

RETURN
of an
IMPETUOUS PILOT

KATE MCLACHLAN



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The RIP Series

Rip Van Dyke

Rescue At Inspiration Point

Hearts, Dead and Alive

Murder and the Hurdy Gurdy Girl

Return of An Impetuous Pilot

by

Kate McLachlan

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Author's Notes and Acknowledgments

Amelia Earhart really did visit Spokane, Washington, on January 31, 1933. She stayed at the Davenport Hotel and spoke at a breakfast club meeting, where she enchanted the audience with her "naïve charm." She was supposed to fly out that day for Portland, Oregon, but a snowstorm grounded the plane. She was stuck in Spokane until that evening, when newspapers report she caught the night train to Portland.

That much is true.

What did Amelia (we're on a first-name basis by now) do when she was stuck in Spokane that day in 1933? There's little about it in the history books, but fortunately I'm a fiction writer and have no trouble at all filling in the gaps. I hope Amelia doesn't mind that I sent her on a little adventure with my girls.

The Davenport Hotel is real and in 1933 was as described, right down to the goldfish in glass pillars and the telephone alcove underneath the stairs. I'm grateful to Tony and Suzanne Schaeffer Bamonte for their book, *Spokane's Legendary Davenport Hotel*, which provided many of the details. When that book was published, the fate of the old hotel was still uncertain, but it has since been restored to its former glory and is flourishing again, though goldfish don't swim in pillars these days.

I want to thank everyone who traveled about with me in my quest to know and understand Amelia. I was able to visit the Amelia Earhart exhibit at The Museum of Flight in Seattle and Amelia's birthplace in Atchison, Kansas. I stood in the bedroom she had as a child and gazed out at the very same view of the river she would have gazed at as a girl. Thank you Brenda, Liz, Anita, James, and Tonie.

Finally, thanks to Rebecca and Mavis for allowing me to use their original barroom composition, "We are Viking Women! We drink lots of beer!" That little ditty has been stuck in my head for years, and I wasn't even there. Now I share it with the world.

Dedication

For Tonie, of course, and for Amelia Earhart, wherever she is

Epigraph

It may not be all plain sailing, but the fun of it is worth the price.

~Amelia Earhart, *The Fun of It*, 1932

Chapter One

Van - 1988

VAN DREW A crooked noose on the margin of her legal pad and scratched three short lines beneath the gallows. She was a poor artist but good at word games. It would be a better game if she had someone to play with, but she could make it work. The only thing more boring than playing hangman with herself was sitting through another Godawful Monday morning attorney meeting.

The word was D I E, but she pretended she didn't know it. She guessed "A" and dangled a grimacing head from the noose.

"What's really fascinating about this case," Nelson said, "is that he's alleged retaliation for an act that hadn't even occurred yet. Think about it. Durant alleges that the guard retaliated against him for not making his bed, but Spitchuk infringed him before Durant wrote the grievance." Nelson literally bounced in his stained and sprung state-issued chair, he was so excited. The movement in her peripheral vision made Van dizzy. "Durant alleges the retaliation started when Spitchuk ordered him to make his bed and only culminated with the infraction. So, can a retaliatory act begin before a constitutional right is even exercised? It's an interesting legal question."

No it wasn't. Van guessed "O" and added a corpus to her victim. It was not the least bit interesting, and if this meeting didn't end soon she was going to stab her eardrum with the damn pencil so she wouldn't have to listen to another word of it. She pressed hard on the pencil, the lead snapped, and she was denied even that small bit of satisfaction. She peeked around the table. No one had noticed the breaking pencil. They were all too engaged with the speaker, attentions focused, heads nodding, brows furrowed, lips trembling in their eagerness to break into the discussion.

"I had a case like that once," Gerald said. "Well, not exactly like it, but it had rolling dates like that. Statute of limitations issue, I think. Want me to find that for you?"

Anthony jumped in. "I'd try a motion to dismiss, if I were you, right off the bat. Fails to state a claim."

"It's a retaliation claim, though," Nelson argued. "Failure to state a claim won't get you far on retaliation. I think we have to assume the worst and get some discovery going on it."

It's a bed, Van thought. It's a fucking unmade bed. Don't make a federal case out of it.

But it already was a federal case. The prisoner had turned it into a federal case by filing his lawsuit against the prison in federal court, and the judge had helped him do it by waiving the filing fee for the poor little felon.

"If you need any research done on it, I'd be happy to help."

Van glanced at her intern, Sylvester, who sat on her right. Nice of him to offer to assist another attorney without even checking with her first. Not protocol, Sylvester. She couldn't blame him, though. He was chomping at the bit to do some real legal work, and she hadn't given him anything but busy work since the day he started.

She'd been like him once. She'd been like all of them, fascinated by esoteric legal issues, regardless of the fact that they arose from frivolous prisoner complaints. In fact, the prison setting had actually made the issues more interesting to her. She'd been intrigued by the prison culture.

Besides, Patsy worked there.

Van ran the thumb of her left hand over her right wrist, massaging the scar she'd earned on her last trip into the prison. She flexed the fingers of both hands under the table, clenched them into fists, and flexed again, as she'd been taught by her occupational therapist. Her hands were strong again. She'd fully recovered, physically.

"All right, who's next? And let's remember to keep it short."

Van stifled a sigh as the next attorney recounted his list of new cases. Telling an attorney to keep it short is as effective as telling a puppy not to pee. They just can't help it. She used a fingernail to pick at the wood around the broken lead of her pencil. If she could free even a smidge, she could at least add some arms and legs to the body.

They'd been kind to her after the hostage situation. When she was cleared to return to work, the other attorneys made sure she didn't have to go back into the prison for any reason. They conducted her witness interviews, depositions, and investigations, while she remained in the office or the courtroom, where it was safe and she wouldn't be reminded of Rudy or Stu.

It was kind, but it was futile. She couldn't stop thinking of those days she'd been held hostage in the prison tower. She didn't feel safe, and she couldn't make herself care any longer about prisoner complaints. She couldn't focus on her work, and she was increasingly distracted by thoughts of leaving government work altogether, doing something different. A new career. A new life. Escape.

She should go into private practice. She could teach herself to write wills, finally, and set up shop preparing legal documents for gay and lesbian couples. There might be money in that. Jill needed a will and had asked for Van's help, since she didn't trust anyone but Van to write it. She didn't dare tell anyone else about RIP.

Now that was an interesting legal question. How do you write a will to transfer ownership of a top secret time-travel machine, when you can't identify it as such in the documents themselves? Would it be sufficient to list the VIN number of the truck or to

describe it simply as a 1970 Toyota pickup with mismatched camper and all its contents? She should look into that.

"Van? You with us?"

Van glanced up. Everyone watched her expectantly.

"What's new with your cases?" Nelson prompted.

"Ah..." They probably didn't want to hear about Jill's Rapid Intertemporal Projector, and it was the only case she could think of at the moment. "I thought I'd let Sylvester tell you about our cases today. It'll be a good review for him."

"Oh." Sylvester sat up straight, his eyes wide. "Okay. Sure. Um, well, we have a cruel and unusual punishment case in Superior Court. The inmate says it violated his constitutional rights to put him in a dirty cell. He had to clean the toilet himself."

Serious nods all around.

"Eighth Amendment in Superior Court?" Gerald asked. "Have you considered removing it to federal court?"

Sylvester shot Van an uneasy look, but she chose not to rescue him. No one really expected him to understand the question. It was just a bit of gentle legal hazing, but he didn't know that.

"Uh, removal? Hm, no, not yet."

"When was it served? Timing's everything in removals."

"Um, I'm not sure. But it's kind of an interesting issue because there's this case law that says an inmate has a right to a certain level of cleanliness, and sanitation in a toilet..."

No, Van thought, it's not interesting at all. She resumed picking at her pencil.

The meeting ended eventually. It was barely 9:30. So many hours still, to get through this day, and then there was another day after that, and another, and another.

"Your messages, Ms. Hollinger."

"Thanks, Frieda." Van flipped through the stack of pink slips. Defendant, court reporter, opposing counsel. Boring, boring, boring. Everybody wanted something from her, and none of it mattered. She wanted to fling them in the air and tell people to stop bugging her.

The last message slip caught her attention. "Kendra called. Call her at Jill's shop right away--you have the number." The Urgent! box was checked.

Good. Something not completely mind-numbing to do. She went to her desk, impaled the other messages on her spindle, and called Jill's shop.

"Hello?" The breathiness of the single word conveyed urgency.

"Kendra? What's wrong?"

"Van, thank God. It's Kevin. He's gone." Kendra spoke quickly and barely took a breath. "The boys were playing in RIP. Ben pushed a button and sent him back to 1933."

"What? Wait, Kendra, slow down. Your Kevin went to 1933? The little guy?"

"Yes. I just took my eyes off them for a second. They were fine, and they know they're not supposed to play near RIP. Ben did it," Kendra accused. "He must have talked them into it."

"Who's Ben, and where's Jill?"

"He's Hannah's boy. Bennie brought them with her. She came to take the boys to a movie."

Van dropped back in her chair at the sound of Bennie's name. It had been a long time since anyone had mentioned Bennie to her. She thought, in the meantime, that she'd let all that go. She was surprised at the sudden thudding of her heart.

"...even though I gave him a copy of the school calendar," Kendra was saying, and Van realized she'd missed some of Kendra's words. "So I called Bennie. Well, I called you first, but they wouldn't interrupt your meeting, and Inez has her curriculum day, so I called Bennie. She's the one who brought Hannah and Ben, but I don't blame her."

"Bennie?" Van finally said. Her voice did not sound natural to her, but Kendra didn't notice.

"Yes. She went after Kevin, but who knows if it was soon enough, and what if she doesn't find him? What if they can't get back even if she does find him? I told her to go get Jill, but what if she can't find her either?"

"Wait. Kendra, are you saying Bennie went back to 1933 too?"

"Yes, that's what I just said!"

"But...where's Jill?"

"Back there," Kendra said, as if it were obvious. "That's why RIP was set to '33 in the first place. But she went so much earlier, I don't know if Bennie'll be able to find her. It was only a few minutes here, but it was hours there."

She wasn't making a lot of sense, but one thing was clear. Kendra needed help.

"I'm coming over. Is anyone there with you?"

"Hannah and Ben are, and Kyle, of course. Yes, please come. Hurry, Van."

"I'll be there in fifteen minutes."

Van hung up the phone to find Sylvester standing in the doorway of her office. He was a scrawny little guy with a few wiry red curls sprouting from his head like a cartoon character, and an attempt at a mustache shadowed his upper lip. She suspected he would be the sort of lawyer juries laugh at behind his back the first day of trial, but by closing argument he'd have them eating out of his hands. He had a case file under his arm and his eyes were wide. What had he overheard?

"Sorry, Sylvester, something's come up. An emergency. I have to leave."

"But we have to get this case removed," he said. "It was served twenty-eight days ago. Timing is everything in a removal case."

Van grabbed her jacket, slung her purse over her shoulder, and choked back the words she wanted to say, which were, "I don't give a rat's ass." She forced herself to pause and take a deep breath.

"You're right." She pushed through the door, forcing Sylvester to take a step back. "Freida, will you find the Thurwald file, from a couple years ago? We removed that case to federal court, didn't we? Give it to Sylvester. He's going to remove the Cobalt case today."

"Me?" Sylvester squeaked. "I can't do that. I've never done it before."

"Neither had I, the first time," Van said. "Why do you think they call it practicing law? None of us knows what the hell we're doing. Pattern your pleadings after those in the Thurwald file. You'll do fine. Get one of the other attorneys to review it and sign it. Frieda, I'll be out the rest of the day. I have an emergency."

Van rushed to her car and zipped out of the parking lot.

Kendra was excitable, but not usually like this. Her littlest boy was missing--Van did some quick math--fifty-six years in the past, and she didn't have Jill to lean on. Van, of all people, knew how terrifying and disorienting it was to be stuck in the wrong time, and it was horrifying to think of a small child all alone, more than fifty years away from where he

belonged. Van's pulse pounded at the thought that Kevin--and Bennie too--might be lost in 1933. Kendra needed her.

Still, Van's spirits rose. A small part of her--the selfish, lonely part of her, the part of her that would go mad if she had to stay at the office one minute longer--was thrilled that Kendra had called her. An adventure beckoned, and that wasn't all.

If fate was on her side, she would get to see Bennie again.

She reached Jill's shop in thirteen minutes. She rang the bell, and a strange woman answered the door. Tall, young, with two fat honey-colored braids that fell on both sides of her face past her armpits. Her eyes were striking gray.

"Hannah." Van held out a hand. "You must be Hannah. I'm Van."

Hannah nodded slightly and shook Van's hand but didn't speak. She had to know who Van was, since Van was the reason Bennie had travelled back to nineteen seventy-four and met Hannah in the first place. Her eyes flicked over Van as if checking her out.

I'm not your competition, kid, Van thought.

She entered the shop. A strange boy sat on the couch, his face in his hands. Kendra slumped on the stool by the phone staring at the floor. She didn't seem to have noticed Van's arrival.

Kyle had. He sat cross-legged on the carpet, an electronic game in his slack hand. He stared at Van as if she might be his savior.

"How are you doing, buddy?" she asked.

"Fine." His voice was an unconvincing whisper. He glanced at his mom and back to Van in a clear silent plea.

Van smiled at him and put a hand on Kendra's shoulder.

Kendra looked up. "Oh, hi Van. I didn't hear you come in." Her face was pale.

Van didn't know much about shock, but she suspected Kendra wasn't far from it. She went to the fridge and grabbed a Mountain Dew, opened it, and handed it to Kendra. "Drink this." Kendra took the can and sipped.

Van watched Hannah sit beside the boy on the couch. She draped her arm over his shoulders and said, "Pray with me, Ben." Her voice was barely more than a whisper, but it was otherwise silent in the room.

"I already am," the boy said without raising his head.

"Let's pray together," Hannah said. "Where two or three gather together in his name, you know."

Ben raised his head. He was about thirteen years old, and he looked like Hannah. His eyes were tragic, but there were no tears in them. "I'm going through something pretty bad here, Mom. This is between me and God right now." He returned his head to his hands.

Hannah pulled her arm back and mouthed a silent Oh. She looked up, saw Van watching, and flushed. Van smiled, inviting Hannah to share an adult moment at the teen's rebuff, but Hannah compressed her lips and looked away.

Oh-kay.

Van looked back at Kendra. She obediently finished the entire can of pop and handed the empty to Van. The color had returned to her cheeks.

"Thanks," Kendra said. "That was good."

"Tell me what happened. Jill and Kevin and Bennie are all back in 1933?"

"Yes." Kendra rubbed her cheeks with the palms of her hands as if they itched. "It was just Jill at first. I was helping her with an experiment. It was supposed to be fun. She went back a couple of times, just for a few minutes, but this last time she planned to stay for the whole day. She programmed RIP for me to bring her back. But then Paul came and dumped the boys off on me."

Kyle dropped his head.

"He said he didn't know they didn't have school today, even though I gave him their calendar. I couldn't have them around while I brought Jill back, so I called Bennie to come get them. But she brought Brunhilda there with her."

Van choked back a laugh. "Shh. She'll hear you." A glance at Hannah revealed that she had. She frowned at both of them.

"I don't care if she does." Kendra glared at Hannah. "If she hadn't come, her damn kid wouldn't have sent Kevin back."

"Now that's enough." Hannah rose from the couch, her cheeks pink with anger. "Stop blaming Ben. Your kids had something to do with it too."

"My kids are little!" Kendra rose to her feet, her fists clenched.

"Whoa, whoa." Van stepped between them, a hand held up toward each of them. "Hold on. This is not the time for this. You can fight after Kevin gets back."

Both women glared and huffed, but Hannah retreated to the couch and Kendra sat back down on her stool.

"Okay," Van said. "So the kids somehow sent Kevin back to 1933. The same place Jill went?"

"Yes, it would send him to the same place, if Ben was telling the truth, but later in the day."

"Ben doesn't lie," Hannah called from the couch.

Kendra ignored her. "Time passes faster on our end than it does back there. Jill set it up that way. So Bennie went back to find Kevin."

Of course she did. Bennie to the rescue. Again.

"Kevin would have landed two hours after Jill, and Bennie would have landed a half hour after Kevin. Oh, how the hell are they supposed to all find each other? Kevin's only eight years old."

"It's okay," Van said, though of course it wasn't. "Bennie knows he's there. She'll find him. She'll find Jill, and they'll both find him. He'll be all right. When were you supposed to bring Jill back?"

Kendra looked at her watch. "Oh shit." She rushed to the cab of the truck and climbed in. Van followed, and Kyle trailed after them. Van glanced inside the cab. There were dozens of dials and gages on the dashboard of the truck, but only one large button blinked green and another blinked red. "Ben said he didn't touch anything else." Kendra put her finger on the button that blinked red, closed her eyes, and pushed.

A thump sounded, and RIP rocked.

"They're back," Kyle said.

Kendra leaped from the cab, but Van beat her to the back of the camper. She yanked open the door. Jill rose from the stool.

"Oh." Kendra slumped when she saw Jill was alone. "Bennie didn't find you?"

"She did." Jill stepped down from the camper. Energy radiated from her. A layer of snow rested on her head and shoulders, and she brought with her a wave of cold air and the smell of Christmas. She wore a brown wool coat over a filmy yellow dress that reached half way to her ankles. Snug brown leather boots laced up underneath it. She put an arm around Kendra. "She told me what happened. We're going to find Kevin. I just came back to set everything up again and then I'm going back."

"You know where he is?" Kendra asked.

"We know where he landed." Jill hurried to the cab of the truck, climbed in, and began flipping switches and turning dials. "He was gone by the time we got there, but we're going to track him."

"Track him?" Van asked.

"In the snow."

"Snow?" Kendra winced. "Kevin's just wearing a sweatshirt. And tennis shoes."

Jill glanced at her. "He's a smart boy." Jill pushed a button repeatedly and watched numbers change. "He'll find a way to stay warm."

"Yeah, he's smart, Mom," Kyle said. "He'll be all right."

"He's eight," Kendra snapped. "He is not all right. He's stuck in 1933 all by himself in a snowstorm."

Jill looked up from her manipulations and glanced at Kendra, a deep crease between her brows.

"Can I go back with you?" The voice startled all of them. They looked through the window on the far side of the truck. Ben stood there, his expression mournful, but determined. "I want to help you look."

"No, Ben." Hannah came up behind him and put her hands on his shoulders. "Jill knows what she's doing."

"But it's my fault," Ben said. "I'm the one who sent him back. Let me go find him."

Jill didn't answer. She returned her attentions to her console and pulled a lever. "I'm programming it to pick us up in two hours, 1933 time. That's twenty minutes our time. That should give us enough time to find him and bring him back to the landing spot. If we don't come back that time, you just need to move this gage forward one hour and this one .676 and--Kendra, are you listening?"

She wasn't. She stood behind Kyle with her arms wrapped tightly around his shoulders. His head was bent at an awkward angle, and he looked miserable, but Kendra seemed unaware of it. She bit her lip and tried not to cry.

Jill looked at Van. "Van, do you think you..."

"Sure," Van said. She stepped closer. "What do I move to .676?"

"This, but only if I don't come back the first round. Otherwise it's already programmed," Jill said. "The only thing you have to do is monitor the clock, move these two gauges the correct amount, and push the right button at the right time. And don't let anyone touch it in between. We were lucky this time. They sent Kevin back, but they didn't touch anything else. If they had, RIP wouldn't have been able to pick me up. We'd all have been stuck back there. Kendra's learned a lot, but she doesn't know how to program RIP yet."

"Neither do I," Van said. "If anything did happen while you were gone, I couldn't fix it."

Jill didn't answer, and Van felt a lurch of worry in her stomach.

"That's why I should go back," Ben said. "You should stay here, Jill."

"No," Hannah said sharply. "We've already lost one boy."

"Be quiet," Jill said, uncharacteristic anger turning her dusky cheeks pink.

"But Ben's right," Van said. "About you staying here, I mean. You're the only one who can program RIP, and the time it takes you to train me is time wasted back there. Isn't time passing back there even now, faster than it is here? Let me go."

"You?"

"It's crazy to send away the only person who can program RIP," Van said. "If you got stuck back there, it would be forever. For all three of you."

Silence ticked. They all stared at Jill, who seemed frozen in thought.

Kendra stepped forward, suddenly calm and firm. "Stay here, Jill. Let Van go. As long as you're here, I know we'll get Kevin back, sooner or later."

