2003

Mining City Love Tale | A novel

Milana Marsenich

The University of Montana

Let us know how access to this document benefits you.
Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.umt.edu/etd

Recommended Citation
https://scholarworks.umt.edu/etd/2986
Permission is granted by the author to reproduce this material in its entirety, provided that this material is used for scholarly purposes and is properly cited in published works and reports.

**Please check "Yes" or "No" and provide signature**

Yes, I grant permission

No, I do not grant permission

Author's Signature: [Signature]

Date: May 30, 2003

Any copying for commercial purposes or financial gain may be undertaken only with the author's explicit consent.
A Mining City Love Tale

A Novel

By

Milana Marsenich

B.A. Montana State University, Bozeman, Montana 1987
M.Ed. Montana State University, Bozeman, Montana 1990

Presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Fine Arts

The University of Montana

May 2003

Approved By:

Chairperson

Dean of Graduate School

Date
A MINING CITY LOVE TALE

Table of Contents

1895
Prologue

1917
The Old Home

In a Crowded Bar

The Silver Bow Bakery

Promise

Crossed Paths

Birthday Party

Boxing Match

1895
The White Dog Watches

1917
Taking Care

Visiting and Re-visiting

A Letter From Home

Returning

A Guest Comes to Dinner

A Visitor Climbs the Fire Escape

Love and Defiance at the Columbia Gardens

A Stranger’s Embrace

Fire in the Shaft

Bodies

1895
The White Dog Follows the Funeral Procession

1917
A Mother’s Welcome
1895
Prologue

The white dog heard the woman’s cry and rose for his usual haunts in the sanguine dawn. He wandered through the crimson town toward the orphanage where the woman washed the ghostly wet sleep from her cheeks. She woke early often, crying, and he always stopped there first for food in exchange for affection. He rubbed his head into her palm and licked the dried salt from the back of her hands and they started their days together that way, before the children returned from their fairy dreams and the morning lights blinked on. She carved a biscuit and spread it on a pan beside a bowl of water. He sat still as skinned fur until she drizzled bacon grease on the slices.

When the children arrived in the kitchen he licked their hands, nuzzled his nose into their thighs, or leaned his weight against theirs, adjusting carefully to the size of each so that he wouldn’t knock one child down. Two little girls always came to him before breakfast. They looked just like each other, except that one had dark black hair and the other brown and, under the same light, their eyes shined differently, as though one, the dark haired girl, looked off in an odd direction. They were not tall yet and their heads barely reached above his own. They’d ruff up his fur and crawl on him and he’d let them. Mornings at the orphanage were quiet, after the woman’s bad dreams, before the sun glaring and noise began. It was the town’s safest hour.

Later he went to the Copper Tavern and the Goldmine Cafe for steak bones and dried muffins. He wandered this way through the day, sniffing the people that passed him with outstretched hands or pawed his ears with colorful mittens. Some smelled like popcorn or fresh dirt or dried whiskey. Several ignored him, striding quickly with their heads down.
It wasn’t until darkness slid over that winter day in 1895, in Butte, Montana that the white dog receded into the shadows. He heard whispers hissing near the warehouses on East Platinum Street, saw feet blazing the icy streets and snow reflecting red like the dawn. Soon the sirens cut his ears and large fire wagons pulled by teams of horses bulled past him. He haunched backwards, away from the displaced night, toward the flats, a wild lonely sound escaping his throat.

He hadn’t gone far when he felt the familiar touch of the woman’s white hand on his neck. She held the hand of a line of children that snaked up the road toward the copper glow. A towering boy at the snake’s head pulled them closer to the fire. The look alike girls moved near to the white dog and he followed them as though roped by their delighted cries.

Even with the lag between himself and the children he felt the pulsing heat. People pushed toward the fire like a parade crowd. Something popped and exploded and he fled a few vacant steps down the hill. When the woman and children didn’t move away from the fire he went back to them. He grabbed the little girl with the dark hair by the mitten and pulled on her. The snake of children and the woman followed. Soon, as though also a giant serpent, the crowd moved back, away from the jumping, lashing flames.

The fire expanded abruptly and another explosion tore at his ears. He pulled again at the girl. The woman shrieked like the fire wagons and fell in the snow. The white dog let go of the girl, ran to the woman and sank his teeth into her coat sleeve, trying to pull her up from the frozen ground. The sleeve came apart in his mouth and tasted like dried leaves. He sunk his teeth into the sleeve a second time, near her shoulder, when a man with a large stick swung at him, driving him back again and again, until he couldn’t reach the woman or the girls.

He withdrew into the shadows, away from the blows, where he watched the man help the woman cross the street, away from the fire. The white dog ran his tongue across his upper lip where the stick had crashed against his teeth. The blood from his mouth flowed into the snow. The fire flared and grew. At the third explosion much of the crowd
surrounding the warehouse disappeared and for a brief moment the sky rained blood,
speckling the snow and his white paws with flesh. Several fingers and a foot lay in the
snow around him, silent as the mountain or a tree rustling in a brief wind.

Across the street he saw the look alike girls with their heads tilted in his direction
standing between the woman and the man holding the stick like a cradled rifle. The light
girl put her hand up, palm out, and rocked it back and forth, waving at him. The dark one
stood like stone, one hand clasping her mouth, the other one holding her head as if to stop
a pain. Beside her in the snow lay a disembodied arm. Smoke soon filled the gap of street
between them, and the look alike girls, the woman, and the man disappeared into the
fragmented night like the wild ghostly crowd.
Chapter One

1917
The Old Home

In March of 1917 Kaly Shane sat alone in a black vinyl booth at the Copper Tavern, feeling too thin to move. The pregnancy had weakened and shriveled her, the only noticeable width being at her waist. In spite of the storm outside she felt a sweltering heat in her face and neck. A sour noise crossed the floor from two early drinkers who sat at the bar and argued about the war. She whiffed their whiskey and the room swooned around her. She drug a distant courage from an earlier time and willed herself to slip into her large winter coat, place her feet flat on the sawdust covered wood, straighten her legs and rise up on them.

Standing was a simple task. Like any common person she’d done it hundreds of thousands of times, yet today she could not get herself to move in the direction she had chosen. Her paralyzed self weighted the booth bench like a Highland boulder.

“Would you like a drink? The men at the bar want to buy you a drink.” Big Joe, the bartender, wiped her table with a dirty rag and left the table wet.

“I do,” said Kaly. “But I don’t.”

“I can’t do both. You have to decide.” He raised his dark eyebrows at her.

She played her fingertips on the table, looked at the gray wall, out toward the bandstand and back to the burly dark man looming over her.

“Tell them to buy the shoe shine kid a soda or tip the paper boy. I’ve got to go.” She put an arm into her coat sleeve as if it was a natural thing and she had meant what she’d said. That was all it took. In the next moment she found herself walking west on Park Street toward the Polly Mae Orphanage. She left a certain trail of snow steps behind her. Icy flakes landed in her eyelashes. She melted them by breathing deeply, warming the air in her lungs like she’d done as a kid and blowing the warmed air up one side of her face and then the other. The old rhythm calmed her.
Beyond Montana Street, part way down the hill, she saw the home she had grown up in and, as if carried by the storm, she floated on her changing mind toward the front porch. She lifted her light frame up the steps. Brick surrounded the carved door before her. Past the building and further up the northern slope she could see the neighborhood houses and above their roofs the gallowed frames of the mines. Soft flakes twirled around her and landed on her head, covering her silver satin scarf. The mine whistle blew and she knew that the time was twelve-noon. A stray dog howled. The snowstorm had already layered the orphanage porch with a full foot of white fluff and she turned toward the flats and sat down in the cushion of it. She pulled the warm wool coat under her like a blanket.

Kaly had spent her life tripping from one trouble to the next and now she counted her hours in time to the sired sound of the mining whistles. The burrowed tunnels produced a robust supply of copper for bullets during the war. When she was young, Kaly had committed the names of several of the copper mines to memory: Wake Up Jim, Neversweat, Mountain Con, Orphan Girl. She knew men who had worked and died in all of them.

They'd been her best customers, mostly drunk on whiskey, tired from a shift, occasionally jovial or kind. Kaly managed them all with a professional distance. She had cut the cord of feeling at age 10, the day she lost Anne Marie. Lately, though, something like love or anger, a sense of betrayal, or grief would burst through without warning and she'd find herself crying in some John's arms. Later she'd be bitter or sullen, feeling like someone had slipped her a mickey.

The funny thing was it seemed good for business. The men seemed to enjoy comforting her as much as having sex, sometimes more. They'd brush her hair out of her face and apologize. One man left two dollars on the nightstand and he hadn't even loosened his pants. He'd simply wet his palms on her tears, brushing the tiny droplets aside, a deep sigh of satisfaction pressing out from his lips. She'd felt her stomach twist and lurch into her throat that day and the dreaded heat had sauntered up her belly. She had
found herself running toward the flats just to be alone, her gaze fixed on the Highland Mountains, wanting to expel the baby and wanting to keep her at the same time.

She had talked some sense into herself. She would ask Miss Anderson to take the baby into the orphanage until one of the town families could adopt her. Or, and this she could barely imagine, until she, herself, could stand in as a mother to the poor child.

Kaly rose up and turned toward the orphanage door. She lifted the metal knob at the grand entrance of the home and let it thud down. Heat swept up her back and played at her stomach, causing it to sweat and turn, spreading a bitter taste up her throat and into her mouth, the pure wave of it heightening the heaviness in her breasts. And it wasn’t just her breasts that felt heavy; when the heat came, her thin body seemed to be one leadened weight. She expended great energy to lift and move her legs, to stand, to knock at the wooden door of another time.

The worst of that time descended on Kaly. The Rocky Mountains had brought twenty inches of snow in four hours the spring that she and Anne Marie had turned ten. The two of them had emptied their dresser drawers by piling on leggings, undershirts, blouses and sweaters, making it impossible for either of them to bend their arms.

“Kay, will you help me?” Anne Marie moaned from under the deluge of clothes and swiped the air beyond her chest. “I can’t reach my buttons.”

Kaly pushed her arms straight in front of her, pressed them together like scissors and fastened Anne Marie’s coat. “Now me, my turn,” she said.

Anne Marie smiled and waddled a few steps away. “First,” she said, “say the magic word.”

Kaly thought about it. “Mother,” she said.

Anne Marie squished up her nose. “No. Never,” she said, “try again.”

“Blanket?”

“Not that one.”

“Food.”
“More magic than that.”

“Come on, Annie. Button my coat for me. I feel like a winter whale.”

“Winter. That’s it. Winter,” Anne Marie clapped and scissored her arms in the same way that Kaly had.

Together they stepped outside into the burning cold. Icicles formed on their upper lips. Kaly had felt her heart beat fast. Her face had tingled with frozen warmth and her arms felt strong. Tree branches had lifted up, sharp and bright, cradling the welcomed snow, offering passage to the secret world behind their trunks. Kaly and Anne Marie had followed into that secret world. They had stepped off of a frazzled edge, crisp white innocents, and disappeared into the frail deep snow.

Kaly mustered a slow determination and shoved the memory off. Right now she needed to talk to Miss Anderson and decide what to do about the baby. She knew that she had no mothering instincts, knew that she lacked that basic material that caused a woman to pick up an infant when it cried, to look directly into the glistening eyes and be charmed, to love. She told herself that she had nothing to guide her in love, no role model to lean back on, no heroes of love to look toward.

Miss Anderson had occasionally petted her head or held her hand if safety demanded. But even when Kaly was sick and Anne Marie had died Miss Anderson had pushed her away. She had offered the tangible shelter of the home. And she had fed them, although never enough, and Kaly had grown up with a constant crawling feeling in her stomach, her stomach muscles tightening and folding in on themselves.

Kaly felt the heat in her cheeks now, brushed a melting layer of snow from them. The door opened and Coral Anderson stood in its abandoned frame. Her hazel eyes widened. A brief smile swept across her face and faded. Her dark hair had turned perfectly white and was cut bluntly at her chin rather than tied in a bun at the back of her neck. Her ruddy face drooped tiredly as if it had gathered a certain unwelcome wisdom. After the smile her lips pursed politely.
“Go wash up for a snack,” Miss Anderson said to a small group of children just beyond the entryway. A burst of giggles trickled down the hall.

In front of Kaly a red Oriental rug covered the dark mahogany floor. A wrought iron bench sat across from a closet lined with small coats and tiny snowshoes. Photos of young children hung on the wall above the bench. Roughly one third of the photos had a tiny golden cross painted in the lower left-hand corner. The crosses indicated the children who had been raised in the orphanage and died before the job was completed, the memory of them dissolving to dust.

Kaly located Anne Marie’s picture in the photos. She saw the small curves in her cheeks, the soft line of her nose, her deep brown eyes, bangs clipped perfectly across her eyebrows, the tiny sparkle of gold in the photo’s corner. Next to Anne Marie’s picture was her own, light eyes, brown curly hair, not looking at all like Anne Marie’s twin. Three pictures down from her photo, next to one of a long-haired boy, was Tommy Monroe’s. His dark hair was combed back off of his forehead. A shadow fell across one half of his face.

Kaly’s skin burned. She felt a tingling in her cheeks and her eyes watered. She ran her fingers through her hair. “I’m sorry to bother you,” she said, wishing she hadn’t come.

“No one should bother anyone in this weather. You’ll catch your death,” Miss Anderson said.

She waved her in, took Kaly’s coat and hung it on a hook in the hallway closet. She paused briefly as Kaly removed her scarf, then turned and hurried into the kitchen, her gray skirt flying up and behind her as if she were caught in her own wind storm.

Kaly lowered herself slowly onto the wrought iron bench. From the entryway she could hear the familiar moan of the bathroom pipes and the wood in the kitchen stove cracking. She heard the creaking stairs where some child sat drawing. The muffled cry of another child, one who sounded no more than three, came from one of the lower rooms. Kaly had learned to pay attention in these rooms, learned to distinguish a cry of anger from
a cry of fear, learned the baleful sounds of loneliness and that of wrong company. She unlaced her boots and placed them in line where they towered over the others.

"Julian, fix some cheese and crackers. We have a guest." Kaly heard the age in Miss Anderson’s voice and realized that she had been Kaly’s age, 27, when she first took them in as infants.

"I need to speak with you alone," Kaly said from the hallway.

"Wonderful. We’ll schedule a date in about ten years. Julian. Let George help. George. Stop being bossy."

Miss Anderson’s voice sprung out from the kitchen where the two boys fought over who would slice the cheese.

"I need talk to you about something." Kaly arrived in the kitchen as the smaller boy leered at the larger one.

"Stop looking so smug, Julian," Miss Anderson said. The leer quickly transferred to George’s face. “Contain yourself, George. You didn’t win the World Series."

George flushed red and he turned and glared at Kaly. Dark brown hair fell into his eyes and he reminded her of Tommy Monroe. A girl, about six years old, sat huddled in the corner. Kaly had sat in that very corner watching Tommy and Bert Browne fight over a meat cleaver.

Julian waved the knife in front of George who immediately lunged into Julian, grabbing for the knife. Miss Anderson dove between the boys and restrained George in a bear hug.

"Enough," Miss Anderson said. Her deep bark hung in the air. George flailed in her grip. She twisted him and pasted his back to her front. He kicked at her and she pulled him to the floor. He flung his head back, nearly cracking his skull on her dentures. She dropped her shoulder into the back of his head and pinned his chin to his chest. As if on some secret cue, George went limp in her arms. The girl in the corner made a break for the hallway.
“I wondered how long it would take you.” At first Kaly thought that she spoke the words to George. “To come asking questions. It’s been ten years and this is the first time you’ve returned. It’s the nightmares. You still have them, don’t you?”

“I need your help.” Kaly said.

“You’ll have to go to Tommy,” Miss Anderson said and she set George free. “He’s the only one who knows what happened that day.”

“Not that. It’s something else,” Kaly said. Her head was spinning from all the activity and the smoky scent in the room. The room smelled like it did when they had returned from the warehouse fire, when she and Anne Marie were five, before Tommy had come to live with them. When they arrived home, Anne Marie had a distant look and Miss Anderson had put her to bed. She said that Anne Marie had been pelted by pieces of splintered wood from the warehouse, but Kaly knew that it wasn’t wood that hit her sister. She had seen what had flown into Anne Marie’s head. She had seen it and looked away, into the crowd where people were running in slow motion in all directions. When she looked back, she saw the woman’s arm on the ground, still covered by a lace sleeve, a silver bracelet circling the wrist, the index finger pointing toward the fire.

“I’ve done all I can do for you,” Miss Anderson said.

“You think I was a business transaction” Kaly said more to herself than Miss Anderson. She looked out the window to where snow covered the back yard. She had the urge to walk into the blue wave of it, to bury herself under the feathered flakes, to lie still as a fallen bird. The urge pulled her into a silky white world where the crocus bloomed and Anne Marie lived, where a baby crawled through short grass to her mother’s arms, and Kaly picked up the child and wiped the dirt from the corner of her mouth.

Kaly wanted a mother, if only for a moment. She wanted to tell Miss Anderson that she was pregnant. She wanted, even if it didn’t last, for someone to hold her, to wash her face and braid her hair back. She let out the breath she had been holding. It was no good. Miss Anderson had never been there when she needed her. No one had ever been there
when she needed them. But then self-pity hadn’t exactly been a friend either and for the second time that day she told herself to rise up.

“I’m pregnant,” she said. “I wanted you to take the baby when it’s born.”

“Ninety thousand people in town and you choose me.” Miss Anderson put the crackers and cheese on the table. “Aren’t I the lucky one.”

“I made a mistake to come here today.”

“The father?” Miss Anderson asked.

Kaly shook her head. She bit her lip to control the sick feeling in her stomach. She glanced back toward the pictures in the hallway as if through the wallpaper she could see Tommy’s slick grin. He had moved into the orphanage the day after the warehouse fire, when both of his parents were killed in the explosions. He was nine years old and filled with sudden wisdom. He had immediately zeroed in on Anne Marie, leaching himself to her like he were her twin instead of Kaly.

The first day Tommy had lured Anne Marie into his room with card tricks and magic jokes. Kaly heard their laughter behind the door and knocked hard. Suddenly the room became very quiet and she felt the hush reverberate through the walls. She knocked again. A giggle rose up and stifled itself in a breath.

“Let me in,” she had said. “You’re not allowed behind closed doors.”

When no one answered, Kaly did the unthinkable. She told on her sister. Both Tommy and Anne Marie got whipped and Anne Marie had to spend the night in her room without dinner. Kaly hid a muffin in the pocket of her dress and brought it to her sister before bedtime but Anne Marie wouldn’t look at her. In the morning the muffin sat untouched on the nightstand.

From that beginning Kaly had hid her disdain of Tommy, first for the way he had charmed Anne Marie with his magic jokes and athletic wit, later because she blamed him for Anne Marie’s death.

“Is the pregnancy confirmed?” Miss Anderson folded her arms across her chest.
"Not yet, but I know." Exhaustion overcame Kaly and she wanted to curl up in her old bed at the end of the hallway and sleep. She wanted something, one thing, anything, to be easy.

As if to deny her, George bounced from the sink where he'd been standing palming the cheese knife, and stabbed at Julian, catching him in the shoulder with the serrated edge. He pulled it out as if to stab again but Miss Anderson, quick on her feet, blocked the thrust and pinned him in another hold. Blood drenched Julian's shirtsleeve. Something like surprise and satisfaction sprung across his face just before he screamed and burst into sobs.

The heat rose up in Kaly again, seared against her belly and bee-lined for her throat. She raced for the bathroom. The memories flooded her. They had gotten separated in the storm and Kaly had lost her way in the sheet white day. When she finally made her way back to the orphanage she had found Anne Marie in the snow, her dark hair fanned across the drift, her stiff blue hands clenched to her chest. Her eyes stared and looked nowhere at the same time. Tommy had stood over her, his dark hair falling across his forehead, his trousers frozen tunnels for his legs. He had an astonished, happy look in his eyes, as if he had just found a lost baseball.

Kaly had shook Anne Marie to wake and move her. She had to get her into bed. Miss Anderson would warm some broth for her. "Come on, Annie. Come on. It's cold. Stop playing now. It's winter. Winter," she said, trying the magic word. When she couldn't wake Anne Marie, Kaly lunged into Tommy, flailing her padded useless arms at him, until he had restrained her in much the same way that Coral Anderson had just restrained George.

"You wait here," Tommy had said. "I'll go get Miss Anderson."

Kaly had waited, willing Anne Marie to get up and walk inside with her, to finish the dishes or empty the garbage, to make one more yarn doll for the younger girls. But Anne Marie didn't get up, didn't blink or yawn or pull away. She didn't move. Kaly felt
herself falling, dropping into a dark endless pit, searching the vast black chasm for her sister. The empty air crushed her chest and she couldn’t breathe. Fear singed her legs and arms, severed her head from her torso. Just before she disintegrated, she reached out for help and caught, not Miss Anderson’s hand, but Tommy Monroe’s, and in that moment, for the first time, she allowed herself to be hollowed up into the arms of the enemy.

Anne Marie wasn’t the only dead one. Another girl, a baby, had died. An older child---Kaly never knew who---put a pillow over the baby’s head and smothered the infant in cold daylight. Others had been stabbed by knives and sticks. Cheeks had been cut wide open with rocks flung hard from a four-year-old’s hand.

As kind as Miss Anderson tried to be, she couldn’t protect the children left in her care. They were too far gone, too wounded. She was too little mother to pass around and the children learned to count only on themselves.

When Kaly emerged from the bathroom, Coral Anderson thrust George into her arms. In a motion Kaly fell with the boy to the floor, locked him in her grip, the resistance gone out of him. She looked at Julian. His chin was lax, the flat edge in his face betraying nothing. His shirt was soaked in blood.

“Stop feeling sorry for him. They’re all liars and thieves.” Miss Anderson said as she disappeared into the bathroom with Julian.

Holding George, who was quiet and seemed satisfied now, was like holding a snowflake, light, invisible and then gone. Kaly felt his body like a ghost, both haunted and haunting. He eased into her, resting his back against her chest. She sat completely still, afraid to move. She imagined George one day, maybe a year or two from now, taking the carving knife, or a pillow, or a open palm to the child that grew in her belly, demanding that someone look, listen. Demanding that someone love him.

She pulled him in close, held him tightly now. The thought about her own mother came on slowly, like sunlight when the clouds first start to clear. At first it hurt, that
tearing, all over kind of pain when the flu first sets in, or when the whiskey is bad or flowed too freely the night before.

Miss Anderson returned and sent the boys outside, together. They wore coats and gloves but no hats.

"I'll have to think about how I can help you," Miss Anderson said. She pulled a bobby pin from her hair and repositioned it, a practiced tick to regain composure. "It depends on the due date."

"What happened to my parents?" Kaly asked. Until now, Anne Marie had been her family, the only family she had truly allowed herself to think about. But someone, a mother, a father, had come before them.

"Forget it. I'm your parent." Miss Anderson stated it simply, as if it meant something.

"No, my real mother, who was she?"

"It's no good. Let sleeping dogs lie." Miss Anderson clicked her tongue.

"Is she alive?"

The woman stared at her and shook her head. "Here's my offer. I'll do what I can about your child. That's it."

The mine whistles sounded out two o'clock and she heard it again, that sad mournful howling of a stray dog, somewhere nearby. The afternoon shift would finish in another hour and the taverns would bustle with the off shift miners. Normally Kaly would join the working girls gathered in the red light district where business brimmed, but something dormant had pivoted during the storm and she felt the thread of it in her own body. She wanted to return to her crib, build a fire for tea and roll up in the comfort of her own home.

