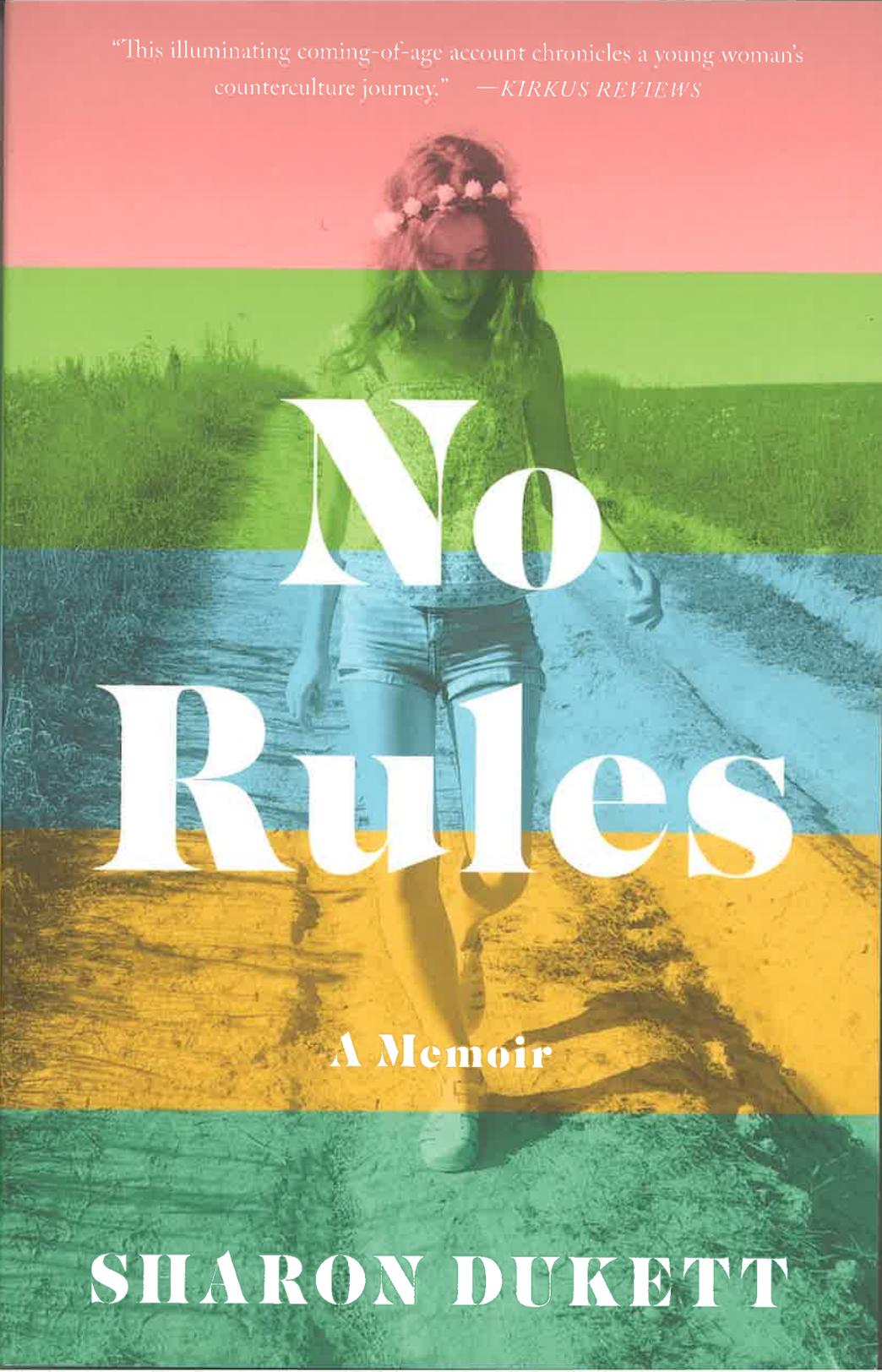


"This illuminating coming-of-age account chronicles a young woman's  
counterculture journey." —*KIRKUS REVIEWS*



# No Rules

A Memoir

SHARON DUKETT

**It's 1971** in Connecticut, and sixteen-year-old Sharon's parents think that, because she's a girl, she should become a clerical office worker after high school and live at home until she marries and has a family. But Sharon wants to join the hippies and be part of the changing society, so she leaves home and heads to California.

Upon arriving in California, Sharon is thrown into an adult world for which she is unprepared, and she embarks on a precarious journey through the counterculture of the 1970s. On her various adventures across the country and while living on a commune, with friends and lovers filtering in and out of her life, she realizes she must learn quickly in order to survive.

In this colorful memoir, Sharon reflects upon the changes that reshaped her during the 1970s women's movement and how they have transformed society's expectations for girls and women today—sharing moments of triumph, joy, love, and awakening all along the way.

“. . . a reminder that every girl has the right—and owes it to herself—to grow, learn, succeed, and become the woman she is meant to be, no matter how difficult it is to find her way and her purpose in a male-dominated society.”

—VICTORIA ZACKHEIM, author of *The Bone Weaver*

“This memoir is filled with beauty and fear and fearlessness and courage and audacity. . . . Give it as a gift to every woman who needs to believe in the greatness of her own life.”

—AMY FERRIS, author of *Marrying George Clooney:  
Confessions from a Midlife Crisis*

“Beyond flawless exposition, Dukett's memoir also offers an unflinchingly honest recollection of her years in late adolescence as a 'hippie chick' runaway, and in her competent storytelling hands, that is one hell of a story.”

—CORIE SKOLNICK, author of *Orfan* and *America's Most Eligible*

U.S. \$16.95 | MEMOIR

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Cover design by Rebecca Lown Design

Front cover photo © Alamy Stock Photo

ISBN 978-1-63152-856-9



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## Chapter 1

January 1971

South Windsor, Connecticut

I slipped the floor-length dress I'd sewn from a purple Indian-print bedspread over my head and pulled it down to cover the two pairs of long pants, three sweaters, and four pairs of underwear I'd put on moments before—then realized how huge my waist looked. If I didn't wear my coat to cover these clothes, my mother would realize something was wrong. I yanked my dress sleeves over all my other sleeves. If anything showed, I'd be screwed.

While stuffing a pair of jeans and my fake suede jacket with a peace sign on the shoulder into a paper bag, I scanned the closet for my sandals. I'd need sandals in Southern California. I was certain it would be hot there, even in January.

With my meager belongings stashed for my journey, I took a last brief look at my room—the room in which I'd spent twelve of my sixteen years living in—and wondered how I could abandon all my things: the FM radio that my parents had given me for Christmas three weeks earlier, the guitar I had begged for when I was twelve, my notebooks full of poetry I'd written over the last

four years. Above my twin-size bed was a poster I'd made with magic markers the previous spring, flowers and peace signs forming a border around large decorative letters that read, "War is Not Healthy for Children and Other Living Things."

"Don't get hung up on it," I coached myself. "It's only stuff."

I crammed my arms into the sleeves of my brown corduroy winter coat and could barely bend them. Grabbing the paper bag and my schoolbooks, I dashed toward the kitchen, knowing my mother was waiting there to say good-bye before I left for school. I took a deep breath.

"You're wearing your new dress." She sounded suspicious; I avoided eye contact. "I didn't realize you had finished making it."

"Yeah, I finished it last night. I'm late for the bus. I have to go." I dove past her.

"What's in that bag?"

"Gym clothes," I shot back without turning around.

"It's awful big for gym clothes."

"I've got to run, okay? Bye."

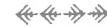
I bolted out the side door and let it shut behind me, not looking back to see my mother for what might have been the last time in my life. But I couldn't think about that. If I did, I couldn't leave, and I had to leave. This was my only opportunity.

I knew she was standing by the door, following me with her eyes, that worried frown cemented on her lined, sad face.

While closing the chain link gate behind me at the end of our driveway, I recalled the dreams I'd had throughout my childhood where I tried to escape through this gate. I was always running with legs of lead that made me move in slow motion, trying desperately to run faster as long arms reached out to drag me back. I never knew what I was running from in those dreams, but I always awoke before escaping. I couldn't let that happen now.

moms  
know

Dirty snow lined the road, remnants of yesterday's storm. I snickered at it. *Sunny California, here I come*, I thought. *Only one last ride on the school bus*. My heart raced, making me almost dizzy.



The warning bell rang, signaling that homeroom was about to begin. I scanned the nearby students walking through the hall, looking for friends with cars. I needed to find someone willing to skip out of school after they took attendance in homeroom and drive me to Hartford, twenty minutes away.

I spotted Dixie and suffered a moment of guilt knowing all the money from the profits of the underground newspaper we'd worked on together were stuffed in my coat pocket. Dixie had written the last issue's cover story on a Black Studies group at our school, typed the mimeograph sheets, and endured insults from our journalism teacher right alongside me. It was my creation, though, I rationalized, stuffing down my guilt. All that mattered now was that Dixie was a junior, a grade ahead of me, and had friends with driver's licenses.

I cornered her near the wall and spoke quietly. "Dixie, I need a ride to Hartford right away. I did it. I'm leaving home today and going to California with my sister. I can't live like this anymore, hiding my whole life from my parents."

Her eyes grew wide, reminding me of Liza Minelli, that same elfish dark hair framing her face. "Oh my God! Far out! How are you going to get there?"

"Anne bought a car yesterday for fifty dollars, even though she can't drive. Eddie's going to drive it." I balanced my oversize paper bag and books awkwardly in my arms; I hadn't made it to my locker yet.

Dixie cocked her head to the side and frowned. "I thought

10<sup>th</sup>  
grade

you and Eddie broke up when that chick from California moved in with him."

"We did." I nodded. "It's a long story. I can't tell you now because I have to get out of here or they'll leave without me. Anne wouldn't, but I can't trust Eddie and he's driving. He tried to get her to move to Boston yesterday, but I convinced her to go to California instead, like we were planning to do in the spring."

"What a shit! Your own sister?" Dixie glanced around. "Don't worry. I can help you. Meet me in the girls' lav by the cafeteria right after homeroom."

"Thanks, Dixie. I'll never forget this." I turned to hurry off before the bell rang.

"Think of me when you're sitting under a palm tree smoking a joint," she called out, and I turned and smiled back at her before darting away.



I didn't know the two friends of Dixie's who drove me to the city, but I had seen them around school. I followed them to the student parking lot, not turning around to avoid looking suspicious. Once in the car, I watched out the rear window for anyone who might have noticed us. My jaw ached from clenching it all morning. I wished I still prayed, so I could pray that I made it to Hartford before Eddie and Anne took off. Nine o'clock was his deadline, and it was eight thirty-five. Luckily, Dixie's friend was a fast driver.

I tried to focus on the future. Everything after today would be perfect, that much I knew. Without my parents telling me what to do, my problems would be over. If it weren't for them, Eddie would still love me, and we'd still be together. They were ruining my life, just like they'd ruined Anne's when she was my age, and I couldn't stand it anymore. I was screaming inside to break free.

Pride  
Youth

How

Minutes before the deadline, we reached the apartment building where Anne lived with her coworker.

I hopped out, bag of clothes in hand. "Thanks for the ride, you guys. Say good-bye to Dixie for me."

The driver raised two fingers into the peace sign. "Watch out for The Man, and stay cool."

I took the stairs to the second floor two at a time and banged on the door. When Anne opened it, she already had her coat on.

"You made it!" She smiled and threw her arms around me, her blue eyes a bit teary, her long brown hair falling against my face. She was my big sister, and even though I had almost caught up to her, she was still taller than me. She whispered close to my face, "Eddie didn't want to wait. He kept trying to get me to leave without you."

Her words caused a dull pain in my chest as I looked past her into the room where Eddie was pacing, his hands buried in the pockets of his navy-blue pea coat. I ached at the sight of the familiar brown corduroy bell-bottoms flapping over his square-toed Dingo boots, the way he lurched when he walked, obviously impatient. He glanced at me from the corner of his eye as though afraid to look straight at me, his dark, chin-length hair obscuring much of his face. He pulled at his mustache self-consciously.

"Let's hit the fucking road," he growled, turning to grab his bag.

"I'm so glad you made it," Anne said out loud, looking into my eyes, her mouth quivering. "There's no way I was going without you."

"That's cool for you chicks," Eddie snapped. "You get caught, the cops send you home to mommy and daddy, but my ass is in the slammer. This is crossing state lines with a minor. It's a felony. Anne, you're cool, you're twenty-one, but Sharon, you're nothing but jailbait. I don't know how I got talked into this."

## 12 No Rules

Even after telling myself I was over Eddie, it stung to hear him speak to me this way. After all, he had been my lover, my first and only. How could he act like that had never happened?

Once outside, we threw our belongings into the backseat of our new ride, a white '59 Dodge Coronet with winged taillights pointing backwards like a jet airplane's. Anne sat up front with Eddie and I climbed into the back. It was painful seeing Eddie and Anne sitting together as a couple.

Snow began to fall as we reached Interstate 84 west, and the windows started to fog. I wondered when my mother would figure out I had left. I guessed probably not until I didn't come home from school, although with her suspicious nature, it could be sooner. My father would be home from work at four o'clock. She would be hysterical by then.

I blocked that image out, forcing myself to think about California and not my parents. Everything was happening so fast, but I knew I had to escape; otherwise, I would drown in their misery.

Ego-  
Youth  
Rash decisions  
↓  
Social Expectations



## Chapter 2

1960s

South Windsor, Connecticut

"I wasn't always like this." My mother gulped down tears, her eyes red from crying. She looked at me, then away, the white Mallen streak of her hair falling forward onto her face. She felt around and pushed it back into her hair grip as she looked down at me. At seven, I had seen her cry too many times already, and it always caused me pain.

"I was carefree and happy," she continued through tears. "I ran everywhere. I used to laugh all the time."

She took my father's shirt from the clothesline, folded it, and placed it in the wicker basket next to me.

I knew I should be helping her, but I hated going into the basement with her and sorting laundry. It was boring, and there seemed to be no end to it. She almost never asked me or Anne for help, so I didn't think of helping her until I heard her crying.

"Mother always told me, when you have daughters of your own, they will help you. I had to do everything." Her crying

stopped and she was starting to sound angry. This was a familiar story that she told often. "I had to take care of my baby brother all by myself when I was twelve and Mother had a nervous breakdown. I had to stay home from school, cook for Father, change and wash the diapers, clean the house. No one even thanked me."

It was as though she wasn't talking to me anymore, but instead to an invisible person. I took the towel she handed me and folded it as she continued, "Mother said, don't worry, when you grow up your daughter will help you." She turned and looked at me in anger. "But you two don't help me at all. I had to do everything then, and I have to do everything now. When will it be my turn?"

"I would help you if you asked." I avoided her eyes, feeling ashamed.

Her voice grew louder. "I shouldn't have to ask. You can see I need help. Someday, when you get married and have children, you will have to do this, so you need to know how."

I got a bad feeling inside when she said this, thinking how awful that future sounded. Would I cry all the time too?

It wasn't so bad when Anne and I did jobs together. Then we could talk. But Mummy got mad when we talked. She would complain that we were so busy talking, we weren't getting the work done.

Mummy handed me a blouse of mine from the clothesline and threw the clothespins into the bag she had made from fabric scraps to hold them. I started to fold the blouse in half.

"Not like that. You'll put a crease down the middle and it will be harder to iron." She grabbed it from my hands. "Never mind, I will do it myself. You just make more work for me. Take this other basket with the ones I folded already upstairs and put it in the living room. And don't let those clothes tip over."

I grabbed the two handles on each end of the wicker laundry basket and headed upstairs, glad to have an excuse to leave.

About a mother's happiness - convey this to her daughters



The only time my mother seemed happy was when she played the piano. Chopin was her favorite composer. Playing his music, she transported herself back to England—where, I was certain, she longed to be, studying piano as she had before the war.

I was still seven when the piano became part of our lives. My parents spent weeks dragging us from one store to the next, searching for one they could afford. My mother insisted she could find more ways to save money to have one, but I couldn't imagine how. Already she made all our clothes, saved green stamps to buy furnishings, and grocery shopped with a paper and pencil in hand, adding the prices of her purchases to ensure there was enough money in her purse before she got to the register. She even made my father's boxer shorts and our winter coats, and knit our hats and mittens. When the ice cream truck drove down our street and the other kids ran out to greet him, I knew better than to ask for any. There was no money for such frivolities.

My father reminded us often that we were not poor, however.

"We have a roof over our head and food on the table. There are a lot of people in the world who don't," he told us while we were all eating dinner together one night. "In London during the war, I would see families living in the subway and I would give them the care packages my mother sent. They needed those things a lot more than I did. We are very lucky, having what we do."

I knew my father had grown up in a poor neighborhood of immigrants in Lawrence, Massachusetts, where his parents had worked all their lives in the woolen mills, speaking only Lithuanian. My father had worked there too before Pearl Harbor was bombed and he was drafted.

He was proud of owning his own house, a dream his VA loan and his job assembling jet engines at Pratt and Whitney Aircraft had made possible. He hated unions, as he blamed them for causing the mills to close and move out of Lawrence. So when the union at Pratt and Whitney went on strike, he'd risked being injured by crossing the picket lines to work. As a result, he'd earned enough money during the strike for a down payment on the house. Then he'd quit smoking two packs of Camel cigarettes a day so he could afford the mortgage.



The day the piano arrived, I sat beside my mother as she dug out her sheet music from a cracked, worn, brown leather bag that she kept in her steamer trunk with other mysterious treasures from her former life. I was always intrigued by what lay hidden under the trunk's heavy lid with its clunky, metal buckles.

"Why is this picture of a boat on here?" I asked her, pointing to the partially missing sticker of the bow of a large ship plastered to the side of the trunk. Although I knew the answer from other times I had asked, I loved to hear her repeat the story of her journey to America.

"That's the ship I came over on from England, the Holland America Line. It was a Dutch ship, see the windmill behind it? They pasted it on the trunk so they would load it on the correct ship. I had to ride out three miles in a tender with my trunk. That made me seasick for the whole six days of sailing."

"How come you had to ride so far to get on the ship?"

"It was just after the war, and the British weren't letting Dutch ships land yet. It was difficult getting any ship at all. The only reason I got on that ship was because I was getting married to your father, and he was an American soldier. Otherwise, I would have had to wait longer."

I knew about The War. My parents talked about it often, and even at seven I was keenly aware of the importance it held in my parents' lives. It had killed Mummy's oldest brother, the uncle I would never know, the person she'd loved most in her youth. And it had brought my parents together on a train full of troops as they were both returning to their bases, my mother in the British Signal Corps, my father in the American Army Air Corps. They were two people from different worlds who had nothing in common and would never have met otherwise.



After the piano arrived, music filled our house: soft, gentle music; sentimental, romantic music; music that spoke of starry nights and green pastures; music that evoked English gardens and Irish eyes; music that caused my mother to sing instead of cry, and occasionally to sing and cry.

I enjoyed sitting nearby and listening to her play. Once, when she was taking a break after singing one of them, she told me, "When I was in the army, the only piano available was in the local pub. I would play songs and all the soldiers would gather around and sing. We had a lovely time, all of us. We could forget about the war for a while. It was great fun."

Another time, she was playing a difficult Chopin piece and was getting frustrated, replaying the same section over and over, until she finally stopped, looking defeated. "All I ever wanted to be was a concert pianist, but my piano teacher told me I wasn't strong enough," she said. She turned her hands to look at them as she spoke. "He said a woman's hands aren't big enough, which is why there are no women concert pianists." She looked at her hands a moment longer before rising from the piano stool. "Besides, I wanted to get married and have a family, and

I couldn't do that if I was a concert pianist, after all," she said, looking into my eyes.

Anne was twelve then, and my mother offered to teach her to play, but she declined. I didn't get it. Playing the piano looked like fun. I begged her to teach me, even though I was only seven.

"Sharon, come here!" she called, beckoning me to the piano, one afternoon. "I have a new book of songs for nursery rhymes."

She opened the cover, pulled out a cardboard foldout, and placed it behind two sets of piano keys, right in the middle of the keyboard. The foldout had different colors that aligned with each piano key, and they had letters on them, A through G.

I turned the page to the first song and was surprised that the musical notes were in all different colors too. In my mother's music books, they were all black.

"Each of these colors on the keys corresponds to the color of the musical note on the page. When the note is yellow, you hit the key next to yellow, and when the note is orange, you hit the key next to orange."

She arranged my fingers over the keys, then put her hands over mine and showed me how to move them. Easy!

Within a few days, I could play the songs in the book by myself. And best of all, I could do something that Anne couldn't, so I was pretty sure Mummy loved me best.

The nursery rhymes got boring after a while. I wanted to play the real music with the black notes like she did. When she decided I was ready, she bought another book where the music was easier at the beginning and got harder as you continued. Over time I progressed through the music, but as it got harder, I practiced less and was less interested in playing.



When I was nine, the Beatles appeared on the *Ed Sullivan Show*. After that they were all I cared about, the same as Anne, who was fourteen. The Beatles didn't play the piano. As a result, I announced I was not going to play the piano either, which made my mother cry again. I thought Anne was so cool, and I wanted her to think I was too. She knew all the neat fashions, hit songs, and trendy dances.

That summer, when the Beach Boys became popular, Anne and I fantasized we were surfer girls with boys dropping at our feet. We pretended we lived on a beach in California where we hung around with surfer boys as we lounged on chairs in the backyard and listened to the transistor radio she'd bought with babysitting money. We put on sunglasses and pretended to be sunbathing, though we were actually sitting in the shade so our pale skin wouldn't get burned.

This was our secret; we knew we were too old to be playing pretend, but it sure beat real life.



Throughout our childhood, my mother insisted on raising us both as though we were living in England. American children, she told us, were too loud, rude, and impolite, and she would not have us "behaving like the hooligans" in our neighborhood.

Our neighborhood was full of inexpensive ranch houses in a development carved out of a tobacco field. The neighbors' children played hopscotch, baseball, and tag in the road, which ended nearby in a cul-de-sac. They circled their bikes and red wagons into groups and congregated until after dark during the summer. But Anne and I were forbidden to play in the road, or with most of the neighborhood children. I had to play hopscotch on my driveway and play in my own yard, unless I was formally invited to someone's house.

On balmy summer nights with my window open, I listened to the other kids laughing and screeching to one another outside and, consumed with longing to be out there with them, cried into my pillow.

Anne's high school reality was quite different from our fantasies. My mother made her wear ankle socks instead of the stockings other girls wore. She was not allowed to wear makeup, and only wore homemade clothes. In winter, my mother made her wear red rubber boots that fit over her shoes, which she removed on the school bus and hid under the seat until the ride home. Already she was the brunt of taunting and private jokes.

At home, she screamed, cried, and argued with my parents, begging for more freedom, nicer clothes, or lipstick, while I watched.

*They will not do this to me when I am her age*, I thought to myself, seething. *When I am a teenager, I will have a life, whether my parents let me or not.* But how exactly that would happen, I had no idea.

At school, I made a few friends from other neighborhoods, but because of our rapidly growing town, our neighborhood was frequently redistricted into different schools. That meant leaving behind my new friends and having to start over.

Toward the end of fourth grade, I finally made a friend who lived nearby. Mary Ann came from a large family and her house was always full of children. I was allowed to go to her house when I was invited. When summer came that year, she invited me to play in her pool. I couldn't swim, but it wasn't that deep. Kids could stand in it. And maybe I would even learn how to swim! My heart pounded with excitement as I headed home to tell my mother the good news.

"I don't want you going in her pool," Mummy replied, her voice full of worries. "Too many children play in there. They may not wash, and they may even pee in there. I don't want you getting sick."

I stood immobilized; my summer fun gone in a flash. None of this had ever occurred to me, but I assumed my mother knew best. I wondered how all those other children could be swimming in there and still be alive.

I never went to Mary Ann's house again, as that summer her friends became the ones willing to join her in the pool.

What my mother knew was fear—a creeping, pervasive kind of fear that reaches out of the dark edges of your soul in ways I didn't understand. When the airport near us began having night flights, planes occasionally flew over our house on a landing approach, low enough so we could hear the engines roaring overhead. I was startled from my sleep one night when I heard her screaming from her bed. I ran to my parents' room and found Mummy sitting up with wide, terrified eyes, my father holding her closely.

"She thought it was the Germans," he explained. "She thought it was a bombing raid and she hadn't heard the air raid signal."

I climbed up next to them and hugged her too. When she came out of her daze, she seemed embarrassed. "Those darn planes, they scared me. I'm sorry I woke you." She cuddled me in her arms, reassuring me that everything was all right, before rising to take me back to my room and tuck me into bed.

There was more fear in her than I could ever understand. I did understand, however, that she needed to protect me and the people she loved because she knew how little it took to lose the most important people in your life.



## Chapter 3

1968–1969

South Windsor, Connecticut

It was election season in the fall of 1968. Richard Nixon was running for president of the United States against Hubert Humphrey, while at Timothy Edwards Middle School, Joe was running for class president against Lenny.

Lenny was good looking, popular, a below-average student but an athlete. All the girls were in love with him. Joe was smart, funny, outspoken, wore glasses, and struggled with bad skin. He had plenty of ideas about how to improve our school. His popularity was limited to the nerdy kids in honors classes. He also sat in front of me in my eighth-grade current events class.

Our current events class was in charge of running the school election so we could learn about the election process. I joined the voting day committee, as did Joe. We appointed ourselves as roving officials, a role that allowed us to wander the halls while talking and laughing together.

At the end of the day, Joe asked for my phone number and I gladly gave it to him. He lost the election to Lenny, but later that

night, when he called me, he said he didn't care anymore, and I knew he meant "because of you."

A few weeks later, we were going steady.

Like Joe, I was in all honors classes and getting A's and B's, except in math. Joe was applying to go to East Catholic High School, a school with a strong academic program where most of the students went on to college. Many others in my honors classes were applying also, and I wanted to be one of them.

"We can't afford to send you to East Catholic," my mother replied when I asked about attending. She put aside the shirt she was mending and looked me in the eye. "Besides, they're all going to college, and we can't afford to send you to college. And you'll never get a scholarship. You have to get straight A's to get a scholarship and you have a C in math."

"But maybe I could work my way through college," I pushed on, hoping to find a better answer. I had heard of students doing this.

My mother frowned and gave me a doubtful look. "It's too hard to work your way through college. You would never make it." She picked up her mending and continued sewing the frayed seam without looking at me. "Besides, girls don't need to go to college. I've told you that before. They only go there to find husbands, and you don't need to go to college to do that."

Her voice had that tone to it that said there would be no arguing with her. She cut the short piece of thread off with scissors, then threaded a new, longer piece through the needle to continue the repair.

"If you learn how to type and take shorthand, you can get a good job as a secretary. I could never do shorthand fast enough, but you could learn, just like Anne did. There is always a demand for secretaries. I don't know why Anne doesn't get a job doing shorthand. She could do better at work."

Mum had a book of shorthand from a business school she had attended in London. It was full of squiggly lines that were supposed to be words or even whole sentences that a secretary would write while the boss was dictating, so that she could type everything out in full at a later time. I could not imagine how anyone could memorize that nonsense. I thought about Anne in her job as a clerk typist at The Travelers Insurance Company. She was bored. She spent her evenings and weekends at home with my parents, having no more fun than she did in high school. After she paid her room and board to my parents to help with expenses, she had just enough money to buy clothes and records and put a few dollars in the bank. What was the point?

"What if I don't want to be a secretary?" I argued. "What if I want to do something else? I could be a writer! I had that poem published in the *Hartford Courant*, and I even got fan mail!"

My mother stopped sewing again and sighed, her left hand forming a fist on the armchair, her face twisted with frustration. I could feel as much as hear the impatience in her voice as she said, "If you want to have a career, you can't get married and have a family. You can't do both. You have to choose." She nodded her head for emphasis. "And if you aren't going to get married, then you shouldn't be thinking about boys!" She glared at me now. "There is no point in dating if you're going to be a career girl. It's a lonely life, if that's what you want."

My father, who'd been sitting in the room seeming not to pay attention to our conversation, folded his newspaper and looked at us. He rubbed his brow and shook his bald head. "I'm fifty-seven now and I'll be forced to retire at sixty-five, before you could finish college. We won't be able to support you. You'll need to have a job. Even if you could pay for college, what would you live on?"

My mother, no longer looking at me, talked to my father as

though I wasn't there. "I've always said it was a good thing we had girls, because I have no idea how we would have paid for boys to go to college. You know how I always wanted boys because they're much easier. My brothers never caused my parents any trouble at all, not like these two."

My father said nothing in response, just returned to reading the *Hartford Times*. I stormed out of the living room, entered my tiny bedroom, and slammed the door behind me, wanting to scream. I had homework to do, but I didn't care. No one asked to see my homework anyway, since my parents admitted they didn't understand it. My father had dropped out of school at sixteen to work in the mill, and my mother had taken nothing but piano lessons after fifteen, since any higher education was not required in England.

What was the point of getting good grades in honors classes if I was going nowhere? Even my C in math was for an advanced-level algebra class. Maybe I would have an A if I were taking eighth-grade math!

I sat on my bed, picked up a magazine a friend had given me, and started reading a short story called "Baby Hip." It was about a teenage girl who leaves home to live in Greenwich Village and become a hippie.



It was Christmas Eve. I had the day off from school, but Anne was in bed with the flu. It was boring without her to talk to. I stared at the beige rotary phone sitting on the old maple wood cabinet next to the kitchen table, wishing Joe would call. Normally we talked on the phone every day, but I knew he was busy with his family.

When the phone finally rang, I grabbed it. "Hello?"  
"Hi," my father's voice said softly. "It's Dad."

"Oh, hi." I was disappointed. I lowered my voice so Mum wouldn't overhear. "I found out what to get Mum for Christmas."

I knew he'd been too tired to shop and hadn't been feeling well. He thought he was getting the flu, but if he called in sick, he wouldn't get paid for the Christmas holiday. He was determined to make it through the workday.

"Not now," he interrupted in a hoarse voice. "Tell your mother I have the flu, and I'm coming home. I have to go to medical to get a pass first."

Three hours later he still wasn't home, and he only worked twenty minutes away. When the phone rang again, Mum answered it and listened silently for a long while.

"Is there anything I can do?" she finally asked. "Should I go to the hospital?"

She listened again.

"Okay. I'll wait for the doctor to call."

My mother slowly replaced the receiver on its cradle, then turned toward me. Her eyes were watery, and her mouth was quivering.

"That was Medical at Pratt and Whitney. They said he doesn't have the flu, he's having a heart attack." She gulped before continuing. "They took him to Manchester Hospital in an ambulance. I have to wait for the doctor there to call me. She said it may be awhile and I should wait here." She stared at me.

