



FINDING SARAH

A true story of rape,
seduction, betrayal and
becoming the hero of
your own life.

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For my mother, my father and
my brother, with love and gratitude.
Thank you for your love, strength, humor,
support and encouragement

Chapter 1

It's two-thirty in the morning after a Monday night in group therapy, the first of July. I'm going home.

At eleven, I'd driven to the Troubadour nightclub by myself, parked, walked in alone through the crowded bar to meet Mary and her boyfriend Dan. We found each other in the middle of the room, wall to wall with standing, smoking people waving drinks, found seats at one of the long wooden tables, and had a terrific time drinking club soda with lime, watching people dance in the aisles, stomping our feet, clapping, singing, laughing.

Sometimes I love being third wheel. Especially with Mary and any of her boyfriends. Since Joe broke us up after a year and a half, just two weeks ago, Mary's been pulling me along with her. Clubs, bands, Pop and Rock concerts are not my thing, but they're hers; when she calls, I go. When I was still with Joe and Mary was unattached, she used to hang out with us, and I loved that too. Threes seem natural to me. Or maybe it's just that I feel comfortable with Mary; I trust her.

The musicians tonight are her friends, one is her cousin. We had high hopes for my meeting her cousin the lead singer, but there was no interest on either part, not really, so I said goodnight to everyone, hugged Mary and Dan and walked out through the bar alone.

I'm heading home. Here am. Independent, a New Age woman, I go places alone. I felt kind of cocky walking out on Hollywood Boulevard to my car. I'm going home. A gray sports car is up ahead of me moving brilliantly through the traffic. My spirits are so high now, my impulse is to follow it, and I do, letting it lead me from lane to lane, cutting in and out, speeding down the right hand parking lane.

He goes faster, I go faster. My head is hot from the excitement of the night; the clear sky, with twinkly stars in familiar places, the hot air on my eyes, wind blowing through the side vent window towards my knees, the drum beat I remember from the party music, the thrill

of being happy alone. I pull up next to the sports car at a red light and smile at the fellow driving. He gives me a shifty look, then turns back to the white lines in front of him. He's nervous, I think. He thinks I'm following him.

At the corner of Beachwood and Franklin, at the bottom of the hill as turn to head up towards the Hollywood Sign. I hear a car horn and stop. I turn—A little MG. And Angela Darcon waving from it.

Angela and I haven't seen each other in two years. We turn our cars around each other, wondering: Do we just wave and go on, or stop to talk? Angela pulls into the gas station at the corner, so I follow, pull up. She gets out. I get out. Hug. It's two forty-five in the morning and it's deserted.

"What have you been doing?" we say together. Her eyes are as big as they ever were, and as difficult to read. The smile and the eyes don't match each other, and neither matches the words, and the feelings behind everything you can only guess at.

"I've been in New York," she says first. "Acting. And singing. Oh...you look so wonderful."

"So do you." Her figure is still adorable, her hair just as shiny, not one more wrinkle than I remember. I think this is silly, standing out here. "Why don't you come up for a glass of wine, or water, or whatever I've got?"

"What the hell." I've never heard her swear before. There is a story among her friends that once a car cut her off, and she got so mad she took off after it, driving like a devil, finally caught up to it, and furious, Gave the man The Finger. Our mouths hung open. Angela giving anyone The Finger? What she actually did was rub her right index finger across her left, saying "Shame on you."

Angela gets back in her little orange car and follows me up the hill to my house. I park in my space, next to the six-foot wood fence that surrounds the house, and go to unlock the padlock on the wrought iron gate. I got an iron gate instead of a wood one so that I could see inside, to see if anyone was in the yard before I walked in. Angela parks across the street. We're excited, talking, and I'm opening the door. I close it and lock it—a bolt lock. The windows are open, the side door is open, Sammy and Eggbert peek around the

corner and walk in. I go to close the door after them as Angela sits down at my cloth covered metal table.

I get some glasses of water and we sit at the table next to the windows that look out on the front yard, only it's dark outside and we can't see anything.

There's a sound of the trees rustling outside. I'm startled. It crosses my mind for a second that there's someone out there.

"Must be the cats," Angela says.

Of course, I think, and dismiss the rest.

"I was living with this man in New York," Angela says. When I knew her at twenty-seven, she was still virginal, so this is very interesting. "But...I don't know. And a shrink." She makes fun of herself.

"I've been seeing a shrink for years," I say.

"Well, this is a psychiatrist, and I'm sure he's helping me, but things are hard, you know? Life is hard." Her face turns up to me, making "Life is hard" a question. There is humor and pain and gracefulness in her voice. Her eyes are clear. Her whole body says, "We manage."

"Mine saved my life. I'm so different. I spread my arms out, hoping she'll notice how calm and serene I am now, how I've changed. "I used to be so tight. I couldn't feel anything but tension."

"Yeah. I'm working on that."

"My boyfriend dumped me two weeks ago."

"Ohhhh." She sympathizes.

"God, 'boyfriend' sounds sixteen. I don't know what else to call him. My lover."

"Love."

"What?"

"He was your Love."

"Oh. No. He was never in love with me, I thought I was with him, but that's not possible, is it? It wasn't committed. For a year-and-a-half. And then he met this woman on Monday when they were building the set for the show I'm doing, and that was it. He fell in love. He told me how they both knew it was serious after about twenty minutes. I walked up to them during a break in rehearsal on

Monday night, before he told me. I could tell something was up, but... God, I'm embarrassed."

"He sounds like an asshole."

We talk about men and sex for awhile. Our bodies lean into one another, excited to have someone new to tell our stories to.

It's three-fifteen, and we say goodnight. I walk her out the door and watch her leave safely, then come inside and lock the door. It's cooling down, so I shut the windows and lock them.

My nails are a mess. I'm exhausted, sleepy, but not ready to go to bed and end the night. I'm in the bathroom taking off the nail polish with Kleenex because I'm out of cotton balls, and it's a tedious process because the Kleenex isn't absorbent like cotton and there are four layers of deep rose polish on my long nails. I walk around the house a little, thinking about the evening, about Joe and Carolyn together and me here alone.

I'm in the bathroom, facing the medicine chest mirror, my nail polish three quarters off. Suddenly I feel a presence next to me. A face with a distinctive profile. I think, This is someone playing a joke; then, This is Joe. But no. I'm grabbed, wrenched to the doorway between bathroom and bedroom, held tight by his right arm around my shoulder. A small knife with an orange handle rises over my head, pointing at my chest, coming out of his left fist, his mouth opens wide. Teeth and rage and madness in the eyes.

"You wanna get killed?" he says through his teeth.

I put up my hands to calm him. I put them up between us, to shield me, and to submit to him. "Alright, alright, okay..." But I know I'm dead. This is it, I'm going to die like Sharon Tate, like others in the newspapers. He's going to cut my heart out and I'm going to die in pain. "Okay," I reassure him. He hits me smack across the face. I think I must be talking too much. I've never been hit before. He's going to kill me because I'm talking, and that's what you're supposed to do in this situation, talk. There's nothing I can do. So I freeze up inside. The fear disappears. It's as if it's a movie I'm watching, or a bad improvisation in class hardly real. My stomach is like a dead weight, knowing that butterflies would kill me, it stops churning, makes itself a rock in my middle.

I'm on the floor on my knees, and he's on his knees behind me. The knife is on the floor in front of me in his right hand. I grab the blade. Simple instinct: The blade is there, grab it. I can feel the blade moving in my hands and I have the knife jackknifed between my thumb and fingers. I'm breaking the knife! I think, amazed at my super-human strength. As if the knife is the only way he can kill me. Seems so narrow, the knife.

The telephone sits on the floor next to me, all white against the wood boards and the blue wall. My head is going fast, the only part inside me working. My organs feel unfamiliar—my head's on someone else's neck, my arms and legs don't belong to me. My mind owns these pieces for the moment, but later, I'll give them back. Thinking If I could press the Operator button and keep this man with the knife busy for awhile, the operator will hear, and I can scream my address and someone will save me! I knock the receiver off the hook. I imagine the operator tracing the call. Just as I'm feeling very smart, he jams the phone back together and starts hitting me again.

I can feel, the sharp sting across my face, but I'm so surprised that I'm conscious and not swimming in pain. My mind floats above my body, putting feelings aside. Are they stored? Will I feel later? Or will I die like this, a robot? If I could feel, I would cry for my humanness, taken away by this man, who has none of his own. I am a stick figure out of a two-dimensional comic book. I'm afraid to die without my whole self. I'm afraid if I live I will never be whole again. This is not important. This whole event has no significance, because it isn't happening, not really.

I see myself move to the window of the bedroom, to call, to jump out the window, then stop in confusion when I don't know how to erase the glass louvers. I consider breaking them with my thinking. This is a movie, and there is some way out, or it will end all by itself if I just endure. He grabs me and rolls me on the floor. I'm getting hit, my cheeks, my ears. I'm talking, talking. Talking my way to standing. Then we're standing, face to face, he's so slender and small, not so much taller than I am barefoot. I think I should be able to overpower him. After all, I have adrenaline going through me. I

remember people picking cars off their children. If only my disembodied mind would make this body superhuman.

Somehow I'm loose for a moment and run for the side door. I'm thinking I'll call out, for Louis next door, I'll call Help. I think I'll make it out the door. Some sound gets out my mouth, then his hand is on my mouth, his arms around me from behind, and from within an arm's length of the open door, he drags me back into the bedroom and turns off the light. I'm in despair. I give up. Back in the bedroom is back in the cellar, the dungeon, no air, no escape, back where I started hours ago in the nightmare. No more doors or windows. All of a sudden I am so completely alone. The pale blue walls that have always made me happy turn cold blue. The harsh light shining in from the bathroom is like a morgue light. I'm ugly in it. I can see the blood dripping down on my jeans and hands, I can feel the shaking body I'm in, and then I know it's my body, and I'm bleeding. I'm so scared. But this can't be happening. Not to me. This is the movies, and I'm a movie princess.

I can see his face as clearly in the light from the bathroom and the living room as I did before, then somehow I'm on my knees again, in the same place on the floor as before, right next to the bathroom, in the same position, him behind me, the knife out in front in his right hand, and again I reach for the blade. Again I bend it back. Squeezing so hard, all my strength in the hand holding the knife, never mind that he's practically on top of me. Now I realize it's a folding knife. It flies from my hand and disappears, and suddenly I see myself standing again.

I'm to the left of the bed, near the doorway to the living room, my back to it. He's standing in front of me and he's losing patience. He reaches over and pulls down my tube top to my waist, orders me, "Take off your pants."

My breasts feel the hot air suddenly, and then the wetness of the blood running down them from my face. They are not my breasts. I am not in my body. I take down my pants. For the first time I realize he is going to rape me. It's never occurred to me that that's what he had in mind. Terror washes over me, Oh God, I don't want to be flat on my back, like a fish on a pier, a turtle or lizard upside down, no!

Anything but that, helpless with him on top, totally in control of me, touching my exposed belly. I'm so scared, but there are no tears. My heart is flying up to my throat; I freeze, naked.

"Get on the bed."

God, I'm scared. He comes over and hits me so hard with his fists at my forehead that I'm thrown to the bed, seeing stars. I think I'm going to go out. I say to myself, No, no passing out, stay conscious. I'm bleeding all over the sheet, the pillows. I look up at my red hands and then at him and ask, "Can I wash my face in the sink? Can I wash off some of the blood? Please. Please."

He stops for a moment, considers. Then he leads me to the sink. Puts me in front of it, reaches around me and turns on the faucet. I am facing the mirror. I don't want to look at me. I say to him, "I don't want to look at you, I won't look at you," as if he would be different in the mirror. As if he's stupid. I splash water on myself. I look up. A grotesque red and yellow face looks back at me, Can it be me? Standing behind me, watching me, the man looks even wilder in the harsh bathroom light. His hair is full around his head, mashed down at the sides, spiking up in places, He is different in the mirror. For an instant I know that's me there, that I'm really here, then I turn away from the faces and flee my body again.

His arms reach around to turn off the water, hold me, and haul me back to the bedroom. In the bathroom I had some hope, there was a pause, and time to think. Now the hope goes off into the air somewhere with my Self and my own body. The nightmare is everything.

But my mind is still working. I say, "Can we do it in the living room? I'll be so much better in the living room." Gloriously, he takes me there. Hope returns. I feel better in the open space, where I can see black air outside the open side door. The green carpet is comforting; the light in the room is like a light in my brain. Then he changes his mind and starts pulling me back to the bedroom. I think of something to do. I say, "Oh God, I'm going to throw up!" I try to dredge it up, maybe it'll disgust him and he'll leave me alone. "Take me outside, I'm going to throw up, take me outside." I'm bending

over in his arms, staring at the sea green carpet on the newly finished pine floor. My beautiful floor. "I'm throwing up."

He heads a little for the door, but I don't throw up, so he thinks for a moment instead of following my directions, and takes me back to the bedroom. All my mind can think of to do is pray. He throws me on the bed. I sit up, put my hands together and pray out loud, hoping he's religious. I mean the praying, I hope God is listening, but this still isn't really happening and at the moment there is no God.

"Lie down on the bed," he says, tight through his teeth.

I get on my back, sitting up on my elbows. "Please don't hurt me."

"Just lie down."

"How do I know you won't hurt me?"

"I won't hurt you." His voice is soft.

I lie back on the bed. He spreads himself out on top of me. I try to relax my vagina so he won't hurt me as much as he wants to that's all I remember reading about rape, to relax and not get torn up. He's quick; in and out, then up off me and off the bed standing at the foot of it, zipping his pants up over his green bikini underwear. I watch him.

"Where's your jewelry?"

Oh God, it's not over. I thought after this he'd just vanish, why won't he leave? I jump up next to the dresser to show him my gold chain and earrings, a poor collection.

I think again about going out the bedroom window, but the louvers stop me again. All of a sudden I think if I'm fierce he'll go. Maybe I'll scare him. I think What would Rena do? What would Gretchen do? They wouldn't let this happen to them. They'd be angry. I pick up the small white wood chair sitting next to me and heave it across the room at him. Maybe I can get through the bedroom doorway and outside.

He catches the chair, throws it to the floor, runs to me, throws me to the floor, bangs my head on the polished pine boards. I feel the pain. He's crushing my skull and I'll die, I think. Then the thinking fades to a daze. I see him go into the back bedroom and come out with my empty beige KCET tote bag.

“My purse is in the living room, on the floor. It’s blue,” I tell him.

“See you around,” He says, and disappears.

I pick myself off the floor and start running. I run to the front door. I don’t know where he is. I get the chain undone, then the bolt, and run out the open iron gate to the street. Thank God I didn’t padlock the gate, how would I get out? I think, while I’m running to the middle of the street. Then I hear my voice screaming “Help! Help! Take me to a hospital!” I don’t know how damaged I am. I’m sure I won’t be able to work as an actress for years while teams of plastic surgeons reconstruct my face. All I want is a hospital. Doctors and nurses. Some light. Human beings.

I am so alone, and screaming from so deep inside me my voice bounces off the hills and is all there is.

I turn toward the house, still screaming. The rapist is running out my gate and down the sidewalk toward the main street, my tote bag in his left hand, lies running fast from the sound of my voice.

No one is coming to help me. It feels like a long time I’ve been screaming. I’m terrified he’s going to change direction, turn around and come for me again. I have to find help. I run blindly toward the houses on the other side of the street, still screaming, screaming for my next door neighbor, “Louis! Louis!” but he isn’t coming.

There is a pink house directly in front of me. I’m screaming on the doorstep, but the house stays dark. I run back down the porch steps and next door to the green house, where I’ve seen two big dogs in the yard, but never spoken to the people. The door opens just as I get to it, then the screen door, and a small woman with dark hair is staring at me. She doesn’t seem frightened. With her left hand she ushers me in, then quickly closes the door behind me. I’m mumbling about not wanting to drip blood on the hardwood floor and running for the bathroom, for water to splash on my face. I cross the bathroom, drawn to the mirror, avoiding it. My body begins to shake, thinking of looking at myself in the mirror.

I stand in the bathtub and watch the blood drip on the porcelain. Then I turn on the taps, kneel down, splash water onto my face and hair, as if that would stop the bleeding, erase the feelings that are starting to shake my body, stop everything.

I want to wash the blood off my body. Everything I know from police television shows about rape, not to wash, not to destroy evidence, floats into my brain like an insane voice. If I can follow the directions in my head, nothing will happen, and this will be a made-up movie. I'm trying to be careful of my pubic area, not to get water there, but it's dripping down my chest from my hair. I need the water. It's comforting, clean. It's something can do to feel better.

I want to call Sam; I want to hear his voice, need to know that someone who knew me before this night knows me now. The woman is standing in the bathroom, calm, She's very lovely, and very concerned, standing in her blue robe in the doorway. I ask her name. Mabel.

"Please, could you dial someone for me?"

She brings the phone in from the living room.

"457-4665"

Mabel looks at me. I must be speeding.

Slowly, "4,5,7,4,6,6,4." I must be hysterical. I can't be. Can't let Sam hear me hysterical. But I can't hold it in, either, he'll know I'm holding it in. While Mabel dials, I hear myself talking, talking. "It's my therapist. Sam. I can't believe this is happening, can't believe it." Over and over. I tell Mabel Sam's number ever and over, even though she's almost done dialing, practicing speaking clearly and slowly. She hands me the phone.

"Sarah?"

"Oh, Sam." I remember it's four in the morning and I've woken him up, and I feel guilty. "I'm alright, I'm alive, I'm alright, but I was just raped and beaten up and..."

"Where are you?" His voice is concerned, urgent.

"At the neighbors...I'm alright." I'm feeling guilty and ashamed to be bothering him. I'm a bleeding, ugly, broken pulp of a person. Being helpless is so humiliating I want to fold up and disappear. "I'm alright." I reassure him, reassure me. My voice is an apology to the world for letting this happen to me, though it hasn't really happened, so I'm apologizing for making it up and bothering everyone with my imagination.

"I'll be right there." Oh, My God, I think. Sam's coming over here? To be with me? I'm astounded that he would do that for me. I need him so much on this phone. I stare at the chrome faucet, mesmerized, concentrating on not fainting, on his voice, on keeping together. The water is running on my feet. I am calm, I think.

"Where are they taking you?"

"I don't know."

"Call Gretchen."

"No." No, I don't want to call her. She's my closest friend, and I don't want to be with her. My heart sinks further, thinking of her here, looking gorgeous, seeing me so desperate, so helpless and ugly. I don't want her to see me. "I don't want to bother her."

"Call Gretchen." Sam is draining his voice of everything but firmness.

"No. I don't want to bother her. I'll call John. He's five minutes away. I'll call John."

"I'll be there as soon as I can." The sweetness of his voice washes over me like the water on my feet.

I hand the phone back to Mabel, and she gives him the address while I continue to stare at the chrome faucet, hanging on another second, another second, knowing I'll see him, that he's coming to me, he cares. Mabel's speaking softly over in the corner and I can't hear her.

I stand in the tub, waiting, staring, thinking.

Two policemen in perfect dark blue uniforms appear in the bathroom doorway, their badges catching the light and flashing off the mirrors.

"Get out of the tub! Get out of the water!" one orders.

"I'm not washing up. I know better than that, I'm not washing. Just throwing water on my face." I can't tell him that watching the water run out of the chrome down my feet is the only thing that's real. I assume these men are brutal and insensitive. "Get me a policewoman!" I start to yell. "I want a policewoman!" I keep yelling.

The officers look at each other. "We'll get you a policewoman." One disappears. I turn the water off. The other disappears.

While I'm staring at the chrome, wanting the water, a man in another kind of uniform walks into the bathroom with a metal box in his hand. He sets it down on the toilet seat and pulls something out. I feel him walking toward me and me moving back away from him, till I'm at the end of the tub, with him in front of me, gently studying my face. I realize he has something to do with doctoring; then I realize he must be a paramedic; then I realize there must be an ambulance outside. I'm overwhelmed that so many people are taking this unreal thing in my head so seriously. They look at my face with such tenderness, and I think, pity.

"How bad is it?" I keep asking him. "How bad?"

He looks at me sweetly. "You'll be okay." He has medium brown hair, very straight to his ears, kind eyes, and is very young. This is television. I'm a movie princess—when do I get to take off my make-up and go home? A flash goes through my chest like a laser, and all at once I know this is real, this is happening to me, I can feel, I am a person. Water shoots up to my eyes. But I won't let it out. I shut down my breathing, kill the thought, and tighten my mind against the horror.

Now I only feel gratitude for this man's comfort. He's ill at ease with me. I think, That must be because I am destroyed. I'm beyond repair and he knows it, but thinks I don't. I would give anything not to be so helpless. I can't even run the water. I remember I'm naked. I want to cover up, to run, but I look at the sweetness of his face and feel the gentleness of his energy and sink down to let him do what he must do.

He reaches toward my face with a beige paper thing.

"No!" I back away. "I want a plastic surgeon." I remember a girlfriend of a girlfriend who once dropped a plate out of a cabinet onto her lip and cut it deep. Her husband rushed her to the hospital and had the presence of mind to demand a plastic surgeon to sew her up instead of letting the doctor on duty do it. So I want to have the same presence of mind. No one else would think of that, I think, I am all alone in this. I'll have to think of everything myself.

"This is just to hold the skin together." He looks hurt that I won't let him help.

“How much time do I have to get it sewn up right?” I’m begging for information, hysterical mostly because I don’t know anything. If I am going to be disfigured and mutilated... My defenses roar as I think of taking care of myself, doing the right thing. I trust no one. No one will do anything right. I’ll have to watch everything. I don’t trust Mabel, or the policemen, or this nice man who wants to help.

“You have six hours,” he says, happy to be giving me good news, pasting the Band-Aid on my forehead. I relax a little. My gratefulness for this information flows over the whole room. Six hours!

“And I’ll be okay?” I have hope all of a sudden. Maybe my face isn’t crushed.

“You’ll be okay.” He smiles at me a little, the best he can do, then turns away from me and disappears. Like the Lone Ranger, I think, I didn’t get his name.

Chapter 2

Mabel hands me a towel, She has in her calm hands short light blue cotton robe, slippers, and a blue rubber icepack for my face.

I get out of the tub, dry off, put on the robe and slippers, and sit in the middle of the bathroom on straight backed dining room chair holding the icepack to my face while she dials John for me so I won't get blood on the phone. Jamie, Mabel's boyfriend, comes in to say Hello.

I nod to him, He's very shy, dark, bright. "I stayed out of your way to give you a little privacy," he says. His presence is very comforting. He's a nice man, and I feel grateful and ashamed at the same time.

I calm myself to talk to John.

"Sarah," His voice is clouded with sleep.

"John, need to ask you to do something, but if you can't, it's okay, I understand..." I want to let him off the hook.

"What?"

I tell him.

"Jesus..."

"I'm alright, but I look awful..."

"Sarah..." His confusion and concern wipe out the sleep in his voice. "Are you home?"

"I'm across the street. A green house, The police are here...John. I look awful. I mean, it's terrible. and if you can't, I understand..." I really want to let him off the hook.

"Of course I can. I'll be there in a minute. Jesus."

Mabel takes the phone and puts it on the hook, and just then Gretchen walks through the door of the bathroom.

"Rena called me," she says, and walks to my chair. She's smiling a little, very calm and serene. My insides stop moving again, as if they don't want to move around Gretchen. I roll up into a little ball in my

mind. At the same time I'm so happy to see her. She kneels down at my left side and holds my hand.

My mind is moving very quickly: I keep thinking about relaxing and letting Gretchen's sweet energy go through me, but I'm miserably uncomfortable with her. The confusion is so sad I want to cry, but I won't let go. What is she doing here?" Why did Rena call her when I told Sam I didn't want to see her? She looks gorgeous and sexy even at four in the morning, she has make-up on her dark eyes, making them stronger, like X-rays, and I'm so afraid she can see through me to everything I don't want to see. She looks beautiful, I'm a dirty rag, stinking meat. I've lost my femininity, I've lost my strength. I'm a nothing.

The police come back, holding little pads and pencils. They want to hear my story and get a description. I'm happy to talk.

"He's blond. Very handsome. Small." I use my hands." Not much taller than me." I put my right hand about six inches above my head. "Very delicate features. A beard. And a mustache, The beard doesn't go all the way up...just a little beard, on the end of his chin..."

"A goatee?"

"Yes." Like charades. On the Nose. "And his hair was full, but he had it mashed down at the sides. A thin face. Bones. Cheekbones. Hollow cheeks. A small nose. Small mouth, And...' I'm getting excited that I can remember so much. I'm able to do something! I feel a little better talking, better still to see people listening and writing down the things I say. "...and a very soft-spoken, cultured voice. No street sound. Very proper. A cream-colored shirt and black pants. Green underwear." I go on and on, reciting every detail I can remember. I'm not a dumb, frightened nothing; I can remember details, I can help the police.

Time is stretching out and it takes everyone so long to understand anything I say. I don't trust anyone. They're all so slow,

I start to notice that the policemen are kind and concerned. I feel so miserable and dumpy in this light, short robe that exposes my legs and the little slippers. I yearn for my fluffy blue robe and fluffy slippers. I describe them to one of the officers, Would he go and find them for me, in the closet on the hook behind the door?

It's three minutes later. I waited, thinking he'd never find them, I would make do, but here he is with my robe and slippers.

I stand up. "Oh...thank you." I would hug him if I wasn't so messy and foul. The kindness is making me feel more and more like a human being. I am beginning, against my will, to thaw. In the blue robe and slippers, the robe like a blanket around me. I feel more myself. I can recognize them as mine. I'm no longer naked and isolated, The robe is like a teddy bear to hug.

John walks through the door. The outside is black. I can't see into the dark living room, but everything outside the bathroom seems like the void of outer space. I can't get my mind around what's out there, can't imagine where people who walk through this doorway are coming from. They drop from the sky.

John's face looks bright and hopeful in the moment I see him before he sees me, then it changes, falls, as he recognizes this unrecognizable thing wrapped in blue as me. I'm still dripping blood from the cuts on my head and hands. I imagine it must be dried and blotched all over my face. His face reflects my own despair.

"Oh no...oh no..." He's almost crying.

I'm thrilled to see him. We've been especially close these last two weeks crying together about my breakup with Joe and his with Stanley. He's been suffering and let me see it, and now I don't feel so strange letting him into my pain. He's standing here, very angry and sad that this has happened to me. I can feel the anger in him balancing off the only things I can feel in me: sadness and terror. He will stand up for me.

All of a sudden we're leaving. The police car is standing right out in front. Gretchen will come in the police car with me and John will follow in his car. I want to be with John, not Gretchen, she's making me nervous, but I don't say anything.

We drive down the hill. At the gas station at the bottom where Angela and I met earlier tonight, we slow down. We're pulling into the station. Don't! my head shouts at them. Ahead of me, perpendicular to the car I'm in is another stopped police car. A blond man with a goatee is sitting in the back seat on the side closest to me. He's wearing a white shirt. Now I scream. Gretchen tightens her arm

around my shoulder. I'm going to be killed. All over again. I'm going to die, he's going to kill me, he's here just to get me.

I blink my eyes for a moment and try to crawl into the vinyl seats. When I focus in front of me, he's standing there, police lights shining in his face, a macabre expression on it made by the glare of hand held lights and headlights and overhead street lights and my terror.

"Is this him?" the policeman in the right front seat asks me.

"I..."

"Is this the man who raped you?" he asks again,

I freeze. The man ahead of me might as well be a woman or a small boy. My eyes cloud over and my body tries to sleep on the spot. Gretchen tightens her arm around me. Her calm, her stoniness is like ice water on my wrists. I try to give an answer. There's a gold chain around his neck. I point to it frantically.

The policemen are milling around the two cars, talking. The lights are like the carnival lights on the roller coaster on fire in my dreams sometimes. An officer grabs the man with the gold chain and pulls his arms tighter behind him. I'm rigid; the pieces of me clinging together, fighting each other, make a racket so I can't think. I'm sorry Gretchen's here, having to be near this man, and in danger, I'm so afraid hell see her, and that she's mad at me because she's here and exposed. And all these people with their arms around me and their eyes on me torture me with their necessities. Please God, get me out of here. I don't want to look, I don't want to know, I want it to be over. The man in front of me is so distorted by the distance and the car window and the lights, so far away from me and standing so far above me, all the shadows on his face unnatural, like clown makeup in a nightmare, the nose moved too far to the left, the mouth disappearing in the mustache, the ears uneven.

Another officer comes up to the window by me. "Don't worry. We re gonna take him into the station and book him on a robbery. You can get a look at him tomorrow when you re not so scared."

I relax. Take the first breath I remember taking. I'll see him tomorrow. I don't have to do anything right now. I'm saved. The lights go out on the rapist's face and we drive away.

John and Gretchen on either side of me, holding my elbows, one policeman in front, leading, one behind, boxing me in and making me feel protected, I walk from the police car through the emergency room doors, down the corridors.

I'm on a table in a cubicle. There's lots of light. Someone takes away my blue robe and gives me a hospital gown, a short white ugly thing open at the back, with short sleeves that expose the yellow bruises and the dried blood on my white arms. So ugly. Awful. I feel like I'm going to be booked for a crime, under angry white light that hurts my eyes and my head because I can't hide my thoughts from it.

A nurse hands me a paper package that's an icepack. I sit up and hold it to my face, my whole face, still not knowing how damaged I am. I'm just happy to be doing something for myself. The ice is my purpose in life at the moment. It's supposed to last for thirty minutes, but feels warm after ten.

Sam comes around the curtain and stands two feet from the end of the table, like a hope turned to concrete. His face and beard are my favorite things in the world. Then he moves, and my mind tries to hold him still, to make him a statue I can look at and know is there, something solid. He opens my heart just by looking at me. His face is arranged in that unchanging, composed expression I know that says, I'm here, I'm a professional.

"Sarah."

My body leans toward him instinctively. My hand goes out for him, and he takes it. I can feel that I will get exactly what I ask for, no more, no less. I will get what I need from him, but he will be the judge of what I need.

"Have you called your folks?"

"No. *No*. I don't want to yet."

"Well, I think you'd better call them. What's the number?"

He's sweet and professional and cool. I'm so happy to see him. But I want to comfort him. I want to apologize for having hurt myself, for bothering everyone with my ugliness, for being a bad girl. His whole body is sad. I want to soothe him more than I want to be soothed.

“If they come I’m afraid I’ll let down. I don’t want to frighten them. I don’t want to cry” I mumble, but he looks at me patiently, knowing what’s best, and I give him the number.

My mother and father are coming around the curtain, Sam tells me. My mother looks like an angel, her gray hair a halo around her pale skin. We touch hands.

“Thank God. It’s not as bad as I thought,” she says, and her face relaxes into an almost relieved smile. My father. Oh God, I want to comfort my father. He has high blood pressure, he’s in his sixties, what am I doing putting him through something like this? What right do I have to drag them to a hospital at five in the morning because I’m a miserable failure? I look at them and the tears fall out of my eyes. I don’t want to cry. I’m the bad girl, I have no right to feel; I have to hold everyone up. I don’t want to be a burden. My body is shaking with embarrassment and self-loathing for what I’ve done to people I love. The tears are dripping down my face, a horror I still haven’t seen, and onto the heavy white hospital gown. But this miserly flow isn’t enough to wash anything clean, not my face, my hands, my spirit.

“I’m just happy you’re alive, that’s all that matters. You’re okay.” She studies my face. “You’re not cut?”

No, I shake my head.

Her face brightens even more. “You’re not cut. Thank God. I was sure it would be worse. you’re alive. Thank God.”

The tears are drying up, but they loosened something inside me. For the first time my body feels hog tired it really is. I’m so glad to see my parents.

They move me to another cubicle, and now they won’t let anyone stay with me. I’m enjoying being alone. I hold my ice pack to my face, thinking, quieting down a little. But I hear them in the hallway: Mom, Dad, John, Gretchen, Sam. Too much. Too many. The white curtains around my table insulate me against the room, the other tables. I can hear the crowd of friends but I can’t see them.

Two policemen in plainclothes come into the cubicle and are shooed away by a nurse. They say they’ll come back later.

Then Sam is here. He explains to me what's supposed to happen next. He's very calm, but I can feel his caring under the calm, and I can feel the control.

I know what's happening, but I listen patiently to his explanation. I'll be wheeled into the examining room. A doctor will do a pelvic exam, take cultures, comb my pubic hair. I know all that. I watch television, I read, I knew. But I'm rolling in the warmth of just hearing his voice and knowing he's here. He can say what he likes. Anyway, I'm probably wrong about everything, and he knows everything.

A blonde woman, my policewoman, comes through the curtains, and Sam leaves. She is sturdy, in uniform, about fifty, with her hair piled on top of her head under her cap, and pain all over her pale face. "My daughter was raped a year ago," she tells me, softly. She is glad to be helpful to me. I'm glad to see her. I asked for a policewoman and here she is. Makes me feel like I have some power.

Only now I realize I'm at the beginning of something, not the end. I'm part of police procedure. It's not going to be like the movies. It's not over. I was happy to give myself to the pelvic exam and give the police anything they asked for because I thought it was really all over. I could cheerfully do my bit by tying up the loose ends for them. But no. I saw a man at a gas station. There'll be pictures for me to look at. I'll have to do more. Or do nothing. I'm so tired. Exhausted. My neck and arms ache from sitting up and holding icepacks. It's five in the morning. The adrenaline is starting to ebb and I want to sleep now.

John is with me, and he yells at everyone when my icepack gets warm and there isn't another one to take its place. He's being my anger.

Miriam sits with me in the exam room while I wait for the doctor. She's a volunteer at the Rape Crisis Center at Cedars, and she's very young, a girl really, a student, and very nervous. I must be frightening to look at. I'm talking and talking, telling my story to this new person, so glad to have her hear it. I tell her smiling, waving my arms, being the knife, being him, being me. The doctor still isn't coming, but I don't care; I'm safe. I'm talking and Miriam's listening.

Sam comes into the room, looks around, then at me, puzzled. "Hasn't the doctor been here yet?"

"No," I smile.

He shakes his head, his face calm and orderly but his eyes angry, and goes off to find the doctor. His manner says he's the man in charge, but he looks like a little boy to me, one I want to hold and cuddle till the confusion passes for both of us.

Miriam is taking notes. When Sam was in the room she shrank back a little, intimidated by his tallness and his maleness and the beard and the Ph.D. A man who's a doctor outclasses a girl student. Sam stopped talking when he realized Miriam was there for me, listening and writing and reassuring me that I'm normal, doing her job. It was a gesture of courtesy. He stopped talking and stepped back away from me so she and I could continue the telling of my story. I was divided up. Some of me wanted to talk to Miriam because she seemed so frightened and I wanted to help her. A lot of me wanted only Sam near me. Most of me knew I'm the expert here, and if that's so, then I'm lost.

My body is jumping with adrenaline. No one seems to understand the joy I feel at being alive. They look at me in shock. Every time I smile they look more downcast.

Sam is back, standing quietly a foot away from my table, waiting for me to finish my sentence. He looks at my face, my eyes, with the intense concentration of someone trying to hide his own. I love that hiding. All I see is sensitivity and love, layer under layer under transparent layer.

"After the examination they're going to take you down to the station for a few minutes and get a statement, and then you can go home with your folks," he says, trying to calm me, who is already a rock of calm.

I die inside. I'm not going anywhere. Are you so stupid you can't see that? That I'm not moving? How dare you suggest I move? I'm safe, I'm staying. "Can't you check me in?," I ask him logically.

His features thaw for a moment into upset, then impatience, then....I can't tell. I think he thinks I'm deranged. Now he straightens up his face. "Who's your doctor?"

He understands! He's going to get me kept here! "Doctor Leven. Steve. Stephen Leven. Levens. On Canon Drive in Beverly Hills." I keep thinking I have power, I can remember names and addresses—I am together.

He asks me for the telephone number. I think that's an unreasonable request. I guess. "550-24.. something."

He smiles and leaves the room to phone my doctor. I'm aware that I'm no longer who I was. I don't know who I am, but I'm not who I was.

Dr. Levens is crouched down at my right side, being doctorly and efficient, but his eyes give him away, just like they do everyone else. The staff doctor who examined me was nice, young, tall, handsome, and extremely kind. I joked with him, telling him I was okay, he could relax. I am so grateful to be surrounded by human beings whose eyes are kind.

John is searching the emergency room for icepacks, hollering. I've been sitting up for so long holding them to my face that my back and neck are stiff and aching. I ask Dr. Levens for a plastic surgeon, as I've asked everyone who crossed within five feet of me since I first walked through the glass doors of the hospital. I will not be touched by anyone but the best plastic surgeon. I'm an actress. I can't afford scars.

The plastic surgeon. The nurse tells me he's on his way, the best. Dr. Grendel. My heart goes dead. Then flops, like a fish giving up on ever seeing water again. "Oh God, not Paul Grendel."

"Yes, I think so."

"Oh God."

"Sort of blandish. Curly hair. Medium height."

None of it sounds like him, but the name is him. I'm cringing deep into the hard table. I have loved Paul Grendel since I was eleven years old, all through grammar school and junior high and high school, and he never much looked at me, except as another egghead sitting in front of him in algebra and chemistry. I asked him to a party once, and danced up close to him with all my buried sexuality. I longed for him. In the last year of high school he dated one of the loose girls in school. I couldn't understand. I didn't

understand what he saw in her, but really I did, and wished to God I wasn't such a nice Jewish girl who could know nothing about sex. Much less do it. I only dated boys, when I dated, that I wasn't attracted to, spending all my time with them pulling away from their embraces, their words, their longing for me. Their paleness sickened me.

When I was a Junior at UCLA I was hired for a play opening in Boston. I knew Paul was at Columbia studying medicine, and on my day off I flew to New York to see the city and him. We spent the evening together, he bought me dinner, drove me around in cabs all over the city. He smoked a pipe and I popped Contac to hide my bad cold from him. When we got to his apartment I trembled with the possibilities, but nothing, but nothing happened. I don't know why; whether he didn't want to or I was just too scared and virginal and loved him too much, but I went home dreaming about him. I still think about him. I still dream about him sometimes. He's the elusive, unattainable man, the dream I've carried in my body since I was eleven and now he's about to walk into my cubicle in this emergency room with his doctor white coat and clean hands and see me rumpled up, reeking and bloody on a table under glaring lights. I am mortified at the thought. I pray it isn't him. It's some other Dr. Grendel.

I hear voices. I think I recognize the voice. The curtains come apart briskly in a single sweep and Yes, there he is. He breezes the two feet to my table, wearing a white lab coat and a starchy smile. His eyes are still green.

"Sorry to be seeing you under these circumstances," he says, the perfect doctor. He and Sam are a team of orderliness, making me uglier in their presence. I want to die. No, I don't, I remind myself, didn't and I don't. I'm just humiliated to have him see me like this, a victim. I'm deeply embarrassed to be a victim. I've offended myself. That's why I'm holding my head up and joking, being my idea of a good sport. I can't bear it a second longer. My dream and my nightmare are in the same room at the same moment. They tear me apart.

He's blonder than I remember, older, his hair is curlier and longer and less flattering and he's a little heavier. But the mouth is still there,

full and sensual. All of a sudden I see what I was most drawn to all those years: his mouth. He smells fresh and I smell rotten. I'm a piece of butchered meat that will splash his lab coat with blood. When he leaves me my smell will be with him. I'm falling. Any minute I won't be able to smile anymore.

I rail at my unwashed body. My hair is a bloody goop. My nails ache without their protective polish, it hurts them to breathe because they are used to being coated, I notice I'm holding my breath. It's uncomfortable to breathe in the light, unbearable to breathe what Paul exhales, to breathe in the same air, Of all things, I rage under my still lungs, the asshole rapist had to interrupt me while I was doing my nails.

I'm such a mess I want to crawl into the floor, but I'm here on a table like a fly under a microscope, between the mirror and the lamp shining down, on a pin waiting to be picked apart. There's nowhere to go. He will look at me as I crumble under his hand. This is a flat table, people stare at me, the merciless fluorescent lights turn me purple and laugh. The lights are becoming my friends because they are the one constant in the world. The lights don't come and go, they don't change, they are there.

Paul is an asshole. He's flip, casual, chatty. "So how've you been?" he asks. If he knows this is a stupid question at the moment, I don't see it in his eyes. They are the most opaque eyes I have ever seen. With Sam, I know there's a shaking human being underneath, at least I think I do, but with Paul, there is only more ice, denser and denser.

To him, this is like meeting at a party. We're going to catch up on old times. Part of me is screaming at him, the rest still longing for him.

He and his assistant briskly go about sewing me up. "Not too great at the moment," I answer him, joking.

"So what have you been doing since the last time I saw you, what was it, ten years?" he says.

"I don't want to know how long." I am meditating, hypnotizing myself into being an ideal patient, withstanding the needles exquisitely.

“You’re doing great,” he says.

“So what’ve you been doing? I don’t feel much like talking right now, you talk.” Tears are starting to drip out of the corners of my eyes. There is a needle going in and out of the skin over my left eye and I’m still.

“I got my degree at Columbia. Well, you know that. Then I did a fellowship in England, in London, and then in Scotland.” He’s still chipper and chatty. The scissors cut the thread, then excess skin from the sutures. “I’m so quiet I can feel how much I want, how much I want things to have been different all my life. I’m helpless on this table and Paul Grendel is sewing me up like a frog in high school biology.

I sit up and he patches my hands. He’s in a hurry and what he’s doing is too tight and hurts. I tug at the bandage and the gauze unravels off my finger.

“I wish you wouldn’t do that,” he says, with such aggravation, impatience and condescension I jerk upright, staring at his profile in horror. I want to hit him and scream and crawl in the corner at the same time. Dr. Levens is at my right side, looking at my swollen face, saying, “She’s beautiful anyway, isn’t she?” to Paul and getting No answer.

He ties up my finger again, then turns his attention to my nose for his assistant and Dr. Levens’ benefit. He touches it, saying, “There may be a fracture there, but we’ll see from the pictures.” He smiles for me. “I have a breast reduction at eight and I’m almost late.” He presses on my nose again, hard. It hurts as well as making me feel like a poked dead bug. Then he presses again, too hard.

I swing at his finger. “Hey, cut it out, will you?” I say, standing up for myself for the first time today. “What’re you trying to prove?”

“I’m sorry,” he apologizes. I see his face move for an instant and regret pass through his eyes. Then the “Sorry” rings in the air like an apology for my stupidity and the young man’s smile takes over his face again.