The young girl who had fled earlier peered through the kitchen door, her hair in tangles. Miss Anderson waved her in, pulled the girl toward her. The girl climbed into Miss Anderson's lap. Through the kitchen window Kaly saw the boys playing. Julian
tossed a snowball with his uninjured arm. George ran, laughed, fell into the white powder, rolled over and over onto the surprising paws of a gray wolf-like dog curled at the edge of the yard. Kaly saw it, as if in a dream, before the thing happened, the great knife-like teeth sinking down into George's shoulder, the red blood soaking his coat in the same way the blood had soaked Julian's shirt sleeve, a mining town debt paid, justice served.

But the dog didn't bite down into George's shoulder, didn't draw blood. Instead the dog rolled with the boy, jumped out of the deep snow, flying with all fours into the air, and landed with his legs stretched out in front of him, hind end in the air, large tail wagging. He licked George's laughing face. George reached out his arms, playfully catching the dog's ears in his palms. He pulled the dog close, nuzzled his forehead against the fur and then they were up and running again, George and Julian, with the wolf dog chasing them, shifting this way and that, rolling in the snow, landing on their feet only to trip and stand again and again. They raced across the land where Kaly had found Anne Marie frozen, the golden sun flickering in the branches above them.

Kaly turned away from the boys. She turned away from Miss Anderson and the young girl. She grabbed her coat and boots from the hall closet and put them on. As if to protect herself she pulled her collar up around her neck, stepped outside into the fallen snow and turned up the hill, toward the mines. She had a family somewhere, a family who had left her, and she was going to find them.
Chapter Two
In a Crowded Bar

Kaly sat down on the edge of the Park Street boardwalk and pulled her paled blue skirt tightly around her knees. The wind blew hard against her cheeks and she heard the frozen hum of miners as the afternoon shift hurried to work. The storm had momentarily erased the roads and started the city clean. Copper tunnels ran beneath the buildings like bandits and the East Ridge of the Rocky Mountains towered like a king. The wolf dog sat next to Kaly and laid his head in her lap. She rubbed his ears, dropped her cheek onto his forehead, and looped her arm around his neck. For a moment she was not alone; she had the dog and the baby.

Some dark crack of the city hid Tommy Monroe, who she knew, as hard as she tried to shake him, would never leave her. He would follow her down Park Street, up Montana, across Broadway, to the Silver Bow Bakery, the Copper Tavern, past the grade school, to the brothel on Granite Street, back to her crib. He seemed to be in every restaurant, every bar. As trite as it was to say it, a part of him lived inside of her right now. He had claimed her in the same way that he had claimed Anne Marie. He had skinned Kaly with his meanness and left her raw. She felt the bile rise up in her belly, crawl across her chest with the thought of him. She didn’t know what he would do if he found out about the baby and he scared her.

The city offered its own protection, a secret path down the alleyways between the buildings, a quick step to the blacksmith from Joe’s Cafe; a door that would open at a dark hour, arms that reached up out of a white mist, like clouds. At times she trusted the city like the weather, to change at a sharp corner, to shift under fog and veil the pursued, to blow a wind so bitter it blinded the assailant. At those times she felt safe from Tommy Monroe. Even he could not outwit the city. Still she knew he was patient and could afford to bide his time. He had no where else to go.
A woman, old enough to be her mother, walked into Thompson’s Dress Shop. The wind curled her hair at her chin. She had a soft mouth and chipmunk cheeks, like Kaly’s. The woman didn’t so much as glance in her direction. Two men walked past her, averting their stares. Around the corner a group of school girls giggled. A full trolley car rolled by. The wolf dog nudged his nose into Kaly’s hand and she rubbed his ears again. Possible relatives were everywhere.

She swallowed hard and her throat hurt. She had not felt well all day and now the sickness swelled in her head, arrested her thin body, weighted her to the boardwalk like a violent thief. Dark clouds swallowed the blue sky. Sweat pocked her forehead and she knew she had better get herself inside somewhere, out of the brittle cold.

As though hoisting a large couch from the boardwalk she lifted herself and walked toward the Silver Bow Bakery. She could get some tea and something to eat, go home with a full belly so that sleep would come easily.

Dan McClane shoveled the walk in front of the bakery. The wind blew against his knit cap and he looked happy to see her. His mother owned the bakery and Dan often helped with the heavy work. She waved to his welcome smile and walked inside. The fresh smell of baked goods, bread, cakes, raised doughnuts, mixed with the scent of cooked meals, bean soup, ham sandwiches, a grilled steak. Cigar smoke spilled out from the back room.

Kaly sat at the counter and coughed into a napkin. She’d had bronchitis before and felt it looming over her. She hoped that she could dissolve it with a good meal. Tara McClane came to take her order.

“What’s the soup today?” Kaly asked.

“Split pea,” Tara said and smiled.

Kaly frowned.

“Colored a true Irish green,” Tara laughed, “or we have our everyday special of potatoe soup.”
“How much is it?” Kaly asked.

“In this weather, half price. Ten cents.”

Tara McClane looked too earnestly at Kaly and her sweetness soured Kaly’s desire for a wholesome meal. The mixed smells of food and smoke assaulted her now and the woman’s words clanged in her ears. She left as quickly as she had entered and walked right past Dan without saying good-bye and turned the corner. Kaly needed less kindness. The Copper Tavern would be a better bet for anonymity.

The wolf dog followed Kaly to the tavern and sat at the door of the bar as she entered. She shook the moisture from her wool coat and wiggled her freezing toes. An adamant weakness in her legs spread up her torso. Her arms ached with tightness and her fingers had gone numb from the cold. She felt the tears edging her eyes, ready to break through at the slightest provocation. She couldn’t shake the sense that any moment she’d burst apart and float away and be sucked into the dark mountains surrounding the town.

Big Joe had been fast and a full shot of whiskey sat in front of her. She drank it down.

“You want a another?” He loomed hesitantly above Kaly, as though remembering her earlier indecision. His question boomed in the unreal air around her. You want a mother?

She looked at him.

“Another?” he asked again. He rubbed one hand through his black beard and with the other hand held a steady bottle of Old Label by the neck.

A small man at the far end of the bar, near the poker tables, yelled, “Joe, give me another shot before I get my ax out and chop this dam bar to pieces.” He then got up off of his stool and charged toward Big Joe and Kaly, but two steps in motion he slipped on the wood shavings lining the floor. He fell face first into the sawdust. The music coming from the back room, beyond the pool tables and poker games, stopped just as his head hit the rough wood, adding a last loud beat to the song.
“Sure, I’ll have another,” Kaly said to Big Joe, who shook his head at the small man, covered in wood shavings and sawdust.

Big Joe poured the shot glass to the brim and replaced the bottle on the top row of shelves lining the mahogany back bar.

“It’s on the man at the end,” he said, still scratching his beard.

Down the wooden bar that men had cut women’s names into sat a dark-skinned man with thick black eyebrows. He was dressed in a brown suit, a clean white shirt and a small brimmed hat. He touched the brim of the hat and tipped it toward Kaly. She gave a salute back.

Michael Jovich stood a full six feet tall when he walked down the long bar and sat next to her. He smelled like tobacco and rose water, a smell that reminded her of better times, the summer that she had first left the Polly Mae and worked at the Goldmine Cafe. The work had been hard and she had made enough money each month for a small room at the Hummingbird Motel. The ladies of the line came in for a late breakfast occasionally. Kaly had felt sorry for and befriended a young girl named Beth. Then the owner of the Goldmine ran into gambling trouble and laid Kaly off.

Things went quickly downhill after that. She was hungry and a harsh winter had settled in. Kaly had no where to go and Beth ended up being the one to help Kaly. She took her in, the two of them living in the squashed quarters of Beth’s tiny crib, sharing a single bed. Although Beth was much younger than Kaly she bought Kaly the red satin dress and taught her the rules of seduction, price and safety, in that order. By spring Kaly had rented the crib right next door to Beth’s and owned two dresses, the red satin day dress and a silk lavender gown with an ivory lace collar, for special occasions.

Michael ordered two pickled eggs and Big Joe delivered them both to Kaly. The white rubbery balls rolled on the napkin before her. The tart smell mixed with the tabacco and she turned her head away from them. She felt her skin itch. She shifted on her seat.
Michael was circling in on her and she didn’t like it when people got too close. The air around him felt crushing.

“This morning you seemed to be on some secret mission,” he said. “Did you accomplish it?” He smiled at her and she saw his broad teeth shine.

“This morning?”

“I saw you charging across Montana Street like a mad buffalo,” he said.

The bitter smell of the eggs stung her nostrils and the heat started up her belly, the invasions coming from all directions. She sat at the edge of her seat, ready to flee. She pushed both the eggs and the heat away, gaining some base control. The little man who had fallen to the floor and was now sitting back on his stool brushed himself off. A full glass of water sat before him. The music had started up again and a female voice sang out, course and rough. Kaly swayed in time with the music. It moved toward her and soothed her like a sad mother.

“I accomplished something,” she said, “I’m just not sure what.” She wanted Michael to leave her alone. Often, she had enjoyed his company and his generosity. She’d known him since they were kids and, although she wasn’t in the habit of trusting, he’d been one person who hadn’t turned his back on her. Right now, though, she wanted her solitude.

Then the whiskey worked its magic and she began to relax. He ordered a shot for himself and another for her. She saw the straight line of his nose as he spoke with Big Joe and the rich brown color in his eyes. She’d never noticed before how much he looked like Anne Marie. She added up the years. He could’ve been, could be, their older brother, if they’d had a brother.

She shook it off. It was too much, this idea of family, too much to try to figure each person mathematically by the angles in their faces, the length of their arms, the shade of their skin, adding up each precious piece to see if she belonged somewhere to someone.
She couldn’t fathom it. She needed to let it rest, take it slowly, find a way to investigate the mystery of her birth, no, say it, her parents, her mother, rationally.

“I’ll pass this time,” she said. She’d already had two and she needed to gain her equilibrium. She knew that she shouldn’t drink too much, shouldn’t drink at all really. She’d seen babies born to women who drank all the way through their pregnancies. Something was always off in them. They seemed disconnected and hard to reach, sweet at times but quick to anger. Plus, alcohol didn’t really taste right. Half the time it turned her stomach and its bitter taste shot straight to the back of her throat.

Big Joe ignored her decline and filled her shot glass anyway. She shrugged her shoulders and sipped at it. Someone called her name. She turned toward the sound but saw no one she knew.

“I spent the day trying to organize miners in the Orphan Girl to insist on safe working conditions,” Michael said. “It’s a dangerous place and their pay is garbage.”

“The boss’s will never pay more,” Kaly said. “They’ll just cry poorhouse.”

“Butte’s the largest city between San Francisco and Minneapolis and growing. There is more than enough money coming out of these mines.”

“Not according to the big boys,” she said.

“The Anaconda Mining Company is worth millions.” He looked at her intently, wanted something from her.

“They can’t fight ‘em. They can only walk away and usually, only after getting fired.” She’d heard it all too many times.

“That’s what I mean. The Union can hold the mine owners responsible,” Michael said. “Then we’re fighting together.”

“We’re? You’ve never been down in the hole, have you? A few years ago pissed off miners attacked the Miner’s Union, several times.” Kaly didn’t want to talk about the mines.
"No, but I don't have to carry my soiled clothes in a turkey to understand the fear of a collapsed tunnel," he said.

"How could you?" She glanced at the poker tables. Men sat grim faced and secretive, holding their cards close, drawing a pair or a full house or drawing dead, still betting on the other men as losers. A suffocating chill swept over her. She put her coat on.

"How could I what?"

"Understand what they go through. Understand the pain and fear that another person feels without having experienced it yourself?" She was prolonging the conversation and she knew it. But the whiskey had pasted her to her seat.

"I don't play the saxophone but I like jazz. Remember the fire of 1895?" Michael asked.

She nodded, pulled her coat tightly around her shoulders and crossed her arms at the chest to try to keep from shivering. The door to the tavern opened and shut every few minutes, and a cold wind blew in as each person entered or left.

Michael dumped tabacco onto a piece of pale thin paper, caught the far end between his fingers and rolled it toward his chest. He licked the edge, twisted the ends and offered it to Kaly. When she refused, he lit it and puffed the smoke out toward the huge mirror that captured bits of their images between the liquor bottles. The blue circles floated and diffused into the smoky air of the tavern. He removed his hat and set it on the bar next to his drink. His thick black hair stood out in all directions.

"I was 8 years old at the time. The sirens woke me," he said.

Kaly remembered the fire well. It had erupted in a flour warehouse, a dry wooden structure right in the middle of town that secretly stored dynamite. Miss Anderson had thought that it would be fun for the children to watch the fire. Fun. Hundreds of people gathered around while the fire department tried to kill the flames. The snow reflected back the brilliant orange glow and the whole sky lit up, beautiful and eerie at the same time. Just before the dynamite blew she had watched a man beat a dog with a club until the dog bled
out the mouth. She had stood next to the dog beater when the building exploded and pink mucus landed in the snow around them and on the man’s face. The fuming man wiped his face clean on his coat sleeve and walked them home after the fire, swinging the club like a bat. He became a constant visitor to Miss Anderson after that and whenever he arrived Kaly and Anne Marie retreated to their room. Kaly never saw him after Anne Marie died. He simply melted away like the winter’s ice.

“No one had any idea what was stored in that building. I watched the fire through a window from inside our house,” Michael said.

He paused and took a drag on his cigarette. Kaly gulped what was left of her whiskey, this time finding comfort in the stinging sensation that surged through her mouth and down her throat until it hit her stomach and exploded

Michael flipped the embers from his cigarette into a black ash tray. “When the dynamite blew,” he said, “glass shattered all over me. I couldn’t move. I just kept staring out the window at the red snow. In some of the red patches I saw lumps. Then as the smoke cleared I knew what they were. I wanted to turn away but couldn’t; my eyes were glued to the fire and those strange shapes in the snow.” He took another drag on his cigarette and stared at the back bar.

Kaly remembered how her stomach had turned cold and trembled. Women’s screams had sounded like distant train whistles, trains that had jumped track, trains that were barging through a station unhalted, trains that no one, not Miss Anderson, not the man with the club, could stop. The screams hit a note and couldn’t move beyond it. Kaly had covered her ears until the screams sounded small and mundane, a far off hollow whine, a child’s cry. The chills and shivering worsened as if she were reliving that night, giving the bronchitis a firm hold on her burning lungs. She shook her head to try to remove the sounds. Michael’s words were broken bottles digging into skinned muscles.

“The lumps were body parts. A leg flattened the snow right in front of me. My father had gone with my uncles to help fight the fire. He was blown back from the building
where the dynamite had been hidden. The explosion broke his arm. My uncles weren’t so lucky. Vuko lost his sight and Uncle Lue died.”

Kaly’s face flushed. Even her blood veins hurt. She thought of the tiny legs and arms developing inside of her, the leg in the snow, the red laced arm that had shocked her sister.

Michael’s cigarette rested between his fingers, mostly ash now. “The company knew it was against the law,” he said, "to store dynamite within the city limits. They didn’t care. They did what was convenient to them. Even as the fire department arrived, the copper bosses could have warned them. All but three firefighters died. One horse lived. They still don’t know how many bystanders died.”

Michael had pulled her into the night and held her there. She remembered the funerals. Some private. Two public. One for the fire department and a combined funeral for all of the people that the city was not able to identify. Miss Anderson’s idea of fun. Some fun. A horse had lived through it. A horse had been to the blackened world, withstood the blown town, lost the men he loved, and returned to haul a fire wagon to another site. Kaly had held on to the horse’s slim survival like prophecy. The horse still pulled water to fires up until a couple of years ago when he was retired to the field. She imagined him easing his way through sleepy days, gnawing simple hay while the smoke from other wind fanned flames circled his large nostrils, feeling content and done with good work.

Michael put his cigarette out and drank the shot of whiskey in front of him. The Copper Tavern had gotten very busy. Men occupied most of the barstools and others flocked behind those seated, trying to get Big Joe’s attention. An occasional female face showed through the maze of heads. Some of the women Kaly recognized from the streets, some of them she had even worked with, women who, like herself and the horse, had developed a hundred new ways to survive each year. The music, still playing in the background, was dulled and difficult to hear through the yelling of the crowd.
At the far end of the tavern she caught a glimpse of Tommy Monroe’s chin just before he turned his back to her. He walked the long way around to the front poker table and sat down with the other men and lit a cigar. Certain that he’d been watching her as she talked with Michael she brushed at the air as if pushing at a lingering part of him.

“I’ll start working with Stojan Mirich and a group of miners that meet at his house next week,” Michael said.

“Jovanka’s father?” She said the words aloud before she could edit them. She knew the girl, had passed her on the street. She had often been struck by how much she looked like Anne Marie.

“You know her?”

“The girl reminds be of my sister, but she’s not my sister. I don’t have a sister. I don’t have a family,” she said and pushed herself away from the bar.

Michael stared at her, looking stunned, and said nothing. She was behaving badly and she knew it. At this moment, though, she didn’t care. Let them have their families, she thought. She made her way past Tommy Monroe at the poker table, toward the door and the free cool air outside. Someone grabbed her arm. She froze.

“Hey, we got a free seat. Play a game with us.” The man who had fallen from his barstool spit the words through his whiskey breath. She looked toward the poker table. Tommy stared straight-faced at her and patted the empty seat next to him, inviting her to join him.

She pulled her arm from the little man’s grip. “Oh, I’m lucky at poker and love,” she said. “But not tonight.”

Once outside of the Copper Tavern, where the snow had begun to fall again she saw the remnants of the wolf dog’s tracks going south toward the Highlands. She knew that the peaks were covered in snow and imagined how they might shine under a full moon in a cloudless sky, beauty saved for another time. The city lights had come on and the streets were bright under their glow.
Kaly started for home. She breathed in the cool air and it felt good in her feverish lungs. Oh, I am lucky at poker and love, she thought, and laughed at the joke, the private joke, the joke that was always, ultimately, on her.
Chapter Three
The Silver Bow Bakery

Jovanka Mirich put her ear to the door of the washroom. Something was wrong. Papa was dying. This much she knew but her parents didn’t talk about Papa’s consumption. Their conversation centered on a less tragic and more loathsome subject. They wanted her to marry Michael Jovich. They wanted her to marry a man she only knew by sight and, as she recalled, the sight was not too pretty.

"Is he kind?" Mama asked.

"He’s a strong thinker; he’s worked hard for the unions. Without his influence the Speculator would be just as dangerous as the other mines."

"He’ll be traveling a lot, then?" Jovanka heard the sound of Mama scrubbing clothes on the washboard. The heat from the wood stove made the room too warm and she wiped her forehead with the back of her hand. She hoped she could count on Mama’s to divert Papa.

"He’s dedicated to his work, if that’s what you mean."

"Stojan. Look at me. Will he be good to her? Will he take care of her?" Jovanka heard Mama’s hands go quiet.

"He’s a good man, Milla. He comes from a good family."

"If you think this is best, talk to his father about the engagement."

Papa cleared his throat. Jovanka heard nothing else but the sound of water dripping down the washboard.

Miner’s consumption had made Papa weak. He couldn’t support her any more, but it was wrong to marry her off, without asking what she thought, what she felt. This was the 1900’s and America and the mining frontier, where even women had rights. In fact, just last week Grace Hedges had won a contested divorce from Henry Hedges, shift boss
at the Gray Rock. Papa had to understand that they no longer lived where things were
done the old way. But Papa didn’t understand. Papa didn’t understand her at all anymore.

She pulled the heavy blue curtain aside to reveal four covered sleeping cots and
rummaged through a large trunk. She moved her medicine bag to the left side of the trunk,
found the shawl her baba had crocheted as a gift before they left Montenegro. She wrapped
it tightly around her shoulders like a cocoon. Her grandmother was a healer in their small
mountain village. Before Jovanka left the Balkans Baba had taught her a love for medicinal
plants and caring for the ill.

If she married this union man she would never have the chance to study anything,
let alone medicine. The union was all consuming; she had seen it in her own family, seen it
with Mama and Papa. Mama was generous and even excited about Papa’s union work.
She often scrimped on family meals just to purchase and roast a lamb for the union
organizers.

Jovanka knew that she did not have as big a heart as Mama’s. She knew that she
wanted nothing to do with the unions or the mines. Even the names of the mines disturbed
her, especially the ones named for wives and sweethearts—the Emma, the Nettie, the Little
Minah—women eventually left behind, their husbands failing to come home one night due
to a landslide or fire in the shaft. Papa had even told her that ten years before she was born
his own brother had died in Butte in a mining accident.

Jovanka gathered her long hair into a tight bun at the back of her neck and secured it
neatly under a flowered scarf. Without a word, or another look at the washroom, she
walked out into the fresh snow onto East Galena and started up the hill toward Park Street.
The sour smell of sulfur and arsenic quickly reached her nose.

She had heard stories about the cows from nearby Anaconda raised on arsenic laced
grass. They grew fine and produced a sweet meat, unless they were sold and turned out to
purer pastures. Addicted to the arsenic, the cows needed it to live; without it they died.
She'd also heard that before the turn of the century the mining fumes in Butte had singed the air so badly that businesses turned their lights on during the day and the trolley cars sounded their horn before they turned a corner. When the company moved most of the metal smelting to Anaconda the air remained slightly tinted, mostly noticeable at twilight when the setting sun turned the sky a brilliant array of crimson, pink and orange. Or when the moon shone golden red through the vaporized veil.

Jovanka waved off the smell. The weather cooled her anger, but instead of feeling comforted by the sun reflecting off the snow, as usual, the buildings closed in on her and the blue sky leered at the crowded streets. She felt afraid and confused. She was selfish to think only of herself when, at this very moment, Papa's lungs filled with black mucus.

Mama and Papa's marriage had been decided before Mama was even born and look at how they laughed together. In the old country a girl simply accepted the man her parents chose as her husband. In the old country men and women worked together in the fields, and when war came the women worked alone and waited for the men to return. For generations marriages had been arranged without the consent of either party. It had worked well for many of her ancestors.

Jovanka reached Park Street, lifted her simple cotton skirt and stepped onto the boardwalk. Her legs burned from the uphill climb. The spring air felt good against her cheeks and she remembered when Baba would splash cold water from the creek on her wrinkled face. It had tightened the skin and made her look young again. Jovanka smiled at her own stubbornness; she was her father's daughter.

At the center of town women and children flowed in and out of the shops, the children often bursting through the doors with a new toy or a bag of marbles or groceries. Tired miners stumbled out of the bars and toward home or another bar, the mixed smell of sweat and whiskey clouding the common air surrounding them. Pretty women in shiny red and purple dresses who lived from the wages of the off-shift workers stood on the street.
corner. Their dresses dropped to their ankles and flared out like brightly colored balloons. Some of the dresses were paled and worn, the hems frayed and stained the color of dirt.

Marko, her brother who was two years younger than herself, had learned the hierarchy of prostitutes from the neighborhood boys and he had taught Jovanka how to determine where a woman fit in. The women with the prettiest, cleanest, most elaborate dresses, the dresses collared with fine lace or edged in beads, worked for the madams in the finest parlor houses. A little bit less elaborate dress, made of bright satins or silks in plain straight designs, indicated women who lived and worked in the brothels. When the dresses were simple and worn the women usually worked for themselves or a pimp and lived in one of the cribs, small rooms attached to each other, each of them barely large enough for a bed and stove. The street women were poorly dressed and often had no home. They survived on kindness or violence, whichever paid.