I stared back at her, stunned. Then I felt tears pour from my eyes, and my mother started to cry too. I walked over to where she was standing and put my arms around her, feeling her warm, soft body shake. She reached her arms around me too and we stood together, sobbing.

I couldn't believe this was happening. It was Christmas Eve; we should all be sitting by the tree together. If I didn't think too

hard, I could pretend my father was still at work, as he always was during the day, and not in an ambulance racing along for his life.

Hours passed. Anne was still sleeping, and Mum didn't want to wake her since she was sick. It grew dark as the two of us sat together in the kitchen, discussing how this could have happened and what would have happened if he had come home instead of going to Medical. We would not have known to call an ambulance.

Anne finally awoke and staggered into the kitchen. When Mum told her what had happened, she started crying along with us, but we kept our distance from her, not wanting to catch her flu. The hospital called once to tell us they were admitting my father, and that the doctor would call back with more details later. We waited. The evening lingered on. Anne finally grew too feverish to stay awake and crawled back to bed with more aspirin. Mum realized we hadn't eaten and made a bologna sandwich for us to split; we both nibbled on our halves, but my mouth didn't seem capable of chewing. After a while, my mother sent me to bed, saying she would wake me as soon as she knew anything.

I couldn't sleep. I lay in bed, thinking of all the sleepless Christmas Eves I had spent trying to hear reindeer hoofs on the roof or imagining the gifts that would be under my tree in the morning. It all seemed stupid now. How could I have ever thought that mattered? I tried to imagine life without my father. I prayed the *Our Father*, several *Hail Marys*, and the *Our Father* again. I offered deals to God, promising never to want anything for Christmas again, just as long as he let my father stay alive. I clung to the clear blue rosary beads I had recently received for my Catholic Confirmation, hoping God could hear me better that way.

Much later, I heard the phone ring. I listened to my mother's calm voice from my bed. When she finished, her footsteps approached

my room, and I held my breath. She left my bedroom light off, so only the light from the hallway came in as she opened the door. The springs of my bed squeaked as she sat on its edge.

She reached out and stroked my hair away from my face. "Your father's alive, but he's in intensive care. Apparently, his heart stopped for two minutes and they used electric paddles to restart it, but he's out of danger now." Her voice choked out the words. "The priest was there and gave him last rites."

Last rites! They had thought he was going to die! My mother and I wept and held each other, then she suggested we say a prayer together. We folded our hands and said another *Our Father*. It made me think of when I was little, and we knelt by my bed as we said my bedtime prayers together. I remembered the two of us praying: *Now I lay me down to sleep, I pray the Lord my soul to keep. If I should die before I wake, I pray the Lord my soul to take.*

*Please don't take my father's soul tonight, I prayed silently that night. Please keep him alive.*



Christmas morning, we didn't open our presents. We stayed out of the living room and didn't look at our tree. Anne was still sick, so Mum and I went to the hospital to see my father without her.

I'd never been in a hospital. The receptionist gave my mother directions to the intensive care unit, and we wound our way through the halls and took the elevator up three floors. The nurse there informed us we could each go in alone for five minutes and we couldn't get close to him.

I waited outside the room while my mother went in first. Then it was my turn.

The room was full of tubes and machines that were attached to a frail old man who I realized, with a jolt, was my father. He lay

in the bed, his eyes straining to open, unable to speak because of the tube down his throat. I knew I should speak, but would he even hear me? He scared me, this ghostly shadow of my father whose breath I could hear long and slow, in and out, in and out. I took his hand and was surprised at how cold it was. He gave me a weak squeeze. I knew I mustn't cry. That would make him feel worse, wouldn't it?

"I love you, Dad. Get better soon."

His breath went in and out faster and I heard the beep, beep, beep of the heart monitor accelerating.

The nurse walked over to my side. "Time to go now, dear. He needs his sleep."



The presents stayed under the tree until my father came home three weeks later. Each day, Mum and I—and later Anne, when she was well—went to the hospital to visit him as he gradually improved.

I was miserable during school vacation. I grew depressed, bitter, and angry. I needed a reason for this, so I blamed my father's job. I believed if he didn't have to work so hard, standing and lifting all day in the heat, cold, and noise of the plant, this would never have happened.

When Joe called, I didn't want to talk to him. What did he know about this? His father worked in an office where he sat at a desk. He didn't have to see his father come home in dirty work clothes with slivers of sheet metal clinging to them. I couldn't talk to Joe about what I was feeling, because I was sure people like his family looked down on people like my family. I hated Joe because he could afford to go to East Catholic, and to college. He would never know how it felt to be trapped in a lifetime of scrimping and saving, having nothing, wanting everything, and knowing the future offered nothing better.

When I went back to school in January, I gave Joe his bubble gum machine ring back and told him I didn't want to go steady anymore.

A few months later, we had to enroll in our high school classes. I refused to take math, which wasn't required at the time. My parents agreed that algebra was useless, said they didn't see the point in learning it.

I enrolled in art, typing, and home economics. I made sure I didn't take any honors classes. My parents thought I was making good choices in deciding to learn practical skills. I hoped the school would place me in classes with kids like me—kids who didn't care about college.



## Chapter 4

August 1970  
Connecticut

**S**haron, look!" Anne alerted me in a loud whisper as we started crossing Main Street in downtown Hartford. "Check out these guys."

Two men with long, dark hair, mustaches, and bell-bottom jeans, one in a tie-dyed T-shirt, the other in a plain white T-shirt with WOODSTOCK FESTIVAL written across the top and a picture of a dove sitting on a guitar handle below it, were crossing the other way. They were several yards away, but they looked straight at us.

I was feeling bold on this August Saturday, a few days before my sophomore year of high school was due to begin. Anne had just turned twenty-one; I wouldn't be sixteen until November. We'd taken the bus to downtown Hartford for the day—"to go shopping" is what we'd told our parents, but our real goal was to look for excitement. I was wearing my new woven headband, and around my neck were several strands of beads I'd strung together. Anne wore large, round, rose-colored sunglasses.

"Keep staring," Anne encouraged me as the two of us continued across the busy downtown road.

Instead of turning away, we looked straight at them as they passed, and their eyes stayed latched onto ours. Finally, we spun forward, giggling wildly to each other over our brazen behavior. As we reached the sidewalk, I glanced back to see if they were still watching us.

"They turned around!" I gasped. "They're following us!"

"Really?" Anne's eyes went wide with surprise, and her cheeks flushed pink. "Walk slow," she muttered through clenched teeth. We calmed our pace to a nervous crawl, unsure of how close they were. They caught up with little effort and, after a moment's hesitating, one of them spoke.

"Where you chicks heading?" Woodstock T-shirt asked. "Going to the park?"

"No, we're on our way to have lunch," Anne answered.

There was a small restaurant in Hartford that had become a ritual for us to dine at ever since Anne started working and she could treat me. We both looked forward to it.

"You don't want to go to lunch. Let's take a walk to the park, see what's happening."

"Actually, we do want to go to lunch," Anne said. "In fact, we're here now." We'd arrived at the restaurant, a small breakfast and lunch spot with prices Anne could afford. "Do you want to join us?"

I heard the nervous excitement in her voice.

"Yeah, I guess we could get a cup of coffee," Woodstock T-shirt replied. He held the door open for us while we walked into the dinette.

We settled into a booth for four, Anne and me on one side and the two of them on the other, next to a silver jukebox on the

wall. I was sitting across from the one in the tie-dyed T-shirt, who had thin hair to his shoulders, no smile, and droopy eyes that made me wonder if he'd recently woken up. Anne and I took the menus from the metal stand on the table while the guy across from Anne did all the talking.

I was awestruck over the presence of these real hippies, particularly the one across from Anne. He had long, thick, chin-length dark hair, dark brown eyes, and an olive complexion. He had a dimple in his chin and a thick mustache. Italian, I thought. I hoped he couldn't tell how young I was. Anne often told me I could pass for seventeen.

"So what's your names?" he asked. "I'm Eddie. This is Gene." Gene nodded in our direction.

"I'm Anne, and this is my sister, Sharon."

"Sisters, huh? All right." He nudged Gene, who pulled out a pack of cigarettes and offered each of us one.

We declined.

"Gimme one of those," Eddie said, taking one from the pack. They both lit them from Gene's lighter, then turned their attention back to us.

"Did you go to Woodstock?" Anne nodded toward Eddie's T-shirt.

"Sure. It was far fucking out. Hey, you chicks seen the Woodstock movie yet?" Eddie smoothed down the ends of his mustache with his thumb and index finger, almost hiding the tiny dimples to the side of his facial hair. His devilish smile sent strange shivers through me.

"No, but we have the album," Anne told him. "We've been playing it nonstop since June."

"You ought to go see it. It's playing right up the road at Cinema. They got quadraphonic stereo and a huge wide screen. No

other movie theater like it." Eddie flicked the ashes of his cigarette into the ashtray on the table, then turned his face upward and blew smoke through his lips.

The waitress arrived to take our order.

"Just coffee for me," Eddie told her.

She gave him a disdainful look. "There's a three-dollar minimum at lunch time. If you don't want to eat, you'll have to leave."

Eddie and Gene looked at each other and, shaking their heads, rose to leave. "This place sucks. Let's get out of here. See you chicks around, okay?"

"Okay," Anne replied. I was disappointed that they couldn't stay.

We ordered club sandwiches and Cokes, then burst into a flood of conversation once we were alone.

"Oh my God!" Anne blurted out. "Do you think Eddie liked me?"

"Yeah," I said, "he kept looking at you the whole time. He was really cute. Maybe we should have left with them."

"We'll walk around after lunch. Maybe we can run into them again."

I wished I was old enough for Eddie to like me but knew he probably thought I was a kid. Anne put a quarter in the jukebox at our table and "Mama Told Me Not to Come" by Three Dog Night began to play.

We didn't run into Eddie and Gene after lunch, and although we talked about Eddie for days after, I never expected to see him again.



Two months later, in mid-October, a political rally was held in downtown Hartford at which Senator McCarthy was to speak in support of Joseph Duffy, a peace candidate running for Senate in

Connecticut. Although McCarthy had been defeated in the democratic presidential primary in 1968, he was still actively outspoken against the Vietnam War and remained a huge draw. The event would take place during lunch hour on a Thursday, and any student at South Windsor High with parental permission was allowed to leave school to attend.

After I swore to my mother that practically the whole school was going, and that I could ride the city bus downtown, she wrote me a permission slip. I forged two more for my friends Carolyn and Joanne, and Anne and I made arrangements to meet when she was on her lunch break.

Carolyn, Joanne, and I arrived downtown early. We were walking around when I recognized the hippie walking toward us as Eddie. A few days prior, Anne had reported spotting him downtown for the first time since that chance encounter two months earlier.

"Bring him with you when you meet me at lunch," she had joked that morning, and we'd both laughed over that daydream. Now the daydream approached as I rapidly filled in my friends.

"Carolyn, that's him! The guy I told you about. He is so far out!"

"He's cute," Carolyn acknowledged. "Do you think he remembers you? You should talk to him."

As he approached, I scanned his face—that same familiar face I had memorized in the restaurant—for signs of recognition. He wasn't much taller than me. His hands were buried deep in the pockets of his unbuttoned navy pea coat, and his wide-wale corduroy bell-bottoms swayed with each step.

He slowed to a stop as we grew near. "Any of you chicks have a light?" He smiled as he placed an unlit cigarette between his lips.

"I think I do," Carolyn answered, smiling back. I could tell she liked his attention as she searched the contents of her fringed

tote bag. She produced a book of matches and lit one; he cupped his hands around hers to block the wind.

"Is your name Eddie?" I asked, already knowing the answer.

"Yeah, where do I know you from?" He turned his eyes toward me as he raised his head to exhale smoke into the air above him.

I was elated to think he might remember me.

"My sister and I met you last summer, on our way to eat right over there at that restaurant." I nodded in the direction of the building, which sat just a block away. "Do you remember?"

"Oh yeah, I remember that." He smiled at me as though this meant we were old friends, and I was thrilled all his attention had shifted to me. "Where are you chicks going? You skipping school?"

"We're walking around until the rally starts on the plaza," I explained.

"Mind if I come with you?"

"Sure," I agreed, giddy with excitement, wondering if I could convince him to stick around long enough to meet Anne with me at lunch. *She will die*, I thought to myself as we rounded the corner to Union Place.

We stopped first in a dimly lit head shop cluttered with clothing racks of flag print shirts and flowering bell bottoms, wall posters illuminated by neon black lights, and drug paraphernalia. Eddie monopolized the conversation, telling me how he had recently returned from Florida, where he'd jammed with the Allman Brothers, and had been at Columbia University during the student strike two years earlier. I was impressed by how much he had done.

As we all walked back toward the rally, he surprised me by reaching over to hold my hand, an action I felt was warranted: it would keep me from flying up into the clouds. When Eddie wasn't looking, Carolyn winked at me, and then she and Joanne started walking ahead of us.

I explained to Eddie about meeting my sister for lunch, and he agreed to wait for her with me. When we reached the building where Anne worked, Carolyn and Joanne promised to meet me at the city bus stop at two thirty, in time to get back for the school bus ride home, and left for the rally.

We leaned against the wall of the Travelers Insurance Company, watching the clean-cut men and women leaving the building for their lunch break. Some looked over at us and grimaced. I loved it. *Let them eat their hearts out, wishing they were free like us*, I thought. Eddie put his arm around my shoulders and leaned in close to my ear, making small talk.

After about ten minutes, Anne came out through the doorway. When she spotted us—Eddie's arm around me and his face near mine—her face froze in a look of shock.

"Look who I ran into," I announced, gloating in my accomplishment of capturing the prize. "He wants to come with us to the rally."

"Sure," she answered, not looking at me or Eddie as she led the way to the plaza. I had expected her to be excited but instead I could see she was hurt, and I regretted gloating.

Anne had never considered me a threat with guys she was interested in. It had not occurred to either of us that I was old enough to be one, as my sixteenth birthday was still two weeks away. Eddie's interest in me was unexpected, and I felt as though I had advanced several years forward, to the age I wanted to be.

The crowd was elbow to elbow on the plaza when we arrived, and the three of us squeezed through to get closer. I could hear a speech over the sound system, followed by cheers and applause, but I wasn't following the event. Only Eddie's hand in mine had my attention. My stomach fluttered. What waited for me in the future? Where would this lead? And how would I ever convince my

parents to let me see him again? For I knew with absolute certainty I would see him again. Nothing they could do would stop me.

When Anne's lunchtime was over, she barely said good-bye before turning to hurry back to work. I could tell she was upset. Eddie suggested we walk to the park instead of being squeezed by the mob of onlookers, and I let him pull me through the crowd, oblivious to the people we passed.

The mid-afternoon sun had taken the autumn crispness out of the air. Striking blue skies and wispy clouds offset the gold, yellow, and red leaves filling the trees of the park; the green grass had been raked clean by city workers. Bushnell Park was small enough that you could see most of it from one end to the next. There was no privacy to be had, so I felt safe there with this guy I barely knew.

He stopped by an area of grass that was thick and dry and pulled me down to sit with him. Then he wrapped me in his arms and kissed me, leaning me back into the grass.

My eyes darted around to see if anyone was watching. I was filled with apprehension, worried I was in over my head. We were in broad daylight, but his assertiveness scared me. I knew free love was an integral part of the hippie lifestyle, same as smoking pot. I was torn between enjoying his kisses and worrying about where this was leading.

Finally, I pulled away and sat up to check my watch. It was two twenty. I was going to miss the bus if I didn't leave immediately.

"Don't worry about it," Eddie reassured me. "I can drive you back to school."

"But my friends are supposed to meet me, they'll be wondering what happened."

"They know you're with me. They'll figure you're having a good time and didn't make it. Don't be so uptight. You worry too much. Enjoy yourself, have fun."

I knew he was right. I did worry, just like my mother. And how much fun did I ever have? Hippies didn't worry, they lived for the moment, and I wanted to be that way too.

"Okay, I'll stay a little longer, as long as you promise to give me a ride to school by three o'clock."

"I told you I would, didn't I? You can trust me."

And I did. I trusted him at that moment and for the next three months we spent together. I trusted him when he called me each day and we talked late into the night, when he asked me to be his steady chick and told me he loved me. I trusted him when he took me to his apartment, and I gave him my virginity. I trusted him until the day he stopped calling and I learned two girls from California had moved in with him and his roommate.

But on that October day in the park, all that was still to come. On that day, we walked to his car through fallen leaves that filled the sidewalks. I loved hearing the swish, swish, swish of our feet kicking through them, and the feel of Eddie's arm around my waist, holding me close. I loved watching his heavy leather boots step in time with my shoes, thinking how right they looked next to each other and how magical a day this was.

use all your money in this fucking place when you got somewhere to stay there for free?" He glanced sideways at me in the passenger's seat, then into the rearview mirror at Anne. "How come no one's talking? I mean, what the fuck! I drive you all the way out here and this is the thanks I get?"

*Not like you did it for free, I argued silently.* Anne and I were both fed up with listening to him. Eddie had a former girlfriend in Bakersfield and had been trying to convince us to join him, but our plan had always been Southern California; we wanted to be near the ocean.

The YWCA appeared as we drove off the exit. Eddie jerked the car over to the curb, oblivious to the honking traffic. Jumping out, he rushed to the trunk, pulled out our belongings, and dumped them beside us on the sidewalk.

"You're making a mistake staying here. But what the fuck, can't tell you chicks nothing. See you around."

He hurried back into the driver's seat and inched away through the traffic. I waited for sorrow to set in, but all I could feel was indifference. This trip had taught me more about Eddie than I had learned in the three months we'd spent together as a couple. My parents had managed to limit my time with him, but all that had done was make me like him more. I suppose they were trying to save my virginity, but there is always time for sex, no matter how little time there is. They should have let me spend every minute of every day with him, so I got to know him better. That would have ended it.



Anne and I shared a dormitory style room with four other women that night and were given a copy of the New Testament.

In the morning, we rode a bus to the end of the line, where Venice Boulevard stops, then walked onto the beach for our first view of the Pacific Ocean.



## Chapter 5

January 1971

Venice, California

Anne, Eddie, and I arrived in downtown Los Angeles as the light was disappearing from the late-afternoon sky. We were on our way to the YWCA; I had called ahead to inquire if Anne and I could get a cheap room there.

"I hate fucking LA," Eddie grumbled as he steered across five lanes of freeway traffic and made a quick right off the exit.

"Careful with Anne's car," I wanted to shout, but then I thought, *Why bother?* Although she'd paid for the car and everything else on this five-day trip, since neither she nor I had a driver's license, we needed Eddie to get here. In exchange, he was keeping the car. I held the directions I had scribbled in a phone booth at a gas station earlier, glad I would only need to listen to Eddie's rambling for a short time longer.

"I don't know why you chicks want to stay here. Look at this smog, you can't even see the sky, this is fucking gross. I wouldn't stay in this shit hole. You chicks should come to Bakersfield. Why

"There it is," I said, reverence in my voice. "We're here."

That January afternoon, the air was cooler at the beach, so I slipped my arms into my jacket and buttoned it against the breeze. We strolled along Ocean Front Walk, a wide, straight walkway separating the beach from the city. In the distance, someone rode a bicycle toward us; on our right, a lean, bearded man accompanied by his golden retriever walked by, nodding a greeting in our direction.

We sauntered south, awed by the newness of the landscape: palm trees planted at intervals in the sand, low one- and two-story stucco buildings facing out to sea, some with high walls and wrought iron railings. I kept thinking, *This is really happening. This is California, just like in the movies!*

The bicycle we had been watching approach inched by, and its rider greeted us. When we answered his hello, he spun the bike around and pedaled along beside us.

"I've never seen you two out here before. You new to Venice?" He was wearing a red bandana as a headband. Under the bandana, he had long, sleek, black hair. His Fu Manchu mustache gave his grin a slightly sinister appearance. He was tall and fashionably hippie thin in his faded bell-bottom jeans with a few patches of colorful fabric sewn over the worn spots and heavy, leather sandals. I later discovered his tan skin and high cheekbones were the result of his Cherokee descent.

"Yeah, we just got here," Anne replied. "Someone told us this is where all the hippies live, so we're checking it out."

"This is *The Place*, all right. Where're you from?"

"Connecticut. We just got to California yesterday."

"My name's Ed. What's yours?"

"Oh no," we both said in unison. "Not another Ed!"

"Hey!" Ed said indignantly, applying the brakes on his bike. He stepped off the pedals. "Ed is a good name. Just because you

know some asshole named Ed, you can't condemn us all. I'm a nice guy. You should get to know me."

We introduced ourselves and he continued riding his bike as we walked, asking us questions, occasionally circling us like we were prey he was cornering and stalking. He made me nervous.

"Want to get stoned?" he finally asked. "I live just a couple of blocks from here."

Anne and I exchanged uncertain glances, searching for a clue from each other. The offer was tempting. I knew she was as eager as I was to try some California grass.

He let out a low chuckle, apparently amused by our hesitation. "Hey, you don't need to be afraid of me, I don't bite." He laughed again, then added, "Not unless you want me too."

Finally, Anne agreed. I wondered what we were getting into, my stomach churning.



Ed lived in a yellow one-floor stucco house on the corner of two canals. Bushes were falling over onto the sidewalk, leaving little room to move between them and the water.

We entered his living room, where a huge American flag with a peace sign in place of the stars hung across one wall; on another was a psychedelic poster of a couple sitting in a tantric sex embrace, facing each other, arms and legs encircling one another. Peter Max posters of each of the Beatles hung in rainbow hues along the side wall. I was awestruck.

As we walked across the room, my feet sank into the wall-to-wall carpeting. It felt like I was walking on pillows; I wondered what was underneath.

Ed switched on the stereo, then the TV, leaving it silent. The first guitar riffs of Jimmy Hendrix's *Electric Ladyland* blasted as

colorful electrical streaks pulsed through an attached globe in time to the music.

Ed motioned for us to sit on his faux couch—padding a few inches thick that encircled the room, including a back rest leaned against the wall that was covered in matching fabric. Looking up, I saw an Indian bedspread hung harem style from the ceiling, obscuring a yellow light bulb.

Ed sat cross-legged across from us and laid out several joints. He lit the first one and took a hit before passing it to Anne, and then me.

“So tell me what brought you here,” he said.

We took turns telling him our story, including how I was sixteen and had run away from home and that our parents had no idea where we were.

Ed offered us Red Mountain wine out of the bottle to wash down the smoke, which made me choke a bit. I had never had wine before; it burned my throat with its heat and tartness. He laughed at my reaction and listened to our tale with a delighted expression on his face.

“Listen, you two,” he said when we were done. “I need to fill you in on a few do’s and don’ts if you’re going to be staying here in Venice, and you are going to both have to learn quickly.” He gave me a stern look. “First, don’t tell anyone you are sixteen. From now on you are eighteen. Learn your birthday, learn a new name, forget the real one, it doesn’t exist anymore. Sixteen is too young for a lot of the things that go on around here.”

I told him I wasn’t that innocent.

He laughed. “You’ve never lived in Venice before. Most of the parties I go to, I wouldn’t dream of bringing you to. You have no idea of what goes on around here. Are you both on the pill?”

I was shocked at this personal question, but he asked it so matter-of-factly that I felt obligated to provide an answer, a muttered

no that was barely audible while I blushed. Anne had gone through the routine in Connecticut of borrowing an engagement ring and lying to a doctor that she was getting married so she could legally get a prescription. I’d had no such opportunity, nor the money, to perform the necessary charade.

“Well,” Ed said, “get down to the free clinic right away. It opens every weekday at four o’clock over on Venice Boulevard—it’s next to the police station. They give you pills free. Remember, you’re eighteen. They don’t check. You can always get an abortion now in California if you need one, but I’ve heard it’s not a fun thing to go through, so make sure you don’t have any sex until you get them.”

His bluntness surprised me. I had never heard a man speak so openly about stuff like this.

Ed reached into his pocket and pulled out a small metal box. He opened it to display some dried herbs that looked like pot.

“Here, smell this stuff,” he ordered, passing the box under our noses. It had a sickly, perfumed scent. “If you’re ever at a party and you smell this, don’t smoke it, unless you want to get really fucked up. It’s this new stuff called Angel Dust, just started going around here. I’m sure they don’t have it back in Hicksville, Connecticut yet. Somebody gave me a hit of this stuff and I damn near passed out. And I’ve done more than a few drugs in my day!”

Anne and I exchanged anxious looks with each other while Ed continued his intro-to-Venice narrative.

“Listen, I’ve lived here for a long time, and I’m not going anywhere.” He lit another joint and passed it to me. “But I see these guys come and go all the time in this town. They don’t give a shit about you, so don’t let them take advantage of you. I’m going to see you every day walking down the street. If you need anything, come see me. I’ll take care of you. I know you’re probably thinking

who the hell is this guy, but I'm very up front about who I am. I don't bullshit anyone. Why bother?" He shrugged his shoulders and looked from Anne to me and back again.

I was fascinated by this man, so different from anyone I had ever met. But, of course, I had never lived in California before. Ed was just the beginning.

"And hey, if you chicks want to make some money, I'll sell you some mescaline for fifty cents a hit. You can turn around and sell them for two dollars each."

Anne told him thanks, then inquired where we might find a place to stay that night—we planned to look for an apartment in the morning.

"You can stay here if you want. I have a big bed." He winked. "But not until after midnight, 'cause I have company until then." He stood. "Or you could try the Other Side Coffee House out on Ocean Front Walk. Keep walking the direction you were going when we met, you'll come to it. Good people run it. They could probably help you out."

I staggered to my feet, nearly falling over on the pillow-floor. Anne looked stoned; she giggled as Ed walked between us to the door, his arms around us both.

"Make sure you come back and visit, okay? Good luck!" He leaned over and kissed me on the lips quickly then turned and kissed Anne. He was smiling as we wandered out the door.



## Chapter 6

January 1971

Venice, California

The morning after we arrived in Venice, getting our own apartment was our top priority. We had walked nearly the length of Pacific Avenue searching for an affordable place in a half-decent building with two young men from Texas we'd met over breakfast. Bob and John had offered to drive us downtown to fetch our belongings from the YWCA once we found a place, and I was enjoying their company; they had a relentless sense of humor that kept Anne and me laughing throughout the tedious search.

We entered yet another building and buzzed the superintendent. She had a vacant apartment for \$90 a month—Anne could afford that. While we waited for her to return with the key, Bob sat on the stairs that led to the second floor and stared into my eyes as I conversed with John. I'd never understood the attraction to blue eyes until this moment. What was it about Bob's? Was it his almost smile that told me he was flirting, or those magnetic eyes that were reaching right into my soul? I wanted to turn away. I knew I was

returning his gaze for far too long to pretend innocence. John was my typical type, chin-length dark hair and dark eyes. Bob, on the other hand, had curly, light brown hair just long enough to suggest a budding afro, a beard that was still trying to fill in, and a dimple in each cheek.

I shifted away from Bob's stare, self-conscious, but he continued to focus on me as he spoke, as though the world began and ended with my face. By the time the superintendent returned, something in my stomach—I later came to know it as longing—cascaded through me every time I looked at him. The feeling grew more intense as the day wore on.

Anne and I agreed to take the one-room furnished studio with a tiny kitchenette and an old-fashioned bathroom containing a claw-foot tub and no shower. A small, unvented heater gave off a strong odor of gas in the room, and there was only one twin bed, but we loved it. Our very own apartment! We'd fantasized about this since we'd pretended to live by a California beach when I was nine!

Bob and John helped us separate the mattress from the box spring to make a bed each for Anne and me. As Anne was paying the rent, I claimed the box spring, where my jacket would serve as a pillow and my coat as a blanket.

When it was time for the ride to retrieve our belongings, I was surprised to discover that Bob's car was a two-seater Triumph Spitfire convertible.

"We can do this," he assured us, noticing the dubious looks on our faces when we saw the tiny car. "It's been done before. It helps to take the top off. How 'bout we leave it in the apartment? That'll make room for your stuff."

We agreed. He and John started unsnapping the canvas hood from the red sports car and folding it accordion style, but the storage area behind the seats was still full.

"We'll have to take our stuff out, too," Bob said. "Otherwise, I dunno if y'all's will fit."

Bob opened the trunk and heaved out a box of canned goods, while John pulled coats and bags from behind the seats and handed them to Anne and me. Within a few minutes, our apartment was cluttered with their belongings. We paused to smoke a joint together, sitting cross-legged on the floor in the apartment, leaning against boxes and jackets, having a few more laughs before the ride.

Finally, giggling from the effects of the pot, we maneuvered our way into the car's small space. Bob climbed first into the driver's seat, and John slid into the seat on the passenger's side. The two of them half lifted me over John, and I positioned myself partially on both seats, Bob's jacket padding the emergency brake, my shoulders bending inward as I squeezed between Bob and John. Anne nearly fell face first into John's lap as she climbed into the car, and the four of us collapsed in a laughing fit.

It was a warm, sunny day, and I enjoyed the wind hitting my face as I rode above the line of the windshield back into the city. I had to cross my legs so Bob could shift, but the top of his hand still rubbed the outside of my thigh each time he did, regardless of how much room I tried to make. Occasionally I glanced sideways at his handsome face a few inches away, feeling the warmth of his arm pressed solidly against mine.

Once at the YWCA, we loaded our belongings into the trunk. We had to tie one suitcase to the luggage rack to make it all fit. On the ride back, a motorcycle passed us and the driver gave us a peace sign, then a tractor-trailer truck double honked its approval; we joked that passing vehicles must think we drove all the way from Texas like this.



By evening, I'd lost track of the number of joints we'd smoked, and my face hurt from laughing. We strolled along Venice beach, then climbed onto the rock jetty near our new place to watch our first sunset over the ocean.

Back at the apartment, we threw together a dinner for the four of us with the canned goods from the guys' car, cooking in an old frying pan that had been left in the apartment.

"Tomorrow we have to go to the Salvation Army store and get cooking utensils, plates, and stuff," Anne said as we scraped up the last bits of food from the frying pan with our plastic spoons. "But right now, I've got wicked munchies. Let's go see what they've got at the Liquor and Deli on the corner. There's one right near Ed's house."

"Who's Ed?" John asked.

"This guy we met yesterday on Ocean Front Walk. He's got tons of drugs. He offered to sell us mescaline for fifty cents a hit."

"Wow." Bob perked up immediately. "What do y'all say we drop mescaline and head to Malibu tonight? God, it's such a beautiful night, I can't imagine a better time and place to trip. Y'all up for it?" Raising an eyebrow, he looked directly at me.

Hearing that Bob wanted to continue this dreamy day made me warm all over. My mescaline trips in Hartford had been interesting, but the prospect of tripping under the stars at Malibu beach with this exciting new guy sounded like pure fantasy. I couldn't imagine a better time and place myself.

"That'd be far out," I replied. "I'm up for it. Ed said come over anytime, so I guess we could go now."