“I’ll see you later,” he says, and is gone.

My folks come back, and John, and Gretchen and Sam. I’m emotionally exposed and frightened. My dream is crushed and my

pride wounded, my head hurts and I want to be alone but I don't want to be left. My mouth won't speak any of this, and I can barely cry. Paul will see me later.

Chapter 3

I've moved into my parent's house, and brought Samson and Egbert with me. It's a miracle that they get along with the four cats that live here already. Louis is feeding Chauncey until I can figure out what to do with him.

On Sunday night, Gretchen came over for the evening carrying beautiful, long-stemmed purple flowers, the kind that dry out and last forever. I started to tense up the moment she walked in the door.

She looked around, sat at the dining room table while I put the flowers in a silver pitcher, one of the wedding presents I kept, seeming a natural part of the house and the air, talking easily with my mother, while I got stiffer and stiffer, hating it, not knowing why I was tense, hating my ignorance, feeling tiny. "Even I feel nurtured here, just being here," she said.

We sat together at the edge of the pool, swaying our legs in the cool water.

I first met Gretchen in my living room. She, Harry and Harry's then best friend David and I sat in the straight-backed dining room chairs because we'd just cleared out all the heavier furniture for the carpet installers, and talked for a half an hour before she and David left for dinner. Her hair then was soft around her head, and Harry liked her because she was "very sweet to David."

I'd brought David to Sam, and David brought Gretchen to Rena. She was already in the Monday night group when I joined, the week after Sam told me I was living a lie. There was a distance of light years between us, between the timbres and speeds of our voices, and I knew we'd never be friends.

But after I'd moved out of the house, thinking Harry would come after me, after he fell in love with Geri instead, Gretchen and I inched toward each other. David was causing her pain, and once she called me, crying, and then thanked me for listening; "Thank you for being there," she said, it was the first time I'd ever heard those words like a medal bestowed just for picking up the phone and not hanging up right away.

After that she came over one afternoon to comfort me when my first love affair since Harry broke apart miserably, and we laughed on the terrace.

Rena used to say we were opposite sides of the same coin. She dark, me fair, she angry, me appeasing, she able to cry, me talking instead, she “heavy duty,” me “flighty,” she Queen and me underling. We started hanging out together, going to movies, having dinner, decorating our apartments and watching opera on television. But I never felt really comfortable with her, never. I always thought it was because I just wasn’t up to her level.

When she confronted me for dissembling, I thought it was good for me, and I loved her for it; we said we were on each other’s side, always telling the truth. But at night, or in the afternoon if she decided she wanted to see her boyfriend instead, she dismissed me, like some little friend or tacky cousin. Her praise and criticism seemed to me disinterested, but I thought that was the right way to do things. I thought she was the one who knew how to be a friend.

It was her role in the relationship to know about emotions and energy fields and everything mystical. She was psychic, read Tarot cards, talked of leaving her body in the middle of the night, and practiced birth control by astrology. I was into saving money, meeting men, mathematics, trying to keep order in my hopelessly disordered life, my father and mother’s sense of the practical and secure, learning about all of Gretchen’s things, and never once forgot my diaphragm.

I think what she likes about me, what she wants, the way I want her darkness and fire, is my lightness. I’ve always been a buoyant person, resilient, determined, energetic, and optimistic. But this she says she hates in me, calling me a Pollyanna, and never misses a chance to call attention to it, especially on Monday nights.

We’d get together for coffee after group and talk about other people. Lately she’s become close to Melinda, a new member of the group, a tall auburn haired creature, elegant and refined, who wants to lose all that about herself and become an Earth Mother, and I think they get together and talk about me. I used to think I was jealous, but I spend time with Melinda too, sometimes the three of us

go out for lunch or dinner. After two years in group, Melinda has changed her whole look and personality, dropping the reserve and becoming earthy, but to me it seems a veneer, studied, if sensuality and spontaneity can be studied; I miss the cooler Melinda. She had class.

In these last months, when Joe and I were falling apart and she'd split with her latest rich boyfriend, we spent a lot of time together, depressed. Instead of lifting one another's spirits, I left her bluer than I was before I left the house, and by the end of the evening she would have drifted away into some dark memory or foreboding.

Last night, cooled by the water on my legs in my father's backyard, I felt guilty. I want to be Mommied by everyone. I have a mother; why isn't she enough? I was so embarrassed I could've crawled behind the palm tree and covered myself with dead leaves.

It's seven-thirty, another Monday night, and Gretchen pulls into the driveway to take me to group. Already I'm jumpy. I don't want to owe her for the lift. I shiver thinking of her in charge of the drive, giving myself over to her managing her big car on the freeway.

I hate being so frightened in her presence. I hate being vulnerable with her. And Gretchen hates weakness. She's smiling, so dark, her eyes firm, her hands relaxed, her whole body in such serene grace compared to my wretched stiffness.

"Drive carefully," Mom sends us off. Mom thinks Gretchen is sweet. She is. What's wrong with me?

I open the car door, get in, get comfy. What a large car! It's all burgundy, inside and out, leather, warm. But I don't feel safe. My heart is going out the window in some other direction from my body. It's trying to fly out my mouth, it beats in my head, in my ears, and my body is staying put, sinking down through the leather, through the steel, melting on the driveway. She could take off without me. I could slide away, I'm afraid of the road, of the night, of thirty minutes alone with Gretchen. Thirty minutes of not saying what I feel, whatever it is.

It's the same room I've been in every Monday night for almost three years. The carpet is new, maybe ten months old, but the lamp is

the same, with the three-way light bulb that gives either too much or too little light. The same pillows on the floor we sit on, our backs against the same pillows against the same white wall, all around the room. Sam sitting on the floor against the sofa, where he always sits, his hand on Rena's foot, her legs tucked under her on the couch. The same people in a circle. Gretchen on my right.

I don't really want to be here. I am ashamed of my purple and yellow face. I feel alien.

But I'm sitting on my favorite pillow, against the soft purple and brown pillow I like behind my back, in the spot closest to the door so I can tolerate the cigarette smoke. I've never liked the smoking in here. Now I hate it. I hate Gretchen, I hate everyone, because they are not me, I am not them. It's all different. I don't know how to be. I want Sam to come bouncing up and hug me. My God, do I want to be pitied? The room is quieting. They wait for me to begin.

"I feel like hitting..." I say. My eyes are beginning to water. I want to be good, I want them to like me, love me. Please just hold me. But mostly I'm frightened. This is the first time I've been out at night; I'm afraid of the dark, of the night and the evil that crawls out when the sun goes down.

I love these people. I know some of their pain. I want to be whole so that I can comfort them. I want to forget myself, disappear. If I can just help them, help others, love them, I can disappear.

"Allright." Sam moves over a big pillow, plumps it up right in front of him. I crawl over on my hands and knees to face him, Rena, the pillow.

I love Sam. I trust him.

"Okay, now make a fist," he says. I bring my arms up above my head, interlocking the fingers, tensing my hands. I'm kneeling in front of the pillow but I see no face in it to hit. Wham. I slam my hands and forearms on the pillow. Again. Up over my head, wham, down on the pillow. All of a sudden I see a face, his face, the rapist. I hold the pillow down with my left hand and slam into it with my right fist. Wham. "Ahhhh," I'm grunting. Wham. My voice is getting louder. I'm up on my knees, up tall, then with my full weight, wham, down

on the pillow. Ahhhhh. I'm starting to yell. Hit, hit, hit, slam. I want to kill. I see his face and I'm smashing it. Sam has the pillow in his hands, he's moving backward. I follow him. I see Sam's face. I love that face. I want to kill this face on the pillow. But it's in pieces. It won't come together. It's hair and then it's a beard, just perfectly remembered pieces. I'm lower on my knees. The tension is in my thighs, my shoulders, I am a steel rod, hitting this face with all my rage. I'm screaming. Shrieking.

The rest of the room is quiet. I feel the others. I'm embarrassed. My shoulders want to keep hitting. All of a sudden my eyes open up with tears. I'm in agony because I am hitting. I don't want to hit. He hit me—I don't want to be a person who hits. The sounds are high, the soundproofing can't hold back my shrieking. The pillow is soaked with my tears. My purple T-shirt is soaked with my sweat. It feels like everyone's moved into the walls; dissolved into their little spaces and I'm in an empty place with the pillow where even Sam can't get to me. They've run. I'm exhausted.

I sit back on my heels, sobbing. Part of me was with the pillow, getting hit. Part of me was with him, and that hurts the most. I feel like him. Or like he's a part of me. Closer to me than any of these people. They will never understand. I'm sitting on my heels like a grown person, but I want to crawl into Sam. He moves the pillow away. Gretchen has a question. I turn to look at her. I'm blurred. What world am I in? I am five years old in some aunt's garden. Someone tell me how to behave.

"Did you know the man?" she asks.

I shake my head, No.

"Have you ever seen him before?"

"No.

"How could you...? I mean...the way you live your life...opening yourself up to strange men on the street!" Her face is much looser than mine, the dark hair, the dark lipstick, dark eyes surrounded by black eyeliner—she's so powerful, so right, so angry. The angry person always seems right to me. She is right anyway. She's upset. She's blaming me. I blame me. I want to fold up. I am guilty, miserable, incompetent. I've been stupid. I want to listen to what she says, I

want to change, but I hate the listening. I think, I've never been so careless, never taken home strange men. I'm friendly. I'm warm and Gretchen is cold. I say, "I don't understand what you're angry at...." I'm frightened. I don't want to drive home with her.

"Gretchen's just trying to...this is the only time to ask these questions, now, before you close up...it'll be too late," the members of the group say. "I think Gretchen's asking you in a very loving way," Pat says.

Am I crazy? I know that learning about yourself is painful, uncomfortable. It does not feel good, ever, to be confronted with the truth if you've been busy covering it up for twenty or thirty years, but now, now? I can't see. I'm beginning to be boring. They're angry. I don't blame them. The beige and brown room with the tacky multi-colored couch has turned gray and ugly. It's like a vat of steam. The air's so heavy. My heart wants to sleep. My back is now a steel plate. I cover up inside. I don't want to look at anything. I don't understand anything. There's a heavy, awful feeling in every part of me that this is not all over. I have to do more. I can't just forget and heal. This is just the beginning. I feel like I'll never heal.

"Sam, I want to go back to my house tomorrow night," I say. "I want to walk through it." Sam's face hardly registers anything, but I think he's pleased. He wants to go with me.

"How's eight o'clock?" he asks.

"Good."

"Do you want Rena to come?"

I hesitate.

"Say what you want, Sarah. So you want Rena or not?"

No. I don't. I want Sam all to myself. "Yes," I say. "Okay."

What makes me think Rena wants to come? She'd probably rather stay home. What am I doing? I'm jealous. I must hate her. I think she should come and protect Sam from me. She should keep me from feeling guilty.

It's Tuesday, eight o'clock in the evening. I'm standing with Mom and Dad and John in front of my house. I'm all forced calm, so stiff. The streetlight's on, but the house is dark. A burgundy colored Buick

is turning the corner, coming toward us. Sam and Rena. I've never seen them outside the office. I'm amazed they have a car. I haven't ever really imagined them with a life, not a real one, just a made up one, like the fantasies of my own life that run through my head.

They park. They're out of the car, coming towards me. So many people here, too many. I can't be myself. I don't know what myself is. My insides light up as Sam walks to me. He's carrying a small tape recorder in his right hand, he slouches his way over to my folks. Rena is tall, erect, beautiful, cool. I'm all blotchy and stupid. If Sam can still like me, love me, I'm all right. He's the only one who counts. Why?

I'm a hard shell, not a person. A smile on a hollow body. Waves of tension bounce off my inner walls, from inside my leg to inside my armpit, from stomach to back to eye socket the energy ricochets. Something wants to get out.

Sam has a sense of adventure about his face. His eyes say "This is going to be exciting and interesting." I can feel his blood moving fast. I turn to look at the house.

"You ready?" he asks.

"Yes." I am, very. I'm walking to the front door. Sam is slightly behind me, at my right shoulder. I wish he'd touch me, hold my arm in his hand. Instead, he holds up the tape recorder.

"Just in case you remember something important. If you say something accidentally...."

My shrink, detective of the mind, now a real-life Columbo. What could he be thinking? I wonder about his excitement. Seems...I don't know...No. Sam is a perfect creature. When I'm around him I feel in a state of hope.

Mom, Dad, John and Rena are standing on the sidewalk behind the gate. My key is in the lock. I'm turning it to the left and I can feel the bolt move. I go numb. I am only a half-smile, a paste-up picture of a woman turning a lock, feeling nothing. *Where is she going?* reads the caption. My mouth clamps shut against the old, bad movie I am entering. Then it opens so I feel my teeth against the hot night air. In another second I'll be somewhere else.

Now I'm pushing the door slightly. The light switch is just inside the door on my right. I'm reaching for it, I flip it on, light floods the living room and suddenly there are colors. The green, a light sea mist green, bits of carpet on the newly sanded pinkish-brown, polyethylene protected pine wood floors, the white cushions of the couch, everything sprinkled with red. Drips of red, like paint, like catsup, like the movies. My heart is still. No jumping, moving, sliding, no whispering. It's at Stop. Breathing stops. I want to turn back. I feel Sam next to me. He doesn't know what I'm going to do. I can feel his body and it feels safe. He stops and waits: I feel kindness and curiosity touch me; his warmth holds me up and makes me ashamed. I want him. I want him always with me.

The red is blood, I follow my trail to the bedroom. My heart's moving again, murmuring a little, talking to me through my ears. The house is hot. Poor house. I hate it now. Meow. Chauncey screeches to be fed from the side door. He is truly afraid. He's so real that he pulls me out of myself: a live furry thing that only needs to eat and sleep. He's afraid of people and hands and love. I worry about him: what will I do with him, this wild, frightened, homeless cat?

"Chauncey, oh, Chauncey... hang on a little, we'll figure something out, I promise...."

Now I'm past the bedroom door. The room is a tumble. The sleeping bag I had spread over the bed as a comforter is on the floor, all bloody, all mixed up with the stained sheets, the pillows are all over, the white chair stands in the corner covered in white fingerprint powder. The telephone sits on the floor just to the left of the doorway, smeared with my dried blood, pasted over with white powder. I'm stopping again. I can't take it all in.

There's blood on the floor, on the cream-colored carpet pieces, the cheap white dressers. I feel fear starting in my knees, riding up to my throat. All I want in the world is for this not to be. I want it never to have happened. I don't want to deal with five minutes from now, an hour from now, tonight, tomorrow, tomorrow night. The future looks like more of the same. My face is burning. My body is turning to lit charcoal, simmering. I'm crying, the tears drip on the floor on top of the caked blood.

Sam kneels down to pick up the telephone, now an abstract sculpture, red and white smears on a white plastic found object. “You ought to save this.”

“Yeah.” The white fingerprint powder adds an extra nightmarish quality to the scene, it’s so eerie to know the police have been here, rummaging through my house, seeing how I lived, leaving bits of themselves to mark what they saw. The big blotches of white on the floor are like snow and glue, like flour paste, like starch and rice powder, like the raised maps of the world I made in grammar school, somehow familiar. My space has been violated by a lone rapist, and by two or three police protectors with paintbrushes and tape. Did they find anything? Did they overlook anything?

Sam looks around. I’m standing here with this man I love and can’t love, and my life is broken all around me. My past is sealed off. I will never come back here. One pain is over; new kinds begin.

Mommy and Daddy are so sturdy, outside waiting for me, waiting to take me home and take care of me; I can rest; I am blessed. Lucky, lucky girl. I’m calming. My breath is beginning again, it’s bringing parts of my body back to each other. My feet belong with my arms, my stomach with my head, I can feel how they might function together.

I’m moving around the room, a ghost returning, trying out the evil spirit that sent me away. I can’t. In the bathroom I feel his presence at my left shoulder, around me. The knife is a shining orange spark imprinted on my eye, it glows in my dreams, it floats in space over my head as I stand in the doorway. I look at Sam. I beg him with my eyes to make sure this is only a dream.

The chair is in the corner, covered in white sticky powder. I’m amazed. Did I really throw you at him? What was I thinking? Poor chair. You got beat up too. I’m talked out. Back in control of the house. I’ve survived another bad night here. I remember so many of them—in loneliness, in despair; the house is filled with bad nights. It is folding up under the weight of its karma. I wonder who lived here years ago, then years before that.

Sam is hugging me. Something is very different. We hug all the time, but this is different. My pelvis is three inches from his thighs.

It's a spell. Does this man love me too much? I can't breathe. We move to the bedroom doorway. Mom, Dad, John and Rena are waiting at the open front door.

There are paintings on the wall around the room that I've painted over the years; they're of my cats, of the way I saw things out my old windows when I was married: one's a sky of swirling blues and greens around streaks of a white cloud. It's a painting of turmoil that makes me feel balanced. I can see who I am in it. I'm lifting it off the wall gently to take along. Rena stops me.

"What're you going to do with paintings?" She's smiling, calm. "Take the food and forget the paintings." She's cleaning out the refrigerator, packing the cheese and salad dressing and tea in a basket. She hands it to me. I take the basket in one hand and the painting in the other.

Rena turns from me and snickers. If I could push her in a hole and take Sam from her I would. Sam is her husband, and I want him.

Chapter 4

Here on this Abbey Rents bed in this room in my mother's house where my brother used to sleep before he went off to live his life, I realize I can't sleep with my back to the door.

The theater's parking lot looks like a black sea floating multicolored cars that Mary and I'll have to wade through, slowly, like moving in a nightmare, to reach the pretty and lanky actors waving nonchalantly from the open door. From here I can smell the stage; the dark, the cigarette smoke heated by the lights, the history.

The director cancelled tonight's performance, and instead we're going to rehearse; I wonder if he's worried I'm going to fall apart on him.

Sandy waits for me inside, on the stage, hand on hip, dark eyes softening. "Hi."

I take off my sunglasses to show them all my face, still purple and yellow, and my eyes, still black with red spots in the whites; I want to get this part over with *fast*. They look.

"Are you putting ice on it?" Michael asks, like a doctor to a prizefighter.

"Only the first twenty-four hours, after that..."

"No, keep putting ice on it."

The other men, Dan and Steven and Douglas the director, kind of nod in my direction with brotherly smiles that don't quite turn up. I want to comfort them. My heart breaks to see how their sweet faces trying to wear the studied expressions they'd planned, while they think some other thoughts. The muscles in their cheeks hang low, life comes and goes from their eyes, they are here and then they're not. I know this because of how much I love them and how glad I am to be here, to have work to do. I love them because they haven't raped me. They would have helped me if they could.

Four weeks ago I sat cross-legged on the lawn across the street during the long technical rehearsal, reading a book while inside they set up the lights. A red car pulled up in front of me. It was a full

twenty seconds, I'm sure, before I even noticed it sitting there, I was so absorbed in the book, and then a man's voice spoke to me in Spanish. I looked up to see a round man and a young child sitting in the front seat, the man waving at me.

Without thinking I went back to my book.

He spoke again. I heard, "Baby."

I looked up, angry to be disturbed, and said, "Leave me alone."

He wouldn't leave. He kept waving and ordering me over. I said, "Leave me alone," again, louder. I was thinking of the child. How could he do this in front of the child? Enraged, I picked myself off the grass and walked in front of the car across the street to the theater, where five or six actors milled around in the parking lot, talking, saying lines to themselves and to each other.

Michael had heard me telling the man to go away, and he and Dan were walking across the street to the red car, saying things I couldn't hear. I retreated to the dressing room, embarrassed, to change into my nurse's uniform; the voices filtered through the door, getting louder, until I opened it and saw that the man in his red car, with the child beside him, had pulled into the parking lot and was yelling. Six actors yelled back. Was this because of me, I thought? I am not a femme fatale, I don't deserve this. But I loved it. All those men defending me. And it sickened me. The man had chased me because I had rebuffed him. He was angry.

Now the man in the red car has become a man with an orange handled knife who followed me into my house. I feel humiliated. I think my friends hold me responsible.

They shuffle and sway, wandering around the scenery, lighting cigarettes, looking discreetly at my bruises. They are men, and they know what some men do to women; they know what they can do to a woman by being bigger and stronger, and they feel such hatred sometimes. They have rage against women, deep down, stuffed down, and it makes them uneasy.

Sandy wants to change a direction. Her character is supposed to slap my character across the face. She doesn't want to do that anymore; not with my face all purple and yellow, not with my red eyes, which I may hide with little glasses I bought that hang just right,

covering the black bruises. She doesn't want to seem that cruel. And she can't bear to touch me that way, even pretending. We try all kinds of stage fakery. I don't mind how we do it, or if we do it, or what we do. I love Sandy and I love Douglas, and I love the lady I'm playing with her sweetness and earthiness and love of life. I love being here on the stage under the lights, working. Gentleness floods the theater. Voices are calm and quiet, movements have slowed down. I'm fine. I want everyone to see that I'm fine, so they can relax.

We finally settle on Sandy going for me with the flat of her hand, me blocking it by putting my hands in front of my face, turning away, and squeaking. This is special tonight; there is electricity in the theater, an expectancy. But no audience. Only the actors.

We begin. At the climax of the play, my character runs across the stage pursued by the gardener, screaming, "Help! Rape! Rape!" Ahhhh, Method acting.

No one wants to see me do this. Dan, who plays the gardener, doesn't want to move. He wants me to know this offends him; he's very Christian, very moral, and very upset. But he says nothing, suffering quietly, looking mournful. I know this is pretend. The coincidence is so incredible, I find it funny.

At the end of the play, Dan and I re-enter, my dress torn from the shoulder down, my hat askew; we are now in love with each other.

It was at this theater nine years ago that I met Harry, my ex-husband. I'd come to a regular monthly meeting on a Monday night to rejoin the company after graduating from UCLA and spending a summer in Europe. Not knowing anyone in the room, I settled myself in the top row next to a tall, dark-haired, exotically beautiful woman who sat smiling and crocheting a multi-colored shawl that already spread out over two seats.

I took off my jacket slowly, mesmerized by a man standing in front of the raised stage yelling, waving his arms, leaning forward as though at any moment he would leap up and smack the company's president on his balding head with the gavel. He looked up to the shawl lady for a moment, saw me, froze his arms in midair, and smiled as though he were two years old and I was something fuzzy

and wonderful. Then he went back to yelling, picking up his gesture at the spot he'd left it, sharp, clean. From where I was, I looked down on a bald spot on the top of his head.

Grace flowed through his agitated, long limbed body, wispy hair flying and energy radiating out from his long, beautiful fingers that turned like a magician's as he pointed, drew and erased word pictures. Every few moments he'd look up to me and smile, his face warming the room, and I'd smile back. My hair then hung long and straight to my shoulders, fighting the wet night air, beginning to frizz at the ends, a very pale blonde. I brushed it back over the collar of my coral colored sweater that hid the shaking in my upper arms and softened the hardness of my jaw.

After the final vote was taken and he'd won, snapping his fingers and turning to the room in victory, he leapt up the fifteen steps to where the shawl lady Felicia and I were now discussing needlework, cocked his head to the right and looked straight into my eyes.

"Well, hello," he said.

"Hi."

He was smiling at me so brightly, I hardly had to do anything to keep up my end of the conversation.

"Would you like to go for coffee?"

"Sure."

"First I have to say goodbye to that girl over there," he pointed to the door where a cute girl in pigtails was waving on her way outside. "I want to be nice."

I didn't understand. Later I found out she was the last girlfriend, and he was being friendly and polite. I liked that about him. Felicia and he had lived together for three years. All his lovers stayed his friends. None of mine had. I liked that.

He just kept smiling, like I was a new toy at Christmas.

At the neighborhood hangout at midnight, we leaned towards each other across the coffee cups and the corner of the table, gesturing wildly, talking fast, hearts pumping, smiling, tense, utterly charmed by each other. All hyped up. My stomach turned with an attraction I'd never felt before.

"Look how fast we both move," he said, waving his arms.

It was amazing we didn't knock things off the table, water glasses and napkins.

All the years we were together, when I rehearsed in this theater I felt safe. Harry was here to go home with, or go home to.

Now, at the curtain call I look out and see that all the men have left the audience; they're outside smoking and talking, waiting for notes. Only Mary is in the house, clapping.

In the parking lot, everyone gets into their cars quickly and goes, leaving Mary and I standing suddenly alone in the dark at midnight, searching for car keys. I shake, terrified, wondering how they all moved away so fast. Michael waved goodnight a moment ago. How inconsiderate. You'd think now everyone would know a woman isn't safe in the dark in Hollywood.

Chapter 5

It's three weeks now, and I still jump at loud noises. When someone walks into the room too quickly. Every sound. Every voice.

I'm in the lobby of Parker Center downtown to identify the rapist at a lineup, standing against the wall so no one'll see me and I won't see him. This is an attractive building; not stucco, old, depressing, but glass and steel, modern. I need to be places without a lot of history. As though we could all start fresh together. From the parking lot I could see the stores and restaurants of Little Tokyo, amazed I was noticing anything but my own heartbeat, saying to myself: Remember this, remember this. I can give this memory to my grandchildren, like a train set.

I put my sunglasses on and tie a scarf over my hair. I'm starting to shake. I know he's here, in the building, the man I'm here to look at.

Another half-hour goes by and then a very tall man in a blue uniform and badge, looking very official, says I'll have to go up by myself. It's like being five years old and separated from your parents the first day of school. My knees buckle suddenly. They don't want to take me anywhere. I'm two years old now and sinking fast. Soon I'll get down on my hands and knees and begin to creep and then the officer will have to reach down and carry me up. His starched blue uniform looks like a god's robe, his badge a golden seal. He's the most significant being in my life, and I would cling to him if he'd let me.

We're in a new corridor. There are people behind walls of chain link, typing, filing, as if they're in accounts receivable at Robinsons-May. Innocents behind bars.

The elevator door opens. As the officer steps inside and motions for me to follow, I reach out for his hand. Out of my terror I reach for Daddy, my God in uniform. Instantly I stop the gesture midway, embarrassed. Just then a man behind wire yells "Not yet!" Over the

intercom it blares, “Not yet!” We stand, waiting. The door closes again. They must hear my heart pounding all over the building.

The officer gives me advice while we wait. “Don’t say any more than you need to,” he says, “be cool, be deliberate, if you say anything you don’t need to, the defense attorney’ll use it.” This is such an everyday thing to him, he must know; I hang onto his wisdom. I decide to lock up my feelings and zipper my mouth.

Just as I’m thanking him the intercom blares out so loud I jump, “Bring the female up.” There’s another God here. The place is filled with them, like Olympus. The order is unfamiliar, terrifying. I am “the female.”

The elevator door opens again. Now there are two tall officers and me; two strange big men, one little girl. My knees are going out again. I lean back against the wall as we’re pulled upwards, breathing, relaxing, trying to be here, to keep it together, wanting to float out the top of the elevator; I look up at the lighted ceiling panel, imagine pulling it off, climbing out into the shaft, then dropping, then imagine the whole elevator dropping, we’ll die unless we can jump high enough; we’re stopped. The doors open. We’re moving off. I let myself be turned and led.

“Is it normal for my heart to be pounding?” I joke.

“There’s no normal. Whatever,” one of them says.

I’m walked to a little aisleway, a little hallway with a dead-end. Jessica, the District Attorney, Bernie the Detective, and the defense attorney, all in suits, one beige, one gray, the attorney in stunning dark blue, wait for me at the end, smiling, relaxed.

The one way mirror is on my left. Take a breath, I order myself. The air is musty, old, eerie, from some other world, a dark world. I walk to the window, unafraid. I concentrate. The second I look into the little room at the five young black men with beards and moustaches except for one, number four from the left, who’s shaved his beard off, I know, because he’s the man who raped me, I know who I’m here to see, and in the next second I’m blank, turned to stone. Now he’s a stranger. My heart is leaping around, shouting at me, but I’m busy being cool, concentrating so not to give the defense attorney an inch for later on. Only my eyes are alive, and they’re

staring at number four from the left. My mind is racing, bouncing off the walls of my skull, practically throwing me to the floor.

I'm cold. I look hard at him, but my own flesh and blood has turned to granite, and he is not real. I think, He's skinny. He has no beard. I look at him in pieces, hair, eyes, hairline, hands, build, mouth. I stare. Bernie is reading me a statement saying that hair and beards change, that I don't have to identify anyone, that I'm not here to please anyone. But he doesn't see that I'm crazy, or that pleasing people is all I do. My urges pull me back and forth, into and away from the glass; I sway whole inches. I think I'll crash through it and then number four will get a good look at me. Suddenly I'm an adult, I'm calm, mature.

But at the bottom of everything is terror I can't tolerate. I've never been so scared in my life, not even during the rape itself did it hit me so hard. I'm breathing. My body is holding together loosely, but I see clearly.

Jessica tells me I'm prejudiced, that I have ideas about how one should act under these circumstances. I only know I want to scream and cry and pound on the glass. But I'm quiet and all I can see are separate pieces of a face.

Two nights ago at the theater, Frank Hall came backstage after the performance to tell me, "All you have to do is give me the guy's name and address and I can have his legs broken for you for two hundred dollars. And listen, I'd be happy to pay for it." I wanted to reassure him that the rage in me was already taken care of.

"Thanks." I smiled at his sweet, sorrowful expression. I know Frank through the theater, but mostly because he and Harry were good friends. Every New Year's Eve Harry and I were together we went to Frank's to dance and eat with the hundreds of people he opened his house to. In these years since the divorce, I've gone with one man or another, or with Mary. It's a tradition that fills me now with nothing but sorrow, makes me want to take all those years back. I looked at his sweet face and felt his hate and then my hate and suddenly wanted to take him up on his offer.

"You could have him killed for a little more."

Now I'm terrified. It just occurred to me that for two hundred dollars he could have my legs broken. He could kill me for a little more.

Bernie is telling me to tap on the glass when I've seen enough of each man going through the paces, turning left, right, looking at me straight through the glass as if they could see me and scare me to death right there. The defense attorney gives me his metal pen to tap the glass with.

"Are you okay?" Jessica keeps asking me as I'm glued to number four and shaking harder.

"Yes. Can I hear them talk?" I ask.

They go about arranging it while I stand here watching the five men at ease, really only number four, watch him smoke and talk, watch his slender fingers move, still trying to piece the face together. It's like looking at the Mona Lisa, but seeing only a nose, a smile, folded hands, and not knowing for sure if it's the Mona Lisa you're looking at. Do I know this man?

We go downstairs. A fifteen minute wait outside the auditorium like waiting for curtain at the high school play. Marching solemnly down the aisle, sitting in the front seats. Jessica, me, the defense attorney.

"You okay?" Jessica asks for the tenth time.

"Yes. Yes," for the tenth time. I'm outwardly under control, a shaking phony inside.

What if I'm making a mistake? What if I'm wrong? What if the pieces aren't supposed to fit together because it's not him, and that's why I can't see him whole?

"What do you want them to say?" Bernie asks.

"Tell them to say, 'Just let me love you.'"

"Just let me love you," he repeats.

"And 'Where's your jewelry?'"

He turns to another man standing on the stage. "Okay. 'Just let me love you' and 'Where's your jewelry?'"

The other man nods his head.

The five young men walk casually across the stage under the stark lights, space themselves out and stand at ease. Tension rings through

the still air binding us all, one to the other in a circle, with almost visible electricity.

“All right, each one of you say this twice when we get to you. Start on the end there, Number One,” the man on the stage says to the suspects, “Say: ‘Just let me love you.’”

“Just let me love you,” Number One says, then says it again. Then Numbers Two and Three. All the time I’m staring at Number Four from the left, tuning into him, grabbing this last chance to act like a responsible human being.

“Just let me love you,” he says. Quietly, as though the words hold some old, strange feeling for him. The sound of his voice goes through me in an instant and I know who he is. Tears shoot out of my eyes before I’m even aware of feeling anything at all. I look down for a second and see that my hand is gripped around Jessica’s wrist.

“Are you okay?” she leans in again.

He says, “Where’s your jewelry?” when his next turn comes around. His face has come together. I’m melting into the chair like a five-year-old who has to report to school, when it can be put off no longer. The tears end it. I’m going to trial.

Outside the auditorium again, bent over with terror, I sit in a wooden school chair with a big wooden arm, hunched over a blank yellow legal tablet on which I’m supposed to write my accusation.

I write, “I identify suspect number four.”

Now I’m really going crazy. I try to take it back. I tell Jessica, “Listen, if this whole case is me, I mean if I’m it...

“You are it,” she says simply.

“Well...I don’t know if I can do it for you. • .I....”

“Is it him?”

“Yes. I...yes.”

“We all saw you shake upstairs when you looked at him. It’s obvious to everybody. You grabbed my hand.”

“I keep thinking you’ll find a fingerprint, or something.”

“There’s nothing.”

“I mean, I’m willing to testify, I am, but to be the whole case, I don’t know.”

“Listen. You’re a nice person. No one wants to point the finger at someone else. No one wants to do that. I understand.”

“If you don’t have anything else, then we don’t have a case, do we?”

“You saw him. The lights were on. You identified him in the mug shots and here, you identified his voice, that’s good, they won’t be able to claim you were influenced in any way. We have a good case. You’re it. It’s direct evidence. That’s better than circumstantial evidence.” She sees my blank, terrified face, and goes on. “It would be nice if we had something else, but we don’t. But look– you’re not the judge and the jury, you know. You’re trying to play God, and you’re not. You can’t do anything to him, you’re not making the decision, you’re just a witness. That’s the judicial system. You were there.”

I’m stunned. I know I don’t have to do any of this. Every step of the way they tell me I don’t have to. But I know I do. I have to for my own healing. I can’t let him walk away and do this to another woman because I’m afraid. There is a sense of honor and duty not just to other women, but to myself, in learning not to be a victim.

When Jessica and Bernie lead me back to my folks in the coffee shop and tell them that I’ve made an identification, I’m behind them hanging onto the wall. I don’t know what I’m so scared of. It’s a general terror of the unfamiliar, of people, of life, of having to let go of the old seconds in order to move into the new. Time passes and things happen while I desperately try to keep track. I’m holding onto a life raft that doesn’t exist.

Back home Mom tries to soothe me. “I thought we’d have to carry you out of there,” she says into the teakettle while it whistles. I’m thinking of what it would mean if I’ve identified an innocent person. Why would I do such a thing?

I sit on the couch shivering, sure I should back out.

“Honey,” Dad says, “unless you hate him so much you want to kill him don’t put yourself through it.” Dad is giving me an out.

“No,” Mom says, standing over him in his green vinyl recliner. “She should go ahead. Later she’ll be glad. It’ll be better.”

It's just that I feel tainted. He touched me, he was inside of me. I don't want to forget it, I want it erased. I can't erase something that will drag on for months, maybe years. It will become a part of me, sadness and fear and feeling tainted. I wonder how the trial itself will change that. Will it end the ugliness? Erase it? Or deepen it, dig it into me like ink etched into metal?

My parents, especially Dad, always taught me to be careful. "Careful" is the word I most identify with. They protected me so from the world that I could only imagine what I was supposed to be careful of. My father was a pessimist, and I became a fairy princess.

I was supposed to be afraid of glass in the street, cars, bicycles, roller skates, the dark. Everything could hurt me. Every moment I did anything, I felt scared. My life was about timidity, I was trapped in it. "Careful, I Am Fragile" written across my forehead. I'd seen life from under my mother's arm, with one hand on her skirt.

One summer, Mom and Dad took Scott and me north up the West Coast through all the national parks; I saw places that were wild, places with no roads. I got the glimmer of an idea that somewhere it was okay not to have a map, that there were places not mapped at all. Yet my whole life was so charted, so predictable, so safe. Or had been.

In the morning, I call the police, and Bernie tells me, "All they want is the truth, Sarah."

"But..."

"Just the truth, that's all. Just what you know. Go get counseling, Sarah."

"I have a therapist."

"Go to Cedars, they have a Rape Crisis Center, they know how to handle this. Your ordinary shrink probably doesn't know shit."

Eva's arms move in an arc in front of her tanned and slender face, framed so nicely, so thickly, in shiny black hair. We are sitting opposite one another in red chairs in a little room at the Thalian's Center at Cedars-Sinai. She is my Rape Crisis Counselor, and very good; I feel better than I've felt in weeks. She seems to understand.

Suddenly I get the idea that the way I feel isn't so special: everyone who's ever been raped feels the same way, goes through the same adjustments on their own timetable. I feel better.

"Look," she says, "a crisis—it's like a pendulum." Her right hand continues to arc in front of my eyes. "It swings back," she moves the arm backward from the perpendicular starting point, the center, "that's the awful part, the pain, then when it swings forward again," she whooshes the arm forward, and I can see as she says, "look at all that new space you have now. See? You've got a whole new range of motion now. It's all new strength, believe me. You have it for the rest of your life. You get stronger."

"I'm afraid I'll lose it all."

"What?"

"I'm afraid I'll go back to being the way I was."

"You will."

"No, you don't understand..."

"You *want* to go back to functioning the way you did..."

"No, I don't want to function. I don't care about that. I'm afraid I'm going to forget all the pain. I don't want it to have been for nothing. I'll go back to where I was and that's all I'll have. I won't have learned anything."

"It's there. It'll always be there."

"I'm blocking out his face."

"That's all right." Eva tries to comfort me, telling me it's okay, however I am, but I know it's not.

"I don't think I can identify him in court."

She can't help me with this, I know. I can see in her face that she knows she can't.

"Talk to him" she directs, pointing her hand to the wall.

I am an actress. I know how to do this. I look towards the wall, two feet from my face, and wait for him to materialize. I wait for his face to become clear, but it's only stubborn features pasted over a monster's skull, it's not a whole face, not a real one.

My hand turns itself into a fist and I can feel it rising. "I hate you," I say to the air. "I hate you. Hate you."

Eva is nodding.

“Hate you.” Tears are rolling down my face I know; I can feel the wetness on my cheeks, but I feel so little. Feeling so little is making me sadder, the tears become wetter, and now I can feel my eyes opening up, and my mouth moving downward involuntarily. There is nothing sadder in life than not to feel.

Eva turns to me, glowing with approval. “That was very dramatic...”

“But you don’t feel it,” I finish it for her, the line said to all bad acting by everyone who loves the theater, or doesn’t know what else to say. But Eva is not being critical. She does not consider this a performance. She just wants to help.

“You’re intellectual. That makes it hard.”

All these years of trying to dump my head and speak from my heart, all this time and money and pain, and even after this violence, I can only intellectualize. If I can’t feel, how can I act? I am impoverished.

“That’s okay,” she says. “Please, please, Sarah, stop being so hard on yourself, please.”

Moments go by in silence while I take that in.

“I used to be more scared than I am now,” I say.

She nods her head. She knows what I’m talking about. Other women must’ve said the same thing to her. I’m not so strange.

“I feel terror all the time, but it’s not the same. It washes over me, it’s always there, but I’m not so scared of life.”

“Yes,” she says. She understands, really, I can feel it.

“I mean, I could’ve died, you know?” I feel that the worst thing that could happen to me, the thing I’ve been afraid of all my life, happened, and now I don’t have to be afraid anymore. The tears are warm now, and they feel so good. They fall so freely, they relax my shoulders with their warmth, then the warmth massages my heart, my eyes are open, Eva is crystal clear. The door is clear, the wall, everything is bright. The tension is gone from my body. I am relaxed. Maybe I can identify him.

“Yes. But you didn’t die. You survived.”

I know our hour is almost up, but I don’t want to leave. I’m afraid if I go outside, I’ll get afraid again.

“It’s okay to be a survivor, you know.”

Now the dam breaks, and the tears are falling, not sweetly, but with despair. The part of me that’s so guilty speaks up saying that I shouldn’t have survived. That’s it, that’s the voice I hear sometimes in the morning when I’m most panicked, that’s the voice coming from the clean bathroom tiles in my mother’s house, that’s the voice in my cramped thighs and stiff back, that’s the voice of my headache, saying I should have died.

Eva reaches out and touches my knee. I smile.

“You aren’t the bad person, Sarah, he is. He’s the rapist, not you. You weren’t supposed to die,” she says as if she read my thoughts. “It’s good that you survived.” She’s talking to me like one machine calmly trying to reprogram another. “I’m glad that you survived.”

Chapter 6

I have to move out of my house. I don't want to be there, much less rummage through my cheap, second-hand furniture, the old cheap sweaters and socks I hang onto year after year. But I have to move.

My parents are driving me, and I can feel my heart beat faster as we climb the hill, my body pushing against the seat to make us turn around. Why am I here again? it says.

I'm ashamed of the dust and the old, musty smell of the bed and curtains. I'll abandon them. The bed was borrowed, just a boxspring with foam over it, held together by a mattress cover, a relic from my first apartment. I put the white painted pine dressers out for the Salvation Army, drag the bed out, the rugs, the cheap desk. They will come tomorrow and haul it away.

Driving home, I remember I was supposed to call Gretchen from the house to tell her if I needed her help. I didn't; I didn't want to see her, but instead of telling her that, I just forgot to call. I want to want her company.

I call.

"I'm watching a program on Space," she says.

I can hear the television in the background. I picture her at her small round table, sitting in her natural canvas director's chair, looking out her tiny blinds into the greenery just out her window, beyond the porch, eating raisin pumpernickel bread and brie.

"I'm sorry," I say, "It was just my folks and John and me, and we got so involved, and I just wanted to get out of there as fast as I could, my heart pounds so fast when I'm there, so I forgot, I'm sorry."

"I figured you would." The edge in her voice is almost non-existent. I wait for it.

I start getting weepy. I can't understand my hostility towards her, this exotic creature who was my friend, who tells the truth.

"I'm sorry," I go on with my apology. "It's not you, it's me...."

"I know it's you." Now I can feel the edge.

"I don't know what's wrong."

"Well, I want to watch the rest of the show right now." She dismisses me and my problem. I know there's more that hangs in the air between us, invisible, too difficult to search for.

"Okay. I'll call later." My heart is flopping around, and all of me is flabbier than it's ever been. My brain cells are not in working order. I am an emotional slob, and Gretchen knows it.

The movers are coming today to take everything to storage; John will be here to help. I've taken the books I want with me to my mother's, not much else, and rented a space I hope is big enough for the antique dresser, the chairs, the trunks, the mirrors.