Kaly turned sideways to slide past two women, one wore a paled pink dress with a tear in the bottom of it, the other wore a dress of blue stiff satin, as if it had been newly purchased. They smiled at Jovanka as she passed. The closer one, the one dressed in pale pink, coughed, then dropped her head at cocked her eyes at Jovanka. She looked weak and Jovanka could see the paltry tone to her skin.

"You sure seem to be in a hurry," she said. "Where are you going so fast?"

"I need bread for dinner," Jovanka answered, rehearsing the excuse she'd give to Mama and Papa for leaving so abruptly.

"Slow down and visit a minute. The bakery isn't going anywhere," the woman said. She slid her hand all the way down her pale pink side and raised her arm in a large arc toward the other side of the street, her graceful fingers pointing toward the Silver Bow Bakery.

"Thanks, but no. I want to finish my errands," Jovanka threw a smile back over her right shoulder. Papa would have a fit if she had stopped to talk to the prostitute. Still, the woman's invitation to step, even for moment, into the illicit world, tempted her and made
her heart beat fast. Jovanka felt so constricted by Mama and Papa and the ways of the old country. She was tired of being good. She was tired of following Papa’s rules and wanted to talk to anyone, to everyone.

Jovanka waited on a crowded corner while a horse drawn carriage crossed Park Street. Two boys under the age of ten, curled up like snails, hung on to the back railing, sneaking a ride to the flats. Her eyes followed them down the steep hill toward the town’s edge. From where she stood she could see the snowy tips of the Highland Mountains, the beautiful treacherous mountains they had crossed by train to arrive in Butte at midnight six years ago.

Lightened by the business of town, Jovanka wondered what Mama and Papa thought when they emerged from the washroom to tell her that she was to be engaged to Michael and almost giggled. She could see Papa’s hand held out at his chest, his mouth opened to speak, beginning the lecture to the thing air. Ha, she thought. It was a small triumph. Certainly they knew that she did not wish to marry Michael Jovich or anyone else for that matter, not at 17, maybe never.

So far, she had managed to be inconspicuous in the world of suitors. On union nights she would disappear into the washroom to do the evening dishes. Most days she wore dark, uneventful skirts and pulled her scarf just so, to hide her face. When men were around she kept her opinions and her smile to herself.

It wasn’t that she didn’t like men. She’d had crushes on boys in Montenegro and America. Just last month she had a schoolgirl crush on Dan McClane. She had seen him helping a young girl who had tripped and fallen in the street outside of his mother’s bakery. She had noted the tender way that he lifted her to her feet again and looked her in the eye when he asked her if she was all right, as if he really wanted to know. But he hadn’t noticed Jovanka watching him and she was relieved to have put the it behind her. She had skated easily out of that near romance.

A yell from across the street turned her head toward the Silver Bow Bakery.
“Hey! They got the best damn Irish band in there,” the man yelled at the crowd and pointed to the door of the bakery. “You wanna dance ma’am?” He looked directly at her and she heard the faint music coming from inside. She had never danced in America; it always seemed too bold, too wild. Perhaps it was just what she needed. She started to accept his offer when she saw a short woman, with long stringy hair, reach out a stubby hand from the throng. She might have been his wife. He looked at Jovanka and then at the short woman.

“Damn the rotten luck,” he said.

Jovanka unpinned her hair, pulled the flowered scarf off of her head and tied it around her wrist. Her pitch-black hair fell straight below her shoulders, nearly reaching her breasts. She flipped it behind her ears and exposed the flush in her cheeks as she walked toward the bakery. She dropped the shawl to her waist and tied a knot at her hip. If I am doomed to marriage, she thought, knowing the impossibility of denying her father, let me enjoy myself now.

She walked into the Silver Bow Bakery, stopped short and waited for her eyes to adjust to the dim light. Probably it was this motion and the wide smile on her face that caught the attention of the young man sitting at the end of the counter. He waved his hard-hat toward the leather stool motioning for her to sit down. Jovanka felt her heart slip and accepted the offer from Dan McClane.

She smelled fresh bread and cookies baking. The booths were filled with customers and their faces danced like storytellers. Their words mixed together into one loud hum. Someone near the back of the bakery, where the band played, smoked a cigar and its sweet scent reminded Jovanka of Papa. She saw Easter eggs with elaborate pictures of doves, crosses and flowers painted on them in thin lines of wax and then dipped in colored liquids so the images showed up brilliantly.
Mrs. McClane served coffee and sandwiches to the shoppers and miners. She bought the bakery with her husband before he had been killed in a mining accident. Dan her over. She came to take her order.

"Have you met my son, Danny?" she asked, pointing.

"No. I don't believe so, not officially." She turned toward him and smiled. He wore rough coveralls, the color of copper-stripped earth, and a canvas work jacket. He seemed to know her, like a lot of people seemed to know her, mostly men from her father's union meetings.

"Dan," he corrected his mother and nodded his head at Jovanka.

In the dim light of the bakery she could see his eyes and the shine of his skin. Then she saw his hard-hat and her heart slipped again. She ordered coffee and soda bread to take home to her family. Mrs. McClane returned with coffee.

"Danny works at the Orphan Girl mine," she said.

"My father and brother used to work there," Jovanka said. "Now they work at the Speculator."

"That's a huge operation—over 500 men," Dan said.

"Father's insisting upon fair wages and safe conditions."

"He must be making some headway. They're getting pretty strict about safety."

"Oh yeah, Papa always gets his way." Jovanka's anger toward Papa ignited again.

"I don't like the Orphan Girl either. I'd like to get on at the Speculator."

Jovanka couldn't decide whether to respect or walk away from a man who agreed with her father. She knew one thing. Papa would never approve of her talking to Dan McClane. The Irish were fine workers. They were even strong supporters of the unions, but they were not people his daughter should know.

"My husband knew your father," Mrs. McClane said. She stared at Jovanka.

"They worked together at the Leonard."
Jovanka rubbed her earlobe as though it itched. She felt her skin tingle and tighten. Shortly after they arrived in America her father had been working at the Leonard Mine when the engine had gone out of control while lowering the evening shift into the mine. The cage fell to the sump. All five men on the lower level were crushed and died. Daniel McClane had been one of those men. She’d heard the story. Papa had often told her how lucky he was and how badly he felt about being so lucky. Moments before the cage crashed to the bottom of the shaft he had just walked off of it and the other men on.

She averted her eyes toward the band and looked back toward Mrs. McClane. “I’m sorry about your husband,” she said.

Dan tapped his long fingers on his hard-hat. “Your father brought us half a sheep after the accident, and two blocks of ice a week over the next year. Once a month he cut and stacked our wood,” he said. “I was too young to work. We really needed his kindness.”

Jovanka remembered the accident and afterwards. They had just arrived in Butte from Montenegro and they were short on money. Papa worked double shifts at the mines and took his time coming home. Mama wanted to know where the money was going and accused Papa of gambling, a habit Papa loved from his youth. Did she know that he had bought food for Mrs. McClane?

“Even now, sometimes, I find a bag of wheat on our doorstep. Your father is a good man,” Mrs. McClane said.

“More coffee, please,” Jovanka said. She felt the volley of their words like pelting rocks. She needed to buy some time, secure some distance.

Mama and Papa had fought every day then, yelling loudly and throwing things, small things like the coffeepot or a breakfast tin. Jovanka and her brother, Marko, hid in the washroom. To pass the time they would play “Paper, rock, scissors”. At first Jovanka didn’t like the rules of the game—the winner slapped the loser hard on the wrist with two fingers made wet with saliva. Yet, as time went on and the fighting didn’t stop, she took
solace in both the giving and taking of pain and in the red welts, like rolling hills, on their wrists. Her parents' voices had beat like drums, a familiar background rhythm from which Jovanka and Marko kept time. Paper, rock, scissors. Paper, rock, scissors. Paper, rock, scissors.

"Come on, let's dance," Dan said and grabbed her by the wrist.

On the polished linoleum floor he taught her an Irish jig called "The Siege of Ennis". As a girl in Montenegro she had joined in the many village kolos danced to songs about the great battle of Kosovo in 1389. Jovanka understood a celebration of battles.

As Dan taught her the steps she lifted her feet and pointed her toes, and moved forward and back, stepping in threes and then in sevens, stepping side to side. She concentrated but felt clumsy and forgetful.

The sweet cigar smoke mixed with the odor of baked bread and she remembered Papa again, and Michael. She couldn't bear to think of marriage with such a man.

Jovanka finally caught on to the rhythm and the order of steps. She moved her feet faster and faster, and, eventually, with confidence and ease. She carried herself in unison with Dan and the other dancers, feeling a strong, quick sense of belonging.

Dan caught her up in his arms and swung her around. Her breath caught in her throat and she felt her spine shiver. She had never been this close to a man who was not a relative and who was, in fact, only a month before, a complete stranger. She forgot the morning conversation between her parents about Michael Jovich. She forgot her own arguments against marriage. She forgot about Papa and his strange sense of loyalty to Tara McClane. Jovanka forgot about Dan's hard-hat and the fact that he worked in the mines.

When the swing was over he let her go, holding her only with his eyes. She felt as she had as a young girl in the mountains of Montenegro, dancing with her father and uncles and could almost see the campfires of those nights and hear the hoot owls in the trees as they talked back and forth to each other. She felt the lightness of that time again, before
they moved to America, before she left her baba and the wars began again, before the glory of the circle dances faded into the sweetness of youth and battles.

Still giggling to herself when she sat back down, she noticed the bakery with new clarity, as if the dancing had sharpened her senses. A package of soda bread sat near her coffee cup. Mrs. McClane leaned against the back bar near the brilliantly colored eggs, her lips crooked into a half smile, arms folded across her chest, as if she were cherishing a secret. The booths were mostly empty now, and Jovanka noticed the light outside had begun to darken.

Having stayed much longer than she had intended, she needed to go home. They would be waiting on her for dinner. Jovanka paid for her coffee and the soda bread with money from Mama’s grocery fund and walked out into the fading light. The streets had begun to clear as citizens returned to their homes for dinner. To her surprise, Dan followed her out.

“Meet me at the Columbia Gardens next week,” he said and he caught her arm.

“You’re crazy. With this snow still on the ground?” she laughed. She felt wonderful and free his fingers hooked in her shawl. “They won’t be open.”

“That’s the best time, when the gardens are quiet and mysteious, before they begin to swell with people,” he said. He let go of her arm as though it were something precious and fragile.

“Go against the rules?” Jovanka thought about it. “No, I better not.”

“Memorial Day Weekend then. When they are scheduled to open. Saturday at one o’clock on the corner of Park and Main. We’ll take the trolley car up together and make an afternoon of it,” he said.

She thought of the trouble that would cause Papa and felt her stomach flip. “You’re standing out here without a coat on. You’ll catch a cold.”

“Memorial Day weekend,” he said.
Jovanka thought about her first visit to Gardens after arriving in Butte from the old country. She was 11 years old, didn’t speak English yet and lonely for new friends. All day long she had wandered the grounds, talking to the blooming lavendar bushes, the tall pines, the pansies planted in gardens the shapes of butterflies. She had loved the baby green smells mixed with the fresh smell of cotton candy and popcorn, had loved the excited, happy sounds coming from the midway. She had imagined riding the roller coaster and the electric airplanes, one day, with her new friends, once she learned their language.

Since that day she’d gone to the Columbia Gardens dozens of times with Marko, or by herself. Riding on the trolley car at the same time as Dan would be similar to riding up by herself and meeting a friend. It could cause no real harm. On the other hand, Memorial Day Weekend was a long way off. A lot could happen by then.

“At one o’clock on Saturday, opening weekend then,” she said, “if I’m well and the sun shines and Papa doesn’t have too many chores for me to do, I’ll be there,” she said, allowing herself plenty of outs.

On the way home she smelled the sour, stifling scent of the sulfur and arsenic odors in the air. She cherished the image of Dan’s face when he taught her “The Siege of Ennis”, his fingers on her shawl and, yes, even the image of his long fingers tapping, in time with the music, on the top of his hard-hat.

She knew that her father would never allow her to spend time with Dan McClane. Why should Papa forbid it though? He, himself, had supplied Dan’s mother with food and ice for an entire year. According to Mrs. McClane, Stojan Mirich still supplied her with food from time to time. Certainly if I Papa could care about Dan’s family Jovanka could care about Dan, even more so in Papa’s eyes, she thought, since Dan was a miner and believed in the unions.

Surprisingly, for the moment, she didn’t seem to care that Dan was a miner. Perhaps she, too, had been poisoned by the air, and now craved danger, like the cows who died without their daily dose of arsenic. She entertained an idea. If Mama and Papa were
serious, and she was to be married off, perhaps Papa would let her choose the person she’d marry. She would first take time in choosing and then she would choose someone impossible, someone obviously incompatible with Papa’s standards.

Papa considered himself a reasonable man. She would talk to him, convince him that they lived in America now, the times had changed and, knowing that Papa would never agree, she designed the argument to buy her time, to keep her youth from leather brown hills turning the sky the color of fresh rhubarb, being snatched by marriage and the likes of Michael Jovich. Pulling her shawl tightly now around her shoulders, she watched the sun set behind the leather brown hills, turning the sky the color of fresh rhubarb.
Chapter Four
Promise

Jovanka opened the front door. Candles burned on the table near her sleeping cot. Mama, Papa and Marko sat quietly, too quietly, around the empty dinner table. She looked at Papa. His black eyes glazed over, almost lost themselves in his black bushy eyebrows, as he stared at something on the far wall. He lit his pipe, the pipe that hastened his journey toward death, and the sweet smoke filled the small room that had been their home for the last six years. He understood full well that she wouldn’t like the news he was about to deliver.

“What is it? Did someone die? Did America join the war?” she asked, feigning ignorance, her eyes flipping back and forth from Papa to Marko. She needed time. Marko ran both hands through his dark curly hair. A candle flame in the sleeping room flickered, the wick nearly finished.

“Jovanka,” her father said, continuing to stare at the far wall, as if gazing into some remote and distant place, the high plains of the old country, or maybe the site of his father’s first battle. “Sit down.”

“But Papa, I need to fix dinner,” she said, moving like a wild cat toward the stove for a water pan. The silence hurt her ears. Her heart raced, bumped into her throat, strangled her breath. She’d get the water boiling, cook potatoes and turnips. Everything would look differently on a full stomach. “I’ve been out late and you must be hungry.” She felt like someone was strangling her. She looked at her mother for a clue. Mama would make it better.

Milla Mirich, a handsome woman with sharp elegant features, wore a brown scarf, embroidered with richly colored flowers and a pale lavender dress, that fell in soft folds, like shear curtains, to her ankles. Mama saved that dress for special occasions. Jovanka had only seen her in it two times. The first time was at Marko’s first birthday, when she
laughed like a girl, happy to have a boy so strong and healthy. The second time was at her uncle’s wedding before they left Montenegro. That night they had danced until the last ember from the wedding fire had cooled and the warm sun livened the sky. If this, then, was a celebration, why did they all look so grim?

Her mother sat stiff-backed in a wooden chair Marko had made, her face tilted toward Papa. She nodded for Jovanka to sit down as her father had commanded. They all focused on her, the girl, as the unusual center of attention. She swung another of Marko’s handmade chairs to the table, smoothed her skirt under her legs and sat down. She placed the soda bread on the table like an offering for some unspoken sacrifice she was about to make.

“Papa, I’m sorry I was out late and I left without telling you or Mama where I was going. I was rude and thoughtless,” she said as she sat. “I broke the rules and I knew it. I will take my punishment. I’ll stay home for a week, chop the wood, do Marko’s chores in addition to my own.”

Papa’s glazed eyes came into focus and looked directly at her.

“Milosav Jovich came by this afternoon to ask for your hand in marriage to his oldest son, Michael.” Papa held her eyes briefly then turned his stare to the embroidered tablecloth. Jovanka followed his eyes to the table. Song birds of all types flew in place on the white cotton. A pair of robins flying side by side caught her attention. Baba had made one just like it for Jovanka, as was the tradition among the grandmothers in the old country, for some future wedding day. Jovanka had tucked it safely away.

“I am needed here, to care for Mama and Marko.” She knew it was coming, yet she felt the shock of it in her stomach as it turned and twitched. Her face flushed and her hands felt hot. She looked at Marko. He was the spitting image of a young Papa, large bushy eyebrows, dark, almost black eyes, a tall flat forehead, his nose broad at the bridge, full, puffy lips. He fingered his thin mustache, with raised eyebrows and gave her a look of helplessness.
“The announcement will be made on Easter Sunday,” Stojan said. “I have sent a letter to Baba requesting her blessing, that she attend and that she keep you and Michael in her prayers during the short engagement period. The wedding will take place as soon as we receive the letter with her blessing; by the end of the summer at the latest.”

“She can’t come. The village needs her. They have no doctor. She must tend to the sick. Without her people will die and enough of our people have died already. You know people die every day in Montenegro. Why take what little solace they have?”

Jovanka’s words fell into a mile deep chasm. Everyone knew that Baba would not come to America for the wedding. It was a formality, a very important tradition to proceed only with her blessing, which she would undoubtedly give, thinking this was something good, thinking that this was something that Jovanka wanted. Baba would support Papa.

“She will, perhaps, make the long journey by boat and stay to live with us. Once you are married we will have more room,” Papa said, ignoring the severity of his illness.

For the second time that day Jovanka felt a numbing sensation in her chest. The muscles in her face tightened and she clenched her hands against each other. She couldn’t believe it. Papa had talked with Mama about finding her a husband just this afternoon. Did they think they just said it and it was done? Without talking to her? They knew she dreaded the idea of marriage. Had Papa no consideration for her feelings?

She didn’t even know Michael Jovich. But she promised to hate him. She would never respect a man who could gain a wife under the disguise of tradition, treating her like so much chattel that could go to the highest bidder.

Papa had betrayed her. She stiffened her face to keep the tears back. She needed to compose herself or Papa would tune her out and give no credence to what she said. She had too much experience with Papa’s cold silences. She too knew the ways of the warrior people her country so admired.
"Papa, I have only this day begun to think kindly on the idea of marriage at all," she lied. "But I have no thought to marry this Michael. I don’t know him. Surely you cannot just dispose of me to the first asker."

Her father shot his dark eyes at her and she felt the burn in their aim. He held perfectly still. Jovanka could not even hear the breath that he normally labored over. It was as if his lungs had cleared and grown healthy with his decision.

"I mean no disrespect," she continued, "I ask only that you listen to my desire."

Stojan nodded his agreement.

"I don’t want to marry. Not yet. I am only 17. I want to continue my education, which you, yourself, have taught me to value." Jovanka chose her words carefully. "I have a dream, to study medicine, to become a doctor, here, in America. And if the time is right, to bring what I learn back home to the mountain villages.

"Perhaps it is a ridiculous dream, but it has consumed my thoughts since I was young and Baba taught me the medicinal uses of local herbs. She taught me to care for people in a way that even the best medicine couldn’t surpass. If I have both, Papa, this modern knowledge, and the ancient ability to care deeply, people will heal and my life will be of purpose." She wanted to reach out and hold Papa’s shoulders in her palms, the way large men do with young children who have misbehaved. Instead she kept her hands folded politely in her lap.

Finally, he answered, "You think your mother has no purpose? Are you and Marko not purpose enough for her? You stand yourself in esteem way above others. How do you come to believe that you, a woman, would even be allowed into the schools of medicine? And who, pray tell, would pay for it?"

Jovanka looked at her father in surprise, "Papa, you told me that America was the land of opportunity. A land without war and famine. You work in the mines and speak of fairness to miners. What about fairness to women? When we were children you told both Marko and myself to ‘read, learn, study’. When I was eight years old, exploring the many
caves of Certza Mountain you, yourself, said I could climb as well as any boy. *You taught me to shoot a gun.*

"Enough." Stojan Mirich's eyes glazed over again and he stared through the cigar smoke. Through the haze Jovanka saw a glint of water in his eyes. Smoke or compassion, Jovanka took it for a good sign.

"Papa, please." She hesitated. When met only with his sadness, she continued. "I do not want to marry a miner. I fear he will die and I will be left alone to care for my children. How will I be able to feed them if I am not educated enough to work and make a living wage. Women hardly get paid two dollars a day. I cannot feed my children on that."

She tried a new tactic and turned toward her mother.

"Mama, you don't agree do you? Just last week Roberta Owens and Danitza Draskovich both lost their husbands. A fire broke out in the drift and both were poisoned by the air. You said yourself that in Butte, to marry anyone was to marry death. You fear Papa dead if he comes home an hour late from his work shift.

"At least," she pleaded to her father, "let me choose a man. Let me find a husband who does not work in the mines."

Papa's mustache lifted and he smiled slightly, as if her words had given him some glimmer of satisfaction.

"Michael Jovich isn't a miner," he said. "He's an organizer for the Union."

Jovanka's heart sank. She knew this, but in her haste to convince her father she had forgotten.

"I will put a small cot in the wash room and Baba can still have a bed here if she chooses to come. I will do chores and study and be no bother to anyone. Please don't ask this of me," she said.

Stojan looked toward Milla whose eyes filled with tears. She nodded her head and said, "You raised an independent daughter, Stojan. One who is half boy in her ways. You
took her hunting for game with you and camped all night with her on the spot where your father died in battle. She knows her own desires.”

Stojan pursed his lips like he was about to speak and then stopped, started again and then stopped.

Marko, who had been quiet all this time, was the one who spoke.

“Papa, can it hurt to postpone the wedding, so that Jovanka can study for a year or two before marriage?”

Papa nodded his head slowly and dropped his eyes to the floor. The room had grown dark as no one had thought to light the lantern. The flickering candle had burned out and the others threw off too little light.

When Stojan raised his head he spoke from a throat that had been cracked and cleared.

“I am your father. I have made a promise,” he said.

“Papa.” She stepped, knowingly, into dangerous territory. “This is America. They do things differently here. If you would have me marry, let me have a say in it. It shall affect my entire life. And that of your grandchildren.”

“This is for your life. I know what is best for your life,” he said simply, and folded his large hands around a glass of rakija, plum brandy, which Jovanka had just noticed. He had decided. Even in the dark she saw his eyes.

“Mama?” She looked at her mother.

Milla steadied her stare on her husband but under the table she wrapped the embroidered songbirds around her index finger.

“Jovanka, your father has decided,” she said. “Papa desires your happiness. And your cooperation.”

“Mama didn’t meet Papa until their wedding night.” To Jovanka’s surprise Marko spoke. He understood the battle had been fought and lost. Now she simply needed to make the adjustments required after any battle to accept her new status: the status of an
engaged woman. “Their twentieth year will begin this fall,” Marko continued. “They are happy. You could be happy too, if you’d let yourself.”

He lit the lantern and sat in the shadow of it. Jovanka could barely see his face and she turned on him suddenly, with all of the anger that had been building toward Papa.

“What would you know? You, a boy, soon to be a man in a world that serves men? Of course, you’d think a woman for a man’s pleasure is good. A woman to care for your kids when you’re off fighting for the causes of men buried under rock in some stupid mine so that the Copper Kings can line their walls in silk, not caring if you live or die.” She slapped her hand over her mouth, catching both her breath and her sob, shocked by her own cruelty.

“A single woman is not safe. Do you think that I would leave you as prey for any aggressive vagabond who set his sights on you, allowing you to live a life no better than the whores working down on the line? It’s my responsibility to protect you and I have decided. You will attach your loyalty to Michael Jovich.” Papa said as though finishing a difficult job. He put his pipe, which had gone out, to his mouth, re-lit it and sucked on the mahogany stem, then turned his head toward the front door and blew the smoke in wafting circles. The circles obscured his face and then disappeared into the growing darkness beyond the lantern. She held her tongue about papa’s pipe. He was dying; how he hastened the process was his own business. He had made that point clear to her again and again.