"It's not like I haven't time-traveled before," Van pointed out.

Jill chewed her lip, clearly troubled, but she couldn't deny the logic of their argument. She examined Van and, most likely for the first time in her life, took in Van's apparel. She was dressed for a spring day at the office. "You can't go like that," Jill said. "It's snowing. You need pants and a coat. Boots."

"Where did you get those boots?" Kendra asked, pointing to Jill's feet. "Those aren't the shoes I sent you back in."

"Those gave me blisters," Jill said. "And they're no good for snow. These are Amelia Earhart's boots."

A long moment of silence greeted her words.

"Did you say those are Amelia Earhart's boots?" Van asked finally.

"Yes," Jill said. "You should take them back to her. She's wearing my shoes, and her feet must be freezing."

Chapter Two

Jill - 1933

THE LAST TIME Jill was in the Davenport Hotel was when Inez dragged her there to listen to Geraldine Ferraro speak, right after the announcement that Ferraro was running for Vice President on the Democratic ticket. A politician was a politician, male or female, and Jill hadn't really wanted to go, but Inez had been so excited she trembled, so Jill gave in and went with her.

That would have been in 1984.

They'd stood on the balcony, and by then the old hotel was so dilapidated Jill had wondered if the balcony might collapse under the weight of the hundreds of people standing on it. Ferraro hadn't even stayed at the hotel and had opted instead to stay at the shining new Sheraton nearby. In fact, they'd closed the Davenport down the next year, and there was talk recently of demolition. Requests for reservations still came in from around the world, though, the reputation of the magnificent hotel outlasting the building itself.

Jill huddled in a chair just outside the Isabella Room, the closest she could get to the speaker without a membership in the 1933 Spokane Women's Breakfast Club. The abrasive lace of Kendra's garter gnawed at Jill's inner thigh, and she uncrossed her legs discreetly to give it a rub with the other thigh. It didn't work, so she crossed her legs again and rubbed a bit harder. She probably looked like she had to go to the bathroom.

Darn that Kendra. A pair of No Nonsense would have done just as well. Did Kendra really think someone was going to kneel at Jill's feet and peek up her skirt to make sure she wore genuine silk stockings and garters? Kendra had been right about the dress, though, and the hat. None of the women Jill had seen that day wore pants, and none were hatless.

The shoes were another matter. Jill had blisters already just from her walk to and from the trolley, but Kendra had insisted on them. She'd fallen in love with them on first sight when she'd spotted them in a vintage store in Hillyard--alligator skin with yellow silk heels

and ribbons wrapped around the ankles--and she'd planned Jill's entire outfit around them.

Jill wriggled her toes to pull the pressure from her heels as she examined the hotel.

Seeing the Davenport Hotel when it was young, Jill finally understood its mystique. Every surface--gilt, marble, crystal, glass, silver, even the water tinkling in the fountain--sparkled or glowed with reflection from the fire that roared in the immense fireplace at the west end of the lobby. Exotic plants without a single spot of brown sprouted from marble pots, so tall they nearly grazed the painted beams, and Jill could not locate a speck of dust on the fronds. Multicolored birds sang from gilt cages but did not dare molt, did not even dare to drop a single white turd outside their cages. Most amazing to her, live goldfish swam in the round glass pillars that marked the entrance to the dining room, and no scum marred the clear glass. How in the world did they manage that?

It might have had something to do with the army of servants, immaculate in their crisp black and white uniforms, who floated like faerie dust throughout the hotel, scarcely even noticed by the patrons. From her seat, Jill could count enough bellmen in the lobby to field an entire baseball team. She'd heard that the silver coins that passed through the hands of the Davenport staff in those days were polished like new in a silver polishing machine in the kitchen before any was returned to a customer as change. She caressed the silk of her yellow purse and fingered the few worn silver dollars Kendra had located from the 1920's. Before she returned to 1989, Jill decided, she would trade them in at the front desk for shiny new ones.

Laughter from the Isabella Room drew her attention back to the breakfast club meeting.

"I know most of you aren't old enough to remember this, but I am," the speaker said, causing more laughter. "It wasn't that long ago, was it, that cars were hardly ever seen? Prophecies of a system of paved roads linking towns and cities were sheer lunacy. Now we have the Federal Aid Highway Act, and soon there will be so many connecting roads our maps will look like the veins and capillaries bringing oxygen to the far reaches of our bodies. The same sort of change will happen sooner than you think with airplanes."

Her voice was low, her words evenly spaced and methodical. If she'd been speaking in 1989, she likely would have received voice lessons, even acting lessons, to achieve more liveliness in her speech so as not to lose the attention of the television generation. Yet there was something very compelling about her slow speech, as if each word was carefully chosen and pondered before it issued from her lips and was therefore filled with more meaning than it otherwise might have been. Her audience certainly thought so, or they were less jaded than their progeny. They listened in complete attentive silence.

"If you haven't yet flown in an airplane, you likely will, and for your children it's an absolute certainty. Aviation is as much a part of the future now as the telephone or radio or motion pictures. Your children will fly to all corners of this continent, and transatlantic

flying will come sooner than most people believe. There are even plans to launch rocket-type planes into the stratosphere. And women will be a large part of aviation's future. There are many opportunities, many inventions yet to come. Inventions will change the world in ways unimaginable to us today, and quickly too."

Jill's scalp tingled.

"They say necessity is the *mother* of invention, after all, not the father. That's no coincidence. Inventions are born of ideas, and we all know that women have as many of *those* as men do." Chuckles spread around the room. "Women's inventions are highly practical, too. Did you know it was a woman who invented the life raft, and the fire escape, and the windshield wiper? Why, if it weren't for a woman's invention, men would still be sticking their heads out of moving cars during rainstorms to see where they were headed."

The audience erupted into laughter. They loved her.

Jill sat back in her chair and absently dug two fingers behind her ears to loosen the bobby pins that attached her hat to her head.

She sensed an ally. An invention like Jill's carried with it myriad responsibilities and burdens, but it brought so much more than that. It would be nice to share RIP with someone who understood the possibilities, and felt the thrill of them, rather than the dread or skepticism felt by so many of Jill's friends. Well, not Kendra, of course, but even she only supported Jill's experiments because Jill wanted her to. She wasn't drawn to it for the fun of it.

"Is she in there?"

Jill looked up. A woman stood before her, breathless and flushed, her hat and shoulders glistening with damp. Jill leaned over to peek out the lobby doors and smiled. "It's snowing."

"Yes." The woman slumped into the chair on the opposite side of the door and pulled off her gloves. "I'm too late, aren't I? I couldn't get downtown in time."

"She's still speaking," Jill said. "But I think she's nearly finished."

"Did you see her? Is she lovely, like they say?"

"I haven't seen her," Jill said. It had taken longer than she'd expected to ride the trolley downtown, and she'd missed the first part of the speech. "I've only listened."

The woman rose and moved to the door. "I wonder..."

"I already tried that," Jill said. "They've blocked it."

The woman tugged on the handle anyway. The latch gave, but when she pulled on the door, it wouldn't open. She glanced around, saw no one but Jill watching, and pulled her chair in front of the door. She kicked off her shoes, climbed onto the chair, and peeked through the window above it. Jill watched, curious. She'd had the same idea, but couldn't risk the chance of getting kicked out of the hotel.

"I can see her. Oh," the woman sighed, "she is lovely. She's not at all manly. I thought she'd be more manly, to do what she does."

A male servant headed their way.

"Get down," Jill whispered. "You're going to get us kicked out." She'd traveled too far to let this woman spoil it with her impatience.

The woman saw the servant and hopped down. "It's all right." She waved him away. "I'll behave." She pushed the chair back where it belonged. The man nodded and moved away.

"I just needed to see her," the woman said. "There won't be any time after. The paper said she's flying out this morning."

Jill glanced again out the lobby doors. The snow was falling heavily now. She felt smug. "I wouldn't worry about it."

"Oh, they won't be stopped by that little bit of snow. They can fly above the clouds." The woman pulled her gloves back on. "Well, I've seen her now. There's no point waiting around any longer. They'll whisk her out of here lickety split when she's done, and I've got loads of shopping to do. If you want to see her," the woman leaned toward Jill and whispered, "I recommend the chair."

Jill watched the woman leave, bowed out by a doorman in a red jacket. She bit the finger of her authentic 1920's glove, tugged it off, and let it dangle from her teeth as she reached into the tiny slit pocket of her skirt. She pulled out the white photocopy of a newspaper article dated Tuesday, February 1, 1933. She unfolded it and re-read the two-inch story, though she already knew it by heart.

AMELIA EARHART LEAVES BY TRAIN: Delayed one day by yesterday's snow storm, Colonel Lt. H. Brittin, manager of the Northwest Airways, and his flying party planned to leave Felts field early this morning for Portland in their tri-motored Ford plane. Amelia Earhart, noted woman flyer, left here last night by train for the Rose City. She will rejoin the party there for a flight to Seattle.

Jill smiled again, folded the paper, and tucked it back into her pocket. She re-crossed her legs, managed finally to get a hefty scratch at the offending garter, clasped her hands upon her lap, and settled in to wait.

Today was only Monday, January 31. Amelia Earhart wasn't going anywhere just yet.

Applause broke out in the Isabella Room, and Jill heard the sound of chairs moving and conversations starting. The door opened, and she peeked inside. The audience was milling about, some preparing to leave, but many surrounding Amelia Earhart, who stood at the far end of the room, smiling and speaking to each person who greeted her.

Jill was becoming an old hand at time travel, but even she was not immune to the thrill of seeing Amelia Earhart, living and breathing, right in front of her. She was too far away to see her clearly, though. There were two exits from the Isabella Room. If Jill stayed where she was, it was possible she would miss Amelia Earhart's exit. She rose, winced as her shoes pinched her sore feet, and crossed the lobby.

In a small alcove beneath an inconspicuous set of stairs were a table, a spindly chair, and a telephone. Jill sat on the chair and eased her feet out of her shoes. From here she could see the main entry to the Isabella Room as well as the door on the west side. Amelia couldn't leave without Jill seeing her.

She eyed the phone. It was obviously a new and up-to-date model for the time, with a numbered dial on a round black base and a bulky black handle balanced on top. Connected to the phone by a thick cloth-wrapped cord was a small oak box with two gold bells wired to the top of it. The ringer. Curious, she lifted the receiver and held it to her ear. It was heavy and reminded her of her grandmother's phone when she was little. There was no dial tone. She was about to tap on the cradle when a voice came on the line.

"Davenport Hotel operator. How may I connect you?"

"Oh. Uh, sorry, wrong number."

She replaced the receiver and peeked around. Cripes, where was the hotel operator? Could she see Jill from wherever she was? Could she tell which phone the call was placed from?

Women streamed from the Isabella Room, chattering and laughing and exclaiming about the snow. They dispersed to the front door, where they huddled waiting for the doorman to call for taxis, or to the hallway with the elevators. Jill could just see the elevator doors from her vantage point. The doors had handles and were slid to the side manually by the elevator operator, who was dressed in a uniform similar but not identical

to the doorman's. Inside the inner door of the elevator was a filigreed iron gate that the operator also slid aside before allowing four women to enter. Jill felt a yearning to ride that elevator, but instead she returned her attention to the Isabella Room. She couldn't take a chance on missing Amelia Earhart.

But it wasn't Amelia Earhart who entered the lobby and gave Jill a shock. It was Bennie.

Chapter Three

Kevin - 1933

KEVIN LANDED ON his bottom and fell back on his hands. His mouth dropped open. His mom would have asked if he was trying to catch flies, but he couldn't help it. Jill's strange camper had disappeared, and so had her shop. He was outside. He couldn't see Kyle or that big boy or Bennie or the strange lady with the long hair. Even his mom was gone.

His bottom and hands were cold and wet. He'd landed on a thin blanket of fresh snow, and more snow was coming down, hard. He rose to his feet and stuck his hands in the single big pocket in the front of his sweatshirt. Leonardo nestled there. Kevin wrapped his hand around his hero's plastic shell and tried not to be afraid.

It was March, and still winter, Kevin knew, but only for one more day. "Get ready to spring into spring when you come back," his teacher had said on Friday before they left for the long weekend. "It'll be the first day of spring on Tuesday." But still, this seemed like an awful lot of snow even if it was still winter, and it was a lot colder than it had been this morning.

He pulled the hood of his sweatshirt over his head and squinted through the swirling flakes. Jill's shop might have disappeared, but that was sure Jill's house right there. Kevin walked to the back door. The snow swallowed up his footprints almost as soon as he made them.

He didn't knock. He'd been to Jill's house lots of times, and he never knocked. He opened the door and stepped through the tiny mud room into the kitchen, where he stopped. A strange lady, at least as old as his grandma, stood at the sink with a knife in her hand. She turned at the sound of his entrance and frowned.

"Who are you? What are you doing?" she asked sternly.

He looked around the kitchen. This was Jill's kitchen, all right. The walls and the windows and the floor were right, but the rest of it didn't look the same. A long low sink stuck out from the wall with no cabinet below it, and the fridge was a squatty little box like they had on old cartoons. Dishes and food were stacked on shelves with no doors, and the funny black and white stove was so low, even Kevin could have cooked on it. It radiated heat, and a huge white pot on the back burner steamed.

"Where's my mom?" he asked.

The woman squinted at Kevin. "Is it snowing?" she asked, like he was going to be in trouble if it was. She stabbed her knife at the window and scraped the curtain aside with it. With her other hand she wiped moisture from the window. White flakes pummeled the glass.

She sighed. "*Farmer's Almanac* is wrong again." She tossed the knife onto the cutting board and wiped her damp hands on her apron. "What are you doing in here, boy?"

She stomped toward him as she spoke, and he shrank back against the mud room door. She'd dropped the knife, but she was still a little scary. She ignored him, though, and reached over his head for a broad brimmed hat and heavy sweater, which she threw over her shoulders.

"I don't know where everybody went," he said.

"Why aren't you at school?"

"There's no school today."

"Huh." She opened the door, pulling mittens on her fingers as she spoke. "Don't lie to me, boy. Come help me with this wood."

He scurried after her around to the far side of the house, where a lean-to provided a bit of shelter for a stack of split logs. Jill never had a pile of logs there, and the house that was supposed to be next door--wasn't. He turned his back on the strangely empty lot.

"I'm not lying," he said.

"Hold your arms out." She dropped a split log into his arms, then another and another, until his arms started to droop.

"I can't hold any more," he protested.

She grabbed an armful herself and led him back into the kitchen, where she dropped the logs into a basket next to the stove. Kevin let his arms fall as well, and the logs clattered into the basket. He shook his arms out, proud that he'd carried all those logs without dropping any.

The woman opened a little door on the front of the stove. A fire burned inside. She thrust one of the logs inside and shut the door. "Who's your mother?"

"Kendra Brennan."

She shook her head. "I don't know her." She picked up her knife again and sliced at an onion on the cutting board. "Where do you live?"

"In Spokane." Kevin held his chilled fingers toward the stove to warm them. "And there really isn't any school today."

"Careful there," she said. "Little liars go to hell."

"I'm not lying!"

She turned quickly and pointed the knife at him. "Don't raise your voice to me, young man."

Kevin glowered at her. He had raised his voice, he knew, and he would never have talked to his mom or dad that way, but it just made him so darn furious that she didn't believe him.

The woman glared back at him for a long time, and he quivered a little bit inside. The knife in her fist glistened with onion juice, and it looked sharp enough to cut out his heart with two swift slashes. He stretched his eyes to make them big and smiled his widest, going for the sweet innocent look that sometimes worked on ladies. This one only rolled her eyes, but she dropped the knife on the cutting board and shook her head, her hands on her hips. "What am I supposed to do with you?" She looked out the window at the snow and back at Kevin. "You don't even have a proper coat. Where's your coat?"

Kevin shrugged. "It wasn't cold when I left."

"Is your mother on the telephone line?"

"Huh?"

"Do you have a telephone at your house?"

"Yeah. Don't you?"

She grunted and shook her head. "I keep telling him we need to get on that line. Would sure come in handy now. Are you hungry?"

He thought. It had been quite a while since his Cocoa Puffs, and he was feeling a bit hollow. He nodded.

"Sit there."

A table was next to the window. Kevin sat on the chair nearest the stove and watched the woman pull a bowl from one of the open shelves. She dipped a ladle into the steaming pot and dropped a glob of mush into the bowl. She set it before him and handed him a spoon. She turned to the funny refrigerator and pulled out a glass bottle of milk. She poured some into a mug and placed it beside the bowl.

Kevin eyed the mush. He should have asked what she had before he admitted being hungry. He lifted the mug of milk and tilted it slightly, watching the thick creamy liquid stick to the sides. It looked funny.

"Do you have any chocolate milk?" he asked.

"Chocolate milk." She looked at him like he was crazy.

He should have known. She really wasn't the kind of lady who would have chocolate milk.

"Hershey's Syrup then? I know how to make my own."

She pressed her lips together like she was holding back a bad word. "Young man, you will eat what I put before you, and you'll like it too. There's nothing wrong with that milk."

Glumly, Kevin raised the mug to his lips. He stuck his tongue into the glass and lapped once, like a kitten. It tasted weird. Maybe it would go down better if it was mixed with the mush. He poured half the milk into the bowl. He scanned the table for a sugar bowl but saw none. With his right hand, he stirred the mixture and took a tiny taste. He shuddered and tried not to make a face. It was as bad as he'd feared. He peeked over his shoulder and saw the woman watching him like a mean teacher. He turned back around and forced himself to eat another small bite.

Tears blurred his vision, and he tried to blink them away. With his left hand in his pocket, he stroked Leonardo for courage. This was Jill's house, but there was no sign of her. There was no sign of Kyle. And there was no sign of his mom. There was no sign of anybody.

He pulled Leonardo out of his pocket and set him up beside the bowl. He mourned the loss of Leonardo's sword. It was lost somewhere at his dad's house, but nobody would help him look for it. He raised Leonardo's arm and poised an imaginary sword at the offending mush.

"What is *that*?"

Kevin clutched Leonardo to his chest. "Nothing."

"Let me see it." The woman reached over his shoulder and snatched Leonardo from his grasp.

"No!" He tried to grab Leonardo back, but the woman held it up too high.

"Dear Lord in heaven, what is this?"

"Give it back. It's mine." He scrambled onto his chair and stretched his arms for the toy, but the woman turned her back on him and held Leonardo just out of his reach.

"This is a foul thing. Does your mother know you have this?"

"Yes. Give it back."

She gave him a cold look. "I'll give nothing to a boy as disrespectful as you. I'll give it to your mother, if she has the nerve to come collect it." She reached up to place Leonardo on the very top of the highest shelf, where he'd never be able to get it.

Desperate, he leaped from the chair, threw one arm around her neck, wrapped his legs around her middle, piggy-back style, and tried to pull her arm back. "Give it back to me. It's mine, you old bitch."

He'd never said that word before in his life, and he knew instantly that it was a terrible mistake. The woman froze, but only for a moment. Faster than he could even let go of her and drop to the floor, she bent down, opened the stove door, and threw Leonardo into the flames.

"Leonardo!" Without a second's thought, Kevin scrambled to the open stove door and reached inside. He snatched Leonardo out of the flames and tucked him safely back into his pocket. Only then did he feel the pain in his hand. He dropped to his knees and grabbed his right wrist with his left hand. His fingers were already blistered.

"Stupid, stupid boy." The woman lifted him roughly and carried him to the sink. She turned on the water and thrust his hand under the stream. "Dear Lord, would you look at that?"

Kevin didn't want to look. He'd never felt such pain in his life, and the cold water didn't help much. He wanted his mom.

The woman plopped him into his chair. She took a cloth from a drawer, soaked it with water, wrung it out, and wrapped it around Kevin's hand. "Leave that there. I'm going to the corner house. I know they have a telephone. Don't move."

He didn't cry. It hurt too much. He never realized before that when you *really* hurt, you don't cry. He pulled Leonardo from his pocket with his right hand. A part of his shell had

melted, but it was already dry and hard. Kevin ran his finger over the melted spot. It wasn't enough to weaken the shell, he didn't think. It was a battle scar, that's all.

His hand throbbed, and he felt the sting of tears in his eyes again. His mom would want to know about this, he was sure of it, but he had no idea where to find her.

One thing was sure, though. He didn't intend to stick around and wait for the wicked old woman to come back. He tucked his hand inside his sweatshirt pocket and wedged Leonardo in there as well. He pulled his hood up over his head and slipped out the back door into the snow.