Last week, John's friend Diane said she would take Chauncey, so I grabbed him two days ago, took him to the vet to be neutered, and the next day took him to the house she shares with Jim. Chauncey was still so groggy, and so scared, so wild, stalking the house like a drunk, looking desperately for a place to sleep it off, that the whole time I was with him I shook. His fear made me feel afraid; anxiety crept up on me. Poor Chauncey, we want to domesticate you, to save you. Will you ever be a fat housecat, sitting on laps, or will you spend all your time remembering being free and looking for an escape?

My space in the storage facility is on the second floor and down a long corridor. There are narrow steel carts on wheels lined up against the wall as you come in, like soldiers, all in deep gray. My heart is feeling lighter already. We pile up three of the carts, raise them one at a time on the little elevator, run up the stairs, roll them off the lift and down the hall to number one-twenty-five. I stick a coin in the slot and turn on the light. The walls are cardboard. Sprinklers in case of fire are set in the ceiling every ten feet in the ceiling, little friendly mechanical things that break up the whitish plasterboard. There is no one else around, but this is a living place. Households are parked here, getting comfortable in the dust and telling each other stories.

The movers are wonderful big men, warm and friendly, handsome. They have wrapped everything well and carried it gently, and it's all safe. In the small space, they cleverly stack chair on chair on box, on trunk, on dresser, and somehow it all goes in.

I shut the door, turn off the light, lock my padlock, the same one I used for the wrought iron gate protecting my house, write the movers a check, and sit with John to talk about his life, now that mine is more in order.

"I don't know what's wrong with me. I don't know why I'm falling apart this time," he says.

"Oh, John."

"I know I'll be okay, it just takes time. No, I don't know why, I feel this time like I'll never be okay. He's so Goddamn young, that's it."

"Why do you always go for babies?"

"Don't know. Why do you?"

He's got me there. "Maternal instinct. You feel paternal with Stanley?"

"No...He makes me feel young, I guess."

"John, you're a grown man, you know things, you've done things. What do you want with a kid? Why do you want to be a kid, anyway?"

"Damn." I can see tears staring out of his eyes. John doesn't hide his emotions, they're close to the surface like Gretchen's. I'd love to see them fight. Gretchen told me on a Monday night that that morning in the hospital after the rape, John had cried and she'd had to comfort him. "He cried," she said. She says she can't stand weakness in men. "It doesn't make sense," John says, "It's totally irrational; it didn't even last very long, two months, Jesus, but I was in love, you know. He told me not to fall, and I kept saying it was okay..."

"I know." I reach over to hold his shoulders, he slides into my arms like a small boy. "You try to be cool, but inside you're dying for a kind word."

"Yeah."

"John, Stanley was so unsteady."

"I know."

"It's shit to let them throw you off balance. They lean so hard, and then all of a sudden they shift their weight and you fall down."

"You give good advice. If you could only follow it."

"I know."

"You fall down more than I stay up."

"I know."

"After Harry, we had to scrape you off the floor."

"I know."

"Some can do, some can talk. You talk good."

"Thanks. No more falling down."

"Deal." We clutch hands tighter. "When I was with him I forgot about everything else. My whole life was on hold while I was in love. I liked it."

I don't think John is recovered from his mother's death last year, and Stanley's leaving has opened up the wound that never healed.

"You need some time, John. Take it easy on yourself."

He looks up at me as though I've committed a sin.

"What?" I ask.

"Cliches. You give good cliché."

"Don't be a prick."

"No. He moves away slightly, we sit cross-legged on the two carts on wheels, reaching across to hold hands. Outside, the movers have started their van's engine and are pulling away.

"I'd like to fall in love and forget my life."

"Yeah," he agrees. Well, call me when your rich and fabulous Prince comes to sweep you off. Maybe he'd like a third."

"Hey, I still have my hopes. Passion and a white picket fence. The whole thing."

"Bullshit."

"Yep."

"Jesus, now I feel so old," he says.

"Well, who wants to be a baby again anyway?"

"Me."

"Me too."

We giggle, holding hands in this empty warehouse. Are we like these other people waiting for their lives to change so they can come back here to reclaim furniture and be whole again? This moving begins to feel like a rebirth. A new chance.

“Just remember,” he says, “nobody ever died from fear.”

“Oh yeah?”

“Let’s eat.” He pulls my hand, we rise as one, and I know soon we’ll be tearing into cheesecake.

Chapter 7

When we were dating, Harry wore jeans that were more iron-on patches than original material, all tight around his very impressive ass and cock. My mother thought he was a bum. He was very sexy. He lived on food stamps and seventy-five dollars a week unemployment, and more nervous energy than anyone I'd ever met besides me.

On our first date we discussed the Territorial Imperative. After our first dinner together around a card table in our apartment, he called me a parrot, saying I had a college girl's mind: I didn't think for myself. He was right. He was the only original thinker I'd ever known.

My first shrink, a strict Freudian complete with Victorian couch and dark wallpaper, seemed to think Harry was pretty terrific from my descriptions, and tried to help me be a better woman for him. He'd sit in a chair by my head, me stretched out on the red velvet pillows of the couch, and point out which leg I had crossed over which, corresponding significantly to who I was free-associating about, mother, father, brother, while he poked holes in his cigarette filter with a needle to do something to the nicotine or tar before it got to him. Once I came in with a headache. Suggesting that the cause was sexual anxiety over him, he encouraged me to verbally fantasize sex with him. It seemed a reasonable idea, it does even now. But there was nothing remotely attractive about Dr. Sanders, though he intimidated me. I did my best, but I don't remember what happened to the headache.

After nine months of free-associating and expensive IQ tests, when Dr. Sanders thought I'd only touched the tip of my hysterical neurosis, and I realized he thought this was going to be a long haul, and I was starting to think less of him, I stood up to leave, saying it was for good, Thank you very much, but I'm not that sick. He warned me through tight lips that "If you leave me, you'll break up with Harry. You'll transfer all your emotional ties to your father from me to Harry, and he won't be able to stand it. The strain will destroy

you.” I left him anyway and shook for months, thinking I was going to ruin us with all those hidden feelings. But we lasted seven years, so I showed Dr. Sanders. Sometimes I wondered if we only stayed together so that Dr. Sanders would be wrong.

My father was very hurt when I left him for Harry, but in the end he wished us well, although all he could see for me now was a life of moving from one man’s bed to another in despair. I had departed from everything normal and could never come back. “Honey,” he said, his face all screwed up with indignation and upset and love, “I just hope you’re not making a mistake you’ll regret for the rest of your life.”

I loved that apartment. It was my very first, and I wasn’t alone in it.

The first time Harry and I made love, it was in his bedroom in the apartment he shared with Grant and Felicia, with Grant sleeping on a mat on the floor just outside the louver doors of Harry’s space, snoring, and the sound of dripping faucets through the walls. We came together. It was the first time I’d ever come with a man at all, even through the college years of petting (I was a virgin till twenty-one, till just before graduation,) and the seven men I slept with after that.

Orgasms to me were quick, quiet little involuntary movements set off by my right hand, the sensation of a light switch going on and off in my head, then a guilty feeling. I learned how to do it in college, in the sorority house in the afternoon, or at night after my roommate in the lower bunk fell asleep, and at home on holidays, in my parent’s house. With a man I would be terrifically turned on but just not go over the edge.

That night with Harry I somehow forgot about what was going on in my body and head and just let go, long enough for the sensations to take over. He whispered, “Now I know what ‘precious’ means.”

It was a surprise, miraculous, especially since the whole time I was very aware of how my domed blonde fall was pinned to the top of my head and whether or not my false eyelashes were still glued on

and not halfway down my cheeks. That whole year before I met Harry I never left the house without eyelashes and a fall mixed in with my own long blonde hair, but I never looked phony or overdone. Singing country western tunes on the graveyard shift of a downtown Las Vegas Casino stage I got used to having lots of hair and eyes, and through the last year of college at UCLA it was all very in style, fake hair and Twiggy eye makeup. With eyes like in a Keene painting I felt attractive. Or more attractive. The straight fake hair hid the frizz of my own and I felt almost normal. I don't think Harry knew until I told him years later that on that night he had his hands in hair from Hong Kong, and his mouth with its wonderful kisses on lashes from Europe.

Three months after we moved into the darling apartment over the garage, after making love at least three times a day, in what I thought was every position, with fantasies and laughing, Harry stopped wanting sex with me. He pulled away at night, turned over, saying he was tired, and slept. I was devastated. I would reach for him and he would kiss me and turn away.

"You're mechanical," he once said.

I was too rejected to think or talk, and for the first time, angry enough to not sleep on it, so I went for a walk. At three in the morning. I got up off the bed, a thick foam pad laid on the living room rug, put on my red jeans and a T-shirt and headed out into the kitchen. Harry looked up from his fake sleep and asked me where I was going.

"For a walk."

I got as far as the house in front of the garage. There was a loud, drunken, druggy party going on, and they invited me into the kitchen for coffee. I sat at the wooden table next to the open door, enjoying the fresh company, watching the dancing and drinking, feeling terrifically sorry for myself, angry, and completely confused.

I saw him walk by the open kitchen door, and watched him search the driveway and down the street for me before he headed back home and saw me sitting there watching.

"I thought you were going for a walk?" he accused.

We adopted a kitten and named her Samson, thinking she was a boy, and she in turn adopted Eggbert. He would jump on the front door screen to come in, screaming, and we'd get up and let him in; they'd curl up together at the foot of the bed, her dark tortoise shell and his perfectly white fur all wound around each other. A harmony I wished for with Harry.

In September I went to a big open call audition for singer-dancers, and beat out two hundred other women for a spot on a variety series. Next week I reported for work, and at the end of the week I'd made seven hundred dollars.

It never occurred to me that Harry would be jealous of my moneymaking. He was doing Movies of the Week, and some good serious film roles, and there I was dancing around in white boots, smiling.

He'd help me rehearse my solos: "You're stiff, you're not getting into it. You've got to get into it."

"Okay." I'd try again, trying to relax, and only tightening more.

"Look," he'd wave his arm, "you've got to get into it."

"I know. I know," I'd say, trying not to be defensive, "I don't want to be stiff...."

"Am I making you nervous?"

"You're helping me."

"I'm making you nervous."

"No. It's just hard for me to get into it." We should have giggled, but it just got tenser between us, me needing him to stay put, working with me, no matter how lousy it felt.

"I'm making you nervous." I knew that was the end of it. "Let's quit," always followed.

I'd tell him over and over that I was getting a lot out of the session; then I'd ask if he was bored.

"I'm just not helping you." His back was usually already turned to me, his arms reaching for a book or something else to do.

"You're helping me!" I'd call after him.

"You should work without me."

"Maybe we should go eat," was my next move. If we couldn't work together or make love, at least we could eat. Then we'd discuss,

while I got dressed, changing clothes five times until he was so irritated he'd almost leave without me, where to eat. We never wanted to go to the same place.

"I want Chinese but you never want that," he'd say.

I'd suggest Musso and Frank's on Hollywood Boulevard.

"They put bread on the table." He was always able to watch his weight, and I hated him for it.

"Tell them not to bring it."

"I don't want to do that."

"I'll tell them not to bring it."

"I'll know it's around and I'll want it. Forget it."

We'd end up eating Chinese, or wherever else he wanted, because all I wanted was him.

In the second year of living together, Harry went on location in Canada for two weeks and I fell apart. I, who never cried, who longed all my life to be able to feel enough to cry, could not stop. Wet Kleenex lay all over the house. Without Harry I was scared, alone, miserable, less than half a person. I'd thought I was so independent.

I found Rena through a friend of Harry's. She was very cheap then, just starting out, with an inexpensive office on the wrong side of Westwood decorated in tortured self-portraits by her patients. She was calm and concerned, serious and confident, very dark and exotic, but dressed incongruously in schoolgirl plaid and loafers. Although only a few years older than I, she was a mature woman.

One afternoon, sitting on Rena's waiting couch in the hall in front of her office door, a tall man with a beard and long brown hair strode past me, leaving her office, heading across the courtyard to his own. He was Rena's husband, Sam. The moment I felt him coming and looked up to meet his eyes I averted mine. He scared me. I thought he saw right through my smile to the awful person I really was beneath the stupid girlishness and all the teeth. His look was so intense I knew he knew everything about me. But there was something else. A softness. He hunched over when he took his long strides. His lips were large and soft, and the hair was too long for his face; it hung around his head in an odd shape. I did not then see him

as beautiful. When I went in to see Rena, she seemed so much stronger than he. I asked her. I said Sam didn't seem to me to be strong. "Oh, he is," she reassured me, "he is."

After a couple of years with Rena I started to feel better. I went to New York with Felicia, in the spring for a month, and got work there: a commercial that flew me to the Virgin Islands for a week to shoot on the rocky beaches and to Florida to play with dolphins. After the first two weeks Harry and Rob, Felicia's boyfriend, joined us.

We all stayed at an apartment in Hell's Kitchen, sleeping practically next to each other, separated by a thin plasterboard wall that didn't go all the way to the ceiling.

We could hear each other breathe. There was no lovemaking, but by then I was so used to its absence that I just tightened up my body against my senses and the cold and slept. There was never enough heat in that apartment; I slept under coats and dressed in flannel and a robe, but my bones always woke me up, clanging against each other, stiff. I put it out of my head that I'd been happier in New York before Harry came.

We got married. Things were going well, I had money saved, we wanted to buy a house.

At the wedding, there was no one there but Mom and Dad and Scott. Harry didn't want friends. He was embarrassed. I was so tense the whole time that later I couldn't remember much of what happened, except that it took place in the office of a commissioner at the Van Nuys courthouse who was an acquaintance of both my mother and father. My mother ran the whole thing, making me feel like a five-year-old who was being a bother.

She was a county clerk at the time, so she issued our marriage license. That part I loved. Dad took pictures. I wore pants and a sweater, as if to make a statement about the occasion's lack of specialness; Harry wore pants and a shirt, and the only flower I carried was a rose I'd bought for myself on the way to the courthouse while Harry sat in a yellow zone in front of the florist's waiting with

the motor running. The photos were dark. I remember feeling strange kissing my husband in front of my father for pictures.

Mom, Dad and Scott were not enough for a wedding, we needed one more witness; I had wanted at least one woman friend there, but no, Harry vetoed it, so we sent downstairs for a girl I'd met twenty minutes before. She'd been behind the desk when we got our license and seemed friendly and warm. Our rings were silver plated bent spoons from a head shop on Hollywood Boulevard.

After a married year of things going well between Harry and me, of working together, doing a play together, directing each other, enjoying each other, I started waking up at three in the morning sobbing. Harry never woke up at the sound, and if I touched him, he'd pat me on the stomach, or the shoulder, and roll over again. He was starting to take his writing seriously then, getting up at six in the morning to go to a coffee shop and write among all the other early regulars using the restaurant for an office. He took his sleep seriously. I didn't want to wake him. I wanted him to wake up of his own accord and be concerned for me, but I didn't know what I was crying about, so I didn't want to shake him. I'd get up, go in the living room, grab the big pillows off the couch to stuff over my mouth, and cry so loudly for so long I thought I'd break. Surely Harry would guess something was wrong and come in to comfort me.

One night I finally went back to the bedroom and woke him up.

"Harry," I whispered loudly, touching his shoulder, hoping it wouldn't take too much to wake him, hoping he wouldn't be angry, hoping I'd get what I needed from him.

"What is it?" he said, trying to see me and still keep his eyes closed at the same time.

"I'm crying," I said.

We sat on the couch, me heaving and sobbing, hugging a big gold patterned pillow, him leaning back, away from me and into the graceful bamboo arm of the couch, his left arm over the back of it, almost touching me, wanting to be around me, but unable to stretch. My face was red and swelling, his tired and tense, trying to figure out what to do now that we had some feelings between us. He'd only

seen me cry once before, during a horrible depression when I didn't know what to do with myself or my life. I was weeping that I didn't know "What I have to offer," to the world. I was fully aware then that I had wrapped my life around Harry's and that to unwind it and take it back into myself would be too painful. I wanted him to love me in a way that would make me feel perfect, but that wasn't going to happen, I knew it. He sat in the chair next to me discussing my feelings as if it were an interview, with no hug in sight, and me incapable of asking for it because I felt I didn't deserve it.

And now I could only say, "Can't you hold me?" which made him try harder to exit through the arm of the couch, even as some impulse in his body almost reached out for me.

He finally did drop his arm around my shoulder, but he pulled his mind away so that I was left with some man patting my back as if I was two years old and had stubbed my toe, or not gotten the last piece of cake.

"I have to go to sleep," he said.

I didn't even look up.

"I have to get up early, I've got to sleep." He kissed me on the head. "Are you coming to bed?"

"In a minute."

He got up and left. I sat for a minute, but couldn't cry anymore, so I went to bed, turned toward him for warmth, then away, jiggling the water in the bed, and finally drifted off.

In the next week I went back to Rena. She suggested I take an eight-week workshop with Sam, called "Sex and Spirit."

In the first session, six of us sat on the floor the room, against heavy colorful pillows along three acoustic tile walls, the nubby beige couch blocking fourth wall. Sam, the shrink, sat in a soft, thick cotton shirt and pants on the floor, his long legs halfway across the room, like the priest at the altar. Six women and him.

I was afraid, but I wanted to participate, so when Mona, a voluptuous dark haired woman sitting in the corner opposite me raised her hand, I volunteered along with her.

We lay side by side on pink flowered sheets stretched over two-inch-thick foam on the floor in the center of the circled women. We

breathed. Mona inhaled deeply. In. Out. All I could feel was anticipation and frustration. My hands reached up to the ceiling, looking for something, my throat fighting the thick air, but I pulled it into my chest.

As the breath went through my body, my hands began to tighten, my mouth curled up uncontrollably, and I wanted to stop breathing. The hyperventilation was a vise, my temples pushing in on my brain, my legs steel pipes, the air going through me tightening the grip, until tears began to pour out of my eyes. A memory floated past the inside of my forehead: rocks at the bottom of a river; the water moves clearly over the rocks, I am a riverbed.

I sobbed loudly.

I am being hurt. The pain rolled out of me without connection to the vision. I could not remember why I was crying, what I felt for riverbeds. I was a stone, sinking, drowning. Did someone throw me there? Or was I the clear water? Was I walking through the river, being able for once to see the rocks, not just stepping on them blindly, poked, cut, falling, getting wet and screaming. I was so tired of being dry. So tired of catching myself from falling. I moved my arms to cover my face, the ugly contortions of my mouth, all tight, out of control, clenched them over my eyes. I thought, I am grotesque.

The vision changed. I was in white. A white room, white people in white, everything sterile. A scale. A baby scale. I cried, someone grabbed me. Someone was making me do something. I didn't know what. Violent. I was being violated. Someone came into my heart and ripped out my Self. I did not exist as a crying thing, my voice was without a body, invisible. No one was listening. I was put to rest somewhere; surrounded, a feeling of suffocation that felt like being taken care of. I could identify the terror and temporary comfort as mine.

The vision dissipated; I heard Mona breathing and gagging on her deep voice; the other women were close by us now, breathing, crying softly, feeling the same loss. It went through us all like a common memory. No real words were said, only bits and pieces of sound, and wailing.

Mona sat up and crawled over to Carol, who was weeping, kneeling by my side. She hugged her, and said “Open your mouth.” For a moment I thought she was going to kiss her and my heart jumped.

“Open your mouth and breathe,” she said. Carol’s sobs sank down into her body, quieting her, her chest moving more slowly and evenly with the breaths, and the room was softer.

For eight weeks we met there, on Tuesday nights, talking to one another, asking to be stripped of our defenses, breathing. We said we trusted one another and Sam in his different colored cotton uniforms. But we didn’t. Only the screaming was easy.

On the eighth meeting, we sat in a circle cross-legged, our eyes closed. Sam moved around the outside of the circle squeezing baby oil into the palms of our hands, singing, “Roll me over, in the clover....”

We rubbed our palms together, touched one another, held hands, began to chant. “OOOOOOOOOO-ooooooooommmmmmmmm....”

I was uncomfortable cross-legged. I sniveled and complained behind my “OOOOOOOOOOooooooooommmmmmmmm.” I did not feel liked. I tried, but I could not melt into the other women, I could not give myself up. I felt separated from them by something in my imagination.

Just before we got up to hug one another goodbye, Sam thanked us for trusting him: then he turned to me with his fierce hazel eyes and said very simply, “Sarah, you’re living a lie.”

The next day I called him to ask what he meant.

Since then I’ve been seeing him once a week, twice when I can afford it, rain or shine, every Thursday morning at eleven. Soon after I started seeing Sam regularly, I joined the Monday night group just as my marriage to Harry spiraled steadily downward.

As usual, I’d turn to Harry in bed, putting my arm over his back, kissing his shoulder, then when I got no response, I turned away myself. Once I sat up and said we had to talk.

“What can I do?” he said. “You’re familiar. You’re available.”

“You don’t want to make love to me because I’m available?”

“You’re pressuring me.”

I girded myself to ask, “How? How do I pressure you?”

“I haven’t thought about it.”

I begged him to tell me anything that would help. I said I’d listen no matter how bad it was. I told him that I’d try and change: I wasn’t demanding that only he change.

“I like it in the morning,” he said. “You never like it in the morning.”

“You turn me down in the morning.”

“I have to write in the morning.”

I didn’t know what to say to that.

“The way you like it is work,” he said. “You want to bounce off the walls. You want to swing from chandeliers.” Then, “I can’t help it if you’re familiar.”

I tried not to wail. “I still want you. All the time.”

“Men are different.”

“Oh God.”

“I do want you, you’re terrific. Just familiar. We’re married for Christsakes.” After some silence, he looked at me sweetly, as though everything was all right and would always be. “I’m content. Things are fine the way they are.” He smiled and put his arm on my shoulder. “I’m sorry you’re unhappy, but I don’t have any problems.”

I looked at him for a while and tried to feel something, anything, looking inside me for tears, but coming up with just a dull, throbbing ache, a numbness. My body told me that he was right, everything was fine, or it would be over. I didn’t understand what that would mean after seven years. I didn’t know how to be anything but my mother’s daughter or married to Harry.

“I have to sleep,” he said, and slid into the sheets, winking at me, turning over, and drifting away.

I’d be sick and depressed and not want to come to group on Monday night; once I called Sam to tell him, then at fifteen to eight, dragged myself out and called him from a phone booth to tell him I was coming after all and to leave the door unlocked for me. I sat in the corner of the room, weeping over the end of my marriage.

Three months later I decided to move out of the house, saying it would take the pressure off, hoping Harry'd see how much he loved me and come after me.

After my third load of boxes, cushions, and bottles, he watched me start out the door with a chair on my head, and said, "Hey, maybe this'll bring all the romance back. You won't be so familiar."

He thought it was a wonderful idea, my moving out, but when I asked him to give me a hand with the furniture, he said, "In a minute," and that minute never came. I carried everything over to that dark apartment alone, painted the walls white alone, and when I came back to the house one evening, after the gas and phone had been turned on in my new apartment, for one last box, I stayed the night. I didn't want to leave, I was scared.

"Don't leave," he said, reading his script. "Spend the night. Spend two nights."

I stood there, nodding my head, telling him I was scared.

"Don't go at all, you don't have to go. It's not all cut and dried. You could change your mind completely. You want to do that?"

I just wanted to curl up in his lap and get taken care of for the rest of my life. Could I have that? I wondered. For a small fee, maybe? I said, "I don't want to be a big girl and I don't want to live alone." And after a moment, "Are you asking me not to leave you?"

Softly, simply, he said, "I'm just saying that you don't have to do anything you don't want to do."

"Oh." I kept thinking there was going to be a magic moment where I'd turn for the door and he'd come running after me screaming, Don't go!

"Maybe this will really be good for us," he said.

I tried to start a fight. "You prick," I said, with venom. I wanted to be like Gretchen and Rena, fiery and angry, and I always thought that if I learned how to do that, Harry would love me. I threw a book at him, trying, but he just stood there patiently, saying he wasn't in the mood.

I stayed the night, and we sat in front of the television eating grapes, playing with Sammy and Egbert. We didn't make love, we

hadn't in so long, but he woke up in the dark almost crying, telling me about a dream he'd had.

"I dreamt you were leaving me forever. I went up to this big swimming pool and when I got there it was empty. I panicked. I sat down and cried." He sat up in bed, trying to cry, but it was a bad performance. Years ago it would have been a start. Maybe we could've learned to trust each other and cry with each other.

"What do you want?" I asked him.

"I don't know what I want."

All of a sudden I knew, no matter what he said, no matter what he dreamed, he didn't care anymore.

"Fuck your dream, and fuck your crying," I said. "It's too late and you don't care." Then I got up and got us some water and some more grapes.

I'd planned to make my new bedroom Persian and passionate, but it turned out Japanese and serene. Harry lay down on the bed, after our one date since I left the house, looking up at the parchment butterflies hanging from the wall and playing with the chrome airplane mobile, waiting for me to come in from the living room doorway and lie down with him. Instead, I made myself a cup of decaf, sat down at my dining room table and silently begged him to come to me.

After an eternity, he finally did, looking defeated, very quiet.

"What'd you expect?" I asked.

"I don't know. Nothing." Then after another moment, "I thought you'd come in and lie down with me."

Everything softened in the room for an instant, and I was about to tell him that I needed him to come to me sometimes, when he pulled his features together and said "I guess the cats are wondering where I am."

I watched him put his coat on and kiss me lightly. I watched him go, saying goodnight, had my first smug thoughts and then my first good cry.

A month after I moved into my tiny apartment, hoping he'd come after me, he became seriously involved with Geri, a friend of ours, the girlfriend of a close friend, Ed. They'd been our dinner

companions, and New Years' Eve guests two years in a row. We'd played charades together, and went shopping, and when I moved out, Harry hung around with Geri and Ed, eventually following her to New York while Ed had to stay here, and coming back ready to live with her.

They set up housekeeping in my house with my cats, and what I missed most, more than Harry, was Sammy and Eggbert. Every time I went there to see them or to pick up some clothes I was assaulted by fresh cut flowers and Geri's books and hats strung over the living room and kitchen. Her presence was there. I felt her hand on Samson's fur and wanted to throw up. Her car was parked in front.

Before I knew they were living there together, Harry said they were going away for the weekend and would I take care of the cats. Wanting to be cool, I did. When I got to the street, there was Geri's car, and when I opened the door, there were Geri's things. Harry was such a bastard not to tell me beforehand. If he'd only told me, I might have been able to say something to him, or salvage some respect for myself; as it was, I felt like a fool.

One day I called Felicia for the truth. She was friends with everybody, straddling all the fences. She said Harry cared a lot for Geri and it was going to take him a long while to find out just how much. I thanked her, hung up, called Harry, told him I was filing for divorce.

"Oh God," he said.

I was surprised he was so surprised. But glad I'd shocked him. I'd taken things into my own hands, was making a move. I felt stronger, less the abandoned one. I said there were no hard feelings, that I only hated his guts some of the time. That actually I didn't think he had any.

Two days later I had a lawyer.

Three days later I sat on the floor of Harry's room going through the bottom drawer of his file cabinet for tax returns, income statements, escrow papers, every financial paper I could find, and he came up next to me, smiling.

"Need help?" he said.

"No, I'm okay." I was angry.

“Well, we might as well do it together. What’re you doing?”

I told him.

He said I had the returns in my hand, but that wasn’t right, we needed the W2’s.

I said we didn’t need them, the returns were fine.

“But they’re joint.” he said.

“I know. They’re fine, they have everything.”

“How can that be right? How’ll we know whose is what?”

“What?”

“How’ll we know who made how much when so we can split it up right?”

“What’re you talking about? It’s ours—yours and mine, community property...,” I said, like a schoolteacher, incensed.

“It’s always been yours and mine separate!” he yelled, his arms waving in the air above his shoulders. “We had separate checking accounts, separate savings accounts. I bought my eyeglasses and you paid for your shrink. We split the dinner checks. Except lately, since I’ve been making some money...”

“Thanks for the meals...”

“Our money has never been together. What are you trying to do?”

“We said it was separate. It wasn’t really, not really, and you know it. It was a sick idea to start with. We always spent my money on what you wanted anyway!”

“That’s got nothing to do with it!”

I called him a pig. His face went from rage to fear, like a wounded puppy. He thought I was about to take his life from him. He brought his arms down tight against his body.

“It may have been sick,” he said, “but that’s the way we did it. Community property is the law, but our relationship is different. We kept things separate and now you want to put it together! You bitch!”

“You want to figure it out to nickels and dimes, huh? You want to figure out how much money in taxes you saved by being married to me and doing these returns joint with all my shrink bills to deduct? You want to figure out how much you owe me for going to the shrink for both of us?”

“If you weren’t going to your shrink we wouldn’t be getting divorced!”

“You want to stay married?” I meant to throw it at him, but deep inside I knew I was still hoping.

He just stared at me.

I took a breath. He didn’t want me. And he didn’t want me to have half the money either. I told him he could pay for the divorce, since he wanted it, and for the lawyers too. I called him a prick, told him to fuck himself. I thought if I’d learned to say “fuck you” seven years earlier we’d still be together.

“What lawyers?” he said.

I stared at him. “Yours and mine. Unless you want to use my lawyer. That’s okay, then he’ll be ours too...”

“I thought we were doing it ourselves.”

“What?”

“The divorce. Doing the divorce ourselves.”

“Are you kidding?”

“You know. For seventy dollars somebody gives you a packet and instructions and we fill them out and mail them or something like that.”

“You want me to sit down with you and do my own divorce?”

“Lawyers cost money!”

“Tell you what,” I said, “When my lawyer contacts you, you can do your half of it yourself, then you’ll only have to pay for my lawyer. Does that make you happy?”

“You want my money, you bitch. This is all about money. Well, I’ll tell you, I’ll fight you and I won’t lose. You’ll end up with nothing!”

I got very calm. The pain was starting to be noticeable. “It’s nice to know after seven years you’d like me to end up with nothing.”

“I didn’t mean that.”

“What would you like me to end up with?”

“I don’t know yet.”

I said I felt like throwing his typewriter out the window.

“Then do it.”

“Don’t patronize me.”

“I’m not patronizing you.” The smile was back. He had the upper hand, the energy felt good to him. “I’m encouraging you to express your feelings.”

I sat down. “Now I don’t feel like throwing it.”

“This is almost pleasant.” He sat next to me. “Listen—if there were no penalty for murder—would you shoot me?”

I thought. “No.”

“No, listen—if you couldn’t ever get caught....”

Suddenly, out of thinking about killing him, I stood up and overturned two boxes of papers. I threw them across the room, screaming.

“Nothing!” I shrieked. “Seven years of nothing!”

I jumped at him, slugging his arm. He was stunned, put his hands up in front of his face, tried to quiet me. “Wait, hold on....” he said peaceably.

“I hate you!” I was punching him in the arm, over and over, crying, not like me at all. All of a sudden I reached out for him with both hands, they were around him, and we were holding on. “It’s rotten, rotten. I can’t stand it.” I cried. “Seven years and no Brownie points, no gold stars. You get nothing for sticking it out. Nothing.”

“It wasn’t nothing.” He was trying to be emotional, trying to cry. Bad actors both of us, trying to end the relationship like human beings instead of mechanical dolls.

“It was a waste. This is a waste.” I thought we had everything two people could have with each other. Why weren’t we together? I looked at him and realized for the first time that it was all Over, and apologized. “I’m sorry,” I said, “I’m always trying to manage you. Stupid. I thought I could manage you...” I apologized for hoping.

Then he pulled away gently, looked at me from the distance that was always there that I’d never wanted to see, and said, “I feel a lot for you. I want to be your friend.”

I saw that he was no friend: he hated conflict and discomfort too much for real friendship. I saw him trying to be smooth. I finally saw myself as deeply humiliated. I pushed him away, grabbed the tax information and escrow papers from the floor, ran for my purse and

the front door with him following, confused after such a tender moment.

I looked at him with all the hatred of seven years of neglect.

“How dare you,” I spit. “Don’t talk to me. Don’t call me. We aren’t friends. What makes you think you’d be any better friend than you were a husband? We aren’t anything.” I left, slammed the door behind me. I’d made a good exit.

On Thursday Sam handed me a red Bataca and smashed into my right thigh with his blue one. He motioned with his fingers and a leer in his eye for me to hit him back. I slugged him.

“Good,” he said, his eyes lit. Sam likes fire and anger.

“God damn him....” I swung at his shoulder. I started to giggle, but then I hit him hard again on the rear, and that felt so good, I kept hitting him hard, making him turn in a circle to his right, me following, hitting him and hitting him, now screaming, “The bastard! He doesn’t care at all, he doesn’t!”

“No, he doesn’t, Sarah, I know.” Sam kept his cool, letting me hit him, just bringing his hands to his face every once in a while, but I wouldn’t have hit him there, only on the fleshy part of his body. I loved Sam. It was Harry I was so afraid of hating, so afraid of losing. I hated Sam for saying Harry didn’t care; how dare he say that? I kept hitting, then the anger turned to tears. I lowered my club to the ground, leaned over, sat. Sam settled himself a few feet from me, staying professionally interested, watching my face. “A waste,” I cried.

He shook his head. “You didn’t know any better. But now you do. You did what you did then, but now you know more. You’ve got to get on with it, Honey.”

“I feel like a used paper plate. Disposable.”

“Sarah, forget him,” and he reached over to me and held me, rocking me against his chest and letting me cry into his silky print shirt, letting me lean my head against his beard, breathing steadily and evenly, as if to make my breathing easy.

I remembered Harry saying a few weeks before, on a coffee date I’d asked for, that he was happy with Geri, happy with what he had

and didn't want to go back with me. He'd said about the sex and all the discussions I'd started, "I found out it wasn't *me*...I'm phenomenal in bed."

"Compared to what?" I'd asked him.

Sam was rocking me, holding me, breathing. "If they don't care, Sarah, forget 'em." he said. "Forget about hamburger, forget about crumbs. Go and get yourself a piece of real steak and I'll help you cut him up."

I stopped crying and smiled up at him. "I brought a copy of Harry's script. He gave it to me...with an inscription." I reached over for the manuscript, opened it to the title page, read for Sam: "'To my neurotic partner—thank you for all your help and love and support.' I hate him," I said.

"I know. You want to burn it?"

He got a big ashtray off the table, and his silver lighter from his pocket, and together we fed each page into the flame and watched it shrivel in the ashtray. He turned off the lights, and as I lit another page, it felt like Sam and I were making blood brothers. He hated Harry for hurting me, he hated him when I couldn't. I didn't understand then that Harry had abused me in his way, through neglect and indifference, and that I'd accepted it as the best I could get.

The next Monday night I went to group and sat cross-legged against my favorite pillow, sobbing, now knowing it was really over with Harry, and Lindsay crept over, unexpectedly, and then Nathan, and they sat on either side of me, holding my hands. Gretchen hardly knew me then, except to hate the way I talked, the way I was, but she was working late that night and wasn't there.

Sam said to me, "Your future's pulling on you, darlin'."

"I don't feel much hope," I said, "just pain."

"You have a new life," he said. "You have all the hope in the world."

If hope springs from pain, must you have pain to feel hope? Or is it that you don't need hope till you have pain?

Where is my complicity? Why have I been abused by men: one a rapist who abused me physically, terrifying me; one my husband who

was pleasant but indifferent to me. I can understand being a victim with a knife over my head, but why Harry and his neglect? Is this all I deserve? Or all I think I deserve?

Chapter 8

“In the dream, he—the rapist—he still has the face I thought I saw, the one I can’t put together, instead of the face of the man I identified; he sits down to lunch with me, then he attacks me. I get myself to the doorway where everyone around—there are lots of people around—can see, and he runs, then somehow I’ve got him stunned and laid out on a shopping cart. All the people throw in things he’s touched, for fingerprints. There he is in the shopping cart, barely conscious, covered in cans and boxes and cookies and pots.”

Sam’s excited, smiling. “You got him.”

“Yeah.”

“Great dream, darlin.”

He studies me.

“Gretchen,” he says, very matter of fact, but with a glow starting behind his eyes.

“Huh?”

“Gretchen’s a bitch.”

The glow is fully there, and now some sadness, and it’s transferred to me: I can feel my eyes lighting up, getting hot.

He leans in earnestly, “If she’s not productive to you, don’t see her. Drop it.”

On the next Monday, Sam is not in Group. Here in this big room Rena is so different from when I worked with her one-to-one in her little office. Ever since I came to Group three years ago, she’s confronted me about things we used to let slide by.

Rena and Gretchen are so much alike, so strong and verbal. Dark, volatile emotions come bubbling up so appropriately while mine turn in the pit of my stomach, completely unsorted, awaiting a Captain to lead them out and up to my mouth. There is no pipeline direct from my heart. When messages leak through, when feelings metamorphose into thoughts against my will, I muffle the impulses so I can pretend not to hear them. Then the thoughts become hollow, with all the heart taken out of them again.

Gretchen says, "You're milking it. You just want attention. I hate it."

Sam is not here to protect me; I'm out of my league. But I want to stand up for myself. Then I think, Maybe she's right. I always think Gretchen is right. Except now, a little voice is squeaking up through the squeeze on my heart, telling me that maybe she doesn't know anything. She's just scared, like me, like all of us.

Sam once pointed out to me how loose and spontaneous Gretchen's body is when there's anger flying around the room, so different from my stiffness. She can darken her eyes and throw hatred out of her mouth, then suddenly drop tears out of softer eyes, and let the hurt run out through her hands as though her skin is transparent, like a plastic Visible Woman, showing not organs but emotions. Throughout this anger she can lay stretched out languorously on the floor, her legs resting lightly one on the other, her lap uncovered, her shoulders moving effortlessly with her words. When I am angry I sit rigid. Every muscle in my body stops anything unplanned from being said, screaming Maintain! Maintain! Hold it down, hold it down!

"I've said everything I have to say." Her nose is tilted up over the red-lipsticked half-smile, slowly changing to a sneer. She dismisses me as she lifts a brown Sherman cigarette from its red cardboard case.

"I'm sorry if you feel hurt..." I make a stab at uncovering something under the anger, but can't finish. I'm looking for a way in to a conversation, a way out of the vise around my heart.

"Look, I told you the truth, isn't that what a friend is supposed to do? I told you how I felt, pointed things out to you." She looks up to Rena, "Isn't that being a good friend?"

Rena nods her head gently, almost non-committal.

"I don't know what else I was supposed to do."

Gretchen smokes, very calm, smiling, relaxed. She is done with me. She is through with me and my rape and my confusion; she's brushed off her hands and moved on, already smiling. I don't know what I'm doing here. What am I trying to prove?

I remember visiting Gretchen in Malibu when she was living with the film producer. We made tuna salad for lunch and ate on the terrace watching the pelicans glide just feet over the gray, sad ocean. She was so depressed, so bored; nothing cheered or excited her and she had no real interest in me, though I tried hard. She was so unhappy with the producer and had resorted to picking fights with him and complaining about the relationship. I thought he was a jerk. But then, what did I know? I was recently separated and had just been dumped by my first lover since Harry. I obviously knew nothing about men. I could only watch helplessly as they slipped through my life.

There were so many men between Harry and Joe I'd kept a list. I tried to make up for their indifference by being desired constantly. I slept with men who wanted me, for a night or two anyway. I thought I was spreading my wings as a New Woman while I spread my thighs to a new man. I learned about sex. Has my rape paid for those years looking for something from men? Did I invite it?

I was plastic, Gretchen was porcelain. I was wishy-washy, she was direct. She was attractive and sexy, I was round and pale and smiled too much. She was fiery and bitchy and I didn't know how to do any of that. Men like that fire. All I know is how to be as sweet as possible. Gretchen had very little patience with me. I always asked myself, Why does she want to be my friend?

Now I ask, Why do I want a friend who doesn't like me?

She sits next to me, on the brown carpet, a stranger after two and a half years in this room together; a warm body that feels like ice from three feet away. I think the barrier is not really there, that she wants to be reached, that she is touchable.

I've always seen destructive relationships in terms of men. Not women. But we are women friends, we said we loved each other.

Last Wednesday night I dreamt about her. I was playing chess in a room with a man. For some reason I was asked to leave, and I did. Then Gretchen appeared, in a diaphanous, flowing gown, with beads in her hair and sparkles on her face, barefoot and long limbed. She took my place at the chessboard and everything seemed right when she played.

I can smell cat shit in this room, the smell of cat litter. Samson is trying to cough up a fur ball. “Ahhhhggghh.” Then a swallow, her eyes big with surprise.

I’m not getting enough rest. The voices in my head don’t match the impulses in my body; they fight. When they stop fighting, I feel translucent, as though all the turmoil has churned itself out, leaving me shiny inside and out. Like a snail without a shell. Like a clear eye.

Most of the time I feel all stuck together inside, like a glob of glue without any of the paper, wood or plastic it’s supposed to be holding together. Glue all by itself.

I sleep without nightmares, but I’m afraid they’ll come later.

A friend from the show, Jennifer, was on a lake somewhere in Nevada the night of the rape, but she came over last night to sit awhile and tell me that she had a vision. It was a dream about an evil man and someone she thought was me calling for help. She sat up, miles away from here that night, terrified for me. We didn’t go deep into her vision or my real night: it’s too frightening. My friends go on with their lives, afraid for themselves, and I can feel them closing down around their fear. They don’t know what to do; neither do I. We drift.

I sit here, trying to think, and all I can think of is the millions of women who’ve been raped and never told anyone. I’m tired of living with fears.

We do not die from emotional pain. Or do we? We die from the stress of trying to stop it. We spend more energy on stopping pain than living. I’m exhausted from working so hard on not feeling.

Now I see moving shapes. I shudder when a leaf falls outside the bathroom window; then I spend twenty minutes looking out the blinds of my bedroom trying to see some prowler lurking in the camellias. I shake when the dog next door growls, jump when he barks. I think I’ll never again live with a man, there will never be another nice man. I will never feel safe. It’ll be fear all the time.

Tomorrow it is Thursday, two weeks since I stored my things; I will see Sam.

I make a salad in the kitchen while Mom unwraps frozen chicken crepes for the microwave. I carve up a tomato. She wipes the used tinfoil clean.

I've wanted to talk for a long time, wanted to ask, "How are you, Mom?"

"Huh?" I've startled her. "Oh."

She puts the tinfoil down and picks up her glass of buttermilk. "There's Caesar dressing in the refrigerator. And fresh lemons if you want." She takes a mouthful, swallows, then realizes I want to talk. "I'm fine. How're you?"

"Hungry."

"Want me to make you a potato?"

"Uh..." I can't decide because it's fattening.

"Five minutes in the microwave?"