Jovanka turned her gaze to Mama; Mama’s gaze locked on Papa, as she had always been locked to Papa, determined to hold onto him, ever grateful, it seemed to Jovanka, that fate had insisted she be his wife. Yet she was no one’s chattel. She belonged to Papa only as much as she belonged to herself, something Jovanka knew but could not understand. Mama is a woman of a different age. The times have changed, she said to herself for the hundreth time.
She turned to look at Marko, Marko who carried her in his arms to the bunks in the ship's hull when she became ill from the constant motion of the sea, Marko who had stopped the captain's aid when he dragged her by the arm into the rope room. Marko told her it would be good in America, where even women could make money and have a chance at something besides watching their sons and husbands go off to war to be killed as so many generations of Slavic people had done for centuries.

She felt her sorrow rise up in her belly for the words she had launched at him. She wanted to apologize, tell him it was Papa she was angry at, not him, but he had turned his head away from the light so that she could not see his face, a sure sign that he had closed his ears to her. They had all closed their ears to her. Papa had made up his mind and the family had followed.

Her eyes burned from the tears lurking at their edges. It is not proper to cry at first news of your engagement, she told herself sarcastically. Engaged. The word beat at her head like bat wings in the open timbers, like the cawing ravens on the hillside of a good kill. She rang her fingers through her long hair as though she could shake them out, delete them from existence, clear room to think. But there was no room to think and she burst out with the fear of men confined too long in the cage.

"Papa, you don't even know this man. How old is he? What is he like? Maybe he stinks. Maybe he's gross, fat, dirty, or drinks too much whiskey. Maybe he's mean and he will beat me and our children. How could you send me, your only daughter, off with someone you don't even know? Have you talked to him? Have you ever had him here to dinner?" She had lost control. She felt unreal, like she was outside of herself watching herself. Then she caught Papa's face, his eyes slit in anger, his bottom lip quivered. His pipe now lay smoldering in the tin ashtray and he tightly clenched his glass of rakija, which remained completely full.

"Mama, you will ask your daughter to leave the room," he said.
But before her mother could speak, without looking at anyone, Jovanka excused herself from the table, rose out of her chair and fled to the washroom.

Once inside, she threw the door shut and slammed her body against it. Let them think I'm hysterical, she thought. She allowed her back to slide down the splintered wood, taking slow charge of something she could control. She remembered the game that she and Marko had played while her parents fought—paper, rock, scissors—and the red swells on their wrists, her's and Marko's, equal partners in pain. She pulled her knees to her chest, put her head in her hands. She took in a breath and let it go. Equal partners in pain. But for this pain there was no partner. This pain was hers alone to bear.
Chapter Five

Crossed Paths

Jovanka walked into the small building on Broadway just as the sun hit mid-day. She saw the rough wooden boards of the walls peak out in places from under their plaster coat. The plaster was painted the color of faded clay and the room housed exquisite furniture from the turn of the century and it smelled of antiseptic. On a red velvet bench, trimmed in gold brocade, sat Tommy Monroe, one of the top contenders for the middle weight state boxing championships. He'd fought Birddog Billy, The Red Tycoon, Mad Madison Mike.

He grinned at Jovanka and the long scar down the left side of his face turned into a half moon. A thin scar at the corner of his left eye gave the impression of a permanent near wink. His broken nose had healed in a crooked arc. She recognized him immediately by matching his wounds to Marko's stories.

Marko loved the prize fights and Papa allowed him to go to them. He'd come home late at night, nudge Jovanka awake and signal for her to follow him into the washroom. Once enclosed behind the heavy door he'd give a blow by blow account of the fight. "Then Bart the Bomb knocked Tommy across the ring. Then Tommy righted himself and downed the bomber." Marko had said, falling backwards with the first blow and charging forward with the second. Marko had never seen Tommy Monroe lose a fight. Jovanka couldn't quite believe that he had never lost a fight. He seemed a phenomenon to her. Hardly curtailing the urge to stare, her curiosity all but sprung her onto the bench next to him. A booming voice, from behind a large oak desk, saved her.

"Do you have an appointment?" Miss Parsons asked the question without looking up from her work. She scribbled some notes on one of the pieces of parched paper that topped the desk which barricaded the receptionist from the patients.
“I’d like to talk to the doctor about employment,” Jovanka said. She remembered the business at hand and stepped closer to the desk. She caught the scent of lilac in Miss Parsons’ perfume and saw a row of medicine bottles which lined the shelves behind her and her fortress: potassium bromide to lift the spirits, belladonna to help with sleep, ergosterol for vertigo and salicylates for aching bones. The shelves, contrary to the desk, were a slender shiny black without a speck of dust on them.

“I’ll ask you again. Do you have an appointment?”

“No. I’m not sick. I’m for hire. I’m skilled at mixing medicines,” Jovanka said and pointed to the medicine shelves.

“You need to make an appointment.” Miss Parsons looked up. A pair of round eyeglasses slid part way down her nose. “We see no one without an appointment.”

“I just want to talk to Dr. Fletcher. It’ll only take a moment. I’m not leaving until I talk to the doctor.” Jovanka crossed her arms on her chest and straightened herself to her full 5’8” in height. She both caught and ignored Tommy Monroe’s smirk. Miss Parson’s stood up and leaned over the desk, stretching herself out into the world of patients, towering over Jovanka. She looked appalled and ominous. Evidently, people usually did what she said.

“Please, if I can just talk to the doctor.” Jovanka tried a softer tactic.

“You do need an appointment. To get your ears cleaned. You obviously don’t hear well. He can see you tomorrow at 2:00.”

“I want. To apply. For a job. That’s all I want.”

“Are you an overgrown child? You look about 20 but you’re throwing a two-year-old temper tantrum. Do you want the two o’clock appointment or not.”

“Tsk. Tsk.” Tommy Monroe shook his head.

“What’s all the commotion?” A small bald man wearing a pair of eye glasses identical to Miss Parsons’ stepped through a door located near the back of the building. Jovanka was amazed at the resemblance in the two people, even though the doctor was
much smaller than Miss Parsons, both faces rounded and turned red at the cheeks. Peanut eyes peeked out from behind the circular glasses and their shoulders humped in almost exactly the same shape. Surely, the woman’s neck stretched out much longer than the man’s, but other than that fact and her height, they could have easily been brother and sister.

Miss Parsons glared at Jovanka and took a step forward blocking her small double from view. Rumor had it that Miss Parsons and Dr. Fletcher had been married at one time and that she found him much too difficult of a man to live with so she divorced him and, finding herself in need of a livelihood, went to work for him instead.

Jovanka, who had never been weak at heart, spoke through Miss Parsons as if she were air, “Dr. Fletcher, I have been trained by my grandmother to care for the sick. She taught me the medicinal uses of plants and herbs. I am a willing student; I’d like to learn more. I’d like you to teach me.” The words blurted out of her mouth in a volcanic rush, something she seemed to be getting quite good at these days.

The doctor stepped out from behind Miss Parsons and instructed Miss Parsons to sit down, which, surprisingly, she did. Then he walked over to Jovanka and instructed her to go home. He waved his arms in a jerking, puppet-like fashion as he spoke.

“I have no work for a woman,” he said, disregarding the fact of one sitting right behind him. “Women leave their jobs as soon as they find a husband and have babies. Medicine takes education and dedication, both of which I doubt you possess, not that you couldn’t possess them, it is just unlikely that you’ve been to university, not to slight your grandmother, I’m sure she is a fine woman. It’s just that, well, a wives tale is a far cry from a cure and a wife is a far cry from a doctor. Well, I’m sure you understand. Go now. I’ve go work to do.” His voice was hypnotic and seemed to be more directed to a theatrical audience than to a real person. Jovanka wondered if he talked like this to his patients.

“I’ll start anywhere—mop floors, clean patient rooms—and study at night. You’ll see that I have the knack.” She could feel Tommy Monroe’s grin and she hated herself for
begging in front of him, especially him, a man who evidently never lost a fight. Yet she
desperately needed to begin work before the wedding. Making her quit would be much
more difficult for Michael Jovich than denying permission. Permission. Jovanka
shuddered. Could she really submit to anyone other than Papa? Even Papa had become
more and more difficult to obey as she grew to be a woman.

"Mamn’, you are making a spectacle of yourself, not that a spectacle isn’t
interesting at times, but you are a young lady, and a respectable one I presume. A “no” is a
“no” is a “no”, when a “yes” is not appropriate a “no” must suffice,” he said in his
theatrical voice.

"Where a “no” might suffice a “yes” would be twice as nice.” She smiled and to
her surprise he smiled back. In the background Miss Parsons countered all good cheer.

"Ah, yes,” he said, “nevertheless, a “no” will have to do.”

The door slammed against the outside wall and they all turned toward the sound.

“Quit talking such nonsense and keep your dirty hands off of me,” a large woman
in a red coat said to an even larger man who followed her as she tripped through the door.
Jovanka and Tommy Monroe exchanged glances.

“My dirty hands. My hard working hands, you mean,” he said. “Besides, I haven’t
touched you in months and we’re here for help. You have to tell the doctor the truth.” The
man wore bib overalls and huge work boots. His red hair sprung out curly in all directions.
He hulked over the woman.

“Quit nagging me. I’ll do as I please,” the woman said and wiped at the red coat as
if literally brushing him off of her. Her graying hair was braided loosely down her back
and she swung it so that it flipped across his chest.

“Can you hear her?” The man turned toward Dr. Fletcher. “Do you hear how she
talks to me? She used to be sweet and kind. Now she acts possessed. It’s a complete
transformation. I don’t even know my own wife.”
"You ought to backhand her," Tommy Monroe said from his seat against the wall. Jovanka slapped a look at him, warning him to behave. He shrugged.

"How long have you been married?" Dr. Fletcher asked. Miss Parsons peered over the doctor’s shoulder.

"Twenty-two years," he answered.

"Too long," the woman belted into the man’s face.

"Children?" Miss Parsons asked.

"They’re all like him. Ungrateful, nagging, nonsense talking know-it-alls." She stood on her toes with her face pointed at the man’s chin.

"Well, you’re probably just tired." Dr. Fletcher said and picked up a chart. He called out Tommy Monroe’s name.

"I told you," the woman said to her husband. "I told you I was tired, that I just needed a little help around the house. But you can’t listen to me. You’d rather pay good money for a doctor’s visit just to hear what I’ve been telling you all along."

"Wait Doc. You can’t just dismiss us. She needs real help," the man said. Jovanka felt sorry for him. He looked like he was about to cry.

"Does she have a broken bone? A bad tooth? A deep cut?" the doctor asked.

The man shook his head.

"Does she have syphilis? Pneumonia? Consumption?" The doctor waved his arms in the jerking motion. "Her lungs sound good. She seems to have plenty of energy. She’s obviously strong as an ox. I think she’s fine. Maybe you and your kids should just try being a little nicer to her. I can’t really do anything for someone who is not sick."

"Ha," the woman said but actually looked dejected.

Jovanka whispered something to Miss Parsons who begrudgingly gave her a piece of paper and a pencil. Jovanka scribbled something and handed the paper to the woman, who looked at it as if it hurt her eyes. Jovanka realized that the woman couldn’t read and

"Eat plenty of red meat. Get plenty of sunshine. Take a long walk every day. Eat soybeans. Gather and eat alfalfa everyday," she said.

The woman stuffed the paper into a pocket of the red coat and looked confused.

Josephine leaned closer and whispered. "It's the change. All women go through it eventually, when they're done having children. It'll justs take your body a while to adjust."

The woman smiled, thanked Jovanka and walked out the door with the large hulk of a man following her. Dr. Fletcher, who'd been standing, watching, motioned to Tommy Monroe and they disappeared into his office.

Jovanka turned back to Miss Parsons to make another bid for employment. Through the sheer curtains, she saw her father fast approaching the doctor's office.

"It's the change of life," she whispered, "that's all. Tell Dr. Fletcher that I accept his offer of employment and I'll be here to work at 8:00 a.m. sharp tomorrow morning. My father will be pleased." Jovanka pointed toward the window where her father walked toward the entryway. "The doctor won't be disappointed. Do you have a back door?" She asked.

Miss Parsons pointed to the hallway to the left of her desk and walked in front of her, now hiding Jovanka from view. Jovanka heard the front door of the office open and shut.

"Do you have an appointment?" She heard Miss Parson's ask. Then she quietly slipped into the alley.

* * *

Kaly Shane sat in Dr. Fletcher's office already knowing what the doctor would tell her. First he'd chastise her, then he'd lecture her, then he'd hold her hand and look deeply
into her eyes. He’d tell her that she had no business raising a child, that the only reasonable course of action was to give the child up for adoption or give the child to the orphanage. He’d remind her again that she was a whore and no respectable whore would raise a child in a whore’s life. Babies and whores don’t mix. Once a whore always a whore he had said to her a hundred times, as though just saying the word thrilled him.

She knew that he would be right to tell her to give the child up for adoption, that she could never raise a child. The chances were too good that the child would grow up hungry, and stunned for love. She also knew that if she gave the child up for adoption, or to the orphanage, the day would come when the child would be obsessed with the curve in a stranger’s chin, would watch random street crowds for just the right the arc of the eyebrow, the shape of a nose, to see if any matched her own. She’d walk into every cafe, every bar an instant member and instantly repelled at the same time, never falling off of that one edge.

Whatever the doctor told her, she knew she’d make up her own mind. Nevertheless she liked him. She liked the way he looked at her sideways through his spectacles and punctuated his speech with a flip of his hand or an unexpected elbow jab. He seemed to accept her and he seemed to pride himself on having such close relationships with the working girls. His profession was to tend to the sick, no matter who they were or how they conducted their lives, and he meant to live by his oath.

The man sitting directly across from Kaly coughed into one hand and wiped the sweat from his brow with the other. He had wide bushy eyebrows and deep wrinkles in his forehead. His shoulders hunched forward like a shifting timber. His pallid skin had been too long underground. She’d seen him enter the doctor’s office just before her. Since they’d been here he’d had a coughing fit about once every ten minutes. She knew that sound, could almost see the phantom walking next to him.

“Would you like some tea?” Miss Parsons asked them.
The door to the patient office opened and her stomach lurched when she saw that it was not Dr. Fletcher who emerged but rather Tommy Monroe. She saw his dark hair, the scar across his cheek, the shift of his eyes.

“You would do best to come by next week, and in between now and then be easy on yourself. You’re in no shape to be fighting,” Dr. Fletcher said to him.

Tommy shook his head. “No way I’d let Bert down, Doc. See ya next week.”

“Well, if you have to be that way, alright then. But I do not approve. The doctor does not approve. I’m against the fight. Let it be known.” He walked over to Miss Parson’s desk and picked up a chart.

“Stojan Mirich,” he called out as if the waiting room were full of people. The coughing man stood up and followed Dr. Fletcher.

Tommy Monroe walked over and stood next to Kaly. She heard the door to the doctor’s office shut as Tommy broke into a grin and reached out and put his hand on her hair. She slapped at his hand to push him away. He jumped back, feigning injury, but held onto her hair as if they shared a tender moment and he found her repulsion endearing.

“Today she hates me,” he said. “But tomorrow she’ll be begging for my help again.”

Miss Parsons bolted across her desk and stood a foot away from them. “Take your hands off of her,” she said.

Kaly broke into a sweat and her heart beat fast. Her hands were shaking and she willed them to stop. Tommy’s voice, course from whiskey and cigars, made the awful heat start again in Kaly’s stomach. She felt unreal and realized that he, Tommy, had no idea who she was, had never had an idea that she existed beyond Anne Marie. Kaly was a sour representation of something to Tommy, a representation of something bitter and full of bile and she felt it in her own body.
"She'll tell me where she wants me to put my hands," he said. He pulled Kaly’s head so close that she saw the boxing gloves stamped into his bronze belt buckle. "She’s got no problem speaking up for herself."

"Now. Or I call the sheriff." Miss Parsons didn’t budge.

"Yes, ma’am. Whatever you say. I don’t mean trouble." He spoke the words to Miss Parsons, but continued to hold onto Kaly. He tipped Kaly’s head up and looked down into her face, reversing time, entering into the small part of her that he possessed, then he loosened his grip. Kaly felt the release like waking up from a bad dream.

For a minute she thought she saw the ghostly outline of Tommy Monroe step away from himself and toward the window, a scared boy in a snowstorm, and her stomach calmed. But it was just the way that the sun, coming through the blinds, shifted on his forehead and she the dreaded heat edged in again.

"Is there a problem here?" asked Dr. Fletcher, who’d evidently been aroused by the commotion. He stood next to Miss Parson’s desk. Stojan Mirich marched over and stood beside Kaly.

"No problem," Kaly said.

"Are you all right?" Mr. Mirich asked.

"We grew up together. We’re like siblings. We’re settling old scores," she said and exchanged a glance with Tommy who nodded, either in agreement or approval. She couldn’t tell which.

"Well now. Let’s all let bygones be bygones," Dr. Fletcher said. "We’ve all got work to do."

"We’ll see you next week Tommy," Miss Parsons said. "Of course if you want to continue discussing your case right here in the reception room I’d be happy to accommodate you."

Tommy left but Kaly knew that he was never long gone. He always lurked just beyond some doorway, under some eave. He was his own living nightmare, she told
herself, troubling his own shadow as much as hers. It confused her though, the
compassion that she felt for him at that moment. She’d felt compassion for him another
night too.

It was stupid. She’d drank too much and walked home under the bare light of the
new year’s first new moon. She had been just within reach of the cribs and almost home
safe when she heard Tommy step out from the shadows. He cornered her near a storage
shed.

“Taking customers, Darling?” he asked, leaning over her in the dark night.
“I’m tired. I’m going home,” she said, feeling the wine crash down on her.
“Come on, Baby.” He ran the back on his hand across her cheek, down her neck to
the top of her breast. He pressed himself in on her and kissed her ear. “I need you.”

She pushed at his chest, barely moving him with her drunken strength. “Another
time. I have to go,” she said and tried to slide sideways, first one way and then the next,
trying to get out from under his weight.

He blocked her dodges by shifting with her. Grabbing both of her wrists, he
pinned her arms to the splintering wood behind them and kissed her hard on the mouth.
Maybe it was the wine, or the too thin moon, or the cold air. Maybe it was fear. Whatever
it was, with that one kiss, due to influences not entirely outside of herself, she softened and
kissed him back. He pushed his body against her breasts and swayed with her there, in that
dark winter night, where she thought she heard his heart beat.

“Baby, baby,” he kept saying, as if she meant something to him. “Come on, baby.”
She was without protection and it was during the most fertile time of her cycle, when she
knew better, and baby, baby had come on, just like that.

She didn’t know what to do about it. She’d so despised him most of her life and
she didn’t trust him. He changed from moment to moment. She’d never known what
would snap him and when he’d turn violent on her, only that, sure as a whistle, he’d turn
violent. She couldn’t know what he’d do to the child.
“Would you like some tea?” Miss Parsons asked as if she had just rewound the clock and erased Tommy Monroe from the afternoon. If only Kaly could erase Tommy from her own life so easily, she thought and started to cry.

“Of course you’d like tea. Just because the sun is shining doesn’t mean a woman doesn’t get cold and need comfort. I’ll put water on the stove and we’ll have some chamomile,” she said and disappeared through the doorway to the back room.

Kaly wondered why Tommy had seen the doctor. She stepped quietly over to the big desk. Tommy’s chart was on top. She opened it to the last note. She saw the words scribbled in the doctor’s handwriting. *Panic jags almost cured.*

“Tea coming,” Miss Parsons said from the other room. Kaly dropped the chart and stood back from the desk. The dark oak pulsed in her vision and the beating sound of it hurt her ears. Then she realized that it was the heart inside her own chest beating, terrified, and demanding, and somewhere nearby, she imagined that she heard some other, barely discernable heart, beating twice as fast.

“Pacing the floor are you,” Miss Parsons said as she emerged from the back room. “I know what that feels like. Sometimes I sleep so badly I just get up and walk. I walk outside around the neighborhood. You can’t believe the family fights I hear.” She set the tea tray on her desk. “But in your shape you really shouldn’t be pacing so much. You should rest as often as possible.”

“What shape?” Kaly asked as though a shade had spoke.

“You can’t hide such a thing.”

“What am I hiding?”

“Come on Kaly Shane. It was bound to happen. Surely you didn’t think you’d be the one safe from it.” Miss Parsons shook her head.

“Tell me what you’re talking about,” Kaly said.

“You’re pregnant.”

“If I were, how would you know?”
"I've been watching pregnant women for years. The flush in your face. The way that your hands dropped to your stomach when he grabbed you. You have that full sinking feeling, the sense that there is no way out."

Kaly said nothing. She thought of the man who had been trapped in a landslide last year, near the Gray Rock. On a night when he could do nothing else but talk, he had talked all evening. "You can't breathe," he said. "Your chest is caving in. You're certain you'll never move again and you need to move. The world is frighteningly small and even though someone digs you out, your world never gets large again. Every time you hear a rock falling your chest seizes up and you can't breathe. You die. Even though you didn't die when you were buried alive, you die at the sound of each rolling pebble," he had told her, "each time the sand shifts."

She had understood the man too well and she knew that, in a way, Miss Parsons was right. On the worst days Kaly did have that sinking, no-way-out feeling, on the best, she was grateful that she had learned to breathe again. She wondered if this was what her own mother had felt.

"If you don't want to talk about it at least drink your tea," Miss Parsons said. She sat down at the big desk.

"Do you keep all of the adoption records for the town?" Kaly asked.

"Locked up tightly in the basement." Miss Parsons squinted her eyes.

Kaly smiled. She felt something misty and sticky pull away from her, and the air in the room settled. "What about the orphanage kids, the ones that are dropped off and never taken into families? Is there a record of them?" she asked.

"Sealed off somewhere. I'm sure," Miss Parsons said.

Doctor Fletcher and Stojan Mirich emerged from the back office at that moment.

"Yes, yes. Well, come back next week and until then be easy on yourself. Rest. You're in no shape to be down in those tunnels," Dr. Fletcher said.
“Gotta work as long as I can,” Mr. Mirich said. He nodded to Kaly and Miss Parsons and left the building.

Dr. Fletcher walked over to Miss Parsons desk poured a cup of tea and stood staring out the window while he drank it. Kaly wondered if he was watching Stojan Mirich. When he finished his tea he walked over to the big desk and picked up a chart.

“Kaly Shane,” he called out into the waiting room, even though she was standing only two feet away from him.
Chapter Six

Birthday Party

From across the street the young Beth looked like anyone’s grandmother, sitting on the front porch, knitting a blue scarf. She would be finishing the present for Lottie Doyle’s sixtieth birthday party. The party was a surprise, and scheduled to start after the sun went down and the moon came up. Beth, who had just move out of her crib and into the brothel, had insisted that Kaly attend the party, had insisted that it would be the best time for a formal introduction. Kaly agreed and brought a silver silken scarf as a present.

She wasn’t ready to arrive yet and, under a changing sky, as the sun went down, Kaly watched Beth rock. As always, Beth looked charming from a distance. Behind her the house was dark inside and a large picture window doubled her allure. The house, a fine two story building, had a sharp roof line which pointed through a dark rouge cloud band on the horizon, the ruddy sky, made heavy with mining vapors. The silhouette of the Speculator mine frame sat on top of the house like a gentleman’s cap.