Chapter Four

Jill - 1933

BENNIE WAS BREATHLESS and hatless. She wore jeans, sneakers, and a bright blue satin Seattle Seahawks jacket, the shoulders black with wet. Her short dark hair was black as well and plastered damply to her head. She strode to the center of the lobby, circled the fountain, and scoured the room, oblivious of the strange looks cast her way by staff and patrons.

Jill fished for her shoes with her toes. For Bennie to be here, something must have gone terribly wrong.

Bennie rounded the fountain and saw Jill. An expression of immense relief crossed her face, and she hurried over. "Thank God I found you," Bennie said, her words coming in a rush. "You have to help me find Kevin. He's here somewhere."

"Huh?" Jill was too stunned by Bennie's sudden appearance to comprehend her words.

"Kevin. He's here."

"Kendra's Kevin? How? How could that happen?"

Bennie shook her head. "I don't know. He got in RIP somehow. The boys were playing. It was an accident, but they did it. They sent him back in time. He's here. In 1933."

Jill sank back onto the telephone chair. It was impossible. Kendra was supposed to bring Jill back to 1989 after only thirty minutes, her time. How could things have gone so wrong so quickly? "Why were they playing with RIP?" she asked, then realized it didn't matter. "How long ago?"

"He left maybe five minutes before me, but Kendra says that's a half hour in 1933 time."

Jill nodded.

"There was no sign of him when I landed. Kendra's frantic." Bennie sounded a bit frantic herself. "She told me if I didn't find him right away to come find you. You can get us all back to '89. But first we have to find him."

"Okay, okay, let me think." Jill dug her fingers into her hair and absently removed the annoying bobby pins. The hat dropped from her head and landed on the floor behind her chair, unnoticed by both of them. "Getting back to 1989 is not a problem, as long as Kendra... He's a little boy. He can't have gone far. How did you get here? Never mind, we'll take a trolley back to Hillyard. Do you have a token?"

"We can't take a trolley. I took one half-way here, but it ran into a couple of cars stuck on the tracks. It's the snow. I had to run the rest of the way."

"We'll take a taxi, then. I have a little money." She looked at the lobby doors again. Women still crowded there waiting for rides. The demand for taxis seemed to exceed the supply. "Maybe we can--"

"Excuse me."

A low voice made them look up.

Amelia Earhart stood on the staircase that rounded the telephone alcove and leaned over the railing. Her short hair was tousled and her bangs fell into her eyes, which shone with excitement.

"I couldn't help but overhear," she said.

Jill released her grip on her hair and rose to her feet. "Uh..."

"My plane's been grounded by the snow, they tell me." Amelia Earhart skipped lightly down the remaining stairs and joined them in the alcove. "Apparently I have the gift of time on my hands, and no speaking engagements whatsoever. And if I understood you correctly," she lowered her voice, "there's a little boy out there who needs to get home to 1989." A smile quivered on her lips as she glanced from Jill to Bennie. "Please. Please let me help you."

Jill stared, shocked. This was not part of the plan. She wasn't supposed to actually talk to Amelia Earhart. Change nothing. It was the number one rule in all time-travel, but especially this time.

Just like last time, though, Bennie ignored the rule. "We could certainly use your help, ma'am. He's just a little kid."

"No," Jill said. "I'm sorry, but you can't. It's impossible."

"Nothing's impossible," Amelia said. "You should know that. Besides, you'll never get a taxi now. I have a car. Give me five minutes to change my clothes."

"No," Jill said again, but at the same moment Bennie said, "We'll wait right here."

Amelia chose to hear Bennie. "I'll be back in a jiffy." She turned and ran up the stairs.

"She can't come with us," Jill said as soon as she was gone.

"Why not?"

"Don't you know who she is?"

Bennie frowned. "She looks sort of like Amelia Earhart. But what would Amelia Earhart be doing in Spokane?"

"It is Amelia Earhart. She's on a big speaking tour, flying all over the country."

"No kidding?" Bennie's brows rose and she looked up the stairs where Amelia had gone. "Holy shit."

"We can't disrupt her day. It could change history."

"I doubt it," Bennie said. "Remember when you were so worried I was going to change history in '74? Turns out I couldn't. I was part of history, that's all."

"That happened once," Jill said. "A one-time result doesn't prove a theorem. Besides, I have a very particular reason for not disrupting anything about Amelia Earhart's life."

"Is it more important than Kevin?" Bennie asked. "He's here somewhere, Jill. We have to find him, and she has a car. Think about Kendra."

Jill prided herself on her scientific mind, which was ruled by logic and reason, not emotion. Kendra was the exception to the rule. She was the one person who had managed to squirm her way past Jill's disciplined defenses and reach the part of Jill that wasn't always logical. An image of Kendra's face, puckered with worry, flashed before her, and Jill felt some of the anxiety Kendra must be feeling. Even worse, Kevin's face appeared before her too, and Jill felt an unusual and scientifically inexplicable pull in her gut. The little guy must be pretty scared.

Still, if Jill's idea about Amelia Earhart was correct, the feelings of one woman--two, if she counted herself--and a small boy could not be allowed to override the necessity of keeping the facts of Amelia Earhart's life intact. The alternative could be too terrible.

Jill marched as best she could on her yellow silk heels toward the front door. "We can find Kevin by ourselves," she said. "We'll get a taxi and--" Jill stopped. The line at the door for taxis was long, and the only taxi in sight spun its wheels in an attempt to find traction on the glaze of ice that had formed in front of the hotel. The snow continued to fall.

"She has a car," Bennie said.

Then again, everything was already messed up. Bennie wasn't supposed to be here. Kevin wasn't supposed to be here. Sure, Amelia Earhart wasn't supposed to give them a ride back to Hillyard, but maybe that was a small matter. Would it really change history if she took a little time out of her day to help them rather than--what? Sit in her room writing letters? Jill had no idea what Amelia Earhart really did on January 31, 1933, except catch a train to Portland that night. There was no record of it in the history books, or even in Amelia's everyday correspondence, which Jill had read word by word. Perhaps there would be no harm in accepting a ride.

Suddenly she was behind them, dressed in long pants, leather boots, and a calf-length coat of dark fur. "The garage is this way," she said. "Quickly, before anyone sees me and demands my squiggle."

Jill could have dug in her blistered heels. She could have shoved to the front of the taxi line and declared an emergency, or she could have grabbed Bennie and headed for the trolley. Instead, she followed Bennie and Amelia to the garage.

"I'm Amelia, by the way. Amelia Earhart."

"I'm Benita Sanchez, but you can call me Bennie. This lady in the dress is Jill Durgan."

"I'm pleased to meet you both. You've lost your hat, Jill."

Jill put her hand to her head. It was bare. When did that happen?

"I abhor hats myself," Amelia said. "I breathe better without one."

"Me too," Jill said.

"What does the patch on your coat signify, Bennie?" Amelia asked. "Are you a flyer too?"

"Me? No, that's the Seahawks logo. It's a football team, from Seattle."

"Football? Gracious, do women play football in 1989?"

"Don't tell her, Bennie," Jill said quickly. "I'm sorry, Miss Earhart, but we can't tell you about the future. It could change what's supposed to happen if you know too much."

"Call me Amelia, please. And I already know about time travel. What harm football?"

"There may be no harm in that, exactly," Jill said. "It's the precedent it sets. Better that we don't tell you anything."

The garage was across the street from the hotel. It was three stories high, and the cars were levered up with a car elevator to the second and third stories. Amelia's car was on the top floor, but it still took no more than a minute for the garage attendant to bring the car to a smooth stop in front of them.

"I know it's awfully big and black," Amelia said, "but it's the only car I could get my hands on." The uniformed boy climbed out and Amelia slid into the driver's seat. "Hop in."

The car was huge. They walked around the front of it to the passenger side. Jill reached for the handle of the front door, but Bennie leaned in and grabbed it first. She opened it, bowed, and said, "Ladies first."

"Ha ha," Jill said. It was a dig about the dress, which Jill had forgotten about, but she didn't mind. She preferred sitting in the front seat anyway. She stepped onto the running board and slid in, tucked her skirt and coat about her legs like a lady, and let Bennie close the door behind her.

"You ought to put some chains on her, Miss Earhart," the boy said, "before taking her out in this."

"I haven't got any," Amelia said. "Have you?"

"No, not anymore today. Everybody's been coming in asking."

"Then we'll go without. Can't be worse than flying, can it?"

Jill examined the dashboard. It was polished wood the size of a coffee table, though the business part of it seemed confined to a decorated bronze square in the center no bigger than a video cassette. The gages on the edges of the square were too tiny to be of any use to a driver while the car was moving. Jill leaned forward and examined them. Speedometer, odometer, oil pressure, and a couple others she couldn't identify. The seats were benches as large as sofas, upholstered in soft brown leather, as were the insides of the doors.

"What kind of car is this?" Jill asked.

"It's a Willys-Knight. Not as much fun to drive as my roadster, but probably more practical in this weather."

"It still smells new." Bennie bounced on the back seat. "I feel like a gangster." She slid forward and folded her arms on the back of the front seat, her chin on her hands, like a kid riding with her parents. "No seatbelts," she added.

They both watched Amelia start the car, as fascinated as if she were about to fly a plane. She turned the key, which was already in the ignition, released the hand brake, and pressed the clutch with her toe. She grabbed the gear shift lever, which protruded from the floor on a rod, shifted into first gear, pressed on the accelerator, and released the clutch. Her moves were smooth and controlled, and Jill relaxed. It was really not much different than driving RIP, and Amelia seemed to know what she was doing.

Amelia stopped at the garage exit. "Which way?"

"Turn right," Jill said. "We need to get to Hillyard, which is north. Turn right again and left at the trolley tracks. Follow the tracks, if you can."

"Certainly I can." Amelia pulled out of the garage, and snow pummeled them from all sides.

"It's like driving into a cloud," Bennie said.

Amelia turned on the single windshield wiper, but it made little difference.

"So much for that invention," Jill said, and Amelia laughed.

"Can you see where you're going?" Bennie asked.

"Well enough," Amelia answered. "I know we're moving forward, anyway. When I flew across the Atlantic, I hit an ice storm at night, and my altimeter failed, so I truly was blinded. I couldn't tell if I was going up or down."

"There wasn't much you could hit up there, though," Bennie said.

"That's true. Only the ground. Or the water. Still, I'm awfully glad I didn't hit it."

"Have snow tires been invented yet?" Bennie asked.

"Certainly they have," Amelia said. The car glided gently sideways. "Of course, I don't know if this car has any on it. It's only rented."

Jill tensed again. It suddenly struck her that the potential for disaster was immense. One wrong move could change Amelia's life forever, could change all their lives forever, and here they were driving blind in a snow storm without snow tires or chains.

"This might have been a bad idea," Jill said.

"Nonsense," Amelia said. "I've driven through much worse weather than this."

Jill was sure she had. In fact, Jill knew she had. Jill knew things about Amelia Earhart that Amelia didn't even know about herself, because she had forgotten or they hadn't happened to her yet. She was a woman who flew at a time when women rarely did. Through a combination of skill and luck, she'd broken record after record, including many set by men. When she was a little girl, she built a roller coaster in her back yard that really worked, and once when she was sledding down a hill, she couldn't stop and slid right between the front and back legs of a horse crossing the street in front of her.

Amelia Earhart was amazingly brave and skilled and--right up until her attempted flight around the world--lucky. But she was not a model of safe behavior.

"You're not supposed to be driving through this kind of weather," Jill said. "Not today. Not with us. If you get in an accident..."

"We'll be fine," Amelia said. "I'm not going fast enough for anybody to get hurt."

Jill tugged at a finger and cracked her knuckle. "What was I thinking? I shouldn't have let you come."

"Let me?" Amelia turned to Jill, eyebrows raised. "Oh my. Not since I was in pinafores has anyone let me come along."

"Eyes on the road," Bennie suggested softly.

"Listen." Jill reached into her pocket and pulled out the article marked with yellow highlighter. "This is what happens today." She read aloud.

"AMELIA EARHART LEAVES BY TRAIN: Delayed one day by yesterday's snow storm, Colonel Lt. H. Brittin, manager of the Northwest Airways, and his flying party planned to leave Felts field early this morning for Portland in their tri-motored Ford plane. Amelia Earhart, noted woman flyer, left here last night by train for the Rose City. She will rejoin the party there for a flight to Seattle.

"See?" Jill said. "You have to leave *tonight*. By train. It doesn't say anything about driving to Hillyard in a snowstorm to look for a lost child."

"It doesn't say I didn't." Amelia glanced at the paper. "What is that?"

"It's a newspaper article from--"

Amelia snatched the paper from Jill's hand and looked at the top. "This is tomorrow's date." She flipped it over. It was blank on the other side. "It's not from a newspaper."

"It is. It's a Xerox copy," Jill said. "From microfilm. I printed it at the library."

"Microfilm?" Amelia repeated. "Like for a camera? What's Zeerocks?"

"Sort of camera-like. It's a machine that projects images from static electricity. It uses light--"

"Eyes on the road," Bennie suggested again.

"Oh, sorry. Should I have turned there?" Amelia asked.

Jill looked up. "Oops. Yes, sorry. I should have been watching."

"That's all right. I'll just--"

Amelia shifted down and turned the car on the empty road, but when she stopped turning, the car continued to swirl gently in a circle.

"Whoa!" Bennie fell back on her seat and slid sideways.

Jill tried to grab the dashboard, but her gloved hand slid on the glossy surface and she found herself lodged tight right next to Amelia Earhart, who still tried to control the wheel. Two big bumps shook the car. The left side dropped about eight inches and it stopped, hard.

They sat a moment, each assessing her own condition, but Amelia was right. They hadn't been moving fast enough for anyone to get hurt.

Amelia switched off the ignition. "That's rotten luck."

"Luck?" Bennie asked.

The car was tilted. Bennie opened the left door, but it struck the ground after opening only the width of a hand. She scooted across and pushed the other door up and open.

Jill pushed herself off from Amelia and pulled herself toward the front passenger door as well. She climbed out and dropped more than two feet to the ground, which was already covered in three inches of snow. Amelia followed, and soon they all stood beside the car. The front and back wheels on the driver's side had slid into a trough created by the trolley tracks, while the tires on the passenger side hung uselessly in the air.

"We've lost our landing gear," Amelia said.

Jill felt a moment of despair mixed with resignation. She knew something like this could happen. She should have prevented it, but she didn't, and there was no sense wasting her thoughts on what could have happened. She moved into damage control. "What are we going to do? We can't leave it here."

"We can't very well move it," Amelia said.

"It'll get hit by a trolley."

"No, this is a side rail," Amelia said. "They won't be barreling any trolleys along here. I should think they'd be able to stop in time, anyway."

"The car's not the important thing," Bennie said. "We need to get to Hillyard and find Kevin."

"They'll trace it to Amelia," Jill said. "Did you rent it in your name?"

"I didn't rent it, precisely."

There was a moment of silence as Jill and Bennie processed that.

"You said it was rented," Bennie said.

"It is, but not by me. It was rented by the man Brittin hired to drive us around," Amelia said. "You needed a car, didn't you?"

"For all the good it did us." Jill looked at her watch. "It's nearly one o'clock already. I need to be there before two. That's when Kendra's picking me up."

They were on Crestline, which in 1989 was a rundown arterial near the heart of the city. In the winter of 1933 it was a sparsely populated business area about halfway between downtown Spokane and Hillyard. There were very few vehicles on the road. A rickety Model T went by in the opposite direction, and a horse pulled a wagon toward them, but most of the people they saw were on foot, moving slowly, heads bowed against the snow.

"Looks like we better start walking," Bennie said.

"How far is it?" Amelia asked.

"About two miles," Jill said. She glanced down at her skimpy shoes. Her feet were already freezing.

"Too bad you're such a slave to fashion," Bennie said. "You'll never make it in those shoes."

"Kendra made me wear them," Jill said. "She designed my whole outfit around them."

"Around *those* shoes?" Amelia's expression was appalled.

Jill squared her shoulders. "I can still walk on them," she said. "I practiced." She stepped onto the road Amelia had missed and headed north. Bennie and Amelia walked on each side of her. She suspected they planned to catch her if she slipped. She was grateful, but her dignity would not allow her to hold onto either of their arms unless she absolutely had to.

It was easier to walk in the grooves made by cars that had passed by earlier. Only twice did cars come by, both headed in the wrong direction. They moved to the side of the street to let them pass, then returned to the freshly compacted path.

"Who's Kevin?" Amelia asked.

"My, uh, my...Kendra's little boy."

"Your Kendra?" Amelia smiled.

"Why were the boys even there?" Jill asked, suddenly annoyed. "And how did they get near RIP? Kendra knows they aren't supposed to play there."

"I know. She knows. Their dad dropped them off," Bennie said. "She called me to come get them right away, but... It was an accident, Jill."

"She *accidentally* let the boys play with RIP?"

"Hannah was with me," Bennie said.

"Oh." That explained a lot.

"She and Kendra sort of got into it, and we lost track of the kids for a minute. It was Ben who pushed the button. He's a good kid, really. He thought RIP was just a toy."

"So there were three boys and you and Hannah and Kendra all at the shop? Right in the middle of my experiment?"

"Yeah," Bennie said. "I should have just grabbed the boys and got out of there."

Respected scientists didn't have to deal with that sort of chaos. What Jill really needed was an actual laboratory, with security and assistants and funding. Funding was the real problem. If she was willing to share her discoveries about time travel with the government, or even a university research center, she'd get the laboratory and the assistants and the funding. Of course, she'd also lose all control over what RIP could be used for. She couldn't risk that.

"What's RIP?" Amelia asked.

Jill hesitated. It wasn't good for anyone to know too much about the future, not even Amelia Earhart. Especially Amelia Earhart. But she already knew that Jill and Bennie had travelled back in time to 1933. It was tempting to share her invention with the one woman she knew would truly appreciate it. Before she could give in to temptation, though, she slipped.

"Ack!"

She landed on her back, and her skirt flew up. The snow cushioned her fall, but it was still jarring. She pushed the skirt down and held her hands up for assistance.

"Nice garters," Bennie said, helping her up. "I never would have thought it."

"Shut up."

"Jill, you're bleeding," Amelia said.

"What?"

"Look." Amelia pointed to a red spot in the snow.

Jill traced it to her feet. They were so cold she hadn't felt the blisters pop. "It's these darn shoes." She rubbed the damp toe of one shoe against the opposite heel, where the blister oozed blood.

Amelia leaned down and looked more closely at the shoes. "They don't fit you properly," she said. "They might fit me. Let's trade. My boots are soft."

"I'll get them all bloody. And your feet will freeze."

"My feet aren't rubbed raw, at least," Amelia said. "You can't walk around with open wounds on your feet. You could catch an infection."

It struck Jill as an odd worry. "Have anti-biotics been discovered yet?"

Amelia's eyes lit up. "I don't think so. What is it?"

"Oh my God, you two are just alike," Bennie said. "We're not going to stand around here talking science all day while Kevin gets more lost. Trade with her, Jill."

"I'm taking my boots off." Amelia grabbed Bennie's arm for support as she lifted a foot and untied her boot. "You can wear them or not. If you won't give me your shoes, I'll walk in my stockings."

She sounded just like Kendra, Jill thought. Maybe her theory about Amelia Earhart was wrong after all.

But when she put on Amelia's boot, it fit perfectly.

Amelia didn't seem to have any trouble walking in the yellow shoes, though Jill hovered close in case she fell. It would ruin everything if Amelia broke an ankle or something. She needn't have worried, though. They reached Jill's house safely five minutes before two. It still snowed, but less heavily, and the flakes were smaller. A woman was there shoveling a path from the front door to the street.

It was strange for Jill to see her own house fifty years before she bought it. It had clapboard siding painted white. The side windows were smaller, and the front porch was not enclosed, but otherwise it looked the same. Except in the back, where Jill had built her shop, there was nothing but a large garden covered with snow.

"Excuse me," Bennie said. "Have you seen a little boy? He's eight years old--"

"Are you Kendra?" the woman interrupted.

Bennie smiled. "He's here?"

"He was," the woman said.

"What do you mean 'was'? Where did he go?"

"I don't know. He took off. That little boy of yours needs to learn some manners."

"Took off where?" Jill asked.

"My back was turned. I didn't see. He lit out the back door."

Jill rounded the house to the garden. Amelia was finally slowed down by the shoes now that there was no depression in the snow to follow, and she held Bennie's arm for support.