I loved that Bob enjoyed discovering California as much as I did. They'd been in Bakersfield for a few weeks but had only arrived in LA the day before.

Anne, John, Bob, and I stopped at the Liquor and Deli for Twinkies along the way to Ed's house, stuffing them into our

mouths like starving children. Bob wiped a bit of Twinkie cream from my cheek.

I could hear Ed's stereo blasting as we approached, even though his lights were barely visible. While Anne knocked, I imagined his warm welcome. Instead, he peered through the crack of the door, scowling, before opening it to let us in.

Ed shut the door behind us and motioned for us to sit on the floor. The couch area was already occupied by several stoned people; one couple groped each other in the corner. I waited for Ed to crack a smile, but it didn't come.

"This is John and Bob," Anne introduced them as we sat. "They helped us move today. We got a place on Pacific Avenue. We wanted to get some mescaline to trip tonight."

Ed's scowl grew fiercer, bordering on anger. I wondered what could be wrong. He looked from Bob to John.

"You guys got any pot?" he demanded.

"Yeah, sure." Bob looked confused.

"Well, bring it out, let's smoke it."

Bob pulled a joint from his pocket with a worried look on his face. He lit it and passed it to Ed, who took a good, long hit before passing it on. Without another word, he rose, beckoning to Anne and me to follow, and led us into the kitchen.

Spinning around to face us, he launched into an attack. "Now listen and listen good, because I'm only going to tell you this once. Don't ever, *ever*, bring anyone over here again! You two are welcome anytime, but there are narcs everywhere, and you don't know who these guys are. You chicks don't know your way around here, and I'm not about to get busted because of your stupidity."

I felt frightened by the hard anger in his face.

"They're definitely not narcs," I assured him, worrying about what might happen next. "We've been smoking with them all day.

And they're not even from around here. They have a car with Texas license plates and everything. They're really far out, I swear."

I recognized the way Ed was looking at me now, as though my naiveté was showing. The anger began to disappear from his voice, replaced by sarcasm.

"Listen, sweetie, I'm glad you're enjoying yourself, but I'm going to look out for my ass, because no one else is going to. I can't let a little innocent sixteen-year-old get me busted, however sweet you may be. That's why I asked to smoke their pot. Narcs aren't allowed to smoke when they're working, it's one way of flushing them out. If they didn't bring pot, none of you would still be here right now."

He paused, watching us closely to see if we were getting the message. I began to relax as I heard a touch of softness finally come from his mouth.

"And remember what I told you about these transient guys, okay? Have a good time, but don't go getting attached. I've seen this happen too many times. And by the way, I offered to sell you mescaline so you could sell it and make money, not go turning all your friends on."

He shook his head like a distraught parent, wondering what to do with these naughty children before him. Anne responded to his calmed tone by asking for what we had come for.

"Can we still get some mescaline? Maybe ten hits?"

He shifted his eyes from her to me and back again a few times, a smirk on his face.

"This is highway robbery, you know. I'm not even breaking even at this price." He walked out the back door and returned with a brown paper bag. He pulled a plastic baggie from his kitchen drawer, counted out ten white gelatin capsules and placed them inside it, then handed it to Anne.

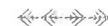
When she passed him the five-dollar bill, he held onto her hand with both of his.

"This is a favor, so you owe me one now. Remember that." He leaned over and gave her a quick kiss on the lips. "Next time, come alone."

He was smiling at last, a satisfied smile that made me slightly uncomfortable. Tossing his head back to fling his long black hair away from his face, he slid both hands into the front pockets of his jeans, then leaned toward me and whispered in my ear, "You too," then kissed me briefly as well.

He straightened and looked at us both. "You chicks have a good time, okay? This is a nice, mild trip, nothing scary, so enjoy the ride. And by the way, I'm having a party tomorrow night. Why don't you come by?"

Flattered by the invitation, we agreed, then headed back to the living room to leave. As I turned to say good-bye, I saw him leaning against the doorway watching us, one hand running his fingers through his hair to brush it from his face, his mustache framing a wicked grin. I wondered what the mescaline would really cost.



By the time the mescaline was taking effect, the four of us were once again packed together in the car, defying the design intentions of Triumph engineers. As we rode along Highway 1 under the stars, I buttoned my winter coat tightly against the cold wind that blasted over the windshield.

When we arrived at Malibu Beach, we descended the stairs along a sand cliff to reach the ocean—a location from my adolescent dreams. I wondered on this whimsical evening if this was indeed my life now, or if I would roll over in a moment and find myself back in my room, alone in my bed.

The mescaline was mild, as Ed had promised. No hallucinations, just a heightening of the senses and a feeling of joy and abandonment. I sat in the sand for a while, watching the white foam of the incoming waves rise before breaking near shore and then gradually thinning out before me, turning from a deep whoosh into a high-pitched hissing.

"Want a hit?" Bob asked from behind me, jolting me from my hypnotic state. I stood and turned to face him, staring into those haunting eyes lit by moonlight and mescaline. My fingertips lingered near his as he slipped the joint between them. I raised it to my lips and inhaled deeply, holding his gaze now that drugs were giving me courage. I slipped the joint back to him as John approached.

"Hey Bogart, how 'bout passing that joint over here?"

Bob handed it to John without looking at him, then John moved away.

Unencumbered, Bob wrapped his arms around my waist and pulled me close to him, exploring my eyes with his for an extravagantly long moment. I reached my arms over his shoulders, resting them on the wide sheepskin collar of his suede jacket. I feared I would collapse in a heap of desire if he didn't kiss me soon. When his lips at last touched mine, I understood passion for the first time, a sensation so consuming I would have failed to notice the devil's own fire if it had been burning at my feet. My existence consisted only of his warm, silky mouth exploring mine, the gentle pressure of his strong arms as he pressed his body against me, our thick coats keeping a teasing barrier between us.

A strong ocean wind blew my long hair across his face, and he gently scooped it away, running his fingers through it to hold it in place. I let my fingers wander through his thick curls, eager to explore the newness of him, to finally give in to the impulses I had felt all day.

I had daydreamed and imagined that kissing could be magic, and this moment proved it. Could anything be more perfect? Caution meant nothing to me. I wanted to indulge myself in its glorious spontaneity, follow where it led me, into new realms. Bob sparked sensations in me I'd never known existed before this moment.



We made love for the first time in our new apartment, with the early-morning light coming through the window. Neither of us had slept all night as we squeezed together on the twin box spring, oblivious to the jabbing spring ends. Anne and John had quietly fallen asleep on the other mattress hours earlier, in a tacit agreement of friendship only. I had spent hours pretending to resist Bob, never wanting to for a minute, conflicted over this vast confusion of emotions. Sex with Eddie had been dutiful and dull, a routine I went through with the belief it was part of being "in love." Now, for the first time, I experienced desire, propelled by the incredible joy I felt being in Bob's company for nearly twenty-four hours, the best of my life. I thought maybe I should be waiting, but also sensed this was no ordinary moment. Some people waited their whole lives for someone who could make them feel this way, I was certain. I was a free person now. I could follow my feelings wherever they took me. I could worry about tomorrow, tomorrow.



## Chapter 7

February 1971

Venice, California

*You do your thing, I do my thing.  
I am not in this world to live up to your expectations,  
and you are not in this world to live up to mine.  
But if by chance we find each other, it's beautiful . . .*

These words (a quote from Frederick Salomon Perls's Gestalt prayer, I would later learn), were on a poster in our apartment, along with two hands reaching out to one another, not quite touching. I pretended I agreed with this attitude about relationships, because wasn't that how I was supposed to feel? Inwardly, though, I thought it sad that two people weren't supposed to touch—that they could hover in each other's presence but never completely connect.

In the three weeks since I'd met Bob, I hadn't managed to get used to his random arrivals and departures. I knew I had no claim to him. My heart soared when he walked in the door from

wherever he might have been and filled with despair when he drove away two or three days later.

Bob had been back from his latest escapade for one day, and we were awake on the single box spring we shared. It was nearly morning, and the only light in the room came from streetlights. He had woken me with his insistent caresses while I groaned and brushed him away, begging for more sleep.

Suddenly, a strange vibration shook the floor, startling us both. Bob sprang to his knees and jerked open the window blind, but it crashed down on him and he was thrown back to the bed. The room was swaying, like we were sailing over ocean swells in a great storm without a solid piece of ground beneath us. It was as though the walls and floor were stretching and heaving in opposing directions; hairbrushes and bottles jiggled across the dresser top, and cabinet doors banged open and shut in the kitchen.

Instinctively I cried out to God, begging him not to let me die, terrified that this was my final moment on earth. It didn't matter that only weeks before I had pronounced myself an atheist. The God of my Catholic childhood exploded from my subconscious. My thoughts flooded with visions from pictures I had seen of the earthquake that had struck Peru months earlier—how buildings had collapsed and tens of thousands had died—and I wondered if I would be a faceless statistic in tomorrow's world news. My mind screamed at the unfairness of the possibility. From the next bed I heard Anne wail, "Oh my God! Oh my God!"

The whole event took less than a minute. Once the room stilled, Bob and I threw open the window above the bed. I expected to see wide cracks in the ground with buildings tumbling in, but the street looked surprisingly unchanged, except for the absence of lights. There was an eerie silence punctuated only by a distant hissing and snapping of raw electricity.

Bob fumbled around on the table next to our bed for Anne's transistor radio and switched it on, scanning first the FM, then the AM radio bands. Silence. Had Los Angeles been destroyed beyond our street? Anne came over to my bed and sat near me, gripping her own arms into a hug, her eyes wide and teary.

"Can y'all find a candle?" Bob fiddled with the dial. "I'll keep trying to get a station. Isn't there supposed to be an emergency broadcast or something? It's all dead air!"

He located a voice as we felt a second tremor, a tiny one in comparison, but long enough to renew our fear. The announcer spoke in a soothing tone.

After a few minutes, I sensed a group exhale, and then we all began talking rapidly.

"I thought that was it, I really did," Anne said. "But it doesn't look like anything happened except the power went off."

"Wow," Bob said. "I have been through hurricanes and even tornadoes in Texas, but they're nothing like this. What the hell can you do? You can't outrun the damn thing!"

"I was sure I didn't believe in God," I told them. "Now I don't know. When you feel this close to death, it makes you wonder."

We rattled on at each other until we succumbed to the laughter that follows fear, nervous giggling that shook through us like a small tremor.

"You know what?" Bob interrupted, jumping up. "There's only one thing to do: get stoned! I'll bet Jack's up. Let's go see."

Jack lived downstairs from us in a basement apartment. After Bob's first absence, he had returned to Venice without John, and Jack was his new buddy.

"I'm going to try to sleep," Anne told us. "Maybe I'll come down later."

When Bob and I reached Jack's apartment, he and his roommate Bill were already smoking.

"Hey, man. Come on in, have a toke." Jack stood in the doorway holding a joint, his tailored shirt unbuttoned and hanging loosely over stovepipe pants that were two inches too short.

Jack had returned from Vietnam and been discharged from the Marines a few months before we met him. He looked like a civilian of an outdated era, without a single pair of bell-bottoms in his wardrobe. His straight blond hair was beginning to grow, but not enough to fit in.

With the radio for our centerpiece, we settled around the room on the pillows and chairs in the studio apartment. Jack crouched on his mattress, leaning against the wall with his knees to his chin, chain-smoking cigarettes. His stance—his elbows resting on his knees, one arm dangling in front of his legs, the lit end of the cigarette cupped inside his hand—was appropriate for spending long hours in fox holes, hiding burning butts from enemy eyes.

Jack was the first Vietnam veteran I'd met, and the Vietnam he spoke of didn't sound like what I'd heard about on the evening news. Any time we got together, the conversation would turn to his experiences there. Even today, as we discussed the earthquake and what we could do while the power was out, Jack brought it up.

"Over in 'Nam, we had our ways of entertaining ourselves. My buddy and I, we'd smoke a few bones and then slip out over the hill and light grenades, fling 'em into the hootches. Man, you should see those things burn. Looked like the goddamn Fourth of July."

"Were there people in there?" I was horrified.

"Just gooks. They're all trying to kill you while you're sleeping, we were getting them first." He broke into a cackle, amused at the look on my face.

"But how do you know there weren't children in there?"

"The kids are more dangerous than the grownups. They'll walk right up to you like they're trying to sell you cigarettes, and next thing you know, out pops a grenade. That's in the villages, though, not in Saigon." He relaxed and his expression changed, turning to a knowing smile. "I gotta admit, I had a terrific girl living with me in Saigon. I really miss her. 'Nam is a great place, except for the war. A guy like me can live pretty good. What the hell do I have here?" He motioned across the room at the small studio. "If you're tough, and you know your way around the streets, there's nothing you can't have there."

"I guess that's cool," Bob said. "Never heard anyone tell it like that."

Music had returned to the transistor radio, and Elton John's love song, "This Is Your Song," played. Bob sat across the room, watching me, and began singing along to the words as if he was singing them to me. His eyes looked full of emotion, telling me things I longed to hear him speak. *Is he telling me he loves me with these lyrics?* I wondered. But I knew this moment would pass and tonight, or another night, he'd be gone again, leaving me to pine in his absence. "Don't be good, be happy!" he liked to say on his way out the door, as though instructing me to go raise hell. I did my best to take his advice, but it never made me happy.

Bob and I left Jack's apartment mid-morning to walk on the beach. We held hands as we strolled over the wet sand. The waves were breaking about ten yards closer than normal. Our hands stayed locked together, as though the solidarity between us would keep us safe from the unforeseeable future.



Bob, Anne, and I were milling around the apartment later that day when there was a knock on our door. I peeked out, and found Ed standing in the hall.

"I figured I'd stop by and make sure you chicks survived our surprise this morning," he said. "How's it going? The question of the day is, what were you doing when the earthquake struck?"

I stepped out into the hall and closed the door behind me as Ed gave me a quick kiss.

"We're fine. I was awake, then we got stoned."

He smiled. "Listen, the reason I came by is I finally got some acid. I promised you next time I scored, I'd turn you on to it since you've never tried it. Want to come over tonight and trip with me?"

I hesitated, wondering if Bob had heard. I had been wanting to try LSD, but since Bob was around, I wanted to stay with him.

"I can tell you have company, I didn't mean to interrupt," Ed acknowledged, backing away.

I heard the rattle of Bob's car keys before I heard his voice, and I knew what it meant.

Bob opened the door and brushed by us on his way out. "I'm meeting Jack," he said without looking at me. "See you around."

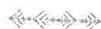
I felt the familiar ache I was growing used to as I watched him leave. I knew he would be gone for more than the afternoon. Was he leaving anyway, or leaving because of Ed? I wished I could turn off my feelings as easily as Bob seemed to and simply have a good time, like he kept saying I should.

During Bob's absences, I'd started visiting Ed, figuring this constituted not being good but happy. I pretended I was wild and free, but I didn't feel wild and free. I felt confused. I wanted Ed as a friend, but sex was part of the package for him. At thirty-three years old, he was gifted in the art of manipulation far beyond my insight. His interest flattered me, although I wasn't sure if I was

glad for it or upset by it. I felt I needed to prove myself to him because of my age, and he seemed to enjoy this advantage. I listened when he told me what to do since he was older and wiser, and the person who knew everything about life in Venice.

Ed's friendship wasn't only about sex, however. We had thought-provoking conversations that I didn't have with anyone else, including Bob. All the hip books were on his bookshelf, and he encouraged me to read them. Herman Hesse's *Siddhartha*, Alan Watts's *The Way of Zen*, Robert Heinlein's *I Will Fear No Evil*. He took great pleasure in introducing me to concepts and ideas I'd never heard of, as though he were molding me into who he thought I should be. Having no idea who I was, I followed his lead.

"Sure, I'll trip with you," I told Ed. "Why not?"



I went over to Ed's house in the early evening, feeling I was about to be initiated into a hippie fraternity. He handed me a tiny yellow-orange pill called Orange Sunshine.

"I've been told this is really good stuff," Ed warned me. "Get ready."

I swallowed, and we went into the kitchen to make popcorn while we waited for it to take effect. About ten minutes later, I jumped as I noticed movement in the darkened pantry to my left. Nothing was there. I felt mildly apprehensive.

"See something?" Ed asked.

I nodded.

"We're starting to get off already. We better go sit down. We're in for one hell of a ride."

The mescaline I'd taken in the past needed an hour or two to take effect, then increased gradually, then peaked for a few hours

before wearing off. By the time I sat in the living room, I was losing my ability to stand.

The next several hours were an onslaught of uncontrollable thoughts, dreams, hallucinations, fears, and visions. I never moved from the floor. All sense of time and space vanished. Colors pulsed with sound, music danced before my eyes, dizzying patterns collided randomly. During moments of coherency, I attempted to analyze what was happening so I could describe it in detail to Anne. The thought of what must be going on in my brain frightened me. It was as though all my neurological circuits had crossed, causing one sense to have the experiences of another.

At one point, I noticed an annoying buzzing that wouldn't go away, try as I did to ignore it. Then I realized it was Ed's voice, speaking into my ear.

"Listen to me, listen to my voice. That's better, now pay attention to my words. You're getting too far away, you need to come back."

I was desperate to have it end. "I want to come down," I pleaded. "Please help me come down."

"That's what I'm doing now. I'm talking you down. I'm helping you control it."

"Is that all you can do is talk? Isn't there anything you can give me to make it stop? I can't take it anymore!"

"You think I can give you some magic pill and turn it off? Sorry. You'll have to ride it out."

The hallucinations were astounding. I focused on Ed's face for a while, watching as it changed. Once he had heavy wrinkles and graying hair. Then the wrinkles disappeared, and he had no eyes, just a forehead. Then his head was free-floating, without a body. I saw him as an Indian medicine man, and as a head with arms sticking out of his ears, like something I used to draw as a

little kid. Once during this time, I watched torment writhe on his face until he broke into tears. I could tell my brain hadn't manufactured this vision; he was truly crying.

Hours later, as normalcy returned, Ed suggested we step outside—a total lunar eclipse was in progress. Standing by the canal, watching the dark red moon with colors swirling around it, I wondered, *Is this real, or am I still hallucinating?* I felt like I'd experienced baptism by fire and survived.

Later, Ed discovered we had each taken four-way sunshine, a pill intended for four people to share, not one. We had taken enough LSD to get eight people high.



One afternoon, Anne and I received a certified letter from our parents. Stunned, we tore it open and we read how they had been searching for us, and someone had finally shared our address. We had mailed it to a few select friends we trusted.

We called home collect on the pay phone in the hall, huddling together to hear their voices through the earpiece, although that was unnecessary when the shouting began. They demanded that I return home at once; Anne, they said, was free to do what she wanted. I threatened to leave Venice and go elsewhere, although I didn't want to. By the end of the call, I was worried that they may have the police come get me.

It took a couple of more calls to finally reach an agreement. Their local police advised them not to force me to return because if I left again, they might never find me. My parents decided to take that advice and settle for contact. We had to write letters every few days, and they would call us once a week on the pay phone in the hall. But they hoped we'd choose to come back before long.



Bob returned a couple of days after my LSD trip with no more explanation than he had given when he left. I knew the drill. I wouldn't ask; he wouldn't ask. But it pained me not to discuss it.

"I got some pot seeds I've been saving," he said that day. "Thought I'd plant them in Topanga Canyon. Wanna take a ride?"

We spent the next few days together sharing greeting card experiences. We rode through the canyon and stopped at another beach, watched sunsets from the rock jetty near our house, and stayed up together until dawn. We sat on our rooftop eating spaghetti for breakfast and watching the sun rise. One afternoon as we laid together with our bodies intertwined, listening to the Crosby, Stills and Nash album, he looked into my green eyes and sang along with the haunting song "Guinnevere." The intimacy between us was growing.

A revelation had emerged during my acid trip with Ed about how deeply I loved Bob. Like psychedelic truth serum, there was no lying to myself, no feigning nonchalance. I wanted to tell him, but I was afraid. So I wrote him a letter.

When evening came, I handed it to him, announced that I was taking a walk, and fled the apartment. I circled the block, wondering if I had done the right thing, but our noncommittal relationship was becoming painful enough that I didn't care as long as something changed.

As I approached my building, I had a clear view into our dimly lit apartment. Bob had his jacket on and was leaning over my dresser, writing something. Immediately, I regretted my decision and was sure I'd driven him away.

Not wanting to face him, I raced to the third-floor roof of our building. I burst into tears as I watched his small red car weave its way up Pacific Avenue.



*I need some time to think*, his note said. That didn't sound menacing. But the waiting left me fidgety the next day. I finally went for a brisk walk toward the grocery store, so lost in thought that I didn't notice when a car pulled up beside me.

"Hey, Foxy, want a ride?" Bob's familiar voice caught me by surprise. When the Triumph stopped, my trembling hand struggled to open the door. As I climbed into the seat next to him, my heart raced.

He leaned over and kissed me tenderly, lingering for a moment to gaze into my eyes.

"Where're you going?" he asked, turning his attention back to driving.

As we drove to the grocery store, I tried to contain my excitement. I had expected him to be gone for several days, but not even twenty-four hours had passed. And that kiss! When we reached the parking lot, we sat in his car.

"Guess what?" he asked. "I got a job. I'm going to be working replacing glass for this company in Malibu, right in the Malibu movie colony. Far out, huh? It's a good thing, too, cause my unemployment just ended."

I gulped, realizing he would be here all the time now. "That's really far out. I've been looking, too. There was an ad in the paper at the phone company for operators. It said no experience required. I'm going to apply."

A rolled-up poster behind the seat caught my eye. It was new, and my curiosity got the better of me.

"What's this?" I asked. "Can I see it?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"Because. . . Never mind. I'll show it to you later."

This worried me. What was he hiding?

"If you're going to show it to me later, why can't I see it now?" I pressed.

I could see he was becoming irritated, but I couldn't stop myself. Too many unanswered questions left me impatient.

"Okay. If you want to see it that bad, I'll show it to you. It was supposed to be a surprise for later." He smirked as he reached for the poster in the backseat and handed it to me.

I unrolled it to find a picture of a long-haired girl sitting on a rock jetty, gazing out at the sunset over the ocean. Three simple phrases were printed in one corner:

*I believe in the sun, even when it does not shine.*

*I believe in God, even when he is silent.*

*I believe in love, even when I am alone.*

He studied my face as I read the words, their meaning filling me like a rush of heat.

"I was going to give it to you tonight," he explained. "I was going to wait until we were making love to tell you I love you. Then I was going to surprise you with the poster."

I rolled it up carefully, speechless from his romantic gesture. Looking into his eyes, I saw affection and uncertainty as he awaited my reaction. I fell into his arms, ecstatic.



## Chapter 8

February 1971

Venice, California

**S**unlight filled the room as I awoke the morning after Bob discovered he had lost his job. He had only been there a couple of weeks, but work had been slow. Through my half-closed eyes, I saw Bob's face leaning over me. As I forced myself awake, I realized he had his coat on. There was sadness in his eyes that frightened me.

"I have to leave for a while," he said.

I felt my stomach muscles tighten, waiting for the sledgehammer to fall.

"I'm not sure when I'll be back. Jack's going with me for a few days. But I will be back, I promise. I'm going to leave the quilt my mother made here. You keep it. That way, you know I'm really coming back."

He kissed me long and slow, like it would have to last, and I held on to him, afraid to let him out of my arms, afraid to face a day without him in it. Our plan to get a two-bedroom apartment together in Santa Monica with Anne once she and I found jobs was shattered.

"I love you," he assured me in a whisper.

I choked out my reply. "I love you, too. I'm going to miss you so much."

He looked away toward the window, and I saw the dampness in his eyes. His lips gripped together in what looked like a silent plea for self-control even as my own tears exploded.

He rose from the bed and grabbed his fully packed bag.

He hesitated by the door. "I will be back," he emphasized, then turned and left.



Anne understood my hurt. She licked my wounds like only a sister can and tried her best to take my mind off him. She'd become involved with Bill, Jack's roommate, and the two of them decided I should not be left alone.

Toward evening, Bill was getting fidgety, which was normal for Bill, since speed was his favorite drug. He popped the little white pills on a regular basis; they made him animated and talkative to extremes. Jack found Bill's behavior highly irritating, and the two of them were barely speaking by this point. So Jack's absence left Bill in a celebratory mood.

"Either of you been to the Sunset Strip?" he asked, his mustache wiggling as he licked his dry lips side to side.

"No, we haven't, except on the bus when we first got here," Anne said. "But I've heard a lot about it."

"Yeah, it's a real trip. When they say freaks there, they mean it." Bill giggled in short, quick laughs as he shuffled through his stuff, then jumped up and looked through Jack's ashtray for a cigarette butt. "But there's a whole bunch of clubs and you don't have to be twenty-one to go in all of them. There's always music. You want to go?"

"How will we get there?" Anne asked. "It's going to be dark soon."  
 "We'll hitch. I do it all the time." He gave a *why not* kind of shrug.  
 Anything that'd help me stop brooding about Bob was worth  
 a try.



We arrived at the Strip in the middle of chaos. Flashing neon lights and blasting music surrounded us as we wove our way through the human congestion on the sidewalk. Men in cars honked and yelled out to women nearby.

A guy leaned forward from the crowd as I passed and spoke into my ear. "Purple barrel acid. Two bucks. Reds, yellows, mescaline, anything you want."

Bill seized both our hands and pulled us into the nearest shop. It was lit by black lights. Posters of Jimi Hendrix and Janis Joplin adorned the walls next to pictures of huge marijuana leaves and motorcycle emblems. Santana's music poured from the speakers at decibel levels designed to block out conversation. I toyed with the small glass vials of liquid in rows on the counter. They were labeled "Essential Oils" and had names like Jasmine, Sandalwood, and Patchouli.

I touched Anne's arm and yelled in her ear, "This is that patchouli oil Ed was talking about! The stuff he said all hippie chicks wear and he can't stand!"

"I wish I could afford it." She picked up a bottle and sniffed before handing it to Bill to smell, but he was already familiar with it.

We giggled over the idea of a repellent that could keep Ed at a distance, then Bill pulled out his money for the cashier and handed the bottle to Anne. We walked back into the street and began dousing ourselves with it.

"Do you think it keeps away all the assholes?" Anne yelled to me as I rubbed the deep brown oil onto my arms and neck.

"I don't know, but this smells weird. I think I like it!" I yelled back.

"Let's find a place to get a drink," Bill said.

We passed by the checkerboard walls of the Whiskey A-Go-Go; its cover charge exceeded our budget, but a bar nearby had free admission and allowed minors. We went in.

The bar was dark, with black walls and ceilings. Over the stage was a sign that read OPEN JAM NIGHT, and a terrible band whose members looked like high school students blasted their guitars.

We sat around a table as far from the band as possible. An attractive, stoned-looking man wearing a tie-dyed tank top started dancing near our table, then asked me to join him. I stood and bounced around to the monotonous beat. For the moment my sadness faded, replaced by a hollow feeling of indifference.

"Ever do psilocybin?" he shouted in my ear over the noise of the band.

"Yeah, a few times." An image of sitting on a curb tripping with Bob, laughing and out of breath from our sprint along Pacific Avenue, came to mind. I tried to shut it off.

"I'm doing some right now. It's pretty good." He reached into his pocket and pulled out a small, oatmeal colored pill, handing it to me. "Here. It's on me."

Feeling careless, I slipped it into my mouth, thinking this would make the night fun. Soon after I swallowed, I regretted it. What if this was anything like the acid I did with Ed? I didn't know this guy; he could have given me anything. *Don't get paranoid*, I told myself. *Anne won't let anything bad happen to me.*

He talked and danced with the three of us as I slowly lost coherency and stumbled around. After some time, Anne and Bill

decided it was time to head home. On the return trip, I got despondent, crying on and off. It felt like hours getting back to Venice, moving from car to car as we caught rides through dark, confusing neighborhoods.

During one ride, the opening notes of Marvin Gaye's new song "What's Going On" came over the radio followed by his haunting voice—and a chill shot through me; it was as though I was feeling his song in my body. I leaned my head back against the seat and closed my eyes, dreaming awake, wondering how life would ever feel right again.

When we reached Venice, it was after midnight. Bill and Anne wanted to go to sleep, but I was still tripping and wide awake.

"I'm going over to Ed's house to get downers," I told Anne. "I need to sleep."

"Be careful on the bridge," Anne said.

Ed's house was near the canal, and occasionally there was a homeless guy under the bridge, but he never bothered me.



I wasn't too high to walk, but it was difficult to see, as I kept crying. When I arrived, it took Ed a few minutes to answer.

"Come in, it's good to see you. You haven't been by in a while." He looked me over for a minute as I stood in his living room. "You don't look good. What's the matter?"

"I'm tripping, and I don't want to be. Someone gave me psilocybin and I can't sleep. I need downers."

"Okay, I can do that. Have a seat. Is that all that's bothering you?"

My tear-streaked face must have given me away.

"That guy from Texas I was living with left this morning."

"You weren't in love with him, were you?" he asked.

I burst into tears.

"What did you do that for? Didn't I tell you to stay away from these transient guys? They're here, they're gone. I warned you. You don't want to go falling in love, you're too young. You haven't even lived for yourself yet."

"Yeah, but he's coming back. He said he was."

He looked at me and slowly shook his head. "Don't count on it, sweetheart," he said softly.

*It's not like that*, I wanted to say. *He's not one of those transient guys, this is different*. But Ed knew more about everything than I did. I wished I could have stopped myself from falling in love.

"Don't you worry about a thing. Doctor Ed will fix you right up." He pulled out a small wooden pipe with a bowl no bigger than a thumbtack, then unrolled a piece of foil, revealing a nugget of dark brown hashish. He snapped off a chunk, placed it in the pipe, and held his lighter over it while first I inhaled, then he did.

"Is that patchouli oil you're wearing?" he asked with a frown. "I thought you said you never heard of it."

"I hadn't. We bought it tonight on the Sunset Strip."

"God, I hate that stuff. Don't wear it anymore."

"I wasn't planning on coming here, but I didn't know where else to go."

"Well, you came to the right place." He stroked my hair and whispered, "You're so sweet, you don't ever need to worry, someone will always take care of you."

I tried to smile at his compliment, but underneath a nagging anger stirred that I didn't understand. Why did this make me uncomfortable? I should be pleased. I liked the idea of being taken care of. After all, I wasn't having any luck finding a job. Would someone always take care of me? Was I truly that sweet, that helpless, that useless?

I smoked more hash and put the thought deep in the back of my mind. For this moment, at least, Ed would take care of me.

He reached around me and started to remove my shirt.

"Ed, don't. I really don't want to do this, that's not why I came here. Can't we just talk?"

"Yeah, we can talk," he replied gently, continuing to pull at my clothes. "Aren't we talking?"