The brothel, itself, looked hot and stuffy in the warm evening air. As though someone pushed and pulled her at the same instance, Kaly moved forward one slow step at a time. She took in a deep breath and resolved again to find a way to solve her problem. The baby was growing and she needed a plan, a place to hold up until the baby was born, a place that was secure.

Since the copper mines had opened, and the war began, everyone had a few extra bucks in their pocket, to spend at the dry goods store, or in the taverns. Night-life had escalated and the town spun wildly around loose money and booze. Last week she saw a man get shot just a few feet from her crib. Two days ago a mad wife rode her horse through a saloon looking for her husband. She found him in the corner, passed out, his pockets emptied, the trouble of spring in full bloom.
Like nothing else, the city belonged to Kaly. But the pregnancy had turned her foreign to herself and now the city frightened her. She wanted out and she wanted to belong at the same time. She was hoping that Lottie Boyle’s brothel would offer that one perfectly balanced edge, where she’d be taken in, yet given little notice. She’d heard that Lottie was a straight-forward woman who was happy as long as she was doted on. Kaly winced at the thought of it, brushed her hair off her forehead, and readjusted her hat. It’s a small price to pay for a home, she told herself.

If Lottie liked her and took her on as one of her girls and gave her a room and a small salary in exchange for favors with men, life could be much easier. Going it alone in Butte had gotten more and more difficult as the town had expanded. Pimps, like vampires, wooed and threatened her in the same breath. Living and working at the brothel offered, not only protection, but also a community, and, an acceptable compromise between solitude and safety.

She walked by two dark-haired girls playing jacks at the edge of a dirt street. Near a small patch of gray snow, one of the girls had just caught a ball in a hand full of sharp silver stars. She smiled brilliantly at her triumph, and then at Kaly, holding them up for her admiration. A woman, probably the girl’s mother, looked out from behind a half-closed curtain in the second floor apartment. Kaly waved a gloved hand at her, and to Kaly’s surprise, the woman waved back.

"Those are some pretty stars you hold in your hand," Kaly said and she kneeled down. "You must be two very lucky girls."

"They’re silver like your scarf," said the girl holding the jacks. Strands of hair that had escaped her ponytail fell in her face. Her pink checkered dress was stained with mud.

"I guess they are," Kaly touched the silk scarf looped around her neck.

"And the ball is red like your dress," the girl said.
“And your red ball sits in the center of the stars like just our world sits in the middle of the universe.” Kaly held her hand out to indicate the sky, then swooped it around toward the buildings and the barren landscape in between.

“Where’s the moon?” the second girl asked.

“The moon. You’re the moon. And this is a very special world because it has two moons. Your and your friend,” Kaly said. “What are your names?”

“I’m Leesy. And this is Licia,” said the girl with the jacks.

“Are you sisters?”

The girls looked at each other. “We play like we are,” said Leesy. “I just have brothers and Licia only has older sisters who ignore her. My real name is Jaleese and Licia’s real name is Alicia, but we changed them.”

“I see, so you’d be “L” sisters. Your names both begin with the same letter. That’s sounds like sisters to me. Leesy and Licia Moon,” Kaly said. The girls giggled.

Kaly was trying hard to get over her bitterness about other people’s families. After all, these two were innocent. They hadn’t been the ones to leave her and Anne Marie at the orphanage. She admired them and their stolen sisterhood, especially at this time of evening, when people wrapped up the loose ends of the day and gave bad luck a second chance.

“Is that your dog?” asked Leesy. She pointed behind Kaly. The wolf dog sat about ten feet away wagging his tail and pawing the air with his large forefoot.

“He’s adopted me,” she said and smiled at the irony. “Come here, boy.”

Leesy and Licia climbed into each others’ arms. “Does he bite?” asked Licia.

“He’s friendly. He won’t hurt you,” she said and put her hand on his head. The dog lay down, rolled on his back and bared his belly to Kaly. She rubbed his stomach and the dog stretched his long neck toward the young girls, creating a smooth graceful line with his fur.

As if they were one, the girls edged closer. “Can we pet him?”

“You’d have to ask him,” said Kaly.
"Can we?" they said in unison to the dog. The dog wagged his tail and they took it as a yes. While they rubbed his belly Leesey's mother called for her to come home and Licia, Kaly and the dog all left too.

At the brothel the green paint on the porch had begun to peel and, like a half-hidden secret, the previous crimson coat peeked through the worn paint. The dog curled at the base of the brick foundation. Kaly climbed the steps. On the porch, sitting in the large wooden rocker, Beth wore a blue silk dress with a low-neck line and a puffed skirt. The sharp color high-lighted her full, blush face, her bright green eyes, her curly golden hair, her robust bosom. She was beautiful.

Kaly leaned over and kissed her on the cheek. Ever since Beth had taken her in that first year they had been good friends. She had told Beth about the orpahanage and the fire, about Anne Marie and Tommy Monroe, about each interesting or disturbing incident with a john.

"What did the doctor say?" Beth asked. The blue yarn ran across her lap and down her leg, attaching itself to a wild ball which had rolled into a corner and stopped. She knitted furiously at the last edge of the scarf.

"Whores shouldn't raise children." Kaly laughed and flipped her arms to mimic the doctor.

Beth shook her head. "You are pregnant then?" She asked the question only as a confirmation.

Kaly nodded. Her face felt bright red, felt like it was on fire. And it felt powerful. At any moment she could burst the slightest paper or the largest home into flames simply by turning her cheeks toward the desired dissolution.

She'd gotten used to the heaviness in her breasts and the tenderness in what seemed like her whole body. She still had the morning sickness. At times, she felt like she'd crawl out of her skin, but, in general, the changes had gotten easier.
“How did you let this happen?” Beth looked south, toward the Highlands where the snow inched higher up the mountain each day.

“I don’t know.” Kaly said. “He’s been eyeing me sideways ever since he was old enough to get out of detention. Something finally pushed him, or me, over the edge.” Kaly thought of Tommy Monroe at the doctor’s office and how he had nearly clamped her head to his stomach.

She felt the bile rise up in her again and was glad to feel something like the old hatred. It was simple. Whenever he arrived, bad things happened. She had wanted to sink her teeth into his belly or drive the ball of her fist right through his groin. As always though, she had sat paralyzed in his presence, had even protected him. The worse thing was, that since she’d been pregnant, she couldn’t hold onto her rage toward him. It inevitably drizzled down into contempt or even a quieter anger or fear.

“You can’t let Lottie know,” Beth said. “She’ll never take on the burden of a pregnant woman.”

“She’ll find out eventually,” Kaly said.

“No, you have to get rid of it.” Beth stopped knitting and looked directly at Kaly. “You can’t raise a child. You can’t work if you’re pregnant. You won’t be able to pay the rent. Who is going to take care of you? Who is going to take care of the child?”

“You’re right. Dr. Fletcher’s right. What good could I give a child?” The truth hit her like a slow fallen rock and she started to cry. She didn’t want to get rid of the baby. “I’ll go back to Miss Anderson and ask her to take the baby when she’s born.” She offered the solution to Beth as a truce, to stop the conversation and talk about something else, but the truth was that she didn’t think that there was a solution. She didn’t know what she’d do. Nothing felt right.

“And what, pray tell, will you do until the baby is born? Twiddle your thumbs? You have to eat. Or have you forgotten that simple fact?”
Kaly stopped crying and stared at the horizon. The sky had turned nearly black now. She ran her fingers down the silver scarf that she had brought for Miss Lottie, then she looked at Beth. A light came on inside of the brothel. “I can’t get rid of it,” she said.

“You’ll end up in the streets,” said Beth.

“Have you ever seen the pain that women are in after they’ve come back from those so called doctors? Pain that sometimes never goes away? You know why Miss Lottie gave up working on the line and started the Brothel. I’ve heard the stories on the street.”

“Don’t talk about it,” Beth said.

“Because of some quack doctor. She’s lucky she’s alive.” Kaly’s shoulders tightened and her heart quickened. “Except for a county funeral, some women never even come back.”

“Stop it. We’re not allowed to mention it. She just got old. That’s all.”

“She can’t work after the abortion, Beth. Can’t do a lot of things. Of all people in town, she should understand. Maybe, if I explain it to her, she’ll let me stay on, if nothing else, as the house cleaner until the child is born. The second of birth I’ll take the baby to the orphanage. I promise. I’ll have the baby there, if that makes you happy.” Kaly just wanted to be past this, to move on to the simpler topics of birthday presents and cakes.

“None of this makes me happy,” Beth said.

“I can’t go to one of those butchers. They don’t know, or care, what they do.”

“Listen, honey,” said Beth. “Your own mother could have been a one of us. Think of the trouble she’d have saved you if she’d had gotten an abortion. All the trouble, Anne Marie, Tommy, the orphanage, would have been nothing. Thin air you could move a stick through. That’s all you’d have. Nothing to haunt you, nothing to make you sad, nothing to deal with. You wouldn’t have had all of that trouble. Wouldn’t be standing in a brothel right now.”

Kaly felt her body go quiet. “I wouldn’t have had all of that trouble. That’s a truth I can’t deny. But then I also wouldn’t have you.”
“You might not have me if you go through with this. Giving birth, itself, could kill you. And how, on earth, will you pay a birthing fee to a doctor?”

“Bethy. Please. Let’s stop. Let’s just enjoy the evening. I’ll talk to Miss Lottie about it myself. If she doesn’t understand, I’ll figure it out from there.”

Kaly didn’t want to fight with Beth. She trusted Beth. She had a sixth sense, born out of trauma, and she was rarely wrong about people. Her lively-hood depended on her ability to know when to trust and when to close her heart, her ability to know a person’s cards long he revealed them. The hair rose on her arms. She felt trapped and she began to cry again.

Beth’s eyes softened. “Honey, you been crying all week. You gotta stop sometime.”

“I know. It’s just that at times like this I wish I had something.”

“A family?” Beth offered.

“I wish I had a mother, to hold me and tell it’ll be fine. That I’ll be fine, the baby will be fine and we’ll figure it all out together.” Her tongue felt large in her mouth and she resolved again that she’d work hard at the brothel, mind the rules, be an asset. Lottie would see the she’d be worth it, if she would just give her a chance.

“Come here.” Beth reached out her arms and Kaly walked over to the large rocker and Beth pulled her into her lap. She wiped at the tears on Kaly’s cheeks, tucked her hair behind her ear and pressed Kaly’s head against her breast as if she were a child. “It’s gonna be just fine,” she whispered. “We’ll figure it out. We’ll be each other’s mother. And, until the baby is born and you send the poor thing off to the orphanage, she’ll have two mothers to make up for the ones that we didn’t have.”

Kaly tried to calm herself to be comforted by Beth. But to be this vulnerable and this close to someone, even Beth, who had rescued her more than once, made her edgy and she broke into a sweat. She reasoned how long would be long enough to stay seated. The two women swayed in the rocker for an eternal five minutes. Angels carved into the
wooden chair back flew around their heads. The sounds of quick chatter, laughter, clanging dishes and light footsteps drizzled out from inside of the brothel. Through the window they could see that all of the lanterns had been lit and the big room decorated.

“That’s a fine sight.” The voice came from the stairs where Dan McClane stood in the half dark evening. He held his work clothes under his arm in a bundle. “Two grown women holding each other and crying. You girls didn’t lose at the poker games again last night, did you?”

“Hey Danny.” Kaly, glad for the distraction, dropped her eyelids and tilted her head back so that her chin pointed toward his hat. “Looks like you’re off to work.”

“On my way to the Orphan Girl. Can’t stay long,” Dan said. “Just thought I’d pop my head in and say hello.”

“I saw you dancing with that girl the other night,” Kaly said, pushing herself out of Beth’s lap, standing, and retracting her hands to her hips. “At your mother’s bakery.” The slavic girl, who had seemed immune to bad luck, laughed so hard that night that tears ran down her face, looking like she carried the light of angels. Kaly had asked Tara McQane the girl’s name. Jovanka Mirich. Jovanka Mirich, the girl with the sweet, easy smile.

“She looked like she needed cheering up.” Dan said.

“You needed cheering up. Nothing wrong with that girl, except that she’s too innocent for you,” Kaly said.

“She can take care of herself.”

“She fell in love with you that night in the bakery, before she learned the first set of dance steps.”

“You’re dreaming, Miss Kaly Shane. And although I’m grateful for the compliment, I assure you that no woman’s ever fallen in love with me that quickly,” Dan took his hat off and held it at his chest. His hair stuck to his forehead where the hat had been, except for a few stands that had been electrified and stood straight up.
“You’ll break her heart in a second. Just like it’s nothing. And then you’ll act just like nothing did happen, all happy and pleased with yourself.” Kaly leaned toward him.

“I’m not going to break her heart. I barely know her,” he said.

“You swing a woman in your arms like that and she’ll fall hard for you every time,” Kaly teased.

“That’s the dance.”

“I know the likes of you, Danny McClane,” she said, “but we’ll talk about it another time. You better go now. You’ll be late.” The foremen were sticklers about being on time. They lowered the cage five minutes after the whistle, one time per shift, and anyone who missed the cage dropped a day of work, sometimes got fired. A man could always rustle a new job the next day, and sometimes, even get back on at the same mine, but eventually the word got around and a man could spend days, weeks even, in the rustling line before working again.

“You’re the bossy one tonight,” he said.

“And you should leave the girl alone. Let her grow up some, into a woman,” Kaly said and ran her hand down the front of her body, starting at her neck, between her breasts to her belly, flirting with him in a way she knew she’d never act on, not for love or money. He was a friend, and that meant trouble in both areas.

“I’ll go,” he said, the words sounding half-hearted. He might have thought to turn around, to leave, but didn’t move his feet.

“I’ll tell you a secret,” she said and touched her stomach again. Suddenly she wanted to seduce him, not into bed, rather into the intimate details of her life, into a sort of father-uncle status for her unborn child. She wanted to tell him about the baby, wanted to confide in him like a brother and to feel his air of protection.

“I don’t know,” he said.

“We’re having a party and you’re invited.” She reached out her hand to him and nodded to Beth who was still sitting on the other side of the porch. She had picked up her
knitting needles again and worked them on the very last stitches of the blue scarf. Not only had lights come on inside of the brothel, they also had come on all across the town and Kaly could see them stretching down to the flats, reaching out toward the East Ridge, where the crimson moon had appeared.

Dan stepped toward Kaly, two porch steps at a time, and took her hand. An even six feet tall, he met her almost eye to eye. She pulled him close to her and wrapped his arm around her waist.

He slid his hand along the red satin up her back, to her neck and pulled her to him. She knew that he should leave immediately and go to work, knew that she should never step too close to that line that once crossed over would disappear forever. Still, Kaly threw her head back and laughed a sweet laugh, a charming laugh and Dan McClane swung her in his arms and danced her across the wooden porch of the brothel.

"Two complete strangers dancing on my front porch." Lottie Bolye stood at the bottom of the stairs. "That's a fine sight," she said, sounding just like Dan had moments earlier. She sounded friendly and Kaly took it for a good sign.

Dan stopped, let go of Kaly and made for the stairs. "I'm sorry, Mam. I was just leaving. I'm on my way to work."

"No. Stay. We're having a birthday party for some decreped old maid. It's a surprise." She laughed and walked up the steps. She walked over and pulled the scarf off of Kaly's neck. "Thank you," she said. "You're welcome to stay for the party, but you are much too old to be one of my girls."

"How did you know we wanted to ask you that?" Beth seemed to think that she was talking to magician rather than a sixty year old woman.

"Deary, I haven't come to be in charge of the finest brothel in town by keeping my nose in silt. I have a few secrets up my own puffed skirts," she said to Beth, but stared at Kaly. She looked Kaly up and down, as if she had just examined a bad cow and was ready to move on to a better slaughter house. "And as far as that bastard child of your goes, don't
even give it a second thought. I'm less interested in that kid than the dirt on the mister's workboots there," she said and pointed toward Dan. She wrapped the silver scarf around her neck and walked over to Beth and picked up that scarf too.

Kaly stood dance-step frozen at the top of the stairs. She felt the heat in her stomach again, the heaviness of her breasts. Her breath caught like a red ball in her throat. The world went fuzzy and turned unreal. She hadn't even had a chance. She heard the mine whistle blow for the late shift and the wolf dog howled from the foundation of the brothel. Kaly looked from Beth, still sitting in the rocker, who winced and shrugged at the same time, to Dan at the bottom of the porch stairs, who held his hand up, as if to offer her a graceful out.

Lottie Boyle took Beth by the arm and pulled the girl into her domain, the two scarves flying behind them like flags. Kaly turned and stumbled down the stairs.

"Let's cut the cake." She heard Lottie Boyle say from somewhere inside of the brothel. A wave of cheers spread across the house and the sour sound hurt Kaly's ears. Knowing that Dan would miss the cage, and likely get canned, she left Beth to her new home and, and tagging the hand of the miner, she took his out. Together with him and the dog, under the pregnant red moon, she fled into the street.
Kaly napped on the bed in her tiny crib and woke a from the nightmare with a start. Sweating and breathless, her heart beat fast and, like usual the details of the dream disappeared as soon as she tried to hold onto them. She did remember the boot and the pallid faces swirling together like one face with three or maybe four expressions. No, not just expressions, the mouths and noses were actually different, clearly belonging to separate people.

She sat up on the side of the bed and pulled her lavender robe around her. The room smelled smoky from the smoldering fire. She rubbed at her eyes and brushed her hands toward the floor, as if she could pull the dream out of her and brush it off to be swept away with the dirt. Her head felt dull and full of water. She shivered, trying to shake the feeling.

How long had she been having this dream? Ten years? Fifteen? She had lost track. Lately she dreamed it often, each dream slightly different, each dream more focused than the last. First, she remembered the boot. It was old, scuffed up with the laces missing. Then she remembered the teeth in the face, pushed forward and to one side, like they'd been shaped by miniature bulldozer. The image left her with a milky sense of dread and feeling sick to her stomach.

She lifted herself off of the cot carefully, slowly, feeling like an aging elder. Miss Lottie was right. She was too old. They have been twenty-seven long, hard years, she thought. She tried to remember earlier times, the time before Anne Marie died. Those years in the orphanage she, a child, had a purpose: half-mother, half-sister to Anne Marie. She had felt that calm feeling of purpose again that day at the Polly Mae when she had held George in her lap and it felt good.
She slid her feet toward the small vanity against the west wall of her crib. The room, eight feet by eight feet, held all of her belongings and she paid $5.00 a week to stay there. She sat on the wine colored stool and pressed her palm flat against her reflection in the mirror, the same reflection that looked back at her each night before she went out to work the taverns. She looked old, her face weathered, wrinkled, used up.

"Kaly," she said, calling her own name, "a dream is just a dream," comforting herself as she had once comforted Anne Marie. "It's OK, Kaly's here," she'd say to her sister. "Kaly won't let anyone hurt you," she said. "You're safe. You're safe."

But Anne Marie wasn't safe. Bad things happened, really bad things happened and she couldn't protect her sister, couldn't keep her safe. If only the storm hadn't been so bad. If only they wouldn't have gotten separated. If only she hadn't gotten so confused and lost.

Kaly had been over the "if only's" a million times and they all boiled down to one: if only Kaly had arrived sooner that day to help her sister, her sister would still be alive. Each time she had the nightmare she woke up thinking about Anne Marie and the storm that killed her, about Tommy leaning over her like a viper. The memories pushed forward and she pushed them back. The night would be wasted if she allowed them stage room.

She tried to clear her mind by tending to her night's work. In the mirror she saw that her makeup smudged under her eyes from her early evening sleep. Her cheeks paled from the faded rouge and looked ghostly under the kerosene lantern hung from the ceiling.

"You're a mess," she said to the image in the mirror. She poured water into the wash basin and set it on top of the small wood stove in the corner of her room. As she stoked the fire, she thought about the way that Dan had pulled her down the street like a wagon, until Broadway, where he stopped and danced with her. Without a word, he opened the door to the Goldmine Cafe and, once seated in a booth, ordered a steaming bowl of clam chowder for her. Later her walked her home and waited until she was safely inside with the door locked behind her.
“Kaly Shane,” a voice interrupted her thoughts. It came from Beth. She stood in the doorway dressed exactly as she had been the last time that Kaly had seen her, in the blue silk dress that she had worn for Lottie Boyle’s birthday party. “Are you coming? We’re heading down to the Casino.” Behind her several girls from Lottie Boyle’s stood waiting.

Kaly pulled her robe tight and motioned for her to come in. She greeted her exactly as if the world outside had not changed and as if she and Beth still had the same chance for friendship. Beth told the other girls to go on without her, that she’d meet them later. She made herself at home and sat on Kaly’s bed.

“Do they expect it to be busy tonight?” Kaly asked. She sat with her back to Beth and looked at the image of her old friend in the mirror.

“They’ve got a late night prize fight scheduled. Between Bert Browne and Tommy Monroe. We can watch him get creamed,” Beth said and slit her eyes at Kaly. “It should draw a big crowd and get some action going. You know how men are after a fight, they just want to keep fighting, one way or another, you know what I mean.” Beth took a playful swing at Kaly’s arm. “It’s good. Except when it turns bad. Like last year after the Independence fights.”

“That was bad,” Kaly said. She had been surrounded by a group of teenage boys. The boys carried sticks and rocks and they yelled names at her. The biggest boy grabbed Kaly and the others closed in on her. Beth, who watched from a street corner, walked right up to the attackers and into the center of them. She calmly pried the boy’s fingers off of Kaly Shane’s arms and told them to get lost. They scattered with little resistance.

Kaly’s hands shook and her feet remained like cement blocks on the ground. Beth wrapped her arms around her and walked her back to her crib. Kaly was unable to work the rest of that night and went to bed early. She had the nightmare that night and it was the first time she remembered the boot.
“Your hair’s a rat’s nest.” Beth flipped her eyes at Kaly. “You can’t go out like that. I’ll fix it for you.”

She untangled Kaly’s long hair until it was smooth as lake water. Then she twisted it into a French roll, revealing her long, graceful neck. She slipped in several black hairpins to secure it into place. “You are a raving beauty. Now, stop dilly dallying.” Beth pointed to the sweater hanging on the wooden coat stand.

“I’m coming,” she said and grabbed her red beaded purse from the bedpost. She checked her makeup one more time in the vanity mirror. Not bad, she thought. Not great, but not bad.

At the Casino the action had already begun. A couple of teenage boys fought before the big contest. The Casino gave the upcoming fighters a chance in this way. Kaly recognized one of the boys from the group that had her surrounded last Fourth of July. He took a solid hook to the face and seemed to be off balanced by it. The other boy took advantage of his shakiness and pummeled his head. About the fourth punch to the face the boy who had been part of the group lie unconscious on the floor, knocked out. The referee counted to ten and declared the other boy the winner.

“There’s some good old fashioned justice for you,” Kaly said to Beth and pointed to the boy.

“Oh yeah, what goes around comes around. I’ve never seen a bully yet who didn’t get his due,” Beth said with a laugh. She winked at a man across the ring.

The crowd cheered and Kaly looked up to see Tom Monroe saunter into the ring. He wore red shorts that looked like cut off long johns and a small cotton blanket around his neck. He slid the blanket over his left shoulder to his corner stool and started bouncing around and punching the faceless air.

Bert Browne stepped up to his stool, his red hair hanging down to his shoulders and the cheering thundered across the excited crowd. Tommy Monroe had won the last five fights by a knock out and he was favored to win again. Kaly knew from the town talk
that most people thought Bert a madman looking to get hurt. In fact, the crowd seemed to perversely enjoy Bert's plight and likely fate.

   Kaly relaxed. There was nothing to do for now but watch the fight.