Pristine snow covered the back yard, but there was a narrow depressed trail, like small footprints that had been swallowed up by fresh snow, leading from the back door to the alley behind the house.

"He must have gone that way," Jill said.

Bennie and Amelia turned to follow his steps.

"No, wait," Jill said. They stopped. "It's time for Kendra to pick me up. I have to go back. I have to reset RIP to pick us all up when we find Kevin."

Amelia looked around. "How does it work? Is there a machine I don't see?"

"The machine is in 1989," Jill said. "It's able to pick me up from the same spot in different times."

"But you're coming back?" Bennie asked.

"In five minutes. Maybe ten. No longer than that. Just wait here for me."

Jill scanned the garden. She needed to position herself in the same spot where she'd landed six hours earlier. She couldn't tell the exact spot, not with the snow, but she was familiar enough with the area to get close. It would do.

"You're just going to vanish?" Amelia asked. She snapped her fingers. "Like that?"

Jill grinned. "Watch me." She stood in her spot and looked at Bennie and Amelia. The last thing she saw before RIP picked her up was Amelia's face, her eyes sparkling with interest and a smile playing around her mouth, as if she was about to witness a miracle.

Chapter Five

Kevin - 1933

THE MEAN WOMAN went out the front door, so Kevin lit out the back. He ducked in the alley where she couldn't see him and took off running as fast as he could. It was snowing, which was good. She probably wouldn't come after him in the snow, and even if she did, she wouldn't be able to catch him. His shoes were Nikes, so he could run really fast, and he made pretty good time. He got to the street and stopped.

Horses! There were horses pulling a wagon up the street. Now that was something you didn't see every day. The only time Kevin ever saw horses was in the parade, and they always had clowns running after them with pooper scoopers to pick up the horse poop. Sometimes the clowns threw candy at the kids in the crowd. There were no clowns following these horses, though, and this was no parade. The guy driving the wagon didn't even look happy. Kevin waved anyway, like he did at the parade, but the guy just ignored him. After he passed, Kevin ran across the street and kept on going down the next alley.

Thinking of candy gave Kevin an idea. He didn't plan it that way, but he was pretty sure he was heading toward the store where he and Kyle went for candy sometimes. It didn't look the same as when he walked there with Kyle, but they usually went the front way. Besides, everything was different. It was weird. Like he was still in Jill's

neighborhood, but it was in the olden days. Maybe that's what Jill's camper was all about, sending people to the olden days. That's probably why they weren't supposed to play in it.

He was pretty sure he didn't have any money, but he stuck his hand in his pocket just to make sure. That made his hand hurt like crazy where he burned it, and his pocket was empty anyway. He looked at his hand. He had a big blister on his pointer finger from where he rescued Leonardo, and a littler blister on the next finger.

He'd had blisters before on his feet and once on his finger from writing too much. That was the time he had to write "I will not talk in class" a hundred times. He was only in the first grade then. He wasn't used to writing yet and he still held the pencil way too tight. He could probably write it a million times now and he wouldn't get a blister. They did a lot of writing in the second grade. He bent his finger, but he couldn't bend it very far because of the blister. He didn't see how he could hold a pencil with that blister there. Maybe he could get out of penmanship. There was a boy in his class who broke his arm and had it in a cast. He still had to do reading and math, but he didn't have to do penmanship at all.

Kevin usually popped his blisters and squished the pus out. It kind of hurt and his mom told him not to, but it was really gross and hard to resist. He poked at the blister but decided not to pop it. It still hurt too much. Besides, if he did that, he might not get out of penmanship after all.

His mom got mad that time in first grade when he got the blister, but not at him. She yelled at the teacher for making him write so much. He knew his mom would give that mean lady at Jill's house a big piece of her mind when she found out about his blisters.

The burn started to throb again, so he bent down and grabbed a handful of snow to cool it off. He pulled Leonardo out of his sweatshirt pocket with his other hand. He sure was glad he had Leonardo with him. If only he knew where his mom was. Maybe the nice lady at the candy store would let him use her phone.

But the candy store was not a candy store at all, and the nice lady wasn't there. The building was the same, but when Kevin walked in, he saw tables with grown-up men sitting at them, smoking cigarettes and eating. He ducked back out. The whole street looked different, and the people did too. The cars were all old-fashioned, like on reruns of *The Waltons*, and he saw more horses pulling buggies. Yep, he was in a different time, all right. He finally figured it out. Jill's camper was a time machine.

He heard kids' voices and saw a whole passel of them running down the street toward him, sliding and throwing snow. A couple of them veered off into one building, another into a second building, and then two boys pulled out of the pack and stopped in front of Kevin. White air puffed from their mouths as they caught their breaths.

One of the boys was bigger than Kevin and one was smaller. They stared at him and he stared at them.

"What's your name?" the bigger boy finally asked.

"Kevin. What's yours?"

"Gale. This is Jed."

Gail was a girl's name, but Kevin decided to be polite and not point that out.

"Did you just move here?" Gale asked.

"No. I'm...visiting."

"How come you're dressed like that?" Jed asked.

Kevin looked at himself. He was wearing his dark blue sweatpants and sweatshirt and his Nikes, like he did every day. Gale and Jed were wearing heavy brown pants and button up coats like grown men wear, and they both had caps on their heads. Old fashioned caps, not baseball caps.

Kevin shrugged. "I didn't know it was going to snow."

"How come you're not at school?" Gale asked.

"There's no school today."

"Yes there is."

"Not at my school."

"There is at our school," Gale said.

"Are you hungry?" Jed asked. "Do you want some lunch?"

Kevin hesitated. He was hungry, but what if they offered him something disgusting like that mush the mean lady gave him? But these were kids. They probably wouldn't pull a trick like that on him. He nodded.

They went through a narrow passage way between two buildings and entered the candy store building from the back. They were in a kitchen with a big steaming pot on the stove, just like the mean old lady had. Nobody was around. Gale dragged a chair over to the stove and climbed on it. Jed handed him three bowls, one at a time. Gale filled them with some white drippy stuff, and Kevin had a really bad feeling. The three boys sat at a small table, and Gale and Jed dug in like they really liked it. Kevin stirred his first. It looked like chunks of potatoes in milk. He took a tiny taste and was surprised. It was good. He ate several more bites.

"Can I use your phone?" Kevin asked.

Jed looked at Gale, and Gale shook his head. "Dad won't let kids use it."

"But I need to call my mom," Kevin said. "I'm kind of not sure how to get home."

"Are you lost?" Jed asked.

"No," Kevin said. "I think my mom's lost."

"He could ask Dad," Jed said, looking at Gale again. "Dad might let him use it if he's lost."

"You can ask Dad," Gale said, "but you'll have to wait 'til he comes in. We can't bother him at work."

"Okay." Kevin pulled Leonardo out of his pocket.

"What's that?" Jed asked.

"Leonardo," Kevin said. "He's a Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtle." The way Jed looked at Leonardo, Kevin thought he might never have seen one before. "Don't you have Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles here?"

Jed shook his head. He stared at Leonardo, and Kevin could tell he was really interested in him. He walked Leonardo across the table to Jed. "Wanna play with him?"

Jed nodded and smiled. He grabbed Leonardo and started moving his arms and legs. "Look Gale. Look what he does."

"Let me try." Gale grabbed Leonardo from Jed's hands. "What's this for? Can he hold things? Say, this is nifty."

"He has a sword but I lost it at my dad's house. Leonardo's the leader, but Donatello's my favorite."

"How many are there?"

"Four. They fight crime. Like this." He hopped from his chair, held his arms up, and showed them his ninja moves. "Hi ya!" He kicked into the air. "Take that, you evil punk."

Jed jumped up too, raised his arms, and kicked his leg. "Hi ya!"

Kevin kicked a leg up and spun around, keeping his leg raised to sweep all the bad guys to the ground at once. "Bam bam bam bam bam! Take that."

"Bam bam bam, bam," said Jed. "Take that, you evil punk."

"Hey, what's going on here? Who's this?"

The look on Jed's face when he stood still and straight was all Kevin needed to know that the man who entered the kitchen meant business. Kevin stood still and straight too.

"His name's Kevin," Gale said, still sitting there looking all innocent. He dropped Leonardo under the table. "He's lost." Gale gave Kevin a meaningful look, like he was trying to tell him something.

Kevin looked up and swallowed. The man was big and very stern looking. It was kind of nerve wracking to talk to him, but Kevin forced himself. "Can I use your phone?"

The man frowned even more than he already was. "That telephone's not a toy."

"I need to call my mom. She doesn't know where I am."

The man squinted his eyes at Kevin. "Does your mom have a telephone?"

Kevin nodded.

"Do you know the number?"

Kevin nodded again. "555-4674."

The man smirked, like he thought Kevin was stupid. "That's not a real number."

"Yes, it is," Kevin said. "It's our number."

"It's not a real number, kid." The man glared at him and his voice boomed. Gale and Jed just watched with their eyes wide open and their mouths closed, like they knew better than to say anything, but Kevin couldn't stand it.

"It is too."

The man put his face down low, an inch away from Kevin's, and said in a soft voice that was scarier than the loud one, "It is not."

The man's breath was disgusting and his eyes were meaner than ever. Kevin looked away, and the man stood up.

"Get back to school, now. All of you."

Gale and Jed scrambled up and headed for the door. Kevin followed, but he decided to make one last ditch effort. Maybe he really was lost, and he didn't know what else to do.

"Can I call the police, then?"

"Nobody's calling the God damned police from this house!" the man shouted and made a quick darting step toward Kevin. "Get the

hell out of here."

Kevin left, and the man slammed the door behind them.

Gale and Jed ran to join a bunch of other kids walking down the street, going back to school he guessed. Jed waved good-bye over his shoulder and yelled, "Thanks for letting me play with Leonardo."

That's when Kevin realized the worst news of all.

Leonardo was still under that evil man's table.

Chapter Six

Bennie - 1933

BENNIE HAD TRAVELED through time herself, three times altogether if you counted this one, but she'd never seen anyone else do it. Seeing Jill stand there in the snowy garden one second and vanish the next was shocking, even though she knew it was going to happen.

Amelia had never seen it. She gasped, clapped her hands, and laughed out loud. She looked at Bennie, her eyes sparkling, and grinned. "Did you see that? It's really true. I couldn't be sure. You might both have been lunatics."

Amelia's laugh was infectious, and Bennie laughed too. "We may be lunatics, but it's real, all right."

"It's wonderful. How fun. What else can you do in 1989?"

Bennie hesitated. "Jill wouldn't want me to."

Amelia peered over one shoulder, then the other, leaned close to Bennie, and whispered, "Jill isn't here." Her expression was serious, but her eyes danced. Bennie was drawn in. She wanted to please her. She had to tell her something.

"Women don't play football," Bennie said. "Except in powder puff leagues sometimes."

Amelia made a face. "Are they still bandying that powder puff phrase about? Will Rogers coined it for the first all-woman flying derby, and I found it terribly insulting. We flew as far and as fast as the men did, and faced the same dangers too, but powder puff made it sound as if we were all just powdering our noses."

"Yeah," Bennie said. "I've never used a powder puff in my life."

"Tell me something else," Amelia said. "One wee little thing that happens between now and 1989."

"Well," Bennie said, "I was born. In 1960."

"Goodness gracious. That is monumental. I'm old enough to be your...well, goodness gracious. I really meant, though, something broader in scope, perhaps. Something historic or scientific."

Bennie thought back to her history classes. What happened after 1933? Hitler happened. World War II. Hiroshima. Vietnam. Amelia Earhart vanished while trying to fly around the world. Bennie couldn't tell her that. She tried to think of something that wasn't depressing.

"Rock and roll," Bennie said finally. "Elvis Presley and the Beatles." She sang the first line from "You Ain't Nothin' But a Hound Dog" and thrust her hips back and forth. Amelia laughed.

Encouraged, Bennie tried to think of something more to impress her.

"We have television. It's like a miniature movie screen in your house. You watch shows on it."

Amelia looked slightly disappointed. Bennie thought harder.

"They can grow babies in test tubes now."

"For heaven's sake, why?"

"Um, I think they match the sperm and the egg in the test tube, and then they implant the embryo in the mother's womb," Bennie explained. "Maybe they don't actually grow the baby in the tube."

The disappointment in Amelia's face grew. Bennie scrambled for an idea.

"Oh, and they sent a man to the moon."

Bingo! Amelia's eyes lit up. "When did that happen? Did he survive? Was he able to return? How did they protect him from the air pressure? What did he do for oxygen?"

Uh oh. This was exactly what Jill did not want to happen. If Amelia got too much information about the future, she might abandon her attempt to fly around the world and try to fly to the moon instead. Talk about changing history.

"I don't think I should tell you anymore."

"Oh no, Bennie, you can't stop now. You've given me just enough of an idea to--"

She was interrupted by a body landing in the garden in front of them. Thank God. Jill had returned just in time. "Oof!"

Except it wasn't Jill.

Lying on her backside in a powder blue ski suit, puffy white moon boots kicking the air, was Van. She blinked and stared up at Amelia, her mouth wide open. Bennie reached for her, but she scrambled to her feet and continued staring at Amelia.

"Hullo!" Amelia said. "You're not Jill."

Van shook her head, her mouth still dropped open, and thrust her arms toward Amelia. "Here. I brought your boots."

"Oh, splendid."

Bennie pinched the skin on the back of her hand. It hurt. She bit her tongue, and it hurt too. She sure felt awake. She'd traveled back in time to 1933 with hardly a second thought, and she'd taken meeting Amelia Earhart pretty much in stride too. But Van? Amelia Earhart, 1933, *and* Van? It was too surreal. She had to be dreaming.

The last time Bennie saw Van was at the hospital five months ago. Van had been doped up and loopy, and she'd told Bennie she loved her. Bennie hadn't heard a word from her since. Now she was standing in front of them dressed like the Michelin Man turned blue from the cold.

Amelia put a hand on Bennie's arm to stabilize herself while she kicked off one ruined yellow shoe and slipped her foot into a boot.

She did the same with the other and released Bennie so she could bend over, pull the boots up, and tighten the laces.

"Where's Jill?" Bennie asked.

For the first time, Van looked at Bennie, and Bennie knew then that it was not a dream. Just like always when their eyes met, a nearly physical conduit opened between them. Without words, Bennie knew that Van was nervous about seeing her. Did she remember telling Bennie she loved her?

"She's staying in '89 so she can bring us back." Van glanced at her watch. "She's going to make pick-ups every hour on the hour, right here. Starting at three o'clock, 1933 time."

Amelia gave a last tug to the laces at her knee and pulled her trouser leg over the boot. She stood up. "My name is Amelia Earhart," she said to Van.

Van beamed like she'd met her favorite movie star. "I know. Jill told me you were here. I'm thrilled to meet you. I'm Van Hollinger." She held out her hand.

Amelia seemed pleased to be shaking hands and said, "You've heard of me?"

"Sure. You're famous."

"For what?"

"Don't tell her," Bennie said quickly.

"I won't. We can't tell you too much about the future," Van explained. "It might influence you to change what you do, and that could have all sorts of consequences we can't even imagine."

"I already know about rock and roll," Amelia said, and she wiggled her hips.

Van shot Bennie a look of mild reproof, which made Bennie smile, as if she'd winked or blown her a kiss. Van looked away quickly, like she'd felt the same.

Kevin, Bennie reminded herself. They were there to find Kevin.

"Kevin went this way." She pointed to the faint prints in the snow. She turned to follow them into the alley behind the house, and Van and Amelia joined her.

"I wonder why he went that way," Van said. "His home's over there." She pointed in the opposite direction. "I would have thought he'd head home."

"He could have got turned around," Amelia said. "It's easy to do. Happens to me sometimes when I'm flying."

"Things look different now," Bennie said. "There aren't as many houses. His house wasn't even built until the '50s. It doesn't even exist yet."

"You think Kevin would know that?" Van asked. "Oh Amelia, I'm supposed to remind you to catch the train to Portland tonight."

"Jill, I assume?" Amelia asked.

"Uh huh."

"She's awfully concerned that I catch that train."

The snow in the alley was nearly untouched except for Kevin's little footprints. Amelia was snug in her long fur coat and leather boots, and Van's snow suit and moon boots would keep her warm and dry, but Bennie's jacket wasn't waterproof, and her Adidas were the breathable type, with nylon mesh on top. She was soaked, and her feet felt like blocks of ice. She hoped Kevin was in better shape wherever he was. There was no point in calling for him. As long as they followed his footsteps, they knew Kevin was still ahead of them.

Bennie walked in between Van and Amelia. After five months with no word from Van, she'd nearly given up. She knew Van loved her. Van had told her so. But Van loved Patsy more. Bennie got that message loud and clear, not only from Van, but from all Van's friends--Jill and Kendra, Inez and Grace, everyone. Ever since Bennie returned from 1974, they'd included her in their party invitations, but only when they knew Van and Patsy weren't going to be around. They tried not to talk about Van in front of Bennie, but she picked up enough to know that Van and Patsy were still together, doing better than ever, apparently. Patsy had stopped drinking and had been promoted to lieutenant at the prison.

Bennie had put Van out of her mind, she thought. She threw herself instead into the lives of Hannah and Ben. They were what it was all about, after all. Not in a romantic way, despite what everyone seemed to think. 'Pussy whipped,' Kendra called her, but it wasn't true. Hannah wasn't a lesbian, and Bennie wouldn't have been interested in her even if she was. To Bennie, Hannah was still the kid she'd met back in '74. A kid with a kid. But keeping an eye on both of them had kept her occupied enough in the last few months that she was able to keep thoughts of Van at a distance, most of the time.

But that was before Van landed in the snow at Bennie's feet.

She wanted to ask a hundred questions, but when she opened her mouth, all she said was, "What's that you're wearing?"

"I've been wondering the same thing," Amelia said. "Is it a suit for traveling through time?"

"No," Van said. "It's just Kendra's ski suit. She made me wear it, and I have an extra jacket underneath for Kevin." She unzipped the powder blue ski coat to reveal a red one underneath. "I couldn't wear my own clothes. I came from the office."

"You've gone back to work, then?" Bennie asked. It was a lame, back-ass way of asking if she'd recovered from her ordeal last October, but the surprise of Van being there combined with the stress of having to watch what she said around Amelia made Bennie tongue tied.

"Yes, I've been back since December."

"That's good," Bennie said.

Van shrugged. "I guess." She didn't sound convinced.

"What is your work?" Amelia asked.

"I'm a lawyer," Van said.

"Do women generally have jobs in 1989?" Amelia asked. "Or are you unique?"

"You don't give up, do you?" Bennie asked.

"Of course I don't. Where would I be if I did?"

"Some women don't work," Van said, "but most do, I think, at least if they don't have small children."

"You think we should tell her that?" Bennie asked.

Van shrugged. "It's a harmless question, don't you think? Besides, Jill's not here."

"That's what I told her," Amelia said.

They reached a cross street, and traffic--automobile, equine, and human--had destroyed any prints left by Kevin. When they crossed to the alley on the other side, though, they picked up his trail. He'd stuck to the alleys.

"He's heading for the Hillyard business district," Van said. "I wonder if he knows where he's going."

"Have you had an illness, then?" Amelia asked Van, "that prevented you from going to your job?"

"Not an illness, exactly," Van said. "I had a--an accident, I guess."

"It was no accident," Bennie said. "She was held hostage in a prison for two days by a couple of prisoners."

"Hostage! How did you get away?"

Van didn't answer, so Bennie did. "The guys got in a fight with each other. One of them helped her get away. He died." It was a vast oversimplification of what had actually occurred that day.

"Bennie went back to 1974 to save me," Van said.

"That sounds so strange," Amelia said. "Back to 1974. So you've traveled in time before, Bennie?"

"Just that one time," Bennie said. "Van's traveled before too. To twenty-oh-eight."

"When? Two-twenty-oh-eight?"

"Two thousand eight," Van said. "That's how they say it. I went twenty years into the future. It would be seventy-five years from now."

"Oh." Amelia's eyes sparkled again, and she clasped her hands like a child. "What is it like then? What are women doing? Don't tell me you can't say. You know what it's like, and it hasn't harmed you, has it?"

Van laughed. "The jury's still out on that."

"Yeah, Van," Bennie urged, "tell us what it was like then."

Van turned to Bennie, laughter still in her face, and said, "I think I may have told you too much already."

Bennie caught her breath, not just at the beauty of Van's smile, which she hadn't seen directed her way in nearly a year--not while Van was fully conscious, anyway--but at Van's admission. She must remember.

"No," Bennie said, "not nearly enough."

