had the sensation that my body was being held down. I reached for my wrists, but even free as they were, as I lay safe in my bedroom at Mary and Frank's house, I could feel a strap tightening. I couldn't breathe and I wanted to run to Mary and ask her to help me. I was paralyzed. I was mute. I felt I could hear the droning of all of the women who remained locked away. Not their faces, but the sound. It was all those women haunting me. The ones who would never leave. Their hell was rising up around me. The painful moans and cries. For a moment, the human din would stop and I would get up, put on my robe and walk across the hallway to Charlie's room. I would bend over his crib and make sure he was breathing. I'd tiptoe back to the room only to return to him again and again. Each time I ventured across the hallway, I was frightened of the floor beneath my feet, as if snakes were wrapping around my ankles. It was like that almost every night. I'd wait for dawn to begin to illuminate daytime. Then, I'd fall into a half sleep until Mary would come and check on me.

Frank never pressured me but convinced me several times to go over to my house in the daytime and look at the things he'd fixed up and built there. The pergola was finished and the grapes had grown a little, maybe three feet. It would take a couple of years for them to reach the wooden slatted top, and maybe another for the grapes and leaves to fill in the spaces. It was hard to even take the short drive to my house, to walk in the yard. I knew Frank wanted to spark my enthusiasm, but I was too tired. I wanted nothing.

I found that I was tired most of the time and only wanted some tea and toast on most days. Mary would come sit with me while Charlie

was napping. I think she meant for it to be just like it had been before the baby was born. Back when I'd rest in bed and Mary would pull up the rocker. She did this after I was released from the hospital too. But, I felt she was trying to figure out what to do. She'd follow my expressions as I watched the wind move the branches through the window. There was really nothing to think about. I was mostly dead. Fall was beautiful and she urged me to walk with her and Charlie to the gardens I'd plotted out; the one I had promised for her or the one I had started at my own house. I told her I didn't want to, that she should take Charlie by herself.

I was much worse than after Nick died. A constant dull ache that seemed like something I should have been able to push aside and overcome. At moments, it seemed as if it wasn't really that bad at all which made it worse when it returned. It was a weight, a heavy sadness that dominated every thought, feeling or action. It was terrible to admit to myself, but I even felt that way towards Charlie. When I'd sit with him he'd smile and let out a short yell. He'd wait, his pause an invitation to one of his games. He'd run from me giggling but I would just sit on the sofa my eyes focused on the falling leaves out the window. Often when I was lost in thought and then turned back to him, he was standing beside me or trying to climb on me. He'd pull on me and I couldn't respond to him. His brows would furrow and he'd grimace. He'd start crying and run away, screaming "gamma" for Mary to come and pick him up. She'd rush in and I would watch her, pick him up and bounce him up and down and he'd start playing back and forth games with her. "Mine" he'd say as he reached for something on the counter. "No! No! you little rascal!" and he'd break out in peals of laughter. Frank would chase him around the house and Charlie would pretend to hide. Impish and silly, really believing Frank couldn't see him right there next to the fireplace.

One day, Mary and I were sitting in the parlor, on the sofa. She'd made us hot tea and it grew cold on the coffee table in front of us. It was warm outside and the light had that beautiful amber brightness of fall in Oregon. There wasn't a cloud in and I could see the farm hands walking towards the orchard with large baskets, carefully picking apples and I knew once they were full of apples and pears, they'd carry them over to a large bin and Frank would take to town.

"Eve? What are you thinking about?"

"I was just watching the men outside. Don't you think it's hard work?"

She nodded and took a deep breath. "Are you feeling the way you did was after Nick was killed?"

I wasn't afraid of her question. I didn't care about anything. If she thought I was melancholic or insane, it didn't matter to me any more. What was the use in fighting what everyone had seen in me?

"What do you mean?"

"You seem very sad to me."

"I don't know if I am. I just want the quiet. Anything that interrupts it is unbearable." I couldn't take my eyes off the scene outside.

"But you're a mother. Before you left you had so many things you wanted to do. You wanted a house, your garden. More than anything you wanted to take care of Charlie. Don't you want to do those things any more?"

I looked at her. I shrugged my shoulders. I felt the weight and sometimes, like in that moment, it would burst, a hot melting feeling would fill me. I felt both nauseas and faint, but I couldn't cry. I was afraid to feel anything at all. I continued to follow the advice Nellie had dispensed while I was in the hospital. I couldn't remove the wall I'd built around me. I felt if I showed any feelings, I would be in the worst kind of danger.

"You don't even cry any more. Remember how sentimental you were? You and I would laugh or cry at the drop of a hat."

I shrugged my shoulders again, "I don't do that anymore."

"I don't suppose it would help to tell me what happened? Maybe it would help, Eve. To let me know. You know how much I love you. You know you can trust me. I want to carry some of your burden for you."