   The referee yelled “round one” above the heads of the crowd and rang the bell. Tommy Monroe shot across the referee with a right hook to the chin, which Bert deftly ducked, but Tommy followed with a left jab, then slid his right foot in and threw a right uppercut that caught Bert right under the chin.

   Kaly cringed as Bert's head flew back and he stumbled. Bert kept his eyes on Tommy Monroe as he gained his balance and lunged back toward him, weight forward and all body behind his right round punch. The punch caught Tommy square on the cheek which seemed to barely phase Tommy. Then he mirrored the move with the left fist.

   This just seemed to piss Tommy off and he came on like grass fire, enveloping Bert at every opening. Bert first tried to fight back but wasn't fast enough, then he tried blocking but he might as well have ten pound weights tied to his arms. He went down like a cut tree and never got up. Bert took a ten count and a minute and a half into the first round the referee awarded the fight to Tommy Monroe. The crowd cheered wildly.

   Kaly watched as the referee raised Tommy’s hand. Tommy ran his narrow eyes across the crowd, as if he was looking for his prize. They stopped on Kaly Shane. She knew those eyes, always looking for something, searching, as if what he wanted, no needed, would appear around the next corner. He made her nervous and she looked away.

   Five minutes later he stood in front of her, fully dressed in tan trousers and a red plaid shirt. His hair was wet and slicked straight back.

   “Kaly Shane,” he said and smiled broadly. “So nice to see you again.”

   “Hello Tommy,” she said, instantly composed. “You fought well.”

   “Good enough to drink all night with the best gal in town?” He asked, narrowed his eyes and ran his half-open fist down her forearm. The small hairs of her arm raised on end, an age old indicator that lightning is about to strike nearby.
“You always get what you want,” Kaly said shifting her arm away from his touch. He scared her more than usual and she didn’t want to commit five minutes to him tonight, let alone the entire evening.

“You know what I want, Kaly.” He reached out with both hands and grabbed her by her shoulders and pulled her close. Heat spiraled up her belly, zagged across her chest, came into her mouth like fire and stopped at her closed lips. She searched the crowd for Beth and found her laughing across the room with Bert Browne and his fans.

She felt the urge again to dig her teeth into Tommy Monroe, to send her fist again and again into his face like he had slugged Bert Browne. He deserved it. The town praised him but they didn’t know him, didn’t know the harm he could do with his vile wit. She pulled back and he tightened his grip.

“Good fight, fella,” an older man said as he walked by. “Keep him happy doll.” He smiled at Kaly. Across from the man she heard two teenage boys exchanging insults. A rush of laughter followed. Other spectators pushed past them and crowded toward the bar.

“I miss you,” Tommy said. “It’s been months since we had some fun together.” He drooled the words and pushed her toward the casino door and she knew for certain she’d throw up if she didn’t get away from him. His breath smelled like whiskey and his body wreaked from the dried sweat of his earlier boxing match. The smell of Tommy Monroe and his baby growing in her belly didn’t mix.

Anger hit her like a punch. The urge to get rid of him, to hurt him, overrode her age-old inertness. She grinned into his teeth, picked up her high-heeled foot and shoved it into his shin. He yelped and loosened his grip.

“I need to go find Beth,” she said and walked across the room.

When she got to Beth she didn’t even turn to acknowledge Kaly but rather joked with a group of men surrounding Bert Browne. Kaly tugged on her arm. “Beth,” she said. “Let’s go home. I’m tired.”
“Don’t be silly, friend. We just got here,” Beth said with a wink and curled into the arm she hung on.

Kaly folded her arms hopelessly across her chest and prepared to walk home alone. It wasn’t smart, but she’d done it before. She pulled her shawl up around her shoulders when Beth grabbed her arm.

“There’s your friend.” She pointed across the room and poked her elbow in Kaly’s rib. “Bet you two had some fun the other night.” Dan McClane stood at the bar talking to a short bald man in a leather shirt and leather pants, a wood worker who ran a shop on East Galena, when he wasn’t working the mines.

“Dan took me for tea at the Goldmine and walked me home. That’s all.” Which is more than you did, Kaly wanted to say but didn’t. Neither of them had mentioned Lottie Doyle since the night of her birthday party. Kaly smiled and walked off toward Dan. About five feet from him, with his name in her mouth, Tommy Monroe intercepted her.

“Slow down, honey. Ain’t nothing over there that you can’t get right here, only better.” He gleamed his yellow teeth at her.

“Take your hand off of me.” She said, surprised at her own courage.

“You turning into a fighter on me?” He said, wrapping his arms around her and pulling her tightly into a bear hug. “Because I love a fighter.”

“Let go of me.”

“Oh, yes, what ever you say.” He pulled her closer and started to slide her through the crowd, toward the open door.

She caught Dan’s eye. He would help her. He looked at her briefly and then looked away. She was horrified when she realized that he actually thought she wanted to be with Tommy Monroe. She shook her head “no,” but it was too late. He no longer looked at her. And why shouldn’t he be confused. She, herself, was confused one day.

Tommy tightened his grip, hurting her arms. Her head spun. It hurt. Hurt. She thought she’d pass out and she saw those dream faces again, swirling just in front of her.
The smell, this smell of whiskey, she recognized it and another piece of the recurring dream slipped into place. The faces in the dream smelled like whiskey and they demanded something, just like Tommy Monroe demanded something right now.

She didn't want to be seduced by him again, didn't want to be pushed by him again, couldn't let him hurt her. She had to stop him. If only she could remember how, but her mouth wouldn't work. Her brain told her mouth to open, to talk, to yell, but the fear in her heart had her mouth clamped shut. She struggled for breath. How could this many people not notice that she needed help?

She freed one arm and came down heavy on his cheek with her fist. She caught the same spot Bert Browne had clubbed. Immediately she attacked again, shoving her elbow into his stomach. He grabbed her arms again. He seemed unreal, far away, laughing. She dug her long red nails into his bicep and spit at him, then she did it, she sunk her teeth through the dried sweat into his forearm and bit down hard.

She could've guessed what happened next.

"You bitch." Tommy Monroe yelled and loosened his grip on her. His narrow eyes became tiny slits. Before she could catch her breath, he slammed his right fist into her jaw and a blinding pain shot through her head. From the other side he smashed her nose with his left hand. Her head flew back and forth like a banked pool ball. She saw a flash of white light and dropped like a rock to the sawdust floor.

She didn't feel Tommy's foot slam into her stomach again and again, didn't notice Dan McClane bolt across the room, didn't see the wolf dog lunge through the crowd for Tommy Monroe's throat and bring him to the ground beside her.

She floated far from crowded Casino into the dream, the faces, laughing, leering, rising up in anger above her head and descending down on her. The boot standing at the foot of where she lay, then pinning her arm to the pitch white ground, where it stayed frozen under the silver silken snow. She floated from that dream into another one where the
sun shone brightly and Anne Marie still lived for a split second, and the blended conversations from the festive night murmured into cold silence.
The white dog walked through the splintered wood in the smoke black snow where the medical wagons carried people away from the fire. All night the voices yelled out to each other as they found the living, with or without a leg, an arm, a good working hand. The morning sun, rose into a milk white day and workers scattered to clean the street. They walked slowly, coldly, shivering, the words gone out of the town. Dark body parts were placed gently into a wagon separate from the wagon filled with debris. The men of the clean-up crew seemed almost dead themselves, with no sign of emotion in their faces. A woman pulled a young boy from a burned, but recognizable body. The boy yelled and lurched from her hands. She grabbed him and trapped him in her arms. The next day when the white dog arrived at the Pollie May Orphanage the boy sat at the kitchen table, next to the man with the stick, staring at something high up on the far wall of the kitchen.
Chapter Eight

1917
Taking Care

Jovanka Mirich hurried over to Kaly Shane's crib as soon as Dr. Fletcher sent for her. A dog slept at the thin plywood door of the crib as if guarding a grand entrance. Kaly slept in a narrow brass bed with a white quilt tucked up under her chin. Her hair spread out on the pillow like a child's, her face soft and relaxed. Above her head was a painting of several roses in full bloom. The white and lavender colors danced in the light of a lantern set on the vanity table. The light of the lantern shone in the mirror, which reflected off of the water in a wash basin on the other side of the table, creating the effect of several lights. Dr. Fletcher sat at the foot of her bed. He wore his round spectacles and a white lab coat.

"She's been in a coma for three days now," he said, taking the glasses off and cleaning them on the coat. "I just need you to watch over her. She'll come out of it. At least I think she will. I hope she will. Well, we just have to wait and see. What will be will be."

"Shall I do something? Give her smelling salts or something."

The doctor smiled kindly. "Not much to do now. Just be here with her. Tell her stories. Ask her questions. See if you can get her to respond. I'll come back tomorrow to check on her. See if I can find a heartbeat. I don't know if she lost the baby or not," he said.

"Baby?"

"And remember Miss Mirich, a doctor's work is confidential," he said and walked out the door.

"Dr. Fletcher," she yelled out the door after him. "What happened?"

"An unfortunate accident, I'm afraid. Send for me if you need me."

Jovanka took the seat that the doctor had vacated. Kaly did not look good. Her face was bruised; her lower lip was swollen with ten stitches in it. The mound of her left eye was purple and completely sealed shut. This was no accident. If the rest of her looked
anything like her face, Jovanka didn’t see how a baby could’ve lived through whatever happened.

She walked over to the wash basin and wrung a warm wash cloth out into the basin. Being careful of the cuts and bruises Jovanka carefully wiped the sweat from Kaly’s face. Kaly didn’t move. Jovanka had seen others in the sleeping sickness before. She had seen her grandmother, Baba, lead them out of it. For all her life she could not remember what it was that she did that finally brought them awake. Well, she would try Dr. Fletcher’s method and tell her stories.

She began with her *baba’s* story of the white wolves of old. Then she sang every hymn she knew, beginning with *The Battle of the Blackbirds*. When she finished she talked to Kaly as though she were awake.

“Don’t worry about a thing. We’ll pull you out of this. You’re safe now. We’re here to help. Everything will be fine. We won’t let anyon hurt you.” She washed her face and pulled her hands out from under the covers and washed them too.

“Is that too cool for you? Well, never mind. It probably feels fine.” Kaly didn’t stir.

“You rest now. I’ll be right in this chair when you need me.” Jovanka couldn’t think of what else to do and finally fell asleep in her chair, joining Kaly in the dream world where they were running together before a great and heavy cloud. It rained just before them and just after them but never directly on them. Jovanka felt oddly safe in the dream with her hand locked in Kaly’s, and she woke knowing that Kaly would be all right.

The sound of the dog’s growl woke her before she heard the knock. She answered it, and Dan McClane’s mother stood in a long skirt with a shawl around her shoulders. Her hair was up in a bun with loose ringlets around her face and her blue eyes sparkled.

“Dr. Fletcher told me that you’d be here with her. I had some turkey soup left over from the lunch crowd today.” She handed the package to Jovanka. Jovanka took it without comment. “How is she?”

“She hasn’t woken up yet.”
"Has there been any movement?"

"Not even when I bathe her face or move her hands. She doesn't wince or smile."

"Well, she looks peaceful." Mrs. McClane turned to go.

"Wait," Jovanka said. "Can I ... do you want me to tell her something?"

"No dear. Just the opposite. I'm going now and I've never been here. Enjoy the soup. There is enough for both of you if she wakes up." She closed the door gently behind her.

Jovanka stared after the door. The visit and the exchange confused her. The things that she didn't know were adding up. She didn't know what happened to Kaly, didn't know how to help her, couldn't figure what Mrs. McClane's concern was and, for all practical purposes, didn't know Kaly. She had stepped into a foreign world, and she only had the simplest instructions, watch her, talk to her, try to get her to respond.

"Two out of three isn't bad," she said out loud to Kaly but Kaly didn't move.

She looked outside to see if the dog was still there. He was rolled over on his belly were a dark-haired boy rubbed his belly. When he saw her he took off running.

"It's OK," she yelled after him, but he was so quickly out of sight she wondered if she had seen him at all. She reached down and petted the dog who now sat up. He rolled his head into her hand, and she scratched him behind the ears. The snow from the last storm had almost disappeared except in the mountains. The streets were dirty in the bright sun. Back inside the white roses above Kaly's bed glowed like the dawn. Jovanka changed the water in the basin, bathed Kaly's face with the fresh water and sat down to compose a letter to her grandmother, asking how to wake someone from the sleeping sickness. If she could send it by airmail she might get the answer before it was too late.

Late that evening Beth came by to relieve her. She expected to get a lecture from her father when she got home, but everyone was asleep and the house was quiet except for an occasional coughing fit from Papa. In her weariness she left the letter to Baba on the dinner table. When she woke, Papa sat drinking his coffee in front of it.
“You want me to mail this?” He asked. The sweet smell of his pipe filled the air.

“Not yet,” she said. “You had a rough night last night. Did you sleep at all?”

“Well enough to get my work done today. I’m going to the post office.”

“No. Thank you. More coffee?” She poured herself a cup and held the pot out toward him. She’d take the letter to Dr. Fletcher and see if they’d send it by air.

“Looks ready to go,” he looked at her, baffled, and pushed his cup toward her.

She drank her coffee quickly, gathered her things, including the letter, and started for the door. Maybe Papa didn’t know where she’d been yesterday and she wanted to leave before he questioned her.

“How is she?” He asked before she got to the door.

“Who? How is who?”

“That girl you’re watching for Dr. Fletcher. How is she?”

“Fine.”

“She wake up yet?”

“No.”

“Is that what’s in the letter?”

Jovanka stared at him.

“I’ll mail it for you.”

“By air?”

“OK.” He put out his hand for it. He did something else that he hadn’t done for a long time. He smiled. Then he started coughing.

Jovanka got him a glass of water and waited for the coughing to stop. She handed him the letter. “Thank you,” she said, her voice so light and airy that she hardly recognized it. She walked up East Galena to Kaly Shane’s crib. She couldn’t imagine what had come over Papa.

Both the doctor and Beth were there when she arrived. Kaly seemed to be in exactly the same position that she had been in when she left. She looked soft, peaceful, without a
care in the world. The white dog now slept at the foot of her bed and she saw that someone had placed a bowl of water down for him.

"Has she moved?" she asked the doctor.

"Not yet, but I have great faith that she will. She could it seems. I can't find anything that is keeping her in such a state. She may well just be sleeping through the pain. Or resting up. She deserves the rest. Tommy's in not much better shape at the hospital. If she doesn't come out of it, he'll go right to jail from there."

"Did you find the baby's heartbeat?"

He looked quickly from her to Beth. Jovanka winced. She had forgotten about confidentiality.

"I already know," Beth said quietly.

"I did not. I might not yet though if she was not very far along, which I think she wasn't," he said with the flip of his arm.

"Not too far," Beth said.

A knock came at the door at that moment. It opened and Dan McLane stood there with another dark haired man. Jovanka stood bolt upright and straightened her skirt.

"Come in," Dr. Hatcher said.

"I guess," Jovanka added since they were already in the crib standing next to the vanity. It was getting mighty crowded.

"How is she?" Dan asked.

"Sleeping still. What happened?" Jovanka said.

"I must go," Dr. Fletcher said, as he excused himself and was gone like the night.

"She got beat up at the prize fight this weekend," the dark-haired man said.

"I didn't think that they let women fight."

"Tommy Monroe took some bitterness out on her. It was pretty bad. Will she be OK?"
"The doctor thinks so. He wants me to wake her up. I can't get any response. Would you like to try Mr...?" She said and reached out her hand as if an introduction had been made. She stared in the stranger's eyes.

"Oh, you two don't know each other," Dan said. "I'm sorry. Jovanka Mirich. Michael Jovich."

Her mouth dropped and her stomach turned. She felt her face go red and she turned her eyes to Kaly, lying motionless in her small bed. Then she looked to Beth as if they were allies. "Pleased to meet you," she said to the wall. Then she turned and stared into the stranger's eyes. "What are you doing here?"

"He's helping me. I got laid off at the Orphan Girl. He thinks he can help me get on at the Speculator." Dan jumped to the rescue.

"I'm glad to finally meet you," Michael said and stretched a hand out to Jovanka.

"I don't think she should have company," Jovanka said, ignoring Michael's hand and the fact that Beth was standing right at the head of the bed.

"Let us know if we can do anything," Dan said and ushered Michael out the door.

The insolence, thought Jovanka. She felt smug. Wait until Papa hears this. Meeting my future fiancée at a prostitute's crib. He'll no longer think that it's such a good idea for me to be marrying him. She held, she knew, the card to escape her father's vision of her future. Yet the sweetness dulled as soon as she thought it and the vengeance leaked out of her like a sieve.
Chapter Nine

Visiting and Re-visiting

Through the pain in her head and her blurred vision, Kaly recognized Anne Marie, who didn’t speak but simply put her finger to her lips as if to tell Kaly to keep quiet. Then Anne Marie washed Kaly’s face with a cool cloth and the sun shone bright yellow through the one window in the crib, making the room seem transcendent, as if it were a passage to heaven. Everything glimmered in the magical light. Her make-up glimmered on the vanity; the tiny closet door next to her cot was clean and closed, even the wood floor seemed polished.

“Anne Marie,” she said. “How did you get here.”

“I don’t know Anne Marie. I’m Jovanka. You’ve been hurt and been sleeping for four days.” The woman put her fingers over her lips and looked softly at Kaly Shane.

She seemed familiar and so much like Anne Marie; she tried to remember how she knew her. “What happened? Why are you here?”

“Tommy Monroe beat you badly; Doctor Fletcher sent me over to take care of you. At first he was afraid you’d die. Then he knew you’d make it. This last day I knew that he was right. I could tell by the way you’ve been thrashing about.”

“Thrashing about?”

“I’ve never seen such a fitful sleeper.” Jovanka smiled at Kaly and wiped her face with a warm cloth she had just wrung out in the basin. The cool water felt good on Kaly’s face and the air smelled like fresh rain.

“I had a bad dream.”

“Must have been several bad dreams at the rate you were going.”

“No,” Kaly said, “just one bad dream, over and over again, sometimes a little different version of it, but it’s always the same bad dream.” Although her brain felt full of fog for once she remembered the dream clearly and that day behind the orphanage when she and Anne Marie played as kids came into full view.
The back door of the long brick building opened into a jungle of trees and undergrowth painted white with freshly fallen snow. A storm had ravaged the area the night before and they built a fort out of the fallen tree branches.

"Only take the ones that are already broken, or the low, loose one's from the trees. And be careful," she had told Anne Marie, always acting half-sister, half-mother to her, even though they were exactly the same age.

"Why can't I break them off of the trees. The trees don't care," Anne Marie said.

"They do care. The branches that have already fallen to the ground are ready to be used for something else. The other ones haven't given us their permission to use them yet," Kaly said.

"You mean they still want to be a tree?"

Kaly nodded.

Anne Marie ran gathered the nearby branches then searched the far borders of the thick forest for more limbs. She wanted to create a large home that was just theirs and not something they had to share with the other residents of the orphanage.

Kaly swept the snow from the floor of the dwelling, clearing it of loose rocks and fallen pine needles. She had just finished when she heard the scream. It was long and low almost as if it had come from a wild animal. She ran toward it to find Anne Marie curled up in a fetal position, shaking, her eyes wide as silver saucers. Blood poured out of one ear. Her yellow cotton dress looked like it had been drug through the mud.

"What is it? What happened?" Kaly asked, uncurling her sister and holding her stiffly in her lap. Anne Marie's eyes fixed straight ahead, into the trees. Kaly squinted to see more clearly. Whatever had frightened her sister had leapt away so quickly that Kaly could find no trace of it. Yet Anne Marie sat glued as a paper cut out, rigid and un-speaking, in a spell saturated with fear.

"Annie," Kaly Shane tried again. "It's OK. I'm here. You're safe now. I won't let anything hurt you." Kaly Shane held her sister. Then she saw the movement, slight as
the wind and growing like a hailstorm. She heard the branches rustle and break as the feet came crashing through them. Surrounded she clench tightly to Anne Marie and yelled, "Go away. Leave us alone." But the crashing continued and she felt a sharp pain at the back of her neck. Had she let go of Anne Marie or had she gotten up to run?

She tried to get up. She tried to find Anne Marie. The pain jumped for her neck to her head and she lay paralyzed on the forest floor, in a soft bed of snow. To her left she saw feet, to her right more feet, work boots with mud and snow caked on them. And straight ahead, a pair of dress shoes, the soles worn out. Where was Anne Marie?

The air smelled of whiskey and stale cigars mixed with the sweet smell of evergreens. Her heart seemed to be beating in her head, the pain increasing with each beat.

Kaly tried again to lift herself off of the ground when suddenly her arms were jerked out from under her and secured to the ground above her head. Laughter broke out above her. She turned her eyes upward and saw three looming heads, disconnected and fog-like, grinning. Terrified and furious, she kicked up at them with small pointed boots, one right after the other. A head disappeared and soon her legs were secured to the ground like her arms. Then one of the floating grins, topped with brown hair, descended toward her and grew bigger. She recognized it. It belonged to the man from the fire, Miss Anderson’s friend, the one who beat a dog with a stick. As the face got closer, Kaly Shane felt the weight of a thousand mountains fall on her chest and the pain in her head shot through her arms and chest, and with great precision and sharpness down through her torso, to her pelvis and legs and she could not breathe and she knew she would die.

Finally the numbness came, the pain in her pelvis being the last to go. She could see herself curled up inside of herself, a tiny fetal ball, hiding out inside her belly, then rising above herself and above the heads all turned toward her body on the ground. The back of the heads were now at different heights and Kaly Shane could see the unique colors and lengths of their hair, one brown and short, one black, a little longer and matted, one
long and red. She flew in the clouds for moments or hours waiting for them to be done with her, waiting for her body to be her own again.

When Kaly came to, Anne Marie rested in her arms and she could not wake her. She shook her but she was dead asleep in her arms. Whatever the men did to Anne Marie must have made her very tired. Kaly could take care of it; she would simply take Anne Marie home and put her to bed. She would miss dinner, but old Miss Anderson probably wouldn't feed them anyway. She never fed them when they came in late.

“We need to go back to the home. Miss Anderson will have us in our rooms for a month if we don’t go,” Kaly said to a very still Anne Marie. She pulled herself off of the ground and stumbled a bit before finding her balance with Anne Marie in her arms. Kaly Shane’s shoulders and legs ached from the wet snow in the forest. She slipped and fell with Anne Marie falling limply, softly on top of her. Kaly sat up again and cradled Anne Marie in her arms. She sat there like that until dark and through the night until the next morning when Tommy Monroe arrived.

“What are you doing out here?” He asked.

Having no words she just looked at him.

“You have to come in.”

She didn’t want to move. She only wanted him to go away and leave her and Anne Marie alone. Then Miss Anderson showed up.

“Oh my God,” she said. “Tommy, go call the police.”

The police came and took Anne Marie. They pried her out of Kaly’s arms. There was a deep animal sound that came from somewhere and she was again above herself watching herself. That was the first time Kaly saw the white dog. She sat in the clouds with the dog and watched as they put Anne Marie in the ambulance. The dog sidled closer as they shut the door to the ambulance and drove away. She rubbed his pointed ears at their base as she watched.
Tommy helped her enter the back door of the orphanage. He kept his arm around her as she climbed the stairs up to the second floor and walked down the hallway, past pictures of the fine men and women who donated money every year to keep the orphanage running, the same people they thanked God for each night at dinner. When she reached their bedroom, she saw Tommy lay her gently on the bed and cover her with the warmest quilt, the one she and Anne Marie usually fought over.