"Okay. Thanks." I love baked potatoes. The microwave turns them out in the time it takes to wash lettuce for the salad spinner. I'm afraid my folks are going nuts. My father's so quiet, he goes around quietly smiling, being serene. All the power and strength and flexibility of the first two weeks seems to have given way to tension in all of us. I wonder if Mom's afraid I'm going to leave her? I feel like I want to crawl back in the womb.

"I know this happened to me, but I'm your daughter, so I wondered how you are."

Mom stands still for a moment, thinking. Her expression changes from perplexed to irritated, to sad, to helpful. "Well," she says, "there've been some bad mornings." She looks deep into her creamy glass. I can feel my body preparing. She lifts her head to look in my eyes, and in an instant I feel myself back away into my bowl of water chestnuts and soybeans on my side of the sink. But I don't want to back off, I want to get close; I want to get to know my mommy. I want her to know me. I look up.

"Some bad nights," she says.

I nod my head, waiting.

"I worry about you," she says.

"I'm careful, Mom."

“Are you?” her voice accuses me of a whole life of carelessness, then quickly dissolves into motherly advice.

“When have I not been careful? I mean before and after I left the side door unbolted the night of the rape.”

“I’m serious,” she says.

“So am I.” I have always, my whole life, been careful.

“I’m afraid you’ll leave the door unlocked, or the screen, or lock yourself out.

I think, This is silly. My heart is beating hard, because I know I have been careless. I am guilty, but not now, not since then.

“I won’t.”

“I know.”

“Am I in the way here?” I’ve been wanting to ask.

“No.” She means it. “It’s not always the easiest thing. But we love having you here. We’re getting along, don’t you think?”

“Yeah, I think so.” I touch her shoulder. I want to hug her all the time these days.

“We get on each other’s nerves sometimes. But that’s okay,” she says.

“Yeah.”

“I told Daddy not to open your door without knocking.”

I nod my head. He’d possibly walk in on me crying, possibly masturbating, I wonder if Mom has allowed for both those. It’s very considerate of her to think of that.

“I know you need your privacy,” she says.

“Thank you. And you too. I don’t want to be in the way.”

“You’re secretive.”

I can feel the tension rising in me. I want to back out of the conversation. Suddenly I’m getting younger by the minute, and I don’t want to sink further. “Sometimes,” I say.

“I’ve always hated that house. I’m so glad you’re out of it, I always hated it.”

This is a surprise. But I never loved it either.

“I always thought it was vulnerable. I haven’t had a peaceful night the whole time you lived there. So much for that.”

“All I did was worry.”

“Huh?”

“I was worried, but I didn’t do anything, like you.”

She puts down her glass to argue, then stops to listen instead.

I admitted, “I should’ve gotten rid of the louver windows right away. I knew it, but I thought just thinking about it was enough, so I didn’t do it. I thought as long as I meant to do it someday, I would be protected. Anyone can walk into this house; you keep the windows open. You have no alarms, buzzers, no broom handle in the sliding door. If you talk enough about being careful, then magically nothing will happen to you. And if you’re afraid, that makes you safe.”

“You left the door open.”

“I know.” I’m starting to feel terrible again.

“But you’ll never do it again. It was a mistake.”

“Yes.”

Mom looks so sad now, she’s searching for something.

“I want you to know that I don’t hold you responsible,” she says. “I would tear my heart out before I let you think that I thought it was your fault.”

I’m stunned by the depth of feeling. I love my mother.

“Worrying doesn’t do anything.”

“Yes it does.” She’s joking, she’s broken the tension, now we’re laughing. “If you worry enough, it helps.” She’s making fun of herself.

These days I read the papers. I watch the news any time they have it on, dinnertime, bedtime. I don’t want to avoid it. I want to devour reality. I want to know about stabbings, and fires, and mindless, senseless Violence. I want to remember every moment of every day, every year of my life, that I am not immune. Because it happened to me once does not make me immune. I want to feel the sadness and pain and ugliness of the world. I identify with it now, with the miserable side of life. Nothing is too horrible. I used to run, inside, from the violence I felt. In group one Monday I said violence is against nature. “What about Mt. St. Helens?” they asked me.

“I don’t want to pry,” Mom begins. “I don’t want to push you, but I want you to know you can talk to me. I understand if you don’t want to talk to me. But I wish you’d talk more.”

She said that to me when my separation from Harry was happening; she wished I’d break down and cry so she’d know how I felt. I told her I didn’t always want her to know how I felt. But this is different. Then I thought she was sticking her nose in; now I think she just loves me.

Her face scrunches up. There is a new light filtering in from the backyard through the blinds, the sun has moved since we started talking; shade has crept across the pool and the moon is up. The light bounces off our eyes like an energy field we can see, from her eyes to mine, mine to hers.

“I love you, Mom.”

“I love you too. I know I can never say to you that I know how you feel. I can’t know how you feel.”

I’m thinking that only mothers love you unconditionally. Then why on earth would I need Gretchen, or anyone, to be my Mommy? I have a mother.

“How’s Daddy?”

“He’s fine. When he’s not, I give him a little Valium, but he feels the same way. He’s just glad you’re alive. He has high blood pressure. He was on the extension when Sam called; he was trying to stay calm, he got the information, then I calmed him down. I gave him a Valium. I only cry when you’re out of the house, I know, but...I don’t like to lean on your father, I’m concerned about his health, he’s almost seventy, do you know that?”

“He looks fifty.”

“I know, not bad, huh?”

“You look thirty.”

“I tell my friends, ‘I can’t have a daughter who’s thirty-two, I’m only thirty-nine.’”

“You look it.”

“Thank you.”

Our eyes are shining.

“So it’s your father I want to watch out for now, it’s him I want to be concerned with.”

“Yes.”

“He looks older and more tired than I’ve ever seen him look,” she says.

“Oh God.”

“But he’s a tower of strength. He’s fine. He works on his roses, he digs, my God, he lifts that shovel all day, he’s lost weight, he’s in good shape, thank God.” She knocks on the wood cabinet. “Knock on wood.” We smile at the superstition.

“Do you want chicken?”

“No. Thank you.”

“You still don’t eat meat?”

“Nope.”

“Not even chicken?”

I shake my head.

“But you eat fish?”

“Yes.” She’s known this about me for the last eight years. Every Thanksgiving she makes extra vegetables and extra salad for me. All of a sudden I’m angry at her. What for? Sometimes I think she’s never forgiven me for the divorce and for being alone. She changes my linens when my back is turned.

I always feel that I need or want something from my mother and that I’ll do almost anything, stand on my head, become anyone or anything to get it. Although I know she loves me, I want her to be a perfect mother. I want my freedom, but I give her none to be herself.

I remember what Sam said once, when I was talking about Larry, a young man in Group who was having trouble sexually. Sam thought I’d never get rid of him “once you sleep with him. It’ll be so good for him—if you’re into mercy fucking.” I thought he’d drop me right after because I’m not really his type.

“Not his type?” Sam laughed.

“No. He says he has a Playboy mentality.”

“A Playboy mentality,” he repeated. To Larry, I was overweight and six years older. I didn’t realize that to some men like Sam I am a Playboy type.

I said, "He'll dump me."

"So?"

I just looked at him, uncomprehending.

"Darlin', I thought you wanted to be a cosmic lady. Stop thinking like your Mommy."

Now I realize I don't know for sure how my Mommy thinks.

I go back to cutting green peppers, and she puts the potatoes on a paper plate in the microwave, shuts the door, pushes three buttons. The lights light, the thing hums.

"What did Sam say when he called you?" I've been wanting to ask.

"He said not to react emotionally when we saw you. All I wanted to know was if you were alive, then if you were cut. When he said you were in pretty bad shape but okay, I calmed down. When we got to the hospital he said it was important for us to be calm."

I want to know if he'd been gentle on the phone, but I don't ask.

"He told me that you almost didn't call us, that you didn't want to."

"I was embarrassed."

"I don't understand that."

"Well, I didn't want you to see me. I didn't want to cry, and I knew if I saw you I'd cry."

"If you hadn't called until later, I don't know how well I would have handled it. I don't think about it too much. When we came in you were sitting up, I'm sure you looked horrible, but you looked better than I expected. You were alive, you were sitting up, you were talking and you seemed to be in control of yourself. I didn't care about anything else. I was just so grateful you were alive. I don't remember feeling anything else. I know I didn't cry."

I remember her as an angel, making me feel loved, and back in her arms.

In the last two years with Sam and Rena I almost stopped talking to my parents to separate myself from them. I'd be tense when they called. The first words out of their mouths were "Why haven't you called?" I labeled them critical. I told my father I hated being talked to like a twelve-year-old, I'm an adult, he'd better shift his thinking. I

backed way off. I'd decided they didn't love me. Not really, not me. They didn't even know me. They loved the fake me that I'd tried to build for them, but not the real me I hadn't discovered yet.

Now I see they love me.

I am in chaos so much of the time. My friends are here and then they're not. Their inconsistency and my own scares me. Only my mother and father are constants.

"I know we irritate each other with our little lifestyle differences, but..."

If she thinks we are separate enough to irritate each other, she is more confident that I have my own life than I am.

"I think we're good friends, don't you?"

I hug her. The hug is longer than is comfortable; we hold on anyway, we are determined to break through.

"I hope someday you get a chance to fulfill your whole potential."

Oh my God, she's talking about husband and children. I knew it.

"Your human, and artistic, and womanly potential. Soon. I would love to see you have the satisfaction of being responsible for someone in this world beside yourself."

"My God, I can barely take care of me."

"I know, and I don't think that's good."

"I was just joking."

"I'm not. I know that's all going to happen, and I'm going to stick around to see it."

"Okay. It's a deal." I'm listening to this woman, my mother. She's wise so much of the time; she doesn't bullshit me; she tells the truth. I know she loves me. I wonder if it's possible my mother started looking at me as a separate human being a long time ago. I wonder if it's me that wants her only as a mother.

The air has changed. The tension in the room is gone, my shoulders and hers have relaxed at least an inch and we are smiling. There are so few wrinkles on her face. I hope I look like her in twenty years. It's a bright face sparkling with great humor and affection.

"Sure you don't want chicken, huh?"

Chapter 9

“The ladies over at Cedars want you to believe that it has nothing to do with your being seductive, but that’s not true, darlin’,” Sam says.

I remember the time he told me about a woman patient of his who was a television newscaster, and how one night a man came in the screen door of her house and pistol whipped her face. That was the end of her career. I shuddered, begged him not to continue with the story. I thought, that can’t happen to me if I don’t think about it.

“So just wear a skirt and forget about it.”

I look down at my shorts and high heeled slides and wonder if he’s right. But I’m belligerent. The rape was not my fault. Everyone’s going to know it by the fact that I’m not changing anything about me. My legs are good, and it’s hot, and shorts are comfortable. Fuck ‘em.

I’d hate being too old to wear shorts. Gretchen used to tell me that I looked like a ‘Thirties’ pin-up, in shorts and tube top and heels. Round everywhere. She likes my painted toenails.

To be honest, I like looking sexy. Just because I’ve been raped, am I guilty for wanting to be attractive?

It’s two days later and I’m sitting in the waiting room of Paul Grendel’s Beverly Hills office, on a small, tasteful, soft gray couch, watching the receptionist behind her glass window, and pretending to read *Time*. My hair is long and curly and blonde, falling past my shoulders, a mane, I have on high heeled sandals and yellow jeans. I’ve come looking sexy to get something.

“Miss Green?” the nurse calls me in through the now open door to the examining rooms. She ushers me into a large room with a high, almost couch-like table against the wall, a large sink and counter on the opposite wall, and two little mirrors in which I quickly check my face and hair. The swelling is gone, so are the purple and yellow patches, but one eye is still spotted with red. The wound on my left temple is still red and stitched.

“I love your hair,” the nurse says.

“Thank you,” just as Paul rounds the corner of the room.

“Isn’t she pretty, all that curly hair?” she asks him.

“Oh huh,” he nods, as she leaves us alone.

He climbs up on the table with me. I can feel his warmth through my soft knit top and his white shirt. I turn my face up toward him as he holds back my curls and stares at his work on my forehead, ear, the back of my head.

“Looks good. You’re keeping it nice and clean.” There’s a twinkle in his eye again, very clear, he must be interested in me, or amused.

“I was worried about this one,” I point to the side of my face where one lonely stitch seems to be hanging off.

“It’s fine. I’ll take everything out anyway.”

I ask him what he can do to minimize the scars. He tells me that they don’t sand them down, as I thought: scars make in indentation, not a lump, so they inject them with something that fills them out instead. “But I don’t think you’ll need anything,” he says.

I wonder about my nose. “I’ve always wanted to take this bump out, always.”

“You picked another busy day. There’s no time to talk and show you pictures, I have patients scheduled back to back, Sarah. Next time make sure she schedules you with some time so I can show you pictures of the work we do here, okay?”

This is the man of my adolescent dreams, my sex god, and here he is stiff, pompous, vague. His hands and face are soft, they’ve lost that sharpness that was so sexy. His tight body, a swimmer’s body, is now round and soft, his fingers smell of cigarette. His nails aren’t beautiful and shiny, like a doctor’s should be, they’re more like veterinarian’s hands; I imagine I see yellow stains on the fingers from nicotine. Despite all this, my unfinished memory of him makes me want to make love to him.

He’s picking the black threads out of my forehead efficiently. “My assistant usually does this, he’s much better at it.”

I smile.

“Listen, let’s get together and have lunch or something.” He doesn’t mean it.

“Or dinner...” I jump in. His face tightens, I’ve gone too far. I sink. “I’ll leave you my number, I’ll leave it with the receptionist. I have an answering service.”

“Good.” He’s slowly throwing the remains of my stitches in the wastebasket and turning to go to his next patient. “I’ve got to go. Make an appointment for three months from now. I’ll show you pictures.”

I’m trying to keep my face in the same order, but my disappointment must show.

“I’ll call,” he says. “We’ll get together and talk about old times.”

I nod my head and he’s gone around the corner.

I’m left here on the table looking sexy. For what? For who? Why am I wearing these high heeled sandals, and what does he care? Is my past in such need of recreating, am I so desperate for an approving look that it might as well be a leer? Is it power I’m after? Over him? If I can coax a response from him, do I have power? Will he hate me for it, as the rapist did?

Instead of raping me, he turns away. He sees me as a sexless thing, a patient, an old schoolgirl friend.

I pretend I am not seductive. I speak like a woman. I don’t giggle like a girl or bat my eyelashes at him. I am warm, human. But who am I fooling? Do women really have the power to arouse and control men? Or am I just a failure at it?

Is this seductiveness what brought a rapist to teach me a lesson? To what extent am I guilty? Sam is right. I lie to myself. I flutter my eyelashes and pretend I don’t. I want and don’t know how to ask for what I want. I play with power, and I lose. Three weeks ago I lost in my bedroom with a stranger.

My aunt Karen called a few hours ago and left a message. She’s my age, but she married my uncle, who’s older. She’s been pregnant for nine months by sperm from a sperm bank because my uncle, my mother’s younger brother, had a vasectomy before he married her. He doesn’t really want a child or Karen, but she wanted a baby so badly that he said okay in some drunken moment. Now here she is,

ready to give birth and bring her baby home to a lousy marriage with a man who doesn't love her.

My mother and father don't like her. Word is she's crazy. Last year, she left my uncle for awhile, got thin, started dating another man who adored her, got a good job, and seemed to be heading in the right direction. That was when we became friendly out of our singleness and family ties.

I call her back.

"Karen, this is Sarah."

"Sarah! How are you?"

"I'm okay, really. You?"

"Well, not so good." But her voice is cheerful. "I lost the baby."

Oh God. "Oh God, Karen, I'm sorry. I'm so sorry."

"It was born dead. Well, actually, it lived a minute and a half, but then it died."

My heart slides into a sinking feeling. I don't want to hear more. Pain. Crazy. I can't stand how she got herself into so much pain. I hate her humiliation. I hate what I'm feeling.

"I'd gained so much weight, you know. Well, you haven't seen me, but I gained sixty pounds when I was pregnant. The doctor kept telling me not to, but I kept eating, you know how it is."

"Yes."

"So now I have to lose it all."

I ask her how all right she is.

"Well, it doesn't feel so great. I cry a lot, but hey, I joined a group at the hospital, a Loss Group it's called, for people who've been through deaths in the family, and separations, divorces. I've got it on all fronts.

"I know. I...Allen..."

"I'll be okay. But Allen is no help."

"I know."

"But I want to know how you are, your mother told Allen. She wouldn't talk to me, but that's okay, I understand that."

"I'm okay, okay. Like you're okay. No...I can't know..." I can't know how she feels, we know that. She knows she can't know how I feel, but what does it matter what I feel, my God, she lost a *baby*. Her

baby died. I can't even imagine. This is a kinship of pain that can't be translated, but my pain seems like nothing next to her pain.

"It must have been awful," she says.

"Yes. But you...my God."

All of a sudden I see she is not so crazy. I stop wanting to make her into the weak and self-destructive one so I can be the strong and healthy one. I was afraid I would be tainted by her self-destruction. I didn't want to go back and get lost again in negativity and pain. But I am with her for a moment, and by reflection I see my own destructiveness; it is so clear, like a huge sign in my life.

The whole time Karen was pregnant Allen didn't give a damn. He'd go off with his present girlfriend and not come home, and if Karen complained, he'd tell her off. He's my uncle and he's an asshole. Is she crazy to have stayed?

I'm embarrassed that she did that to herself. That any woman would. And then I know I could. I stayed with Harry years longer than I should have. I stayed with Joe for a year and a half, even though he was hung up on his ex-wife and didn't love me. I punished myself with men who didn't care. They were indifferent, and I let them abuse me with neglect. Karen heaped humiliation on herself by staying with Allen and his disgust for her. It's scary. I don't want to be around it.

Karen was always a nice woman. Very generous, loving, good to Allen's three daughters by his first marriage. Then she goes and treats herself like shit. How can a person live like that? But I did the same with one terrible relationship after another. Being so needy. I say I'd never do it again, but I don't know.

I tell her my rape story. She tells me hers, the hospital, Allen, what it felt like to want the baby so much, to lose it. I can't imagine what it must feel like to make a child and then lose it. I can't know. But I identify with her. Karen and I are both failures at seduction. We have been ignored, tossed aside, bruised. Tramps.

I'm crying for Karen and me now. Like her, I've joined the wounded of society, the miserable, the people you read about but don't want to touch. I've learned a dark secret; I've seen evil and can never pretend I didn't see it. I'm outside polite society. A victim.

Done to. Different from my friends, from my mother, from normal people. I know too much. I've been trying to go back, to blend into my old self, and it's no good. I'm different from the way I was.

On Thursday, I am enraged.

"I rethink the rape over and over," I tell Sam. "I relive it with a different ending: I kill him with a gun I have in the drawer or under the bed, or I get him in the back or the chest with a pair of scissors, or I follow him down the street while I'm screaming and see his car. I scream 'Fire!' and all the neighbors, the whole Canyon looks out their windows and men come running—I scream 'Stop that man!' and they do, they grab him, and it's all open and shut. I never have to go through all this doubt and it's not difficult."

"Good," Sam says.

"Or I have mace and I stun him. Or I choke him to death: he wasn't so much bigger than me."

"His violence was stronger than yours."

"I'm always feeling that helplessness, that moment being flat on my back like a fish on the beach. A turtle on its back, or a bug, one of those beetles on its back with their legs flailing around in the air, trying to right themselves. Just vulnerable and miserable. Sometimes I have a gun under my bed and from on my back I can shoot his brains out.

Sam holds onto his steady gaze and nods his head.

"I wonder if I could live with myself if I killed him?" Sam just listens.

"Killing someone. Maybe that would be so painful it'd be unbearable. God. I would be happy wounding him. Just enough to slow him down so they could catch him. Enough to teach him a lesson. De-ball him. Cut them off. Hurt him."

My face is screwed up with hate, and if it frightens Sam, I don't see it in his eyes. He looks straight at me.

"Or I jump out of the police car that night in the gas station and do what I should have done."

"What's that?"

“Scream at him, cry, spit on him. Identify him. Rage at him, God, Sam, and then go back to the police car knowing I did good.”

“You did the best you could.”

I shake my head. I don’t believe him.

“Yes.” He nods, encouraging me to continue.

“I’m so angry.”

“Good.”

“No. Not at him. Angry in general.”

“Men?”

“Yes. No....”

“What was all that just now?”

“In general.”

He smiles, I’m not making sense. “Good.”

“But I’m angry just walking down the street. At normal people, men, just walking.”

“Good.”

“How can that be good?”

“At least you’re angry. You’ll narrow it down to him when you’re ready.”

“Oh.”

“You hate me?” He asks.

“I love you.”

“Good. I love you.”

Quiet.

“Your violence did you in, darlin’.”

I listen. My heart stops.

“You ran from your demons.”

I dreamt them, I think. Then I opened my door and welcomed them in. My heart starts beating again, as though a bad gust of air has just passed through, gone. “Yes,” I say.

The night before, in a dream, I’d gone out to my car in a parking lot, I notice the hood is slightly up, I open it all the way, the engine is completely gone. I scream, run away, then come back to find some of the engine pieces and a nice looking black man standing with them. He’s obviously helped me, he’s there to help me. I talk with him. I

tell him I don't think he took the engine in the first place, Can he help me get the rest back?

I don't understand. The man raped my power, he took my engine, and now I make nice, say it wasn't him. I want to ask him to give it back.

I hug Sam goodbye and he kisses me on the mouth, touching my tongue with his tongue. I look up, confused. I don't know how to take the kiss.

"Hey," he says, "that's perfectly innocent."

I'm sitting out on the patio next to the swimming pool, lying on a green and white plastic lounge chair, Sammy on my stomach, rising and falling with my breath, her eyes closed, softly purring, her paws gently clenching and unclenching, massaging my chest. It's almost dusk. This used to be my least favorite time of day, a gray time when I felt most alone, unwilling to let go of the light as if it was hope, waiting in a near panic until it was completely dark and I could tuck myself in or go on with the night's plans. Now it feels peaceful. I'm not feeling good, but at least I'm feeling. There's an airplane moving overhead. Three steady lights and one winking. Now as it floats across the sky I see a second light. Oh. Take me away somewhere!

Star light, Star bright, First star I see tonight, right in front of me, the first star appears next to the beautiful cypress tree that points upward, every branch and tendril growing upward. I wish for this to be over, and that no other woman in the world has to go through it again. I want to change the world. My heart jumps because it knows that's not possible until I change me, and I'm so scared of change. I'm afraid of what I can feel changing inside me. I don't know who I'll be.

I get scared when I swallow and my throat hurts from all the screaming I do with Sam. Then I think of all the people out there who have throat cancer or some other kind, all the people in hospitals. I'm sick of myself and my pain. I'm sick of thinking I'm special and then pretending I'm not. Of wanting attention and pretending I don't.

The trees are swaying to a lullaby. They're singing me to sleep.

At twelve o'clock next Thursday, at the end of my session, I hug Sam.

"Look, darlin, you can't lean up against me like that," he says.

"What?"

"Look, I'm not going to cut off my feelings, I'm not going to do that for you, so just watch it."

I look at him for direction. One day I'm supposed to be Earth Mother, abandon myself, let go with him; the next I'm too close, I turn him on, and it's my doing, I have to stop.

"The chemistry between us is perfect."

I'm shocked. I can't believe he could really find me attractive as a woman, I'm only a patient. He has a beautiful wife. Rena is gorgeous and smart and better than me, how could he be attracted? He has always been doctor, touching me only to comfort me. He must know what he's doing.

I get up and kiss him goodbye. Innocently. Leaning my hips away.

Chapter 10

Claudia Batt's office, on the eighteenth floor of the criminal courts building, down a hallway that starts simply enough from the elevators, but soon turns into a maze, is littered with law books and periodicals, decorated with clippings from newspapers across the country telling how rapists got theirs, and how judges who've called a victim seductive, including one four-year-old girl, were booed off the bench by their constituents.

Claudia is short and slender but dieting, with short dark hair: the kind of studious woman who might have been my sorority sister.

"Look, Sarah, you saw him, right? You got a good look at him, right? The lights were on? *He's* the bad guy, remember?"

I just keep nodding yes, while my body trembles. I really want to be cool here. Any other time I would be fascinated by this building, by these pretty women who, when my mother was a girl, would never have considered work like this.

"Here is *Claudia's Fifty Points for Good Testimony*. Take it home and look it over. You're an actress, right?" Her voice has a lilt, a singsong as if she's talking to a child but without condescension. Her smile is stiff and doesn't allow for much expression, and her eyes screw up tiny, but I like her. I just can't please her.

Batt, what a wonderful name. Sam's first thought was baseball bats, but mine was of black bats flying through dark caves at night. Gliding through evil worlds. What a great image for a crime fighter.

"What if I'm wrong?" I ask.

"You saw him, right?"

"Yes."

"And it's him, right?"

"Yes."

"Look, Sarah, you're just a witness here. Not the judge, not the jury, not God, just a witness. Just say what you saw, just tell the truth. That's all anybody wants, for you to tell the truth."

“But the truth is, I’m ninety-eight percent sure and the rest is worried, ‘What if I’m wrong?’”

“No one can be a thousand percent sure of anything. Look, I ran down to my car yesterday and thought I saw my husband, and I said Hi and went walking on to my car to get something. I looked straight at the guy. But then he keeps walking, I look up and it’s not him, you know, and my stomach goes crazy. I knew it was him. I looked right at him. I thought he was my husband. You’re still thinking this guy should look like your distorted memory. Look, there was tons of adrenaline going through you, you were terrified, right? I’m sure he looked like a monster, right? Okay, so this guy’s features are relaxed now, he looks like a regular human being, there’s no beard, and you don’t want it to be him anyway, right? You were scared. You were terrified he’d hurt you, right? But now you got a good look at him, and it’s him, right, he’s the turkey, but you’re still scared. You don’t want to point the finger. But if it’s him, say it straight to the judge. Be firm. Or we may as well not bother, he’ll throw it out, and Sarah, we’ve got a good case here. I know it’s him. You know it’s him. I know you’ll do fine at the hearing. Just tell the truth, okay? Nobody wants to prosecute the wrong man. But it is him, right?”

“Right.” Just following her logic is making me shake.

“Look, all this is off the record. I think this is all stuff we have to get out of the way.” She leans in. “The judge doesn’t want to hear about you making yourself crazy here. I want to help you. You’re blocking, that’s all. It’s natural, it’s normal. You’re intellectual, you think too much. You’re confusing yourself, and it’s really simple. The judge is no slouch. He knows a turkey when he sees one, and this guy’s a turkey. He’s the bad guy, we don’t want *you* to be miserable. You’re just a part of the system, Sarah, you’re not it. Look, we’ve got lots of time before the hearing, anyway, and that could be good for us, give you some time to relax and think about it, okay?”

“If he looks at me....”.

“Hey, don’t...”

“Can I wear a wig?”

“You can wear sunglasses and a hat if you want, but you won’t want to, don’t worry. He’s afraid of you, kiddo. Bernie promised me the blood tests by Friday, I’ll call you when they come in.”

Last week Bernie took me to the Queen of Angels hospital, to the emergency room, to give blood and saliva. It was a slow day, the nurses were standing around. We filled out forms, then went back to the treatment area, where a sweet young nurse took blood painlessly, then gave me a little plastic cup to spit into. Maybe they’ll find something, maybe there’s a rare tissue type or something and it’ll match and be conclusive so I can just sail through the whole thing.

I felt comfortable at the police station waiting for Bernie to get car keys and sign out. All the detectives were familiar at their littered desks and full file cabinets. Bernie showed me the notebook for rapes in February—it’s almost three inches thick, and those are just *reported* rapes. None of them will get caught, all those women will go a little crazy. Bernie told me one out of every three twelve-year-old girls in the country can expect to get raped in her lifetime. The lump in my stomach got bigger and I started to weep, and I didn’t want to feel again.

“I keep thinking he’s going to kill me, and then as soon as I think that, I think it isn’t him.”

“Well it is, isn’t it?”

“Yes.”

“Okay. Read the *Fifty Points* and we’ll talk on the phone, okay? Sarah, we’ve got to get these guys off the street.”

In our next session I scream at Sam, “You don’t understand!”

“Sarah, don’t be a chump, you’ve got to do this.”

“I’ll do it, but I just don’t know.” I’m weeping slowly. Everything I own now has mascara stains dripping down the front. You say I’m blocking because I’m scared. What if I’m blocking because it’s wrong? What if I really don’t know?”

“You know, Sarah, you know it’s him. You wouldn’t have picked him out otherwise, you wouldn’t have gotten this far.”

“What if I got this far because I would have felt dumb otherwise? I felt like such a jerk that first night when they gave me a look at him in the gas station.”

“What were you going to do? What should you have done?”

“Jumped out of the car, run up to him, got a good look, something.”

“No. That’s crazy. You did what you did.”

“It wasn’t very good.”

“It was the best you could. Leave it alone.” His eyes close down into hazel crystals while he thinks.

“What if I’m just trying to make up for it? Trying to prove something?”

Suddenly he lunges for me, reaching out with his arms, pushing me down to the floor on my back, pinning me, looming over me, shouting, “Is it him?! Is it him?!”

“I don’t know,” I wail.

“Tell me. Is it him? Who is it, Sarah, who is it?!”

I know this is Sam over me, trying to frighten me and make me angry so I’ll break loose and say what I’ve been sitting on all these weeks, that I know who it is, I know. But I’m shaking anyway. Suddenly the rapist’s face covers Sam’s face, then it changes, it moves, it’s the mystery face of the man who looks like the one at the lineup, only sweeter and more boyish; then I refuse to see, then he reaches out towards me with his beard, then it’s Sam, shouting at me, grabbing my hands over my head, holding me to the floor, and I scream, “I don’t know, I don’t know!” The truth is so deep even Sam can’t touch it.

He sits up on his knees, then back on his long haunches. “I’m sorry I had to do that,” he says.

I sit up, brush off my wet face, smile at him. “No. Thank you for trying. It’s just. . .I need one hundred percent. I need to feel it match inside me, the two faces. I know in my mind it’s him, I saw him, but the faces....”

“I understand,” he says, and helps me up to my knees. His own frustration is held back again behind the glossy beard, I can’t see his lips at all. I know I think about it too much. But what I do counts

here, for my healing and for other women. I have to live with it my whole life.

Chapter 11

Sam has always talked about Esalen. When he does, his face goes soft about the hot baths, and the communal dining room, and the woods and the coastline that falls away below the swimming pool. Now I'm going.

We're giggling, Mom and Dad and I, about all the car trips we took when Scott and I were young: all the miserable driving with colds, upset stomachs, the games we played, spotting out of state licenses—"I Spy." Now we giggle and eat grapes as the highway goes by quickly through the window of my father's big Chrysler on the way to Monterey, where Dad's attending a lawyer's convention and Mom'll keep him company. I'll walk across the street from their hotel to the bus station and wait for the Esalen minibus to take me to Big Sur.

Sitting on the bus stop bench, I meet a woman, Sheri, who's come from Montreal to do the workshop on Yoga, Massage and Meditation. Already I'm getting anxious about meeting people.

We get to the check-in desk almost too late for dinner, then barely take time to dump our suitcases in the cabins, three beds in each, before the first workshop session. Dinner buffet style, terrific, and the evening is delightful. We spend three hours dancing to music, hopping around. I feel loose and relaxed, having a great time. There's a very handsome man in the group of twenty, very tall and tanned, with a beautiful smile: Kenneth. I can't imagine he's noticed me, I feel so fat and sweaty, but we break, and he asks if I'd like to join him at the baths.

"Sure."

"Ten minutes?"

The first step is climbing the hill a quarter of a mile up. From here the Big Sur coastline drops away hundreds of feet to rocks and swirling water, and glittering lights from the sun on the ocean. On the bathhouse roof massage tables are lined up: you lie nude on white

towels laid on white tables and look out at the sea, feeling the brisk air and the hot sun, while an expert works on your body.

I walk to the baths, look around for how to manage this. There are hooks for clothes, if you've come in them, and a sign that says to shower first in the communal showers; I take off my pants and top and shoes, hang them up, take a shower, then, holding in my stomach, walk the few feet around a corner to where the two sulfur tubs are, steaming against the cool night sea air, hanging over the coastline.

Kenneth is there already. The water is hot, too hot, I sit on the edge with my legs in, he sits on the edge next to me, looking very golden and happy to see me. He touches my leg, and all of a sudden I don't know what to do. It's acceptable here to make love anywhere, on the massage table, or upstairs, or on the grass in front of anyone, it would be all right to sleep with him tonight. But I don't know how I feel about this man; I don't know how I feel about sex.

He begins to rub my back, I touch his leg; he asks, "Would you like to spend the night with me?"

"I don't know."

He keeps massaging my back, and now moves to my front. He's touching my breasts and I'm naked and there are people around. This is very sexy, I'm turned on.

"We could go into the big meeting room, with all the pillows."

I consider making love to a man I don't know in a room where anyone could walk in anytime. The idea is erotic, but I hesitate.

"I have a van, we could go there."

That sounds a little more private. We take a shower again, to wash off the sulfur, get dressed, and walk to his truck. I get into the front seat and feel a sudden nausea. He lights a joint, puts it in front of my face. Now I'm afraid, I want to leave. I shake my head, he brings the cigarette up to his own mouth, sucks the smoke in. I wonder if it has to do with the rape, if I'm scared of this man, scared of sex.

"I'm sorry, I'm just not ready to sleep with you. I don't know you." My hand is on the doorknob.

“Well, I can’t say anything about later. I mean, this would be just a weekend thing, you know, just for now, for the moment.” He talks like all the people here.

“I’m sorry, but I just can’t do this here with you.”

“How about the meeting room.”

He is so beautiful, and this whole place is so romantic and lovely, I want to, I want to. I’m so sorry.

“Listen, I’m so tired, I want to say goodnight.”

He looks deeply offended.

Instead of the second massage class on Sunday, I go to the woods. It’s said they’re enchanted, and today someone is playing a flute deep in the trees and the sound mingles with the brook tripping over tree branches and rocks. It’s like a fairy singing in a very old story. Light rays fly through the spaces between the treetops, dancing on the water. I am alone here, it seems, so I can dance. I skip over to the water, sit on a rock for awhile, and then, after only a moment, Sam is the only thing I see in front of me. I imagine being here with him; I feel him being in love with me, our feelings fill the enchanted forest like the flute music.

I imagine him coming up here with me, or meeting me here accidentally, and spending the weekend making love to me in the woods, on the tables, on the pillows in the meeting room. We eat together, walk together, stand on the cliff and watch the sea together. He sits on the rock with me, and we kiss.

After an hour, the images get stale, I know they’re not real, they’re never going to be, and I feel like a child. I feel like myself at twelve, with desperate crushes, thinking my life would end or my soul would wilt if the boy didn’t love me back. I remember burying a time capsule, a plastic box, in the baby tear moss in my parent’s old house. I put in it a love poem for Paul Grendel, a piece of jewelry, a description of life in Los Angeles in nineteen hundred and sixty, a piece of my brown hair. It’s still there in that yard. Maybe it’s been covered over by cement, or they dug it up for a swimming pool and had a good laugh. My crush on Sam is just as comic.

The path out of the woods leads up to a blue wooden house where some of the staff live, and then through the vegetable and flower garden, past a little wooden hut belonging to the thin young man with long stringy hair who does massage. I can smell the incense from here. Light his stained glass windows shines red and blue onto the huge yellow sunflower near his front porch.

I move to the main yard with its huge, warm pool. Most everyone is nude, sunbathing. I take off my clothes, my shorts and T-shirt, walk calmly to the pool, walk down the steps into the water and swim to the other end and back. The water feels like a feather on my breasts and vagina as I swim. The warmth of it feels cool to them. I climb out, like a Botticelli maiden I think, feeling the air brushing my cheek like a lover, let myself dry in it, then put my clothes back on and walk to the railing to look out at the ocean.

Suddenly I am alone. There is no one around; I feel the air and sun and water as if they're there only for me. I could dive off the cliffs into the sea, crash on the rocks, and be happy. I don't want to die, I just want to get closer to them. The light stretches out across the blue green undulating water like a penis, looking for me, reaching out to me, sliding, wet, right up to where I stand, waiting to enter me. I feel it coming nearer, changing from gold to silver to gold, passing under the ducks, around the seaweed, over the waves, reaching out to me in foam. It begins to make love to me. It's a hand, saying Come.

It wraps itself around my back, pulls me close. Fuck me, fuck me, I cry to the sun, bearing down; I will be pregnant by you, I will give birth to more water. I reach out my arms to enfold the yellow light, to pull it up to me, to swallow it, to store it forever. I'm wet from the top of my head to my toes, inside and out. The water inside me is the same as outside me. I am the sea and I love the sun. I need it. My cunt drips, my own juice mixing with sweat and pool water, running down my leg like the sun's semen. I could stand here forever.

But a man. A man cannot touch me. I am afraid of all of them, except Sam.

Last night, my last night here, I dreamt I was in a room with a bad man and other people suspected of being bad, and everyone was

shooting guns. Finally someone noticed a spot on the wall reacting as if alive. I talked to it. We had obviously killed the person it once was and this spot was its spirit. My heart went to it. Excitement bubbled up from low in my body, spreading upwards. I talked to the wall, whispering, intense.

The spirit answered by dropping books off the shelves, crashing a vase—it was pleading. I felt I was about to do something wonderful. I cut the spot off the wall with a knife, lifted it up and sent it flying out the open window. The excitement in me filled the dream, I woke up bearing down, trying to release the feeling in some kind of orgasm: I had freed the presence. By freeing it I had freed me, and the freedom ran through my body like fear that I wasn't afraid of.

I felt that in the dream I'd touched rage in me. I'd let it flow out in such violence that I decimated the bad presence: out there—the rapist, but really, the violent bad man in me. Somehow, by tuning into the evil spirit once it was harmless, I felt such a surge of compassion for it, and for all of myself that I could let it go. Almost as if my greatest fear is of my own rage: the rape brought it out from hiding. So much of my energy has been going into keeping it hid, or at least under control. In the dream I was able to make peace with it. Perhaps it won't change my fears of men, or the dark, or the city, but I hope it will ease the debilitating fear of my own feelings.

It's Thursday, I'm back from Esalen; I walk into Sam's office, another Thursday at eleven. He looks at me with total incomprehension, as though I'm a figurine, a glass doll.

"Let's lie down together," he says, touching my shoulder, guiding me smoothly next to him on the floor, on our sides, nestling into the rust colored carpet. We hug. He kisses me. I feel the energy of the room joining with me, and I kiss him back with the full force of it. His tongue is in my mouth, but detached from his feelings, curiously innocent. Now he's running his hand over my shoulder, pressing on my skin as if to bring me closer to him, but not moving me at all.

I remember Rena in the next room. Could she hear me? What if I make noise? I always make noise in here, screaming, crying, shouting, but not love-making noises. Not with her husband. Fucking her

husband in the next room. A fantasy come true. Everything I dreamt in the woods, on the cliffs, in my little bed alone in my mother's house, on Thursdays at eleven and Monday nights at eight thirty, is happening. I am amazed that I do not care about Rena, feeling that she can take care of herself. Am I making this therapy? Is that what this is?

Then he's on top of me, his long legs between mine, beginning to spread my knees apart. I didn't expect this. I didn't allow for it. Thinking it is one thing, this is another. The moment I feel his skin on my pink and now exposed inner skin, I shut off my lower half. I'm keeping it shut, I cannot feel past my navel. I stop him.

"Wait, wait a minute, what're you doing?" I whisper, hard, practically pushing him off. His mind is somewhere else. This is like the mechanical and rehearsed opening steps of a dance he's not into yet. There's no heart in it.

"What's wrong?"

I hug him to me on the floor.

He turns his head a little to the left, looking past me to the drapes, to the end of the room, and concentrating. On keeping himself hard, or on keeping himself from coming. I don't know what he's thinking, and I want to know.

Why?" I need to know. Had it been me wanting it all along?

"I'd do anything to make it up to you."

"What?"

"After the rape, I'd do anything to make it up to you."

I don't really understand, but I feel loved. I think he wants to comfort me, but I know this is not right for a doctor and patient. He sits back on his heels a foot away.

"Rena's in the next room," I say.

"I know." He looks at me as if that shouldn't make any difference.

"In forty-five minutes I've got to get up, put my clothes on and walk out of here as if nothing's happened but talking."

He nods his head, following me.

"What if I run into Rena in the hallway? What if I run into Gretchen in the waiting room? I don't want to smile and say hello

and pretend.” I think, Rena would smell you on me if I saw her. Later, she would smell me on you. I wonder if she has before, if she’s smelled my tears among other tears on your shirts.

He gets to his knees and turns into the doctor again, his voice modulated, “I can understand your not wanting to get involved with a married man right now.”

I don’t understand. I’m only his patient. Is making love in fifty minutes at eighty dollars for the session “getting involved?” I wonder what he feels for me. All of a sudden he’s just a married man, that’s the problem; his being my doctor is nothing to worry about. So if he’s not being my doctor, and he’s married, what are we doing? What did I say ‘No’ to? Did we solve something long ago, when I wasn’t paying attention? Did he stop being doctor when I wasn’t looking? Have we been pretending, or rather, have I been pretending, and all along he’s been another human being, married, touching me? I’ve been thinking it’s okay for me to be in love with him, all patients fall in love with their doctors. Now what?

He puts his hands on my still bare shoulders, and makes up a poem on the spot. He ends it “Sarah, my love.” I ignore the content. It sounds like he’s in love with me, but that can’t be. He can love children, friends, patients, me; caring for someone, that’s loving them, but being in love, that’s romance, that’s something else. Who do I think I am? I sit up.

I put on my clothes quickly and walk out quickly past Rena’s closed office door and into the outer office, where a nice young man I don’t know sits stiffly on the waiting room couch for Sam. Everything is so brown: the rug, the cheap couch, incongruous for an eighty to a hundred-dollar an hour shrink. Who is worth a hundred dollars an hour to talk to?

On Monday night I sit on the floor against my favorite white nubby pillow. I’m next to Gretchen and the door, across from Larry, Pat, Carol, Lindsay and Nathan, and watch Sam’s hand move up and down Rena’s ankle as he concentrates on Larry’s childhood. I don’t know who I am anymore. A patient? The Other Woman in the same room with the wife? Me on the floor, the supplicant, she on the

couch, imperious, the Queen? I want a hand on my ankle, a soothing male touch, male love. I'm bound, trapped.

Later John tells me he's going to New York to see his literary agent.