"You know what I mean. Stop it, please. I can't do this."

I struggled to push him away, but Ed wasn't hearing no. I knew he didn't believe me, why should I expect him to? It was a game to him, and he enjoyed playing it. I yelled for him to stop and pummeled his chest and arms with my fists. He covered my mouth with one hand and pinned my hands behind my back with the other. I bit him on the hand, the shoulder, anywhere I could reach, but he only grew more excited. I knew I was losing the battle.

"You're mine, you're mine," he repeated over and over in my ear when I finally gave up the fight.



A few days later, Anne and I were making lunch when a pounding on our apartment window startled us. She stuck her head around the corner from the kitchen to see who it was.

"It's Ed. I wonder what he wants."

Neither one of us wanted to see him, but she let him in at his urging.

"You both have to get to the clinic right away," he said. "I've got the clap, so you have it, too. Listen, I have to run, I've got a lot of other stops to make. See you both later."

He was gone as quickly as he arrived. Anne was avoiding looking me in the eye.

"You slept with him too?" I was stunned that I didn't know. I thought we talked about everything.

"Yeah. I don't know why, he's such a sleaze. He asked me not to say anything to you. I probably should have, but I was too embarrassed."

"It's not your fault," I told her. "I wish I'd stayed away from him, too. I feel gross. I wonder how long he's had it."

A wave of anxiety swept over me as I recalled the conversation Bob and I had the night before he left.

"I have to know something," he had asked me. "Have you slept with anyone else since you've been out here?"

I couldn't imagine why he was asking. Had he already been experiencing symptoms? Was that why he'd left?

I had told him the truth, because I never lied to someone I loved. Maybe it was a flaw of mine, this total honesty. I hadn't yet learned that many men couldn't handle honesty. I also hadn't learned that I could ask the same question of him. Instead I accepted the blame, carrying it with me like a scarlet letter, never questioning if only I was at fault. I had slept with two men, so I deserved whatever I got. Tramp. Slut. The words all fit, and I had the disease to prove it.



The humiliation continued at the clinic. People jammed the tiny waiting room. I put my name on the list under "Venereal Disease checkup." After half an hour, the woman at the desk called on me.

"I need to know the names and addresses of all your sexual partners in the last month," she ordered.

That was easy. I gave her the two, pointing out that one of them had left Los Angeles.

"Is that all of them?" She looked doubtful. "Because if there are any more, we need to know. That's the only way we can stop this from spreading."

"Really. That's all." Wasn't two enough? Was I that unusual?

Three and a half hours later, I finally had my turn to see the doctor.

"The tests won't be back for a few days, but since you know you've been exposed, we'll give you the medication anyhow."

He handed me a small brown envelope containing mint green capsules. Vibramycin. Two a day. No sex or alcohol for two weeks.



Right after Bob left, Anne had cut her hand on a piece of glass while taking out the garbage. Several days later, her arm grew swollen and red. Ed was the only person we knew with a car, and he reluctantly agreed to help.

"You're going to have to go to an LA County hospital since you don't have insurance," he explained, grabbing his car keys and leading us out the back door. "There's only two. One downtown and one in Torrance, twenty miles south of here. I think it will go quicker at Harbor General in Torrance. The gunshot wounds and OD's will all be downtown."

Several hours later, they admitted her and gave her IV antibiotics for the next week, leaving me in Venice on my own for the first time. Over the next few days, I dodged the landlady, who kept pounding on our door for the rent and threatening to put us out on the street. I explained that Anne had the money, but I couldn't get it out of her bank account because she was in the hospital. I don't think she believed me.

I was also penniless without Anne. Bill showed me how to cook brown rice so I would have food to eat until she returned. Between that and pancake mix, I wouldn't starve. He also hitchhiked with me to Torrance to visit her.

Still pining for Bob, I sometimes ran to the window thinking

I'd seen his car return, then broke into tears when I realized it wasn't him. I had never known pain like this before, pain that crept into my dreams and got under my skin. There was a new hit Janis Joplin song called "Me and Bobby Magee" that was on the radio constantly. I cried along with her every time she wailed about how much she missed holding Bobby, and I felt like I too had nothing left to lose.



Later that week, Jack returned from the desert. When he knocked on my door, I was ecstatic.

"Where's Bob? Did you ride back together?" I asked.

He grinned. "Last time I saw Bob, he was wasted out of his mind, tearing across the desert on his way to Houston."

I choked back the anguish rising in my throat. I didn't want Jack to see me cry and look vulnerable.

"I see you're all alone. Must be pretty lonely with Bob being gone. Want to take a walk?"

"Sure, I'd love to get out of here for a while," I said. I went on to explain about Anne being in the hospital.

We walked for ages, talking, following the beachfront path all the way to the Santa Monica pier and beyond. We stopped and watched the men work out at Muscle Beach, watched the sun dip into the ocean and the night sky appear. We walked along the water's edge and smoked a joint, and when we felt we couldn't walk any farther, we crossed the beach out to Highway 1 and hitchhiked back to the apartment house. I had never cared for Jack, but this evening I was grateful for his company. He was being nice, and I needed a friend.

When we reached my door, I told Jack how much I enjoyed the evening and wished him goodnight.

"Aren't you going to invite me in?" he asked.

"No, I'm going to sleep." I turned and unlocked the door.

"Not yet you're not." In one motion, he scooped me over his shoulder, pushed his way through the door, and slammed it behind him with his foot.

"Cut it out, Jack!" I yelled at him as he threw me on the bed.

"What are you doing? I thought you and Bob were good buddies."

"Well Bob's not here, is he?" He threw himself on top of me and held me motionless.

I lay there thinking to myself, *Go ahead, you bastard, rape me. You're going to get the clap, and you deserve it.*

Instead, he did nothing but look at me. Finally, he said, "You know, I could do anything I wanted to you right now and there'd be nothing you could do to stop me." He had that smug expression on his face he always had when he thought he was right and wanted you to know there was no point in arguing. "But I'm not gonna." He let go of me and I pulled away from him and moved toward the door.

"There's something I gotta tell you," he said, still lying on the bed. "I got a message to you from Bob. Seems that before he left, you gave him some kind of disease." He waited for my reaction, a cross between a smile and a sneer on his lips. Blood rushed to my cheeks, as though betrayal had slapped me in the face. How could Bob have humiliated me by telling Jack? Couldn't he have written a letter? Called me on the pay phone? Anything? At least Ed had the guts to tell me to my face.

"He was pretty pissed off," Jack continued. He gloated with superiority, grinning at me like he had the times he'd reminisced about torching hootches and killing gooks.

If this was a contest, Jack had won. I had been reduced to dirt. He stood, walked out the door, and slammed it behind him.

In that moment, I experienced a new kind of love—a love that Joe was teaching me, and I wanted to learn. A love that could be shared with everyone and would never hurt you. I was becoming part of this new world. From now on, I would believe in this universal love and never need to feel any pain again.



## Chapter 10

April 1971

Marina del Rey, California

I was enjoying the way the waterbed conformed, womb-like, to my body. I didn't want to wake up. I hoped Guy never returned from Hawaii, where he'd gone with Arnie following his party, so Joe and I could keep sleeping in his room like we'd been doing all week. Joe was crashing there now that his VW bus had been towed away.

A wave sent me bouncing and swaying as Joe leaned onto the bed, and I smelled the smoke before my eyes were fully open.

"Want a hit? It's almost gone."

I reached for the joint and forced myself into a sitting position.

All three roommates at the Marina del Rey townhouse who had bedrooms were from Chicago. Two of them, including Guy, ran a successful leather shop. The third, Rob, was a bum like the rest of us, living off unemployment after quitting his computer programming job to come west. He had become a good friend of mine.

When the joint was finished, Joe lit another Marlborough and went to take a shower. I could hear music from the next room, so I figured Rob was awake and walked next door to visit.

Rob was sitting on the floor, leaning against his bed, listening to music through his headphones. Tall and thin, with sharp, bony features, he had fine, ragged hair that was already receding at the age of twenty-six; its light brown color made it nearly invisible as it faded against his tanned skin. He wore wintry Chicago clothes: a corduroy shirt with a tiny flowered print and wide-wale corduroy pants rubbed thin at the knees from wear and age.

"Hey, Sharon, what's happening? Is that old man of yours talking this morning, or is he in one of his moods?" He slid the headphones around his neck as I settled on the floor beside him.

"Joe's fine. He's very intense, that's all."

"Intense is right. He needs to lighten up."

I had become used to confiding in Rob about Joe because I could talk to Rob about anything. I shared with him what was bothering me. "I feel like I'm doing something wrong, like I ought to be able to make him happy."

"Lady, there is nothing wrong with you." He smiled and shook his head in my direction. "He's the one with the problem. You could make anybody happy. Listen, I love Joe like my own brother, but I can't relate to his trip. He's all fucked up over his divorce."

"What should I do?"

"That's easy. Leave him alone. Let him brood if he wants to."

He removed the headphones from his neck and placed the pillow-like plastic cups over my ears. The music vibrated through my bones as though I were directly plugged into an amplifier. I closed my eyes and listened to Cat Stevens singing "Wild World" and I felt like the refrain could be about me. It made me sad.

After a couple of tunes, Rob took back his headphones.

"Earth to Sharon. Hey! Want to go for a ride on my bike?"

"I guess so," I said. "I'm stoned, I can handle it. As long as you promise not to drive too fast and scare the shit out of me."

Rob stood and pulled me to my feet. "You've never seen me ride *fast*. I only get really cranking when I'm alone, never with anyone on the back. Don't worry. You're safe."

I poked my head next door to grab my jacket and say good-bye to Joe, who was sitting on the bed deep in thought, smoking another joint. He gave me a nod in acknowledgement.

I followed Rob downstairs to the garage. He unlocked his modified 650 Triumph Chopper and rolled it into the driveway. The front wheel extended a few feet ahead of the bike and its handlebars stretched toward the sky.

Rob ran his wire-rimmed sunglasses around his ears, mounted the bike, and backed it out of the driveway before kick starting it.

"Hop on!" he yelled above the roar. I pulled down the stirrups and climbed onto the higher level of the two-tiered seat, leaning back against the support bar as I had done several times before, and we took off. Since I was riding higher than Rob, I could feel the wind hitting me in the face and rattling my long hair, yanking it into tangles.

We turned up a canyon road, leaning through the turns first one way and then the other, the pavement within arm's reach as we spun around hairpin corners on the edge of cliffs. Was there enough aerodynamic force at work to keep us from skidding sideways across the blacktop? I gripped Rob tighter and closed my eyes, terrified that an oncoming car waited for us around the next curve as the bike moved faster and faster.

Finally, I couldn't stand it any longer. "Stop! Stop! I'm getting off!"

I had threatened before to walk away into an unrecognizable part of LA County—day or night, it didn't matter. When

he pushed me to the point that I thought the end of my life was moments away, I was prepared to get home by thumb.

He pulled over and let me dismount.

"That's it! I'm hitching home! I don't know why I always ride with you. You get a charge out of this, don't you?"

His laughter showed I was right. "Aw, c'mon. I wasn't even going that fast. Why you always spoiling my fun?"

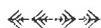
"You're a maniac."

"C'mon. Get on. I'll be good."

"I'm not going with you next time."

"Yeah, I know. That's what you said last time. Admit it, you love it."

Reluctantly, I mounted the bike again. He pulled back onto the road.



It was April 24th, the day of the San Francisco March for Peace, which was being held in coordination with a march that was happening in Washington DC the same day. Joe, Rob, Anne, and I had made the spontaneous decision to drive north so we could join in with thousands of others and experience the energy of that many caring people in one place, protesting the Vietnam War. This would be a historic event, the largest of its kind to be held in San Francisco.

Joe had an additional agenda. His ex-wife, Nancy, and four-year-old daughter lived nearby, and this was an opportunity for him to visit them.

I stood next to Rob's black and yellow '54 Chevy truck, which he affectionately called The Bubble Bee, and stared out between two mountains to the Pacific Ocean. I hadn't seen a sky that blue in months due to the smog in Venice, and the bright sun felt blinding.

We'd slept on the side of the road in Mt. Tamalpais State Park, Rob in a sleeping bag on the roof, Joe across the front seat, Anne and I sharing a mattress in the back. Now Joe was preparing breakfast on the two-burner Coleman stove—steamy black coffee in one pan and hard-boiled eggs in the other. I wrapped myself in his poncho against the crisp morning air. A Volkswagen beetle drove by and the driver waved, as did a young woman riding up the side of the mountain on a ten-speed bicycle.

"See what I mean about this place?" Joe threw his arms open. "It's great isn't it? People around here are like a bunch of little elves. They just appear out of the woods. This is the way it's supposed to be, not like that rat race back in LA." He poured me a cup of black coffee and I wrapped my hands around it to warm them. "Can you imagine my daughter growing up here? She'll be a little elf, just like them."

When Anne emerged from the truck, she looked pasty and stared at the ground, looking up only to make a face that I recognized as meaning she felt terrible. On the drive there the day before, she had taken LSD for the first time, and she had tossed and turned all night. I could tell she regretted her impulsive decision, and I felt sorry that I'd encouraged her.

Anne had always been more cautious than me. Since leaving home, I knew she'd been feeling the weight of responsibility, while I allowed myself to blunder into each new experience without concern for the consequences. I never worried about buying groceries or paying rent. Anne took care of supporting me with her unemployment and savings.

I also knew that when she didn't feel well, she was stubborn and inconsolable.

"I didn't sleep at all. I think I'm going to throw up." She leaned against the truck.

"Maybe you need to eat something."

"Eggs. Ugh. That will make me even sicker. Is there a piece of bread around here?"

Joe found part of a loaf tucked under a jacket and handed the bag to Anne.

"I have to go home. There is no way I'm going to walk around San Francisco in a crowd of people feeling like this." She tore a piece of bread from a slice and stuffed it into her mouth.

"Aw, c'mon. Be a sport." Rob walked over and put his arm around Anne to hug her.

"Fuck you." She threw off his arm and walked to the other side of the truck.

"What did I do?" Rob shook his head at Joe and me.

I shrugged. "It's not your fault. She gets this way when she doesn't feel good."

Joe stared at the ground, rubbing his beard for a moment, before looking up. "There's a bus station in Mill Valley. I bet she could get a bus back to LA from there."



Two hours later, I was waving good-bye to Anne at the bus station. It felt strange not having her with me while exploring a new place. It was the beginning of a split that would deepen with time.

By the time the bus arrived, it was too late to get to the demonstration before they closed the roads. We'd been warned the city would be shut down once they did. So Joe, Rob, and I spent the rest of the morning meandering around Marin County, exploring Stinson Beach, Bolinas, and Mt. Tamalpais. When we reached Nancy's house in San Anselmo late in the afternoon, we watched the news and learned that 150,000 or more people had marched down Geary Avenue. I was disappointed we hadn't been part of it.

Nancy was pretty, as I had expected—slender and feminine, with straight, dark, nicely trimmed hair. She oozed confidence and sarcasm; she seemed not a woman beaten by divorce but one freed by it. I couldn't help comparing myself to her, an exercise that left me miserable. For one thing, she was at least ten years older than me. I was still sixteen. I had nothing interesting to say, or even a single enlightened statement to make. During my months in Venice, I'd gained weight from gorging on junk food after getting stoned. Now my clothes fit too snugly, and next to svelte, delicate Nancy, I looked blubber-like. Joe insisted we were cosmic sisters, but I felt like a cosmic klutz as I tried to be useful in the kitchen. As Nancy chopped salad, I did my best to cut through the carrots, but my knife kept slipping and I almost cut myself. She graciously asked if I could set the table as she took over the carrots.

Meanwhile, their daughter hovered around Joe, climbing on and off his lap and making a fuss when he wasn't paying attention to her.

Nancy rented the room she inhabited with their daughter from a man who worked for a music magazine. We spent hours listening to music I hadn't heard before from the demo copies he'd brought home from work. When the time came to go to bed, Joe suggested that he and I could sleep in the truck, but Nancy teased him, asking, "What's the matter, Joe, can't handle two old ladies in the same house?"

As a result, Joe insisted we sleep on the floor in the living room, right outside of where Nancy slept with their daughter in a double bed behind a curtain. Rob slept on the other end of the living room on the couch. No one asked what I thought, and I felt unworthy of offering an opinion. I was extremely uncomfortable and barely spoke throughout our stay. I wished I could disappear.



In the morning, still lying on the floor in the living room, I heard Joe arguing with Nancy in the kitchen. I wished I didn't have to listen to this. Joe had told me previously that one of the reasons he wanted to visit her was to talk her out of pressing him for child support payments he owed, claiming it was unsisterly of her. As they spoke, he accused her of being too hung up on security and suggested she trust all her brothers and sisters to take care of her.

"How come you never want to see your daughter?" she demanded.

"I don't want her to get hung up on the idea of me as her father. Everyone's her father. Richard's her father, Tom's her father, Rob's her father—"

"I don't want to be a father!" Rob called out from the living room, looking over at me with a smirk and shaking his head.

Nancy wasn't giving in. "You don't care about her at all. You even gave all her clothes to somebody else."

I believed Joe wasn't saying these things out of selfishness but from of a belief that by relinquishing material belongings, you became a better person. This apparently connected you with the vast universal consciousness where we all became one. At twelve, I had read books about saints, aching inside for the strength to be as good as them and capable of devoting myself to faith. In Joe I sensed that same devotion, a belief strong enough that ordinary human relationships paled in comparison. In my mind, he couldn't do or say anything wrong. If I didn't agree with him, then I must be at fault.

Yet as I lay there, something nagged at me, and I couldn't help but sympathize with Nancy. A child had to eat, after all.

And why had he given away all her clothes? Couldn't he have given them to her?

"I'm the one who's taking care of her. I'm the one who goes to work every day so she can have a home and food on her table. What do you do?"

"You've sold out to the system," he argued back. "I won't do that. I will not support this warmongering society where all that matters is how much money you have. We're making a new world—no, a new universe. Our consciousness is going to move beyond all of this, to a place where there are no mothers and fathers, only equals, only brothers and sisters, can't you see that? Can't you be part of that?"

"My job does not support warmongers. Come on! I work for a leather shop! We're making a new society, but it's a society that can feed you while you step outside of the bounds of tradition. And what about you? I mean, you were a hairstylist, for Christ's sake. How is that supporting the war?"

"It was Beverly Hills! That's as warmongering as you can get. I styled hair for all those people shopping at Georgio and driving Lincolns. It was starting to make me sick. Where do you think their money came from? Someone was burning babies to get rich."

"Joe, you've even abandoned your music. What's happening to you?"

I rolled over and peered into the kitchen. Joe was silent, but fidgety. He dug into his cigarette pack, only to find it empty, then crumpled it into a ball. Nancy handed him one of hers.

"I'm moving on. I'm casting off everything. That stuff was my ego. When it's all gone, I'll be a free man, one with the universe. I'll have reached a state of perfect consciousness."

I studied Joe from the living room floor, saddened by that too-familiar look of anguish on his tense face. I wanted to believe in him—he was my man, after all—but I feared he was wrong.



Back in LA a few days later, Joe was indeed casting off everything.

“That was a good thing for me when my bus was towed with most of my belongings,” he said. We were getting stoned in Rob’s room with the music playing. “Now I don’t have to be hung up on needing it. You’re lucky, Sharon. You never got involved in owning stuff. You’re pure, uncorrupted, a true child of the universe. That’s beautiful. Me, I have to reach bottom before I can be truly pure, before I can find my way back up. I’m not there yet. I’m still on the way down.”

He opened his film canister of crushed LSD, licked his finger, jabbed it into the white powder, and sucked it off like a child eating icing from a cake before handing it to me. I was careful to take a small amount. Rob reached for the canister as well.

It had become a ritual since we’d returned from San Francisco, eating small amounts of acid each day for the purpose of maintaining an ongoing higher consciousness. I was spending nearly all my time at their house, and Anne seldom joined us anymore, since she preferred to forgo the tripping.

Joe turned his head from side to side and rolled his shoulders—what he always did to ease tension. “I met this guy Jeff today. He’s hitching around on the coast with only a Frisbee for luggage. Far out, huh? Anyhow, he lives on this commune in Eureka, and he’s here looking for new members. It’s way out in a redwood forest: no locks on the doors, no cops, no bullshit. That’s the place for me. For all of us! We should all go. How trippy would that be?”

Rob nodded. “Sounds great. I could get into it. I’ve had it with this bullshit going on around here. This dude was telling me there’s a major drug bust coming, like three hundred John Doe

warrants coming out just for Venice. LA sucks. We’re going to have to deep-clean the house.”

I’d never heard of a John Doe warrant. Rob explained how all they needed was an address to come and search your house, not the names of people living there.

“I heard it’s coming this weekend. We’re going to have to lock all the doors for once. You got a key, Joe?”

“I don’t need one. I won’t be here. I’m leaving with Jeff on Thursday.”

I was startled and hurt by this news, feeling a cross between *Why didn’t you tell me* and *Why can’t I go*? It was obvious from Joe’s remark that he meant to go alone, and I felt like I’d failed. My hero was leaving me behind. He was casting off attachments, and after a few weeks together, I had become one.

He looked into my eyes and raised his eyebrow, as though asking how I was taking the news. I made an effort to smile and he grinned back at me, nodding. *It’s going to be all right*, his eyes said.

“Rob, you going to come to Eureka?”

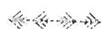
“Yeah, I think I will. I’m ready to bust out of here. I’ll need a trailer for my bike to tow it with the Bubble Bee.” He looked at the floor as though mulling over the necessary activities for a few moments. “Yeah, I’d say in about two weeks I could be ready to go.”

Joe turned to me. “Why don’t you ride along with Rob when he comes?”

I was confused. Did this mean Joe wanted me to be with him, or was he trying to pair me up with Rob? Perhaps the pairing made sense to him, since I had always been closer to Rob than I was to him. Then it dawned on me: Joe believed we were all one consciousness—all friends, all lovers. He wanted me there because I was part of his universe, pure and uncorrupted, like Eureka.

I nodded back. "Okay."

He was grinning as wide as the Santa Monica Freeway now.



Hot rumors blew in with the Santa Ana winds, making everyone jumpy. We heard the bust was delayed, but it was still on. I helped the roommates vacuum the shag carpeting for roaches and pills, clean out the sofas, empty the ashtrays, and throw out the vacuum cleaner bags. What few drugs Rob had left he stashed inside the gas tank of his motorcycle, sealed in a plastic bag. I was still staying there most nights, even though Joe had left a few days earlier. I wanted that emotional connection.

In preparation for the bust, the house was clean of drugs and the doors were all locked. It was quiet until morning, when we heard a sudden pounding on the front door that sounded frantic.

Rob sprang to the window to check for cops. "Aw fuck, it's only Jeff. What a jerk. I thought he had a key." He bounced down the stairs to the front door. He had never liked Jeff. He only tolerated him because he was Joe's friend.

"Jesus, what's your problem?" I heard Rob yell as he unlocked the door.

"You fucking asshole!" Jeff shouted as he entered. "I've been banging on this door all night. I was having a bad trip and I couldn't even get in my own house. You left me out there! How come you never answered the door, asshole?"

"Hey, man, I thought you had a key," I heard Rob reply. "I never heard any knocking until now. You must have been knocking on another door."

I could see Jeff now, and his eyes were wild. He raised his fist and swung at Rob, landing a smack to his jaw and then another quick blow to his stomach. Rob doubled over for a moment, caught

off guard. Between the grunts and punches I heard myself screaming, "Stop it, Jeff. Stop it! He didn't lock you out. *STOP IT!*"

Jeff ignored me and backed Rob against a wall next to a dresser. Rob's years in Chicago seemed to instinctively return. His eyes were frantic, scanning the dresser top, and I barely saw his hand snatch an open jackknife and raise it toward Jeff's throat.

I flew from the room and raced downstairs, not bothering to shut the front door, not looking back to see what had happened. My heart pounded as my feet ran. I needed to get out of there. What was happening? Was all this talk of loving each other and building a new world bullshit? I was sick of Venice, sick of the paranoia, sick of feeling manipulated, sick of the idealism that disappeared when anything went wrong. How would Eureka be any better?

I was nearly home when I heard the roar of Rob's motorcycle behind me. I couldn't stand to look at him, or talk to him, or begin to think about what happened.

"Sharon, wait! I need to talk to you!"

I ducked into an alley that led to the back of my apartment house and stood by the back door, shaking and crying. If I waited awhile, if he didn't find me, maybe he'd go away, I thought.

A few minutes later, he burst into the alley. I started to run, but he grabbed me before I could get away.

"Where are you going? What did I do? I was just trying to defend myself! Soon as I held up that knife, Jeff backed down. But there I was, numb with pain, trying not to get beaten up, and I turn around and you've run out. What's going on?"

I didn't know how to explain. I couldn't put into words the flood of emotions and horrible doubt.

"Rob, I don't want to go to Eureka. It's going to be more of this same shit. Jeff's going, too. How's it going to be any different from Venice?"

"There won't be any locked doors in Eureka. Everyone's uptight because of what's going on around here. Once we get out of LA, things will be better. Really. I know they will."

He put his arms around me and stroked my hair as I buried my head in his chest and let the tears run onto his shirt. I couldn't find it in myself to believe anything would be better in Eureka. I felt burnt out and depressed and yearned for a stable relationship with someone who truly loved *me*, not just all humanity.

We walked inside to my apartment and Anne was there. She gave me an odd look and I wondered why.

"A letter came for you from Boston." Her voice was monotone. Boston? Who did I know in Boston?

I was shocked when I discovered it was from Eddie. It seemed like another lifetime when I knew him.

Rob told me he would talk to me later and left.

*I miss you, the letter said. I've been looking all over for you. Carolyn gave me your address. Here is my number and the code to make up phone credit card numbers so you can call me for free. I still love you. Eddie.*

Wow. Eddie missed me and had gone through trouble to look for me? I was stunned. There was a time when there was nothing I'd wanted to hear more than words like this from him, but now I wasn't sure how I felt.

I walked to a pay phone on the street so they couldn't trace the call to our building, and moments later, Eddie was on the phone.

"Hey babe, I found you, this is great! You should see this place I'm living in right now. I got a great apartment on Beacon Hill. I'm getting into a work training program. The only thing missing is you. I want you back."

I was speechless.

"Hello?"

"I'm still here. I don't know what to say."

"Say you'll come back to me. I know I screwed up. I know I wasn't always good to you the way I should have been, but this will be different."

"Why don't you come visit me in California? We can see how things go."

"I hate fucking California. But if that's what you want, okay. I'll come to California. I have to get some new tires first. I don't know if the Dodge is gonna make it on these tires. I drove her all the way back to Boston, and to Florida and back. Pretty good car, huh?"

"The best," I agreed, feeling nostalgic.

"I'll call you in a few days and tell you when I'm coming."

Everything felt confusing. I thought back to a time less than six months earlier when I'd believed all my problems would be solved if I left home, that everything wrong with my life was because of my parents. And in a sense, I was right. The problems I had then had all been solved. Only now I had new problems, ones that were far more complex than I'd ever imagined. I'd had no idea life would be so difficult once I had the freedom to make my own decisions.

Eddie called a few days later.

"The Dodge isn't gonna make it. Besides, if I come to California, I'll miss getting into that training program at Mass General. Why don't you come to Boston? I'll send you the money to fly."

Eddie cared enough that he would send me plane fare? He really had changed!

"Let me think about it."

I thought about everything that had happened since I'd arrived in California. How Bob had broken my heart, how Joe needed to cast me off, how the cops hounded all of us whatever we were doing, how any happiness I found was soon destroyed. I felt drained and unable to put faith in the unknown that waited

in Eureka, and staying in California with Anne felt like more of the same.

I couldn't think of a reason to stay in Venice any longer. Eddie said he wanted to make a life with me and make me happy, and in this moment of vulnerability, I trusted him one more time.



## Chapter 11

May 1971

Boston, Massachusetts

I stared out the airplane window at blackness, glad my stomach felt better, wishing I could sleep. I was nervous on my first flight, and turbulence set in quickly as we took off. Before we reached flying altitude, I reached for the barf bag.

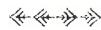
Now I had long, dark hours to worry about seeing Eddie again, and to reflect upon how different I felt leaving California from when I arrived. Anne and I had exchanged a tearful good-bye at the airport. She'd wished me luck, but I knew she thought I was making a mistake.

I tried to remember how it felt to love Eddie, but the memory was cloudy. Eddie begging me to come back to him proved there was justice, didn't it? He had come to his senses and realized he loved me. He would be different now, I was sure of that. And now that I was on my own, with no more interfering parents, what could go wrong?

I had some pure acid left. I'd hidden it under my floor-length, purple dress, tucked away with a few downers in case of

a difficult LSD crash. This was a special gift. Eddie and I would trip together, and this would help us renew our love and feel close again. I tried to remember feeling close to Eddie, but all my memories were vague.

From thirty thousand feet, I watched morning unfold as a pale, faint light seeping across the sky. The golden glow on the horizon reminded me of religious book covers showing the awakening of faith. The vision filled me with hope for this new day in a new life.



When we landed, I retrieved my US Army backpack from the baggage claim and hobbled to the pay phone. Two weeks earlier, I had dislocated my knee while prancing downstairs. The swelling wasn't as bad now, but I still had it wrapped in an ace bandage and winced from pain if I tried walking normal.

"Call me when you arrive," Eddie had told me. "I don't want to park. I'll pick you up in front of the terminal."

After the call, I limped out front and waited for the Dodge to make its appearance, waited to rush into Eddie's arms and have him tell me how much he missed me.

Ten minutes . . . twenty minutes . . . a half-hour. Was I standing in the wrong spot? Had he gotten lost? Caught in traffic?

Another half-hour later, I spotted the Dodge as it pulled alongside the curb. There was the dark, shaggy hair I remembered, the mustache, the narrow eyes, the Eddie scowl. I rushed forward and opened the passenger's side door.

"Get in!" he yelled from the driver's seat, barely glancing at me, his focus glued to the rearview mirror.

I managed a smile as I shoved my pack into the front and shimmied in after it.

"You got fat," he growled. His scowl continued and I felt ashamed. Shifting into drive, he pulled away from the curb and began the drive to my new home with neither a kiss nor a hello.

"This is the worst fucking time to be driving to the airport, right in the middle of fucking rush hour."

I stared at the angry profile fidgeting with the mirrors and hanging onto the steering wheel like he was attacking it. A wave of heat began to creep along my arms. Oh my lord, what had I done? I recognized the Eddie I had managed to forget. No wonder my memory was cloudy. Why would I want to remember this?

Eddie cursed and ranted while we inched through traffic. A jumble of red brick buildings rose up a hill on my right. He turned up one of the streets and climbed the one-way road, rounded the block, and then pulled between two cars in an area marked NO PARKING that was full of cars.