"Well," Van said, "I'll tell you this much. Women are completely involved in nearly every career and sport there is, including politics, the military, everything, but there still hasn't been a female president. But when I left, the two people leading the race for the Democratic presidential candidate were a woman and a black man."

Bennie and Amelia both grew wide-eyed.

"A black man? In our lifetime?" Bennie asked. "Wow."

"I know," Van said. "That's one of the things I regret about leaving the future. I never got to find out who won."

"What else to do you regret?" Bennie asked, hoping to hear something of herself, but Van just smiled and shook her head.

"Why were you in 2008?" Amelia asked.

"It was an accident," Van said and glanced at Bennie. "Bennie saved me that time too."

They reached the Hillyard business district. In 1989, it was a decrepit Spokane neighborhood with a rough reputation, given over to thrift and second-hand stores and a large number of bars that catered to bikers. But in 1933, Hillyard was only forty years old. It had started as a separate city, linked to Spokane by the trolley. By 1933 it had been incorporated into the larger city, but it still acted as a town in its own right, and the snow didn't slow its business at all. People slogged through piles of slush in the street and on the sidewalk with little concern for the splashes that landed on their own and others' clothing.

Kevin's footprints vanished.

Bennie looked up the street. It was filled with businesses on both sides--grocers, drug stores, laundries, barbershops, and a soda fountain. Signs in the lower windows pointed to businesses upstairs offering insurance, printing, and legal advice. That the Depression was still on was apparent, despite the bustling air of the citizens. Stores that advertised clothing and furniture and cigars were boarded up, as was the local bank.

"Where shall we start?" Bennie asked.

"Perhaps the grocers?" Amelia asked. "He might be hungry, and they may sell sweets."

They went into a corner store called Pay'n Take that boasted a sign in the window that said, "Shop the modern way. Cash only. No credit!" Pay'n Take could learn a lesson in marketing from modern grocers. "LARD" was announced on a handwritten sign beside a pile of paper-wrapped squares stacked on the first table in the store.

Cider vinegar, calf liver, potatoes, and rye bread were among the other items being pushed. There was no candy aisle and, in fact, there were no aisles at all. The store was crowded with shelves and tables placed wherever there was room. The grocer stood at one table trying to prop another hand-lettered sign that read EGGS. Another sign hung over a barrel near the door and urged shoppers to "Buy two, Give one to the hungry." The barrel was empty.

"Have you seen a little boy?" Bennie asked the grocer. "About this high. Not dressed well for this weather."

The grocer eyed Bennie like he thought the same could be said for her, but he just shook his head. "Kids are all in school right now. I'd of noticed if one wasn't."

"Okay, thanks."

"This place is amazing," Van said. "It's like we're visiting the Waltons. I think I want to buy a souvenir."

Bennie laughed. "What sort of souvenir? Lard?"

Van smiled. "Maybe. Look how it's wrapped."

They left the store and scanned the street. "What do you think?" Bennie asked. "I don't think he'd be drawn to places like that." She indicated an insurance office. "But he must be freezing. His feet would be wet. He'd go inside wherever he could get warm."

"If I were a child, I'd look for other children," Amelia said.

"I'd look for candy," Van said. "Don't Kendra's kids run down here for candy sometimes? In '89, I mean?"

"You're right, they did," Bennie said, "and that's the store, right there."

They hurried to the tiny storefront. It wasn't a candy store in 1933. The window was painted with the word *Restaurant* and a cardboard sign in the door was flipped to OPEN. They entered.

It was a small room, crowded with eight square tables and a lunch counter on one side. A chalkboard on the wall informed them that they could have a plate of spaghetti for fifteen cents and a meatball for a nickel more. Potato soup was a dime and it came with bread. About half the tables were occupied, mostly by men who looked like they'd just gotten off work.

A wood stove burned in the corner, and without thinking Bennie moved toward it, her hands outstretched. Until she felt the heat of the stove, she hadn't noticed how cold she was.

"Bennie, your coat is soaked," Van said. "And your shoes. I didn't realize. I'm sorry."

"I'm all right," Bennie said, but she shuddered as she said it.

"You need something hot," Amelia said. She moved to the counter. "I'd like a bowl of your potato soup, please. Nice and hot."

She said potato funny, Bennie thought. Po-tah-toe.

Van pulled her gloves off and took Bennie's hands in hers. She rubbed her hands over Bennie's to create friction. "Your fingers are so cold." Her head was down, her attention focused on Bennie's hands.

"Van," Bennie said.

Van looked up. Her cheeks were red from the cold, but when their eyes met, her entire face flooded with color. She blinked and looked back down, but she didn't stop rubbing Bennie's hands.

Something new and odd was going on with Van. She normally tried to keep Bennie at arm's length--to keep her out of reach of temptation, Bennie liked to think--but this new behavior didn't conform to how she normally acted. It was almost like Van was giving in to temptation, rather than resisting it.

"You should take your shoes off," Van said. "Let them dry by the fire. Look, others have done it."

There was a line of shoes drying behind the stove, and several of the customers wore only their socks. Bennie bent and tried to untie her shoes, but the strings were soaked and knotted, and her fingers were too stiff. Van knelt before her and worked at the strings of one shoe while Bennie fumbled with the first.

"Are you that lady flier that's supposed to be in town today?"

Bennie looked up, expecting Amelia to be busted, but the man who spoke was not looking at Amelia. He was looking at Van.

"Me?" Van looked up from her task, but continued to work at the knot. "No, I'm not her."

"That looks like a lady flier's suit. I seen 'em in the motion pictures," the man said. "I never knew they were blue, though."

"Oh, I, uh, think they come in all colors," Van said. She removed one shoe, waved Bennie's fingers from the other, and set to work on it.

"Blue is the most popular, though," Bennie added. "Because it's the color of the sky."

The man nodded as if that made perfect sense. "You a flier too?" He pointed to the Seattle Seahawks logo on Bennie's jacket. "That what that bird means?"

"Yes." Bennie turned so he could see SEAHAWKS embroidered on the back. "We're a women's flying group."

The man nodded again, and Van shot Bennie another one of those reproving looks like she'd sent her before. Bennie grinned. She didn't know what was going on with Van, but she liked it. A lot.

Amelia approached in her long fur coat with a steaming bowl of potato soup in her hands. She ducked her head like she didn't want to be recognized, but no one seemed to

notice her. She set the bowl on the only table that wasn't already occupied. "This will help warm you up."

"Thank you."

Van removed Bennie's other shoe, and they all sat at the table. Bennie took a bite of soup and nearly groaned from pleasure. She hadn't realized she was hungry, and it was delicious. "This is good. Doesn't anyone else want any?"

Amelia shook her head. "I attended a breakfast banquet this morning. I won't need food again for hours."

"I just ate breakfast a little while ago," Van said. She turned to the customer who was curious about aviator suits. "Have you seen a little boy, by any chance? He's about this tall, and he's not wearing a coat."

"Not in here," the man said. "A passel of 'em ran by a little bit ago, headed back to school."

"Where is the school?" Amelia asked.

"He wouldn't be going to school," Bennie said. "He's not from around here."

The man pointed north. "It's up that way a couple blocks."

"He might seek out other children." Amelia went to the door, looked outside, and came back. "There are none in sight."

"Why don't you stay here and finish your soup," Van said to Bennie, "and get warmed up. Amelia and I will go check out the school."

"No." Bennie shook her head, alarmed at the thought of Van getting away from her so soon after reappearing in her life. "No. I don't think we should separate."

"Nonsense." Amelia rose to her feet. "It's only a couple of blocks away."

"We're both dressed for it," Van said, standing as well. "And you're not. We'll be right back. Oh, here." Van stuck her hand in the pocket of the ski suit. "Jill gave me these, in case we needed money." Van put a stack of coins on the table.

Bennie picked one up and looked at it. It was a silver dollar, heavy and unfamiliar. A picture of Lady Liberty was stamped on one side and an eagle was on the other. There were five coins in all.

Van turned to leave.

"Wait." Bennie felt helpless in her stocking feet. "You might need some money."

"I have money," Amelia said. She patted Bennie's shoulder and gave her a smile as intimate as a wink. "Don't worry, I'll take good care of her."

Bennie's jaw dropped. They left and Bennie pocketed the coins and picked up her spoon.

As soon as she was finished eating, the man who had been behind the counter when they arrived approached her table and sat down, unmasked.

"Enjoy the soup?" he asked.

"Yes, it was delicious. Thank you."

"Warm you up all right?"

"I'm getting there," Bennie said.

The man leaned forward and spoke in a soft voice. "You interested in something that'll warm you up faster?"

Warm her up faster? Bennie could only think of one thing that might warm her up faster than hot soup, and the clandestine way he brought it up intrigued her. Now that she thought of it, she didn't think she'd seen any bars or saloons along the street, and no beer or wine in the grocery store either.

"I might be. What have you got?"

"You probably gotta use the honey pot, right?" He glanced over his shoulder.

Bennie followed the direction of his gaze to a sign at the end of the lunch counter. It said RESTROOM and pointed to a narrow hallway.

"Yeah, sure I do." She felt like she was in a movie.

"You go right ahead. Keep going past the kitchen to the brown door. Four quick knocks. When they ask what you want, just say 'Joe says I'm all right.'" The man winked, rose, and returned to the lunch counter.

Bennie took the time to put on her wet shoes and lace them up. Her feet were still cold, but she didn't want to take a chance. She didn't need to be chased out into the snow in her stocking feet by some 1930s Keystone cops.

She gave a last tug to her wet shoestring and sauntered to the back of the restaurant. She felt like a john hooking up with a prostitute or a gangbanger trying to score some

drugs. She felt like everyone was watching her and knew exactly what she was doing. They probably did.

She paused at the lunch counter. "When those two women get back, ask them to wait for me?" He nodded and winked again. She entered the hallway and walked past the door marked RESTROOM. Keep going past the kitchen to the brown door, he said. She saw no kitchen, but there was a white door on one side of the hallway. No one was around. She opened the door and peeked in. Yep, it was the kitchen all right. It looked more like a family kitchen than a restaurant kitchen, with tiny counters and a sink that looked like a toy. An old fashioned stove was on one wall with a pot of something steaming on it. A table was pushed up against another wall with three half empty bowls of potato soup on it. She backed out and continued down the hall to a brown door. She gave four sharp raps, and a tiny window she hadn't noticed in the top panel opened. A large brown eye blinked at her.

"Joe says I'm all right," she said.

The window slammed shut, and the larger door opened. A skinny man stood behind the door, silent and waiting. Bennie entered.

She was in a short hall that smelled of smoke and alcohol. She moved forward and the room opened up. She grinned as her hunch was confirmed. She was in a speakeasy.

On the right side of the room was a bar with a half dozen bottles of liquor on it. A bartender stood beside it wiping the counter.

"Joe says I'm all right," she said again.

He nodded. "What'll you have?"

"What have you got?"

He looked her up and down. "I'll make you a Mary Pickford."

She considered taking offense at being thought a lightweight, but changed her mind. When would she get another chance to try a Mary Pickford?

"It'll be a dollar," he said.

Ah, that was it. Joe must have seen Van hand her the silver dollars. That's why he decided she was 'all right'. They'd sure make a hell of a lot more money selling drinks for a dollar in the back than they could selling soup for a dime in the front. She gave him one of the Lady Liberties, and he handed her a martini glass with a vibrantly pink drink in it.

She took a sip and instantly realized the drink was not an insult. It burned all the way going down and then kicked her stomach. She turned, leaned against the bar, took another sip, and examined the room.

It was still early. She suspected the room would get a lot more crowded in the evening. There were three men sitting at one table, drinking, smoking, and laughing. A man and a woman sat at another table, heads intimately close, and a woman sat alone at a third. A silent piano was pushed up against one wall, but Bennie could imagine it later on pounding out jazz and blues, maybe by a guy in suspenders with a cigar clenched between his teeth.

Posters were tacked to the walls. Bennie took her drink and walked over to check them out. In one, a knight in shining armor on a horse clutched a naked woman to his breast. Bennie couldn't tell if he was rescuing the woman or abducting her, but she appreciated the nudity. Another was a print of the Titanic, boasting that it was the largest and safest ship on the sea. A third was an advertisement for Yellowstone National Park, and a fourth was a movie poster of Mary Pickford. She had long red curls, big serious eyes, and pouty little lips. She reminded Bennie of Van. She took a fond sip of her drink.

"Are you a he? Or are you a she?"

Bennie turned.

The woman who had been sitting alone had approached from behind. "Or are you a he-she?" The woman giggled. She was drunk on her ass.

Bennie didn't mind a drunk woman. "You can call me Bennie."

The woman giggled again. "I got nothing against a he-she, s'long as it's good lookin'. And you," she tapped Bennie's chest twice and left her hand resting there, "are good lookin'."

Bennie sipped her drink again but found it empty already. She glanced at the bartender, who met her eyes and tilted his head at the drunk woman. Bennie nodded. Jill would shit if she knew Bennie was using her silver dollars to buy a drunk woman a drink, but Jesus, she was in a fucking speakeasy. Bennie felt like giggling herself.

She returned to the bar, tossed two dollars on the counter, picked up their drinks, and carried them to the woman's table.

"I like your dress," Bennie said.

She must be freezing. The dress was simply made, with two pieces of material sewn up the sides and held on by a couple of straps over her shoulders, but the way it fell over her curves made it sexy as hell. Bennie guessed she wasn't wearing anything underneath it. Her nipples poked out like rabbit ears, and the material was loose enough that if Bennie could get her to lean forward just a bit, she was pretty sure she'd be able to see all the way down to her navel.

She held the drink out just far enough to make the woman lean, but when she did, Bennie missed it. She was distracted by what she saw at the next table.

The three men were having a grand time, grabbing an oddly shaped green object from each other, and howling with laughter. Bennie looked closer.

It was a Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtle.

Chapter Seven

Van - 1933

VAN TOOK A deep breath and blew it out. It was good to get away from Bennie.

She'd been thinking about Bennie a lot lately. Well, ever since she got back from 2008 last July, really, but especially in the last few months. Since she'd been taken hostage.

She'd wondered about Bennie, and wished about her, but she'd been very, very careful never to *do* anything about her, or even see her.

This time, of course, she'd had no choice. She had to go back in time to help rescue Kevin. She couldn't help it if she had to see Bennie again as a result. That was just a bonus.

But she was not prepared for the sheer physical impact Bennie had on her. The power of Bennie's eyes when she looked at her, the power of her skin just inches away, the very vibe of her. It set up a thrumming in Van's veins that she couldn't control. Simply removing Bennie's wet shoes from her icy feet had nearly sent Van over the edge. She had to get away.

Who would ever guess that sloshing down the main street of Hillyard in 1933 with Amelia Earhart, a vibrantly alive and compelling and beautiful woman who had been dead for fifty years, would be the calmer choice?

"I like your coat," Van said.

Amelia's coat was long, past her knees, and thick with glossy dark brown fur. The snow melted off the outer layer of fur without marring its fluffy sheen. "What is it? Sable?"

"Thank you," Amelia said. "No, it's only mink. I could buy a new airplane for what a sable would cost."

"What is sable, anyway?" Van asked. "Is a sable an animal, like a fox?"

"It's an animal, but not much like a fox, I think. Don't you have fur coats in 1989?"

"Well, they exist," Van said, "but they're not very common, at least not in Spokane. They might sell used ones at vintage clothing stores."

"Vintage." Amelia gave a small laugh. "It's brand new."

"Yeah, you could probably sell that one for quite a bit at a vintage store," Van said, "since it's in perfect shape."

"I've heard of antique stores, but not vintage stores. Are they the same thing?"

"No. Antique stores carry older things. Vintage just means it's from before you were born."

"What other sorts of stores do you have?"

"Well, there's Nordstrom and Radio Sha--hey, you're tricky."

"I don't think you're being fair," Amelia complained. "You live in 1989, if I understand you correctly, but you got to go forward in time to see the future. It didn't hurt you, did it?"

"No," Van admitted, "but that wasn't the real future. It was only the future that would have happened if I'd really disappeared in 1988."

"Pardon me?"

"It was an accident, when I left in '88. Nobody knew where I went. They spent the next twenty years thinking I'd just vanished. It affected people," Van said in a major understatement. "Some of them in a big way, you know?"

Amelia nodded.

"But then Jill managed to send me back to '88. I returned just a few minutes after I'd left, so I never really vanished after all. The future that evolved when I disappeared for twenty years didn't really happen, because I didn't disappear, you see? It wasn't the real future. But 1989 is the real future for you, because it really happened."

"How do you know?" Amelia asked.

"Because I was there."

"Weren't you there when it happened in 2008 too?"

"Yes, but..." Van shook her head. "Look, I'm just a lawyer. I deal with facts and logic and--well, it's a fact that I went to 2008. I have a tattoo to prove it. But I can't explain it logically. You need to ask Jill these questions."

"Alas, Jill isn't here."

"I know. I'm sorry."

"It's perfectly all right," Amelia said. "I work with facts too, but I also work with imagination. When I find gaps, I fill them in myself. That looks like the school."

It was a three-story rectangular brick building with a bell tower on top. It could hardly be mistaken for anything else, but the words REGAL ELEMENTARY posted over the front door confirmed it. They went up the steps and into the hall.

Odors of chalk, damp wool, and dirty kids assailed them and transported Van back in time--or forward, rather--to her own elementary school years. They were in a long, wide hallway with a scattering of doors on both sides, staircases in the middle, and a larger door at the end. Van peeked through the window in the first door on the left and saw tiny kids sharing seats in wooden desks bolted to the floor. They were littler than Kevin.

Amelia peeked in the window on the right. "These children are too old," she reported. "Twelve or thirteen."

Van nodded, and they continued on to the next two doors. More tiny kids on the left and big kids on the right. At the third door, Amelia waved her over and Van peeked inside. "They're still a little too big," Van said. "He's only in the second or third grade."

"May I help you?"

They turned, stood straight, and put their hands behind their backs. The woman who addressed them was as intimidating as any school principal could ever be. She wore a long gray skirt that didn't even show her ankles, harsh black shoes, her hair was scraped into a tight bun at the back of her head, and she wore tiny rimless glasses. She frowned and carried a thick stick. She looked them up and down and seemed particularly displeased with Van.

Amelia took a step forward, and Van decided to let her take the lead. "Yes, ma'am. I apologize most sincerely for not coming into the office immediately. We're looking for a lost boy, and we hoped we'd see him in one of these classrooms."

The woman squinted at Amelia. "Do you have children here? You look familiar."

"No, ma'am. He doesn't attend this school. He's visiting. Do you think you can help us locate the child?"

"I would have noticed if there were any extra children running about."

"Perhaps he followed some children into one of the classrooms?"

"My teachers would certainly notice if they had an extra child," the woman said. "It's against the rules to allow visitors without notifying me."

"I understand completely. I do remember though, from when I was a child," Amelia smiled sweetly, "that teachers of the lower grades were often so kind to children. Perhaps even too kind. Might one of them, with a soft heart, have allowed him to stay in the classroom without permission, just for a little while?"

The woman scowled. "They're all too soft-hearted, every single one of them. They teach them that in college now, believe it or not. I suppose you'd better come with me, and we'll check. However, you," she pointed her stick at Van, "will remain here. You would disturb the children. You can sit on that bench in my office."

Amelia smirked at Van behind the woman's back, and Van slinked through the open door in the principal's office to wait on the bench. It was wooden and marked with scratches and gouges no doubt made by naughty students.

"His name is Kevin," she heard Amelia say as they went upstairs, "and he's eight years old."

Van wondered how Bennie was doing. She smiled to think what Bennie would say when she heard Van had been sent to the principal's office.

Several minutes later Amelia and the principal returned, chatting and smiling like old friends. Van rose from the bench, without permission, and joined them.

"He's not here," Amelia said. She turned to the principal. "Thank you so much for letting us look."

"You're welcome, my dear. Come back any time. I'd like to hear more about your social work in New York. Good luck finding your boy."

"You told her you were a social worker?" Van asked after they left.

"Yes," Amelia said. "I was a social worker, before I flew across the Atlantic. I meant to get back to it when I returned, but things took off in a rather different direction."

They started back down the street toward the restaurant where they'd left Bennie.

"What time is it?" Amelia asked.

Van looked at her watch. "Just after three. We've missed Jill's first pick up."

"Jill invented the time machine?"

"Yes. She calls it RIP, for Rapid Intertemporal Projector. Originally it was only meant to project people into the future, just to observe. She never meant for people to interact and actually change things. Especially the past. She gets really uptight about people changing anything in the past, in case it changes the present. Our present, I mean. Not yours."