When Anne Marie came back from the hospital, she woke most mornings hungry and evidently recalled nothing of what had frightened her; she didn’t remember the scream, the fetal position, the staring after something apparently dark and luminous. And she sure didn’t understand why she had gotten sent to bed without dinner, her little belly cramped in its emptiness.

Kaly couldn’t explain it to her, and worse, she didn’t seem to be able to help Anne Marie throughout the next two years when she’d find her, wide eyed, curled up like a snail, making a low groaning sound.

When Anne Marie died, the police said she killed herself, but Kaly didn’t believe it; she’d seen the stare of fear in her eyes. Someone had murdered her sister; someone cold and cruel and with something to hide had taken a hushed Anne Marie and drained the life from her. Kaly knew this as certainly as she had ever known anything in her life.

“Why did Tommy Monroe hit me?” She brought her attention back to her modern day crib and Jovanka.

“Why does a man like that hit anyone? I suppose you denied him or hurt his pride.” Jovanka pulled a teakettle from the wood stove and poured water into a cup and the smell of peppermint filled the air. “Drink this. It’ll be good for your stomach.”

Kaly Shane ignored the cup being handed to her and sat straight up and put her hands to her stomach. The baby. Was the baby OK? Had he hurt the baby?

“Did he...? Am I...?” She tried to phrase the question
“Are you still pregnant?” Jovanka asked it for her. “We’ll have to wait for the doctor to find a heartbeat, but I believe you are. You seem to be experiencing cramping, but I’ve seen no blood. How do you feel?”

“Like I’ve been beat up in a barroom brawl,” she said. She took the tea from Jovanka and drank quietly.

When she finished the tea, she looked sleepily at Jovanka and said, “I’m sorry. I tried to protect her.”

Jovanka made the hushing gesture again and ran her hands lightly over Kaly Shane’s eyelids, signaling for her to go to sleep. And Kaly Shane did sleep, without hesitation, without question, she fell into the soft light of the clouds, a warm comfort firmly supporting her in the thin mountain air.
Chapter Ten

A Letter From Home

Kaly slept while Jovanka read the letter in her lap.

Dear One,

Your request causes me some concern. These things are not always easy to fix and not the same thing will fix all cases of those who have gone to sleep and yet still live. Is it because the mistake was made that they live and God missed them when truly they are to go home? Or is it because a mistake was made to bring them out of their lives too soon and God is holding them suspended until they can find their way back to their bodies and into life again. Without being there I cannot decide.

I will answer your letter by telling you a story that my grandfather told me when I was a little girl and we lived in a cave during the war. He said that my mother’s mother fell off a high cliff when they were young and was severely injured. She went to sleep and did not wake up for a long time. When he’d sleep, he’d see her spirit on the outskirts of their small village. He’d invite her into the town but she could never move beyond the first house. Meanwhile a stranger sat at the dinner table in her own house.

He told me that when one is injured but it is not their time to join God sometimes another spirit would inhabit their body to keep them alive until they find their way home. Sometimes the other spirit gets so comfortable there inside of the displaced person’s body that they think it’s their own home and they don’t want to leave.

This happened to my grandmother. She was asleep for four weeks. Until in a dream one night my grandfather saw her spirit again at the edge of town. She tried to
tell him something but even her words could not pass by some invisible barrier at the edge of town.

He thought to visit the one living in her house to see if she could help him. He went there and knocked on the door. This stranger was generous and kind and offered my grandfather a drumstick from a wild turkey. He refused of course and asked what she was doing there. This seemed to confuse her and she dropped the drumstick. She said weakly that she was simply enjoying her home.

"It's not your home," he said. She seemed to become even weaker at this statement. Finally he said, "You can't stay here. You don't live here. This is not your home so you must leave."

Well this added anger to her confusion and she started running around the house screaming and pulling her hair. She pulled down the curtains and tipped the table. But he repeated again that she must leave and he could see her all the while getting weaker. It became clear to him that she couldn't stay there without permission.

"You must leave. You don't have permission to be here," he said again. "I call on Michael the Archangel to escort you off of this property and take you to your own home." She could not even respond to this and her strength seemed to melt out of her. Soon the room brightened and a ball of blinding light came through the door. My grandfather's eyes hurt so much that he could not keep them open. When he did open them again the stranger was gone. The house was empty except for himself.

He went to edge of town and invited my grandmother to return to her house. This time she easily walked back into the town and back into her own house. The dream finished and my grandfather slept peacefully through the rest of that night.
When he woke the next day he looked over at my grandmother and she had her eyes open looking at him. He rose immediately and brought her a glass of water and she drank it with a vengeful thirst. She got stronger every day from that day on and soon she had her life back again.

I don’t know if this answers your question but I hope that it will help. You’ll have to decide what to do. I hope your friend is made whole again, here or with God, according to God’s will.

Love always,

Your baba

Jovanka folded the letter and sat it on her chair. Baba hadn’t mentioned the wedding at all. Perhaps she hadn’t yet received Papa’s letter. Jovanka wet the wash cloth in the basin and stood over Kaly. She placed her hand on her forehead. It burned with fever and Jovanka worried that one of the cuts from Tommy Monroe’s blows had become infected. She placed boiled arnica leaves on the lesion to remove the swelling.

“How is she?” Dan McQane asked. He had just arrived from the afternoon shift at the Speculator mine. He’d opened the door so quietly she hadn’t heard him come in

“Agitated. Her dreams are filled with demons.” Jovanka motioned for him to have a seat on the velvet vanity chair.

“Infection?” He asked.

“I’m afraid so. Some Echinacea might help. I’ve got some mercurochrome. Dr. Fletcher was by this morning. He said he’d send over something stronger later. She’s going to have a nasty scar.” Jovanka sat on the edge of the bed to face Dan. “Tell me again how you know her?”

“When Mom opened the bakery, she’d have me bring the left overs to the orphanage. I met her there. I’m grateful you’re helping her,” Dan said.
She nodded. “Not much to do at this stage. We mostly need to wait and see. Motor skills are still working. Look at those tight fists.” Jovanka lowered the covers over Kaly’s hands.

“Has Beth been by?” Dan asked.

“Three times. Along with everyone else. One of the boys from the orphanage, Miss Parsons. Your mother has been by daily with food. Beth keeps saying that she needs to get Kaly out of here, needs to get her to a real home before something bad happens. As if something bad hadn’t already happened.” Jovanka bit her lower lip.

Kaly opened her eyes and looked at them.

“Welcome back to Copper Camp,” Jovanka said.

“What are you doing here?” The words fell like drips from a leaking faucet.

“Remember? Dr. Fletcher asked me to watch over you. You’re in pretty bad shape.” Jovanka watched Kaly’s face as she talked. She blinked her eyes and her cheeks twitched, as if the words weren’t registering.

“Where is Anne Marie?” She asked, the slow drips gathering weight and finally rushing forward.

“She’s not here.” Kaly was agitated, and Jovanka wanted to calm her. Dan sat at the foot of her bed.

“What happened?” Kaly looked toward the door, her eyes focused and her voice smoothed. She seemed to be coming back to herself.

Jovanka glance at Dan and said nothing. They had been over it several time already. A look of recognition flashed in Kaly’s eyes. “But he only hit me once,” she said.

“That’s all you remember,” Jovanka repeated for the third time that day. “Dan says he went crazy on you. Fought you just like an opponent in the ring, held nothing back. Dan stopped him.”

Kaly looked at Dan. He nodded.
"Tommy Monroe," she said, the name came from the slow faucet again and her face went blank as if searching some secret memory file for the specific event.

Jovanka felt her own rage at Tommy Monroe's presumption and abuse. She knew Kaly was a prostitute and often invited the company of men like Tommy. America, the free country. What a price some of us pay for freedom.

She knew men like Tommy Monroe. They thought they could have anything they wanted just because they wanted it, just because they had the money to pay for it. She had seen them in her mother's kitchen with her father, and later, when they disappeared and were no longer welcomed, she heard the other men talk about them, the stories of how they had misjudged them.

Once they were found out, those men were not welcome at her father's house. Her father insisted upon respect, not just for himself but for all people, which was one of the reasons he said he had agreed to allow her to nurse Kaly Shane when Dr. Fletcher asked.

"He hurt me bad?" She had asked the question before. This time it sounded feeble and scared. She didn't seem to be able to retain the memory of either the event or their conversations of the event and Jovanka worried about some damage done to her brain. She had seen it happen before with people severely injured in war. They came back in a state of confusion. They're conversations always seemed to have a third party to them. Sometimes it was like they pulled the words out of toffee with the meaning getting lost in the slow tug of effort.

"I'm afraid you might have a couple of nice scars. I've been putting aloe and arnica on the wounds. You've been sleeping pretty fitfully. That might be from an infection in one of the cuts," she said.

"You stopped him?" She looked at Dan.

"Yes," Jovanka said softly.

"Dan saved my life." Kaly made the statement and closed her eyes. She had said this each time they talked. The sun set and Jovanka lit a kerosene lantern and placed it on
the vanity table. Kaly lay so still that Jovanka put her ear close to her mouth and listened for the slow rhythm of her breath. It sounded steady, strong, and her face calmed like the wind after the storm had passed.

Jovanka realized she had been holding her own breath and let go a deep sigh of relief. She was going to make it. For the first time in a week Jovanka knew that her first patient was going to live to roam the crowded streets and taverns again. The firm satisfaction of knowing started deep in her belly and rose to her cheeks and her wide smile, knowing, beyond a doubt, that the work Jovanka had chosen was good work and that she, too, had helped save a woman’s life.

“What are you smiling at? She’s not out of the woods yet.” Dan asked her and moved around the bed closer to her. He reached out and ran the back of his hand down her cheek. Then took her hand in his. It felt warm and strong and sent a shiver down her spine.

She glanced at Kaly then looked into Dan’s eyes. “No. She’s at the edge of the forest and the horizon is bright. I think she’s going to be OK.”

“What’s that in your lap?” He asked and pointed to the letter without taking his eyes off of her.

“It’s from my grandmother. When we couldn’t wake Kaly, I wrote to her to ask her how to bring her back to us.”

“What did she tell you?”

“She said to pray to St. Michael.”

“Did you do that?”

“She woke up.”

Dan took the letter from Jovanka’s lap and placed it on the bed. He tugged her hand to pull her to her feet. He tightened his grip on her hand and pinned her arm behind her back, pulling her into his strong embrace. He danced with her there for a moment to the sound of some imagined song. And Jovanka swore she heard it, the sound of a far off piano playing soft and low.
When the imagined music ended he kissed her neck, moving slowly up to her cheek and then her eyes and finally her mouth. The shiver spread from her spine to her front and down her legs. She felt vulnerable and soft in his arms. She pulled back from him and saw his face shining in lamplight. On the bed Kaly slept peacefully.
Chapter Eleven

Returning

The next day the landlady knocked and told Kaly she would have to pay the rent or move. By this time Kaly had not worked for four weeks and had no money. She was getting better everyday. Her mind had mostly cleared but she felt surly and mean most of the time. She seemed to have lost the ability to take life in stride. She was also getting bigger everyday and she was still weak and in no shape to work. But where would she move to? There was no where for her to go. Then Jovanka told her about the boy from the orphanage who had come by and she sent a note home with him to Miss Anderson with him. Miss Anderson graciously put Kaly up in her old room on the condition that she help out with the kids and housework as soon as she felt better.

One morning in early April Kaly pulled on her warmest robe, got out of bed and poured herself a glass of water. She felt the soft, comfortable feeling in her belly and attributed it to the dream she’d been having. It was so different than the one of the old boot near her mouth with a leering face above it. This new dream was not menacing at all and she could only recall a couple images: the white dog that she had sat with in the clouds was now in the woods of a country far away. He sat next to an old woman, holding her, rocking her. The wolf was like the white dog who now lived in the woods behind the orphanage. She felt an unfamiliar feeling of safety, much like the feeling she imagined family members had when surrounded by their loved ones.

With the feeling of the dream still in her she felt light and airy. Best of all her mind seemed to be coming back to her. She put her hand on her stomach and hoped that the baby would be all right. The doctor had given her and the baby a confident clean bill of health. Just the same, she worried. It had been such a rough beginning and she still didn’t know how she’d care for a child. And if she couldn’t, which seemed likely, who would raise the child.
"Here's your breakfast." George, the boy she had held on her lap over a month ago, stood there balancing a tray juice, scrambled eggs and toast.

"Place it on the dresser," she said.

He did as he was told and then sat on the floor by the dresser.

"You can sit in a chair," she said. "You don't have to sit on the chair like an animal."

"I'm not supposed to bother you. Miss Anderson said."

"Well, then you should mind your elders," Kaly said. Miss Anderson had warned her that she was to follow the house rules. Just then the door opened and Jovanka and Dan walked in with a bag of groceries. A six-year-old girl followed them. Kaly saw two older girls in the hallway peering through the door.

"Shoo," she said and all but George scattered.

"Oh good. You're awake." She put the groceries down on the dressing table.

The words grated on Kaly, interrupted the sweet feeling of the dream, in the way only adults can. "You don't need to bring me food anymore. Feeding people is Miss Anderson's specialty," she said and pointed to the breakfast tray.

"She's a nurse. She needs something to do," Dan said.

Jovanka glared at him then back to Kaly him. "You're worried about the baby," she said pointing to her hand resting on her stomach.

"Not really. Doctor Fletcher was by yesterday and said the baby is just fine. 'That's a baby with an unbearable will, that begs to be born. A baby that will be born beyond all disbelief and bad behavior,'" Kaly said flipping her arms back and forth.

"Aren't you engaged to Michael Jovich?"

The look of a scared dog crossed Jovanka's face and Kaly rather enjoyed it. Then it quickly passed. "Don't remind me. I hate the idea. If I had more courage I'd leave before the wedding and never return. Courage and money, that is," she said.

"He's a kind man."
“You know him?”

“Would I talk about him if I didn’t know him?” Kaly knew she was being rude but she didn’t care. Everyone seemed to be in on her life lately and she just wanted out.

“Well, it doesn’t matter. He could be the King of England and I wouldn’t want to marry him. I don’t want to marry anyone. I want to be independent, earn my own living, live by my own values.”

“I’d marry a king,” George said from the floor.

“But to have a man love and care for you? To rest in the arms of your loved one at night and know you’re safe, know that if you’re ill someone will be there? I’d give anything to have a father for my baby.”

“Maybe you could marry the king, Miss Shane,” George said.

“The baby does have a father. Go to him. Ask him to help you raise the child,” said Jovanka.

“What would you know about it? You’re engaged to a fine man. But he’s not good enough for you. Besides the baby’s father isn’t trustworthy.” She’d been living with secrets all of her life and she was tired of them. If she couldn’t expose her own she expose others’.

“I understand that. Even if he was trustworthy and kind he might not live long enough to raise a child. I hear we’re about to join the war. You could still be left to raise the child by yourself.”

“Kings have a lot of money. You could inherit his kingdom,” George said.

She turned on Jovanka. “It’s easy for you to cast off family because you have one.” The words flew out of her mouth. “The baby’s father’s an ass.” She saw George’s hand cover his mouth.

“You should go to the police.” Jovanka’s expression changed.

“And tell them what?”

“Tell them what happened.”
“Sure, I’ll do that right after your wedding. Stop mothering me. I going to suffocate.”

“How do you know about all of this?” Jovanka asked.

“Michael told me. You and he could adopt the baby.”

“Miss Shane,” George was up and pulling on her sleeve now. “I’ll adopt the baby.”

“I’ve seen you in action. Go get your coat and we’ll go for a walk in a minute,” she said to him and watched him leave the room.

Jovanka was shaking her head. “I don’t even want to marry. I can’t begin to think about children.”

Dan stood by, quietly watching the two women.

“You’re spoiled,” Kaly said. “How could you not want to marry Michael Jovich? He’s one of the kindest, most hard working men in the country.”

“He doesn’t even know me. He just wants a servant to dote on him, and I am not going to do it. You can’t buy a wife.”

“Well, actually you can. We are all willing to trade our goods on something important enough to us,” Kaly said. “Even men. They want to feel their own souls in the presence of a woman.”

“You don’t understand,” Jovanka said.

“You, yourself will pay any price to keep for disappointing or betraying your father. You are not that much different than women like me or Beth. You just have a grander idea of yourself. Give Michael a chance. He’s a good man. In fact, he might be too good for you.”

Kaly saw Jovanka wince at her words. She looked like she’d just been slapped. Kaly knew she should be grateful to Jovanka, but she felt bitter, beholding. She seemed to have lost her sense of compassion. She didn’t feel herself, but she didn’t care if she ever felt herself again.
The sound of a man’s voice boomed down the hallway. Jovanka jerked her head toward the door. Soon Stojan Mirich’s large form loomed over them, huge and omniscient.

“Get your things and come home,” he demanded of his daughter, his voice blunt with anger.

“I’m not ready,” Jovanka said.

“You have no business being here under these circumstances. Get your things.”

“I’m not leaving.”

“I told you to stay away from him. Get your things.”

“Should I stay away from you too, then Papa. You and Mrs. McClane.” The words spit like fire out her mouth. They thundered in the room around them and Kaly felt them reverberating in the walls. She saw Stojan Mirich’s face grow quiet and cold. His eyes landed on Dan.

Without another word he grabbed Jovanka by the arm, pulled her through the doorway and down the hall. When Kaly looked out the window, she saw that he still had her firmly in his grip, moving her up the street. Only once for a moment, when struck by a coughing fit, did he lose his momentum and then his long strides pulled him toward town, Jovanka a caboose latched to his closed fist.

“There goes your girlfriend,” Kaly said to Dan.

“Another fleeting romance,” he said. “What is wrong with you? I’ve never seen you act like that before.”

“I told you that you should stay away from her. Looks like me and her daddy have the same idea. Someday you’ll listen to me. I’m older, wiser, been in the school of hard knocks, and now I’ve been knocked around.”

“And knocked up,” he said.

“What will he do to her?” She asked. “Send her to bed without supper?”

“What can he do? She’s almost 18. She’s his daughter. He’ll be mad, rage about and then forget about it.”
“He works at your mine, doesn’t he?”

“Yeah, but he shows up less and less often.”

“Consumption?”

Dan nodded. “Let’s go for a walk. I think you could use some fresh air.”

“What did she mean that he should stay away from your mom?”

Dan shook his head and pointed toward George who stood in the doorway with his coat on. “Grab your coat,” he said and took George by the hand.
Chapter Twelve

A Guest Comes for Dinner

Jovanka had wanted to stop her mouth from talking, had wanted, with all her might, to show Papa the respect he deserved, but the story of him bringing mutton and ice to Dan McClane's mother had fermented inside her with no outlet for well over a month.

"I know what you did. You lied to Mama. After she moved away from Baba and our home in Montenegro to please you, to try to keep you happy, even though she didn't want to leave. She was happy in her small house in the village. She loved the mountains where she grew up and the wildness of the river. You betrayed her and I know it."

Papa's mouth seethed. "You know nothing. Keep your mouth shut about things that are none of your business. At least Mrs. McClane had the good sense to give her bastard child up for adoption."

"Adoption! Is that what you call the orphanage? You know the children there never get adopted," she said. "Those kids have no family. We just leave them in the streets to survive. Of course they band together like bandits. What else was Kaly Shane supposed to do to live?"

"Your manners have gone," Papa said. Under his quiet voice Jovanka heard a certain rage. But she didn't care.

"At least Kaly can make up her mind about the men she'll take to her bed. No one decides who she'll marry."

He let loose her wrist and walked, fast, straight ahead to home.

"Papa," she called after him, stunned into submission. "I'm sorry. Please forgive me. I'm thoughtless. I don't know what has gotten into me." She had gone too far. She had dropped respect for triumph and she hated herself for it. For all her wisdom of the previous moments, she did not know the words of repair.
The next day she talked with Dr. Fletcher about Kaly’s behavior. It seemed to her that Kaly was more irritable than usual, but since she hadn’t known her before she’d been beaten up by Tommy Monroe, Jovanka didn’t really know how to gage it. Dr. Fletcher assured Jovanka that Kaly was not normally mean. He said that sometimes, especially with trauma to the head, it took a while for a person to make a full recovery. This may be another stage in Kaly’s recovery. Or it might just be pregnancy. One could never know with women, Dr. Fletcher said. Jovanka had felt insulted when he said that and walked off in her own huff. Nothing seemed to be turning out as she thought it would.

When Jovanka arrived home, Mama had already covered the dinner table with a white crocheted tablecloth and set her gold trimmed china out for five people. The room smelled like beef stew and corn bread, and the fire from the stove created warmth and a feeling of security.

Jovanka walked over and kissed her mother on the cheek.

“Who’s coming for dinner?” She asked.

Mama took the lid off of the stew pot and steam rose toward the ceiling; she stirred the intoxicating mixture with a long wooden spoon. “Your fiancée. I thought Papa told you.”

“Michael?” Jovanka wanted to flee.

“You have to meet him someday and what better day than today? Anyway the sooner you meet him the sooner you can get over your fear that he’s such a horrible person. You might surprise yourself. You might actually like him.” Mama pulled the corn bread from the oven and set it on top of the stove next to the stew and wiped her hands on her apron. “Now go clean yourself up. He’ll be here any minute,” she said without looking at Jovanka.

Is the whole world against me? Jovanka thought as she pulled her purple velvet dress out of her large trunk. She felt like everyone had been in on some secret meeting which involved her life, and she, the most important person, had not been invited. It’s not
right that others get to decide what will happen in my life. It's my life. My life. She tried to make the words rich and full of meaning, as though the idea itself were as beautiful as love, or honor. But they fell flat. She seemed to be powerless over changing the course of things, and she wondered if, somewhere, deep inside of her, this was what she really wanted: to have her life directed by tradition, to live simply by the rules of the time and some predetermined agreement between, not just her and Michael's fathers, but between men and women themselves.

When Michael arrived, she had revealed her most beautiful self. The white lace collar on the purple dress set off the wonderful olive tone in her skin and her dark hair, fastened lightly at the back of her neck, let loose a few tiny curls down her back to rest gently on the soft velvet.

She had composed herself and made a decision to be polite. "Hello Mr. Jovich." She rehearsed the words in her head, imagining her outstretched hand to his greeting. In reality, when he took her hand and raised it to his lips, she stiffened and jerked it away. How could she trust him? He was too handsome, no doubt a lady's man, his words smooth as the velvet on her skin. How could she trust him or her family and the way they have disregarded her and evaporated her own opinion out of the decision of who she would marry? And she began the evening seething inside.

After dinner, Michael and Papa sat at the table and smoked cigars, while she and Mama put away the food and cleaned the dishes. She was quiet throughout the whole dinner and by the time they broke out the after dinner rakija she had only said a total of five words, not that any one seemed to notice or care about her silence. Father, breaking the rules of the house, filled five glasses. On this grand occasion, evidently even herself and Marko were welcome to celebratory plum brandy, which she wasted no time drinking. When she finished, she pushed her glass toward Papa as if asking for another and Papa, much to her surprise, obliged. The effect was magical. She found her tongue and began to talk.
“Mr. Jovich, I am caring for a friend of yours. Miss Kaly Shane. She is getting along quite well and she speaks very highly of you.” She felt the freedom in her mouth with the rakija had granted her and giggled out loud, smiling for the first time that night, a smile which greatly broadened when she saw the shock on Papa’s face. Now, Papa will know what kind of man he has promised his only daughter to marry.

“Yes. She is a good friend of mine. I am glad that Dr. Fletcher is training you to care for her,” he said, his strong brown eyes locked, for the first time that night, on her.