As we got out, he explained. "They only tow the cars on each end. As long as I park in the middle, they don't fuck with me."

I took a deep breath to calm myself and scanned the neighborhood.

Four-story brick buildings poised themselves like prison walls, locking in the humid, still air; the stench of garbage and dog feces rose from the sidewalk. I longed for that breeze off the ocean.

We walked downhill. Eddie stopped at a building and unlocked the black, wooden door at the entrance. The musty smell of age hit me as I entered.

"We're on the third floor." He climbed the stairs, leaving me to carry my bag. "Hurry up, you need the exercise, you gotta lose a few pounds." His voice began fading as he ascended. "Sure didn't take care of yourself out there, did you? What's taking you so long?"

It was useless trying to tell him about my knee. I finally caught up as he stopped to unlock the door. I might have been

angry if I wasn't in such a state of shock, half numb from the long flight and no sleep. Disbelief overwhelmed my emotions, as did the realization that I was stuck here: I'd come on a one-way ticket.

A clean-cut man with strawberry-blond hair, freckles, and glasses, wearing a button-down shirt and a tie, arrived at the door to greet us.

"You must be Sharon." He extended his hand with a smile as I entered. "I'm Bill, the roommate. Ignore the rags, I'm on my way to work. This is *not* the real me. How was your flight?"

"Long and bumpy. I got sick at the beginning, but I was all right after that. Where do you work?" I stood near the entrance, not sure what to do next.

"At a bank. It sucks, but it pays the rent. I don't plan to be there any longer than I have to. Once I have enough money, I'm going hit the road like everyone else. Except I want my own wheels and money in my pocket. I'm not cut out for poverty."

Ed took over speaking for both of us. "She'll be getting a job soon, too. And when this program starts at the hospital, I'll be making money."

"Hey, don't sweat it. I know you'll come through. See you both later." He gave another smile as he left.

"Put your stuff over there." Eddie motioned toward a mattress on the floor in the corner of the living room next to some boxes. "That's my bed. Bill has the bedroom. You got to start working right away 'cause we owe Bill money for rent and the plane ticket. I had to borrow that from him. I heard they're hiring at Stop and Shop down the street. We'll take a walk over there later."

I wanted to work. My inability to get hired for anything haunted me. Maybe Eddie would be nicer if we both had jobs. At least I could give him a chance.

He sat on the mattress next to me as I unpacked my small bag and dug through my things. When nothing of interest appeared, he grabbed my pocketbook and started rummaging through it without asking. Before I could object, he held up my birth control pills.

"What are these for?" he demanded.

"What do you think they're for? So I don't get pregnant, of course."

"You been doing it with another guy? Couldn't you wait for me?" His face twisted into an accusing look.

"Eddie, I didn't even know where you were. I didn't expect to ever hear from you again."

"Well, you don't need these now. I won't get you pregnant." He paused giving me a sideways glance. "And even if you did get pregnant, wouldn't that be far out? Wouldn't you love to have a little baby girl with long black hair who'd wear pretty dresses?"

"No, I really don't think I'm ready for that."

*Especially with you*, I wanted to blurt out, but I kept silent, just like I had for all the other wrongs I'd felt that morning. How could he even think about having a child while living on a mattress in someone's living room? Maybe I did stupid things, but I knew having a baby was serious. A baby needed a home, and parents who loved her. No matter how much I'd fought with or disagreed with my parents, I'd never once doubted their love.

As I thought about my parents, I missed them for the first time, deeply missed them. It was too bad I couldn't stand to live with them. I had no plans of telling them I was in Boston; it was only two hours away, and if they knew I was that close, they would try to make me come back. I would keep calling them, but I would pretend I was in still in California. How could I possibly go live there and relinquish control to them again after everything

I had experienced? If I'd felt suffocated before, it would be even worse now.

I finished unpacking, then slipped the leather pouch out from under my dress that I'd brought the drugs in.

"What you got there?" Eddie looked interested.

"I have pure LSD. It's the best, made by a chemist a friend of mine knew. I thought we could trip together. There're downers to crash with too." I hoped he would understand what a wonderful gift I had brought for us.

"Let me see those." He reached out to me, took the pouch, and shook the contents into his hand. After picking out the downers, I followed him into the bathroom, where he threw the LSD into the toilet, and flushed it. My mouth dropped open.

"That stuff's garbage. It'll fuck with your head. I can't believe people are still doing that shit." He grinned as he waved the downers in front of me. "Now these I can use."

Reaching into the medicine cabinet, he pulled out a syringe and a bent spoon. He opened the red gelatin capsules and emptied them into the spoon, added a few drops of water, and flicked on his lighter, heating the liquid to dissolve it. After drawing it into the syringe, he pulled his belt off, sat on the toilet, and wrapped the belt around his arm. As he pulled it through the loop and tugged it in the opposite direction, my last hope for our relationship vanished and I felt like I might vomit.

"This isn't working. You're going to have to help me out here." He motioned for me to take the end of the belt and I followed his instructions, fearful of his reaction if I refused. "Pull on this . . . tight . . . *tighter* . . . come *on*, you can do better than that, what are you, weak?"

I tried not to shake, following his orders silently, looking away out the window. If he had beaten me, it couldn't have hurt any

worse. What a terrible mistake I had made coming here. I had to get back to California. I could get a job, hide the money, I'd find a way back. I had to. I couldn't possibly live like this.

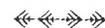


Later that night, on his mattress with the lights out, I went through the motions he expected of me.

"I love you," he told me.

I didn't care.

"I love you, too." My tongue felt clumsy, stumbling on the lie. How wrong it felt to be wasting those words on Eddie. Daggers of guilt dug into me for speaking them. I remembered the joy I'd felt when I'd said them to Bob, the way my whole being had responded when he'd whispered them to me. I wondered how long it would take to stop remembering, stop hurting over losing that love. I waited until Eddie fell asleep, then I buried my head in the pillow and wept.



Climbing the three floors to the apartment still hurt my knee, especially now that I'd spent all day on my feet at the grocery store. I'd gotten hired by Stop and Shop the day after I arrived, and now it was nearly three weeks later. The joy of finally getting a job had disappeared as soon as I had to run a cash register.

The Stop and Shop at the Charles River Plaza was one of the busiest of its stores in New England. As the only grocery store within walking distance of the heavily populated Beacon Hill, and next door to Massachusetts General Hospital, the lines stretched out from the moment I began work until I punched the clock at the end of the day. Customers glared at me for not moving fast enough. I tried to hurry as I manually entered the price of each item

on the clunky cash register, then bagged it. Older people dragging shopping carts insisted I divide their groceries so the bags didn't weigh much and complained if one bag had too many cans and another too many vegetables, then wanted me to repack them. I made mistakes making change, which people pointed out when I shorted them. I figured I overpaid sometimes too, but of course no one ever mentioned that. Nearly every day my register was a little short, and I worried they would think I was stealing money.

Eddie's training program never did start, and I wasn't surprised. I had abandoned faking a relationship with him. I concentrated on trying to find a ride back to California and avoided being in the apartment as much as possible.

I retrieved the key from my pocket that Bill had given me when he moved and unlocked the door. Bill had figured Eddie out not long after I had and had decided to dump the freeloader by moving elsewhere. Out of sympathy, he'd given me his bedroom and his key, telling me I could stay for the last two weeks since the rent was paid. I hoped I would find a ride back west before the time ran out.

Using the fake phone credit card, I called Anne daily; she kept me updated on her life in Venice, and I rehashed how she'd been right about Eddie. She was kind enough not to say I told you so, offering sympathy and hope for a return ride.

As I pushed the door open, the safety chain blocked it.

"Eddie, open the door, it's me!" I heard his voice muttering, and then a girl giggled. No one approached the door. "Eddie, I know you're in there. Open the goddamn door! I don't care who you're in bed with. Let me in!"

There was heavy breathing, but no footsteps. I kicked the door and yelled, but to no avail. Finally, I sat on the steps and waited with my grocery bag.

A few minutes later, Eddie opened the chain and a young, dark-haired girl brushed past me. I stormed past Eddie to the kitchen.

"You're really rude, banging on the door like that. I just wanted a little privacy. Why didn't you go take a walk or something?"

"I don't want to walk. I've been working all day. I'm hungry and I want to eat!"

Roaches scurried into the drain as I shifted dishes from the counter into the sink. No one washed dishes except me, and each day when I returned from work, I found that more had appeared. Thankfully, with Bill gone, I no longer had to clean for him, so I'd quit. I washed what I needed and left the rest to rot.

I waited for Eddie to leave the apartment before emptying my bag. The refrigerator was empty of edible food. I hid the bread and eggs on a low shelf behind slimy lettuce. Eighteen cents for a loaf of junky white bread and twenty-seven cents for six small eggs was the cheapest solution I could find to feed myself. I had change back from my two quarters. Perhaps with only dirty pans for cooking, Eddie might not be tempted to steal my food. This had to last two more days, until my paycheck.

After eating, I walked over to the band shell by the Charles River. There were free concerts on Thursday nights, and on my two other visits I'd met local hippies and transients. We'd gotten stoned, exchanged stories, and listened to whatever music was being performed.

When I reached the park, only a few people were mulling around, and the stage was empty.

"The concert was canceled."

I turned around to see a man with dark hair and a mustache sitting on a concrete wall. He was wearing a long-sleeve shirt and jeans, smiling at me, and holding an unlit cigarette in his hand. "Got a light?"

"Sure." I dug through my bag for the matches I always carried in case a joint was offered. "That's a bummer. I wonder who was playing?"

"Got me. Me and my buddies figured we'd go over to the Music Hall." He lit his cigarette and handed the matches back to me. "The James Gang's playing."

"Really? I love the James Gang." They were one of the bands Rob, Joe, Anne, and I had often listened to in Rob's room in Venice. "I never hear them here but they're popular in California."

"You from California?"

"No, but I was living there until a few weeks ago. I'm trying to find a ride back. My sister lives there."

His expression showed interest. "Oh yeah? I might be driving out there in a couple of weeks. I just got discharged from the Army. Got back from 'Nam a few weeks ago. I live in Worcester, but I can't go hanging around there. I think I'm gonna look up an old Army buddy out west. You could come along for the ride if I go. Wanna get high?"

I nodded. *This could be my lucky night*, I thought, hoping this could turn into the ride I needed.

He reached into his pocket for a joint, lit it with the end of his cigarette, and inhaled before passing it to me. He introduced himself as Paul, and then we sat together on the wall and smoked, telling each other about our lives. I explained how I had run away and was sixteen but had found a job in Boston. I could contribute money for gas.

He had his own holdup. "I gotta kick this smack habit I picked up in 'Nam. Everybody was doing it; you wouldn't believe the vets with habits."

"I thought the Army had treatment centers for that."

"No way in hell I'm going to those Army hospitals." He cringed. "People die in there. I'll do it myself. I keep cutting back little by little. I'm down to about a bag a day, enough to keep from getting sick. Couple more weeks and I'm clean."

A younger guy who looked very much like Paul strolled over to us.

"This is my brother, Mark." Mark nodded toward me in acknowledgment and Paul asked him where the others were.

"Waiting for you, over by the walkway. You coming?"

"Sure. Sharon's coming to the concert too, aren't you?" Paul asked.

"Are you guys buying tickets? Because I don't have any money."

Paul shook his head. "We don't have any money either. We're gonna try to sneak in."

With that, we left, joining three more guys and two girls for the long walk to the theater district, crossing the Boston Common through landscaped shrubbery, towering maple trees, and park benches. Squirrels scampered across the sidewalk and pigeons fluttered out of our path, interrupted from dining on the bread-crumbs tossed to them by an aging lady sitting in layers of clothing. On another bench, a man slept covered in newspapers, his arm dangling from under them toward a wrinkled paper bag that lay beneath the bench, a bottle neck protruding from it.

"Hey, Gramps," one of the guys in the group yelled at him as he kicked the bottle from under the bench. A wizened, startled face popped up and the newspapers slid to the ground. Three of the guys laughed, shoving and punching at each other over the joke. I felt sorry for the old drunk. Why did they have to harass him? He wasn't bothering anyone.

When we reached the other end of the Common, they all headed into a donut shop. The two other girls walked off by themselves and turned their backs, having a private conversation. The three guys who'd been walking with them yelled over, "Hey, what's with you chicks? You coming with us?"

The girls shook their heads no and walked off. I felt apprehensive being the only girl left with the group as I didn't care for Paul's three friends, but I was looking forward to the concert and growing impatient.

After a long while of us doing nothing, the manager of the donut shop announced we had to go if we weren't going to order anything, or he'd call the cops. I was grateful.

We split up when we reached the concert hall for the purpose of sneaking in. After a few minutes, Mark walked over to where Paul and I were standing and told us to follow him.

"This guy will let us in at the side door," he explained as we followed. "He said they hardly sold any tickets."

No one paid any attention when we walked into the lobby.

Rita Coolidge and Kris Kristofferson were on stage with her band, playing the warm-up set. A large block of rows in the back was empty. I sat next to Mark, who was sitting at the end of the group. Mark shared a joint with me and we laughed together. By the time the James Gang was on stage, I had a good buzz and was ready for rock and roll.

As the band pumped electrical sound into the audience, the six of us wound our way to the area in front of the stage and stayed there for over an hour during the rest of the set. Joe Walsh's wailing guitar riffs got me moving to the music. I danced in rhythm to the pounding bass, hooting and stomping; the guys jumped like madmen and played air guitar. It felt good to finally enjoy myself, to have fun and get a bit wild.

After the concert, I announced I needed to get home because I had to work in the morning. I hadn't expected to be out this late.

"Let's hang out for a while," Mark said. "There's no hurry. We'll walk you back."

I didn't feel like hanging out—I was exhausted—but I also

didn't relish the idea of making the long, lonely walk to the other side of the park by myself. It was after midnight, and Boston never felt safe to me even in the daytime. I decided to wait until they were ready to move on.

They lurked around, two or three of them at a time off alone, talking, laughing, like there was a joke I wouldn't get. The tone in their voices was making me uncomfortable. There was a side glance, a snicker. I was growing anxious and finally announced I was heading home, hoping this would get them moving.

It did.

"Let's cut through this way," Mark ordered. "It's shorter."

There was a giggle. Paul hung back from the others. I didn't like walking straight through the park, as there were no lights off the main sidewalk. I couldn't see very well, and I was still limping. Suddenly, Mark reached over and took my hand, and one of the others took my other hand, and they started running, pulling me along faster and faster. I didn't understand why. The grass flew under my feet as I looked at the ground and tried not to trip. I couldn't run that fast, my knee would collapse. "*Don't run!*" I shouted. "*Slow down!*" But they were laughing like they didn't hear me, and then I either tripped or they pulled me to the ground.

I slammed my hip when I landed because I couldn't put out my hands to stop myself. Why were they doing this? Where was Paul? I thought he liked me. Why was he ignoring what was happening?

Mark and one of the others pinned my arms down. A third one was unbuttoning my pants, pulling them off. They were laughing, excited, like craziness was in the still summer air, and they didn't care who I was, only what I was. "She's been asking for it all night," one of them said. He didn't speak to me directly, only to the others, as if I wasn't there. "She's been asking for it all night, now she's gonna get it."

How could this be happening? I thought we were all friends—getting high, dancing, singing, having fun. I was one of them, wasn't I? I was like one of the guys.

But of course, I wasn't. I could never be one of them. That would make us equals and give me a choice, and I had no choice. They were making that clear. It was their choice. It had nothing to do with me.

Someone was unbuckling his belt, kneeling over me. Adrenaline shot through me, causing my heart to pound, and I pulled at both my arms to break free, but one of them dug their fingers into my skin like claws, strong enough to keep me still, and I couldn't budge. I began to cry, but I didn't try to stop them, because I was broken and could do nothing. They had won.

I turned away and looked at the ground as I cried, wishing I could cover my face, staring at the patchy grass worn thin by too many feet crisscrossing that park, too many squirrels, pigeons, too many old ladies whose lives were in shopping bags, too many young punks with pumped up blood who kicked old drunks and raped women. This thin grass had seen it all, had told this story too many times, could barely sustain itself against the beating it took each day as it was systematically ground into dirt.

"Stop!" Paul's voice interrupted like a loudspeaker in the execution room, coming from a place where he had separated himself and could avoid participating in the group slaughter. "Hey guys, I don't think we should be doing this."

There was a moment of hesitation while all of them froze, like in a child's game when someone spins around and yells, "RED LIGHT!"

"She's only sixteen. We're gonna fuck up her head. This is not cool. I really think we should not be doing this."

The guy kneeling over me who was about to violate me first backed away. One of them let go of an arm, and a moment later,

the other let go, too. I sprang to my feet, pulled on my pants, and ran for the direction of Beacon Hill, stumbling over unseen bumps and holes in the darkness, my knee sending sharp jolts of pain with each step.

When I was out of breath, I walked. No one was following, I was probably safe. *Close one*, I thought, but it was okay, everything would be okay. I was breathing fast, my heart racing, my palms cold. What had I done wrong? Why did they think they could do this to me?

"Sharon!" I heard Paul's voice calling. "Sharon, wait a minute. I need to talk to you. I'm not going to hurt you."

I couldn't run if I wanted to. I was panting, and my knee throbbed. He caught up to me as I walked, heart pounding, wondering what might happen next.

"Listen, I'm sorry. It wasn't supposed to happen like this. We all got carried away. They all have something they want to say to you, too."

The others sauntered behind him, looking at the ground, and each muttered a forced "sorry." Evidently Paul was in charge here, and they looked to him for their approval.

"See guys, I told you she has a good head. The fact that she's even listening to us after what happened proves that. Come on. We'll walk you home. No hassles, I promise."

The rest of the walk home was uneventful. They goofed around as though nothing had happened and I tried to act like that was true as I watched for any hint of danger, hurrying along and occasionally getting ahead of them. When we reached my building, Eddie was walking out the door and held it open for me. "Who's your friends?"

"No one."

I told the others good-bye and went inside, even more depressed that my only hope for a ride had evaporated.

bed, wondering what was coming, twiddling my hair between my thumb and forefinger.

She looked up and stared at me, unblinking. "You'll never be happy with him. He's a perfectionist, like his father. He'll make you miserable, the way his father has made me miserable. I was young and in love like you are, once."

I looked at the floor, intimidated by her brutal honesty.

"I was only eighteen when Ernie was born, a few months older than you. Look at us. Is this what you want your life to be?" She put her glass on the dresser top. "We don't even have sex anymore. I lie in my bed awake at night listening to the two of you, next to a man who won't even touch me. Get out now while you can. You have no idea what a favor I'm doing you. Maybe one day you'll appreciate this." She retrieved her glass and left the room.

I felt as if the wind had been knocked out of me. I wondered how many drinks she'd needed to talk about this. I tried to squelch the ideas she'd planted with logic. After all, Ernie wasn't conservative like his father. And I wasn't like her. It was a different world from twenty years ago. We had no intention of getting married. Well, maybe way off in the future. Besides, if Ernie didn't touch me for even a day, I'd know there was a problem.

I'd begun to feel better by the time he returned. I ignored the odd, nagging sensation deep in my gut. I didn't even notice when it grew wider and larger each day—not until I finally decided it was a better idea for me to return to Connecticut to finish my last year of high school while Ernie went to college.

## Chapter 22

July 1973

Candor, New York

I took a deep breath, inhaling the sweet scent of meadow grass and wildflowers, noticing a faint hint of the dairy barn I had passed a while back. These were the aromas of my new home, the home I would soon see at the top of the dirt road I was climbing, a commune named Hubbard Hill.

I plodded along the steep, rutted road, sweating in the July heat under my jeans and tank top. Tenya, my nine-month-old Irish setter, trotted ahead of me on her leash, weaving from one side of the road to the other on her skinny legs, stopping to sniff at curiosities that eluded me.

I stopped to adjust the weight of my backpack, full of the belongings I expected to need living in the country, as it was digging into my shoulder blades. Pulling on the straps, I shifted the frame higher and pulled the waistband tighter before continuing.

Around each bend of the road I expected to see the log cabin, which I understood to be the first building I'd reach, but instead

there was more road. A horse fly buzzed around my head, hovering near enough to annoy me until I shook my braid at it.

I stopped again to catch my breath. There wasn't a house or a barn in sight, just rolling, distant hills, patches of trees, and forests beyond the meadows. What had begun as a dream a year ago in Hope, British Columbia, was becoming reality. I'd fantasized many times while reading the classifieds in *Mother Earth News Magazine*, where people and communes advertised in an attempt to find compatible new homes or new members, but it wasn't until I'd broken up with Ernie that I'd pursued the opportunity. After spending nearly all of my senior year in high school in a long-distance relationship with him, I came to realize we'd never agree on what we wanted in life. Once we were over and I'd graduated high school, I was free to seek the commune life with similarly minded people.

I'd answered a classified ad by Hubbard Hill seeking new members and received a letter back from Jodi, describing the commune and inviting me to visit. I'd been particularly pleased that she indicated men and women were treated as equals. She'd explained that each person built their own yurt to live anywhere on the one hundred and eighty acres of hills, fields, and forests, while the community house was a log cabin used for cooking and meals. The members were vegetarians, like I'd become that winter, and supported themselves by making crafts. She also wrote that they had no electricity or plumbing.

Even though I was excited, I was also apprehensive. What if they didn't like me, or they thought I knew too little about living off the land? I wanted to live on a commune that respected the earth, with members who lived in harmony with it and each other. Hubbard Hill portrayed that ideal to me in Jodi's letter.

The first sign that I was nearly there was the vegetable garden,

a sprawling mass of tangled vines, giant squash leaves, and rows of bean poles. It was enclosed in chicken wire, with a gate framed from wood scraps.

Not long after, the green-and-red checkerboard roof of the log cabin came into view. It stood perched on cement block pillars, a large window facing downhill toward me, with two smaller windows on either side. My heart raced even faster than it was already from the climb.

Several dogs rushed forward to greet us, yelping and barking, and Tenya dove behind me, wrapping her leash around my legs, forcing me to stop and step out of it. At the same moment, the screen door popped open and out walked a smiling man in a T-shirt and bellbottom jeans with long, dark hair in a ponytail and a full beard. My heart still pounded, and I was afraid I might make a stumbling fool of myself during the introductions. Would they see through me to my complete ignorance?

"Hi, I'm Sharon. Did you get my letter that I was coming?" I'd written to tell them I'd be arriving on July 15th.

"Sure did. We've been waiting for you. Welcome to Hubbard Hill. I'm Mike."

My first impression of him was his kind face and transparent warmth; he was the kind of emissary who could put anyone at ease. I relaxed a bit.

"Don't let the dogs scare you," he said. "They just like to make a lot of noise. Come on in and meet the others. I just finished making dinner. Are you hungry?"

"Yes, I am." I was lying; I didn't know if I could eat in my current state of anxiousness. But I was pleased that a man had done the cooking. Mike held the door and Tenya scooted ahead. Another Irish setter rose from the floor, and the two began the doggy dance of sniffing around one another.

The inside of the cabin was dark and funky, with bark-covered log walls, a plywood floor, cabinets made of vertical wood that matched the logs, and a mass of old furniture.

Two men and a woman sitting at a table made from a huge telephone wire spool in front of the picture window greeted me with a chorus of hellos. I realized they'd had a view of me as I approached the cabin.

"Have a seat," said one of the men, nodding toward an empty antique chair at the table. "How did you get here? Didn't you have a ride?"

"My parents drove me, but they were afraid to drive up the hill." I removed my pack and sat in the chair. "They said they were worried about getting stuck, but I think they were afraid of who might be here."

They all laughed.

"That's quite a walk. Have any trouble finding the place?" Mike asked.

"No, the directions were great. I followed the map."

"Everyone introduce themselves," he said. "I have to get the Mexican pan bread out of the oven."

"Mike does most of the cooking here," explained a thin, wiry man with chin-length, kinky, dark hair, a short beard, wired-rimmed glasses, a narrow face, and a protruding nose. "I'm Peter, the only original member still living here. Bonnie was one of the originals, too, but she's moved on."

"Yeah, I live in Ithaca now," said the woman. Her curly dark hair formed waves around her shoulders. "That's my Irish setter who's making friends with yours. Nice to meet you."

"Well, I live here." The next guy was a well-tanned, muscular man wearing only red shorts, with a lot of bushy, long, dark hair in a ponytail and a thick beard. His mouth was lopsided as he

forced out his words. "I'm John. I like to work in the garden . . . and I'm . . . building barns right now with a crew . . . I've been here since . . . last September. Welcome to Hubbard Hill." He gave me an enthusiastic grin.

"Where's Jodi?" I asked. "She's the one who wrote to me."

"She went to Florida for a while," Peter replied. "We're not sure how long she'll be gone, but hopefully she'll be back soon."

A heavy clay bowl filled with salad sat in the middle of the table. John stood and got plates and silverware for everyone. The others already had glasses of water and mugs of herbal tea.

"You want some water?" Mike asked from the kitchen area, where shelves were stocked with canned goods, jars, and dishware, while pots and pans hung from nails above the propane gas stove. A counter divided the kitchen area from the rest of the cabin.

"Yes, please," I replied.

He reached under the counter, uncovered a five-gallon metal milk can, and ladled out some water into a glass for me. "We have to haul the water in these milk cans since we don't have a pump for our well," he told me.

"The well is one hundred and twenty feet deep," Peter said. "You can't prime a pump that deep by hand, you need electricity, which we don't have. It costs too much to get the electricity here, because they charge you for every pole they install, and it's a half-mile uphill. We can't afford it."

"How about a generator?" I asked.

"We've talked about a generator," he said. "But there's the issue of the noise and the smell. They run off gasoline, and they're loud. People thought it would spoil the atmosphere."

"Where do you get your water?"

"In the winter, there're streams that run," Peter said. "It's clean, because we're the highest point on this hill. But this time of year,

they're dried up, so we fill them from the faucet in the farmer's barn at the bottom of the hill. He's been good about letting us do that."

Mike placed a cheese-covered pie dish in the middle of the table. He sliced it into pie-shaped pieces and took a slice before handing the spatula to Peter. The insides resembled hamburger, but Mike said it was made from black beans, corn meal, onions, and eggs.

Just then, another man came in, gray clay speckling his brown hair and beard. He sat across the table from me in the last chair as Bonnie passed me the spatula to serve myself some dinner.

"Hi, I'm Don," he said to me with a smile. "I heard you arrive, but I was in the middle of throwing a pot that I wanted to finish. I have a potter's wheel in the shed, but I'm getting ready to build a new yurt that's going to be my workshop."

"How long have you been making pottery?" I asked, dishing pan bread onto my plate.

"I started doing it as a hobby when I was at Cornell and enjoyed it. When I moved here a year and a half ago, I started again." Don dished salad onto his plate. "First I was going to the studio at Cornell to work, but now that my wheel is here, I accumulate my work and then haul it there to be fired."

"That must be a pain."

"It is. I'm planning to build a kiln here once we have the money. Hopefully before winter."

"Great dinner, Mike," Bonnie said, taking a breath between gulps.

"Another good one . . . Mike," John said.

"Mexican pan bread is one of our favorites," Peter told me.

The conversation stopped as everyone ate. I had never eaten a meatless entree before, and I found it delicious. As a vegetarian living with my parents, I ate the same as them but skipped the meat.

Peter addressed the group after a while. "Should we ask Sharon to take a dish week now that she's here?"

There was laughter.

"That would sure make me happy," Don said, "because I'm supposed to be next."

"Dish week is the only rule we have here," Peter explained. "Nobody tells anyone what to do with their time, except for dish week." Peter had a grin on his face now, and it spread to the other members at the table. "Because there's no running water, you can't do the dishes every day. You have to haul the water, pour it into those dishpans over there, and heat them on the stove. With all these people eating three meals a day, baking bread, and canning, we make a bunch of messy dishes. Everyone takes turns getting a dish week, and your dish week ends whenever you finish on Sunday. The only rule about when you do them is we can't run out of dishes. Most of the time, that means about every two days."

"It gets good . . . and stuck on," John added.

"It helps if you bribe Mike not to cook anything that takes too many pans," Peter said.

"I'll take the next dish week," I told them, eager to be accepted.

"All right, Sharon!" John responded, nodding his head in my direction.

"That's okay," Don said. "I'll take this week and you can go next. It's probably not fair to throw you right into dish week the day you arrive."

I thanked him, relieved.

When dinner ended, Peter took me on a tour of the yurts. I followed him across a field along a well-worn path.

"Yurts are originally from Mongolia," he explained. "The nomads make them out of yak hides, rolling them up to take with them. Ours of course are stationary, but the tax inspector called

them tent frames, so they aren't taxed. Another reason we keep building them."

"What are they made out of?" I asked as he showed me Don's yurt, the first we encountered.

"There's a latticework of wood that forms the frame. A cable between the walls and the roof holds the whole thing together. Over that we put insulation, tar paper, roofing shingles, and sometimes burlap to cover the fiberglass." He pointed out the different parts of Don's yurt before continuing. "We've experimented with a few different materials, but we keep trying new things to see what works. We may find ways to build them cheaper, or with recycled stuff. You can cut any size or shape doors and windows. But there's always a skylight at the peak of the roof that we cover with old windows or plastic."

We arrived at Peter's yurt. He swung open his diamond-shaped plywood door and attached the latch on it to a hook on the wall to hold it open. Inside it seemed huge—big enough for a raised double bed on a wooden platform, a dresser, many shelves, and a long workbench built into one area. There was a small tin wood stove on four legs for heat, with the pipe vented out the side of the yurt.

He pulled out a few pieces of the silver jewelry he'd made and showed me new designs he was trying. "Most jewelers hate to file, but I smoke a joint and sit here filing for hours. That way I can make some bizarre shapes. People buy hand-crafted items because they want something unique and artistic."

He showed me the other yurts before we headed back to the cabin. When we reached it, Bonnie was getting ready to leave, piling her Irish setter into her car. Mike had finished the dishes and was lighting the gas lamps hanging from the ceiling beams that ran off a tank of propane fed through tubes. They burned nearly as bright as electric bulbs.

Peter pointed out the flashlights for trips to the outhouse below the cabin to the right.

"Pee outside anywhere you want," he told me. "Everyone does. There's lime in the outhouse. It doesn't smell as long as you dump at least a cup or more of lime on after you take a shit. You can sleep in any of the yurts you want, or in the loft. There are mattresses on both ends. When we first moved here, everyone slept in the cabin because it was the first building we built."

"I'll sleep in the loft for now," I said, thinking how awkward any other arrangement would be.

The cabin loft was divided into two sides, with a wooden catwalk connecting the two and a ladder for access. At bedtime, I carried Tenya up the ladder, then unrolled my sleeping bag onto a mattress. We lay down together and I stroked her fur while my head buzzed with the myriad possibilities of living here and getting to know these new people.