"That's why you won't tell me anything about the future," Amelia said. "My future, that is. Your present."

"Right. Jill would kill me." Van glanced at her watch again. "In fact, you should probably head downtown to catch that train."

"There's still plenty of time for that," Amelia said. "Did Bennie change anything when she went back to 1974?"

"Y-yes. I mean, no. I mean..." The truth was, Van didn't really know what Bennie did in 1974, except kill a man. "I really don't know. I don't know if anyone knows. Jill, maybe."

"And Bennie."

"Yes. Bennie knows."

"Speaking of whom, look there."

Van looked up. They were half way between the school and the restaurant, and Bennie trotted toward them, with her coat flapping open and a child on her shoulders. "Oh my God, she found Kevin!"

"Halloo!" Bennie called, and waved a hand as she ran. Kevin laughed with every jolt.

Van broke into a run. "You found him!"

"Yep." Bennie's cheeks were flushed. "Well, he found me, actually."

"I found Leonardo," Kevin said. He shivered as he clutched Bennie's neck. His sweatshirt was dark and wet and stretched, and he held a Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtle in one hand.

"He's a crafty little dude," Bennie said. "I caught him climbing through the window back there."

"You're freezing," Van said to Kevin. "Here, your mom sent a coat for you." She removed her blue jacket, then the red. Bennie swung him to the ground, and Van dropped to her knees and wrapped the coat around Kevin. It was too big for him, but it would keep him warm.

"This is a girl's coat," Kevin said. He fumbled with the zipper, but his little hands were too stiff.

"Nobody here knows that." Van zipped it up for him. "Wear it. Your mom said."

"Do you know where my mom is?"

"Yep, she's waiting for you."

He shrugged into the coat and seemed satisfied.

"Hello, Kevin. I'm Amelia."

Kevin waved at her without much interest. "We're in the olden days," he told Van.

"Yeah. It's kind of freaky, isn't it?"

"Yeah."

"Ready to ride?" Bennie asked.

"Yeah!"

Bennie swung Kevin up onto her shoulders again. "You guys'll never guess what they have hidden in the back of that restaurant."

"A blind pig?" Amelia asked. "A tiger?"

"No," Bennie said. "A *speakeasy*."

"Shh," Amelia said, but she laughed. "That's what a blind pig is. And recall it's a *speakeasy*, so called because it's illegal."

"Oh." Bennie glanced around and looked self-conscious. "Sorry."

"Did you go in it?" Van asked.

"Yep. That's where I found his Ninja Turtle. I had to give a secret password. 'Joe says I'm all right.' I went down a secret passage and said it again. 'Joe says I'm all right.'"

"Did you have a drink?" Van asked, though it was pretty obvious she had.

"That's what you do in a *speakeasy*," Bennie said. She looked very proud of herself. "I had a Mary Pickford. I had two."

"What's a Mary Pickford?"

"It's made with rum, I think, and something pink. It was good." Bennie suddenly spun in a circle, her arms spread wide. Van expected Kevin to fly off her shoulders from the centrifugal force, but he just clung like a monkey and laughed. "Whee!" Bennie said. "I feel like I'm in a movie."

"Be careful," Van said.

"It's okay, I got him." Bennie grabbed a lock of Van's hair and rubbed it against her cheek. "Be nice. Maybe I'll give you a ride later." She winked.

Van gasped and backed away. "Bennie!" She tried not to laugh, but she couldn't help it. "Come on, we need to get moving. We still have time to catch the four o'clock, if we hurry."

Bennie grinned. "You know, you look like Mary Pickford."

"What does Mary Pickford look like?" Van asked.

"Like you," Bennie said.

"You do look like her a bit," Amelia agreed. "You're taller, though. Mary's tiny. No more than five feet."

Bennie stared at Amelia. "You know Mary Pickford?"

"Oh yes, we're good friends. She lives near me in Los Angeles."

"Wow. Who else do you know?"

"Now, why would I tell you about 1933 when you won't tell me about 1989?"

"She's got you there, Bennie," Van said.

"Never mind," Bennie said. "When I get home, I'll get your biography from the library and read it and find out all I need to know about you."

Amelia looked surprised. "My biography's in the library?"

They were treading on thin ice. They didn't dare let Amelia find out why she'd become so famous.

"So Kevin," Van asked, "how did you lose--what's your turtle's name?"

"Leonardo."

The rest of the walk to Jill's house was taken up with Kevin's accounting of his adventures and with a serious discussion between Bennie and Kevin about whether Bennie ought to get a Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtle game for her Nintendo. Amelia gave up trying to learn about the future, and Van was preoccupied with watching Bennie.

She kept reminding herself that she was walking with Amelia Earhart--*Amelia Earhart*--and that she only had a few more minutes with her before they were separated again by fifty-six years. She ought to use this time to enjoy the experience and get to know her a bit. But no matter how hard she tried to concentrate on the reality of a living breathing Amelia walking beside her, her attention kept straying to the living, breathing, tipsy Bennie.

Van had forgotten. She only truly got to know Bennie, and to love her, when she'd been transported to 2008, when Bennie was forty-eight years old. Before that, she'd only known the young Bennie, this Bennie, who was still in her twenties. Van had forgotten how flirtatious, outrageous, and uncontrolled Bennie was at that age, and how attractive and vibrant and wonderful.

Bennie had it in her head, or at least she did several months ago, that she was in love with Van. Van was ashamed to admit it, since she never planned to do anything about it, but she secretly hoped that Bennie's feelings hadn't changed in the months they'd been apart. Being loved by Bennie made her feel precious. She missed that feeling and wanted it. But she never really expected Bennie to still love her after all this time. Bennie didn't have the experience of falling in love with Van in 2008. She would certainly have moved on by now. Besides, didn't she have a thing going with Hannah?

But the way Bennie said Van's name back at the restaurant, and the way she'd looked at her when she held Van's hair to her cheek, made Van wonder. The precious feeling in the core of her gut was back, and Van wanted more of it.

They reached Jill's house. As soon as they got there, Van regretted the time she'd wasted walking with Amelia, but it was too late by then. It was nearly time for Jill's four o'clock pick-up.

"You and Kevin go first," Van told Bennie. "As long as you're holding him, she can bring you both back at the same time."

"You come too," Bennie said.

"We won't all fit," Van said.

Bennie sent Van a stern look. "But you're coming, right?"

"I'll be right behind you."

"If you're not, I'll make Jill send me right back again. I'll come back and get you."

"I'll be right behind you," Van said again, this time with a smile. "Jill said she'd do another pickup in five minutes."

"You better be." Bennie turned to Amelia. "Thanks for all your help, Amelia. I've loved meeting you. I wish we could have spent more time together. And thanks for everything you've done. And everything that you're going to do, too, even though you don't know what that is yet. Thank you--"

"You have less than a minute," Van warned.

"Okay, okay." Bennie stood in the tramped down spot of snow where Van had landed two hours earlier. She dropped Kevin from her back and put her hands on his shoulders. "Stand here with me, buddy. We're going home."

Bennie looked at Van. They stared at each other a long moment, and Van knew she would not be able to deny her feelings any longer, to herself or to Bennie. They were bound together by an invisible cord that tugged her to Bennie every time she saw her, and Bennie knew it.

And then they were gone.

Van took a quick step back, as though the cord that had been holding her steady had snapped.

"Oh, I'm not quite used to that," Amelia said. "It's more abrupt than lifting off the ground, even in an autogyro."

"My thoughts exactly." Van positioned herself in the same spot Bennie had stood in and looked at Amelia, who watched with her hands in the pockets of her luxuriant coat. Van felt a little sorry for her. She looked lonely. "I thank you too," Van said. "You don't know what an influence you've had on women. Well, on everyone, but especially women."

Amelia smiled. "You said you're a lawyer. Is that a common career for women?"

"Fairly common," Van said. "There weren't many women in my law school class, but there are more all the time."

"I wish more women were in careers," Amelia said. "I try to convince women with every speech I make that they can have careers and still live fulfilling lives as women, but so many of them are resistant to the idea."

"The idea catches on," Van said. "Don't give up."

"Thank you," Amelia said. "You inspire me."

"Wow." Van caught her breath. *She* inspired Amelia Earhart? "Remember to go catch that train."

Amelia bit her lip and nodded. She looked like she was going to cry.

Van glanced at her watch. "Any second now," she said. "I'm sorry we didn't get to--oh!" Van's face was suddenly filled with fur, and strong arms wrapped around her.

"Hold me," Amelia said. "Hold me tight."

Chapter Eight

Kendra - 1989

KEVIN TUMBLED FROM the back of RIP into Kendra's arms. She wept over him a bit, kissed his blistered fingers, let him tell her about a mean lady and gross milk, pried his cold little feet out of his wet shoes, swatted him once on the butt for playing in RIP without permission, and let him squirm away to tell Kyle and Ben about his adventures.

"Guys!" he yelled. "I went to the olden days. They don't have Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles, and I saw a horse."

She turned to Bennie and hugged her. "Thank you." She kissed Bennie's cheek. It was cold and flushed.

"No problem." Bennie grinned. "I found him breaking into the back of a speakeasy."

"That little shit," Kendra said.

Bennie stuck her head in the driver's side window of RIP. "You're going to bring Van back now, right?"

Jill nodded but didn't look up from RIP's dashboard.

Bennie turned back to Kendra. "I had a Mary Pickford. I had to use a secret code to get in." She lowered her voice. "'Joe says I'm all right.' And they let me in. It was awesome." She was as excited as Kevin was about seeing a horse.

Hannah came up behind Bennie. "Is a Mary Pickford a drink?"

Kendra watched the sparkle in Bennie's eyes dim. "Yeah," Bennie said, turning to Hannah. "I had to go there. That's how I found Kevin's turtle."

Kendra could have slugged Hannah. It was creepy, the hold she had over Bennie, making her practically grovel just because she had a drink in the middle of the day.

"You're a hero. I'll buy you a whole keg of Mary Pickfords," Kendra said, not bothering to keep the snotty out of her voice.

"Hey, it's okay," Bennie said. "I'll probably never drink another Mary Pickford. When would I get the chance?" She turned back to Jill. "Is it time?"

"Almost." Jill stared at her watch while she stroked the red button with her finger.

"Did you meet Amelia Earhart?" Kendra asked.

"Yeah," Bennie said. "She's amazing. I wish you could have met her. It's weird. She's larger than life, but at the same time she's just an ordinary person. I'd be her friend any day."

Kendra had never had much desire to travel through time. It kind of scared her, to tell the truth, especially the future. What if she found out something she didn't want to know? But this was Amelia Earhart. This time she was a wee bit jealous to be the only one left in the present who didn't get to meet her. Well, except for Hannah, who didn't count.

"Did she go catch the train?" Jill asked.

"Not yet," Bennie said. "There's plenty of time. It's only four o'clock back there."

"That means it'll be dark soon," Jill said. She pushed the button, and RIP rocked.

A muffled "ouch" came from the camper. Kendra and Bennie rushed to the back of RIP. Bennie opened the door and took a startled step back, knocking Kendra aside, but not before Kendra saw inside.

"Oh shit."

Van stepped down from the camper and raised her hands in innocence. "It's not my fault."

"What isn't?" Jill asked, climbing out of the cab.

"It truly isn't." The woman behind Van stepped down, her feet clad in familiar brown leather boots. "I took it entirely upon myself."

Jill stopped short at the sound of the woman's voice.

The woman smiled and stepped forward, her glossy mink coat flapping at her sides. "You must be Kendra." She held out her hand. "I'm Amelia Earhart."

"No," Jill choked out and put a hand to the side of RIP, as if she needed its support to hold her up.

Kendra was a bad girlfriend. Jill was having a meltdown no more than three feet away from her, but all Kendra could think was that she was shaking Amelia Earhart's hand. She was shaking fucking Amelia Earhart's hand!

Hannah stepped forward. Amelia smiled at her, but Hannah did not respond. There was something very wrong with that girl. Who wouldn't smile at Amelia Earhart?

Finally, Jill righted herself and rounded RIP. "You can't stay here," she said in a voice that shook. "You have to go back right away."

"I won't stay long," Amelia said. "I just want to see a bit of the future."

"You can't!"

Kendra stared. She'd never even heard Jill raise her voice before. To hear her wail like that was shocking.

Amelia was unmoved. She turned toward the front of the shop where the boys still congregated. "Why not?"

"Because you can't change history," Jill said. "Even changing one little thing about the past could change everything that follows."

"But you can send me back at any time, can't you?" Amelia asked. "Whether I go back right away or after a short visit, you can still get me back in time to catch my train, can't you?"

"But if anything happens to you while you're here..."

"I'll be careful," Amelia said, dismissing Jill's concerns without a backward glance. She strode to the front of the shop. She walked like a queen, Kendra thought, or maybe a king, with a long confident stride and her magnificent fur coat flowing behind her.

Bennie and Van followed, with Hannah trailing behind. Kendra moved to join them, but Jill grabbed her arm.

"She can't stay here," Jill said.

"I know, but you can let her visit for a while, can't you? My God, Jill, it's fucking Amelia Earhart."

"But Kendra..." Jill was pale and shaking.

"What is it, honey?" It seemed to Kendra that Jill's distress was far out of proportion to what the situation called for. After all, she really could send Amelia back to 1933 any time she liked, so what difference did it make if it was now or in a little while?

Jill looked over her shoulder, like someone was going to eavesdrop, though everyone was occupied. Kevin was showing Amelia how to turn on the television with the remote control, and everyone else was crowded around and chiming in with advice. Well, everyone except Hannah, who stood like a Viking woman with her arms folded across her chest, sending alternating glares between Amelia and Van. Now that was interesting. Bennie stood next to Van, their arms brushing, and both of them acting like that was no big deal, which it most certainly was. What the hell happened back there in '33?

No one paid any attention to Jill or Kendra. Still, Jill drew Kendra farther away, behind RIP, and lowered her voice.

"Amelia Earhart isn't just a famous person from the past," Jill said. "I mean, she is that, but...I haven't told anyone, but I've been conducting a different sort of experiment, and I've developed a theory that..." She trailed off, as if she was embarrassed, which was strange enough to intrigue Kendra. Jill didn't normally get embarrassed. "I think I can prove that reincarnation is a real phenomenon."

"Reincarnation?" Kendra felt like she'd just been plopped into a whole different conversation. "What's that got to do with anything?"

"That's what I'm trying to tell you," Jill said. "I think I've figured out who I was reincarnated from."

"Oh, no..."

"Yes. Kendra, think about it. I was born on March 29, 1938." Jill paused to let it sink in. "Exactly nine months after Amelia Earhart disappeared."

"But Jill, that doesn't mean--"

"I know. I know it's not sufficient evidence all on its own, but there's more. We have so much in common. We're both scientific women, explorers, adventurers. We're the same height, we're the same weight. Kendra, we have the same size feet."

Kendra tried not to laugh. She loved Jill. She'd left her husband for Jill and disrupted the lives of her two little boys so she could be with her. She wanted to spend the rest of her life with Jill, but that didn't mean she understood her. And it didn't mean she didn't find Jill, standing there arguing so earnestly in her vintage floral dress and Birkenstocks, utterly ridiculous.

"Oh, honey." It was no use. Her voice quavered. Sometimes it was better not to talk. She bit her lip to keep it still.

"Don't you see, Kendra?" Jill asked. "If there's even a chance I'm right, this could mess up everything. If Amelia doesn't go back, if she doesn't try to fly around the world and die in July 1937, then I won't even be born."

"That would be terrible," Kendra said, able to manage that much, at least, with a straight face. "But if you weren't born, then you couldn't make RIP. And if you don't make RIP, Amelia can't come forward to 1989. And if she doesn't come to 1989, she'll still die in 1937, and you can still be born. So everything's fine."

"Oh, if only it were that simple," Jill said.

Kendra blinked. There was not much she could say to that. "Well, she'll go back in a little while," Kendra said, "and she'll die in 1937 right on schedule, so there's no need to worry, honey. Besides, you can't force her go back. What are you going to do, drug her and tie her up?"

Jill got a look in her eye.

"No, Jill, you cannot drug Amelia Earhart and tie her up. Besides, if you send her back to a snowstorm all drugged and tied up, she'll probably die four years too early because she'll freeze to death, and that *would* change history."

"What can I do, then?" Jill asked. "I can't let her stay here, and I can't tell her why she needs to go back. If she finds out she's going to die in four years, she might decide not to go back at all."

"Well, we'll just have to convince her to go back on her own," Kendra said. "And you won't be able to do that if you don't let her have a little fun, first. You can't expect her not to even be curious. Wouldn't you be?"

Laughter came from the front of the shop, including Amelia's unfamiliar trill, and Kendra was eager to join them. Jill might be Amelia Earhart reincarnated, but the Amelia Earhart laughing over there was the real deal, no reincarnation needed, and Kendra was itching to get to know her. She gave Jill a quick kiss on the lips. "It'll be fine." She joined the others.

"Look, Mom," Kevin said. "Amelia's changing channels."

Amelia flashed Kendra a grin and changed the station from *Days of Our Lives* to *Card Sharks* to a local news program.

"The Governor of Alaska has declared a state of emergency in Prince William Sound as a result of the Exxon Valdez oil spill, the worst oil spill in U.S.--"

Jill shrieked and lunged from behind Kendra. "Don't listen to this!" She knocked Kyle over as she dove for the remote control and tried to block the TV screen at the same time. "You can't listen to the news."

"Jill, settle down," Kendra said.

"No, I won't." Jill gave up on wrestling the remote from Amelia and turned the TV off manually. "You have to go back, Amelia. I can't physically force you into RIP, but I can't let you change history either. More is riding on your shoulders than you know. Please, please, get back into RIP and go back to 1933."

Kendra had never seen Jill so animated. She nearly spit when she talked, she was so inflamed.

But Amelia was inflamed now too. Kendra didn't know Amelia at all, but she had a feeling she was generally no more easily riled than Jill. Like Jill, though, she was riled now.

"I will not go meekly into your time machine and return home like a good little girl," Amelia said. "I did not become the first woman to fly across the Atlantic Ocean because I was obedient. I gained my reputation in 1933, a reputation that apparently has lasted more than fifty-five years, at least, by having the courage to seize opportunities when they came my way. I want to see what has become of airlines, and I want to find out what women are capable of in 1989, and I want to play Nintendo. When I have done those things, perhaps--*perhaps*--I will get back in your damn machine and go home."

They glared at each other, and Kendra suddenly wondered if there might be more to Jill's reincarnation theory than she'd thought. Jill's brown eyes clashed with Amelia's blue, and Jill's short dark hair stood out from her head in a wiry mess, whereas Amelia's hair was a tousled light brown, but other than that they could have been twins. Their chins were raised at identical angles, their lips were clenched with the same ferocity, and their cheeks were equally splotched with red.

Bennie broke the silence. "I have a Nintendo."

Amelia broke the stare-down to glance at Bennie. "Do you live far away?"

"No more than ten minutes."

"I want to play Nintendo," Kevin said. "Can we go to Bennie's, Mom?"

Kendra bit her lip. She was tempted.

"I thought we were going to a movie with Ben and Hannah," Kyle said.

Kendra glanced at Hannah. A true Christian woman, she thought, would offer to take the boys off Kendra's hands so she could go play Nintendo with Bennie and Amelia. As she

suspected, though, Hannah was not *that* Christian. She avoided Kendra's eyes and put her hands on Ben's shoulders.

"I think we've imposed enough," Hannah said. "If Bennie can just give us a ride home?"

"Can we go to Bennie's?" Kevin asked again, bouncing on his bare feet. "Please, Mom, please?"

"Dude," Bennie said, "haven't you had enough adventure for one day?"

It was an obvious hint, and Kendra had to take it. She sighed. "Yeah, we better stay home. You need dry clothes and a n--" Nap, she almost said, but caught herself in time. Kevin would die before admitting he needed a nap.

"I haven't had any adventure," Kyle said.

"Sorry kiddo," Bennie said. "Another time. It's Nintendo for grown-ups day today. How about you, Van?"

Van looked like Kendra felt. It was obvious she wanted to join them, but she shook her head. "I need to get back to work." She exchanged a long look with Bennie, and Kendra was pretty sure she could see steam rising from their eyes.