I turned to her and met her gaze. I didn't believe my telling her would make her understand or that if described the hospital would help me get better. I didn't think it would. I didn't remember a lot of it, it was mostly a series of repetitious thoughts and associated feelings, the invasion of my body and my humiliation. It was starting to form into a story of terrible injustice and violation. I obsessively thought of what Jeff had done to me, each moment a vivid recollection of the events in my bedroom. How he watched me scream as I'd begged him to stop. He must have had some idea of what would happen to me once he saw to it I was committed.

In the end, Jeff had achieved what he'd wanted, what he'd threatened all along. Despite everything else, that was done to me, the worst of it was finding out that his wife had been pregnant while he was breaking my spirit. Even in Eugene. She was sitting at home alone knowing where he was. She must have given birth during my time in the hospital, or maybe just before. I couldn't picture anything but their joy. How could he be there with his wife, holding his baby in his arms? How could that man be the same Jeff who threw me on the floor and twisted my arm. Who told Frank about me and caused me so much terror? To me, that was inconceivable and yet my mind replayed the question in all its irony. I would try to push this obsession out of my mind. As soon as I did, it would start crawling back again. Gnawing at my thoughts. Then the memories would come. They'd rush in, a powerful wave then retreat slowly but the ocean was always there. Sometimes I would fall so deep under the water that I'd almost drown just as Dr. Pope had told me I would.

Mary waited. I don't know how long I'd been lost inside myself. Her face remained drained. I knew it was from the pain she witnessed in me. I shook my head tried and clear my mind. I looked down at my hands, my wrists. There were still red lines, places where my skin was scarred. I didn't know if the marks would stay or just fade over time.

I felt my body shrink. I was a child. "I don't know all of it Mary."

"What do you mean?"

"I don't remember."

"Is there anything?"

I straightened my dress again. I closed my eyes for a moment. Was there anything? Of course there were things. I remembered practicing with Nellie, learning to hold my emotions back. And, the horrible nurses, Dr. Malden's authority. The moment I'd heard him say I needed treatment, that I was a bad mother. I winced at the idea that his predictions had come true, once I returned home, I really had turned into an unfit mother. The hospital made me into the things Jeff and the people at the asylum had accused me of. I was melancholic, I was starting to forget why, starting to believe that it really had been all me and the pattern was real. I wondered if it would be just the same if I met someone like Jeff Lambert again, if I'd let him carry me out of this sadness? I thought I would. I'd let someone fill my life with elaborate lies. Tell me I was more than beautiful, more than special. I'd let a man's hands touch my body and smooth over all the pain. Why wouldn't I? I was promiscuous and immoral. I was very sick. Sometimes I even yearned for Jeff, for him to come for me. I imagined him touching my face and whispering, "don't cry darling." The next undulation, caused the worst kind of shame. I knew it wasn't how I really felt, but it would emerge from nowhere and I would indulge for a moment until the truth descended on me.

"Darling?"

There was Mary next to me. Again, I was losing time. The world of my thoughts, morbid as they were, was taking over. But there was Mary. She was sitting across from me, her hair more gray than I remembered, her beautiful face. She was becoming more elegant with age. Elegant but still a down-to-earth farmer's wife. She was wearing one of her calico dresses and despite that it was a work dress it was ironed and she looked as though she could very well be going to church. It was just her way I supposed, her dignity and beauty.

"Darling, is there anything you remember? We've got to get you back to your old self."

I looked at her, still the tears wouldn't come. "Yes." I answered her with the same dispassion I had come to feel about everything. "I remember being taken into a room with a lot of bathtubs. They were all lined up in two rows. It was nighttime after the other patients had gone to bed. A terrible nurse was there."

Mary leaned in closer and took my hand in hers. She rubbed it. I

could see as she bit her lip that her eyes were growing glossy. She took little breaths and I knew she was holding back tears.

"The it stops. There's nothing. As soon as I remember the bath, I feel Jeff, holding me on the bed, making me look at him while I cried and begged him to stop. Then it's as if I'm drowning in freezing cold water, his body on top of me. It's not a memory Mary. It really happens all over again each time."

I let out a breath, but it only took a moment for me to start up again, "Sometimes I'll remember trying to close the door. Jeff's face looks different when he pushes his way in. It switches back and forth from him to someone else. Someone I don't know, but a man just like him. I'm holding the door. My mind stops and it's as if I drift away and there is nothing but freezing cold. I am the room and I can see Jeff. He stands there, watching me as I scream. Mary, my whole body hurts all the time and it's every time it's the same pain in my wrists and arms, and inside of me. I hate getting into a bath. When I look in the mirror, I see bruises that aren't there. No matter what I'm doing, I'm naked, and the man is there. I try to look somewhere else, but smiles at me over and over and then winks at me. I'm always bitter cold. Just like I am right now. I'm freezing. Feel my hands, aren't they ice cold? Can't you feel how cold they are?" I hold my hands out for Mary to feel.

Tears rolled down Mary's face, "Come here sweet girl," She reached for me. I moved closer to her on the couch and she took me in her arms. She rubbed my back and held me. "It's going to be all right, darling."

Finally, I started crying. I couldn't stop and my cries turned to sobs. She kissed my head and held me. She gently rocked me and whispered, "It's going to be all right."

The End