"Come with me," he says.

The pretrial is put off. Claudia says they'll call me wherever I am. They'll send for me, I shouldn't wait around. I have nothing to keep me here but habit. I need a vacation, I need to get away and think.

I have friends living in Boston to visit, friends in New York to stay with while John stays with his friends. I pack enough for three weeks, call World Airways, leave a message for Sam giving up my Thursdays for a month, kiss Mom and Dad goodbye at the airport, and walk toward the boarding gate.

Chapter 12

Standing on the end of the wooden jetty at Gray's Beach in Yarmouthport, Cape Cod, watching the sun set over the marsh and the mile wide beach, I realize I'm alone and should be afraid. I've never seen a marsh. I think it's the most beautiful thing in the world.

They told me at the coffee shop I stopped in on my way here that this is where cranberries grow; I imagine the reeds filled with red berries, the little water birds darting in and out of the tall grasses, how it all looks in the morning when the sun rises on the other side of the Cape. I've been here since yesterday, when I rented a car in Boston and drove here by myself, two days after the end of tourist season. I'm the only guest at the Colonial Inn; every night it's me and the owner and the waiters and the cook.

A lone seagull is flying over the sky blue water beyond the beach, at the point where it curves, seemingly returning to itself. The tall green reeds move so-delicately, to some music they hear, and I start to sway with them. The sun is beginning to set.

It's four forty-five and the sun is red. I see two men get out of a car at the parking lot and start on the jetty; it's very long, the jetty, it's a long way back to the parking lot, to my car, to warmth and safety. I wrap my borrowed disintegrating gray fake fur coat around me as if it'll turn me into a bear instead of a lone woman. I want to stay. I wait. They walk up to me, nod, walk past me, and suddenly I stop being frightened of them.

The sun is orange, the sky is pink, and the water birds are flying over the silver grass growing out of the sand, and in and out of the marsh, where the sea water tunnels through the grass like a miniature African River, winding around and around in a maze, a gentle flow of water so close to the sea, but separate. The jetty creaks under me.

I take pictures of the sun turning from red to orange to a yellow so bright I'm afraid it'll burn the camera lens; as I look away, the imprint of the yellow sun stays in my eye, giving everything a yellow

center. The sky turns orange, then pink, then gray, now carbon paper blue.

The two men come back towards me, pass me again, get in their car, and drive away. I feel relief, then, just as quickly, I know I am more alone. My breath goes through my body like dry ice fumes. I'm in a mysterious bog, and someone will appear out of nowhere, leap clear across the length of the jetty, grab me and rape me, or kill me. Maybe *this* is my time to die. I want to weep because a person cannot enjoy beauty alone anymore. The cold is going right through me. The sun disappears, the silver turns to gray, and the silence that was so crisp now feels damp.

I stop being fascinated by the beauty of the marsh and hurry back to my car before I'll find myself in darkness. The silver is gone. It's very cold. I clutch my ratty coat over my down vest and pull my head into its collar. The grass moves, swept by the air as the wind comes up, rocking some things to sleep, waking others up.

The Inn is warm and bright. I sit down to dinner, watch the fire, let myself thaw.

I've always promised myself I'd see the colors of New England at Halloween. Before I rented the car and drove here, I took the train from Boston to Concord, to see Thoreau's lake.

I got a map from the efficient fellow behind the hotel desk who was patronizing me because I was a woman alone, going out into the rain with rubber cowboy boots, purple umbrella, cheap Kodak camera, and went off to see Concord. I decided to circle counterclockwise, first to Nathaniel Hawthorne's house. The tour group consisted of one couple and me because it suddenly started to pour and everyone else who might have stopped there decided to drive on by. Into a windowpane in the house, Nathaniel scratched a love poem to his wife Abigail; it's such a childlike and adoring thing to do; the house ceased to feel like a relic and became a home.

"And in this room..." the tour guide continued, "Nathaniel wrote..." His desk, the light coming in from the window, the grass and trees outside, it's all part of a real, sweet life. Real people lived there not so very long ago. In comparison I was lost, rootless, of no time at all.

“Watch your step...it’s slippery,” she said after I’d thanked her, wrapped too many clothes around me, and walked out the door and into the mud. The rain had turned to a drizzle.

I walked toward the Minuteman statue down the block, feeling the sun a little brighter through the gray. Everything was gold and orange and green on the path, colored leaves on the ground. I turned left onto the road that passes over the river and stopped before the Minuteman, who seemed very gallant, standing so still while people with umbrellas hurried around him, past me, away from the walks, heading to their cars as the rain began again, striking the leaves on the ground, spattering the gray Minuteman who now seemed to be glowing almost silver. I was very moved, but I didn’t know why.

On that spot overlooking the beautiful river, the English and American armies stopped marching toward each other and began to fight. There was such a feeling of peace now, it was hard to imagine violence and death where I stood. I wanted to walk on past the Minuteman and follow the path around the river to the house high up on the banks that I could see through the trees. The river glowed from the little drops of water falling on it, making circles within circles, like ever moving silver polka dots on a silver gown, ripples in a gum wrapper. I could’ve stood there a long time, thinking about the past; the past, all glorified and imagined. So far from the dreary details of the present.

Now the rain was coming down hard again. I wanted to see the house where Walt Whitman lived, and it was a long walk away, I was only halfway around the circle. I headed back down the path toward the town center, toward the circle with the flag in the middle and the Inn to one side. But now it was pouring, and my coat was getting soaked through. Just as I thought about hitchhiking the half mile back, a cute sports car approached slowly.

I stuck out my thumb, he pulled over. The driver was a gorgeous young man with the look of an artist; too tall and lanky for the small car, with fine chiseled features and a relaxed mouth. I felt like a little girl again, looking for a pretty man to take me home and be good to me. Anyone remotely fitting the description makes me tense with anticipation, and then I stuff that excitement down in my chest,

where it tightens and sends thoughts to my brain: You're fat, you're tight and tense, what do you think you're doing, wanting all the time? It's a contest. He seemed to win, or the wanting part of me, because I got in the car and smiled. But then the fat girl in my head asked to be dropped off in the shopping area a block down from the Inn. She said, "Goodbye, it was nice meeting you, thanks for the lift," and then I walked two doors down to the ice cream parlor and had a hot fudge sundae.

The rain hadn't let up and I was feeling so tired again. More flu, always that slightly feverish, drained feeling, as if I could sleep for days if only my mind would rest long enough to let me drop off. The sugar in the sundae lifted my spirits, but there was no way I was going to make it anywhere but home.

In my room, I sat by the window still in my coat and scarves, shivering. I tried to think about the evening and how I wanted to spend it. Did I want to nap? When's dinner? The rain was dropping in sheets off the overhang above my room on the third and top floor.

When I first registered, they gave me a lovely red and white antique room in the original part of the Inn, but the sound of the building's generators buzzed through my head when I tried to lie down and take a nap. A steady, insistent and painful hum.

The room's one tiny window opened out on a roof where I could see drain pipes, all manner of machinery thumping away, or maybe it was just the pounding of the rain that made it sound like that. I went back downstairs and asked to be moved, and they put me in their new wing. The room was green, with tiny prints on the walls, an ugly modern bedspread in greens and golds, and the nice straight backed chair I was sitting in now.

I liked this room better, with its view of the whole town—of the flag and the streets running in three different directions, and of the rain. It was very gray and depressing out there. I watched the rain for almost twenty minutes, sitting on the edge of the hard chair, feeling the familiar, always present, upsetting and somehow comforting fatigue that always made me want to eat, and even though I'd just downed a hot fudge sundae, I decided to go down for an early dinner.

I was getting tired of this eating alone. It's nice when you're barely dragging yourself around to not have to make conversation, but with no one to talk to, the thoughts in my head get awfully loud.

After dinner I went back up to my room to start a letter to Sam. Thank God it was dark out now, definitely evening. The half state of dusk was like my own limbo—a hovering between the dark and the light that should mean a graceful transition to one or the other, but in me always seems stuck somewhere in between. When night came, things were simpler. I could watch television or read or write or go eat more, or sleep. I wasn't expected to be productive.

I decided at nine o'clock to go back down again, maybe have a Perrier.

The bar was very comforting—deep red on the walls and chairs, people speaking in low voices, gentle lighting, a few candles. I sat at a small table and ordered a club soda with lime from the kind cocktail waitress. I studied the wedding ring on the hand of the very attractive man sitting alone at the other end of the room. We caught eyes for a moment, then I looked down at my drink and wondered what the hell I was doing. After twenty minutes, he came over. “Hello,” he said.

“Hello.”

“I...um....” He stopped in embarrassment, then looked at me so sweetly I smiled, really smiled, not a flirty smile. “May I join you?” I nodded my head and he sat.

“So...what're you doing in Concord?” It was difficult not to laugh.

“Looking around.”

He waited for me to continue.

“A vacation.”

“Oh.”

“Do you live here?” I asked.

“Yep. Did you get to see much? The rain...”

I told him about my day, then asked, “Does that wedding ring mean you're married, or you just don't want to be mobbed?”

He looked a little sheepish. “I'm married.”

“Oh.”

“My wife and I are...having problems.”

“Oh.”

After I told him I was divorced and we discussed the difficulties of relationships, I invited him up to my room, not sure what I wanted to do with him. He was very nice, seemingly safe, not at all an ax-murderer, not a rapist. But I was scared. We got to the hallway just outside my door and he kissed me. Very gently, like he was honored by my company. Like I was a nice surprise for sore eyes. And a bored penis, I thought.

I was scared, really too scared to bring him into my room and close the door behind us. It wasn't the sex, it wasn't that he was married, in a way that made him safer. It was raining in Concord, Massachusetts and I was on vacation and the whole thing was romantic, but I was afraid to be alone with a man.

“What's wrong?” he asked, “You're shaking...”

“I'm...I'm a little afraid...I....” I was about to tell him. I needed to.

“Afraid of me? Hey...”

“I was attacked last year. Raped. Beaten up.” I felt like a fool telling him.

“Oh.” He stepped back a little. He wasn't moving away from me because he was horrified, because I'd become some strange, pitiable victim suddenly, but because he was a man feeling that guilt all men feel when I tell them. And I could see the anger coming into his eyes a little. For a moment he didn't know what to say, but his arms were still around me, and suddenly he just wanted to comfort me.

“Oh God. I...I'm sorry. I...you haven't slept with anyone since then?”

“No.”

“I'd like to give you a good experience...”

My arms were around his shoulders. I'd have given anything to stop the shaking in my legs, to quiet the terror that rattled through my heart for no reason at all, I knew he was not dangerous, I could feel that he was kind and good. On the other hand, he was considering cheating on his wife, and now it was out of charity to a

rape victim. But I could tell he was sincere, and I wanted to sleep with him. I would have liked to feel a man again.

He kissed me again. Now I could feel myself pull away. There was no help for it. I just couldn't feel, damnit!

"No," I said. "I'm just not ready I guess...I'm sorry, please." Suddenly the irrational fear that since I'd rejected him, he was going to hurt me flooded my system. He was going to turn into a bad man, a monster, and hurt me.

"I want to make it up to you," he said.

I inched toward my door, my key in my hand. Now I just wanted to run from him. "I'm sorry..." I said.

"Okay, I understand...I just want you to know all men aren't like that."

"I know."

"Goodnight. Sleep well." And he turned and was gone.

I stayed up late, writing to Sam, trying to understand what happened, feeling very sorry for myself.

I think about sleeping with the cook. He fixed me lunch yesterday, and he's not bad looking, and seems like a serious person, and I'm lonely. Very lonely, and celibate, and thinking of Sam. My eyes are fogged over from the flu. I'm a hundred years old and a lifetime celibate.

I said goodnight to the cook at ten in the kitchen, watching him mop up grease and wash big pots. In my bed now, at eleven, I think about going down and inviting him up, but all I can see is grease. In his hair. In his fingernails. Oozing from all the pores of his body.

So I sleep alone, and I'm freezing; they've forgotten I'm here and didn't turn on the heat.

In the morning it's raining, but I planned to drive to Provincetown anyway. I had breakfast at the Inn, another cook was on duty, and now I'm getting in and out of my car in the rain, stopping at antique stores, buying nothing, searching for the potter's studio I've been told about on a little side road by the lake.

The rain has stopped for a moment, and I sit on a bench looking at the gray lake, and at the reeds dripping water, the water gently massaging the stems, flowing down, reflecting the brightness in the air from the hidden sun, stroking the reeds and the branches and the tree trunks slowly, sensuously. I want to stroke someone. I want to feel soft male flesh under the palm of my hand, under my fingers, I want to feel it turn hard and taut in the reflection of my bright eyes. I want to look into someone's eyes. I miss Sam too much.

Last night I dreamt I was fixing the kitchen floor in my mother's house. We peeled away layer after layer, tile under tile, under carpet under carpet. I feel like I'm being peeled away, layer after layer.

I am one of a group of twelve people at the potter's studio. The rest are teachers. The potter sits throwing clay and making it rise into curved shapes, demonstrating, explaining. Does he do this for everyone who comes to visit, or just this special group? I'm lucky. I watch him throw pot after pot; I watch his apprentices sitting on benches next to him throw pot after pot. The studio is filled with plants and with rows of pots and dishes, small, medium and large, in different stages of the work; some are glazed blue and brown, all beautiful. The yard on the property is wet and glistening, piled high with chopped wood for the stove just where the domestic, green, short grass changes into tall, wild, browner grass, the woods. He lives miles from the road, on this thin Cape, in the middle of the woods, living off the tourists, off his art. I want to change my whole life right now and sign on as an apprentice potter.

Provincetown is depressing. It's too big, too much of a town, with too many gift shops and too many tourists, and with so many boats in the harbor that I want to jump on and lead out to the ocean. I know Eugene O'Neill and Edna St. Vincent Millay have been here, worked here at the theater, and it makes me think about my own work and how committed I usually am to it. Lately I don't know. Everything is such a struggle, I'm tired. Where would I have been in the Twenties, when Edna Millay was a bohemian in the Village? Home in my mother's house, contemplating how other people burn

their candles at one or both ends, and what my next safe move would be?

I come home to the fire downstairs and talk to the waiters. They have the television going tonight, and that ruins it for me. I want to pretend it is many years ago and I'm in the woods and it's quiet always.

In the dining room of the Inn, sitting by the wall, eating dinner, I feel the radiator warm on my right arm. The curtains smell like they're burning. There's a weed in a glass on the table that looks like heather and makes me think of some never ending and pristine English moor, completely deserted except for the ghost of Emily Bronte. In my waking dream, she's walking—tirelessly walking across the land she loves so much.

Voices from four different tables of people fill my head and quiet my own voices, making me feel blissfully alive. The young men parade around in their tight waiter uniforms; I want to eat them all up.

Pennsylvania station is a rude shock. The bag ladies and street vendors and filth don't make me feel at home, they make me think of being back alone in the woods, and how that doesn't really suit me either; I feel like an alien being with most of her memories of home gone: I know this is not it, I am not comfortable in my skin here, but I can't remember what it's like where I'm supposed to be. I have no sense of belonging anywhere, just a vague recollection of some happier times.

New York isn't my city. My moods change according to the block I'm on—if it's slummy, I get depressed, if it's beautiful shops and apartments, I burst with ecstasy. It's impossible to feel calm with everyone running, and my own system always trying to rush ahead of me. New York is on my speed frequency, but it's a blur.

The policemen in black uniforms walking around Pennsylvania Station remind me of the cop in brown uniform I met in the train station in Boston on my way back to New York. I was killing two hours, waiting for my train, and we started a conversation about cops and trains, and about his tough childhood and tough personality, and

after a half hour, and lunch, and warm, affectionate feelings flowing back and forth, and what I mistook for attraction, he told me he was gay.

I think he would have liked to take me home with him anyway, to the suburbs, for dinner with him and his three platonic roommates, and I would have liked to have gone; but somehow I felt the need to get back to New York; I had closed my mind to adventure when I dropped off my rental car, and there was no opening it up again.

I said goodbye to him on the train, he'd come inside, carrying my bag for me, and kissed me on the mouth. It was warm and nice. I thought about him all the way to New York, and what it would be like to make love to him, a nice safe man, a policeman who would protect me, who had no use for me sexually, and I wanted to turn back, my heart was beating so insistently, flowing out so sweetly for a man for the first time since I left Sam in our last Thursday session before I left town. But I couldn't turn around. So I thought, and dreamed, imagined, and before I knew it I was in the filth of New York; the noise broke the stillness of my dream, and my mind raced again, along with everyone else's in the city, to think of what I had to do now, and next, and tomorrow.

I have a hot fudge sundae in the coffee shop, making myself fatter and more depressed, but then I lift my eyes up off the white Formica in front of me and look at people here underground, and suddenly I'm ready to move out into the street. I'm going to be a New Yorker. This will be fun.

Chapter 13

A voice wakes me up. My father, saying “Hello.”
I shake my head, my heart pounding, I know he was here, in the room talking to me; it was not a dream. I look at the clock. One in the morning. It’s late in November, just before Thanksgiving.

The phone rings.

“Sarah?” It’s Sam.

“Sam! How are you?”

“I’m fine.” The emphasis is on I’m, as though he’s letting me know he’s the doctor and I need something from him, at his most formal. “You’ve been trying to reach me, so what is it?”

I’d called him twice last week and got his service both times. “I just wanted to say Hello.”

“Well, Hello.” There is a silence and we both breathe, loudly so we each know the other is there.

“Well,” he begins matter-of-factly, “Rena and I are getting a divorce.”

“What?”

“We’ve been working on it a couple of months and...”

“Oh God, Sam, you’re kidding me.”

“No, I’m not kidding you,” he’s being patient with me, holding in the irritation, “We’re getting a divorce.”

“Oh, God, I’m sorry.”

“Don’t be sorry.” He’s fake cheery now. Stiff upper lip and full of wisdom about his future. “Just two people going on separate ways, that’s all.”

I’m crying because he needs to tell me stories. I’m crying for the strain in his voice. I wonder how I could have not known. I wonder if he loves me.

“I love you,” he says.

“And I love you.”

More silence, more breathing.

“I wish you well, Sam, I really wish you both well.”

“Yeah.”

I decide to take a chance. “I guess this changes things.”

“Huh?”

“Between us.”

“Now don’t get wicked on me.” His sense of humor is back.

I laugh. “You’re not going to be married anymore.”

“Yeah.”

More silence, breathing.

“I guess it changes things,” he says. “We’ll see.”

That’s all I need to hear. “Goodnight, Sam.”

“Night, darlin’.”

I can’t even think of sleeping. I’m thinking about him in a totally different way. Suddenly I’m no longer a patient. I stop needing him that way. I wonder if I’ve misinterpreted what he’s said to me over the years about the way he loved me; maybe I ignored all the signals. I wonder what’s really possible. I want him.

I get up and make tea, wander around, wish John were home; my arms itch to do something, hold someone. I wish John weren’t gay. I wait for him to get home from the bars or the arms of tonight’s lover so we can make a fire, drink wine, and stay up and talk.

This afternoon we walked in the door five minutes apart, bringing home the same pan, mine from Fourteenth Street, his from Canal. It’s small, blue porcelain flecked with white, perfect for boiling water for tea or heating up soup or leftovers. I came back from an interview at the Public Theater tired and sniffly and a little achy, feeling myself getting scared of another night alone and the dark night coming up. I felt it coming like a weight on my heart.

The apartment is bare except for a card table and two metal chairs, my wood platform bed with a mattress of two inches of foam, and another mattress on the floor of the living room, John’s bed, covered in an Indian spread. The dark wood floors were spectacularly clean when we moved in, and we’ve kept them that way. The fireplace, when we have it going, shines off the polished wood, glowing red, flushing everything wine-colored. Fifteen floors down the view is of dingy backyards between Fourteenth and Fifteenth, but

I can see people walking at the corner of Fourteenth and Seventh Avenue. That comforts me.

It's starting to get cold; winter's coming. Last week I did a small show—singing and dancing about health and safety for Union workers. Two weeks' rehearsal and three performances for union brass. It was great fun; now I have a paid-up Actor's Equity card again. You get used to doing theater for free for so long, it's a surprise when they hand you a check for doing what you love anyway.

In the evenings now, I walk to the Village with John. At night we work with each other in the empty living room, one of us sitting on the floor on John's bed drinking wine or coffee and directing the other. He helped me through treacherous passages about industrial poisons where I listed names, dates and figures in a passionate plea for employees to pay attention to their working conditions. It seems everything everywhere gives off toxic fumes; we are being slowly poisoned by our carpets and drapes and desks. By glue and shampoo. Last night I helped him prepare an audition for a soap opera. We're perfect roommates.

I've had the flu again for a few days, in bed with a fever, reading. Suddenly wanting to write.

John is at Charles and Lily's apartment playing chess tonight; I wanted to be alone with my fever and my book. Lily and Charles got officially married last week, for the parents who didn't know they're already married. Lily wore a rented costume to her wedding, a beautiful gown that looked as though it might have danced with Napoleon: ivory satin with pleats on part of the skirt and pink trim. Lily looked beautiful in the dress, and Charles in a brown tuxedo. John was the best man, also in brown tuxedo, feeling silly. The short ceremony took place in a narrow room of a fancy hotel filled with tall stalks of flowers in autumn colors; Lily and Charles broke the dish at their feet in what seemed like two minutes after the Rabbi began to speak.

The reception started in a smallish room with champagne, then moved into a big banquet hall where we were officially arranged with nametags on the tables for a sit down dinner. They'd put me next to

Lily's cousin Milton, who was small and dark, and not my type at all. I was trying to get the attention of the pale looking, icy fellow two seats away, but once Milton hit on his teaching in the Bronx, we were off. We danced all evening, and then he took me for coffee and pastry to Little Italy, where I'd never been. I knew the restaurant we ate in was Mafia owned, but I liked the street, with gold tasseled decorations spanning lamppost to lamppost, and an air of festivity.

Milton drove me back to Chelsea and came up for coffee and more talk. I wanted to sleep with him, I wanted to be able to sleep with someone. I knew John would be home soon; I could close the bedroom door and have privacy, still knowing he was out there if I needed him. But Milton turned into a melancholy jerk within a half-hour and I couldn't. The attraction evaporated into thin air and all I wanted was to be alone. He was mooning about his ex-wife endlessly, until I finally had to say that I wasn't going to sleep with him and he realized he'd have to leave. We'd had a terrific rapport, feisty and witty. Where'd it go? I get angry with men I want to like when they want only to be listened to. They disappoint me, and then I sleep alone.

When Milton left, and I was alone in the apartment at two in the morning, I got scared. Sometimes, when the fear passes through my mind I make it real. I grab onto it. I look in the closets, the bathtub, and even after I've checked the place my skin crawls. I invent someone behind the drapes who's magically entered the closed window fifteen flights up. Is that fear what I want? Do I enjoy fighting for my life so much that I make up an enemy and play it out whenever I'm alone? Do I enjoy the danger, the fear? Am I so bad that I want to be punished? What did I do that was so bad?

It's almost as though I can feel psychosis creeping in. At this moment I could fall into madness. I feel that as a grownup, I should be strong and whole, but now I see that even grownups are helpless: we don't have our mommies and daddies to run to and blame and hide behind anymore. We have each other, but we know that we have no control. Sometimes we live long and healthy lives and sometimes we don't. I think about how I walk around the city. I say that I will never forget what happened to me so that I will always be aware. But

if I walk around afraid I can't see. I wonder if I'm an invitation to danger. Do I create it?

Now the fear washes over me again. I am a reasonable woman, I'm not crazy, but I go to check the closets. I've been here all evening by myself and now I have to check the closets. Am I a kid with a bogeyman? Do I have a private nightmare to replace reality? Is real life all that much harder to live with than my fantasy demons?

I talk to this man behind the closet door, behind the curtains: Who are you? He answers, *The dark you. Your sexual hatred. Your blind hatred of men. I am your reason to hate, your rationale. Your devil. Love me. I will haunt you till you die. I am you.*

I know it's John coming up the elevator; yes, there's the key in the lock. The walls are so white it's like standing in the recreation room in a hospital ward; you wait to see who's coming in.

"Hi!" I say.

"Hi. You're up."

"Yeah. I had an interesting evening. What about you?"

"Yeah." His face is so soft and non-committal about most things that it's hard to read. It's hard to imagine him having a terrible time with anyone. He looks so sad these days, but mellow. I don't think he's over Stanley. I don't think he wants his life back yet anymore than I do.

I hand him some red wine and we sit on his mattress and talk. I tell him about Sam and the phone call. I pour out my love and confusion. John nods his head, then goes blank for a moment, staring at the far white wall, thinking, then cocks his head over to me and down.

"Oh, Sarah, you don't want him."

It's a week later, I'm sitting at Cafe Figaro with a dour waiter who looks like he wishes I wouldn't sit here alone. I walked here; I couldn't do that in Los Angeles; I like that. I also like cab drivers. They see you safely to your door, they offer contact as human beings who talk to you, who have a sense of humor, professionals.

I sit with my Cappuccino dripping whipped cream down the sides of the cup, too sophisticated to lick it off. I try to catch the steamed

milk and melting cream with my spoon before it hits the saucer, playing, happily waiting for John to come meet me for dinner. I look around, wondering if it's ever allowed in this city to make eye contact without violating privacy.

Two nights ago it was Thanksgiving. With Scott in San Francisco, and me here, and Mom and Dad in LA, we are so separate this year. I miss them, I miss family. John didn't feel like going out, he wanted to be alone, spent Thanksgiving dinner with three old friends from UCLA who live here, eating fish in the Village. This year I have a lot to be thankful for. I'm alive.

The traffic is heavy outside, and people glide by each other perfectly aware but focusing straight ahead. I remember that the cab driver I rode with last night was an off-duty policeman, and that for some reason it didn't make me feel any safer. He seemed out of step with himself. I can't picture policemen without uniforms. Now there's a woman walking by the window hugging a doll, a gray dog made out of yarn, and talking to it. She could be me.

What I like best about New York is that I have no history here. I'm so scared most of the time, but now that I've been raped it's more acceptable. In dance class I met a woman who attends an acting class that calls itself a "Samurai" group. Their philosophy is to live and work as though the point of a sword is touching your back, touching your spine. You can't go backward, backward is death; you have no choice but to move forward. I like the image. With a sword in my back all the time, my fear would be natural.

A man with a green parka and brown ski cap is sitting practically across from me, staring at my purse and packages. My heart goes to my mouth. I want to scream. He starts to look like the mad slasher who cut up five people on East Twenty-fourth Street last week; he's still loose, a composite drawing of him is pasted on every bus, every corner.

This man takes an arm out of the parka and gives the waiter trouble; what he wants is not on the menu. He's still staring at my purse. I wonder what he's thinking: is he blind, or are his eyes stuck like that? I want to move, but I'm frozen. I don't want to call attention to myself. I don't know what I'm seeing, I just know he's

evil. I'm shaking, praying John will show up, or the waiter will come over so I can say something. Now he puts his arm back in his jacket and closes the menu in a huff, gets up to leave, and I start breathing again as soon as he's out the door.

"Aaaahhhhh!" A woman's startled voice. She's holding up her wallet. "He took it all!" she says. "Sixty dollars." The waiter bolts after him half way down the street, but the pickpocket is long gone, and the waiter lumbers back, eyes glowing, looking for a fight but glad he missed it.

So that's how they steal in New York, I think; that's why you always keep your purse on your lap, your arm around it. He'd taken his arm out of the jacket, reached back, opened her purse on the chair next to her while her back was to him and her dinner companion talked away, not noticing, taken out her wallet, removed the money, replaced the wallet, put his arm back in the jacket and left nonchalantly. I watched the whole thing and didn't know what I was seeing. Maybe I couldn't have stopped it. Now I think I'm glad I didn't know, because I probably would have done nothing and just felt worse.

I hate being scared. I hate it. Being scared is appropriate, reasonable in American cities. All of a sudden I see that's true, and how does anyone live with the fear? How do we change things so we don't have to be so scared all the time? I don't know how to eradicate violence, but it seems to me the way to start is to make peace with it within ourselves so we no longer have to push it out into the world in order not to have to look at it inside. But I suppose that's soppy thinking. Every other way I can think to control violence on the streets brings up so much rage in me, the urge to kill, that I feel powerless to affect anything. That's the way people who do violence must feel. Powerless.

So if we all feel ineffectual, only some vent their frustration on themselves and some damage others, you'd think if we could manage to empower each other rather than strip the humanity away from each other, things would be different. Or perhaps chains and locks and iron bars between those who just feel violent and those who act violent is the only answer for now. It hurts my head and my heart to

think about it. It seems like a circle of hate and fear that feeds on itself and can never be broken.

Chapter 14

It's New Year's Eve, I got a fire going all by myself, it glints off the white walls. The snow piles up outside against my fourteen foot high windows while I wait for the ball to drop at midnight. Life here on West Ninth St. in the Village has been so peaceful, like the colors in Glenda's portraits of spoons on her walls, like the deep colors of the African and South American rugs on her floors and over the door, like the carved wood deer on the small oak table. Everything is perfect here. The bed is small; it's for one person, me. I've been so happy here. There are no cockroaches, and the smell is of cleanliness. I like being alone in this room; I don't ever pick up the phone just to hear another human voice.

I've tried painting here; while Glenda's off in Ecuador with Gordon I have her apartment and her brushes; I bought charcoal and paint, but what I'm doing, the view of the single, leafless tree out the tall window on the right, isn't very good. It sits on the easel, waiting to get better, but I'm discouraged.

I don't want to be glowing in the glitter of some man's life. I want my own glitter. But not being in love makes you tired; it feels like you've misplaced something. I can feel my longing to be in love.

This New Year's I could stay in alone, happily, and watch television, but I've been invited to a party at the Manhattan Plaza by the friends from UCLA I spent Thanksgiving with, on the thirty-eighth floor, with a terrace looking out on Forty-second street.

Every New Year's for the last few years in L.A. there's been a party at Barry Hall's. The same friends from the theater, the same lasagna at midnight. Everyone is paired up differently each year after divorces and breakups, but all the faces are the same.

This Christmas, I went to upstate New York with John and his brother Richard, driving in Richard's yellow Dodge through a countryside like the pages of a Currier and Ives picture book.

Richard's house was thigh deep in snow. This is a good life, I thought. Merrilee, Richard's wife, is charming. JoEllen, their little girl, five, started to warm to me after one hour of hiding behind the

Christmas tree, and by dinnertime we were polishing our nails together. I could smell dinner ready to go in the kitchen and I was starved.

We'd stopped at the neighborhood store on the main drag of the town for a gift of wine glasses, toys for the kids and calamari for the spaghetti sauce. I told John in amazement, "I can't believe you grew up here."

"There's the bar I used to hang out in." He pointed to a brown stucco and brick building on the corner.

"My God. You're so sophisticated...."

"Gay. I knew I was gay when I was five. I had a crush on my male teacher. It didn't go away. We used to hang out here after school."

It was so quaint, a village.

"My Dad had a farm," he said.

"You told me a long time ago, but I didn't think what it'd really be like."

"I milked cows and everything."

"Ralph."

"Yep. That's me, Ralph, little Ralphie. I hate my father, you know."

"I know." I put my arm around him.

"He hates me." he held up the bag of calamari, "This is going to be an Italian Christmas. You'll love it."

I remember one Monday night in Group before I left for New York when Larry went around the room describing each of us as an animal. Rena was a hawk—quick, watchful, smart; Gretchen a leopard—sleek, sexy, dark; Nancy a fawn—sweet, tender, innocent. I was a rabbit. Larry didn't think much of rabbits; to him I was soft, warm, cuddly, helpless, and not very exciting. Weeks later he told me he could see a glint in my eye that said to him "I'm for me."

"The rabbit died," he said, applauding the change.

This Christmas I bought cards showing a hare leaping through a snow-covered forest, and sitting by my fire, curled up with chamomile tea, I wrote to him: *The rabbit I am lives with the vulture I am,*

and the vulture loves the rabbit and the rabbit loves the vulture. Knowing this, the rabbit can fly. My heart is pounding with affection, Love, Sarah.

Now I think of myself as a lovely winged rabbit.

It's snowing, and if I'm going to the party, I'd better go. I turn off the television, wrap myself up and head out to find a taxi. It feels like everyone's on the street, no one's at home. The party's out here. Taxis carry four, five, six people, and the drivers wave. I stand a few feet from the curb with my arm in the air, and a cab with three people already in the back seat stops for me. I don't understand.

The driver is giddy with the night. "These people," he says, formally, pointing to the bundled up trio in the back, "Have agreed to pick you up." We all laugh, and I get in. The threesome turns out to be a couple and another single person, going to different places but all heading uptown.

The couple gets out at Thirtieth, paying half the fare on the meter, then we pick up another couple at Thirty-ninth. I wouldn't mind being out here in a taxi at midnight, when the horns go off. I have the feeling confetti will drop from the sky on all of New York, and bands will float down the streets over the snow, and perfect strangers will hug each other on street corners.

But I get out at Forty-third, paying another half of what it says on the meter, knowing that the couple will pay another half, and the last person another half, and all of us will get off cheap and the driver will make a lot of money. It's terrific for everyone. They tell me that during the transportation strike, everyone who hitchhiked got picked up, and there was a festive mood. "People walked over the Brooklyn Bridge," the driver says.

At Joe's, it's quiet. These people don't know what to talk about besides the theater, but out on the terrace, hanging up here in space, you can see the crowds at Times Square, and the silver ball straight across from us. This will be another present for my children, if there are any.

Joe has popped popcorn and a videotape of an old Jack Lemmon movie is playing on the television. His girlfriend Roselle watches him carefully, hanging on him without wanting to seem so; the whole apartment is so small and so sterile, I don't believe anyone makes

love here. The view goes to waste from the bed, it seems, there is no hint of sex between them. I think they watch the lights flicker around the city and kiss each other's forehead and sleep, or perhaps they have sex hidden deep under the covers.

I leave soon after midnight, happy to be outside again with the crowds and the cabdrivers, and when I come home, I light a candle, put on the classical radio station, take off my clothes, and dance with myself. I have lots of New Year's wishes, and no resolutions. I feel very alone, and very glad.

I've made plane reservations back to Los Angeles for next Tuesday. It's the middle of January and I walk around Fifty-seventh street waiting to go home, waiting for a bus to take me off this deserted corner at ten degrees with snow and ice on the sidewalk, away from the mean wind and home to the Village. I don't think much about slipping, I think about getting older and losing my looks. It's over here in New York. I'm already gone. I want to sit out the winter in Los Angeles, and I want to see Sam.

Chapter 15

My mother is so nervous about the safety of women alone in the Valley that I can't leave the house at night. I want to go to dance class. I want to go to restaurants and movies. But it gets dark at five o'clock, and I'm stuck inside with my need to get out. Two blocks away last week a man rode up to a 7-Eleven store on a bicycle, stabbed the owner to death and rode away. The Valley is so long and wide and deserted; there's nothing open at night anyway, and no one's on the street. Don't people have to walk their dogs?

I couldn't bear the lack of privacy at my parents' house, and I'm so jumpy about the hearing that I moved to a motel nearby. I decided it's simply not appropriate to live with them if my wanting to go out all the time makes them uncomfortable. It's their house, I'm a guest, I appreciate my mother's feelings. I remember her on the cot in my room at Cedars. But she makes me feel my desperation.

So I'm here in the Sherman Oaks Motel watching television, with my clothes laid out over the chair for tomorrow, and now I'm scared. I call John and he's not home. I call Sam, I get his service. On Monday night I went to Group and handed out Christmas presents, watching Rena on the couch, wondering how they can live together and work together when they're in the middle of a divorce. I gave Rena a box of chocolates, and Sam a porcelain horse from the antique store around the corner from Glenda's. I bought myself a larger version of the same Chinese horse: his stands on his bookshelf, and mine stands with my mother's teacup collection in the dining room cabinet.

When I came in from the waiting room, I stood by the water cooler filling my Styrofoam cup, watching the rest of the group through the open door. Sam turned to me, and when he saw me his face lit up into a gorgeous smile; it went right through me, his happiness at seeing me. I sat next to him across the room from my usual spot by the door.

He went out for a minute, and when he came back I'd already given out my presents, wool mufflers for Nathan and Larry, pins of

the Empire State Building and candles in the shape of the Chrysler Building for Pat and Lindsay, the chocolate for Rena, who was half way through the box when he sat down. My pictures had been around the room and put back in their envelope under my purse next to me. Sam started the evening with Larry, and after almost an hour, turned to me and asked, "So, Sarah, are you feeling left out?"

I was caught off guard. "What?"

"Well, we haven't asked about you or your trip, I wondered if you were feeling slighted?"

"No, I already passed out gifts. You missed it." Everyone held up their candles and mufflers and pins, "And my pictures." Rena looked at him like he was two years old. "And I'm fine."

"Oh," he nodded, not knowing what else to say, and I knew I was through here on Monday nights. I was in love with Sam and there was Rena on the couch as usual and this was crazy.

That night after Group I took myself to an Italian restaurant near my mother's house, pretending I was alone in New York and could go anywhere, ate pizza and listened to the guitarist. My heart beat twice as fast as his rhythm, knowing there would be no more Monday nights, and that I'd have to go in next Monday to say Goodbye.

It's midnight and I still haven't heard from Sam, and I need to sleep.

The alarm goes off at six-thirty. Yesterday Dad said to leave here at seven to get downtown at eight-thirty, so I'm up, and staring at myself in the mirror. I open the curtains to an empty swimming pool and cars creeping down Ventura Blvd. It sounds strange that I wanted to sleep here alone last night and drive downtown alone, shaking, but I needed the solitude. I needed to feel strong. I knew I'd be on the witness stand alone today: I'll feel something old and terrible when I see my rapist sitting in the hallway outside the courtroom and I'll be alone. If I'm going to get through the day depending on myself, I want to start out that way.

I'm wearing a brown checked antique silk skirt, a brown vest, boots, and no makeup; with my hair up in a bun I look like a milkmaid. I still wanted to wear a wig, but they laughed at me, so I

settled on wounded innocence. He'll never recognize me without my curls and big eyes.

I get to the building at seven-thirty and no one is here. The guard doesn't have my name listed for permission to park near the building; he insists I go down a level and park underground. My heart is pounding. There's no one around, just me and the guard, and he's irritated, and I'm frightened. I'm afraid my rapist is a few feet away, I'm afraid he'll see me. Suddenly I'm sorry I'm alone. Goddamn the guard, Goddamn him, how dare he! I argue with him, quietly.

"I'm on the list."

"Do you have your subpoena?"

"No, I told you..."

"If you don't have a subpoena...look, miss, just do what I tell you and go down there," he points around the back of the building, "and go downstairs and park. There'll be no problem there."

"You don't understand..."

"You can't park here, miss."

"But I'm a witness."

"Miss, you don't have your subpoena, and now you're holding up the line." There's a car behind me. It could be anyone, it could be the rapist. I'm nearly jumping out of the car, my heart is moving in such a wide arc.

"Call the D.A." I order him.

"I can't."

"Don't you have a phone?"

"Look, miss, I don't have a phone and I can't call, so will you just..."

"Call him! Call Claudia Batt. Here's her number, her extension." I start to fiddle in my purse for the number.

"I can't call, look lady..."

He's exasperated, and I'm desperate.

I scream, "Call them will you?" and before he can say anything, "I'm not parking underground, I'm not, so call them!" Then I know what to do. "Never mind," I say, and drive into the lot, go as close to the building as I can, get out and run for the glass doors. I'm afraid the guard will come after me. I want his job. I want his head. He

starts walking towards me; I can see him out of the corner of my eye, but I'm running fast, and he has other cars to check in.

I run upstairs and no one's in the offices, except the secretary to the District Attorney. I sit huffing and puffing on her green waiting room couch and tell her my story.

"Will you please call down and tell him who I am; I don't want him to hurt my car."

"He won't." She gets a better look at my face. "All right."

The building is empty; I'm sure my rapist is around the door, in the marble hallway, coming toward me. All of a sudden Eva from the Crisis Center is here, and Mom and Dad, and Claudia: "Hello, honey;" "Hi, Sarah;" "Well, Good Morning, Sarah."

Claudia is up, smiling, "No pressure, right, Sarah?" She pressures me with no pressure and her smile. Thank God Eva is here. She makes me feel like a person, everyone else makes me feel fragile and terrified. I'm unsure of myself again, of the identification, my hands shake. I breathe, try to relax.

Claudia's on the phone. When she hangs up, "Slight problem there, but no problem. The asshole wants to dump his lawyer, and who can blame him, and continue this again, but no way."

"Can he do it?" my mother asks.

"Nope, no way. The judge is pissed; he won't hear of it."

"How much time do we have?" Eva asks.

"Well, we should go down soon."

"Sarah and I'll go down now and we'll meet you there."

Claudia looks around; Mom and Dad look at me. "That's what you want to do?" Mom asks, a little hurt that I don't want to stay with her, that Eva has a firm grip on my elbow, but she sees that by not being family, Eva can keep me steady.

We get in the elevator and go to the third floor, where the courtroom is; we want to get a look at the rapist early. Two steps off the elevator, there he is sitting on the bench against the wall. I stop dead, standing behind Eva like a two-year-old, peeking out. My heart is pounding and I want to go home, but I want to do what's right. My head is drifting away again, trying to block the memory, blot out his face, clear it all away, leave me with only my body standing here.

“Walk down that hallway,” Eva orders quietly. “I want to watch his face.”

I walk down the corridor, staring at him from behind my sunglasses, then back to her. I don’t want this to be a game, it’s too important. I take off the sunglasses.

“You should have seen his face. He did a double take.” She demonstrates, her dark eyes at first passive, then flashing on a second look. We hover by the phone.

He gets up and walks right past me in his beige three-piece suit to the men’s room. His girlfriend, who’s been hanging on his arm, gets up and walks the corridor, tall, blonde, young, straight hair swinging, a look of innocence on her face. Eva and I sit on the upholstered bench against the courtroom wall. The girl saunters over and sits on the other side of Eva. All of a sudden I’m overwhelmed by pain, tears drip out of my eyes, I need to go to the bathroom and sob. Eva changes the conversation as the girl sits close, leans over, and asks, “Do you have a match?” in a sweet voice.

“No,” Eva says, then turns to me and whispers, “Let’s go to the ladies’ room.”

Inside, I start to cry. “I don’t understand,” she says, “What’s making you cry?”

“I don’t know. Those people. Those people are just walking around. She sat down, just sat down next to you, like nothing, like this is nothing. Weird, evil. Being next to her was like being next to him. It was like the same person.”