## Chapter 23

July 1973

Hubbard Hill

**B**y Wednesday, I was settling into my surroundings. Since I loved baking bread, which I'd taught myself to do using *The Tassajara Bread Book*, I decided to try it out at Hubbard Hill.

In my first three days, I discovered that life at Hubbard Hill revolved around preparing food. Since there was no refrigeration, everything was cooked daily from scratch. This process took hours, since all the grains, beans, and legumes were dried and needed soaking and pre-cooking, and some were used in every meal. The bread-baking process took almost five hours, including activating the yeast, punching down the dough and letting it rise again, forming loaves, and baking, and the bread ran out every two to three days.

I searched through the grain closet for my ingredients. Tins marked with masking tape and black ink contained food purchased in bulk from the Ithaca Food Co-op: bulgur, red lentils, soybeans, wheat, oat and rye flour, dried apricots, raisins, dates,

corn meal, split peas, dried milk, sesame seeds, and brown rice were some of the staples.

After warming water in a kettle, I combined it with yeast in a large bowl, then added honey, dry milk, and whole-wheat flour. Once I mixed it, I placed it in the oven with the door open and turned the temperature on low. Too hot and the yeast would die. Too cool and the yeast would not activate.

Next, I took a walk to the garden to see what was ready. Lettuce, spinach, and pole beans were fully grown. I picked some of each for dinner. In the weeks that followed, summer squash would become abundant, along with tomatoes, cucumbers, eggplant, onions, peppers, and okra. No two dinners were ever the same.

By early evening, Mike and John had returned from work and Peter was back from buying jewelry supplies. Don had been throwing pottery much of the day.

My first bread came out of the oven and the yeasty scent filled the cabin. The guys circled around, slicing off large, steaming chunks and smothering it in butter and globs of honey.

"Wow, this is incredible," Mike said with his usual sincerity and a big smile. "I think we found ourselves a new bread baker."

"Good . . . stuff," John agreed in between chews, his mouth full. Within minutes the first loaf was gone.

"We would have been back sooner, but we stopped off at the lake," Mike said.

"Shit, you guys went to Empire Lake without us?" Peter protested. "Hey, how about tomorrow we all meet there after work? We could bring dinner and eat there. I could sure use a shower by now. And Sharon can get to see the lake."

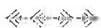
"Empire Lake is where we go to shower this time of year," Mike explained, cutting another slice of bread. "It's run by SUNY Binghamton, the state college, so they have great facilities for all

the students. Plus this beautiful lake in the middle of the woods that no one even knows is there.”

“And the best part is,” Peter said, “it’s mostly all us locals from the communes in the area. The students only go there on weekends. And no one has to wear clothes. I mean, you can if you want to. But they don’t care if there’s a bunch of stark-naked hippies running around. It’s truly clothing optional.”

“Sounds cool,” I lied. I wasn’t sure which worried me more: the prospect of making a fool of myself in the water by not being able to swim, or getting naked for the first time in front of all my male commune partners. Nudity with my lover was fine, but this was different.

As I thought about it, I realized that this was about trust. Not just getting naked at the lake but also living with a group of people. There had to be trust that they wouldn’t hurt me or humiliate me—that they would be there for me, and I would learn to be there for them.



When the weekend arrived, we were out of bread again, so I baked a batch of six loaves after breakfast. John was working in the garden, Peter and Don popped in and out of the cabin for food while they were working on pottery and jewelry, but by noon, I hadn’t seen Mike all day. When Peter came in for lunch, he explained that Mike was in his yurt, tripping.

I was attracted to Mike, and curious about him too. I wondered if I should walk out to his yurt and knock on the door . . . or would that be presumptuous?

Instead, I went for a hike that would lead me past his yurt. I followed a path along the edge of the tree line that looked out across an open field to distant blue green hills.

When I came to a V-shaped pine grove, there stood Mike’s yurt, plopped among the trees like a Hobbit house, a large blue eye painted on the front door that stared at approaching visitors. I inhaled the sweet scent of pine needles that covered the ground as I slowed my gait, making sure I wouldn’t pass too quickly by his large, open window.

“Hello there,” he called out to me.

Looking in, I saw Mike sitting on his bed. “How’s it going?” I called back.

“Really good. Would you like to come in?”

My tactic had worked!

I walked over to the entrance and entered past the eye. Mike lowered himself onto the floor, saving a piece of rug so I could sit across from him. He usually wore his hair in a ponytail but today he’d left it loose and flowing over his shoulders in shiny, mahogany waves that reminded me of Jesus Christ. Mike radiated kindness and sincerity. He was always praising my smallest contributions and going out of his way to put me at ease.

He explained that he had taken three hits of acid, an amount I considered extreme, yet he spoke quietly and smiled, behaving normally. We traded stories on our backgrounds. He told me about his life, starting with Catholic school in his South Philly Italian neighborhood. After graduation, he moved to New York City because movies were his passion.

“I won third place in the National Kodak Teenage Film Awards for an animated film I created. My brother shrinks into this toy person who has to find his way off the bed and ends up getting stepped on. I was nineteen and totally naïve, so when this movie studio in New York called me and wanted to hire me, I was thrilled.”

“Wow. You must have freaked.” I was in awe. I had never met anyone involved in movies.

"I did." His face turned sad. "I went to New York as an idealistic kid expecting to make movies, because that was all I ever wanted to do. They wanted some gopher they could hire cheap to do their dirty work. Their studio made soft porn. After wasting two years working for those assholes, I realized that dream wasn't going to happen. I hung around New York a couple of more years, hoping for a break, until I finally capitulated. One day I saw an ad for Hubbard Hill in the Village. So here I am, where there isn't even electricity, never mind a movie projector."

"Do you miss all that?"

"Not the bullshit. But I miss watching movies on the big screen. I like to sit close, second or third row, so there's nothing between me and the screen. I get lost in them. Have you ever felt that way?"

He looked into my eyes and I was drawn to the intensity of his gaze. *George Harrison eyes*, I thought, noticing how Mike's thick eyebrows arched the way George's did. He'd been my favorite Beatle when I was ten; I'd been in love with his big brown eyes.

"Yeah, when I saw *Romeo and Juliet* in eighth grade," I said. "I saw it twice, but I could have watched it a hundred times. And it was Shakespeare. I'm amazed I knew what they were saying."

"Franco Zeffirelli. That was a beautiful film. But I think all the guys went to see Olivia Hussey's tit."

We giggled together a little, and then Mike couldn't stop laughing, which caused me to laugh even harder, until we were both wiping tears from our eyes. Soon he was crawling around the room on his hands and knees, pulling out artifacts to show me.

"Take a look at this." He opened a huge book and, shifting closer, showed me a series of photos of a person running, then walking, then jumping; another of a horse trotting and breaking into a gallop.

"Muybridge studied motion using cameras in the 1800s, before film. See how each photo is one shift in movement from

the one before it? This is what animators study. When you are creating an animated character on film, the model must be moved in tiny increments, to give it the appearance of being alive. The real masters make the motion look fluid and flawless."

He reached under his bed and slid out a box. In it lay a wrinkled, tangerine-colored rubber creature over a foot tall, with short, mangled arms and a hunched back. He lifted it out and stood it on the floor, smiling like a proud father. "I built this guy. He's a special effects model."

He handed it to me to examine, explaining how it was constructed with multi-rotational joints that gave it jaw movements, facial expressions, fingers, and knuckles, so it could bend, twist, dip, and stretch. He explained the process I took for granted—the five-minute sequence that took weeks to create, the dedication it took an animator to fashion an imagined living being out of ball bearings and liquid latex to breathe life into it.

We spent the rest of the afternoon talking and laughing, sitting close together, and learning about each other but never quite touching, except for the occasional brush of the arm.



"Sunday morning, time for Communion," John announced to the rest of us sitting around the table in the cabin as he stood above us. "Now stick out your tongue . . . and Father John will administer . . . the sacrament."

"AHHHH." Peter stretched out his tongue in mock reverence as John placed the tiny white LSD tablet in Peter's mouth. Peter swallowed and took a gulp of tea, looking around at the rest of us with a grin reminiscent of a little boy who's just hit the teacher with a spit ball.

"You forgot to say Amen," John chastised Peter.

"What do I know about this? I'm Jewish!" Peter hunched his shoulders and laughed.

John walked over to Don and held another tablet above his head, reciting a phrase that I guessed was in Latin, which brought more giggles from all of us. I could see John was enjoying this.

Peter shook his head. "I can't believe you know all this stuff. Imagine that. Hubbard Hill has its own priest! We've had a lot of different people here, but this is a first."

"Almost priest," John said as he made the sign of the cross over Don. "I dropped out before . . . completing the vows. Say Amen . . . Don."

"Amen!" Don yelled out like he was at a Baptist revival meeting. John chuckled and placed the tablet on Don's tongue.

"None for me, thanks," Mike replied when John turned to him. "I had my share yesterday. Today's my day of rest."

"Sharon," John turned to me. "Are you going to . . . to join us?"

Two years before, I had quit tripping and sworn I'd never do it again. I was torn between wanting to participate and being afraid of the drug. Yet by watching Mike the day before, I could tell this wasn't very strong LSD. Perhaps a little wouldn't hurt.

"I don't want to take a whole one," I said. "Give me a quarter."

"A quarter?" John looked stunned. "You won't even feel . . . a quarter. I already took . . . two."

Mike interrupted. "If she wants to do a quarter, that's her choice. Let her do a quarter."

"How strong do you think it is?" I asked Mike.

"Not strong at all. But do whatever you feel like. Half probably wouldn't bother you."

"Okay. I'll do half."

John broke the tablet in two and I stuck out my tongue while I muttered Amen, taking pleasure in the dig at the Catholic Church.

"I'll take the other half," Peter offered.

The reason for tripping was because Hubbard Hill had been asked to help raise a roof on a yurt someone was building, and according to their tradition, they always tripped when they raised a yurt roof. However, they'd been asked because the people building the yurt didn't know how to assemble the roof.

By the time we drove to the construction site in the woods, Peter, John, and Don could barely speak two words without breaking into hysterics. The yurt owner looked concerned.

Peter leaned over to him and said in a low voice, "We're all tripping."

The yurt owner folded his arms and shook his head.

"Sorry," Peter said solemnly. Then the fits of laughter began again.

"But Mike's okay," Peter added, seemingly as an afterthought. "He's seen it done. He can get you through it."

The yurt owner, looking relieved, led us over to the rest of the crew.

I was still coherent, feeling a little high and enjoying the beauty of the day. Several other hippies stood around the yurt waiting for direction. Mike walked over to a pile of lumber and selected a pair of boards.

"I see you already nailed together the one-by-twos. You have fifty pairs?" he asked, pulling the set he was holding apart to examine the nail placement.

"Yes, I do," the yurt owner replied.

"Good. Let's get started. We're going to need some poles for bracing. You have any scraps around?"

I watched Mike demonstrate how to make braces for balancing the roof as others copied him. He stationed us around the interior perimeter of the yurt walls. He had the others raise a pair

of boards and rest them on the braces we were holding, opening them, scissor-like, and then raising the next pair and nesting the tops together until the fourth set was raised. He nailed the end of the first set to the end of the fourth set, and the nail between the two boards straddled the wire that held the walls together.

I recognized the pattern and knew what should happen next. *This is easy*, I realized. Don, Peter, and John tried to keep from giggling while holding the support braces, while Mike hammered the sets together and others carried new pairs of lumber over. There was confusion as a couple of new people tried to maneuver the roof lattice into place, until I explained it to them. The next thing I knew, I was telling them how to lay the following set of boards and how far over to place them to connect them, and where the wire belonged.

We progressed smoothly around the circle. Mike smiled at me as he hammered, silently letting me take the lead.

Finally, the circle was completed, the support braces were removed, and the roof leaned into itself, leaving a three-foot opening in the center for the skylight. Peter, Don, John, and Mike hoisted the yurt owner until he could grab the opening. They stepped away as he hung there, swinging from his new roof, as we all cheered. We formed a circle beneath the dangling yurt owner with his other friends, wrapping our arms around each other. I felt incredible energy flowing through me, this mass of human good vibes, as we gazed at the yurt owner's triumphant face.



Afterward, we drove to Empire Lake. This was my second trip, and this time I felt comfortable taking off my clothes; in fact, I barely noticed that we were all naked.

When I stepped into the water, it felt like silk caressing my body, cool and inviting. Mike suggested I lean back and try to float,

assuring me he would stand next to me and catch me if I sank. I knew the hardest part was to relax and trust the water to support me. I stretched out my arms, slid back, and closed my eyes. The water seemed to buoy me in a cradle. I was floating, as if I had been floating forever!

I opened my eyes and looked at Mike, completely unafraid. He was smiling at me, waiting in case I should need him. I knew he understood, because he hadn't learned to swim until he was nineteen.

After a few moments, my feet began to sink, so I stood.

"I knew you could do it," he told me. "If you can float, you can swim on your back. You start to move your arms as you're floating and pull yourself through the water." He leaned back and demonstrated.

I was touched by his effort to help me. No one had ever tried to teach me to swim except my father, once, when I was eight, which ended with my sister accidentally dropping me underwater when she reached to fix her slipping bathing suit strap.

When Mike stood again, I leaned into the water, followed his instruction, and felt myself moving backwards. I was swimming!

"Damn it," I heard Don yell nearby. "I stepped on a nail."

Mike and I ran from the water and joined the others coming on shore. Peter stooped and looked at the bottom of Don's foot.

"The nail's rusty. We better get you to a doctor right away for a tetanus shot. This could get serious. There's that doctor who has his office at his house in the center of Candor."

We gathered our things and rushed for the parking lot, piling into John's red Opal station wagon. Mike and I slid in the back next to Peter, crushed against each other. Mike reached over and took my hand in his as we smiled at each other, oblivious to Don's pain.

When we reached the doctor's office, John, Don, and Peter got out.

"We'll wait here," Mike told them, and I didn't disagree. When the others disappeared inside, he leaned over and kissed me, and I felt a rush of excitement pour over me. Mike was different from any man I had ever known. Besides being my friend, we shared the same ideals, the same vision; we wanted the same kind of lifestyle. As we kissed, I knew this was the beginning of a good relationship.



When we arrived at the cabin later, four people were standing outside, next to a car. They looked like a family—a short-haired man in his early thirties, a woman about the same age, and two little blond children, a boy and a girl.

"Who's this?" Don asked, but no one knew.

"Is this Hubbard Hill?" the man asked as we climbed out of the Opal.

"Yes it is," Peter answered. "How can we help you?"

"I'm Helen," the woman said, stepping forward. "I wrote to you and said I would be coming. I'm here to see about joining the commune. These are my children, Todd and Amy. And this is Tim. He's a friend from Ithaca who came with me to look around."

"Welcome," John said. "We just came back . . . from swimming. Come on in."

Mike was still holding my hand. He looked at me and whispered, "Want to come out to my yurt?"

"Okay," I whispered back, not caring about Helen.

"See you guys later," he said, and there were smiles from the rest of the Hubbards as we walked off to Mike's yurt.



## Chapter 24

July 1973

Hubbard Hill

**M**y first round of dishes for my dish week was two days after Helen arrived. I had two large enamel pans of water steaming on the counter, one bubbling with dish soap, the other accumulating a film from rinsing all the cups and glasses. Silverware, spatulas, cooking spoons, and chopping knives soaked in the wash water while I placed stacks of plates and bowls on top of them. Three frying pans, a wok, and two glass casserole pans were next.

Throughout my ordeal, Helen sat at the table talking with me while Todd played outside. Amy stood by her mother, periodically lifting her shirt as though asking to nurse. Finally, Helen scooped her onto her lap and Amy reached for her mother's milk.

"They recommend you nurse children until at least age two or three for good health," Helen said. "In fact, it's better if you let them give it up when they're ready. In other cultures, women nurse until their children are seven or eight."

"Are you going to nurse Amy that long?" I scrubbed a plate and stacked it in the rinse water.

"I don't think it should be up to me. She'll know when it's time. Neither of us are ready to quit yet. She only just turned two. Back in Ossining, people thought I was a pervert. That's how sick that society is, suggesting a perfectly natural act between mother and child is deviant. I'm glad to be out of there. I've been dreaming about this since Amy was born. Now, here I am!" She gave me a big smile and shook her short brown hair out of her eyes as she cradled Amy.

The benefits of nursing babies bored me. I figured if I had one someday, far in the future, I would probably nurse mine, since it was gaining in popularity, especially among hippies—but in the meantime, I had no interest. Helen looked matronly to me and was older than the rest of us. I wondered how she and her children would fit in, and if she had other communes she was considering.

"Why did you pick Hubbard Hill?" I asked.

"I think because it's near Ithaca. I went to school at Cornell. I was happy then, and I haven't been since." Amy stopped nursing and looked at me. As Helen started to lift her from her lap, she pulled up Helen's shirt and began again. "It was my fault for marrying Chuck. I let myself get trapped into that female stereotype. After all, every woman I knew was getting married, and I figured Chuck would make a perfect husband." She paused for a moment, and then laughed. "Actually, he is a perfect husband. There's nothing wrong with Chuck, it's me that wants out. I feel like there's no *me* anymore. I'm just Chuck's wife and Todd and Amy's mother. The world is moving on while I'm playing house in Westchester. It's pathetic."

Amy slid from her mother's lap and stood between her legs, gaping at me. I added more soap to the wash water and twirled it around, hoping it would make more bubbles, but it felt too cold. I put the wash pan back on the stove to reheat with the silverware still in it, then heard an unfamiliar female voice outside the door, speaking to Todd in a southern drawl.

"And who might you be? What are you holding in your hand? . . . Let me see . . . Oh! You have a toad! Well, it looks like it's dead to me. How long have you been holding that poor thing?"

A girl about my age with long blond hair almost to her waist burst through the screen door of the cabin and gave Helen and me a puzzled look.

"Who are y'all, and where is everyone?"

"I'm Sharon." I smiled, wiping my hands on the dishtowel, as I headed toward her. "Are you Jodi?"

"That's me. You're the woman with the Irish setter that I wrote to, right?"

"Yep. I made it here." As I reached her, I put out my arms to hug her, and she responded by hugging me back. "They're going to be thrilled you are back."

"Well I sure missed them, too! Where are they?"

"John and Mike are off building barns. Peter drove to Ithaca, and Don went into town to do laundry."

"Shit. My whole drive back from Florida I kept imagining running into the cabin and finding everyone waiting for me. Well, I guess I'll have to wait a bit longer." She surveyed the cabin as I went back to the rinse pan to shift dishes to the drying rack. "I see they've got you doing dish week. Didn't take them long to palm that one off, did it?"

I laughed. "Oh, I don't mind. I offered to go next to be useful. I've been baking a lot of bread, too. Are you hungry?"

"Oh! Fresh-baked bread! Oh God, how I've missed that. It is so good to be back home."

Throughout this conversation, Helen sat silently, watching the two of us. Amy was leaning against her mother, yanking on her shirt again.

"And who are you?" Jodi finally asked.

"I'm Helen. I arrived Sunday."

"Are these your children? Because one of them has been holding a toad so long the poor thing died, and he still won't put it down." She stood facing Helen in her chair as Amy crawled into her lap again.

"Well, he's curious, that's all." Helen cuddled Amy. "I'm sure he didn't mean to hurt it. This is how children learn. He's too young to understand about dying yet."

Jodi didn't move. "Well, I think the toad was too young to understand about dying either, but he does now. I don't think he should still be carrying it around. Shouldn't you say something to him?"

"I don't want him to develop a hang-up about this. This is his first experience with death. I think it's important for adults not to lay our negative feelings on our children. They should form their own judgments."

Jodi stared at Helen for a moment, then turned away, smirking. She walked over to the kitchen table, sat, and lit a cigarette.

Even though I didn't know her yet, I could tell Jodi disliked Helen. I had already noticed that when she talked, I knew what she was feeling by the way she said it. As I came to know her better, I would become fascinated by the musical quality of her voice and the way joy, anger, or bitchiness rolled off her lips without remorse.

It was one of the things I came to love about her.



It started with the sneakers. They were the ugliest shoes I'd ever seen, blue with large ivory colored plastic designs shaped like the emblems of a Mercury sedan on each side and across the toe. Several pair appeared at a church rummage sale in Candor one

morning, selling for a dollar each despite being brand-new. They fit me, so I added them to my bag along with a plaid wool shirt and a snowflake-laden ski sweater.

The ugliness of the sneakers made them almost cool, and I carried them proudly into the cabin and laid them on the table to show off my bargain. As I was bragging about their cost to John and Mike, Jodi walked in and interrupted me with a shriek.

"I can't believe you bought those," she said through gasps of laughter as she held her hand to her face, pretending to stifle herself. I felt insulted until I noticed her other hand frantically pointing at her feet. Leaning over the table I saw she was wearing an identical pair of sneakers. I broke into laughter with her and donned mine, then we danced like can-can girls with our arms around each other's waists, kicking our feet in the air.

From that moment on, Jodi and I discovered how much we had in common. We'd been born exactly one month apart to the day. We both loved Leon Russell, chocolate milkshakes, shooting pool, and Dr. Bronner's peppermint soap. We both believed women should be treated like equals to men. Jodi boasted that women could do anything they could do, which gave me the guts to agree with her. We were both eighteen, the youngest of the adults in the group, while the men ranged in age from twenty-four to twenty-eight, with Helen the oldest at thirty-one.

Jodi and I began doing errands together, like grocery shopping, collecting the co-op food pickup on Saturdays, and hauling water.

When we drove to Candor to do laundry, we'd sneak off to the drug store for a milkshake during the wash cycle. Two more quarters wouldn't be missed when you had several loads washing.

At the drugstore, a teenage boy a couple of years younger than us made our milkshake. Fifty cents was the cost of whipped milk

and chocolate syrup, but he often threw in double scoops of vanilla ice cream without charging us extra.

With two straws and two spoons, we sat across the table from each other, sharing our treat.

"Can you imagine what the guys would say if they saw us eating this?" Jodi giggled.

I licked my lips. "It sure isn't health food. You know what their problem is? They're all too serious."

"Well, that's guys for you. They don't know how to have fun. Especially Don. He must be the most serious of the bunch." She took another mouthful of ice cream before continuing, "And he thinks he's the only one who does anything important. Like cooking dinner every night doesn't matter. How would he have time to do his pottery if everyone else wasn't working in the garden or running to the food co-op? He's free to create while the rest of us do the dirty work, then acts all high and mighty because he's making money." She waved her spoon in the air as she made her point. "And we have to feel guilty for spending fifty cents on a milkshake."

"I do feel guilty," I admitted. "I know it's stupid, but I do."

"I know. I do too. But it sucks, doesn't it? I mean, it's supposed to be that we're all equal, that we all contribute what we're good at and who makes the money shouldn't matter. But it still does. Because that's Don's ego. He has to be *the man*. He says he believes women are just as good as men, but he doesn't act like it."

"You and Don are such a weird couple. It's almost like you aren't a couple sometimes."

Jodi nodded as she sucked on her straw. "Sometimes I wish we weren't a couple. But I love him. I don't know what I see in the man, and God knows, he doesn't deserve how I feel about him. But I'm not going to let him walk on me. I am as stubborn, if not more

stubborn, than he is." She leaned back in her chair and smiled at me. "Of course, Michael is such a sweetheart, he would never act the way Don does. I love that you're with Michael now. He needed someone, and he deserves to be happy. But mostly I'm glad you're here to keep *me* company. It is *so* good to have a woman here I can relate to."



## Chapter 25

August 1973

Hubbard Hill

**W**hen we built yurts, we constructed the octagonal floor first, forming a twenty-foot-diameter frame with four-by-four wooden beams and then covering them with sheets of plywood. We built the floor upside-down to insulate the bottom, since it would be impossible to crawl underneath it later. Then it had to be turned over. A floor flipping required neighboring communes to help, since seven of us couldn't handle the weight.

Don had driven to Owl Creek commune, seventeen miles away in Spencer, a couple of days earlier to ask for assistance, since we had no phone and neither did they. Several people had agreed to help.

When the day arrived, a carload of Owl Creek members joined us at the construction site near a huge oak tree alongside our road. Don had picked this spot for his new yurt, as he could easily drive in to load pottery into his car to take to craft fairs.

This was my first floor flipping, so I didn't know the logistics yet. I noticed he'd attached a set of two-by-four beams on opposite

ends of the floor that each pivoted from a nail. I wondered why, but I figured I'd find out soon enough.

He directed most of us to line up along the downhill edge of the floor, then explained that we were going to raise it on end and have it land on the other side. I stood at one end, figuring there would be less weight there for me to support.

"We're going to walk it upright hand over hand," Don instructed, standing on the uphill side. "Me, John, and Jim will stand on this side and hold it so it doesn't flip up and land on anyone. Once we get it vertical, Mike and Peter will run over here to help us catch it and lower it. Then we'll all lift it onto the base and rest it on the footings. And be careful. If it falls, someone could be crushed."

We looked around at one another and nodded, acknowledging that we were prepared.

"Everyone ready? Let's do it!" Don called out.

Those of us on the lower side began walking the floor upward, but the higher it got, the more the weight resisted moving. My arms grew fatigued as I stretched them above my head as high as I could reach, pushing against the floor as it moved in jolts. Then the beam that was attached to my end swung down and knocked into my upper thigh.

"Ow!" I cried out, wincing.

Everyone turned to see what happened.

"Grab the beam!" Don yelled to me. "You need to hold onto the beam."

I let go of the floor and cupped my hands together, placing them under the end of the beam, pushing upward with everyone else. Suddenly, it became apparent why the beams were nailed near the top. The center of gravity had now risen to a point that those of us on the downhill side could no longer extend their arms any

higher, but we had to remain in place to prevent it from falling back onto us while those on the uphill side dug their heels into the ground, straining to keep the bottom down. Within moments, the entire forward momentum of the floor was depending on the two attached beams, and I was holding one.

My arms trembled from the strain as the weight began to force apart my locked fingers. I braced the beam against my thighs and my arms against my torso, using my whole body to support it, but I was losing control.

"I can't hold it!" I yelled. "It's going to fall!"

"Hang on!" Don shouted. "Don't drop it! We almost have it! Walk slowly this way."

*He wants me to walk?* Every muscle in my body was quivering from strain, and I wondered if I could stand any longer, let alone walk.

"Move!" Don sounded angry. "If you don't move, it's not going to get over the top."

*You shit!* I wanted to scream. *You saw me standing over here, you knew this would happen. How could you?*

Rage finally drove my body to move, allowing my spent muscles to flex a moment more. I wanted to shove the whole damn floor on top of Don as I felt the weight release from me, and the floor reached the halfway point and stood on end. For a moment, I hoped he wouldn't catch it in time, that it would crash to the ground and shatter into pieces.

As it passed the tipping point, the floor accelerated, but the men on the uphill side had it under control and seconds later, it was safely on the ground. My arms collapsed into limp appendages.

Jodi walked over to me from her spot in the middle and muttered, "That bastard. He did it on purpose. He knew exactly what he was doing to you. Well, you showed him, didn't you?"

I felt ready to burst into tears.

"Okay, now we're going to lift it onto the footings," Don called out as everyone spread out around the circumference. I knew I was useless to lift any weight, so I positioned myself next to Jim, a muscular biker from Owl Creek, and faked it.

The floor slipped into place around the separate platform Don had built to support the weight of his potter's wheel. There was cheering and hooting from the crowd, but I felt beaten. At any second, someone's life could have ended because I wasn't strong enough. Everyone knew I was a fraud, especially Don.

Mike walked over to me and smiled, his brown eyes soothing me with kindness. "You did a great job, babe."



Later that afternoon, Jodi, Michelle (one of the day's helpers), and I arrived back at the cabin after taking a walk to view the progress on the yurt Jodi was building in the woods. Jodi put on the kettle for tea and we began discussing the floor flipping, which led us to a debate about Don's motives and character.

"I don't see why Don would have done that on purpose," Michelle said. "What would be the point?"

"The point," Jodi replied as the three of us settled around the table, "would be to prove that women are inferior to men. That is always his point. A woman could never know as much or do as much as he does." She lit a cigarette and placed the pack and her lighter on the table in front of her.

"Don definitely thinks he's superior to us," I agreed. "You can see it in the way he acts. He never notices what anyone else does around here."

"Unless, of course, it's Peter, only because Peter's a better craftsman than he is, and it drives him nuts," Jodi added.

"I guess he has a pretty big ego," Michelle admitted. "But I figured that's just his personality."

"Big ego isn't the word for it," Jodi said. "I'm surprised his ego can be contained in his body."

We all giggled.

"You'd think he was the only one around here who did anything," I said. "Look how Mike cooks almost every night for the rest of us, and John is constantly out there weeding the garden. All Don does is work on his yurt."

"Potter's studio," Jodi emphasized, "not merely a yurt. And he ..."

A sudden shuffling noise came from the ceiling. Jodi froze. Someone was moving around in the loft directly above us. We stared at one another with wide eyes, then Jodi mouthed the words, "Who's up there?"

Michelle and I shook our heads to show we didn't know, but already I was starting to feel sick. Who would be staying silent while we had this conversation, listening to every word?

Heavy footsteps clomped across the ceiling as we all stared up at the catwalk. In the shadows above our heads, I could see it was Don, but I couldn't make out the expression on his face before I turned away. I felt my heart pounding. Jodi's face flushed and she slapped her hand against her cheek, closing her eyes. He stepped slowly down each rung, as if he enjoyed knowing we must be suffering, and when he reached the bottom, he stood facing us, his face stern and his brow wrinkled. When he looked at me, I dropped my eyes to the floor.

Jodi stood up and spoke. "I'm not going to tell you we didn't mean it, because that would be lying," she said. "But it was wrong of us to talk about you behind your back. We should have had the guts to tell you to your face. That would have been the fair thing to do."

Don stood speechless, his expression unchanged.

"If you have something to say to us," she continued, "you should say it. I'm sure we deserve whatever it is you are thinking right now."

Don looked at Michelle for a moment, then over to me, and I felt my face burning. Finally, his eyes rested on Jodi. "I think enough has been said already." He turned and left the cabin.

"Oh my God." Jodi slid down into her chair. "I can't believe this happened. He will never forgive me. And I don't blame him."

She grabbed her cigarette pack to pull one out, then realized one was already burning in the ashtray and picked it up to inhale. "What am I going to do? He must hate me."

"God, Jodi, I don't know," I said. "I feel so bad."

"Maybe we should each go and apologize individually," Michelle suggested. She hesitated for a moment before continuing. "But maybe it will make him think. I mean, everything we were saying had truth to it. Maybe he needed to hear that."

The tea kettle boiled, and I got up, poured the three of us a cup each, and brought them back to the table.