“Oh, you are smooth talker.” She took another sip of her brandy. “Let me get this straight: You are glad that your fiancée is caring for a woman of ill-repute whom you claim to be a good friend to, at the dinner table of your future in-laws? Please. Won’t that tarnish your reputation?”

“That’s enough.” Mama put one hand at Jovanka’s elbow and with the other grasped Jovanka’s chin. She pulled her face and looked sternly in her eyes. “Mind your manners. Mr. Jovich is a guest in our home,” she said gently and let go of her face.

“It’s fine. I have nothing to hide. She is right to question my motives with other women if we’re to be married,” he said with his eyes still locked on Jovanka. He seemed amused and not all disturbed as Jovanka had hoped. She caught Papa’s slight nod out of the corner of her eye.

“Go on,” Jovanka said.

“I have known Kaly Shane since she was a delightful young girl. She cleaned at my parent’s house when she was ten, the year her sister died. I have often thought of her like a younger sister and have looked after her at times in the same way of a big brother. That’s all. I believe we never really know all the forces that create a person’s position in life. I try my best to live honorably and not to judge others.”

“Well, I just wish I was as good as you. Working for the unions. Cheering the underdog. Tell me, now that we’ve the war, will you enlist in the army, too?” She, and the
brandy, would pick a fight with him. She determined that he could not be as pure as he pretended.

“If they’ll take me. My vision is poor. I’m waiting on eye glasses from the east coast.” His eyes softened and for a moment she almost fell into them. She wondered how bad they could be.

She broke contact by drinking the last of her brandy and pushing her glass again toward Papa, motioning for him to refill it. Papa’s fist tightened around the slim neck of the green glass that held the rakija, his eyes wide as owl eyes in the pitch black night, but he did not lift the bottle from the table. Out of the corner of her eye she saw Marko smile.

“Papa, they’re just talking. He said it himself. He doesn’t mind,” he said. For his benefit she made a face at Michael to test his vision. He didn’t react at all but Marko smiled broader. She pushed her glass closer to the bottle.

“May I have another please?” She asked. She really wanted some more plum brandy. She hadn’t known she was so brilliant.

“Me too?” Marko asked.

“Yes, let’s all have another and then we’ll have desert,” Mama said. Marko made the same face at her that she had made at Michael. They had triumphed. Papa filled their glasses.

“You and your brother really look alike,” Michael said. “Especially when you squish up your noses like that.”

She and Marko went red at the same time.

“We always do that,” Marko said.

“We just never grew out of it. Like a left over twitch from childhood.” Jovanka giggled and hiccuped.

“Time for desert.” Mama stood and began cutting the pineapple cake she had made for the occasion.
“Mr. Jovich, you’ll have to excuse me,” Papa said. “I’ve made a terrible mistake. I may have saddled you with a terrible imposition by agreeing to your father’s request that I allow Jovanka to marry you. I’m afraid that my daughter is not mature enough to marry. She’s old enough so that she wouldn’t be a child bride but evidently she is not old enough to stop acting like a child.”
Kaly Shane pulled her gray wool coat on over her ashen cotton dress. Underneath she wore Beth’s long johns instead of her usual petticoat. She wanted to be warm more than she wanted to be pretty, wanted to recover and be well again. Dr. Fletcher had said that the baby survived the attack by Tommy Monroe and, as far as he could tell, would be fine. She smiled to think of the whimsical doctor when he visited the orphanage adjusting his collar and sleeves again and again.

The wolf dog growled at the doorway. She blinked several times and tried to clear her head. She felt like she was living underwater.

“Who’s there?” she asked. She saw something fleet by but no one answered. Then she felt it behind and turned quickly but again no one was there. “I’m just scared of my own shadow,” she said to the white dog who now stood on all fours with his ears perched and pointed.

As she closed the door to her room behind her she saw George sitting in the hallway. “Shouldn’t you be at school?”

“They sent me home.”

“What did Miss Anderson say about that?” She formed the words slowly, as if dragging them out of glue. She noticed several other children playing in the yard. “Were you all bad?”

“They sent us all home. Miss Anderson let the other kids go outside and play but she told me to come check on you. But I was afraid of that dog.”

“Get your coat,” she said.

She pulled on a hat and walked out into the warm spring day to wait for him. Immediately she felt suffocated by the heat and took her hat and coat off. The time had truly flown since she’d first woken up in bed unable to move after her heavy weight fight with
Tommy. "Fight" she said the words to herself. She had actually fought back. She didn’t win, but she did fight back; it was no longer one sided. And she knew that she would never again let Tommy push her around without fighting. She would get a gun and carry a knife; she felt a vengeance she had never felt before and it made her smile and feel a certain satisfaction. She had had no idea that such a mean streak lie so deeply buried inside of her. She would keep his baby, but she would make him pay for the harm he had done to her and what he had had done to Anne Marie. Beth had asked how she could keep his baby and she couldn’t explain it. She only knew that the more she recovered the more she felt that this was her life, her child, her family and that she was not letting anyone take it away from her, not even the child’s father. She wasn’t alone anymore.

George came out with a rope around the dog’s neck. The dog had twisted his neck around and grabbed the rope in his mouth so that it looked like he was leading the boy.

"I thought you were afraid of him," Kaly said.

"He put his head in my lap when I put my shoes on."

"He hates that rope."

"No he doesn’t. We have an agreement."

Jovanka waved at them from the other side of the street. “Hey, you’re not supposed to be up and out. You should have waited for me to help you.” Jovanka ran across Mercury toward her and George.

"I thought you were mad at me."

“I’m over that. The good doctor says that it’s all part of your recovery. I need your help. I made a fool of myself last week at my parents house with Michael Jovich.”

Kaly flinched and felt the irritation swell in her again. She wanted to swat her down to size.

"Can you go to the Silver Bow Bakery with me for tea?"

She looked over her shoulder. “He deserves to be treated kindly. He works hard and has helped the unions in this town a good deal.” Her words were sluggish and thick as
though pulled through churned butter. She couldn't shake the slowness or the sense that she was being followed. In her haze she worked hard to listen to Jovanka as the three of them walked toward the bakery. It was something dream about something choice. She couldn't get it. Walking and talking at the same time was too difficult. She felt obsessed by her own troubles.

Kaly entertained the slow murder of Tommy Monroe. She hated him and she wanted to be like him: conducting her life without remorse. She wanted to make sure that he never again hurt her or their baby. The only way to be certain was for him to simply disappear and she knew men who could make that happen. Though the thought calmed her she tried to shake it. She couldn't find herself in this fog and she hoped she be better when she reached the bakery.

At the bakery George didn't want to go inside and she help him get situated, sitting on the curb with the dog's rope in hand. The dog sat next to him and leaned his whole weight against him, tilting George toward the street. The smell of fresh bread was conspicuously absent.

They tried the door to the bakery. It was locked. On the door a sign said, "11,603 people joined the Selective Service Act. Closed in honor of our Nation." Kaly looked up and down the streets. The activity was limited and she could see that other business were closed too.

"Let's go to the Copper Tavern. They never close," she said. She gathered George and the dog and resituated them around the corner.

Inside of the Copper Tavern sawdust covered the floor and the crowd burst into cheer every time a new person walked through the door. A group of men at the end of the bar were singing "My Country 'Tis of Thee". The smell of whiskey and sweat combined reminded Kaly, not of Tommy Monroe, but of the man with the stick. She tried to gather her bearings. Through the fog she heard Jovanka's voice.
“My father gave me some plum brandy and I had never drank alcohol before, except for a seasonal glass of wine diluted with soda water. I got drunk and insulted him. He may never speak to me again. I may not have to worry about being anyone’s wife after all.”

“Did he act mad?” Kaly tried hard to concentrate. The noise of the bar disturbed her:

“No. That’s the funny thing. He just remained calm. Anything I threw at him he just deflected like a good boxer, except that he never threw a single strike back.”

“Not one?”

“Well, maybe one. Cleverly hidden. Will you help me?”

“Well, you have to go and apologize to him.”

“Apologize! How can I? If Papa does make me go through with this dreadful wedding, I’ll lose what little power I have.”

“You’re wrong. An honest apology will elicit respect from him. When he respects you he will listen to you.”

“But I don’t want him to listen to me. I don’t want to have to have his respect. I just feel badly for my behavior. I didn’t want to hurt him and I think that I might have. Plus, regardless of what happens I don’t want him to think badly of me. I’m a professional now, as Dr. Fletcher says and I don’t want to start off looking badly to people. You’re his friend. He thinks highly of you. Will you please, please talk to him for me?”

“And?”

“If Dr. Fletcher finds out he might let me go. He’s a stickler for good manners.”

“You have to apologize. If he’s not to be your husband, he could be your patient one day. It’s a small town and you’re bound to run into him. Apologize. It’s the only honorable thing to do.”

“A street woman is teaching me about honor,” Jovanka said and they both laughed.
That night she put George to bed. When she returned to her room a sound like rocks pelting her window spooked her. Kaly turned toward the clicking sound at the window and saw a face she recognized staring back at her. Her stomach jumped and her throat tightened. Her belly had grown and was noticeably larger. She looked for a way to hide its size but it was too late. Tommy Monroe climbed through her window.

“Leave. You’re not allowed here,” she said. She looked around for something to grab onto, something heavy and strong, to use as a weapon.

“I won’t hurt you,” he said and walked over and sat on her bed. He looked around the room. “The old place hasn’t changed much has it?”

“What do you want?”

“I’m here on good terms. I want peace between us,” he said.

“There is nothing good between us. I’ll call for Miss Anderson and she’ll get the police.” She wanted him to leave willingly. She didn’t want to wake the kids or Miss Anderson.

“Somethings never change. The last time you called the police I spent four years in detention. Do you know how long four years is in one of those hell-holes? It’s a very, very long time,” he said.

“Leave.”

“Look, I’m not bitter. I want this all—all of it—behind us. I came to say I’m sorry for hurting you.”

“You said it, now leave.” She wanted no part of him.

He bit his lip and looked at the floor. “Kaly, please, listen to me. I’m sorry. I was wrong that night. I’ve been bitter for a long time, but the hospital, jail, they give a man time to think.”

She’d never seen him like this, seeming to have abandoned his pride. She said nothing.

“I’ve blamed you for getting sent to detention. I hated you for it.”
“You deserved to go, you bastard.” All of the muscled in her arms tightened. “Get out of here. You’re not sorry about anything. Not me. Not Anne Marie. Not any little person you got your scummy hands on.”

“You are a self-righteous one aren’t you?” He stood up and paced to the window and back. “Do you even know what happened that day? Do you remember?”

Kaly stood stunned. No one had ever asked her directly what she remembered.

“I was there. I saw who killed Anne Marie.”

“They said it was you.”

“They said she killed herself. What they said was that I forced myself on her and that was why she killed herself. Miss Anderson’s friend said it,” he said.

The man from the fire, Kaly thought. She knew in her gut it was true. She’d seen his face in her dream. Her and Anne Marie had seen him that day in the storm, before they had gotten separated. She felt like she’d been hit in the stomach.

“He killed her,” Tommy said.

“Did you tell the police?”

“Like they’d believe me.” Tommy walked over and stood closer to Kaly. “I joined the army. I might have a chance there. I leave next week. I really just wanted to tell you that I’m sorry. For everything.”

She looked at him, feeling her face go flush. She’d blamed him all these years and yet she couldn’t find her own sorrow. So much of her life had turned on her bitterness toward him. She’d be too empty to give it up.

“Miss Anderson’s friend disappeared after Anne Marie died,” she said.

Tommy nodded his head.

“You paid for his crime.”

“So did you,” he said and turned to go.

“Wait.” She walked toward him, wanting to give something to him, the father of her child, but when she reached him she had no words. She simply took his hand and held
it in both of hers pressed up tightly against her belly, so the child might know someday the feeling of both her mother and her father. Tommy stood perfectly still, looking Kaly straight in the eye. World’s passed there, in a solid moment, before her window. Then he turned and crawled through the window where she watched him climb down the fire escape.
Chapter Fourteen

Love and Defiance at the Columbia Gardens

Jovanka and Dan got off of the trolley car in front the large dance pavilion and followed the boardwalk to the midway.

“Three balls, three hits and you win a stuffed animal for the little lady,” a man in a red beard said. He waved a softball toward three bowling pins. Further down was the fishing pond and the ring toss.

“We’ve got other plans,” Dan said and grabbed Jovanka’s hand. He pulled her toward the roller coaster. She heard the screams before she saw the yellow cars being pulled first up the tracks and dropping to the ground like dumped oar only to be rescued and returned at the last minute to a livable pace.

“I can’t,” she said and pulled her hand back.

Dan didn’t let go. “You can.”

“I’ve never been.”

“A first time for everything. It’ll be fun.”

“You don’t understand. I can’t.”

“You’re just afraid of it because it unfamiliar.”

“I’m terrified of heights.” She yanked her hand from his and made for the ice cream parlor. She sat on a back vinyl stool and ordered a soda. Dan followed her. “You go. I’ll watch.”

“Face this fear and it’ll be like facing any fear you’ve ever had. I promise you’ll be safe. I’ll be right there with you.”

“Come on then. Let’s go walk by the flower gardens. Let’s fully enjoy the day,” Dan said and took her hand again.

Her face flushed with relief and gratitude and without another word she followed him into the sun toward the pansy gardens in the shape of large motionless butterflies.
Chapter Fifteen
A Stranger’s Embrace

Jovanka tugged the sleeve of her mother’s wedding dress down past her wrist bone and looked at herself in the mirror that her mother had brought home from the church bazaar, and placed against the far wall of the sleeping room. In spite of all of her efforts to stay in her home, Jovanka had spent her last night in this room. The thought saddened her. Michael’s brothers would arrive within the hour to take her off to the church they would be married. She still searched for the courage to face her fate. Papa said she acted like a spoiled brat and perhaps he was right.

Michael had received her apology rather well. She had asked if he would forgive her. She said she had drank too much rakija and insulted him in front of her family.

“There is nothing to forgive. You have the right to ask these questions,” he had said calmly. Evidently he was more generous in his opinion of her than she was of him. He did seem kind, and truly, in that moment she saw a sadness in his face that softened her feelings toward him. The real question was, could she really marry him? Evidently yes, she thought, as she turned in the wedding gown.

She heard the car pull up and stepped into the main room where Mama stood holding the white shawl she had crocheted for her.

“You look beautiful,” Mama said and kissed her forehead. “You’ll be happy. Give him a chance. Give yourself a chance.” Papa leaned against the wall smoking his pipe and his eyes said everything, dark and glistening from what seemed to a hint of a tear. His sickness had taken its toll on him this last month; they all knew that he wouldn’t live much longer. Marko stood at his side, smiling.

“I will Mama.” She felt the urge to please her mother, and gain her father’s blessing. “I will be happy.” She caught Papa’s eye and suddenly, at the gravity of the
moment and the realization of how brief life can be, she meant what she said. She wanted to bring peace to Papa in his last days.

"We're here for the bride." The voice came booming through the door just moments before three men in navy suits pushed their way in.

They circled her, picked her up as though she were and old rug and carried her to the back of the car while her family stood quietly by and watched her go.

Jovanka got as gracefully out of the topless Ford crowded with men as possible when they arrived at the church. Men stood everywhere, some huddled together, others shouting in loud voices over the tops of the huddles to newcomers. They were all evidently in good spirits about the wedding.

The women were all at their homes, as was the tradition, faithfully cooking for the festivities after. They'd arrive just before the ceremony. Tomorrow Jovanka would cook dinner for her husband, Michael, who for all practical purposes was a stranger. Even tradition recognized that they barely knew each other. She wouldn't even sleep in the same bed as her husband tonight, rather in a bed with his mother or his brother, so that she might have a chance to become aquatinted with him before they were that intimate.

"This way." Tomo, Michael's brother, grabbed her wrist and pulled her toward the church steps. "Get inside before he arrives. It's bad luck to let him see you so beautiful before the wedding." If she hadn't been so scared, she would have been flattered.

As they climbed the stairs the men all quieted, split apart, creating an aisle to the church and bowed to her in something which seemed like reverence, the air palpable with respect. This was something she hadn't expected.

Just the heavy church doors closed behind her she heard the men cheer and yell again and she knew that Michael had arrived. She felt an unexpected twinge of excitement and she felt her face flush. Tomo stood right by her side, smiling as if it were his wedding.
Michael walked down the aisle toward her. He wore a black suit, with a white shirt. He stood next to her until the ceremony began.

"Do you come to Michael to be his wife of your own free will?" Father asked Jovanka.

"Yes." The word sounded true.

"Have you promised yourself to any other man?"

"No."

"Do you come to Jovanka to be her husband of your own free will?" He turned to Michael.

"Yes. I do." He looked at Jovanka with such kindness that tears welled up in her eyes and for the first time she realized that the arrangement had been made on his side too, that he too had agreed to the elders' decision of binding them together.

"Have you promised yourself to any other woman?"

"No."

The priest placed the crowns on their heads to designate that they were queen and king of their world, equal partners of their world, and they walked three times around the altar to seal their union.

Several days after the wedding, in his father's house, she forgot Dan, forgot her bitterness toward her father; she faced her fear and sweetened wildly in Michael's embrace.
Chapter Sixteen

Fire in the Shaft

Beth knocked on her door just before she flew through it. Kaly woke from a tender sleep. The time was midnight or later.

"Get your coat," she said. She was out of breath and her face flushed crimson.

"You have to go. I'm not allowed to have guests after dinner."

"There's been an accident."

"Who is it?" Accidents happened all the time and Kaly was reluctant to pull herself out of bed at midnight without some details.

"We don't know who all got hurt. Lots of men. A fire broke out in the shaft. Come on." Beth started to cry.

"Slow down Beth. Tell me what happened." Kaly slipped out of her nightgown and pulled on a cotton dress. She heard noises from coming from the kitchen.

"A fire broke out in the Speculator and Granite Mines."

"The Speculators the safest mine up there."

"Dan might have been on shift. We have to go over there."

Kaly wrapped a shawl around her shoulders on the way out the door. George stood just outside of the orphanage gripping the dog. As they started up the hill he followed.

"Go home, George," she said to him as if he were the dog. George stopped cold watching her. She left them both standing there and hurried up the street with Beth. The June air was brisk and filled with the smell of smoke. Sirens filled the night sky and people everywhere were rushing toward the Speculator.

Ahead she saw Michael and Jovanka. She and Beth rushed to catch up with them.

"What happened?" Kaly asked. Michael looked haggard, afraid. She had never seen him like this before. Even Jovanka walked quietly by his side.
"The ropemen and shaftmen were lowering an insulated electric cable into the shaft to operate the ventilating fans on the lower levels. Somehow it got stuck and was suspended in the shaft. It was worn and frayed. The assistant foreman used his carbide light to look closely at the cable to try to find a way to untangle it and somehow caught it on fire. I saw the flames shooting up out of the shaft and came instantly.

By the time I got here, the men who had started the flames and had escaped back to ground level. Evidently, the up draft of the shaft pulled the flames right up the cable and within moments the entire cable was in flames.

I went to get Jovanka and Dr. Fletcher to help with the men we rescue."

"How many men are down there?" Kaly asked, the gravity of the situation not truly sinking in yet.

"Four-hundred and fifteen men were working the night shift."

Kaly was stunned. The smoky air worked to remedy her own foggy brain and she felt clear-headed for the first time in months. She looked toward the crowd. Hundreds of hysterical, weeping people had gathered.

"Are there any rescues yet?"

"Some men have made their way through the levels of other mines which link up with the Speculator to safety. It doesn’t look good though. There are over three thousand feet of shaft, filled with dry, flammable timber burning right now. Even if men escape the flames they still have to contend with the smoke and poisonous gases."

Kaly reached out and hooked Michael at his elbow to slow him, stop him. He looked at her and she asked the question she was most afraid to ask, "Was Dan working?"

Michael looked out at the east ridge and both Jovanka and Kaly followed his gaze. A few remnants of snow remained in the Highlands.

"Dan worked the late shift." He said finally. "I’m sorry."

Kaly started to shake. Michael reached out to her, held her for a moment and then let her go.
Chapter Seventeen

Bodies

Kaly helped as they pulled bodies from the mine. While a few men have escaped out through connecting mine shafts many men were still trapped below. Kaly knew that the poisonous gasses would kill men as quickly as the fire. Tara McClane was on Kaly’s work crew. She made Kaly nervous. She kept looking at Kaly and wanting to help her. Sometimes she asked personal questions. And Kaly felt her skin prickle. Light started to creep over the East Ridge of the mountains and they still had not found Dan. Tara McClane broke down, saying that now she had lost all of her children. Kaly felt badly for her and found herself holding Mrs. McClane while she cried.

* * *

After she received her assignment from Dr. Fletcher Jovanka and Michael worked together. They tried their best to keep the living alive. They worked well together and put several men in ambulances. Mama, Papa and Marko showed up. Papa could barely stand. Jovanka insisted that he go home. Finally he complied and left with Marko. In the light of the next day the bodies lined up like fallen trees after a windstorm. None of them were Dan’s. The foremen said that they didn’t believe that there were any living men below at this point. Finding Dan’s body was only a matter of time.
One cold morning not too long after the warehouse fire in 1895 the white dog ran to where
the flats stretch out below the hill, toward the Rocky Mountains. He reached the black iron
fence surrounding the gray stones just as the yard began to fill with people. Women cried.
Men looked solemn. A few shallow holes had been partially dug in the frozen ground and
abandoned. The funeral carts arrived in droves. All day long men in black robes said words
over the wooden boxes just before they were stored in a make shift cemetery warehouse
until the ground thawed.
Tara Hardy had regretted giving the twins up for adoption ever since that day she first walked away from her infants at the orphanage. She and Judo Mirich had run off to Helena and gotten married by the justice of the peace. Before they could tell their families, Judo was killed in a landslide. No one knew that she had just lost her first husband. When she found out that she was pregnant, she was afraid that she wouldn’t be able to care for the baby and sought out help. Her father was supportive when he was sober and angry when drunk and her mother had passed away when she was a child.

The baby was born and then, moments later, another baby came out. The twins were precious and tiny and she had no means of support. She was afraid that they would die. She had hoped they’d be adopted out, or that when she got stable she could return for the babies. Then she fell in love with and married Daniel McClane, a gentle, hard working man. She didn’t tell him about the twins right away and, the more time that passed, the more difficult it became to tell Danny’s father that she had two daughters in the orphanage. Then he was killed in the Leonard mine accident and she was left alone to raise her son. The twins didn’t get adopted out and Anne Marie died. Now she had lost Danny too.

Kaly was her only living child. Kaly hadn’t told her, but Tara saw the pregnancy in her radiant face. Grief stricken about losing Danny, Tara felt terrified and alone. She wanted to claim Kaly as the daughter that she was, had wanted to claim her for a long time. She was afraid that Kaly would hate her and she didn’t know if she could face losing her too.

Tara went the mine accident to help. Later, she thought, she’d bring food over. When Tara arrived at the accident Jovanka grabbed her by the hand and lead her to the foreman’s office. Jovanka told her that eight men were rescued last night. One of the rescued men was Danny. Danny was alive. Michael and Kaly were with him.
Tara walked through the door. She saw Kaly standing next to Dan where he sat on a bench. Kaly washed his face with a cloth. Tara decided that too much time had passed without the truth. She decided that she will tell Kaly that she is her mother. She made a silent promise to both of them that she will find a way to make up a small part of her sorrow to Kaly. They will have their family and she will be a better grandmother than she had been a mother. At the end of the day, in the mining town’s fracture light, Tara Hardy McClane walked toward her children.