“She was making friendship.”

“What?”

“It’s called ‘making friendship,’ asking for a match, being nice. Making nice-nice. She’s saying to you ‘I’m so nice and my boyfriend’s so nice, why would you want to testify against him?’ And of course it works a little—you don’t want to testify against anybody. You don’t want to be responsible for it.”

Now I’m getting angry. It feels better than the tears. Now I want to get him. How could he hurt me, a nice, innocent girl. Again it feels like I’m paying too much for my sins.

My mother comes into the bathroom to tell me court's in session. Eva and I wait on the bench. Wait. Wait. Another case is being settled, and before long it's time for lunch and nothing's even started. I sit in the third row of seats as if I'm one of the audience. Am I an actress here, or am I a person? I study his back at the defense table as the Judge declares recess. All of a sudden I'm calmer than I've been. I feel comforted in this room, the Judge feels comforting even from here. There's wisdom here. I'm holding onto my hands, in this long, soft, flowing skirt, so comfortable and soft, relieved.

Back in Claudia's office on the eighteenth floor, I suggest we go out for lunch.

"Sushi," Claudia decides.

The walk is a half mile there and back, and Eva has asthma. The whole way she struggles to breathe through the smog; I'm so concerned for her I forget about myself, "Let's go back," I say.

"No," Eva says. "I'm fine. I'm hungry. Keep going."

Back in court, I look square at my rapist when he turns toward the back of the room to stare at me, and I know it's him. I hear his voice as he talks to his attorney, that deep, low, resonant voice, quiet, soft, going through me like an orange handled knife. I talk to him in my head when his back is turned. It's you. You came into my house, you raped me, I know you. I hate you. I'm here to tell you it was not all right, I'm here to make you pay...and just then the bailiff calls me to the stand.

I get up, wobbly, and walk to the dock.

"Raise your right hand, please."

I raise it.

"You do solemnly swear the testimony you are about to give in the cause now pending before this Court shall be the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth, so help you God?"

"I do." I hope I can do this. I don't know what's going to come out of my mouth when Claudia asks if that's him. The voice in my head is one thing, my voice in this room is another. I hold two crumpled tissues in my left hand.

"Please be seated."

The chair is comfortable and womb-like, light green fabric; it curves around my body. The microphone hanging in space in front of my mouth holds me into the chair like a safety bar, friendly, like a soft hand almost brushing my face. I can feel the kindness of the Judge on my right, I can feel the whole history of the courtroom; there has been justice done here, not injustice. I'm a part of the room. I move the tissues to my right hand.

"State your name, please."

"Sarah Green."

I spell it for him.

I look across the room to Eva just as someone reaches up to adjust my microphone. Claudia gets out of her chair, standing in front of me at her table.

"Miss Green," she begins. "Directing your attention back to the date of July the first of last year...."

I'm staring at her face, and it's like a trance. I watch her move as though she's the one reality in the world. I'm going to another place in my head, not hiding, not running, just above the fear. I tell her my story in bits and pieces, a sentence at a time, the way she wants it on the record.

"And where was he when you first saw him?"

"He came right through the doorway right next to me."

"Right into the bathroom?"

"Right into the bathroom."

"Did you see him in the mirror or did you turn around and look at him full in the face?"

"No, my face...must have been three inches from his face when he grabbed me."

"So you first saw him face to face rather than in the mirror?"

"Yes."

"Do you see this man in court today?"

"Yes." This is going to be it, it's coming. I can feel energy rising from the base of my spine, carrying tears upwards to my eyes, forcing them open to let the water out.

"Where is he?"

I raise my right hand instinctively and with full conviction. Totally sure, filled with anger, I point to him and say, "Sitting right over there."

I tell her about being grabbed, and about the knife, and about his body, what it looked like, and his face, and about the lights being on, and knocking the telephone off the hook, and getting hit, and washing off the blood in the bathroom sink, and getting hit again, and trying to throw up, and him on top of me, and getting off me, and throwing me on the floor, taking my tote bag and leaving. I tell her about running into the middle of the street facing my house, watching him run away from me.

"What were you wearing at this time?"

"Nothing."

"What were you doing at this time?"

"I was screaming."

I tell her about running to the neighbors, and the police, and seeing my rapist in the gas station, and later about the hospital. Now she reaches onto her desk and pulls out a small package.

"Your Honor," she says, "I have a series of eight color snapshots, which I've previously shown to defense counsel. I ask that they be marked in order People's one through eight for identification."

The Judge says, "Be so marked."

"May I approach the witness?" she asks.

"Oh, Okay, fine." I wait to be shown what's in her hand.

"Miss Green, let me show you these photographs. And showing you first People's One for identification, are you able to tell us who is the person in this photograph?"

It's me. All red and purple and yellow and looking like someone else, grotesque. The memories fly back, and tears fall out of my eyes, warming me, and the room, and letting me know I'm real, and I'm here. "That's me."

She shows me the rest of the pictures, each more horrible than the last, me yellow under yellow lights, I continue to weep, resting in the chair, letting it and the good feelings in the room support me. This is the most unself-conscious moment of my life. Everything that comes out of my mouth comes from me, I can feel it; it's truthful,

simple, and it's my voice. It doesn't sound like another person's voice being pushed out of me, the way I usually feel; it's my own voice flowing out of my chest, filling my head for an instant with its sound, and then disappearing, as I let it go. I feel incredibly peaceful, and before I know it, it's over with, I'm outside the courtroom.

My mother, who stayed inside when I got off the stand and left the room, comes to tell me that the Judge held my rapist over for trial, held him to answer, and set bail at fifty thousand dollars. I go home feeling very good.

Tonight I see Sam. I need to see him.

Kneeling in front of him in his white chair, I tell him about the hearing. "Why didn't you return my call?" I ask.

He looks at me blankly.

"I called and left a message and you didn't call me back."

He shrugs his shoulders, painfully. "I was busy."

What does 'busy' mean? I think.

He leans forward suddenly. My hand is on his knee, and now his hand is on my hand. I can feel pain through his warm hand, I can feel it in his stiff thigh, and it bores into my heart.

Suddenly he smiles, opens his body, reaches out his arms, and sort of falls out of his chair towards me on the floor, and before I know it I'm enveloped by his long arms, his beard in my face, his long body kneeling in front of me, laughing, tipping me over the edge of the couch so we're half lying in it. We face each other, inches away. My body is so fired with love for him, I can't think. But I remember what I need to say,

"I don't want you to be my shrink anymore."

His face assumes a position. The features hold still; something like fear flicks across his eyes.

"If you're not married anymore, I want you to be my lover."

"I think we can do both," he says.

I look at him in disbelief. "I don't see how..."

He grabs me and hugs me to him. I lift my head up. His mouth is there in front of me and he moves toward me till he kisses me lightly. My body turns on as though a thousand hands are stroking me. He

takes my index finger in his hand, moves it to his lips, runs it along the inside of his mouth. How can I get up and leave now?

“You only get charged for one hour.” He smiles. I smile, we laugh. I don’t ask if he’s serious. Very gently as he kisses me, I move backward, he presses forward. Very very slowly, very gently, very sweetly. I feel gorgeous and desired and delicate; I fall slowly backwards in his arms until we’re on the floor, Sam on me, kissing me, really meaning it for the first time. Not innocent kissing, not doctor kissing, but real kissing. I feel his tongue in my mouth, his gold charm hanging on its golden necklace resting on my chest radiating his heat. I feel his surprise.

He slides me out of my pants, takes off his own. I watch him, my heart pounding. I don’t want to be here, in this office. This is an old place. The old part of our relationship happened here. But I look at Sam’s now soft eyes and trust him, and everything seems fitting.

I feel gently for his penis, the skin is so tender. I hold it, feel it growing harder. Sam reaches for my hands, stretches them up above my head and holds them to the floor with his long arms. Then I feel him inside me. I remember I don’t have my diaphragm in, and then that I don’t need it, Sam has a vasectomy. He releases my hands. I wrap one around his back, bury the other in his soft hair and my face in his soft beard. I look in his softening hazel eyes, and I can do nothing but stay in his hair, his shoulder, and I’m wet.

“You feel wonderful,” he whispers.

I can only sigh. I begin to feel the crunch of time. I begin to feel where I am. The countdown is starting: five, three, two, how many minutes to the next patient? Who is waiting outside in the outer office to see this man about finding his or her soul? Is Rena sitting on her chair next door, quietly listening to her patient weep? No, she’s moving out; out of the office, out of his life. Maybe she’s gone and I’m alone here with him truly. Then I think of her ghost. His memory of ten years of marriage, his working partner, his life partner, and I’m on the floor of his office where I and his other patients have cried so much the carpet is stiff with tears.

What would those patients think of me lying here, with Sam’s body inside mine. Would they think how special I am to him, or how

foolish? I feel his love for me. Suddenly I feel him thinking hard. Now he lifts himself on his arms and looks down at me, just below my eyes. I look at his eyes, his mouth. He's moving in me as if searching for something, concentrating so hard it's like an examination. What is he looking for?

I know I can't come with this clinical activity. And suddenly, an orgasm seems so important, as if it would bind him to me forever. I look again into his beard, his eyes, and then he stops searching and looks at my face.

His eyes melt. They're as soft and deep and loving as any eyes I've ever seen, and in them I can see my own face. I can see my mouth opening. I can see my face melt, I can see it melting in pain. My eyes are sad and longing. Why does this hurt? In this instant we are falling in love. I feel it. He feels it. But I can't make love in this office. I love him, want him.

And I can't have him. Something in me knows. Desperately I think if he would come and I would come, we'd be bonded together. But it's not going to happen. I'm not going to have him, not any of him. Now he's so scared he smiles. He looks at me again. I hold his head, his neck. He feels my waist, my thigh, then bends down with his bearded face and takes my lower lip between his lips. I open my eyes to see his are open and locked to mine. All of a sudden he looks so sweet; this is natural and I belong with him. The sweetness flows between us and out into the street, making the people out there smile without knowing why, coming back to us with warmth. My heart is so hot I think I'll melt. The gold charm hanging on its gold chain moves across my bosom, drops down between my breasts as his eyes change.

Now they're startled, full of fear. I know he can feel my love. He wants to kiss me with everything he feels, but now he stares at me with plain terror.

I thought for a moment he was mine. But he lifts himself away, lifts his penis out of me, still hard, looks at me with a little smile that cancels the terror and brings him back to his familiar, safe self. I must look stricken. I want him, but everything is drifting away again.

He gets up and sits down on the couch. I get up to my knees, then on impulse, in desperation, I lean over and kiss the head of his penis, still hard. He looks weary, but his cock is shiny and firm and big. I lean over further and take it in my mouth; I suck on it, fondle it with my tongue and hands. It's so beautiful, and he's so beautiful. A rush of fondness and love washes through me. The semen rises and he comes. The moment I swallow, his arms take me up to his face. In the instant before he kisses me I see the terror and confusion there. He has broken some taboo. He is lost. But as he kisses me, for a moment he lets himself be lost. For a moment he gives me something of himself. I lay here on him for so long. I don't even wonder if he'll reach out his hand to make me come. I believe this is just the beginning, there will be time for everything. I belong with him.

There is someone waiting outside to see him. The little light on the little brown box on his desk flashes red.

When he follows me to the outer office and opens the door for me to leave past the man waiting on the couch to come in, he says "Goodbye, Sarah," as if we'd been discussing my dreams.

All the way home I feel like a vase that's come through the fire of the kiln, hard, complete and perfect. Set out on the shelf. Breakable, but finished.

Chapter 16

Today is my thirty-third birthday. It's also opening night of John's play in Hollywood, and I'm his public relations person.

I sit in the outdoor shopping mall in Sherman Oaks, eating frozen yogurt with nuts and raisins and thinking what to write on a Valentine's Day card for Sam. The cover picture shows a tiny furry being holding onto a heart-shaped balloon that's lifting him high into the air. Inside it says, "The strength of love is awesome." I've called him in these two weeks, left messages, and he either doesn't call back, or calls and misses me. I'm hiding whatever this is with him from my mother. Why? She sees me lunge every time the phone rings, she's not stupid. Whenever I mention Sam's name I must have a hopeful or pained expression on my face.

Why am I keeping this a secret? Because I'm embarrassed. What is this? A love affair? A mistake? I don't know what to do. I feel like I'm on the end of a string and he's pulling me along. Only he's standing perfectly still. I want to reassure him that I'm not thinking about him too much, but I am. I'm thinking about going back to New York next month, and I don't want to go. I want Sam to ask me to stay. I haven't heard from him since I got up off his office floor two and a half weeks ago.

Yesterday the bills came in from the hospital and from all the doctors. My two insurance companies took care of everything, but the itemized bills came to me. Paul's bill was itemized according to body parts he'd stitched: Ear—five stitches—\$450; Forehead—four stitches—\$350; and so forth. I can understand organizing where the stitching took place, and then a total bill, but now I feel like my ear is more expensive than the back of my head, my forehead the least of it.

Last week I was hired to do an in-house industrial tape for a market chain, and they flew me to Salt Lake City for three days to shoot in a market there. It was so clear and cold and blue at the foot of the mountains that when you breathed you could feel the air all the way down into your lungs and up into your head. Outside the

market, a crowd watched the grips move the lights around; the market was still open, and the women who worked the checkout counters hated us for the cables all over their floors.

The makeup woman, Diana, made me beautiful. I loved being around her—she was staggeringly beautiful herself. She'd been an international model, very full-lipped with a slight European accent from spending so much time in Paris and Rome, and then settled in Salt Lake while studying to be a stock broker. Now, she'd just come from living three years on a Welsh sheep farm with a man she loved.

I wonder if I could spend three years on a sheep farm in Wales. All of a sudden it seems like the only thing I want to do: Go to England, meet a nice veterinarian, and live in the snow on the land.

No. I want to go back to New York. I want to get up in the mornings warm and make money. I want to be rich. No. I want to be with Sam. I'm afraid if I'm not here when he's ready, he'll fall in love with someone else.

I'm selling everything I own at a garage sale. John and his friend Lauren are helping; we've taken everything out of storage. Lauren is tall, big-boned, blonde, striking, and gay.

People are picking through my belongings on the grass like scavengers. I watch them go through boxes of glass things, clothes, dishes, sheets still in the plastic packages, things I remember buying. It's as though all these things belong to someone else. In one sense, I'm wiping out my past.

Tonight Lauren and I are going together to John's opening.

"Let me make you up," I say five minutes after I walk in the door. She has such an interesting face, and she never does anything with it.

"Oh...don't make me look like a whore."

"I won't."

"Well, do. Do."

"All right," I giggle.

She has a great sense of humor, a kind of self-deprecating wit. John says she doesn't think much of herself.

I sit her in a chair and empty my cosmetics on the table.

“You’re not going to overdo this now...”

“Nope, trust me.”

I touch her mouth with a lipstick pencil, notice that it’s full and soft. She fidgets. There is an attraction between us. It feels both exciting and comforting.

With mascara and eyeshadow she looks stunning.

“Look at yourself,” I command, steering her to the bathroom.

“Hey...” She makes a sexy pout at the mirror.

We sit in the front row. The lights go down, the lights come up, Lauren and I applaud and hoot at the jokes and cry at the end. I wonder if people think we’re sleeping together. I’m thrilled for John that his play is so good and popular. I look at Lauren.

After the show is over and the audience goes home, the lights go out again, I hear John singing “Happy Birthday to You, Happy Birthday to You.. .“ There’s a beautiful little round cake in his hands, lit up with three candles; “Happy Birthday Dear Sarah, Happy Birthday to Youuuuuuuuuu.”

I’m so moved. “Nobody ever made a surprise cake for me.” I blow out the candles, we cut the cake, eat, close up the theater, and go off to a late supper at an Italian restaurant.

All the time we’re eating salads and joking, I feel Lauren next to me, and my blood is a little hotter. I’m very turned on. Smiling at her. I think, besides the natural eroticism between women, and Lauren’s attractiveness as a person, and this being modern times, this feels like something more to me. I realize my closest friendships are with gay men. My social life now is with gay people. Am I so vulnerable to men, so afraid of them now after the rape, that I’m keeping away from them and their sexuality? Am I so riveted to Sam that I want to sleep with Lauren in order to tell him about it? I feel so confused about Sam, so rejected. I miss him so much. I miss the Thursdays at eleven. I miss my doctor. It’s been so many years, so long counting on him, leaning on him, trusting him, and now it’s gone. Instantly. Because of sex. I look at Lauren and wonder what will happen tonight.

We’re in the street, shuffling our feet, trying to say goodnight. I don’t want to go home.

“So who’ll follow who?” Lauren asks.

“Where?” John asks.

“Stay the night with me,” Lauren smiles. “I promise I won’t touch you.”

But I want her to touch me. I am so in need of comfort. I don’t know the difference anymore between my need for contact and a desire for sex. This is unfair to her. I don’t know what I want from Lauren, but it seems so unreal.

I follow her home.

We’re pooped. We have orange juice, and then change clothes for bed. I’m wearing only panties; Lauren has on a whole football uniform, padded shoulder, shorts, socks. We lie in bed ten minutes after saying Goodnight. I pretend to go to sleep, but I can’t. My nerves are prickling my skin, my heart is pounding; I want to touch her. I move my hand out of the sheet, turn on my side, and brush her jerseyed shoulder.

She just looks at me. I want to touch her skin. She’s very blonde and solid, and very sleepy. She smiles at me, I smile at her, she hugs me, I hug back. All of a sudden I see that we’re women, and friends. Not everything has to do with sex. She turns over, I put my hand on her shoulder. We feel each other’s warmth and goodwill and sleep very well.

In the morning we have juice and giggle.

I’m out for pizza with John in the Valley, and a friend of mine from acting class, Christine, is a singing waitress here at Pizza Village. She has a lovely soprano voice; I hate that she sings between carrying wine and pizza to the tables in such a plastic place.

She stands by our table for a minute and we talk. I tell her I’m in town only for another few weeks, that I’m staying with my parents but looking for an apartment to housesit.

“I’m going to San Diego for a few weeks, you want my place?”

“Really?”

“Yeah, sure. I’m so tired and run down that my folks want me to drive down and relax for awhile. My mother’s going to take care of me. And my boyfriend’ll come down when he can.”

“Who’s your boyfriend?” The last time I saw Christine I was just leaving for New York.

She lights up, a sixteen year old takes over her tired face. “His name is Bill, and he’s the manager here, and he’s adorable.”

“Is it serious?”

She nods her head, like she’s amazed. “Yes. He’s serious. Call me, and come over and get the keys, and you can meet him.”

“Okay.” I take her hand, then stand up out of the booth and hug her for a moment.

“It’s so great to see you.” Her body starts to shift backwards toward the center of the room. “I’d better get into the kitchen. Call.” And she disappears into the dark walls.

Christine’s apartment is messy and smells bad. More than just a doggy smell from her new Cocker Spaniel puppy, a kind of musty, sour smell from every object in the room. When I came here last week to visit her and Bill and to pick up keys, she greeted me in a very tattered robe, and that’s what I remember: something about her that’s ratty and tacky. But she looked happy, relaxed, in love. I’ve sprinkled the floor with carpet cleaning powder and vacuumed every day, but the smell stays. I thought it was in the refrigerator, but after I threw away what was spoiled, only a part of the room’s odor went away.

I have this place to come to and be alone in for two weeks, and I’m grateful. It’s my first stay by myself in an apartment in Los Angeles; the anxiety is going, but I still feel nervous. There’s a broom handle in the sliding glass door, and we’re on the second floor, but it’s creepy.

Last week I ran into Harry in odd places, three days out of four. On Monday, Mary and I were having lunch in a restaurant by her office when Harry walked in. He came up to our table and we talked; he’s doing well. He had a new blue Porsche waiting for him outside and an alarm beeper strapped to his belt. I was still nervous around him. After all these years I’m not indifferent.

The next day I came out of Paul Grendel’s office from my final appointment and there was Harry walking toward me. He stopped

and talked; he had come from his nutritionist's office, and said, "Let's have lunch."

Paul had taken the time to pull out his portfolio and show me pictures of his face lifts, nose jobs, breast reductions, all the before and after pictures; "See, she was a witch," he'd said, "And now she's a cute girl." An emergency call came in: a male patient had torn his arm and was in a small hospital in the Valley needing to be sewn up, and Paul was the staff plastic surgeon. "Do you want to come with?" he asked me.

I thought about it. Part of me still wanted him. Some old feeling, my ego wanting to conquer him and put that childhood longing away for good, but in real life I didn't want to get in his car and drive over the hill to a hospital with him and then back, listening to his stories of surgeries. I've done enough tagging along, hopeful and stupid.

"No," I said, sweetly, and then "I can't," or "Not right now," came out. "I don't think so."

"Okay." I don't know if he cared much one way or the other about me, but I know he wanted to tell me about his career and how interesting he's become. As if he wanted to drum up business. Maybe he has something left over from his childhood he needs to put away for good. His interest shifted to work and I felt foolish sitting there. He will never call and I will never see him again.

Two days later I was in a little salad bar, and there was Harry having lunch with a woman, discussing a script, the pages spread out in front of their salads. When I saw him I froze. He must have felt me, because I didn't say anything, but he turned around. When our eyes made contact, my heart almost jumped out of my chest, it was so eerie. It was like a time warp. I put my hand to my heart to quiet it down. I could see he was shaken with the surprise. I stood there, he stayed sideways, smiling, though I could tell he was in the middle of his conversation with his writing partner.

We could barely speak, it was so strange, this third time, and I left, not wanting to eat there, and he went back to his discussion. I shook all the way down the street into another little sandwich and yogurt bar, and all through the meal, and afterwards when I went home and wondered if I was supposed to do anything about Harry.

I remembered he had my passport so I called him. Maybe I would go from New York to England and find my sheep farm.

“Hi, Sarah.” His voice was high and energetic. Happy and surprised to hear from me.

“Hi. That was so weird, running into you.”

“I know.”

“I need my passport. When can I come and get it.”

“How about this afternoon?”

I was over there in a few hours, walking through his new house. Geri left to get groceries and leave us alone for awhile, but we talked a long time. When she came back, she sat with us on the couch, looking very content and serene.

“So, are you involved with anyone?” he asked me.

I was embarrassed, I am embarrassed to say No. I can’t tell anyone about Sam. What would I say? “There aren’t too many good men out there.”

“All it takes is one,” he said.

“Yeah,” I agreed, and then got up to leave.

As I walked ahead of him down the stairs in my high-heeled sandals, carefully, not wanting to slip, he couldn’t resist teasing, “Having trouble with those shoes, huh?”

It’d been a long time since I’d been with a man who liked to put me down with humor, and the old tension returned. I wanted to say “Same old Harry,” or anything funny and non-defensive, but I couldn’t resist saying “No, not really.”

I left wondering what we had settled by seeing each other, and how terribly sad it is that we can’t be friends.

I’m sitting here playing the guitar and the phone rings. It’s a heavy-breathing Bill on the other end, quiet, strange.

“Hello, Sarah?”

“Yes, who...”

“This is Bill.”

“Hello, Bill.”

“Do you have another place to stay?”

“My folks. Yes. What?”

“Christy was in an accident here.”

“Oh, my God, is she okay?”

“No.”

“Oh God.”

“She’s not going to live the night.”

“What?” It has never occurred to me that people I know can actually die in auto accidents. I think of damaged cars but not damaged people.

“There’s nothing anyone can do, there’s no hope, please call everyone from class, her friends, and tell them to wait for information about the funeral, that’s all. It’ll be next week sometime probably.”

He’s moving too fast for me. She’s not dead yet.

“I’ll call everyone. Is there anything else I can do?”

“No. Just tell them.”

It’s hitting me now. “I’m so sorry,” is all I can get out. “I’ll make the calls.”

We hang up. I dash around the room, grabbing my clothes, my guitar, my few toilet items, think about lighting a candle for Christine, but see that would be stupid and dangerous. I want to leave Christine her space, so I take everything, leave the keys on the kitchen table, and practically run out the door. I can’t get out fast enough. The apartment’s smell is now of death.

I remember my rape, how I lived, how I expect other people will live through things; the old feelings wash over me as I close the door, letting it lock. Her house is now a mausoleum. Maybe Bill’s wrong, maybe she’ll live. We’ll all pray.

Chapter 17

Christine died three days ago. A truck had hit her broadside, killing everything inside her. They kept her alive on machines, but there was nothing left of her really. When I called the hospital for information, the nurses weren't giving any.

Sometimes violence is final. I am very lucky to be alive. The funeral is at four o'clock today.

The cemetery in San Pedro is all soft hills to the sea. The chapel is filled with sunlight from the windows next to me. I'm on the end of the pew, I can see bougainvillea climbing up the wall outside, and tall rose bushes and a bed of yellow marigolds. I'm crying so hard, looking at Christine's draped coffin up there, covered in flowers as if it was a wedding, big and dark with shiny brass handles. I roll and unroll my tissues, shredding them, finding places to mop my face in the shreds. The minister says, "Maybe Christine had more singing and dancing to do than she could do on this earth."

The energy from her casket fills the room with warmth and love, and her face seems to hover in the air above it, smiling out at all of us. I think I must be going crazy to see her face so clearly, I must be needing comfort so much that I'm making up her smile shining down on us considering our own deaths and the deaths of people we love.

I want to see Sam. I want to be away from death and in the presence of the man who makes me feel alive, even though he doesn't want me.

Desperate to talk to him, I call.

"Sarah." A sexy whisper.

"Sam," I growl back.

Silence. We breathe.

"I'm still here," I say.

More silence.

"Sarah, how are you?"

"I'm fine, Sam. But I'm leaving."

"When?"

"Two weeks. I want to say goodbye. I want to see you."

“Let me get my appointment book.” He shuffles around, then,
“Wait, tell you what, let me call you back later, okay.”

“A friend of mine just died.”

“Oh God.”

“She was twenty-six. A truck hit her car.”

Silence.

“Sam,” I wail, “what is it you feel for me? What do you want with me? Do you want me?”

“I don’t know. That’s what I need some time to figure out.”

“All right. You’ve got time.”

“I’m coming to New York on business in May. Maybe we can have lunch. I’ll have Shereen with me, though.

“All right.”

Silence.

“Sam, I want to see you.”

“Oh, darlin’. Sarah. I’d love to. But the timing is bad, Sarah; can you understand that? I promised my kids I’d spend more time with them...I’m working late every night. Look, I’ll try, okay?”

“How about Monday night after Group?”

“I’ll try. That’s all I can say. Looks good, I’ll try. I’ll call you. What’s a good time to call you?”

“You tell me.”

“Six-thirty. How’s that?”

“Fine.”

“I’ll talk to you then.”

He won’t see me outside the office. Why? Aren’t I good enough? What am I to him then?

In a Sushi restaurant Monday night at seven-thirty I’m on the phone. Sam didn’t call at six-thirty and when I called him twice I got the answering service. I call, his phone rings three times and he picks up.

“So am I gonna see you tonight, or what?” I ask. I know I’m over the edge, I’m begging, I’m desperate. And I’m angry, but I can’t stop. I try to sound matter of fact, business-like.

Bells ring in the restaurant. “Michael Beck!” a sushi chef shouts across the room at a couple entering the bar. So that’s why this place is such a hangout. You get announced.

“Sarah, I can’t,” he says. I need some space, do you understand?”

The man can’t see me. I take a deep breath and give it up. “Okay, Sam. I understand.” But I don’t.

“I’ve got an hour at three tomorrow.”

I take a breath. He has an opening. He’s talking as though I’m still his patient. “I don’t want to come to your office anymore,” I say.

“Okay. I don’t have any other time, darlin’.”

Silence. I’m considering his office at three.

“Sarah, last time I saw you was really lovely....”

“I know. It was.”

He lowers his voice. “It wasn’t enough. I want more.”

“When?” I practically wail.

“I love you darlin’, but I’m on overload, Sarah; can you understand that?”

I’m trying to understand.

“You should be in New York.”

“I’m going, Sam, but...why do you want me to go?”

“New York was great for you.”

“I know.”

“I don’t want to make the relationship real.” A moment. “I sure would like to nibble on your ass, though.”

“Ahhh.” I’m exasperated.

“You’ve got a great ass.”

“Thank you, I know.” I can’t put this together.

“I want to see you too,” he says.

I’m just breathing.

“I don’t know when.”

“Sam, if...”

“Maybe Friday.”

“All right.”

“I’ll call you tomorrow or Friday. I love you, darlin’.”

This feels like the brush off of a callous one-night stand. It’s brutal enough to sleep with a man and not be called again. This is my

therapist of five years. The man I look up to and love more than anyone.

I have no idea what else to say. All I feel is, "Sam, take care of yourself. I love you."

He hasn't called. Either he's never called, or he called when I wasn't home and didn't leave a message. But I'm always home, waiting for his call. I'm making myself crazy. What am I doing to myself? Christine has died. Life is fragile. I'm so lucky to still have mine, and I don't know how to live it.

I'm dependent on Sam. I don't understand him, I don't understand men. He has nothing to give but confusion. After all these years with him, is that what I've earned? His confusion? This is not the end of a love affair. There is no love affair here. He's my doctor, and now he's confused, and gone. We had sex, and somehow that has changed everything for me in a way I don't understand. It feels like lead in my chest, like a weight of anger and frustration. It feels like rape.

John is back in New York waiting for me in a new sublet on Riverside Drive. There is nothing left here. People are hurt. People are dead. Everything is sold, and Sam wants me gone.

Chapter 18

A bus from Kennedy Airport to the Port Authority Terminal, a cab ride and I'm on John's doorstep.

We have a terrace that looks out over the Hudson. I sleep in the loft bed, John sleeps on the couch in the living room. He goes out late, around eleven, and cats around until two, three or four, then sleeps until the afternoon, goes to the gym, and spends the day writing. He's going into rehearsal soon for the first production of his first play.

I feel sick most of the time, but I keep pushing myself out into the streets. I'm out there every day with my list of ad agencies, taking the bus up and down Madison and Lexington, dropping my pictures and resumes off with the secretaries.

In New York everyone's out to make a career. You can feel the energy in every lobby of every building.

I drag myself home at five or six, exhausted and feeling like I'm running a fever, to a terrific meal cooked by a relaxed John. He's been looking forward to showing off his latest salad dressing and rice and vegetable burritos.

Last night I woke up sure there was a man in the room just about to murder me. I leapt from the bed, not realizing till I hit the wall with my right hand and landed on the floor that the bed was five feet in the air. I hit a rolled up rug with my foot, then turned toward a sound and suddenly the lights went on. John was standing in the doorway, his hands braced against the door frame, his legs in a football stance, straining at me. I knew it was him instantly; it shook me out of the dream and I looked down. In my hand I held a hair blow dryer pointed at the wall. John looked at me with horror, and then amusement. We laughed. My heart was pounding so hard my ears could barely stand it, and it took me nearly an hour to relax enough to just lie down again.

I write letters to Sam that I don't mail. I tell him I'm done with hating him, that it's like hating a part of myself. I actually mailed a

short note that said, “I miss you.” In another note I didn’t mail I told him I was hurting, that I was in love with him and he’d sent me away, and I didn’t want to lose him out of my life. Every time I sit down to write something different comes out. I don’t understand how I got to be a burden to him instead of a pleasure. Did I misread him that badly? I want to be happy so I can leave him be. I won’t write him anymore unless I hear from him.

I moved into a sublet of my own on the East Side, in Midtown, eleven floors up in a classy building with a doorman. I love the place. It’s shiny and clean and I can see the Chrysler Building and the people walking up and down Second Avenue, going to the produce market in the morning and the all night deli. I have air conditioners in the living room and bedroom, and an entryway divided off from the living room so that I feel a little safer, a little more private. I still put a chair up against the doorknob when I go to sleep.

It’s the end of April, and I’ve started seeing Sam everywhere. Leaving the theater on Sunday night, walking to the Algonquin to have supper with John, I thought I saw him walking on the other side of the street, in the other direction, with his arm around a woman. My heart shook. I stopped breathing. I thought, Oh God, I’m alone, how humiliating.

I masturbate more than I eat. I can’t think of having sex with anyone, there hasn’t been anyone but Sam for a very long time, and now I’m not sure what that was. He seems more a figure out of my dreams than real life. My teacher granting me a kiss. Sex with father, with God. If he’s here in New York, I want to be thin. He said he’d come in May with his daughter.

It’s Monday. I’m walking home down Fifty-ninth and stop for a frozen yogurt at the health bar, exhausted. I sit in the booth, drop my packages, and go to the phone in the back to call my service.

They tell me, “Dr. Sam Williams called.”

My heart stops entirely.

He’s at the Westbury Hotel on the East Side. She gives me the number. I try to calm down. The kitchen two steps away rattles and women squeeze by me to get to the ladies’ room. I dial.

There’s no answer at Extension 724.

The desk comes back on the line.

“Will you tell him Sarah Green returned his call?”

“I’d be happy to take a message,” she says.

“Please tell him I’ll be home all evening, at 372- 6544.”

I hang up, excuse myself to the waiter, cancel my order smiling apologetically, and race home.

It’s midnight. I’m on the brink of hysteria, waiting for the phone to ring. I’m sure he’s come for me. I breathe deeply and finally lie down.

The phone startles me out of a sleep. I jump; it’s one in the morning. My heart’s pounding, I’m frightened, like a little kid hearing loud noises in the night. Like a rape victim still jolting upright, sure someone’s in the room ready to strike.

I run to the phone, sit on the floor with it, leaning my back on the sofa, trying to shake the fog out of my head. I can’t breathe.

“Hello,” I manage to get out.

“Sarah,” he breathes out my name.

“Sam. Hello.”

“What’s the matter, you sound weird.”

“What?”

“You sound weird.”

I feel him already on the attack. I know now that this is the way he feels most comfortable, with me on the receiving end, him in control, first move out of the box.

“Hey—I’m...the phone surprised me...I...” I’m stumbling through an explanation; I need a minute to relax and get on top of things. “Give me a minute to catch my breath. You talk and I’ll listen and catch my breath. I was asleep. Go ahead, talk.”

“Well,” he goes ahead, just to give me time; “I had a bunch of appointments yesterday, and I’m doing this radio show tomorrow. I took Shereen to see *Barnum* tonight, and then we had supper with some friends of mine, and we just got back.”

He’s been here since yesterday.

“I thought as long as I’m in New York I might as well give you a call.”

How do I answer that?

“So, I want to do us.” Now he’s clinical, cold, official. Like I’m business.

“All right.”

“Shereen, go to bed Honey.” I can hear the television in the background and a faint “Daddy”; then all noises except Sam’s voice end. “Just a minute, Sarah. Go brush your teeth, and I’ll kiss you goodnight.” I wait. “Okay,” he’s back on the line with me.

I can feel him being a father, a real father, he made a child.

“Go to sleep, sweetheart,” he says to her, and I picture her curling up in bed. “I love you,” he whispers into the phone, breathing hard, muttering the words under his breath.

“I love you too.”

“We’ll see.”

“Sam...”

“I want to put my tongue up your cunt.”

“Oh.” I want him to come over here. He will, I know it.

“Where are you?” he asks.

“Just down Madison Avenue.”

“Close.”

“Come over.”

“Well...”

“Bring Shereen. I have a bedroom and a sofa bed.”

“Maybe tomorrow.”

“Okay.”

“I want you,” he says. “And I don’t just mean now, I mean forever.”

I’m convinced we’re in love. I laugh. It’s all going to be perfect. Everything will be okay as soon as we see each other; everything will be wonderful after I get him in bed.

“I’d like you to meet a friend of mine who lives here.”

“Sure, sounds like fun.”

“Really?” He’s excited. He doesn’t want to see me alone, he wants a party. He’s surprised I’m willing to share him.

“And I’d love to meet Shereen.”

“Okay. Maybe.”

I think, How can he love me and not want to be alone with me? I want to reassure him I won't make demands. I know he's scared.

"Okay," he says. "Well, tomorrow evening sometime. Nine-thirty. Drinks or something, okay?"

"Okay."

"Okay then. Drinks. With my friend and his...date."

"Okay."

He lowers his voice. "I want my hands and my mouth all over you."

When we hang up, I sit up in bed looking out the window. The relationship has changed. Now it will be real. I sleep.

At nine-twenty I'm in the street, dressed like a grownup, in burgundy silk blouse and black silk skirt, looking thin after three days of not eating; my heavy winter coat is a useless weight on my arm. A cab driver glides neatly in front of me, chauffeurs me uptown. He doesn't have change for a five, the fare is two dollars; I give him the whole thing.

In the Westbury Hotel, I see the Polo Lounge glass doors waiting at the other end of the lobby; I cross the red carpet, passing mirrored walls; I'm going straight through the doors.

At the bar, on the far side of the green and peach room, he's standing in an expensive navy jacket, beautifully cut gray slacks, a tie, his beard shining. I've never seen him in anything fancier than jeans. He's wearing dressy, soft black shoes. I want to throw him to the floor and cover him with my body. He waves. I walk up to him, stand a foot in front of him, calm, and look around for his friends. He has a drink in his left hand. As we smile at each other, I feel my coat heavy on my arm, and my heart racing inside my soft silk. We lean towards each other and kiss lightly.

"My friend isn't coming," he says. "He called and left a message he couldn't make it, and then I couldn't reach him to find out why." His voice is very stiff and formal, as though I'm a strange, dangerous animal.

"So," I smile, "I have you all to myself, huh?"

"Yes. I guess you do." He's uncomfortable. He doesn't want to be alone with me.

“Let me put my coat away.” I turn back to the empty coat check room. I think, I’m here for two hours and nothing is going to ruin it. Nothing.

“I’m sorry, let me.” He’s close behind me, reaching for my coat. I help myself to a hanger. “Let me,” he says. I haven’t eaten in so long I feel like a feather. He takes my coat from my arm and hangs it up. I didn’t want him to, because I don’t want him to notice all the hand stitching holding the ratty lining together. The maitre d’ finds us, leads us across the room.

“Listen, Shereen’s asleep upstairs, I gave her the number down here so if she gets scared she can call me, so I feel relaxed. We’ve got two hours. Jesus, I hope she doesn’t call.”

I slide into the dark green leatherette booth and put my purse down beside me. Sam slides in, and before I can really take him in or appreciate the view of Madison out the big windows in front of me, his tongue is in my mouth, wet, tasting of beer. He puts his arm around me, holding my shoulder, I put my hand lightly on his thigh. He orders another beer.

“I hate the waiter,” he says. Anger fills his eyes. He stares into his beer. Then he looks out the window, at his beer again, at the waiter, then suddenly puts his free hand down my silk blouse and touches my breast. I nearly jump into him. The booth faces other booths and the street, the other booths face us; I don’t care who’s looking. But he doesn’t want to spend two hours alone with me, I think. I let it go.

“That lady over there knows what I want to do to you,” he says.

I don’t care if we’re in the middle of a stadium. Our bodies press together, almost obscene, our arms wind around each other.

He puts his hand up my skirt. “You wore pantyhose, you shit.”

My hand goes to his cock.

“You’re not going to turn me on like that,” he says.

Oh God, I’ve botched it. I soften my hand on him, just brushing his thigh gently, then take it away into my own lap. Anger flashes in my throat.

“I want to throw you on the floor,” I say.

“Now wait, let’s not go too far here.”

He's misinterpreted. I don't want to fuck him, I want to kill him. I want to throw my glass of water in his face and leave; then suddenly I want to take off my pantyhose so he can touch my bare leg, get his fingers wet in me; I want to stay with him, stay close. I turn to him, my heart flipping around, "Sam, let's get a hotel room; maybe we can get one adjoining yours so Shereen can call there instead of here if she gets scared."

He stares at me, his eyes clouded, cold. "Maybe I would if I thought you really wanted to."

"What?"

"You heard me."

My mouth falls open. I want to feel his body, I want to crawl inside his shirt. He orders more beer, adding a fourth bottle of Michelob to the table. We pick at the smoked salmon, I drink my Perrier. I want to disembowel him.

He touches my leg; I take his hand and move it away. "Don't do that unless you mean it," I say.

"Yeah," he smiles. I glare at him.

"I do that," he says, "I make everything sexual."

I wait.

"I'm scared to death of intimacy."

"Oh.

"I really did it to you, didn't I?" he says.

I just stare at him.

"I pulled you in and pushed you away. I hook you and then I push you away."

"Yes. You do that."

"I'm drunk."

I'm so sober it hurts.

"What are you thinking?" he asks.

I've rehearsed the answer to this for days, but it's the truth. "I'm thinking that I'm in love with you and I'm in trouble."

He turns away, exasperated. "Oh boy, Sarah." The doctor again. "How long have you been feeling like this?"

"Awhile."

He smiles, making fun. "When you make love do you think about me?"

I haven't been making love except in my head. "Yes."

"Oh, Sarah." He shakes his head from side to side and all but clicks his tongue in dismay, saying with his eyes that I'm simpleminded.

He's trying to make me angry to get off the hook, but all I feel is hurt.

"Look," he says, "I'm terrified. I'm in agony."

I tighten my arm around him and stroke his cheek with my hand.

"You're asking me to be in love. The only people I feel safe being in love with are my daughters."

I keep my head steady, looking at him.

"I would love to have an affair with you, darlin', but with the energy you put into a relationship, there's no way anything more. I'm not saying Never."

"Just an affair would be terrific," I say.

"How? Where?"

"Sam..."

"There's no time. But Sarah, I love you." He looks at his beer, plays with the bottle, turning it in his hand. "Rena's moved in with some jerk."

"Oh."

"Yeah. He's a twirp. It's a destructive relationship, it won't last."

"So why..."

"Oh, everybody's got their needs, I don't know." He shrugs his shoulders. "I'm not jealous. It's just...my kids. They just moved from one house to another, they don't understand."

He's losing his children. I can feel his pain. He's drunk. I hold him close, I want to nurture him. I kiss his cheek, his brow, I hold him. I forget that he's just said No to me.

"I'm going to cry, I'm going to cry," he announces, and the tears start to drop down his face. I hold him and kiss him as he cries. A few minutes later it will be midnight.

He looks at his watch. "I have to go." He wipes his eyes and pays the bill.

“Tell me, what is the tradition here? Do I give you money for cabfare, or give the money to the driver?”

“That would be nice.” I don’t care what he does, as long as he pays. I hate him. I want him to pay and pay.

We walk to the street, my heavy coat back on my arm. In two seconds a cab is in front of me with the door open. I’m desperate. I throw my arms around him, kiss him hard and throw myself into the back seat after my coat and sit still.