"I don't know. Maybe. Of course, it probably doesn't matter, because Don is never going to speak to me again." Jodi mashed the end of her cigarette into the ash tray. "Why do we have to love men? I wish I was a lesbian. Women are so much easier to love."

"I know what you mean," I said. "Even Mike drives me nuts sometimes, and he's a sweetheart."

Jodi nodded, then stood up and picked up her cigarettes and lighter. "I think I better try to have a talk with Don. I'll see you two later."

By dinnertime, Don and Jodi were sitting together by the cabin window, smiling and talking as though nothing had happened, happier than I had seen either of them for the last several days.



The Ithaca Woman's Center was on the second floor of an old two-story house downtown, a few blocks from Cornell University. They had potluck suppers every Monday night, followed by an informal discussion group. Jodi and I were thrilled when we learned of this and began attending. None of the guys volunteered to watch Helen's children, so Helen couldn't join us, which gave Jodi and me an excuse to venture alone into Ithaca for the evening. We enjoyed it so much we made it our weekly ritual, always bringing a vegetarian dish from our garden.

The majority of women attending were students or in their mid-twenties, but a few were older. Dinner was held in a room encircled with donated couches and upholstered chairs. Two metal folding tables were set up to hold the food. When the seats ran out, women sat on the floor or brought in folding chairs from the office.

After dinner, a woman from the center led a discussion on the topic of the week. Whoever showed up was encouraged to voice their opinion and share their thoughts with the women in the group. The only rule was consideration of others' opinions. We all agreed we were there to learn and share, not to argue or prove we were right. That was what men did.

One evening, we discussed sexual preferences. Two women in the group said they were exploring bisexuality because of the desire to have an emotional closeness with their sexual partners. "I have never been able to find that with a man," an attractive woman with long blond hair admitted. "Unfortunately, with my female lover I feel like something is missing, so I don't think I will be able to give men up completely."

"Have you told her?" another woman sitting on the floor asked.

"No. I don't want to hurt her feelings."

There were a few sighs in the room.

"But isn't that doing the same thing a man would do? Isn't that the same as using someone?" the same woman asked.

"I don't think so, because I really care for her." She looked around, as though searching for empathy. "I mean, I love her, even. It's just that sexually I'm not totally satisfied. I still want a penis."

"It sounds like you're saying you're not gay," Jodi replied.

"No, I guess I'm not," she answered.

"I've found I prefer women," the second bisexual woman told us, "because they don't treat you as sex objects. Women remember you are a person first. But being bisexual is not the same as being gay. I still like sex with men sometimes."

"We all have choices," the group leader added. "That's the most important part to understand."

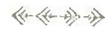
"I don't know if it's really a choice," Jodi said. "I love a lot of women, but I don't want to have sex with them. I couldn't imagine giving up sex with men. This doesn't feel like something I made a choice about, it just is. In fact, if I could make a choice, I would probably choose women, too."

"Well, I've been married for ten years," another woman spoke up, "and I am very happy with my husband. Our sex life is fine for me."

"I wanted to mention to everyone," the group leader told us as we came to a close, "to make sure you pick up the surveys about sexuality on the desk on the way out. A woman named Shere Hite is doing a study and she needs input from lots of different women. Fill them out and bring them back next week."

Jodi and I took the multiple-page survey and spent hours filling in the information, reading our answers aloud to each other, sharing details of our sexual fantasies, experiences, likes,

and dislikes, before returning them to the center. Three years later, we'd learn that we'd participated in the Hite Report, the most famous and extensive study ever done on female sexuality.



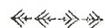
On a separate occasion, we discussed women and the law. A few people there were students from Cornell Law School.

"If you want to change sexism in our society, you have to legislate it," one law student explained. "Men aren't going to give up control voluntarily. The only way for women to gain equality in this country is to become a feminist lawyer. Law schools are under pressure to accept women now. It's the first step on the long road to change. If you can take a case to court, you can set precedents. If enough women become lawyers, we can affect the judicial process. Eventually, we can run for office and make the laws ourselves."

That night on the way home, Jodi and I were excited by the concept of becoming feminist lawyers and changing the world.

"I've been thinking of finishing high school," she said. "I only have a year left. If I hadn't dropped out and married that creepy ex-husband of mine, I could be enrolling in college right now. But at least I can get started. Can you see me going to Candor High? I wonder how long it would take me to get to law school?"

"Maybe I could start community college," I said. "Except I have no money for tuition. I wonder what it costs? I would need a job first, but no one is hiring around here."



While the weekly sessions at the Women's Center were exposing me to people with new ideas, I had also begun reading hordes of literature on the condition of women. *Ms. Magazine* had been on the market for a few months when we sent in our subscription.

While any other expense would have been subject to scrutiny and justification to the group, the men seemed to know better than to question our spending money on *Ms.*

The Hubbard Hill bookshelves were stacked with paperbacks left from former members and visitors, and I began devouring them—Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique*, Kate Millet's *Sexual Politics*, and a 686-page collection of writings entitled *Woman in Sexist Society: Studies in Power and Powerlessness*, edited by Vivian Gornick and Barbara K. Moran. This last book contained essays, plays, research, and interviews of women ranging from scholars to prostitutes to activists. There were essays on the portrayal of women in advertising, in fiction, in magazines; articles about influences during childhood, about hopelessness, depression, and repression. Whatever book I read, with each page I turned, I found myself growing both surprised and angry. It was as if I were viewing my life for the first time with the curtains parted to let in the light.

Moments from my past began to leap into my mind with stark clarity as I read *Prostitution: A Quartet for Female Voices*. One voice was Kate Millet.

"Somehow, every indignity the female suffers ultimately comes to be symbolized in a sexuality that is her responsibility, her shame . . . It can be summarized in one four-letter word. And the word is not *fuck*, it's *cunt*. Our self-contempt originates in this: in knowing we are cunt. That is what we are supposed to be about—our essence, our offense."

I remembered Jack in Venice, grinning as he told me the news about Bob having the clap, eager to let me know that the man I loved was disgusted with me. Now my humiliation was fading, my anger growing. I wanted to find Bob, wherever he was, tell him it could have been him that gave me the clap, and demand to know

what right he had to blame and criticize me when I knew he'd slept with others.

My anger took me back to those guys in Boston, holding down my arms and tearing at my clothes, saying to each other, "She's been asking for it all night, now she's going to get it." Only instead of wanting to cry from helplessness, I wanted to spit in their faces.

Later, I read Elaine Showalter in *Women Writers and the Double Standard*: "Women were created to be dependent on men: their education and training must prepare them to find and keep husbands."

Even though she was writing about women in the Victorian age, I didn't see much difference in my own life.

I could hear my mother reiterating that college was a waste of money for girls, since they only went to find husbands. "It's a good thing we didn't have boys," I recalled her saying. "I don't know how we could have afforded to educate them." I wanted to call my mother and tell her she hadn't been fair, that I deserved to go to college as much as any boy I knew.

I thought about Ed in Venice, stroking my hair and telling me, "You're so sweet, someone will always take care of you." Now I understood the anger I'd felt when he spoke, only it was more than anger—I was screaming inside! I wished he were there next to me so I could tear his hair out when he forced himself on me afterwards, so I could shriek at him, "I am not going to be sweet so some man will take care of me! My body belongs to me, not you or some other man! I will take care of myself!"

I wanted to be strong and tough and able to push back against anyone who tried to push me around.

I'd spent too much of my life playing the female role they'd all expected, trying to follow rules made by men to control me or

hurt me if I strayed into their territory—men who had made sure I knew my place and had been quick to belittle me if I deviated.

Now I felt proud I'd held that beam on Don's yurt floor, pushing with my whole body and no one else's help—that the floor and the lives of the people around me had counted on my strength. Because now I understood that I wasn't a fraud, that women could be strong and powerful, as much or even more so than men. That all those women in Cornell Law School and other law schools throughout the country would one day be making the laws and changing the world.

Somewhere, somehow, I would be part of that change too. I knew there must be many more challenges I was capable of vanquishing that I knew nothing about yet.



## Chapter 26

October 1973  
Hubbard Hill

“Spiro Agnew resigned!” Jodi shouted, running from the cabin toward Mike and me, as we stepped from the Volvo. The back bumper had a sticker with the dome of the White House on it and the words HONK IF YOU THINK HE’S GUILTY, meaning Nixon. Vice President Agnew was no better in our opinion, particularly because he’d blamed the demonstrators at Kent State for the violence on the day four of them were killed by the National Guard while protesting the invasion of Cambodia. He was now being investigated for tax evasion, and it was a joy to know he would not succeed Nixon.

Ever since he and Nixon won the election the previous fall, I’d given up hoping for change. My eighteenth birthday had fallen right before the presidential election in 1972. I was thrilled to register to vote in the first election where eighteen- to twenty-year-olds could vote for the president, hoping to elect the one man I believed would save us: George McGovern.

I was devastated as I watched the results tally up on my television screen on Election Day. McGovern lost by a landslide. The only state he won was Massachusetts, spurring a flood of bumper stickers that read, DON’T BLAME ME, I’M FROM MASSACHUSETTS.”

Now, nearly a year later, between the Watergate investigation and Spiro’s tax evasion, my outlook was improving.

“This calls for a celebration,” Mike said as we walked into the cabin. “Let’s see. We can’t smoke dope, or we all go to jail for life. Let’s have a cup of tea.”

We joined Jodi in the cabin, where she was doing homework with the radio on.

Mike was referring to the new drug law that had gone into effect in New York State on September 1st, giving New York the toughest drug law in the country. For possessing even relatively small amounts of pot, or any amount of LSD, pills, or other drugs, you were automatically sentenced to life without parole. Hubbard Hill members had all agreed that no drugs of any kind would be kept in the cabin. Each of us was responsible for not endangering other commune members if we chose to keep drugs in our yurt.

Mike, Jodi, Helen, and I had decided to quit drugs. None of us cared that much about getting high, so it didn’t seem worth the risk. Don and Peter indulged in smoking pot occasionally in their own yurts. Only John seemed reckless about following the rule.



The next day, while Jodi was in school, having enrolled for her senior year at Candor High, I heard a vehicle approaching the cabin from the woods and stop outside. Peter and John walked in, kicking mud off their boots as they entered.

“We got the Jeep running,” John announced. “She’s all set for a . . . wood run.”

The previous year's woodpiles were almost gone, but we had a few logs from the nearby woods that had been cut and needed splitting. Getting the big ones required the Jeep, which was only used as a workhorse for hauling wood and left sitting the rest of the year.

"Can you teach me to split wood?" I asked Peter. He beckoned with his finger and I followed him outside to watch him split a log.

"Ahhhh!" Peter shouted before landing the ax partially on the edge of the upright log, forcing it to split directly in half and fall to the ground in two pieces. He stopped and took a breath, exhaling visible vapor in the cool autumn air.

"If you scream, it adds force to your motion," Peter explained. "That's why they yell in karate. Before you start, I want to go over a couple of things."

I stood at an angle to him and focused on his instruction.

"First, always wear heavy shoes like those, so you have protection in case you miss." He pointed to the thick leather work boots I was wearing. "Next, keep your feet spread apart, so if you miss, the ax hits the dirt and not your foot. Then bend your knees slightly so you don't lean too far forward." Peter shifted his feet apart and bounced on his knees to demonstrate as I mimicked him. "Otherwise, you could lose your balance from the momentum of the ax."

He lifted a log onto the huge stump he was using.

"So you place the wood up on a level base like this, standing it on end. Make sure there are no knots where you plan on splitting it, because the knots strengthen the log in that spot." He turned the log and pointed out a knot part way around the side before returning it to the original position. "Lift the ax over one shoulder with both hands. Don't let it fall backwards. You always want it

under control. Then let it drop with a scream. Aim it so you get part of the ax on the edge, but most of it in the middle."

I stepped away as he lifted the ax and took a swing, splitting the log in two.

"Here, Sharon, give it a try." He placed a smaller log on the stump, stood the ax upright, and stepped away.

I leaned over the ax, wrapping my hands around the rough, weathered handle, which reached my navel, and I lifted it slightly, awed by the weight that would help give me the momentum to blast logs apart. I planted my feet apart and rocked back and forth to make sure I felt steady. Lifting the ax over my left shoulder, I slowly dropped it in a practice swing to gauge where it would fall. After adjusting my stance, I raised the ax, inhaled, and felt the full power of my body as I let out a roar, plunging the blade into the log. It split easily into two parts, and the blade stuck into the stump below.

Peter nodded and smiled his approval.

I eased the blade out of the stump by wiggling it back and forth.

"You don't need any more help from me," Peter said. "There's the wood. Have fun."

I moved on to bigger logs, stripping off clothing as I progressed, until I was working in a sleeveless tank top and jeans. "Wood warms you twice," Mike liked to say.

As instructed, I piled the bark separately for kindling, and the split pieces began to grow into a pile. I was surprised how satisfying chopping wood felt and proud of my new skill.



That weekend, Kirsten and Gary from Ithaca joined us to help cut trees. Helen needed to watch her children. The rest of us piled into the Jeep and rattled along our grassy road into a thicker part of the woods. It was overcast and the air was crisp, but our mood was upbeat.

I liked Kirsten. She believed in women's rights, like Jodi and me, and was usually up for anything. She was from Holland and had been living with Gary for a couple of years. However, she couldn't get a permanent visa, so every few months she had to leave the US and go back to Holland. Often Gary went with her, but other times he couldn't get a visa to stay there long enough. Today, as always, she was smiling and cheerful, eager to help out.

The men took turns felling dead trees and slicing them into logs, trying to outdo each other as they sawed through larger and larger trunks. Jodi, Kirsten, and I each cut smaller trees. We had two chain saws running all the time, filling the woods with saw dust, fumes, and roaring motors. Whoever wasn't running a chain saw was loading the logs onto the Jeep.

John cut the largest tree that day, and Mike helped slice it. Gary and Don started showing off by lifting a huge log onto the Jeep between the two of them. Kirsten winked at Jodi and me, nodding toward the next log, and we smiled back at her in agreement. The three of us headed over to pick it up.

"You women can't lift that," Don said. "You're crazy."

"Oh, you think we cannot do this, you say?" Kirsten taunted him. "I am glad you said that, because now I am mad. And when I am mad, I am strong!"

"Me too!" I agreed.

"Let's show these men what we can do once and for all," Jodi said.

John agreed with Don. "I don't think they can . . . move that. Never mind get it on . . . the Jeep."

I looked at the log. It was absurdly large, about two and a half feet long and maybe a foot and a half in diameter. We positioned ourselves around it and looked into each other's eyes. I could see the determination on Jodi and Kirsten's faces as our eyes spoke to one another.

"Sisters, we *can* do this," Kirsten said. "Together, we can."

I thought of the stance for chopping wood—the foot placement, the bent knees, the strength that came from a spot deep in my core. I called on that strength and felt it rise. A moment later, the three of us had that log off the ground, our faces nearly purple, and we were taking baby steps to the Jeep.

I loved the sound of the log landing on the metal floor when we dropped it there. Our work done, we broke into victorious smiles and threw our arms around each other.

Don, John, and Gary looked at us with new respect on their faces. I got a kick out of that, but I didn't need that from them. I already had all the respect I needed from Jodi and Kirsten—the same respect I had for each of them.



One night in late October, I was dozing off in bed next to Mike when I was startled by the sound of a vehicle bucking and revving, getting louder as it got closer to our yurt. Mike leaped out of bed and ran for the window.

"What is it?" I called to him. The only vehicle that ever drove through the field was the occasional tractor from the farmer downhill during haying season, but not at eleven o'clock at night.

"Jesus, it's a bust!" Mike screamed. "They're coming this way."

I jumped from the bed and grabbed my boots, carrying them in one hand, as Mike pulled me frantically by the other. We ran outside, branches and rocks jabbing my tender, socked feet, and dove into the pine forest that surrounded Mike's yurt.

Mike threw himself on the ground and motioned for me to do the same. Thankfully, both of us were in our long johns. I heard the motor roar as the headlights zoomed past in the field. In the distance, we heard it stop, and then car doors slammed. My heart

was pounding. What would happen if they found us? We didn't have any drugs in our yurt, but did that matter if they were at the commune? And stupid John had those marijuana plants growing in his yurt greenhouse in full view of the field behind him. Now that the farmer below hated John, maybe he'd turned us in.

The farmer hadn't always hated John. For the first two years of Hubbard Hill's existence, they'd had a good relationship with him. In the summer, when our creeks went dry, we'd filled our milk pails with water from the faucet in his barn, and he'd let us take a gallon of milk once a week at cost, as long as we used clean plastic containers when we dipped it into the vat.

One day, however, he caught John sneaking extra milk using a glass jar. He dropped it in the vat. Fortunately, it didn't break, or the farmer would have lost an entire truckload of milk. But it was obvious John was cheating him and endangering his livelihood. As a result, both our milk and our water rights had been cut off. Now we had to drive into town to a friend's house and use their hose for our water.

The farmer still owned a legal right of way through our property to his back acreage, so it was possible he had seen John's plants. Both Mike and I had been appalled when we'd discovered them, but since he was abiding by the rules and keeping them in his own yurt, we felt we shouldn't complain.

Lying there in the icy air without a jacket or shoes made me wonder if I should have complained.

I strained to listen for footsteps or voices. After a while, the car drove by again in the direction of the cabin.

Convinced that no one was stalking us in the woods, we returned to our yurt.

Back in bed, the relaxation I'd felt earlier eluded me. The door to the yurt pushed open and Tenya crept inside and settled near

the stove. I rose and hooked the latch. It depressed me to think we needed locked doors now.

The next morning, we discovered that it had been John and Mark driving to John's yurt after an evening of getting wasted in the Ithaca bars, smoking too much dope, and tripping. I would have felt relieved if I wasn't so pissed off at John for endangering us.



The first snow of the season fell overnight in early November, the day before my nineteenth birthday. All I could see through our yurt window was a mass of white with gray, distant shadows under an overcast sky. The stove had burned out and the air on my face felt icy. I didn't want to move from our warm bed.

Mike leapt out of bed, scrunched newspaper into balls, and threw them into the stove with some kindling and a match to get a quick flash of heat into the yurt. Then he dove back under the covers, where we cuddled together.

"Winter is here," he murmured. "From now on, it will get colder and colder. Wait 'til we have to chop away the frozen shit in the outhouse because it gets too high."

I cringed.

Once the yurt was warmer, I forced myself out of bed and into my clothes. I shook my boots upside down before putting them on—a habit I'd developed after discovering that field mice had been hiding acorns in them. Then Mike, Tenya, and I walked the path to the cabin, making fresh footprints alongside other paw prints.

A muffled silence surrounded us. I felt as if my senses were sharpened, and I could trust my gut to steer me correctly.

I'd been reading up on spirituality. Some declared we were in a new age, and lots of books were being published on this topic. I'd read *Be Here Now*, by Baba Ram Dass, and consulted the *I*

*Ching*, the ancient Chinese *Book of Changes* regularly; I kept three copper pennies in a leather pouch and used them for divination; and I wrapped my book in silk to protect the vibrations. I had devoured all three of Carlos Castaneda's books, and fell asleep at night trying to fly in my dreams, as he had done, to a different plane of consciousness.

This particular Sunday, Hubbard Hill had company. Mark and Bonnie had come from Ithaca, as had Helen's friend Tim. Mark and John had gone off together, but the rest of us sat around the table drinking tea.

"I bought twenty acres in Tompkin's County," Bonnie announced as she wrapped her hands around her mug. "I got it for twenty thousand dollars, which is a good price there. And it's close enough to Ithaca that I can commute to work if I have to."

I felt an immediate twinge of envy. Bonnie had a job as a social worker, so she had been able to put aside money while living in the tiny A-frame house she and Mark rented. I thought about how I'd love to own my own land and not have to tolerate certain people.

"Ever since I left Hubbard Hill, I've missed having land," she told us. "It's what I've been dreaming about."

"That's fabulous," Jodi said. "If you need help when you get started, come get us. You know we'll all come up and help you build."

Tim paced around the table, waiting for the right moment to break into the conversation.

"I've got news, too," he finally announced. "I haven't told Helen yet, so this is news to her as well."

Helen's smile turned to concern as she stared at him.

"I'm on my way to Alaska. I'm going to go work on the pipeline."

Helen gasped.

"They're paying big bucks to anyone with oil rigging experience," Tim explained, "and I've done that before."

*Alaska*, I thought to myself. *True wilderness*. "They hire women there?" I joked, knowing that the pipeline would be the ultimate male environment.

"Actually," Tim said, "they do hire women in the camps as cooks. They get paid well, too. Plus, all your room and board is included, so there's nothing to spend it on."

"When are you leaving?" Helen asked, her voice cracking.

"Tuesday."

Helen looked away. Tim seemed nervous. I had never been sure of what their relationship was. Of course, she was still married to Chuck. Lately, Tim hadn't been coming around as much as when she'd first moved to Hubbard Hill, and now he was telling her good-bye.

About that time, John and Mark burst through the cabin door, laughing and acting silly, obviously wasted. John walked over to the antique desk that leaned against the front cabin wall, reached into his pocket, pulled out a baggy, slipped it under the desk cover, and closed the cover again.

"I hope you aren't planning on leaving that there," I said to John. We still had a rule about no drugs in the cabin.

"Naw. I'll take it . . . later." It was as if he only half heard me. He and Mark walked over to the bread box and began slicing bread and cheese, giggling.

That evening after the others had left, Mike and I returned to the cabin to check on John's drugs. I opened the desk cover and saw the baggy still there. Not only was there pot, there were also several tiny purple barrel-shaped pills that were likely LSD.

"Here's a guaranteed life sentence right in our cabin." I showed Mike the baggy. "John left it here, like I thought he would."

Mike shook his head. "That asshole. He's out of control. He's going to get us all busted. I'm sick of his bullshit."

I shoved the drugs into my pocket to dump in the woods and faced Mike. "I had a gut feeling today that it's time for a change. Bonnie is so lucky to have her own land. I would love that too, but of course, there's the issue of money."

Mike smirked. "It would be such a relief not to live with assholes, but we'll never have that kind of money."

"But what if we could?" I was excited by my new idea. "What if you and I went to Alaska, too, and worked in the oil fields? I could cook in a camp and you could work on the pipeline. We'd save all our money, and after a year we'd have enough to buy our own land."

Mike rested his elbow on his other fist and pulled at his beard. "How would we get there?"

"I was thinking about that, too. We would have to get a crummy job first and save enough to buy a car. Then we could drive and camp."

Mike's expression looked dubious. "There's no place to work around here. Besides, if we were working, we would have to pool all our money with Hubbard Hill."

"I know. I think the only way we can do it is to leave. There're jobs around Hartford, and I know the neighborhoods. We could get a cheap apartment and be ready to drive north by late spring, in time for the good weather for getting to Alaska."

Mike stood quietly, contemplating, looking at the floor. He had been at Hubbard Hill for over two years. After Peter, he had the second-longest seniority, and he was a stabilizing influence. I knew Mike's leaving would be a blow to the commune. And no one would be more hurt than Jodi, whom we both loved dearly.

"What about Jodi?" He looked at me through almost weepy eyes.

I felt sick to my stomach when I thought about hurting her. "I know. She's the only reason I'm not sure about this. Oh God. I

wish we could take her with us, but she needs to finish high school. If she leaves now, she may never get it done. I will miss her as much as anyone I've ever loved."

Mike wrapped his arms around me. I buried my face in his soft flannel shirt and cried, because I knew he agreed we needed to do this, and despite my excitement, all I could feel was sadness.



## Chapter 27

November 1973

Hartford, Connecticut

I hated being in the city again. The first night, the square walls were closing in around me. Mike and I hung prints from a Botticelli art book he owned, and I tried to focus on *The Birth of Venus* instead of the sirens outside my window. I longed to hear the sound of leaves rustling near my door as I drifted to sleep, to feel the wind blowing through the cracks of our yurt, to savor the sweet scent of wood smoke drifting from the wood stove. Instead, I gritted my teeth and listened to the clanging radiators in our third-floor apartment while sweat poured off my body.

"I need to open a window. I can't breathe," I whined to Mike, rising from my sleeping bag on the floor to shove open the heavy wooden sash. I inhaled the cold air into my lungs, hoping for relief. It smelt slightly of garbage, car exhaust, and asphalt.

Already I regretted our move. Had Hubbard Hill really been as bad as I thought? If it was, why did I miss it?

I reminded myself that this was temporary. Mike and I would work hard and save money as fast as we could to leave for Alaska in

the spring. Of course, we would have to pay Mike's mother back first for the money she'd loaned us to get us started in Hartford.

I heard a scratching noise in the wall, followed by scurrying. I remembered the hole I had noticed in the wall of the closet and jumped up to shut the closet door, worried that a rat might slip into our room. I shuddered. The radiator clanged—one, two, three times—then hissed before clanging three more times.

I lay on the hard floor, my bones already sore on the spots that rubbed against the wood. I closed my eyes and tried to picture Jodi laughing, but all I could see was her tear-streaked face when we told her we were leaving. I leaned into my pillow and wept silently, wondering if all this would be worth it.



To furnish our apartment, we bought a refurbished mattress and my parents donated a card table and two chairs from their basement. In our living room, we added four sofa cushions we found on an abandoned couch and used them as chairs, leaning one on the wall and sitting on the other. We placed a lamp on a cardboard box next to our bed and saved another three boxes to store our clothes.

I'd had to find a new home for Tenya because I couldn't stand to think of her cooped up like us. It wasn't fair that she should suffer. After placing a classified ad in our local newspaper, I interviewed prospective owners from my parents' phone, insisting that they have acreage for her to roam in if they were going to adopt her. I settled on a family with two little girls, and she wagged her tail and trotted after them as she headed to their car.

One more part of my life was gone. I was taking on a monastic future, stripped of joy, devoted only to work and frugality.

It took me about a week to find a job as an inventory control clerk. I had experience from working part time during high

school for a furniture store. It took Mike another week to find a job as a janitor in a factory not far from where I worked.

We celebrated by opening a bank account and depositing all but the minimum amount of money we needed for groceries, bus fare, and rent.

Two days later, a letter from Jodi arrived.

She had finished building her new yurt, moved in most of her belongings, lit a fire in the wood stove, and walked to the cabin for a cigarette. When she returned to her yurt, there had been nothing but smoldering ashes. Her months of labor, her clothes, her photo albums, her favorite books—all had been destroyed.

I broke into tears as I read the news to Mike, stunned by the thought that Jodi could have been inside if she had started her fire and gone to bed.

Mike shook his head slowly and moaned. "Poor Jodi." His lip trembled as he looked into my eyes, and we wrapped our arms around each other, as though our hugging could somehow comfort her.

"Yurts are built like a perfect bonfire," Mike said. "All the wood's stacked inward to reach a peak. We're probably lucky this never happened before. Thank God nothing happened to Jodi."

I continued on through the letter and discovered that the farmer down the hill had shot and killed John's dog for chasing cows, which was legal in Tioga County. Tenya had been John's dog's constant companion. More tears stained my face, but I was grateful Tenya was safely in her new home.

I was almost afraid to read on, but at last there was happy news. "Mike, she's coming to visit us! She'll be here after school gets out at Christmas!"

I checked the calendar. That was about seventeen days, depending on when she actually arrived. Too long. But I would

have to live with it. After all Jodi had been through, I certainly had no right to complain.



The day Jodi was to arrive, Mike and I prepared a vegetarian feast. I'd baked bread on Saturday, and Mike had soaked black beans for his sweet and sour vegetable curry. Now it was Sunday evening, and I chopped pickles while Mike shelled peanuts. We had splurged to buy pineapple and coconut. Mike began sautéing the carrots while the other ingredients—chopped onions, broccoli, raisins, honey, curry powder, and the cooked black beans—sat on the counter, waiting to be added.

After checking that the brown rice was steaming, I wandered into the living room.

Our living room was simple, and I liked it that way. Since we had only two kitchen chairs for our card table, we'd moved it into the living room and folded the legs, resting the corners on piles of books. That way the three of us could eat while sitting on pillows on the floor. I'd covered the table in an Indian bedspread and placed two bulky candles on either side of a bowl of apples and oranges.

Our Christmas tree stood in the center of the room. It had no lights or colored glass balls like my parents' tree. Instead, we'd strung rows of popcorn and cut out delicate snowflakes from folded white paper. The top of the tree was decorated with a star made of aluminum foil folded over a cardboard one.

The tree was my favorite thing in the apartment, partly because of Christmas, but mostly because it reminded me of the pine forest that had surrounded our yurt at Hubbard Hill. The more natural our tree looked, the less guilty I felt about it being killed.

Mike and I had debated the ethics of getting a tree—of destroying nature in the name of a Christian holiday. Eventually,

our longing to bring a tiny bit of the woods into our home had won out over ethics, as we rationalized that the tree had already been cut.

By six o'clock, I was worried about Jodi. It had been dark for two hours and she was hitchhiking alone. In her bulky down jacket, with her hair tucked into her wool knit hat, at least no one would realize she was a woman. I had hitched alone many times at night, but it was different sitting here worrying about her than it was when I was on the road myself. I wanted her safely at my door, knowing she had survived those random odds of danger.

About eight o'clock, the buzzer rang, and we dove for the door and raced down the stairs to greet her. We met on the second-floor landing, and I screamed with joy and threw my arms around her.

Jodi broke into tears and buried her face in my hair for a moment, then kissed Mike on the lips while the three of us held each other.

Mike took her knapsack as we led her upstairs.

"My God, it's fucking freezing out there," she said as we climbed. "I was starting to wonder if I'd ever get here. Y'all moved way the hell too far away, you know that? And what's with all this ice?"

"That's Hartford," Mike explained. "I think I prefer the three feet of snow at Hubbard Hill. This stuff's a pain in the ass."

"Well, I had a hell of a time getting rides," she said. "Do you know I started out at one o'clock this afternoon? Not much Christmas spirit out there on the highway."

"Well, at least you made it. Dinner is waiting for you. How 'bout a cup of peppermint tea?" Mike grinned.

"I'd *love* it."

Mike put her things in the living room, where she would sleep while she stayed with us. Then he ladled out the food, and we settled on the floor around the table and ate.

"I really miss your cooking," Jodi told Mike. "John's doing a lot of the cooking now, but it's not the same. He doesn't have your touch. This is absolutely delicious." She paused. "I miss you both so much!"

Having her there filled me with bittersweet euphoria. I thought I might cry, but I gave her a soulful smile as her eyes started to tear again. She reached into her pocket, pulled out her cigarettes, and lit one. "Anyhow, Don and I finally broke up. I wanted to tell you in person, instead of in a letter."

A smirk stretched across her face and she raised her eyebrows at us, as if saying, *What do you think?*

"We all knew that was coming," I told her. "It's got to be for the best. You were so unhappy with him recently."