God, it was good to see Bennie and Van in the same room again. What a pain in the ass it was trying to stay friends with both of them when they could never be together. Van had insisted, though, and so had Patsy. Kendra had always wondered if Van insisted only because Patsy insisted, and from the way Van was looking at Bennie right then, she thought she was right. The spark Hannah had put out in Bennie's eyes only minutes before was back, even though Hannah was still standing there sending her gloom vibes. Maybe it was the Mary Pickfords that made Bennie spark, but Kendra didn't think so. It was Van.

"Nintendo is acceptable," Jill pronounced, like she had anything to say about it. "But no television. No news. No books. No exposure to anything that could influence Amelia's actions in the past."

"I get it," Bennie said. "Like jury duty."

Jill nodded. "Like that." But she still looked worried.

"I'll go with them, if you like," Kendra offered, "if you'll watch the boys."

"I can't watch the boys," Jill said, "I need to work on RIP. I have to prepare it to send Amelia back."

Damn.

Chapter Nine

Van - 1989

VAN DROVE HOME with her hands clenched on the steering wheel and her eyes fixed squarely on the present. She'd lied when she said she was returning to work. She'd be no good at work now, and besides, Sylvester would be immersed in learning how to remove a case to federal court. She didn't want to interfere with that. It was the best way to learn the law, being thrown in over your head to sink or swim, with no life preservers in sight. It was one of the things she hated about the law.

It was early enough that she might catch Patsy before she left for her shift. She needed to see Patsy. Patsy was Van's lover, her partner. She'd be Van's spouse if such a thing were possible. Van loved Patsy and she was committed to her. That was the reality of the present.

She knew better than to tempt herself with Bennie. Bennie was too difficult to resist. As long as she kept Bennie far away from her, out of sight and sound, Van could resist, like chocolate when she was on a diet. When Bennie was right in front of her, though, and she looked at Van with those smoldering eyes, it was impossible.

No, not impossible. She'd resisted today, eventually, anyway. She didn't go with Amelia to Bennie's apartment, though she'd wanted to so badly it hurt. She'd separated herself and was going home to Patsy, her lover, her partner, her spouse. It wasn't impossible to resist Bennie. It was just very, very difficult.

She pulled into the driveway shortly after two. Sadie ran out to greet her. Van patted the dog and let herself in the back door.

"Hello, I'm home!"

Patsy came out of the bathroom. She smelled like soap and wore her uniform pants with a sleeveless white tank. She looked strong and vibrant, more than she had in years. She had a tube of hair gel in one hand and a glop of it on the fingers of the other.

She frowned. "Van? Why are you home? Are you sick?"

"No, I'm fine." Van leaned into Patsy and kissed her, enjoying the unusual combination of strength and vulnerability, since Patsy was stuck with her hands full of goop and couldn't hug back. "But something amazing happened today. I had to tell you."

Patsy gave her a squeeze with her forearms and returned to the bathroom to style her hair. "What happened?"

Van followed and watched Patsy in the mirror. "I got a call at work from Kendra. You're not going to like this part, but Jill was experimenting with RIP again."

Patsy rolled her eyes as she scrunched the gel into her hair. Van didn't know why she bothered. Her hair would be limp again in an hour. "I wish she'd leave that God damned thing alone," Patsy said. "It's nothing but trouble."

"Yeah, but listen. Jill went back to 1933 this morning, and somehow the boys got to playing with RIP, and they sent Kevin back too."

"Kevin? Is he the little one?"

"Yes. Kendra didn't know what to do. She was frantic, so she just started calling people asking for help."

"She didn't call me," Patsy said.

"Well, she wouldn't, would she? She knows how you feel about RIP."

Patsy grunted acknowledgement and turned on the water.

"Besides, she knows you sleep in. But she called me, so I went over, and Jill sent me back to 1933, and I brought Kevin back."

Patsy stopped rinsing her hands and turned to face Van. She didn't look happy. "Are you fucking kidding me?"

"No, I'm not. I know you don't like RIP, but--"

"You have got to be fucking kidding me. After what happened last time?" Patsy wasn't just unhappy. She was furious. "You got in that fucking thing again and let her send you off?"

They didn't talk about RIP much. It was one thing--one of a growing list of things--that they carefully did not talk about. Van knew that Patsy didn't like Jill's time machine, but she'd never before realized how strong her feelings about it were.

"What happened last time," Van said slowly, "is that Bennie went back in time to rescue me from the prison tower."

Patsy's nostrils flared as she took in a deep breath. Bennie was one of the other things they didn't talk about. "Which never would have been necessary if Jill hadn't fucked

everything up by sending Bennie back in the first place," Patsy said. "Besides, you would have got out of that tower anyway."

Van sighed. Arguing about what caused the hostage situation was a chicken and egg argument. Which came first? Impossible to know. "Okay, but listen. When I came back from 1933, which I did with no trouble, by the way, guess who came with me?"

Patsy grabbed her uniform shirt from its hanger. "Besides Kevin?"

"Yes." Van paused a moment, but she knew Patsy wouldn't guess. "Amelia Earhart!"

Patsy had one arm in the shirt, but she stopped and again stared at Van. "Amelia Earhart came here?"

"Yes, she's here now."

"Christ. What the hell kind of game is Jill playing now?"

"It wasn't Jill's fault. It wasn't anybody's fault, except Amelia's.

When it was time for Jill to bring me back, Amelia just grabbed onto me and came too."

"Where is she?"

"She's with Bennie at her apartment," Van said, again saying the forbidden name. Telling was hard, but lying would be worse. "Don't look at me like that. Kendra called Bennie too. I didn't know she'd be there. Well, she *wasn't* there, when I got there. She was already in 1933. But somebody had to go back and help and explain how Jill was going to bring everyone back to the present. It made most sense for me to do it."

Patsy raised her chin to button the top button of her shirt. "Of course it did." She was no longer meeting Van's eyes. "How long were you back there?"

"Only a couple of hours. And now Jill's going nuts, because Amelia won't go back. She wants to stay and find out what 1989 is like. Jill's afraid she'll change history, and that'll, you know, change the present too."

Patsy checked herself out in the mirror. She rubbed her hand over the gold bar on her sleeve that signified her rank as lieutenant. She looked satisfied with what she saw, as well she should. She looked good.

Van had encouraged Patsy to accept the first lieutenant job that opened up after she'd passed the exam, though she hadn't needed much encouragement. A female lieutenant was still a rarity at the prison, and Patsy was determined to be successful. She was lucky that

the first opening was swing shift--three in the afternoon to midnight--rather than graveyard, and Patsy had easily adjusted to the new schedule. For Van, it was not so easy.

"I don't want anything to do with it." Patsy no longer sounded angry, merely dismissive. "There's nothing good about it." She looked at Van again, finally. "I don't want you to have anything to do with it either. I know you'll make up your own mind, but..." Patsy shook her head. "I just don't want to hear about it."

"Don't you even want to meet Amelia Earhart?"

"No. If I know Jill, she's just going to fuck everything up. Maybe that's what she needs to do. If she fucks things up badly enough, maybe she'll stop playing around with that damn thing."

Patsy sighed heavily, turned, and put her arms around Van. She buried her face in Van's hair, and her badge poked Van in the shoulder. "I love you, baby. I don't want you dragged down into Jill's shit. Okay?"

Van nodded but said nothing. Patsy kissed her, grabbed her jacket and her lunch, patted Sadie, and left.

It was still light out. Van wasn't normally home when it was light out, not on a weekday anyway. Not by herself. She looked at the clock. It was early, but it felt later, since she'd spent a couple extra hours in 1933. She still had nearly ten hours to get through before Patsy came home again.

Maybe she should take a bubble bath. It was still light enough that maybe it would be okay. Yeah, she'd take a bubble bath.

She made sure Sadie was inside, locked all the doors, and checked the windows to make sure they were still locked as well. She brought the phone as close to the bathroom as its cord would allow and started the bath water.

It was too loud. There was no way she'd be able to hear anything while the water was running, not if she stayed in the bathroom. She quickly poured some bubble bath into the water and left, closing the door behind her. She had to be able to hear if anything happened.

She took a deep breath and felt brave. This would be her first bubble bath since Patsy started her swing shift. Her first bubble bath alone since she'd been held hostage in the tower. Being naked and wet in the tub made her feel too vulnerable, which made it hard to relax. But it was still light out. Maybe today it would be okay.

She listened to the bath water while she also listened for other sounds. When it sounded like the tub was nearly filled, she opened the bathroom door and checked. The bubbles had just reached the top, and the room smelled creamy and sensuous. It was perfect. She

turned the water off, propped the bathroom door to make sure it would stay open, and called Sadie in. She tossed an empty toilet paper tube on the floor. The dog grabbed it and settled on the floor to rip it to pieces. Van picked up the handset of the phone to make sure there was a dial tone. Only then, finally satisfied, did she strip off her clothes, put her hair in a pony-tail on top of her head, and step into the tub.

The water was hot, but not too hot, and silky from the bubble bath. She slid down until she was completely submerged except for her head. Her shoulders relaxed. She closed her eyes and let her hands roam over her body, from her breasts, down her stomach, to the folds between her legs that had been throbbing ever since she took Bennie's shoes off and Bennie said her name.

Everything Bennie felt about her had been in her voice when she said Van's name.

Van dropped her legs open, tucked her fingers inside, and stroked the outside of her mound with her thumb. She groaned out loud, and the dog looked up.

"Sorry Sadie," she gasped, but she didn't stop.

Sex was something else that changed when Patsy took the new shift. They hardly saw each other anymore, and when they did, one or the other was half asleep. Sex rarely happened. Since the tower, Van hardly even cared.

What was that?

Van sat up. Sadie stopped chewing and looked at Van. Van rose, climbed out of the tub, and stood dripping on the bath mat, her heart pounding.

It was probably nothing. Almost certainly it was nothing. This happened every night, after Patsy left. She was stupid to think it wouldn't happen just because it wasn't dark.

She grabbed the towel and pulled it to her chest. "Come on, Sadie."

It was probably nothing, but the problem was, she had to check. She always had to check. Telling herself it was nothing wouldn't stop her heart from rapping at her chest like a little man was in there with a hammer, trying to pound his way out. No matter how many times she told herself it was nothing, her heart would not stop its horrible racket until she checked and made sure. There never had been anything. Usually, though, she wasn't naked and wet.

She stopped first at the bedroom door. Patsy's robe was closest, so she grabbed it and pulled it around her. She kept Sadie at her side while she checked every door and every window again. She looked inside every closet, under the beds, behind each piece of furniture large enough to hide even a small child. She made her sweep from the back door to the front, keeping an eye on the stairs so that no one could sneak behind her while she

wasn't looking. Upstairs, then, just as carefully, until finally she was assured. She was alone.

She'd gotten pretty good at it. She could check the entire house now in less than ten minutes.

Her heart settled down. She returned to the bathroom and emptied the tub. She wouldn't try that again. She'd been stupid to think she could take a bath. She dressed in jeans and a sweatshirt and put on her running shoes, just in case. She wished, like she did every night, that she could drink a glass of wine to calm herself down, but they no longer kept alcohol in the house. Not since Patsy stopped drinking.

She was so tired of being scared.

Patsy had no idea Van spent her evenings like this. She'd give up her shift, if she knew, and turn in her brand new lieutenant stripes. Van couldn't let her do that. It was Van who told Patsy to take the job in the first place. Of course, that was before Van knew how fucked up she was from the tower. It wasn't until after Patsy left that first night, so excited she couldn't stop grinning, that Van started hearing noises.

Van did mention once that she was jumpy about being alone at night. Patsy suggested they get a gun. Van shook her head and didn't bring it up again. She'd heard too many stories of accidents or of gun owners having their weapons used against them. Besides, Van shook so much when she was scared, she'd never be able to hit anything, except maybe her foot.

It was just a reaction from being held hostage in the tower, and maybe even from traveling through time into 2008 before that. She'd been through a lot in the last few months, and it was bound to take a toll. She kept expecting it to stop. One day, some problem from work would grab her thoughts. She'd come home still thinking about the legal issues. She'd feed Sadie and herself and go to bed early, dream of a solution to her conundrum, and wake up pleased and refreshed, having forgotten all about being afraid.

It hadn't happened yet.

She would keep vigil tonight, like she always did, until after midnight, until right before Patsy was expected home. Then she would get into her pajamas and crawl into bed. Patsy would come in and she'd pretend to wake up.

"I'm sorry I woke you," Patsy would say, and Van would answer, "That's all right. How was your day?"

She looked at the clock. It was five-thirty. Still not quite dark. She now had seven hours to get through before Patsy came home.

She sat on the couch and turned the television on. Muted, though, so she wouldn't miss anything. She normally didn't cry about it, but today she was tired, and her feelings were raw, no doubt from traveling to 1933 and meeting Amelia Earhart.

Who was she kidding? Her feelings were raw from seeing Bennie. Today she wept, but silently.

So she wouldn't miss anything.

Chapter Ten

Bennie - 1989

"JUMP," BENNIE SAID. "Jump! Look out!"

"I'm trying." Amelia swung the controller up into the air to encourage the little plumber to jump, but her timing was off. The turtle nipped Luigi on the leg and he died. "Oh dear. I've popped off again."

Bennie howled, rolled back on the couch, and held her stomach, which ached from laughing. "I keep telling you, you don't have to swing the controller like that. It's your fingers and thumbs that control the movement, not your arms."

"And that was my last life," Amelia mourned. She handed the controller to Bennie.

"Just for this round." Bennie started her turn. She skipped the shortcuts she usually took on the first levels so she could show Amelia the tricks. "See, there's a flower hidden in this brick wall. You hit it with your head, and if you're already big, you get flower power. Then you can knock the turtles out from way back here. You can get all the bad guys. Without flower power, you have to jump on them, which is dangerous."

"It certainly is," Amelia said. "If only I could stay big."

"And in here's a hidden star. It makes you invincible, but only for a little while. It's not always worth the trouble to get it. If you already have flower power, you're pretty invincible already."

"That would be marvelous."

Bennie decided to end her turn on the third level. She was too good. If she waited to die on her own, her turn would last an hour or more and would take her to levels Amelia didn't need to know about. She dove off a tower.

"Why did you do that?" Amelia asked.

"So you can have another turn." Bennie still had two more lives. She let herself die two more times and handed the controller back to Amelia. "Here you go."

"That's very kind of you to die for me like that," Amelia said. "I'll try to make my turn last a bit longer this time."

Bennie watched. Amelia got the hang of the controller almost immediately. Bennie supposed it was all those years of flying airplanes. They had controllers too, after all. Amelia had a little more difficulty mastering the tricks of the game, which did take some getting used to.

"No, don't go down the pipe," Bennie said, but it was too late.

"Oh no, now you can't get flower power."

"I know," Amelia said, "but I can get more coins. I prefer coins. I can buy extra lives with them."

"You're going to need them," Bennie said darkly, "if you don't have flower power."

Amelia laughed. "You should be more respectful. I'm old enough to be your great-great-grandmother." Moments later, her turn over, Amelia handed the controller back. "Do you think we really do get extra lives?"

"What do you mean? In real life? Like reincarnation?"

"Like that or something similar."

"I don't know." Bennie thought a moment. "I guess not. If I believed that, I might be more careless with the one I have. I mean, if we got more than one life, we could play around with the one we're on now. We could be like Mario and Luigi and try dangerous things to see what might happen, because we'd always get another chance. Real life's not like that."

"Isn't it?" Amelia asked. "Some people would say I do live my life like that. I've already had more chances than most people ever get. I'm like a cat. I think I have nine lives. I've crashed my plane several times, and I really should have popped off on my flight across the Atlantic last year. I know I joked about it when I was driving in the snow this morning, but when I hit that storm over the Atlantic, I truly couldn't tell if I was going up or down. It was black as pitch, and it can be very disorienting flying a plane in the dark."

My altimeter broke, so I didn't know how high up I was. Then I got ice on my wings. The plane dropped for a long time. I was certain every second I was going to crash into the sea. Eventually enough ice melted and I was able to pull out of the fall, but I have no idea how close to the water I was. I may have been only a foot away. I may have been inches."

Bennie kept her eyes on the screen. She didn't want Amelia to see anything in her eyes to hint that a similar situation would occur four years in Amelia's future, and that she would not survive.

"Can I ask you a personal question?" Bennie asked.

"All right."

"How did you pee?"

"The same as you, I expect."

"No, you know what I mean. You were up there for hours, and you couldn't even move."

"Well, I don't generally tell, though you're not the first to ask. However, since you can't report it to anyone who knows me, you will be the first to get the true answer. I wear men's underwear, and I insert a rubber funnel through the fly."

Bennie grinned. "I wear men's underwear too."

After a while, they switched to Zelda.

"This is a role-playing game," Bennie explained. "You're the little guy with the sword, and the goal is to explore the island, kill the monsters, and rescue the princess. I like it better than Mario. Mario's easier to learn, but I like the challenge of Zelda."

"And you like rescuing princesses," Amelia said.

"Yeah."

"You rescued Van," Amelia said. "Twice, if I understand it correctly. Once in 2008 and again in 1974."

"Not really. That wasn't the real me in 2008," Bennie said. "It was just some future version of me. And I only tried to rescue Van in '74. She ended up rescuing herself." Bennie absently scrolled through the screens, expertly killing the bad guys, to get to the first palace. "I did rescue Hannah, though."

"How did you do that?"

"When I went back to '74," Bennie said. "That's where I met her. She was just a kid. Her step-father was messing with her, and I stopped it. Actually, I killed him." Moments passed in silence while Bennie slaughtered skeletons and bats and gumdrops. Finally a giant hand grabbed her and deposited her back at the front gate, and Bennie handed the controller to Amelia. "I'm not really sorry I killed him. He was trying to kill Hannah. But then another guy, an innocent guy, died too, because of me."

"How was it because of you?"

"They thought he killed Hannah's step-father, not me, and he died because of it." Bennie didn't generally talk about it, except to Hannah, but talking to Amelia was easy, maybe because Amelia would be returning to 1933 soon and they'd never see each other again. "Hannah says there's a reason for it all, that it's part of God's plan for me. She thinks I had to save her so that she could save me."

"Save you from what?" Amelia asked.

"Hell."

"Good heavens, you're going to hell?"

"Hannah thinks I am."

"Because you killed her step-father?"

"No, not that. It's because I'm a, well, I don't know what you call us in your time, but I'm a lesbian."

"We call you lesbians, among other things, and I gathered you were," Amelia said. "You all are, aren't you? Jill and Kendra and Van?"

"Yeah. Not Hannah, though. She thinks it's a sin. She's trying to make me give it up."

"Did you tell her to go boil her head?"

"No, how could I?" Bennie asked, though she laughed. "What if she's right? I did kill a man, and another man died because of it. There has to be a reason for that. What if it was so that Hannah could save my soul?"

"You must be very important for God to kill two men just to make you stop loving women."

"It sounds silly when you put it like that."

"It is silly."

"But don't you think there's a reason things like that happen?" Bennie asked. "Those guys couldn't have died for no reason. If I killed for no reason at all..."

"I think you've put yourself on an awfully high pedestal to think God's plans revolve around you."

Bennie stared at the television screen. Amelia's little man had died long ago, and the controller lay limp in Bennie's hand. She didn't even remember Amelia handing it back to her. "Hannah says God loves all of us more than we can imagine. She would say he does put us all on a high pedestal, me included."

"Could you stop loving women?" Amelia asked. "Could you love a man instead, if you wanted to?"

Bennie tried to imagine it, but almost immediately her chest and heart grew tight like a boa constrictor had wrapped about her body and was squeezing the life out of her. She grimaced. "I can't imagine it. Hannah prays every day that I'll stop being a lesbian, and she wants me to pray for it too. I've tried, but it's hard to pray for something you don't want. Hannah says I should pray to want to stop loving women. But it's like praying to grow a tail or turn orange or something. I don't think it can happen, and I don't really want it to."

"Then why are you praying for it?"

"In case she's right." It was a stupid reason to pray for something, and Bennie realized for the first time how futile it was. God was probably smart enough to recognize the insincerity of her prayers.

"Have you talked to Van about any of this?" Amelia asked.

"Oh, God, no. Van and I don't even talk."

Amelia's brows rose.

"I'm serious," Bennie said. "Today's the first time we've spoken since, well, since last July, except for once in October, right after she got out of the tower. But she was all doped up that time, so it doesn't count."

"Why don't you talk? It's obvious you have warm feelings for each other."

Bennie smiled. "Really?"

"Definitely. She is a lesbian, isn't she?"

"Yes, but she's with someone. They've been together over five years."

"That is a complication," Amelia said, "but I don't see why you can't at least talk to each other and be friends."