He hands the driver a five, “Take the lady where she wants to go,” and waves.

The cab moves off as he walks back into the lounge, into his hotel room, out of my life.

At home, I sit on the floor for thirty minutes before the tears come. My sobbing is so loud and deep I’m frightened. Why’d he bother to call me? I come clear to New York and he comes here and calls me and sits me down next to him in order to reject me. He was the only man I never thought would push me away. Did he ever care for me? I must have paid him twenty thousand dollars over the years. I’m embarrassed. Humiliated. What have I done? Why did he come here to do this to me? I call Mary in Los Angeles.

“Well, girl, you’d better pick yourself up and get on with it,” she says.

“I know...”

“You’ve got things to do in this world beside waste yourself on that jerk.”

“I know, I know. Thank you.”

Chapter 19

“Come down here for dinner,” orders John.
“I can’t. I’m going to go to a neighborhood meeting.”
“What do you want to do that for?”

“I want to meet my neighbors.”

“Why do you want to do that?”

“I’m depressed.”

“Don’t you want to be with friends?” His voice is filled with irritation; it makes me want to please him.

“I want to meet men.”

“Oh, Sarah.”

I think a moment. “Okay. I’ll be there in half an hour.”

I decide to take a cab, and on the way over I pass the meeting hail. I can feel how much energy it would take to go there, so much energy to look at men and smile. The cab is lovely and I sink into it like a baked potato settling down into butter.

I sit in coffee shops. All over New York I sit—greasy spoons, spotless donut places with stools bolted to the floor around curving counters, fancier fish restaurants, sometimes a sushi bar, health food stores with salad bars.

I eat salads and omelets and egg salad sandwiches and tuna and coffee. Danish and coffee. I eat desserts and gain weight. I sit at the counters thinking, at the tables writing; in a gourmet take-out place on Columbus and Seventy-second I eat chocolate cake, even though I never really liked chocolate.

I like to walk down streets of shops, one after another. I look at myself in the windows. Once I peered at myself in a dark window, liked what I saw, smiled, made a face, smiled again, then stopped cold as a hand pulled a curtain across the inside of the window. I hadn’t noticed that there was a person watching me make faces on the sidewalk. I was too ashamed to be embarrassed. She must have thought I was one of those crazies that haunt the streets, that I was spying on her. We both thought we were the center of things, that only we counted at that moment.

Today is a green day. Winter is ending, spring is close. I thought I saw little yellow buds on the gray-brown twigs all through Central Park, but I might have made them up. I love winter. I hear voices in my head and when they stop for a moment my heart grips itself. It can't bear peace.

I hear a thousand car engines and smell roasting pretzels. In the windows in Bernard Altman's on Fifth Avenue, the mechanical dolls are moving in perfect miniature sets. I am so grateful that I can walk down the street, that no one has to push me or carry me, that I'm singing in rhythm with the dolls. No one looks. Here you can sing in public and some people look for your tin cup; some people look the other way the moment they hear the tune.

The day is green. I know things are moving. But am I?

I've stopped at John's in the middle of the day, on my way to the gym or to chocolate cake. I sit in his director's chair while he putters around making tea, watching me, making conversation. I shred a Kleenex in my right hand, my eyes continually check for my purse, my gym bag, music, pictures, as if we will all disappear. I am so much less substantial than the air.

I move slowly, my hands and legs trying for a smooth grace that is impossible. I reach into my purse for another tissue, pull it out with so much concentration that, watching, I'm stunned by the effort. The artificiality of the gesture overwhelms me with sadness. I have lost the reasons for things. Everything inside me is stuck, like a stopped watch. The brakes are more powerful than the engine. I'm surprised to feel my heart beating. If I can't be happy here, in New York, with everything outside me moving, where can I be happy?

In the Village, on the corner of Sixth Avenue and West Fourth, there's a Chemical Bank. I'd never been in before; I was struck by gleaming clear walls from the teller's counter to the ceiling. I thought it was beautiful. As we were walking back down Sixth to have lunch, I told John that I thought those translucent panes were nice, and he stopped moving and just stared at me. "You *like* that plastic stuff? Jesus, it's just to protect the tellers from guns.

My face flushed with embarrassment. How could I be so stupid and tasteless? A few days later I walked into another Chemical Bank

in Midtown, with newly installed see-through walls between the customers and the tellers. I realized I was in a prison: only I was on the outside, and the poor tellers and vice-presidents were encased in plastic. You have to speak to each other through little speaker holes in the panes, and even then you can't hear each other.

What could I have been thinking?

I think about going home to Los Angeles and then anywhere but home. John is my confidante and therapist now.

"He likes strong women," I say.

"He likes ball-busting, castrating women."

My eyes widen a little.

"He likes to be pushed around," he says. "And he'll never pick you."

I stare at him, contemplating "Never." I think, If Sam, my shrink, can't take care of me, who will?

"You can take care of yourself," he says, reading my mind. "You don't need him, Sarah, you don't need any man to lean on. I'm saying this to myself at the same time."

"John, if Sam is no better than me, then no one is.

"So? That's good. You only know who you are in relation to him. He's your North Star or something."

I giggle.

"So you're alone. So your shrink left you. So?"

A moment.

"I understand," he says. You want to understand what you did wrong, so you can keep on trying. But that's not how it works. You didn't do anything wrong. There's nothing you can do."

"I know."

"He doesn't want you."

He gets up for more tea. I hand him my cup.

"Furthermore," he says, "he's a jerk and you don't want him. You just like longing."

I feel like I will not be who I am without him. I love his power over me.

"Sarah, sometimes the pupil passes the teacher. You outgrew him."

I consider.

“Give it up, Sarah. Give it up.”

I nod my head and blow my nose.

“This is not some affair that went bad. This is some shrink who took advantage of you. A bad apple. The whole thing was disgusting. Not you. Him.”

I nod my head.

“Come on, let’s go to a play. Let’s get out.” He collects my coffee cup, picks me up by the shoulders, hugs me, then turns me to the door.

Early in the morning I dream that I’m in a play with Peter O’Toole. I go to a restaurant after rehearsal, and there he is behind me, looking very sad. I’m surprised and thrilled to see him. I say, “Hi,” and ruffle his hair. He leans his head down on my shoulder. We sit. It turns sexy, with kissing, touching, and then his wife of ten years comes out of nowhere and joins us. I am very disappointed. We make plans to meet again anyway; the wife goes away. Mary comes up to me, she’s in the play too. I want to shout to her that I’m going to sleep with Peter O’Toole, but I decide to be cool. Mary guesses. She angrily tells me that Peter’s wife is standing outside on the street crying. I know I’m responsible but I still want to sleep with him.

I wake up, thinking, Is Rena crying?

What was I doing in the middle of Sam and Rena’s marriage? How dare I? I’m deeply embarrassed.

I’ve had the flu all week, so I’ve been at the typewriter. What’s come out of the writing I’ve been doing in coffee shops and late at night when I can’t sleep is a play about Harry and me. The end of our marriage. I don’t think it’s brilliant, but it’s funny and true.

At least it’ll have one performance, in my living room tomorrow. John says the play’s not bad and deserves a reading, so he’s invited all his actor friends, and I’ve invited all my actor friends. I’ll cook dinner, and then we’ll read.

It’s six o’clock, I’m washing lettuce, simmering ratatouille, slicing eggplant for Eggplant Parmesan. These are all the things I know how

to cook. Lisa and Rich are the first to arrive. They were actor friends in Los Angeles; they decided to move here to give it a try before I came. Rich is doing very well. Lisa is going into casting.

“Oooohhh!” we all throw our arms around each other.

“Are you good at salad dressing?” I ask Lisa, pointing to the huge bowl of lettuce, string beans, avocado, water chestnuts and tomatoes.

“Yeah, let me. Love your apartment.”

In half an hour there are twenty-two people here in my living room, filling the place with smoke. Five minutes later we are all sitting, in chairs, on the floor, six of us with scripts in our laps reading. I shake through the whole thing.

At the end, people get up to stretch and eat more beer, wine, eggplant. But their energy stays in the room.

“Well...,” I say.

“I want to talk about it,” Dave says.

“Yeah,” Al says.

Everyone says they want to stay and talk about it.

“You mean it’s not so bad?” I ask, still shaking.

“No,” comes from around the room.

We sit, and for an hour they tell me what needs tightening, what doesn’t work, what they like. I can’t believe they’re thinking of me as a playwright. Harry was the writer, not me. John writes, not me. John is beaming.

At least I finished it, I think. But it’s hard to take myself seriously.

Chapter 20

I can smell him, Mike Abramson, his sweaty thermal top, the New York air hanging on him like soot; it's not a pretty smell, but my body responds to him anyway. He kisses me with thick arms around my waist, and I can feel my wetness inside and out. We fall onto the bed, him on top, kissing me, deep in my mouth, feeling my breast with his left hand, my hands on his strong, slender back just beneath the massive shoulders.

I giggle.

He smiles.

I'm getting girlish and nervous. It feels wonderful.

He feels wonderful, I can barely contain myself. I think I shouldn't go to bed with him right away. I only met him a few hours ago, at an audition. I'd thought, How blonde he is; how muscular in his white knit top; how interesting in his dark wraparound glasses. How quietly authoritative, sitting on a bench in this dark, boxy theater waiting for his name to be called.

"I feel an obligation to know you better," I manage to lift my head out of his neck to say.

"I feel a *desire* to get to know you better." He's smiling, boyish and nervous. He's misinterpreted what I said, thinking I meant I want to see more of him, but then he's just said that to me, and I like it, so I don't bother to clarify.

I want to take a shower; actually I want him to take a shower before he touches my sheets, his smell is strong, but it's too late. I'm responding to him, the sensations are building all by themselves without my thinking about it and willing it to happen. Every tender part of me is up against every soft part of him; I can feel myself gliding into his rhythm, giving myself up to his pulsing; his face is that of an angel turned animal. I am making up the tenderness between us just by looking at him, I'll find out later if it exists, and then, without warning; I think he's coming, and I feel him slow down and get softer. Oh my God, he's going to leave me here on the edge! I shout to myself. But no, I won't let that happen. I push myself up

against his shrinking cock, pushing myself into the hair of his stomach, and just before he melts away completely, I know I'm going over, and I do, spilling over into orgasm, gripping his back, unwilling to let him slide away.

It's difficult sleeping the night, his smell is getting stronger and stronger, and there's no more passion to make it okay.

It's morning, we take a shower. Even after scrubbing him with my loofa and sweet smelling soap, he still has his own sour and sweaty gym smell. But I like him.

Tonight, he calls, he wants to come over.

"Sure," I say.

I have strawberries and yogurt in the refrigerator; we eat them in bed watching baseball. I'm thinking the whole time, trying keep myself under control, wanting to hug and touch and kiss, getting only a perfunctory hand holding between bites of strawberry. He's come from the gym, fresh from a shower, and is sweeter smelling, though still distinctive. Again, in bed, he lets himself come just before I settle into my own orgasmic rhythm.

I want to say something to him, but I don't. Maybe I wasn't communicating clearly enough. Even so, he should've let me know what was going on with him. Men should tell you when they're going to come so you can ask them to wait. Despite his bad timing, I like listening to his stories; I like his Long Island accent with Shakespearean resonance. I like the way he feels, and I've gotten used to his smell, it seems masculine to me now. I love his eyes and his chest. I like that he's going to Milwaukee to do Repertory Theater. He's fresh.

Last night he was here, and all I feel today is melancholy. Does he like me? Will he call? Will I see him again? Will he like me next time? Will he call again? The same fantasies: He'll ask me to live with him after the second date and we'll be married with one kid by next year. Tomorrow we'll be discussing things seriously. This is the first time I've slept with anyone since the rape, except for Sam. I try not to think of Sam, but somehow I don't feel free to be with anyone else, or do much else with my life but try to get over thinking about him. I

feel connected to him by something terribly important and unfinished.

I hate thinking about being in love; it's too distracting. It's been two weeks since my playreading and I haven't been writing. Being celibate and uninvolved leaves you free for more important things. When you love a man you get crazy.

An ice cream bar is in my hand as I sit and watch the Dodgers, sipping Decaf with cinnamon in it, licking vanilla drippings off my hand before they fall. I sit with my legs crossed on the edge of the sofa, as far in the corner as I can, thinking about Mike. What does it feel like when it's right?

Mike calls with tickets to Hedda Gabbler for tonight. I go to the theater early, in white pants and very high heels, and wait for him outside, then inside. I hold back my anger that he's so late, that our seats are so far back, that his mind is so far away.

After dinner at a Mexican restaurant near the Bowery, after the theater, he wants to walk. At midnight, on the street, it's dark and empty, with one mean looking man coming towards us. I scrunch myself up next to Mike, tensing my body, waiting for the man to pass us. Instead he veers towards me, holding something shiny in his hand I can't see, causing my heart to go to my mouth. In an effort to get away, I shove Mike three feet to the right and almost into the gutter. Mike smiles at the man, comfortable in his safe skin, while I involuntarily wave him off with my hand. Then I practically race down the street, pulling Mike along. When we find a cab and get inside, my hatred for men spills over him like hot lead.

Now I make him wait in my living room while I stare at myself in the bathroom mirror, hoping to stop shaking.

"What's wrong?" he asks.

I remember the fear of that man, the old fear of the rapist, of the night, of the streets. I hate Mike because I don't feel safe with him. I feel safer alone. I don't want him to see how upset and scared I am. I don't want to be that vulnerable with him because he doesn't love me.

I walk out to the living room and put my arms around his shoulder.

“You’re still upset,” he says.

“Yeah.”

I hug him, he puts his arms around me to comfort me.

We go to bed and make love, but it’s the same as always, him cutting out before I get to the finish line. I think he doesn’t care; he’s a good enough lover to be better if he wanted to. All night he sleeps holding my hand.

In the morning he says, “Where do you want to eat?”

“Down the street is fine.”

We settle into a table by the window after a twenty minute, uncomfortable wait, and order Eggs Benedict with orange juice. Sunday Brunch.

This relationship is like dancing with Glenn Herbert, the stage manager at the theater in Los Angeles. He can’t dance, but he’ll stand there and smile while you dance around him, holding one hand and then the other over his head. He has a great time being a part of the dance. Every once in a while he’ll do a tricky about-face that makes you giggle. But you’re the only one moving.

He talks about going to Milwaukee.

“So I guess it would be stupid of me to fall in love with you,” I say, smiling.

“Oh yeah. Don’t do that.”

“Okay.”

“I’m just not ready to do that. Fall in love. My career is just getting going, and I’ll be in Los Angeles next year. But I’m afraid it’s going to happen in Milwaukee.”

“What?”

“Falling in love, you know, you’re close to people for so long.” His face is babylike, innocent, like I’m his big sister and he wants my advice. I knew this was just a short-term thing, just a month and a half, but does he have to be a jerk about it? I feel like leaving my eggs, saying goodbye sweetly and just going, but for some reason I’m still eating.

“Now, don’t feel bad,” he says.

I pay the bill because it was me who pushed him into brunch offering to pay, and then we walk up the eight blocks to Fifty-ninth

for his bus. I realize I've lent him three of my favorite books and plays and will have to see him again to get them back. I realize he doesn't know I won't see him again, he's smiling and loose. I smile, kiss him goodbye on the cheek, spin around towards home, landing at Sedutto's drowning my anger in coffee ice cream. How alone am I really? Can I get more alone than this?

Maybe I'm ovulating.

It's Sunday afternoon, almost dusk. If I were in Los Angeles, if this were four months ago, tomorrow I would be in group with Sam. Tomorrow I would see Sam, he would still be my doctor, and everything would be all right. He would help me understand Mike.

I think I've made a fool of myself with Mike. He made love with his eyes closed. I remember Gretchen saying "Sarah, you're like a kitten jumping up on someone's lap, they knock you off, you keep jumping back up, they keep knocking you off, you keep jumping. Don't you know how to take No for an answer?"

What does love feel like?

I want to write a scene where a man and woman are making love. The man's eyes are closed. He's getting as far away as he can from her and at the same time holding and pressing on her buttocks and moving his cock inside her. She's on top. She lifts herself on her elbows and looks at his face. Over and over she thinks, open your eyes, but her body continues to respond. As she gets closer to orgasm she's about to cry with frustration. She comes, he comes. She cries. She lifts herself off him, lets him, still hard, slip out of her, sits against the wall, her hand over her eyes.

He's stunned. "What's wrong?"

I want to write the scene where the woman stops in the middle because her heart wants to. She stops moving. She tries to breathe slowly. He continues to stroke her backside and move, his eyes still closed. Her face rests on the sheet, sweating against his cheek. Her hair nearly covers his face. She starts to calm, then starts to cry, holds on to him.

Then she lifts herself up, lets him slip out of her and sits against the wall on his arm. He looks at her. He's afraid to move.

"You're shutting me out," she says.

“What?”

“Your eyes are closed.”

“You should have said something. You have to learn to speak up.”

What I don’t understand is sex. It’s power over me.

Three years ago on a Thursday morning with Sam, I lay on the floor on my back, breathing, my knees up and wide apart.

“Now tilt your pelvis up and down,” Sam instructed.

I did.

The warmth of his leather vest shot out in rays that touched my thighs. His body, fully clothed, was so much warmer than mine, so powerful are pants and a shirt. When he brought his face close to me, my body jumped, moved like steel to the magnet of his beard.

He touched my forehead, and my face relaxed.

“Keep it moving, keep breathing,” he said.

I thrust my pelvis into the air, letting it fall back down, beginning to feel lust. Then not lust, just a warmth in my lower body. I started to thrash around. Sam sat at my knees.

I began to feel powerful, generating my own sexual feelings with no direct stimulation. I reached out for his hand, wanting to be connected to him, knowing he wouldn’t take advantage, try to throw his energy into mine. He was there to observe the creation of feelings. He was there to watch and smile as they came to the surface and leapt from my body into the air, filling the room with sex. I was a hermaphrodite, impregnating the air.

“This is not about a penis,” he said. “This is not about anybody else doing anything to you, this is not about organs.” He held my hand delicately. I felt his pleasure.

I began to float. Gyrating faster, wider. Relaxation moved through me like a hand, starting at the top of my head, passing downward over my body to my feet, erasing thought. I was, for one moment in my life that I know about, losing thought. My brain went on hold. I began to feel what my body was feeling. Wonder. Excitement. I had been given permission. I held Sam’s hand only to stay on the earth; I wanted nothing from him. Everything I need at

that moment, I had. I was giving myself. I almost came, then stopped. The feelings fell away, slowly. I lay still for awhile.

He looked at me. "I was thrilled for you," he said.

I eased myself up.

When I think of Sam I think of him somehow birthing me.

In the fall of my first year with Harry in Laurel Canyon, I became obsessed with needlework. I'd sit on the porch crocheting until the sun went down and I could no longer see outside. More than anything, I wanted to be domestic. Even when I was making fifteen hundred dollars a month on the series, working steadily, being a homebody who could cook and sew was more important. Because Harry could cook better than I did, I was not a cook. He was not making love to me, so I was not sexy. So I drowned myself in yarn.

After I moved out of our house in the Hollywood Hills, I went out on a date with a handsome man and slept with him. I was on my way to promiscuity. I was going to be a free, modern woman, and find out about sex. I was going to find out who I was. More men came and went out of my life. Young, younger. I couldn't hold a man. I still can't.

I was brokenhearted and alone and frightened. I breathed on Sam's floor and felt things deeply. I cried, and when I sat up off the floor, he was there to hold me. I knew he loved me. I was his patient. He loved all his patients. No matter what, I had Sam, once a week, rain or shine, eleven o'clock on Thursday.

Now I remember, one Thursday morning last year: me crying softly on the floor, lying down, beginning to breathe, and Sam leaning over me. I pulled the air into my chest and let it out. It flowed into my head until all I could feel was air filling my brain, pushing at my skull. With Sam I knew I was not alone, I'd never be alone, and for fifty minutes I didn't have to be frightened of anything out there.

I felt slight pressure on my chest, between my breasts. It felt soft and moist. I opened my eyes to see Sam leaning across my body, kissing my breast. I watched him move slowly down my torso, kissing my belly, below my belly. I would have stopped him, but I loved him, and I didn't understand what was happening. I thought, Let him, let

him, Sarah, Give to him. He is so beautiful. Sam was always wise and I wanted him to be happy with me.

His mouth moved to the hair above my vagina, from which a Tampax string dangled miserably. No man had ever approached me sexually when I had my period unless my diaphragm was holding it all in. But a Tampax? I once stopped a man from touching me for fear he would feel the Tampax string and be revolted. But I didn't stop Sam. His mouth was on the lips of my vagina, and I could feel his wet tongue dabbing at my soft tissues. Was this a prescribed therapy for loneliness, I thought, One doctor's tongue in patient's vagina? But I was not thinking about consequences, only that I wanted to be a good girl and come for him. I wanted to let him know how much I loved and respected him.

My pelvis began to move. I relaxed into the feeling, my body heaving toward Sam's tongue. I watched him moving slowly, holding my pelvis gently, and wondered what he was thinking. Then I came, tears dropping sideways down my face to my ears, falling out of my confusion. Who was this man I paid by the hour, and why did he choose this as therapy?

He sat up on his knees, touched my belly, then stood up. "And don't go around feeling dirty because you have your period. That's some Jewish thing. You're not dirty."

I've tried to forget this experience, make it just something that happened between doctor and patient. I put it away. I remember now that at the time I thought I was giving something to him. But that thought was quickly replaced by one in which he is always giving to me. I didn't then feel exploited. I felt loved. Now I shiver thinking of it. He was married. I was a patient. There has never been anything between us but that. I have been vulnerable. Divorced, confused, then raped. I needed him. I participated in sex that was not right. I am enraged at both of us.

Chapter 21

My memories come back, one at a time, so slowly. My heart is surprised by the pain of going over such moments and trying to flesh them out and link them together.

It hurts, not because I'm sad that these things happened, or because I remember feeling hurt or sad or humiliated, but because I can't really remember much at all. I've lost pieces of my life. Whole chunks of my life were lived by someone else. Another woman took over for me, and I went to sleep. Where is she? How do I talk to her?

I sit on a towel on the couch by the window wrapped up in a cotton Kimono, leaning on two pillows, soaked with sweat. My fever has gone down to a hundred and one, and I'm less scared, but my head is so fuzzy I can barely follow the trashy book I'm reading. Tomorrow, I think, I'll be better still and I'll go out walking.

Walk where? The same four blocks around Fifty-second and Second? Passing the same stores, sit in the same postage-stamp park with the chlorinated waterfall? Look at the same people on their lunch breaks and feel a part of the working world even though I haven't seen the inside of an office in a week?

When I walk around thinking of Sam, I notice men looking at me. Is it my anger they like? Or is it that I've stopped smiling all the time and I seem real for once?

I know four things: The rape happened; It could happen again; Sam doesn't want me; He never will.

I sit in this apartment, dripping sweat instead of tears, still not believing the things I know, thinking that if I suffer and think enough and prove that I can survive, he will admit he loves me and ask me to come home.

I run around New York with John, Lily and Charles, and Lisa. We go to parties and plays other friends are in, Broadway shows sometimes. We have brunch on Sundays across from Lincoln Center, and dinner on Columbus Avenue. But most of the time I'm alone. Going to matinees when the air gets too oppressive. Eating alone in

restaurants, going to the gym, taking dance class and acting class twice a week. Gregory, my acting teacher, is wonderful, but as usual I'm attracted to him, and it's getting in my way. I want to be good for him, instead of just doing the work. And I care about my work. I care about being an artist. It seems the only reason I'm on the earth at all. I must have work to do. If Christine needed to die in order to do more singing and dancing, I must have mine to do here.

I go on interviews for commercials and have done two since I've been here. In one I wore a jogging suit and ran into a bank, breathless, telling the camera what the bank wants the public to know. I ran a half a block over and over, at least thirty-five times, sweating, stopping on my mark and trying to talk without gasping. I wait in long lines at Actor's Equity to get seen for plays. Sometimes there's a second interview, but mostly I think I'm too short and too round for stage work in New York.

I walk into the Museum of Modern Art and the Whitney when I can't think of anything else to do. I look at the same paintings, always loving Calder's *Circus* at the Whitney, always moved by Picasso's *Guernica* at the Modern.

I walk through the Village, through SoHo's galleries, and try to help John through the trauma of rehearsals for his play. He can't stand the director or half the actors; it must be torture for him to see his work in hands he doesn't trust.

Sometimes I just walk the streets looking at nothing in particular, writing in my little notebook, and the day goes by. Outside Lincoln Center, people sit on the fountains, watching the water. I stand in the street with a huge crowd on Sunday afternoons listening to live jazz. There is so much going on that I don't have to search for things to do. I just come upon them.

I've been hired by a woman I met at a commercial audition to sing the lead role in a rock musical for a backer's audition, it'll take place in a big rehearsal hall at Broadway and Forty-second. I never thought I could sing Rock 'n Roll. I've always been a pop singer, a ballad singer, a folk singer. I never thought I had the spontaneity and guts to sing real Rock 'n Roll. Ellen is teaching me to do it; she says I

have the voice for it. I'm belting out tunes up high, leaning into the words, learning to let the sound be raw, having a great time.

At the performance, we face a wall of mirrors, the audience between us and our reflections. I sing over their heads to myself in the mirror, hypnotized by Ellen's loud, insistent, melodic piano and the sound from my own throat. Afterwards we go to Sardi's for our own opening night celebration. I feel a part of New York now. Ellen will go back to Los Angeles tomorrow with her partner and some of the cast, but I'll stay here.

At the Actor's Equity office, on the bulletin board, a flyer from the Roosevelt Hospital Rape Crisis Center asked for volunteer counselors. I want to give something back. Their training program is a weekend: Saturday and Sunday nine to six. I've been in New York almost five months now. In two weeks it will be a year since the rape. An anniversary.

At the beginning of the program, I'm glued to my chair, Kleenex in hand. The women who run the program know I was raped last year, and that I'm not sure I'm ready. But we're optimistic. One after the other, women come to the lecture podium in this big auditorium, filled with at least two hundred women volunteers, talking about different aspects of rape: the law, the syndrome, recovery. They show a videotape of three victims talking about their rapes. I shiver through the whole thing, wondering if I can do this, wanting to. A woman comes to the front of the hall to tell her story. It's been three years for her, and she talks with a detachment that disturbs me. She says that even three years later she's not yet ready to counsel, but she is able to tell her story dispassionately, like a reporter. Being an actress and loving to tell my story, I want to volunteer immediately to be the storyteller at the next training.

I write down information and my feelings, and look around me. The women here are very New York, very efficient and busy. There is no nonsense about them. In small groups between lectures, we act out counseling scenes, hospital emergency room scenes, and though I'm emotional, I feel that I can do this. I'm good at it and the group leaders seem to think so too.

At the end of the training on Sunday evening, six of us walk uptown to Columbus Avenue for dinner at an outside cafe. We are from different backgrounds, we have different careers. One is a nurse, another a bookkeeper, one works in publishing, another is a student getting her masters in psychology and using the Rape Program as experience.

A week later I have a final appointment with the social worker in charge of the Program. We meet in a cubicle of the emergency room. I feel collected, but the moment I walk in, she says, "Calm down."

"What?"

"You're very anxious. Would you like a glass of water?"

"Yes." I don't want to be defensive, but I don't feel that anxious. A little nervous. Excited. She brings me a paper cup of water and sits back down in her red plastic chair.

"It says on your application you were a rape victim."

"Yes. Last year in Los Angeles. Actually, tomorrow it'll be a year."

"Well, I think it's too soon."

I look at her. How can she make that snap decision when I've already passed through a grueling weekend that showed me no more paranoid about going back to the night streets than other women? To me, she looks anxious. Her movements are short, her body birdlike, her face hard. If I were brought in here in the middle of the night, I wouldn't want to be comforted by her. "I don't think so," I say, "I think..."

"Listen, a year is really not that long. Why don't you come back and do the training again in six months and we'll see?"

She's dismissing me. I feel terrible.

"I know how Year Anniversaries are. Good Luck." She moves forward in her chair.

"Were you raped?" I ask, curious.

"No," she shifts her body back an inch, "But I've been here a long time, and I know how first year anniversaries can be." Then she stands up to shake my hand.

I get up, smile to hide my disappointment, shake her hand, and walk out of the emergency waiting room, down the ramp to the

ambulance lot, and onto Fifty-ninth. I have been rejected at the one thing I know I know about. Rape. Maybe she's right. It's too soon.

I'm walking towards chocolate cake on Seventy-second. I want to sit on a white stool and dig a plastic fork into dark frosting and deep, wet cake, a piece so big I can stuff it down until my insides have had enough and there's still cake on the plate. I want there to be enough. I want to be self-destructive, to get fat. I want the immediate gratification of food. But I'm tired of eating. Tired of restaurants and coffee shops and florescent lights in high ceilings. I'm tired of walking around people, gliding effortlessly through ranks of businessmen and secretaries and writers and actors doing the same dance I am, moving at the same speed: we pass each other in tune with each other, but looking at the air behind our heads, never at faces. I'm tired of seeing the sun disappear every day. I'm tired of cars. I'm tired of being alone. Tired of being brave and sane. Tired of me.

I feel like ghosts are behind me, just over my shoulder, propelling me faster, laughing at my running while they float and take in the view. They like the people, my ghosts. They like the streets and the cars. They love the starchy food I eat, the sugary Danish and whipped cream. They love ketchup on potatoes and ice cream sandwiches from street vendors. They like being around when I start to fade. I keep on walking, to the market, to the movies, to dinner; I walk and look but it's their voices talking in my head; they like it when "I" drift away and New York is all theirs. I have names for the voices. Sad Sarah. Little Sarah. Critic Sarah. Mommy's Voice. Leave-Me-Alone, Go- Away Sarah. Crying Sarah. Centered, Calm Sarah. Sarah Gone.

I'm on Seventh Avenue. All I see is cheesecake. My feet hurt so much I've got to sit down. I want to eat something healthy, I really do, maybe a fruit cup, or a salad, but all I can think of is cherries on top of cheesecake, dripping chemicals and sugar, maybe a cheap pie. I think about red. Strawberries, cherries, my nail polish that doesn't last too long. I've been typing too much. My back hurts from sitting up and hunching over like a monk in a demented word factory.

I've looked at the Roosevelt Tramway to Roosevelt Island everyday I walk up the street and would like to ride it. Today is as good a day as any. Maybe the ride will break my mood.

Twenty or so people stand under straps or next to silver poles and half of them are holding paperback books up to their noses. I jockey for a place by the window. As we lift off, starting to climb like the Disneyland skyway, I expect everyone to put down their books and watch Manhattan move under us with the same excitement I feel, but nothing changes. I can't believe it. I want to shout, "Hey, look, look!"

On the Island we get on a little red bus, as if this whole place is a Disneyland ride, and head for the center of town. I can't find it. I don't know when to get off the bus. A drugstore looks like the hub of activity, so I smile at the driver, being the last person on his bus, and get off.

There is a feeling of such drabness about this place, like it's a prison island. I can't tell if it's high rent or low rent, but it all looks the same. There are swimming pools and grass courts. I get a health food candy bar and head with my book toward the river. There's a strip of nice soft grass. Two women lay on towels in bathing suits. I wonder who lives here? Who lives here but can sit in the sun on a Monday like me? I lie down to sleep.

On the way home on the tramway, hovering over the river, sliding down into the city, I hardly notice the view. Two times and it's already old. New York takes away so much. It gives you surprises, but makes you forget how to enjoy them.

I think I'm going crazy. Going mad.

As I think about being alone here, in this restaurant, I can feel my mouth turn down. I should be crying. I don't know what my life is about, and I haven't written in a week. I turn halfway around to look out the window, and out of the corner of my eye I see a red shirt, only one, at the table behind me. For a second I turn completely around, and there's a pretty, blonde woman eating alone, facing the same direction as I am. A white visor cap is sitting where a plate would be if someone were joining her for dinner. I smile, so relieved to see another woman alone, she smiles back, and the released energy

drips off me like pounds after a good run. I turn back quickly, not wanting to intrude. My aura is lighter, I'm sure. I am not so strange a woman.

My heart is palpitating because I'm feeling a little happier. And I can't stand it. I keep looking around the room for things to make me unhappy.

A man walks in, blonde, moustache, dark sunglasses, sits down at a table across from me. I cannot take my eyes from him. I try not to look at him, but I shake. I know he's there. I'm nervous, self-conscious, finally wishing I hadn't sat here or that he'd finish, get up and go away, because men are no longer supposed to throw me off like this. And what kind of man can you meet in a restaurant in the middle of the day, anyway. I concentrate on writing but the man pulls at me. I relax my face, relax my body, think soft. I feel expressions pass across my features, I try not to organize them. I like the slight smile, the sad look. I am sad because my attraction is so complete to this man I don't know. I feel him get up, move toward me. No. He's going to the cash register, and he very definitely has his back to me. All you have to do is smile once, and they get the picture. If you have to do it twice, he ain't interested, sister. I won't be a kitten jumping up on a lap one more time.

I've been standing in front of this painting at the Whitney for a long time. My feet are tired, but I don't want to move and disturb the feeling between me and the Edward Hopper nightmare on the wall. I'm almost in the painting, almost touching the woman standing here in the doorway, standing in the light; I push her aside...I notice I'm wet. The front of my blouse has spots on it, people are staring at the dark splotches—how could I have left the house with splotches on my pink blouse? The woman in the painting looks. She's come back into the light and shoved me out of the frame. I'm standing here, dripping. I can feel the water coming from my eyes. I hear sounds from behind my eyes, getting louder. I'm singing. The sad person in me is singing. I listen. It's my mouth turning down, my eyes are like open faucets, but Sad Sarah is singing. She must be crying, but it's the same sound in my head I'm so used to. Nothing's changed, except

that now I have to leave here. I have to go, but I'm stuck to the spot. I beg the painting to send me home. Lady in the picture, turn, point your finger, show me the way out!

I don't know how I got here, but I'm standing at home in front of the air-conditioner, looking out at the Chrysler Building, listening to Melissa Manchester, wishing I had some food in the house.

I'm dreaming. I see my mother come toward me with an axe, her eyes huge and dark. She is leaping for me, to kill me. I scream. I wake myself screaming. I sit up, my heart pounding so hard the blood clogs my ears, all I can hear is the pounding. My mother is killing me. She's thrown down the axe, her hands are tight around my throat. Suddenly I see in the vision it's not my mother; it's me. I'm killing me. I look around, at the buildings across the street, at the sooty, heavy air, at the closed windows and the air conditioner, at the glass of water by the bed. I look at my round stomach from eating all the time. What am I doing? Why am I killing myself? The tears roll down my face as though I'm three years old and my mother has just stopped taking care of me, just walked away. I've walked away from myself in this dirty city, poisoned myself with garbage food and hate.

I want to fuck men the way they've fucked me. They hold me at night sometimes, but always turn away in the morning. They come into your body looking for warmth and shelter, and after they feel comforted they leave you with their residue dripping out of you. They wash you away in the shower but you remember them for days every time you look at your panties. They always want you for comfort. And they leave you none. Now I want their role.

The woman's role is to meet a man who's half-decent and try to make him whole. You invest him with qualities he doesn't have; you magnify his small virtues, you mold him, you patch him up with clay. Then he leaves and you see the clay you pasted onto him came from you. He leaves with little pieces of you stuck to his body and psyche. You make yourself less to make him more, and then again, when he leaves, you have to rebuild. And he takes the pieces of you and gives them to some other woman he loves better, and she puts them on herself, or does what you did and pastes some of her onto him. And

that's how we all become one another. But I remember Sam saying, "We're looking for deeper integration of ourselves, not to become one another."

I wake up as usual in a panic. I wake up, get up, then lay down again. Another half-hour and I'll get up and go to the gym. I dream. I'm at a party. Sam walks in. I'm Sam's eyes, watching me be beautiful. I radiate calm, love, serenity, warmth, beauty. My eyes sparkle. I'm golden. One earring sparkles. My hair is my aura, pure, silky, tight natural curls, golden. I am the sun. I glow. I can feel Sam still looking, melting in my golden heat. Am I only beautiful if he, or another man, thinks I am?

The blankets are heavy over my face, but I can feel the day light coming through. I fight to stay dream drugged, out of reality. It's the day again. I do the same things, in different orders. There are the same spots on the floor, on the refrigerator. Rust stains. I've slept in the same gray sweat pants, the same cream-colored sweater for two weeks. When I had my period I ran out of slender Tampax and tried to sleep with no protection. The blood and mucous stains are in the sweat pants, unwashed, beginning to smell.

I like the smell. My body. If I never washed the pants, I'd have everlasting proof of my body's functions. As long as I can menstruate I have hope.

I call Lindsay from the group in Los Angeles to say Hello, she has a brother in New York she wants to introduce me to, sometimes we keep in touch.

"Do you want to hear some gossip?" she asks.

My stomach goes crazy. I know this has to do with Sam, and I don't want to hear it.

"He's been seeing another woman for three years, her name is Susanne, and finally Rena just couldn't accept it."

I can't speak. Whatever he's done, whatever I feel, and now I'm feeling hatred for him, I can't tell Lindsay about him and me.

"What do you think happened?" I ask, my heart pounding.

"I don't know, but he was with this woman three years, on and off. Rena tried, but finally she just had enough."

Three years. I wouldn't stand that for three minutes, I don't think.

"Anyway, so Rena has a new boyfriend."

"Already?"

"Yep. He's fifteen years younger. They seem very happy, I've seen them together. She looks softer and happier than I've ever seen her."

"Oh, my god."

"Yeah. Isn't it something?"

All he ever had to do was say "There's someone else." Or "I don't feel that way about you," or "It's impossible." He lied to me. He had time for her and no time for me. He needed space, time for work, the kids, but he had time for her. He lied. I told him nothing but truth and he lied to me. I humiliated myself for lack of information. If he had told me the truth I could have taken care of myself, I wouldn't feel so used and stupid. Or would I have believed I could compete, that he was different with me, and that I'd win him in the end?

"I would be mad at him," Lindsay says. "But I think I'm just mad at me. I was never comfortable with him in group, he always made me feel incompetent."

"I know the feeling."

"Well, I guess that's the first rule of adulthood. Personhood. Have your own values, create your own life out of them, and look up to no one."

All I can think is, He lied.

"No one can tell you anything."

"So let me give you Rich's number."

I promise to look him up, and we hang up.

At least the man who raped my body didn't ask for trust and truth from me. He didn't lie, and he used me straightforwardly. But Sam is a sneaky mean bastard. He raped my mind. I blame myself for needing him so badly as my Prince, my model, my example. As it turns out, he's not only imperfect, but treacherous. He failed me as a lover and doctor.

The phone rings. It's my mother telling me the trial will start in two weeks. I have to go back to Los Angeles. It's time to go home.

Chapter 22

It's Sunday night. I've been in Los Angeles a week. The trial starts tomorrow.

Claudia Batt gave me a copy of the transcripts of the pretrial hearing to refresh my memory. How odd. I read my story, my name, on an official document, a report. It's been a long time. A year. But I'm sure of myself this time.

I've been staying in Santa Monica, house-sitting. Samson and Eggbert are still with my mother, happy, but I miss them; soon I'll start looking for a place for the three of us to move into and make a home.

An hour ago the phone rang twice and then someone breathed and hung up. Then I got a call for a Laura. I got so scared I walked around shaking, thinking my rapist was going to have me murdered before the trial so I couldn't testify. I've been doing this nightly battle with myself for a week now.

About a half-hour before I go to bed, usually when I'm leaning over the bathroom sink to brush my teeth and wash my face, I start to know that someone's coming in the apartment. Every sound is a footstep coming up the stairs. The typewriter's whirring turns to a thumping, a body coming up the stairs. Toilets flushing, doors opening and closing, lights going on and off next door are all happening in here. Footsteps outside on the landing, the locks noiselessly picked, the doors already opened, a man at the bedroom door. I know when I will start this imagining. It takes hours before I comfortably drop off to sleep. There is a shadow and a presence always behind me, over my shoulder. I could get frenzied, but I stay calm. I try to sleep and eat and work, because I know I will live alone a long time.

In the morning Mary calls to say she'll meet me at the Courthouse.

I'm here at two o'clock, alone. The drive was so short and pleasant, the parking was easy, the attendant was polite. I head for the Victim Advocate's Office.

Maria Lopez is waiting for me. She's dark, small, with an absolutely charming, bright, open, and sincere smile. We shake hands.

"I'm looking forward to this," she says. "I'll stay with you as long as you want, as long as it takes."

I thank her.

We go down the elevator to the eleventh floor, walk towards the Courtroom. As I reach the hallway near the ladies' room, I feel, more than see, a presence in a beige suit pass me. I know it's him. It's him in a three-piece suit. I go into the bathroom, and when I come out, he isn't there.

"He's inside," Maria says. "They've started motions."

"Is he wearing a beige suit?"

"Yes."

We wait and wait. My mother and father arrive, hug me, then go to sit in the courtroom. An hour goes by, another hour. Maria goes in and out, says nothing is happening. All of a sudden the doors open and people come out, it must be a recess. My father and mother come out, then the defense attorney, then my rapist. I take off my sunglasses and look at him. I can feel the fear everywhere in my body. He looks back, cool as can be. Our eyes make contact.

Mary is walking down the hallway to where Maria and I sit. She sees the energy between me and the rapist and stops in the middle of a step. I watch the rapist turn his attention from me to his attorney, continuing the conversation, following him down the hallway to the elevators. Mary's eyes open wide with fury as she picks up her step and walks toward me. The rapist disappears behind the corner, maybe into an elevator. He's gone for awhile. I stand up to hug Mary.

"Thank you for coming."

She tries to adjust the rage in her face to a smile for me. "Was that him?"

"Yeah," I say, and that ends it. "This is Maria Lopez. Maria, this is my friend Mary."

“Hi,” they say to one another. I feel perfectly protected by the two of them, cushioned from the ugliness of this building, of the torn vinyl seats on the marble benches, the smell of cigarettes, ashtrays overflowing. We sit through the recess, chatting and giggling, keeping it light.

New people are arriving: Bernie the Detective; the two policemen who came to get me that night, who were there with me in the gas station when I could not identify my rapist and told me I’d have another chance the next day; Ray, the man who gave my rapist two different lie detector tests.

“He lied through his teeth,” Claudia told me four days ago.

“How could you tell?” I’d asked.