"He never deserved you," Mike said. "You're so much more of a sincere person than he is. I don't dislike Don, but let's face it. He's shallow."

Jodi giggled, as though soothed by our comments. "You know, I don't see why I didn't end it a long time ago instead of letting it drag on. When my yurt burned down, it made me think about my life. I was so depressed. I couldn't stand it, between losing my yurt and you guys leaving."

Mike reached over and rested his hand on Jodi's arm.

"And, of course, he has his brand-new, perfect yurt, with his kiln, which he used to fire pottery for Christmas. Him and that damned kiln. I'm glad he has it for the benefit of Hubbard Hill, but now work is all he cares about. I certainly didn't get any sympathy from him with all I was going through. I really need to be with a kind, decent person who respects me. Meanwhile, I'm perfectly capable of getting along by myself."

I knelt over and hugged her again. "Is it hard being there with him around?"

"Oh shit, no. In fact, I'm better off now, because I don't need to worry all the time about what he's thinking. And I'm at school a lot, and I have a couple of pretty good friends there now."

"Do you think you'll ever build another yurt?" I asked.

"Oh no!" she shouted, putting down her fork and shaking her head. "No more yurts for me! I moved into the loft of the cabin and I am staying there. It gives me the creeps every time I think about those smoldering ashes. I was only gone long enough to have one cigarette!"

Mike nodded. "We couldn't believe it when we read it. Thank God you went to the cabin. At least you weren't hurt."

We finished our dinner and talked on into the night. After a while, Mike brought out his guitar and his new book of Paul Simon songs, and the three of us sat around singing "Lincoln Duncan," "The Boxer," and "America."

It was in the early-morning hours when we finally retired. It seemed like a waste sacrificing this precious time to sleep, but I knew Jodi was exhausted after her trek.



The next morning was Christmas Eve. We gathered by our tree to exchange gifts. Ours to Jodi and hers to us were all books, a gift we each used every day. Jodi's gift to me was a square book called *Seed* by Harmony Books, the first half printed on brown grocery bag-type paper symbolizing the earth, with green lettering for plants. The second half was filled with black-and-white cards to punch out along the dotted lines. They contained pictures of holy men, goddesses, tarot cards, Jesus, Sufi symbols, babies being born, people dying, prayers, and incantations. Jodi, Mike, and I spent an

hour punching them all out into a deck. These images became part of my daily ritual of reflection. The first half of the book contained quotes, verse, poetry, and comments relating to the cards. I came to cherish these as one of my most important possessions.

By afternoon, Jodi had to leave to get back to Hubbard Hill for Christmas Day. She'd committed to being home and felt the need to help hold together what was left. We held each other and I tried not to cry, knowing it would be awhile before we saw each other again.

"Despite everything, I still really love it there." She mounted her pack on her back. "Come back and visit on your way to Alaska."



## Chapter 28

Spring 1974

Bike Trip

**D**oes it make sense to drive to Alaska when gas prices have quadrupled in a few short months and the federal government has ordered gas stations to close on Sundays to discourage long-distance driving? I wondered.

My parents were aware of my plans for Alaska, and my mother, who had become accustomed to my wanderlust but always prayed I would get over it, called me one evening in late February.

"I just watched a long newsreel on Alaska tonight on Walter Cronkite," she told me. "They had cameras there interviewing people right on the streets of Anchorage. There are so many people unemployed, all gone there to work on the pipeline thinking there would be jobs because of the gas crisis. Now they're living out on the street. They said only people with oil experience found jobs, and all these others are stranded there."

"If we can't make any money, there isn't any point in going, is there?" I acknowledged, not letting on how much this upset me,

since all our future land-buying plans revolved around making money in Alaska.

"No, I would think not." Her voice sounded hopeful.

I no longer found the need to argue with my mother, and she seemed to be avoiding that as well. We talked for a while longer, but I was preoccupied with her bad news.

Afterward, I walked into our bedroom, where Mike sat on the mattress leaning against the wall and reading, his wavy, dark hair hanging loosely around his shoulders, his face deep in concentration. I flopped beside him on the bed.

"I'm starting to think we'll never get our own land." I filled him in on the Walter Cronkite segment. "If we don't go to Alaska, what do we do?"

Mike closed his book and tugged at his beard.

"Well, baby, I certainly don't want to pour all our money into getting to Alaska so we can do the same thing we're doing now." He paused in thought before continuing. "You know, Hubbard Hill isn't the only commune in the world. Maybe we could find someplace we like better, where everyone has their act together."

Leaning over the pile of magazines next to the bed, I pulled out the latest issue of *Mother Earth News* and flipped to the classifieds in the back.

"This is how I found Hubbard Hill," I told him. "There're always interesting places in here. Maybe I should start writing to some of them." I scanned a few of the ads.

"Here's one that sounds good. 'Ten-acre farm in Hudson River Valley with large house, barn, and good, fertile soil, looking for new members willing to commit time and energy to bringing together a communal household based on farm living.' What do you think?"

I picked up a ballpoint pen and circled the advertisement.

"Sounds interesting," Mike said. "How will we get there?"

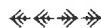
"Well, if we aren't going to Alaska, it doesn't make sense to spend money on a car, does it? I suppose we'll have to hitchhike."

"I have a better idea," he countered. "We could bike."

"Bike? As in bicycles? I don't know. I got that three-speed while I was in high school and barely made it up hills."

"Yeah, but you're in a lot better shape now. Look at you." Mike nodded his head in my direction. "You walk two miles to work every day. You were chopping wood and hauling water at Hubbard Hill. You're much stronger than you were in high school. Besides, I've been reading about the new ten-speed bikes built intentionally for long distance traveling. They're called touring bikes. They're made for hills."

"Touring bikes, huh?"



It was a warm Saturday morning in early May when Mike and I attached all our gear to our two-month-old Motobécane Gran Touring bicycles. The weather had been getting warmer for the last few weeks, and we wanted to start biking before the heat of summer set in. We'd given our notice at work, and I'd visited my parents to say good-bye.

We packed spare tire tubes, a patch kit, a portable tool kit with Allen wrenches and tire irons, a hand pump that attached to the bike frame, and canteens. We each had two panniers—the equivalent of saddlebags for bikes—one strapped between the handlebars and the other hanging over the carrying rack on the back.

On top of the carrying racks, we strapped sleeping bags and mats. Mike carried the tent and a tiny gas cook stove just like the one Ernie and I had used two summers earlier when we'd hitchhiked across Canada, and a small glass jar of gasoline for fuel.

Each of us carried clothing, food, dishware, rain ponchos, soap, and maps. I also packed the meditation cards Jodi had given me at Christmas, a deck of playing cards, a book, and the letters from the four communes we intended to visit as we searched for a new home. All these items I wrapped in plastic inside our panniers, in case of rain.

We had been training for eight weeks, ever since we purchased the bikes. We rode between ten and fifteen miles every day after work, and over thirty miles daily on the weekends. I thought I was in great shape, able to pace myself on the hills around Hartford's suburbs.

I'd mapped out our route the day before we planned to leave, picking roads I had never traveled where there were long stretches between towns, since we planned to camp in the woods at night. Our first destination was Copake Falls, New York, a few miles outside of northwestern Connecticut, about seventy miles away.

After following the Farmington Valley from Hartford, our route turned toward Burlington. A gentle uphill stretch loomed ahead of me, and I paced myself into it with ease. As I rounded the next bend, I saw it was now steep enough to warrant an additional lane for slow traffic. Full of optimism, I cranked into a lower gear and felt the pressure of the climb ease off as my pace slowed. Mike pushed on ahead, advancing farther, before giving in to the gear drop. I waited too long to downshift the next time and felt the gear grab with a jerk when I forced it in under pressure; I had to stand on my pedals to continue.

With each turn of the road, I expected it to level off, but instead it climbed farther upward. I tried to shift yet again, only to discover I was in my lowest gear and had to stop. I dismounted, walked awhile, got back on and pedaled some more, walked again, rode, walked. This continued for nearly an hour, until at last, the

steepness decreased and I could ride. Mike stopped several times—to offer encouragement and to keep from getting too far ahead—but my confidence was damaged, and I was no longer convinced I was prepared for this trip.

When we finally reached the top, we stopped to rest. “That was brutal,” I said. “I hope we don’t get many more hills like this.”

He nodded. “I had a hard time too. It wasn’t just you. But we made it. After this, it should be easier.”

“I hope so.”

As we started downhill, I experienced a sense of exhilaration

as I accelerated, but suddenly my bike began to shimmy rapidly from side to side. I squeezed the brakes hard to slow down, but

the oscillation grew worse as the road grew steeper. I was terrified. Mike pulled over and I flew past him, clenching my brakes, my

hands feeling like they would explode as I tried to stop. I threw my whole body into steadying the bike, squeezing my elbows against

my sides, gripping my knees together around the frame, and trying to pull the handlebars straight in a desperate fight for control. At last the bike responded, and I brought it to a stop. Mike caught up

and jumped off his bike. From the look on his face, I knew how close I’d come to disaster.

I collapsed into the grass next to the road, shaking, feeling sick to my stomach, and broke into a cold sweat. Mike joined me and wrapped me in his arms against his chest.

“God, baby, I thought I was going to lose you just then. That was scary.”

His body was comforting, and I started to calm down. After a few minutes, I could breathe normally and was able to continue.

Unfortunately, the joy of whooshing down hills was gone forever. Instead, each downhill experience brought with it

anxiety, causing me to slow my speed more than was necessary instead of gaining enough speed near the bottom to accelerate up the next hill.

Throughout the day, the drudgery of the first hill repeated itself as we crawled toward our destination.

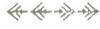
When dusk approached, we watched for a wooded spot where we could camp as we approached Litchfield, our goal for that day. We spotted a high point on the side of the road where we would be hidden and dragged our bikes over the ridge and into the woods. Mike picked out a level spot and we assembled

the pup tent, then dug a trench around it for water to run off since it looked like rain.

While I unloaded our gear into the tent, Mike rode off to fill our collapsible gallon water jug in town so we could cook. By the time he came back, it was nearly dark. In our frying pan, we cooked instant rice, canned beans, and vegetables, then melted cheese on top. We needed our flashlight to finish. I was so exhausted I barely noticed eating.

A fine mist was falling as we washed the dishes with water heated on the stove. Fatigued and damp, we crawled into the tent and fell asleep. Several times during the night, I awoke from the sound of rain pounding through the trees above us. Fortunately, we were protected from a direct onslaught by the dense foliage.

I felt like everything had worked against me that day to make the trip harder. I hoped I would wake up to sunshine.



Morning arrived without an end to the rain. The tent wasn’t big enough to sit erect, so after Mike mixed powdered milk with water to pour on our granola, we ate it while leaning on our elbows. With one shower curtain draped over the top of the tent and another

on the floor, we were staying dry, but little patches of water were beginning to seep through along the edges.

By midday, the rain hadn't slowed. We read, played cards, and read some more. My body ached from being in the same position too long, and whichever way I turned didn't seem to help. Whenever I had to pee, I knocked into the walls of the tent as I slipped on shoes and a rain poncho, and when I unzipped the sopping wet doors, water poured through onto the floor. Once back inside, I felt wetter and colder than before, with no way to get dry or warm. I dreaded the minutes that crawled by as I huddled inside my sleeping bag; it was as though the hands on my watch were stuck in sludge.

The rain continued into the evening. Rather than go outside again to cook, we agreed to eat cheese and whole wheat bread for dinner. It was surprising we could agree on anything by evening. I was increasingly irritable and arguing with Mike over everything. When he moved and knocked into the tent, I screamed at him for getting more water inside. When we played cards, I quit after losing two straight hands of gin rummy and refused to count my points. Later, after I bitched at him for something else, he yelled that I was being an asshole, so I punched the tent over his head and made water fall on his hair. He glared at me like he might reach out and choke me. I felt like a caged animal that needed to escape.

When night came, neither of us could sleep. After hours of tossing and turning, I shoved my face into my inflatable pillow and screamed, pounding my fists into the ground and kicking my feet, until I was relieved by tears. Finally, the tension in my body subsided, and I fell asleep.



In the morning there were patches of sunshine. I pulled open the zipper and dove outside, thrilled to be mobile again. Unfortunately, I knew this meant another dreadful day of hills, although only about half as many as the first day.

We reached Copake Falls, a town in the flat Hudson Valley, late that afternoon, ending the day with easy pedaling.

The commune was on forty acres, with a large, white farmhouse in need of repair and a two-story barn. A woman about my age introduced herself as Lisa when we arrived, and showed us around. When she explained that they faced a five hundred-dollar rental payment each month, Mike and I exchanged dubious looks. Hubbard Hill had a one hundred and fifty-dollar land payment each month, and we'd had trouble meeting that at times. The house used oil heat as well. Lisa shared that their only income was from food stamps, unemployment, and one person's full-time job in town.

At dinner, we joined two other men who were visiting for the first time, along with four commune members. We ate the casserole made from mushrooms that Mike and I helped Lisa harvest in the field that afternoon.

"Did she tell you this place is haunted?" one of the visitors asked me. "I just found out this morning. That was *after* I saw the ghost last night."

"I won't sleep in this house," Lisa admitted. "I've got my room over the barn. You're welcome to sleep there too, if you want." She nodded to us. "There's an extra mattress."

"It was so real, it totally freaked me out," the guy continued. "I was in that room at the top of the stairs, reading. When I looked up, this little girl was standing in the doorway. I was surprised because I didn't think there were any children here. Then she turned around and left. This morning I asked Jim who the little girl was. That's when he told me about the ghost. I was in her room."

"Other people have seen her, too," Lisa said. "She was murdered in this house. About twenty years ago, a mother was living here with her two small children. She couldn't afford to feed them, and they were starving to death, so she killed them both and committed suicide. No one has lived here since until us. The local people won't come near this place."

"I probably would never have believed it if I hadn't seen her myself," the newcomer said.

We slept over the barn that night and left early the next morning.



For the next three days, thick, gray rainclouds taunted us, sometimes dropping a light drizzle, always reminding me of our first night in the tent. With my body beaten and exhausted at the end of each day, I could not endure more discomfort, so I convinced Mike to stay at motels. They were cheap in the Catskills in early May, as tourist season didn't start until Memorial Day.

As if the physical challenge wasn't tough enough, I was also discouraged by my inability to enjoy the scenery. When I began the trip, I'd imagined that biking would be an opportunity to feel close to nature. Instead, my focus went no farther than the blacktop a few hundred yards ahead, the width of the shoulder that sometimes disappeared, or the ominous look of the sky. At the end of the day, I couldn't recall any fields, forests, villages, or towns we'd passed. At night, I closed my eyes and felt like I was still moving. The road haunted my twilight minutes between wakefulness and dreams, taunting me with yellow, pulsing lines and making me jolt awake as I felt I was falling off the edge of the pavement.

Each morning, I dragged my body out of bed again, ate my granola, washed my plate and spoon in the bathroom sink,

showered, and stuffed the leftover bars of motel soap into my bike panniers. My body and my mind felt numb. I kept expecting it to get easier, but each day I dreaded it more.

Aside from my shoulders aching from hunching over my handlebars, aside from my hands sweating inside the leather gloves I wore to prevent blisters, aside from the cramps that randomly shot through my calves, thighs, and knees, the part I hated most was that I felt like a failure. I had taken on this bike trip with enthusiasm, spent time and money preparing for it, and now I wondered why the hell I was doing it. And this wasn't a passing thought. This was a reverberating theme that flowed through my aching muscles every minute of every hour. Each crank of the pedals drilled this deeper into my consciousness. I had time, lots of time, to review every failure in my life, with this being the pinnacle of them all.

Not trying harder to go to college was my first failure, and I blamed my parents over and over, anger seething, as I recalled the way my mother agreed to let me drop all my college prep courses in my sophomore year of high school when the material got tough. I'd begged them to let me try the courses even though college wasn't in their plans.

"I didn't think you'd be able to do this," she'd told me when I suggested dropping the classes, and those words had stung me, reinforcing my fear that I was not as good as the rest of those kids with brighter minds and richer parents. *It wasn't fair*, I argued back with her in my mind as my legs punched the pedals. *I could have done it, if only you'd believed in me, if only you had found me the help I needed to keep going. Instead you encouraged me to quit, and I've quit everything since that wasn't easy.* I'd quit living at home, I'd quit school, I'd quit boyfriends and Hubbard Hill, and now, most of all, I was desperate to quit this stupid bike trip!

Tears were streaming down my face when I reached the bottom of the latest hill somewhere near Howe Caverns. I jumped off my bike, threw it on the side of the road, and started walking, sobbing and angry. Mike turned to look back and stopped before turning around to bike back to me.

"I'm not doing this anymore!" I screamed. "I'm finished! I refuse to pedal up one more fucking hill! I hate your stupid idea! I'm sorry I ever agreed to this!"

Mike set his bike down and walked over to me, his eyes sympathetic. He tried to put his arms around me, but I knocked them away.

"It's no good. You can't just hug me and make it all better. I'm taking my stuff and hitchhiking."

"What about your bike?"

"To hell with my bike! I hope someone takes it. I don't want to ever see it again. I'm leaving it in the ditch."

I paced around on the pavement, angry still, but my tears had stopped.

"Look," Mike said, "why don't we just sit here for a while and take a break? Let's think about this before rushing into anything."

"Think? All I do is think. I want to stop thinking."

I started to cry again, and this time I let him comfort me. Mike kept me stable, I knew that. He was the level-headed person I needed in my life, the one who could get me to stop and reconsider before impulsively blundering into my next decision.

I agreed to sit, and we rested on the grass for a while. I talked about the thoughts I'd been having about my parents and how they'd screwed up my life.

"Parents are assholes," Mike agreed. "They have no idea how much they can mess up a child's life. That's why I'm never having children. They don't do it on purpose, though. I think they just don't know any better."

"Well, my parents kept me locked away from the world with a long list of rules to force me to become just like them. And I hated it. I had to get out of there."

"And you did," Mike pointed out. "You got out, and now you're your own person. You put yourself down too much. I know you are capable of a lot more than you think. Give yourself a break. This bike trip is tough, but you're doing it. It's tough for me, too. Sometimes I wonder if I can keep on going, then I look at how far we've come." He looked me straight in the eye, raising his eyebrow. "We've ridden almost two hundred miles! That's an accomplishment I'm proud of. And I'm proud of you." He pulled me against his shoulder and stroked my hair. "Look at the faces of the people we meet in the little stores we stop at. They all smile and ask about our trip and treat us with respect. We're doing something they can't do, and they know that."

I sniffed, wiped my eyes, and sat up straight. "I know you're right. And we're probably only another day from the next commune. I guess I can get that far, at least."

"Look, why don't we stop early today?" he suggested. "We've been making good time, doing over thirty-five miles a day. So what if we only do twenty? We'll stop, eat dinner in a restaurant instead of cooking in our room, relax, and read. Maybe even have a drink."

"Okay. I know I can make it to the next motel with a restaurant."



In our motel room, I watched soap operas and game shows, mindless dribble that I found amusing, allowing my brain to unwind. Our afternoon off from biking was like an afternoon off from my whole lifestyle. In the restaurant, I ordered a Manhattan from the cocktail menu because it sounded sophisticated, and I soon felt drunk. Since the only vegetarian item offered was iceberg lettuce

and tomato salad, I said what the hell and ordered chicken cacciatore with pasta and sauce. I hadn't eaten meat in over a year, but instead of feeling repulsed and guilty I ate ravenously, wolfing the chicken down to the bones and wishing I had more. It felt good to abandon all my principles for a few hours; it was as if they had become a burden from which I needed a reprieve.

Later that evening, I opened my Carlos Castaneda book and immersed myself in his story. He spoke of a power deep within our navels that could be summoned to perform incredible feats, both spiritual and physical. As I considered how this could apply in my life, it occurred to me that I could use this power he described to overcome my biking trials—that I could turn this journey into a spiritual one, much like monks I had read about elsewhere who had endured hardship to reach greater enlightenment. I pulled out my meditation cards and delved into them, searching for inspiration. I encountered a Buddhist chant I had used previously for meditating, *OM Mani Padmi Hum*. Repeating it sent a feeling of tranquility throughout my body.

In the morning, I added additional words for my personal power-invoking chant: *OM Mani Padmi Hum, Use the Power, Sat Nam*.

When Mike and I set out on our bikes, I repeated the chant in time to my cycling. It was the perfect rhythm for pedaling, and instead of constantly changing my speed I kept the same, steady pace. When it started getting too difficult to pedal, I downshifted and maintained the pace to my chant. When my thoughts began to drift, I pulled them back using the chant, maintaining serenity while gazing at the road in front of me, rather than getting discouraged by worrying over what lay ahead. I was experiencing the ability to *Be Here Now*, breathing in . . . out . . . in . . . out . . . *Use the Power . . . Sat . . . Nam . . .*

Instead of feeling beaten, I felt fresh and energized. I no longer cared about how far we needed to go, what the curve ahead would bring, or if I would even reach it. I eased past Mike on a difficult hill, and never needed to stop. When we took a break, Mike shook his head in disbelief, and I explained what was happening. It was as if the books I'd been reading over the last couple of years about reaching a spiritual state of being were suddenly alive to me, like I was no longer reading theory but instead experiencing a shift in consciousness.

My mind was now clear of negative thoughts. I felt calmer. Instead of my thoughts controlling me, I was in control of them. The trip was only torturous if I allowed it to be. I could shape my experience to be positive. I didn't have to quit or fail like I'd done in the past. This energy inside of me had been waiting to begin anew. Now I understood I could control this power to pace myself through my journey.

That's when I realized I needed to let go of my anger at my parents for the ways I felt they'd failed me. Regardless of the past, they weren't in control anymore. What happened from now on was my responsibility, and if I wanted something to be different, only I could change it. My parents' vision of my value as a woman had been limited by what they'd been taught during an earlier time, but my view was exploding with possibilities, thanks to the women leading our liberation. I had become a strong woman with the ability to navigate these hills and valleys, and I could shut out the voices in my head that told me I wasn't capable.

Summoning my confidence, I got back on my bike and rode toward the hill I would climb to my next destination.



## Epilogue

**F**or most of us, the line between the destinations in our lives is seldom a straight one. That's how it was for me. The strength and vision I recognized during my bike trip at times grew foggy, and at other times buoyed me through to success.

Mike and I never found another commune. Instead, we rented a house near Hubbard Hill until our relationship broke down and we went our separate ways. At that point, I returned to Connecticut, and I have lived here since.

The next few years brought a marriage, a child, and a divorce, followed by a job reviewing medical claims, and then I finally began taking college courses at night.

In 1980, at the age of twenty-five, I enrolled full time in a technical school and, after completing, entered the world of technology as a computer programmer. I suspect my first boss hired me because I was a woman, as he had outstanding sexual discrimination complaints (now called gender discrimination) filed against him with the company. Those complaints helped to open a door for me, as well as the woman hired soon after me, on the previously all-male team. As the woman from Cornell Law School had pointed out to us at the Ithaca Women's Center in 1973, men aren't

going to give up control voluntarily. It was cases that were tried in the '70s that set the precedents to strengthen those laws to where ordinary working women in companies across the country could access them for their grievances and be taken seriously.

While still in technical school, I sought the help of a therapist. I was suffering from depression brought on by a difficult relationship, along with struggling to survive while living alone on unemployment and hoping my car would hold together until I had a job.

My therapist suggested that my state of mind was the result of more than just this relationship and circumstance. "Each hurt triggers the unresolved feelings from a prior pain," she told me. For her to begin to help me, she explained, I needed to face my past.

"How do you confront your feelings?" she asked me.

"I write."

I went home to my apartment and began handwriting pages on a pad of lined paper, detailing the memories that were still vivid in my mind. In between coding programs and studying for tests, I wrote pieces that would morph into a book over time. I began to heal through writing, and to learn better ways of handling relationships through my therapy.

By 1992, I had experienced enough success in the technology industry to start a consulting business. With that came my first personal computer. A writer friend read my ramblings from 1980 and convinced me to transfer them to the computer and continue writing. That was the beginning of years of drafts, writing workshops, conferences, classes, and a writer's group.

By 2000, technology had shifted to the internet and my career had shifted to project management. Eventually, I became a deputy director for state government, managing a technology area in the male-dominated field. During those years, my career became

more demanding, and I put the draft of this book aside. I retired in 2017. After retirement, I finally picked it up again and completed it.

For many years, I kept quiet about who I was at the time of this memoir. I feared that exposing my life would hurt my career or diminish my credibility in the workplace—or, worse, have a negative impact on my children when they were teenagers. As I read other memoirs, however, it struck me that I did not think less of the authors who wrote them. Instead, by sharing their stories, those writers had exposed their humanity and their struggles, and grown stronger in my eyes. I came to understand that by sharing my story, others might make sense of their own struggles and triumphs and be less likely to judge themselves or others harshly. Our lives are all laced with setbacks and mistakes, even tragedy, and at other times breakthroughs and joy. We all cope as best we can with what we have and hope to grow in the process.

Whatever path you take, it will change you. My evenings at the Ithaca Women's Center and the awareness I garnered from reading feminist writers and activists changed me. Books set me on a path to dive into a field I knew nothing about, where I knew of no female role models, and gave me the strength to push forward. I'd been taught to believe women should live limited lives, that we should follow the rules men had put in place for us—advice I thankfully ignored. My mother had preached that a woman didn't need an education, that she couldn't have a family and a career, which was one of the reasons I'd left home in the first place. I'd dreaded my future. The women's movement changed that for many of us. Like other women of my generation, I stumbled through the unmarked trails of marriage and family along with a career and responsibility seldom available to women in prior decades.

At times I still hear young professional women saying they are not feminists. They don't believe in "women's lib." They seem

to be unaware that the only reason they have such myriad career options is because of those women who walked the feminist path so they could have choices. For those of us who straddled that change and witnessed the before and after, there is no denying the gifts handed down from those feminists who enlightened and educated us, who stood for change and helped create the culture shift that is still in progress.

Many of the people I've written about here have reentered my life over the years, often in random and unexpected ways. Some continue to be activists in one form or another, advocating for climate protection, peace, and human rights, including women's rights. Some have passed on. One of the reasons I continued to write this story over time was the desire to preserve these people as I remembered them, when youth, freedom of expression, and unlimited possibilities converged like nuclear fusion.

I think of the individuals from this time as my first tribe. They all played a role in taking me from my sheltered youth and transporting me to a larger world as a stronger and more resilient person. I am grateful for their place in my life, even the ones whose lessons were painful. I have forgiven the past hurts imposed upon me, and forgiven myself for the pain I imposed upon others, particularly my parents. We were young and had years of learning ahead of us.

I still have much to learn and more to experience. The challenges, like life, keep changing, but I know I am better equipped to handle them now than I have ever been. And on most days, if you asked me, I would tell you I am happy.



## Acknowledgments

This book is an accumulation of years of work and input from instructors, workshop coordinators and attendees, a writer's group, and friends and family who shared their knowledge and support along my writing journey. It would be impossible to name every person who was there to lift me up along the way, so I apologize in advance for those I missed below.

First, I would like to thank Brooke Warner—coach, teacher, cheerleader, and publisher. She literally changed my life by enabling me to transition from an endless work-in-progress, bordering on volumes, to a completed book. By believing in my work, she inspired me to finally bring this out into the world.

I am endlessly impressed by the professional team at She Writes Press, including Samantha Strom, my project manager, for her quick responses to my questions as she moves my book through the publishing phases; Krissa Lagos, my editor, whose attention to detail goes far beyond my capabilities; and Julie Metz for her stunning cover design.

I thank my publicist Crystal Patriarche at BookSparks along with Tabitha Bailey and her team for their wide reaching effort and support of this book.

Karen Cwirka came along just when I needed her, providing in-depth reading and input at a critical moment that helped me reach the finish line. I will be forever grateful.

Without Laura Denino reading parts of my scribbled first draft and convincing me to type those pages onto my first computer and keep writing, this book would still be a pile of yellowing pages stuffed into a file cabinet. Thank you.

For several years, I participated in a writer's group that kept me moving forward with twice-monthly deadlines for submitting and reviewing work. A number of members came and went but Sandra Karakoosh, Karen Biernat, Lisa Calhoun, and Susan Omilian were there through most of it. These women read through chapter upon lengthy chapter, providing feedback and commenting on the evolution of my story as we pulled each other along. Thank you for being my readers and keeping me motivated. I learned from all of you.

Marcia Olsson, Nancy Teed, Maria Matarazzo, Claudia Traskos, Amanda LaPlant, Pauline Kendall, Mary Meggie, Pam Civiello, and Anne Hughes Smith were each my early and later readers. They offered support, feedback, and encouragement, despite their busy lives. Many thanks to all of you.

I am indebted to the consistency and dedication of Tammy Delatorre, a talented writer who runs online writing sessions multiple days a week. These forced me to sit at the computer and keep on a schedule even when distractions were overwhelming. I am glad to know you are still there as I move forward with my new work.

Going back, I must thank my seventh grade English teacher, Jerry Hilliard, who believed in my work enough that he submitted a poem of mine to the *Hartford Courant*; they published it, gifting me with my first opportunity to see my words in print.

I attended a number of writing conferences and workshops to learn craft and stay inspired. Those that had the greatest impact on me were the International Women's Writing Guild Summer Writers Conference and the Iowa Summer Writing Festival, which I would highly recommend to others. There were many individual workshops or instructors from other conferences that stand out in my experiences as well—Linda Joy Myers, Katha Pollit, Cynthia Huntington, and Amy Ferris, to name a few.

For the women I met at the Ithaca Women's Center so many years ago, whose names I cannot recall, who imparted their wisdom, shared their experiences, and taught me to believe it was possible for women to change the world if we supported one another, I thank you for changing my world.

Most of all, I want to thank my husband, Richard, who has provided his endless support for my work. He has cooked lunches and dinners while I typed, and entertained himself on vacations while I sat in a quiet room with a laptop. When I traveled to conferences or spent evenings in writing groups, he never complained about his extra responsibilities, even when our children were small. He gave me the freedom I have always needed to be myself while loving me unconditionally, and even promised not to read my book until I was done so I would not feel constrained by imagining his reaction. He is the love of my life.

## About the Author



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**S**haron Dukett has been a computer programmer, deputy director in state government, cocktail waitress, and project manager (PMP certified), and she has designed and embroidered handmade clothing. She travels extensively, using loyalty points and avoiding tourist traps. When she is home, she and her husband live in central Connecticut in a house he built that overlooks the Connecticut River—the house where they raised their family. When not writing or blogging, she is reading, skiing, biking, golfing, spending time with family and friends, creating clutter, and committing to more activities than she probably should. She loves reading memoir from a variety of backgrounds—to learn how others feel, experience life, and deal with their struggles. *No Rules* is her debut memoir.

[www.sharondukett.com](http://www.sharondukett.com)

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