“The last test, God knows why he took it, these turkeys think they can beat the machine, Ray just stopped in the middle—we were watching the whole thing behind a one way mirror—and Ray just said, ‘There’s no point going any further. You’re lying.’”

“What did he do?”

“He just threw up his hands, and unhooked the bastard.”

“No, what did the rapist do?”

Well it was so obvious he was lying. He looked shocked, let Ray unhook him. That was that. But we can’t use it in court, you know.”

“Yeah.”

“But we didn’t do it for court, kiddo, we did it for us, right? For you, and so we could all have peace of mind that we’ve got the right guy, right?” I nodded. “And that’s what you’re going to say on the stand, right?”

“Right.”

Standing in the hallway, she says to me, “Your eyes were swollen, you were scared, you could barely see with the lights in his face, in that gas station, remember?”

Everyone stands around and I know I’ll be going into court soon.

“I’ll be fine. I know I will.”

“I know you will.”

Claudia opens the courtroom doors, goes inside, and Mary and Maria and I wait, watching my mother and father pace the hall, smiling at me. My mother holds her huge purse in front of her, a

sweater thrown over its top, her arms encircling them. She chews gum, and it makes me happy just to see her there. Dad walks up to me. "Okay, honey, I have to go back to work." He leans down and kisses me, smiling.

"Bye, Daddy.

"I'll call you later." He waves to Mom and Mary, smiling at Maria, and disappears around the corner.

"Okay, Honey, you're on," Claudia motions to me through the half-open courtroom doors. I remember that I am an actress. I remember Carol saying to Sam in Group, "I don't trust her. She's an actress." And now I'm going on. I don't want this to be a performance, ringing with truth and authenticity. I want this to be the truth.

Mary and Maria and Mom follow me and settle themselves in the middle of the room. I make my way to the stand, past the wood swinging door separating the observers from the Judge's bench, the Defense table, Claudia's table, the Jury Box, a Kleenex in my left hand, and raise my right hand to the bailiff.

I sit in the witness chair and look out. There are people I don't know out there, maybe his family, his sisters, brothers. Who is he? Does he have a history before me? Suddenly I'm surprised to think of him functioning in the world. It was as if he lived in a vacuum until he came out to rape me, and then went back, only coming out again to make appearances at Parker Center in the lineup or in court.

He belongs only to me. My rapist. That is who he is. That's what terrifies me now. He has seen me at a depth greater than any other human being has. He has seen the core of my being. He has seen me beg for my life. He has been the essential person in my life, he is at the bottom of it. It overwhelms me with grief that he's been where no one else has been. I swore that he did not get to me, that I reserved my personhood, my humanness, when he told me to lie down, when he climbed on top of me, when he entered my body.

I swore that I held that from him, that he got my body, but not my soul. But now I feel as if he was there. He might not have known it. I doubt that he knew where he was or who I was, but he knew how frightened I was. He knew that he held my life in the palm of his

hand. Every time he hit me, he made a choice not to stab me instead. When he pounded my head on the wood floor, he made a choice not to splatter my brains. I pleaded with him to leave me alone, and he did what he wanted. He owned all of me when I forgot that I belonged to something bigger, to the universe, and not to anyone. I became his.

I look at him sitting behind the huge wood table, staring at me, cool, his features like a beautiful marble bust, radiating his hatred of me and all women out through his hands. He leans back in his chair, not taking his eyes from me. The defense attorney asks him a question. He reluctantly turns to him to answer. I watch; then he turns back to me.

I stare at him. Claudia told me not to let him bother me, not to look at him, to look only at her, as I did last time. But now I want to see him. I want him to see me holding his eyes, because no matter what happens here, no matter what the Judge decides, no matter whether he ends up behind bars for eleven years or out on the street again tonight, I've brought him here. I dragged him into Court and forced him to hire an attorney and sit here looking at me. And no matter how hard he lies, or how hard that blonde girl hanging on his shoulder in the hallway lies for him, what he will remember, in this moment that he is sane and not raping, is me staring at him. Me telling him that what he did was not all right. Telling him that someday he will get back the hatred he's given out.

I know he must live in misery. It must cause him agony, what he does. There must be a terrible battle inside him all the time, getting louder and more violent, demons clawing at him, screaming, drowning the tiny voice of his soul, that make him go out and rape. He has to try to murder the demons in someone else.

All this time, since I walked around New York in a daze, wondering why I even bothered to get up in the morning, I felt my own demons pulling at me. They screamed at me to wake up, to listen to them, to acknowledge their presence. The demons would go on chewing at me until I said Yes, you are there, I hear you screaming, I feel you, but now I'm going to get up this morning and live. But he hears the voices screaming and thinks they are him. He

cannot live with them, so he tries to subdue them. He goes out and rapes. He takes away my dignity. He tries to rob me of my humanness.

I stare at him from up here on the stand. I see he is a human being, a man, listening to the wrong voices inside him. He is lost. He needs more courage to live than he has. I look at him and tell him this with my eyes, that I have courage, I choose to live, I have taken back my dignity.

I want him to rot, sitting with rats and starchy food, for the rest of his life. I want to laugh at his three-piece suit and rob him of his dignity, of his pretensions to humanness. I hate him so much I want to leap on him, rip his silk shirt to shreds, pound on the top of his head with my fists, force him to the ground before the Bailiff can get me off him.

I do this in my mind. I strangle him. I take his balls in my right hand, little soft sacs of tubes and mucous, and with one quick movement, squash them flat in the palm of my hand. He screams as though he's dying, falling back on the floor, moaning, grabbing his testicles, crying, rolling on the floor, and then he fades, he dies away. Instantly, I stop wanting to do this. I stop wanting to castrate him, to kill him. It's killing me to hate him so much, to focus all my energy on hating him. Tomorrow all this will be over, and I have to let it go. I have to let it flow out of my body. I have to say goodbye to this time of my life, make peace, put it to rest.

I see him sitting there as another person. He's not a figment of my imagination, magnified by my fear, not a twilight being who'll crawl back into the woodwork somewhere. If he is only part human, then I am only part human. I've shut down a part of myself in order to not see him clearly.

I have demons too. But I don't want to stunt myself with hating him.

I feel him come towards me, floating across the ten feet between his chair and my chair. I feel his dark hand reach out to me in space. I feel everyone else in the room fade into the walls; the light is dim. The pounding in my head has moved to my temples. I feel him coming nearer. I get up out of the chair, I'm standing. I move

forward. I'm terrified, but not of him. I'm afraid of saying goodbye to him. I'm afraid to be left with my own demons, afraid to not have him to hate anymore.

I reach my hand across the space, he comes closer. In a split second, his hand hovers an inch over mine, his slender fingers about to make contact. I pull back instinctively. I want to run. I don't. I lift my hand again under his. I decide to breathe again. He is looking at me, blankly. All the pieces of his face are there in order, clear. I see everything about him, and in the same moment as my breath fills my lungs, our hands touch. I feel a shiver go through me. Cold, then so hot my whole body turns red, a coal, about to break into flame. I want to brush him off, to run, but I don't. I feel his hand on my hand. I feel that his hand is not my hand. It's lost its power to hurt me. I feel him small. I allow my body to relax and feel. I feel my vagina. I will not shut it off, not for him, not for anyone. I feel my legs. All of a sudden, I say to him *Go*. He moves his hand and drifts back to his seat. I stand there, my hand still in midair. Suddenly I feel myself back in the green chair on the stand. I see my right hand holding a Kleenex in midair above my knees, between our faces.

I have not taken my eyes from his. *I let you go, I let you go*, I say. *I am done with hate. I have myself. I don't need you to hate anymore. I don't need to hate. Go.* And then the tears come, and I can feel the room quiet. I don't want to sob here, not with all these people. I'll think about it later. Now I have to do what I have to do. I turn my clouded eyes away from the rapist, dab at them and at my cheeks with the Kleenex, and look, clear eyed, at Claudia as she begins, "Ms. Green..."

I sit at my blue dining room table in Santa Monica, looking out the window, waiting for the trial to be over. It's been two days, and the rapist is on the stand. My mother is in Court, she will call to tell me the Judge's decision.

A weird fog is rolling in from the ocean. The air is getting denser and grayer; the telephone poles are like masts of big ancient ships. We are all sailing, a hundred years ago, lost in the fog. You can see it drift past, like a cloud moving through the city, making your eyes burn and your lungs ache. The city is disappearing.

I want to go home to my Mommy, where it is warm and someone will hug me, and I can hug back. I am all gray here. I imagine my mother in colors, deep red shirt, blue pants, healthy skin, a pink smile. My Daddy's rosebushes are lavender and red and hot pink and yellow and every possible color in between. These are real, bright. My mother's house is real. I can feel my mother's house. *I'm fooling myself*, I realize; it's as gray there as here, it's more smog than fog, it will hurt more. I'm looking for too much.

The phone rings. It's my mother.

"Well, it was Acquittal," she says.

I take air in.

She softens her voice. "You there?"

"Yeah. I'm okay."

"The Judge really had no choice." I can feel her sorrow and anger. "He went on record saying the police bungled the case. They lost the mug shots, and there just wasn't enough evidence."

I'm just breathing.

"You there?"

"Yeah. I'm okay. I expected it, you know. I never thought we had a case." I'm letting it slide off me.

"Well, you might've."

"You okay?" I ask, cheerful now.

"Yeah. I was concerned about you. I'm so angry at the police, but..."

They let him walk out. A year-and-a-half and I'm so tired. It's over. It's behind me.

"Sarah, I don't think I ever told you about the book."

"What?"

"That night...it happened...I was reading a book. It was two in the morning, two thirty, I couldn't sleep, and this paperback was lying around called *Love Kills*. The man who wrote it wrote *How to Be a Jewish Mother* so I thought it'd be light, but it was about a young woman coming home to her apartment late. Somehow the door wasn't locked. There's a horrible, grisly scene with a man coming into the apartment and trying to murder her with a knife. Is this okay to tell you?"

“Yeah, please.”

“It was you in the book. I said to myself, ‘That’s Sarah.’ I got hysterical. I was terrified. She was pleading with God not to punish her for this one mistake, because the door wasn’t locked. I threw the book in the trash. I was hysterical. I wanted to call you, to tell you to check your door. It was three by then; it was so late. I didn’t want to wake you, I didn’t want to scare you. Anyway...when Sam called from the hospital, I knew what it was...I don’t know why I didn’t tell you before, but I’ve never stopped wondering what would have happened if I’d called.”

“Oh, Mom.”

We’re quiet.

“Mom, I’m glad you didn’t. It wouldn’t have done anything. I had windows, louver windows. It could’ve made it worse, you never know.”

“Maybe.”

“I love you, Mom. Thanks for sitting in Court.”

“Of course. Love you too. Come for dinner tomorrow?”

“I don’t know. Maybe. I’ll call, okay?”

“Okay.”

Chapter 23

This New Year's Eve I'm at a small party at Mary's. Soon after midnight the men go home, and there are six women left.

We talk about men, and how hard it is to remember who you are when you fall in love with, or even meet, a good man.

Mary talks about the boring, rich, jet-set man who took her to a party last week. "I need to be with stone geniuses and not people who are rented. I mean, you hang out with a guy like that, you'd be like a trailer."

We laugh.

"I felt good when I was with him, but after he left I felt better."

Lorna and Connie are in the corner talking about depression. "Handling things beautifully doesn't mean you go through disaster whistling a happy tune," Lorna says.

"For all we know, Colleen Dewhurst was a wimp," Mary says.

We giggle all night. This has been the nicest New Year's Eve in years.

In the morning I call John to wish him a happy New Year's, and by mistake I dial my old number, the one Harry and I had in the house in the Hollywood Hills.

"John?"

"No...Sarah?"

"What...Oh my God..."

"What? Did you dial the wrong number?"

"Harry. Yeah...I was calling John...Oh...well, Happy New Year."

"Happy New Year. How are you?"

"I'm good. Fine. Actually I feel wonderful this morning. It's a new year."

"Listen, are you sitting down?"

"Yeah. What?"

"Are you ready for some news?"

"Yeah." My mind is reaching for what he's going to tell me. My heart goes up towards my mouth.

“Sure...I don’t know how you’re going to take this...”

“Well go on for God’s sake...”

“Geri and I got married last week. It was just a spur of the moment thing. We flew to Las Vegas.”

“Well, Congratulations.” I mean it. “I wish you well. If that can happen, I mean if...some people can fall in love, then there’s hope in the world.”

“Yeah. Guess you have to follow your heart.”

“Yeah. That’s nice. Well, look, I’d better call John, give my best to Geri, and really, good luck, and...good luck!”

“You too.”

It feels like the circle of my old life has closed up while I’ve moved out of it, circling by myself somewhere in a large empty space filled with hope. I’m starting to feel like my life is my own.

The man who raped me is walking around the city. I may run into him in line at the market, or at the bank. I no longer have the need to be afraid.

I still imagine Sam walking down the street toward me. We meet in line for a movie. We meet at a party. I say. He says, the woman he’s with says.... I tell myself to stop it but the fantasy comes back. His beard. His soft hair. His slenderness. I pull away from the daydream figure. The real Sam is unlovable.

I imagine running into Sam years later and he says, “My God, Sarah, after all this time you’re still thinking about me, all these years you’ve been waiting to get back at me. What’s the matter with you?”

I won’t do that.

The new day is too beautiful.

A small theater in Hollywood is interested in producing my play. At the moment it’s called *More Than Friends*. John wants to direct a staged reading with me in the lead, so the staff at the theater can make a final decision.

Copies of the play have been lying around my mother’s house, but she’s never asked about it. Three major scenes are based on her, Dad, and me, and I’m afraid she would be offended. But I’m over for lunch, and we’re chatting across the kitchen table. I tell her that I

have the reading almost cast, but that the woman set to read the mother isn't sure she can make it.

"Let me audition for you," she says.

"What?" My face is turning bright red. My mother was an actress. I'm sure she can do it.

"If she can't do it, just to help you out, I'll do it for you. If you need me to."

All of a sudden I'm excited. "Sure. You want to read the scenes?" I get up to the bookshelves, take out two copies and plunk one in front of her.

I sit, thumbing through the play, watching her read.

Her face lights up, and she lets out a belly laugh at the second line. "Let's just read it," she says. "Audition me."

"Okay." We read. She's better than I am. I'm so nervous that she's going to be offended, but she keeps laughing after almost every line.

"I've got purses for you...all kinds, they're too small for me, but they're perfect for you..." she reads, then dissolves in giggles that stop us both. We laugh, hard, leaning on the table, holding our sides, falling off the chairs.

"OOooooohhh!" she squeaks. "That's funny." My mother is always buying purses; big ones, little ones, tote bags. I get the overflow. She always has two or three tucked away in the closet waiting for me every time I come to visit. It's a joke between us now.

We finish the scene. "Let me read the whole thing. I'll read it tonight. You can write, Sarah, you can. Do I get the job?"

"Yeah. I'm going to call the woman now and tell her I've got someone definite."

"No, you don't have to do that, just if you need me."

"No, I want to do it. You're funny, it's perfect."

"Okay. Just don't tell anyone who I am. I'm only thirty-nine, I can't be your mother."

We laugh, I get up and hug her, we hug for a long time, and kiss each other's cheeks, pick up our purses and go off to a cafe for dessert.

At the reading, there is almost a full house of friends. John tells them, "Now this is just a reading, sitting down." Then he introduces the cast and we start.

We are all very nervous but the audience responds. They laugh where I didn't know there were laughs. They're very quiet at the end, and then they break quickly into applause. My mother was very good, and no one knew she was my mother. This was a third rewrite, a very different version of the play than the rambling piece we first read in my apartment in New York. I didn't know I had the discipline and the seriousness to keep reworking it, but I did.

Everyone talks over coffee, wishes me well, and leaves. John sits in the house looking at me, tears in his eyes. I run over to him and we hug for a very long time.

"Is it that good?" I say.

"No..."

"Thanks."

"No...it's good, you know it is, it needs work, you'll work on it. I'm just moved because you finished it. You said to me six months ago in New York that you were going to write a play, and you did. You said you were going to get it read at a theater and you did. I'm proud of you."

My eyes get very wet. We collect my beaming mother and all go for Sushi.

I ran into JoAnne from Monday Group at a taping of a show at ABC on Friday night. I barely recognized her, but I knew I knew this woman. I stared. She stared back. "Sarah," her lips moved but it was so noisy I couldn't hear the sound.

"JoAnne" and I moved around the circle of people she was standing with til we were close enough to reach out and hug. She seemed taller. Her hair was darker, shorter. She seemed older, more mature, less fragile. Less feminine. Her smile was different. Mary told me later what bad caps they were. That was the difference. Her chipped tooth was gone but the lisp in the voice was still there.

"You look so different," but I couldn't really put my finger on what it was.

She told me she was in graduate school getting her degree in psychology, aiming to practice. I asked her to send me a flyer when she put out her shingle so I could send folks to her. I didn't ask her about Rena. The questions sat on my tongue, but I left them there. I had the feeling she knew what a fool I made of myself with Sam.

Mom and I sit on the plastic webbed lounges in the backyard and look up at the sky. It's seven-thirty, a summer dusk. Bright blue just turning dark. We lay back. Mom raises her two hands to the sky above her head, looking at the sky through her fingers. She shows me the illusion. Your hands feel and look like they're in the sky, a part of the sky. The sky is right at your fingers. Your hands, your whole body float in the sky. You are lifted up. You touch the cloud. It's beautiful. We sit here, holding our arms up, looking at the blue sky through our fingers. Mother and daughter. We've never been so close or so vulnerable with each other. We sit like children holding up our hands to the sky.

Chapter 24

It's my thirty-fourth birthday. I've moved into my own apartment at the beach with Samson and Eggbert. We're a family again.

It's another sunset with the sky turning bright red; it will be that way for awhile before it goes dark. Sunset is no longer a terrible transition for me but a special time of day. I stand on the sand and watch the sun melt into the sea until the red disappears, and then I deal with the night.

I bought myself a Raggedy Ann doll. For Little Sarah. Her arms are outstretched and her red-blond hair looks like my blond curls. We're sisters.

Now that I've come to realize that my mother and father approve of me, now that my life is my own, now what? This is completely uncharted land; I feel totally alone. I look at my hands, my nails, my nose; I know they are like my mother and father's. My voice came from their voices; my eyes from their eyes. But their limits are not my limits. I can go wherever I want, as far as I can, no matter where they are. I have never felt so scared and at the same time so excited.

Two months ago I called Cedars-Sinai to volunteer as a Rape Crisis counselor. Enough time has passed since I tried in New York; I can give something back now. I've trained here for six weeks, I'm part of the program, and tonight I'm on overnight call. If a woman is brought into the hospital emergency room, the Crisis Center will call me, and I'll go to be with her the way Miriam came to be with me. I hope there are no calls.

The phone rings at four in the morning.

"Sarah?"

"Yes."

"This is Jeannie from Rape Response."

"Yes."

"There's a woman in Emergency at Cedars."

"I'll be there in twenty minutes."

"Great. I'll tell the nurse."

Before I hang up, “Jeannie, is she badly hurt?”

“I don’t know.”

“Okay. Twenty minutes.”

All the way to the hospital in the dark, on the deserted streets, my head clangs with different noises. Fear, excitement, sadness.

I park in the Emergency lot and walk through the same doors that John and Gretchen and the two officers led me through two years ago. My volunteer photo badge hangs from my belt. Three policemen stand in the hallway, talking. I head straight for the main emergency treatment room and walk up to the nurse with the red coil hanging out of her pocket, signifying she’s the one in charge at the moment.

“Hello, I’m Sarah Green from Rape Response.”

She looks at my badge. “I’m Sheila Brinker. Her name is Carlynn, and she’s waiting in the exam room.”

“Thanks.” I turn to the hallway.

“I’ll be there in a minute,” she says behind me, hard, a warning that this is her territory, I’m her guest. She will tolerate me until I prove myself welcome.

I walk up to the three officers, two men and a woman. They stiffen as I approach, eyeing my badge.

“Hi,” I smile.

“You can’t go in,” one of the men says.

“What?”

“We haven’t questioned her yet.” His stern look, rather than covering his nervousness, reveals it. “You can do your therapy later.”

I smile reassurance, deferring to them. “I’m only here to hold her hand, that’s all.”

“Oh,” the other male officer says, relieved suddenly, “Well...she certainly could use that...”

“Yes. And it’ll make it easier for you.”

“Gomez will question her,” the first officer nods his head in the female officer’s direction. She’s a sweet-looking, small woman, very nervous. She smiles at me. All three of them are lovely, obviously concerned about Carlynn, obviously upset for her. “We want to get the guy.”

“Yeah,” Gomez says.

“Is this your first time with a rape survivor?” I ask. The concept of ‘survivor’ rather than ‘victim’ is very important to me.

“Yeah,” she says.

“Well, I was here myself two years ago, on the table in there, so...”

“Oh,” she looks even sadder.

“Let me go in and tell her what’s going to happen,” I say, moving to the door. The three nod.

I push on the door handle, step into the small room, close the door behind me. On the examining table sits a thin, small, delicate looking woman, shaken, but not bruised. “Hi,” I smile at her, moving closer.

“I already talked to the police. I don’t want to talk to anybody else,” she says, on the defense, angry.

“It’s okay. You don’t have to.”

She looks up at me, waiting.

“I’m from Rape Response. My name is Sarah Green.”

“Oh,” she says. “I don’t want to talk about it.”

“Okay. I’m just here to be with you. Sit with you, if that’s okay.”

She looks at my badge. Her eyes soften for a moment. “Okay,” she says.

I move closer, sit on the end of the table, giving her as much room as she needs.

“I told the police everything,” she says.

“I know.”

Suddenly her eyes well up with tears. She’s about to let go of the iron control keeping her together. I reach for her hand, hold it. For a moment she stares at the wall, then I feel her hand tightening around mine, and the tears begin falling down her face.

I look at her in this place, and my heart is jumping around, my temperature must be two degrees higher, I’m flushed, red, my pulse as fast as Carlynn’s, and I’m afraid. But not as afraid as I thought I’d be. I’m not so afraid of being here, at four in the morning, or of being with Carlynn’s pain. I’m afraid that I won’t help her, that I’ll do

no good. "If you'd like to tell me what happened..." I say, tightening my hand around her hand, moving closer.

All of a sudden she turns to me, "He had a knife, and he said if I didn't...he would kill me."

"Yes." I nod my head, listening.

"I want it to be over. I want to go home."

I tell her about the pelvic exam and why she should do it. That she doesn't have to do anything now, but in case later they catch the rapist and she decides to go through with the legal process, they should have her lab results.

"Oh God, I just want to go home."

"I know."

She nods her head. "Okay."

"Carlynn," I decide to tell her. "I was raped two years ago. He had a knife. I was in this same room, on the same table. And I'm all right now, and you will be too, I promise you."

She looks up at me, her eyes barely wet. I know she's in shock, and that it'll take a long time for her to thaw.

The door opens. The nurse, Sheila, walks in. "Carlynn," she says cheerfully, "the officers want to question you now, and then after we'll do the exam. Okay?"

Carlynn looks at her. "Okay," she says.

Sheila goes out, and before anyone else comes in, I tell Carlynn, "The officer's a woman, she's very nice. I'll stay here with you."

Carlynn squeezes my hand. "Thank you," she says.

Later, I think, I'll thank her for helping me heal as well.

Officer Gomez walks into the room, a smile and sadness one after the other on her face. "Hi, Carlynn," she says. "I know this...I'm sorry...but I have to ask you some questions."

Carlynn nods and Officer Gomez pulls up the little black rolling stool to the table. She spreads out her forms on the sheet, looks up into Carlynn's eyes, and begins: "Okay. Can you start from midnight last night..."

Carlynn takes a deep breath. "I was in my room..."

I get off the end of the table, move behind it, and put my arm around Carlynn's shoulder, holding her hand with my other hand. As

she talks, the horror of the night hits her, she gasps and leans back against my arm for a moment, crying in spite of herself. I rub her neck. What I'm hearing, about this other man with a knife who terrorized this other woman, goes through me. But above everything, I'm so glad I'm here. I feel useful. I am helping by being able to handle all of this. I am not shocked, or even so horrified by what has happened, because it seems real to me that these things do happen. I haven't forgotten that it happened to me, and that I am not immune. But instead of feeling powerless and frightened, I feel safer just being aware that I am not safe. Reality is nowhere near as terrifying as the imagined. You can't fight against it so hard: it is. So you can stop pretending it isn't and go on with your life.

Two days later Carlynn sits in front of me, in a red chair like the one I sit in, her face tensed up with the effort to keep the feelings buried and the shock in place.

I ask her what she's feeling.

"Scared, that's all." She looks at the wall, steady, her hands in her lap.

"I know."

"I just want to forget about it. Look. As far as I'm concerned, it's over with."

"Carlynn, the longer you wait to feel what you're gonna feel, the longer it'll take to get over it."

"I don't want to feel what I'm supposed to feel."

"All right. But if you were feeling that, what would it feel like?"

She smiles. "Shit," she says.

"Yeah." I smile back, then see her hands tighten around each other. "You look like you feel like crying."

She looks at me startled, but at the suggestion, tears well up in her eyes. She tries to stop them.

"Let it go, Carlynn, just let yourself be. You saved yourself," I say. "You did everything right. You lived."

She looks at me as though that's the last thing she expected anyone to say. The tears are flowing down her cheeks. "It's shit," she says, grabbing for the box of Kleenex next to the chair. The shock

has worn off. She blows her nose, then takes more Kleenex, shredding them in her lap, confused. "I let him! I let him," she chokes out.

I lean forward, put my hand on her knee. "You haven't done anything wrong, not anything...."

"I must've...."

"What did you do?"

"I don't know...I was there...."

"That's it. You were there. He was in the mood to rape, and you were there."

"I must have done something, or it wouldn't have happened to me," she wails.

"Make a fist...."

"What?"

"Make a fist."

Half-heartedly, she makes a fist.

"Hold it up in the air. Here." I hold my hand up two feet from my face, taller. "Okay, he's right here. Right where my hand is. Look at him. Hold up your fist. What do you want to say to him?"

"Nothing," she says, and almost puts down her arm.

"Carlynn," I push, "say, 'You had no right.' Say that to him."

"You had no right," she repeats.

"That's good."

"You had no right. You had no right to do that." For a moment her fist shakes in the air, and her face tightens into rage.

"No," I say, "he didn't."

"You had no right...." She sits on the edge of her chair, the momentum of her feelings taking over, punching her fist at the air.

"Hit him. Hit him hard."

She punches harder.

"Do your legs feel like kicking? Kick him."

She punches her fists, then swings a leg out, kicks hard. The force of it opens up the bottomless well of pain just underneath the hatred, and pushes her back into the chair. She sinks down a little, covers her face with her hands, and sobs.

"Were you afraid he'd come after you again?" she asks me.

“Yes.”

“What did you do?”

“Nothing. There’s nothing you can do. I just learned to live with the fear, and then it went away. It just faded. Now I hardly think of it. Of him.

“I can’t breathe knowing he’s out there.”

“I know.”

“I think he’s going to walk through the walls of the house and come get me.”

“I don’t think he wants to be anywhere near you, now, Carlynn.”

“How do you know?”

“I can’t promise, but they hardly ever come back. Really. You called the police, you made trouble. He doesn’t want trouble, he wants it easy. He wants it when he wants it. Easy. It wasn’t even personal. He didn’t even see you.”

“I know. I wanted him to see me.”

“Yes.”

“I thought if he could see me, he wouldn’t do it.”

I remember talking to the rapist. I wonder now if I talked, not so much to reason with him, but to reassure myself that this was real, and not a dream, and somehow, if I talked enough, he might for a moment hear me, then look at me, and see, not something from his imagination, but me, a real person, a human being. I thought that somehow he would be touched, and his anger leave him.

I think about how long it will take for her to be herself again, to feel safe and clean. I feel my own frustration at not being able to make it all better. I can’t.

“You have to have faith,” I say.

Chapter 25

I come in from the gym and there's a message waiting for me on my service from Sam.

I find a cheap bottle of awful wine, pour a glass, drink two mouthfuls, set the bottle beside me on the floor next to the telephone, and lean against the wall. Suddenly the room looks ugly. So dirty white.

I remember dreaming every night and twice a day that Sam would call. I hoped. I wanted that dream to be real so badly I lay face down on my pillows wishing he were under me. I saw him beside me, next to me, equal to me as a partner, my love. I didn't realize till now how long it had been since I thought about him that way. Months.

Does pain come marked in centimeters, or decibels? In tears? In missed days? In missed years, waiting, dreaming? Does pain count up in some way like time, so that it takes space, something you can remember by? A clock. "Oh, that was the year of pain from wanting Sam, Oh, that's when my tooth hurt, and I was too grown up to ask for Mommy in the dentist's chair, Oh, that was when I was unpopular in school. I've marked my life by pain times, not high times. I would rather remember that I cried than that I laughed.

Now I'm trying to change that, I'm trying to end pain for others at the Crisis Center and stop it in my own life.

When I call Sam back, I decide to refuse pain.

He says, "Are you all right?"

"I'm fine. How are you, Sam?"

We've decided to meet for drinks, ten o'clock the next night. As I pull up in front of the white restaurant across the street from the ocean, a silver Mercedes Sedan rounds the corner and settles into the space in front of me. I'm so nervous and tired from waiting for ten o'clock to creep around. I smile.

We get out and our arms are around each other as if the separation has been trivial. He's not as tall as he was or maybe I've grown a little. The white restaurant is closed, so I get into the clean, classy Mercedes and we go to a Mexican restaurant a few blocks away.

Up a glass elevator, looking at the lights around the beach that frame the ocean, we chat. We sit sixteen stories up in front of a window, he drinking Margaritas, me club soda.

Who is this man and how do I feel about him?

His beard and mustache are intact; his hair is the same sandy color and delicate consistency, but he looks smaller. Sadness hunches him over. I want to help hold him up even while I want to punch him in the stomach and knock him off his feet. I'd like to leave him lying flat, walking away without another thought.

I put my hand on his shoulder. This is not the same man I adored last year. This is a shell. This is not Sam. Or maybe this is and everything else was a cartoon figure I made up.

His eyes are very sweet and innocent, belonging to a small boy.

"Sam, why did you call me?"

"Because I wanted to see you."

"Why did you wait so long?"

"Because I've been in a fog." He looks up from his glass. "I just came out of the fog."

"Tell me about Susanne."

He's taken aback. "How did you know?"

"Grapevine."

"Jesus."

"Don't you think I should've known?"

His face settles down. He wants to be patient with me, answer my questions. "She came on to me. I met her at the gym. I thought about getting involved in a relationship with her, and then I decided I would."

"You lied to me."

"By omission...maybe..."

"Why didn't you tell me about her?"

He shrugs his shoulders. "I just didn't."

We sit, quiet.

“Are you still in love with Rena?”

“No.”

“You’re so angry.”

“We were always angry. When we had enough anger we split up. Anyway, I wasn’t in love with Rena then, I was in love with you.”

“I don’t believe that anymore.

“When I saw you in New York,” he says, “I just couldn’t, I couldn’t. Don’t you think I know how much agony it caused you? I’m sorry. I couldn’t. You begged me. You humiliated yourself for me. I was in the middle of it. I couldn’t.”

“You got involved with Susanne.”

“She wasn’t my patient. That was the difference.”

Oh. So there was a difference. Am I so interchangeable?

“And how could I tell you that I was locked in a power struggle for my children with that bitch.” His mouth turns down with such hatred I recoil from him. “How could you’ve helped me? Even Susanne couldn’t help me. I really loved her a lot.”

I’m confused. At once he’s the man I loved, the man I hated, and some man who acts like a mental patient. My legs tense and untense. I tap the table base with my foot to make sure I’m feeling my leg all the way down and notice for the first time how uncomfortably tight my jeans are.

“She really loved me, but even she couldn’t help me.

I look at him. He looks out the window.

“We were perfect physically. A perfect fit. She loved me a lot. But when we tried to make it real, it fell apart. I’m not capable of a relationship.”

“So why’d you call?”

“Huh?”

“Why’d you call me, what do you want from me?”

“I called you because you have this wonderful energy that bubbles up....”

“But what do you have to offer me?”

“What?” I’ve caught him off guard. He hadn’t thought about his end of it.

“What do you want to give to me? What do I get from being with you?”

“Well...support. I’ll help you to be the best that you can be. Commercials are fine, but unless you want to do them all your life... And, well, I know people. I can help you.”

All of a sudden he seems deluded. I want to drop this, but I’m curious. “Thank you, I’d appreciate that. Any help you can give me.” I want no enemies. Especially crazy men I’ve loved better than anyone.

He backs away a few inches, his face taking on an even younger expression, as if he hadn’t expected me to take him up on it and now wants to call his own bluff to slide out. “Well, I don’t know what I can do, but I have folks in my practice.... They say I should be a leading man. *Tess*. That film I should have directed. I’m going to be studying acting with a very famous woman. She’s going to be my acting coach.” He seems very excited for himself. I’m horrified. Part of me wants to scream, how dare you want to be an actor! How dare you think it’s so easy! And then I realize he’s not all there.

I know he is not all there, but I want to believe he is. Where is my Prince? What turned him into this frightened, hunched frog? Or was he always a frog, and was I never a Princess? Was I ever loved? I must be in a Fellini movie. Chills go up and down my legs, my heart thumps against my wrist, making the table shake.

“Kiss me,” he commands.

I sit still. He looks at me sorrowfully, leans toward me. I take his face in my hands and kiss him and try to make it all different. My feelings fly out of my heart into the air around us, in spite of myself. I remember his holding me years ago, touching me.

He considers the kiss. “I could feel your soul,” he says.

I do not tell him that I couldn’t feel his. I’m beginning to feel sick to my stomach.

“Are you getting tipsy?” I ask.

“Drunk. A little.”

I look at him, disgusted.

“Well, you didn’t expect me to face your hostility sober, did you?”

“What hostility?” I mean it. He smiles. What did he expect?

“Look,” he says, “I thought we could hang out, and go to movies, and I’d be your friend. We’ll be friends. Come home with me tonight.”

“What?”

“Just follow me down Pacific Coast Highway. Ten minutes and we’ll be there.”

“I thought you didn’t want to make love to me?”

“Come home with me and I’ll show you my house and we’ll cuddle all night. Look, I don’t want your pussy. I love you. I’m not in love with you, but I love you. Just follow me, ten minutes, and in the morning I’ll make you breakfast and send you home.”

“You want to sleep with me but not make love?”

“Yes. But if we ever do make love, then you’ll know what love is.” He looks at me passionately, in total seriousness, and for a split second, I believe him. It’s what I’ve always believed—that Sam has the key to what real love is and he might someday share it with me. Then I see he doesn’t even know where the door is.

“I come all in one piece, Sam. Love and sex and all my feelings.”

He shakes his head.

“You were so lucky,” I say. If I’d been some other kind of woman I could’ve gone under. Or I could’ve sued your ass.”

“I know.

You must have been scared shitless that I’d take you to court.

“Yeah.”

“But you didn’t care if I went under.”

“You didn’t.”

We’re both quiet for awhile.

“I don’t know, darlin’, what can I do?”

I stare at him. He really didn’t care what happened to me. I would throw that at him and wail, but it seems like so long ago.

“We never really made love,” he says.

My mouth hangs open.

“I was never inside of you.”

He lies, and he forgets.

“This is crazy,” I say. What is the difference? Is oral sex not sex? He was my doctor. I wasn’t ready to see him as anything else. As he was. And is.

“If we’d really made love, then you’d know what love is.”

There’s nothing to say. I don’t know who this person is, and I keep asking myself, who was I all this time?

Now he’s cheerful again. Playful. “Ah, come on, come home with me. Just follow me up the hill. Ten minutes.”

I shake my head No and the force of it, or the sadness of it, pushes him up out of his chair, right hand swooping up the bill, left reaching into the back pocket of his jeans for money.

Suddenly tears want to flow out.

“Let’s go,” he says, finished for the evening. I’m finished with him.

In the glass elevator, I stand near the glass, he leans against the wall away from me. He looks like he’s going to cry. I want to think it’s sadness for the way this is ending, but I really think he just wants somebody to hug him all night. His disappointment mixed with the Margaritas are weighing him down. He doesn’t want to be alone tonight. And I no longer adore him.

Very coolly, I remember that one Monday night in Group just before I left for New York, Sam tried an experiment. He turned off all the lights and put on music; sounds of flutes and strange old instruments winding in and out of a darkness. I sat listening against the white wall, afraid as the face of my rapist began to emerge from the sounds in my head. It was as though he was appearing out of caves and canyons, pushed along by the music, coming into focus for the first time.

As he drew nearer to where I could see him clearly, with all the pieces making a real face for the first time, Nathan sneezed from across the room, loudly. Suddenly there was another sound in the room, drowning out the others, screaming; the lights went on instantly, I could see Sam’s hand at the light switch, and I looked at him and realized it was me screaming.

I backed into the wall, trying to hide the screaming and now the sobbing. Rena just looked at me; everyone sat still. I looked at Sam,

thinking through my terror and embarrassment that he had touched my body with his hands and mouth, and there he was sitting on the floor watching me scream and sob uncontrollably. Because Rena was next to him and we were lying to everyone there, he could not come over to comfort me. I should have realized then how phony and wrong our relationship was.

Sam drives me in his silver Mercedes back to my car.

“All right, Darlin’, the next call’s yours.”

I pull the handle, push open the door. “I won’t make it, Sam.”

He looks down at me.

“Goodnight, Sam.” I am out of the car. “Goodbye.”

I close his door, turn away, and know Sam is finished for me.

Chapter 26

I met a man. A nice man. Robert.

He's tall and dark, with a warm face. When I open the door to see him, he smiles at me, his beard fluffing out, and my heart tingles.

He has a sailboat, and he's teaching me to sail: to watch the telltales, to keep the sails trimmed, to feel the boat, feel the wind. Holding onto the helm is like flying; I'm a part of the sky, floating on the sea. I belong out there. Every once in a while I catch Rob looking at me with a soft stare, almost as though he can't believe I'm real. I've never been looked at like that before. When I catch him looking and our eyes connect, it feels that he's a part of the ocean, of the air, the shore, he is essential; my whole body tingles. I haven't felt the tingles in so long, I'd forgotten. Perhaps it's a new feeling. I appreciate him. I see he is a separate person.

"Who's steering this boat?" he yells when I head too far upwind and the sails luff. I adjust and he smiles at me. He's an engineer. He fixes things. We're very different: I'm Jewish and he's Italian; he grew up in a small town near Los Angeles and I grew up in the city. Sometimes there are long silences between us. Often I feel the need to touch him, to make sure he's real, and before I reach out, I feel his hand softly on my shoulder. For the first time with a man, I see he's another person, a separate being, not an extension of me or my wishes. He's fine the way he is.

It seems to be working because I'm putting more pieces together. My seductiveness is giving way to something else. I used to think if I didn't sleep with a man something awful would happen. I chose men I didn't trust, didn't feel comfortable with, men who seemed strange to me. I spent my energy trying to get them to love me, knowing they would never love me, because I was afraid to be loved. I liked struggle. I was used to conflict.

I have to be done with punishing men, punishing myself. There's a part of me that still thinks sex is the only way to safety. It was the

way with Sam, and it was the way with the rapist: what they wanted was power...sex was the form it took. Was I the good daughter, hoping for favor from “Daddy?” Sex was what Sam wanted, but then he’d say it was my fault, I was seductive, I wanted it.

When sex is wrong it’s all a kind of using. For men and women. In the past I would try to find a man to fix something in me, and when I did the required things, and I still wasn’t fixed, I punished him. I wanted each one to fasten me to the planet, press me into the bed till I felt safe.

I don’t have to do that anymore.

Only I can make myself safe, keep myself safe. I no longer want to be protected from life and from the responsibility of following my own heart.

Last night Mary and I talked about the movie *Fantasia*. Her memories of it are of the Chevron gas stations in Florida where she grew up. The tall signs at the stations are huge pictures of winged horses, just like those in *Fantasia*. She used to stand in front of them for a long time, waiting for the horses to fly off.

I no longer stand in front of my dreams, waiting for them to become real. I have to enter my own life; no one can live it for me, no one can even tell me how to do it, and no one can save me from it. I no longer stand in front of ugliness, waiting for it to turn beautiful, or study frogs, waiting for them to turn into Princes. There are no Princes. Only men and women.

Carlynn was sitting alone in her mother’s apartment in front of the television last night, watching the news, when her stolen jewelry flashed across the screen. She told me she jumped up and screamed that that was her gold heart, her ring, laying up there on the table. The police found it all in the apartment of a man suspected of raping eight women. Carlynn called the police in the morning; they’d lost track of her. Maybe this is the man who raped her, and he’s been found. I’ll go to the lineup with her, and to court. Perhaps he’ll get put away for a long time.

I see other women at Cedars as a counselor, a therapist. The stories they have to tell are horrible, with knives and guns, and the backs of cars; sometimes more than one rapist, once three, taking turns in the backseat, finally throwing her out in some neighborhood far from where they found her. Now I see therapy from the other side. I see how easy it is to be mistaken for someone who knows, just because you're sitting in the other chair, listening. I see how easy it is to be granted wisdom you don't have. But I also see that in the field of Rape Trauma Syndrome, I'm as expert as anyone. No one who's read all the textbooks and got their Doctorate in Psychology can know more what a rape survivor feels than I do. But there is something else. I see the value of just being a human being sitting in the other chair, of listening. The client works out the answers for herself in your presence.

Perhaps therapists are drawn to the profession in order to heal themselves. Then the difference between a good therapist and a bad therapist is that the good therapist knows this. I know that in listening to the stories, to the fear, the dread, the despair in the hearts of the women that have shared a room with me, I've had to hear my own, and that has healed me. Out of the pain, we've given each other hope.

I've been of service. I feel valuable and competent. And in loving these women and the other counselors in the program, I've come to love myself more. None of us that I've met seems to feel complete and whole, but I feel as though pieces of me have been resurrected. I have more than I've ever had. This stuff inside me has weight. I feel happy.

Last night I dreamed that Mom, Dad, Scott and I were all transported in chairs with seat belts holding us in, up thousands of feet in the air looking down on Los Angeles. It was terrifying but beautiful. Scott flipped over on his stomach so he could see better. We all went beyond our fear because it was so breathtaking.

The image of us hanging in the air stays with me all day. If the only thing we can do is hold on tight and fly with the winds, I would rather have my head up and my eyes open than encase myself in fear and anger. I want to enjoy the scenery.