"That's what I always thought," Bennie said, "but Van's the one who made the rules. She used to flirt with me like crazy until she realized I was serious. I think it scared her. Or she scared herself, when she found out her feelings were serious too. That's when she started pushing me away."

"She wasn't pushing you away today."

"No." A wave of heat washed over Bennie. "She wasn't, was she?"

"Not at all."

"But it doesn't make any difference," Bennie said, talking herself down. "Today was an emergency. She won't come around again."

"Don't you have a say in the matter?"

"Not really. She's in a relationship. I have to respect that."

"Who said so? Hannah?"

Bennie felt herself flush. "I don't need Hannah to tell me it's wrong to break up a happy relationship."

"If it was happy, why did Van look at you like that?"

The question irritated Bennie and pleased her at the same time. It was only in the last few months that Bennie had come to realize how wrong it would be to get between Van and Patsy. It was their business to make their relationship work or to end it if it didn't, not Bennie's. Her new theories of right and wrong were still shaky enough that she didn't like them questioned, but she was pleased that Amelia had noticed how Van looked at her.

"I'm surprised people are still bound by those medieval codes of faithfulness," Amelia said. "Especially a modern lesbian like you. I believe we're meant to enjoy this life and do what makes us happy. Why do we owe anyone else more than that? When I married George, I made it very clear, the night before we married, that I would be seeking pleasure with others, and I expected him to do the same."

"And he still married you?"

Amelia gave a wry smile. "Oh, he had plenty of reasons to marry me beyond faithfulness or love."

"Like the fact that you were famous?"

"George made me famous," Amelia said. "But yes, that's why he married me. I could never have become such a celebrity if I didn't have a man attached to me. People might have thought I was a lesbian." Amelia made a shocked face.

"Just because you weren't married?" Bennie wanted to ask if the suspicions would have been correct, but she didn't. Amelia would tell her if she wanted her to know. "I didn't even realize you were married."

"What, I'm famous all these years later, and George is not? Oh, poor George."

"I shouldn't have told you that. Jill would be pissed."

Amelia glanced around the tiny apartment. "Jill's not here."

Chapter Eleven

Jill - 1989

JILL USED A meter stick to find the exact center of the door. She stepped close and touched the tip of her chin to the wood, brought her finger up to mark the spot, and used a pencil to make a dot. She'd checked just this morning. Her chin was even with Kendra's eyes. She pounded a nail into the dot, hung the sign on it, and stepped back to see the effect.

DO NOT DISTURB.

Jill smiled.

Kendra lived with her now. Jill wasn't sure exactly how that happened. They never even talked about it. Or maybe they did. Truth was sometimes when Kendra talked, Jill didn't listen.

It seemed to Jill that Kendra was just there more than she wasn't, and one day she stopped leaving. Jill didn't even think about it until the boys came over one Friday after school and didn't leave until Sunday night. There was only one bedroom in the house, and even Jill couldn't fail to notice the sleeping bags spread out on the living room floor all weekend.

"Visitation," Kendra called it, and then she'd asked if it would be possible to drywall the basement and put a bedroom down there.

Jill didn't mind, really. She loved having Kendra around, and she didn't even mind the boys staying at the house. They were likable enough kids. Messy and loud, but that bothered Kendra a whole lot more than it bothered Jill.

The shop, though? The shop was a different story. The shop was Jill's private laboratory and her sanctuary. It was supposed to be, anyhow. Somehow lately it had become Grand Central Station.

Jill knew she couldn't conduct her experiments by herself. She could figure out a way to send herself into the past easily enough, but she couldn't figure out how to bring herself back without help. She needed Kendra for that. But that didn't mean Kendra should be allowed to come into the shop any time she liked, especially when the boys were around.

Jill had a particular need for peace and quiet right then. She had to figure out what to do about Amelia. Before Jill met her, she'd really only had a vague theory that she was Amelia Earhart reincarnated. She told Kendra she'd been doing experiments with reincarnation, but it wasn't technically true. She'd made some preliminary plans for experiments, which was why she wanted to meet Amelia in the first place. If, after meeting her, she still felt she was Amelia reincarnated, then she would direct her experiments toward proving it.

The problem was, the only experiment she could do that would definitively prove she was Amelia reincarnated would be to prevent Amelia from dying in 1937. Jill could simply not send Amelia back to 1933. She could keep her safe and alive for the next four and half years, and if, after that much time had passed, Amelia and Jill both remained alive, Jill would know that her theory was false. If her theory was true, though, and Amelia didn't die... Jill didn't know what would happen then, except that she wouldn't be around to see it. Amelia wouldn't be reincarnated until later, when she did finally die. Jill either would be born later, or she would be reincarnated from someone else, or perhaps she wouldn't be born at all. It would defeat the purpose of the experiment if Jill weren't around to see the results.

Then there was the problem Kendra had picked up on. If Jill weren't around to create RIP, how could Amelia come forward in the first place? That might cause Amelia to remain in 1933, attempt her flight around the world in '37, and disappear just in time for Jill to be conceived. Or someone else might invent RIP. Jill was not normally a jealous person, but the idea of someone else inventing RIP bothered her more than the idea of someone else usurping her life.

"What the hell is this?"

Jill looked up from RIP's engine. Kendra stood before her with the DO NOT DISTURB sign in her hand.

"Oh, it's, a, something I thought...you know, after what happened yesterday, with the boys..."

"The boys are at school." Kendra tossed the sign onto the counter beside the coffee maker. "And then they're going to their dad's. You can put your DO NOT DISTURB sign away 'til Friday. Unless you meant me?"

When they first started dating, Jill might have said yes. She was trainable, though, and had finally learned that when Kendra said something in that innocent voice, it was a trap.

Jill thought carefully. "No, not you," she said. "You're my partner."

"That's right. Did you call in to work?"

"Yes."

"Good." Kendra moved closer and stood right in front of Jill, so that her breasts brushed the front of Jill's shirt. "Because I fully intend to disturb you."

For the first time, Jill noticed what Kendra was wearing. "What's this?" Jill touched the top of Kendra's blouse. It was black lace, cut low and see-through, and beneath it she wore a thin silky white camisole.

Kendra caught her breath and arched her back so that her chest nudged Jill's fingers. Jill took the hint. She let her fingers drape over Kendra's breast, felt the nipple grow erect beneath her thumb, and remembered one of the reasons it was so nice having Kendra around.

"What is this?" Jill bent and nuzzled the nipple through two layers of barely there cloth.

She felt Kendra's hands slip inside the back of her jeans. Jill's pants were always loose, so there was plenty of room. The tips of Kendra's fingers slid inside the band of Jill's underpants.

Jill wrapped her arms around Kendra and cupped her backside. She leaned back against the side of RIP, pushed her knee between Kendra's legs, and pulled her closer, nearly lifting Kendra off the ground with her thigh.

Kendra threw her head back and thrust her crotch forward. "Oh, yeah," Kendra said. Her creamy breasts were nearly bare, and they were plumped out right in front of Jill's face.

Jill dropped her head, nestled her face, and inhaled the delicious aroma of Kendra's breasts.

The door burst open, and Bennie and Amelia barged in, their faces flushed and laughing.

Kendra and Jill jumped apart, but not quickly enough.

"Oh ho!" Bennie said. "We'll come back later." She turned to leave.

"No." Jill tugged her jeans up. She'd been waiting all morning for Amelia to arrive. She couldn't let her slip away now. "Don't go. We're finished, right Kendra?"

"Honey, we never even got started," Kendra said, adjusting her own clothing. "Maybe you ought to keep that sign handy after all."

Jill noticed Bennie and Amelia both carried motorcycle helmets. "Did you ride your motorcycle?"

"Yeah. It's still a little cold for it," Bennie said, "but Amelia might never get another chance."

"In my time, driving a motorcycle is worse for women than flying an airplane," Amelia said. "I took a ride in a sidecar once and nearly caused a scandal. Thank heaven they decided I was merely plucky and forgave me."

"She did great," Bennie said. "I just showed her once, and she took off."

"You actually drove it?" Jill asked Amelia.

Amelia grinned and nodded. "It was glorious."

Jill felt betrayed. She rounded on Bennie. "You were supposed to keep her safe. I never would have let her go with you if I knew you'd risk her life like that."

"Let me go with her?" Amelia asked.

Bennie frowned. "She was perfectly safe. Jesus, Jill, we didn't do wheelies or join a biker gang or anything."

"Though we may tomorrow," Amelia said.

"She didn't mean it." Kendra moved close to Jill and gave her stern look. "Jill knows she doesn't get to tell you what to do, right honey? She's just nervous about her experiment turning out wrong."

Jill nodded. She was definitely nervous. She was used to controlling the variables in her experiments, but Amelia was a variable she seemed to have no control over whatsoever. It was making her crazy. "I'm sorry," she said.

"We rode out to the airport," Bennie said. "I never knew there was so much to see out there. I kind of took that place for granted."

"We never got into a plane, though," Amelia said. "They wouldn't let us, without buying a ticket. Bennie taught me how to drive her car, too."

"Did you play Nintendo?" Jill asked.

"Are you kidding?" Bennie asked. "She's a Nintendo savant. She stayed up nearly all night playing Zelda, and she saved the princess."

"Okay, so you've seen planes and you've played Nintendo." Jill counted out two fingers. "Did you find out what women do in 1989? I'm a scientist, and Kendra sells make-up. Bennie's a traffic flagger, and Van's a lawyer."

"Substitute traffic flagger," Bennie said, "but I'm going to be an engineer."

"And I haven't sold make up since Christmas," Kendra said. "Now stop it, Jill. She can't go back to '33 right now. Look, she's not dressed for it."

Amelia was wearing a pair of jeans and a leather jacket, both loose on her. They must be Bennie's. Jill had a feeling her own clothes would fit Amelia perfectly.

"Where's your coat?" Jill asked. "Where are your boots?"

"They're at Bennie's," Amelia said.

"Did you really save the princess?" Kendra asked.

"Yes," Amelia said, "but now my thumbs are sore."

"Oh, I know," Kendra said. "I worry about the boys. Our future generations are going to have huge heads and gigantic thumbs, but almost no bodies." Kendra had her hands clasped together in a way that pushed her breasts up and outward, and Jill could swear Amelia noticed.

"That would be a shame," Amelia said. "Don't people play sports anymore?"

"Sure," Bennie said. "I'm on a softball team, and I play rec basketball in the winter."

"I love basketball," Amelia said. "I played it a bit in high school, and I coached it too, when I was a social worker. Chinese girls. I didn't speak Chinese, and most of them didn't speak English. It was loads of fun."

"I think the game's changed since then," Bennie said. "You only played half court, didn't you?"

"Half court? That would have been keen. When I played in high school, our court was divided into thirds, and we only got to use half of that. If we left our corner, we were declared foul."

"Oh my God," Bennie said. "You should see it now. It's too bad you can't stay longer. I'd take you to see a game."

"Why don't you?" Amelia asked.

"No," Jill said. "There's no time. You have to go back to 1933."

"Not yet," Kendra said. "Don't be such a party-pooper."

"Unfortunately, there aren't any games right now," Bennie said. "The season's pretty much over, except for the Final Four."

"You said you'd go back after you saw planes and learned about women and played Nintendo," Jill said, "and now you've done all those things. It's time to go back."

"You're twisting my words a bit," Amelia said. "I said after I'd done those things, I might be ready to go back. Anyway, I haven't learned enough about women yet. I have a feeling I might learn a bit more tonight."

"We're going to Ginger's," Bennie said. "It's trivia night."

Amelia grinned. "Imagine that. Lesbians and alcohol in one place, and they're both legal. In 1933, they're both illegal. There's some trivia for you."

"How fun," Kendra said. "Let's go too, honey. We haven't been to Ginger's in forever."

It was a mistake to let Amelia spend the night with Bennie, Jill thought. Bennie wasn't responsible enough, and they'd obviously had too much fun. She should have made Amelia go stay with Hannah, where she'd have been bored and miserable and chomping at the bit to go back home. But if Amelia was going to stay in '89 another night, Jill decided she'd better stick by her side. "All right," she said. "We'll go to Ginger's."

"Great," Kendra said. "I'm calling Van."

"What an excellent idea," Amelia said.

Chapter Twelve

Bennie - 1989

WHILE AMELIA SHOWERED, Bennie drove to Hannah's apartment. It was movie night, and Bennie wanted to break the news to them in person that she wouldn't be joining them.

Ben opened the door. He rolled his eyes when he saw Bennie. "She wants to go see *Land Before Time*," he announced.

"Let her in before you hit her with your whining," Hannah said.

Ben stepped back and let Bennie enter. Hannah stood at the ironing board, which she'd set up in the living room. The air smelled like starch.

"I want to go see *Die Hard*," Ben said. "All the kids in my class have seen it."

"If all the kids in your class jumped off a bridge, would you do it too?" Hannah draped a crisp white blouse over a plastic hanger, hung it from a hook on the bathroom door, and grabbed another blouse from the laundry basket.

"Probably," Ben said. "Tell her, Bennie. *Land Before Time* is a baby movie."

Bennie raised her hands in surrender and kept her mouth shut. She'd picked the show for movie night once, and it had been a fiasco. How was she to know *Who Framed Roger Rabbit?* wasn't a kid's show? It was a cartoon. It had a bunny. It turned out to be a pretty funny show, actually. Ben nearly peed his pants, he'd laughed so hard, and so did Bennie, for that matter, but when Hannah got over her shock, she dragged them out of the theater and they didn't get to see the end.

"You liked *An American Tale*," Hannah said.

"Mom, I was eleven."

"Well, you're still only thirteen. No R movies 'til you're seventeen."

"That's without parents," Ben argued. "You and Bennie will be with me. Even babies can get in R rated movies with their parents."

It was time for Bennie to speak. "Um, actually, I can't go with you tonight." They both looked at her.

"Oh?" Hannah asked.

"No, I promised Amelia I'd take her to, uh..." Bennie glanced at Ben. Hannah wouldn't want Bennie talking about going to a bar in front of him. She liked to preserve Ben's

impression of the world as a place where no one drank or smoked or swore or had sex outside of marriage. Or was gay.

"I see." Hannah compressed her lips and picked up the empty laundry basket. "I have one more load down there. Don't touch the iron. I'll be right back." She slipped out the door and headed for the basement.

She would bring the laundry back, fold it, and finish the ironing. Then she'd put everything away, hanging like clothes with like clothes, slacks and skirts and blouses organized by color and length. Another woman might have stopped working on the laundry when a friend stopped by, let the laundry wait, but not Hannah. Her world was organized and orderly, neatly run and scheduled. Tuesday was laundry day, and Tuesday night was movie night. Bennie was welcome to join them, as long as she fit herself into Hannah's plans, but a suggestion to see a movie on another night would not be welcome.

Bennie understood. Being a parent and a grown-up was thrown at Hannah when she was too young. At the age of fourteen, she had a baby and was hit with too many things she couldn't control, too many things she couldn't handle, and she'd reacted by taking control of everything she possibly could. She'd adapted in order to survive and raise her son, and the church had helped her. Ben had turned into a great kid, but Hannah hadn't managed that by being soft. Motherhood, to her, was a battle, and she'd armed herself for it with a Bible and a thick shell of righteousness that she had no intention of shedding. She was grown now and had a handle on life, but in many ways it was too late. Change, now, terrified her.

Ben dropped into an easy chair, flung a leg over the arm, and pulled on his bangs, something he did when he was anxious. He eyed Bennie. She thought he was still thinking about Die Hard and was surprised when he spoke. "Do you think time travel is wrong?"

"Wrong? No." Bennie thought. "Well, not time travel itself, anyway. I think it can be used in a way that's wrong."

"What do you mean?"

"Well, sometimes things aren't wrong in and of themselves, but people use them to do wrong things." She sat on the couch across from Ben and tried to think of an example that was safe to share, something benign and free of what Hannah would consider sinful behavior. "Like hunting," she said. "If someone hunts to get food for his family, that's not wrong, is it?"

Ben shook his head.

"But if someone goes hunting just to go out and kill as many animals as he can, for the fun of it, I think that's wrong."

"Me too," Ben said. He tugged at his bangs some more. "You know, there's nothing in the Bible about time travel."

"No, I guess there wouldn't be. I don't think it existed back then."

"But the Bible is the word of God. Wouldn't God know about time travel?"

"Uh..." Bennie was in over her head. Ben had never spoken to her about religion before. She spoke freely about her beliefs, or the lack of them, with Hannah, who saw herself as Bennie's spiritual adviser, but she didn't think Hannah would want Bennie to share her doubts with Ben. She had to say something, though. "You know the Bible was written by men, right? Even if God knew about time travel, that doesn't mean the men who wrote the Bible did."

Ben frowned. "But they wrote what God told them to. It's God's words in the Bible, isn't it?"

"You're asking the wrong person," Bennie said. "You should ask your mom. She knows more about this sort of thing than I do."

"Mom thinks time travel's wrong."

Bennie bit her tongue. It was because of time travel that Bennie was able to save Hannah's life fourteen years ago. Time travel made it possible for Ben to be born. But it wasn't Bennie's place to tell Ben those stories. "Well, there's wrong and there's wrong," she finally said. "Your mom may not like time travel, but that doesn't make it a sin or anything." Ben raised his brows like Bennie had said something surprising, and she laughed. "What? Do you think your mom decides what's a sin or not?"

Ben grinned. "No, I know she doesn't, but I didn't think you knew it."

Bennie's jaw dropped, but before she could grasp the implications of what Ben said, she heard Hannah coming up the stairs.

Ben resumed pulling his bangs, and when Hannah walked in, he said, "If anybody sees me going into *Land Before Time* I'll be the worst laughing stock of the whole eighth grade."

"If someone sees you there," Hannah said, dropping the basket beside the ironing board, "that means they went to see the movie too."

"No it doesn't, Mom," Ben said, his voice filled with teenaged condescension. "There's three screens there, you know."

"Don't use that tone with me, young man, or we'll go nowhere tonight."

"Fine. I don't want to go to that stupid movie anyway."

"And you can take that attitude to your room, too."

"Fine!" He stomped to his room and shut the door firmly, just shy of slamming it, which he must have known was crossing a line.

Bennie blinked at the rapid switch from sullen teen to religious philosopher to sullen teen again.

Hannah sighed and started ironing a pair of slacks. "Sorry," she said. "He's thirteen."

"Yeah. They don't make many movies for kids his age," Bennie said, as if that's all the argument had been about.

"You couldn't have gone anyway, right?" Hannah said. "Where are you taking Amelia?"

"To Ginger's."

Hannah winced. Bennie had never hidden anything from Hannah, so Hannah knew all about Ginger's. "Does she know it's a..."

"She knows," Bennie said. "She doesn't care. She just wants to see what it's like."

"Who's going?"

"Me, Amelia, Kendra, Jill. Maybe Van."

Hannah shook her head, as if her worst expectations had been confirmed, and put down the iron. She gave Bennie a look that was serious and direct. "Don't go, Bennie."

"I have to. I promised Amelia."

"Let Kendra and Jill take her."

"But I--"

"I know," Hannah said. "You want to go. But don't you see, Bennie, that's what a temptation is? It wouldn't be temptation if it wasn't something you wanted to do. You have to resist it."

"Why? What's so wrong about taking Amelia to check out a bar?"

"It's not just taking Amelia to a bar, and you know it. You know as well as I do what the real temptation will be tonight." Hannah's gaze was so direct and true that Bennie had to look away.

"I know."

"You were doing so well, until you saw her yesterday."

Irritation flared. "Why is it so bad? It doesn't feel wrong. You aren't the one who decides if something is a sin." Even Ben knew that.

"It's in the Bible."

"The Bible doesn't know everything."

Hannah sighed. It was something they could never agree on. "Bennie, I know you don't believe everything I believe. I know you have to make your own way to God, but you've been doing it. These last few months you've grown so much." She turned off the iron and abandoned her task to sit in the chair Ben had vacated. She leaned forward with her elbows on her knees and spoke earnestly. "You told me once that as long as you weren't around Van, you could resist her. You have resisted her--you've resisted all women--for the last five months, and you've become a stronger and gentler and more thoughtful woman because of it. So why are you deliberately putting yourself in the path of your worst temptation now?"

Bennie had a vision in her head of a cartoon devil on her left shoulder and a cartoon angel on her right. The devil looked like Amelia and the angel was Hannah, and each was urging her in different directions. Go to Van. Stay away from Van. Go to her. Stay away!

But there was a third vision in Bennie's head standing directly in front of her, and that vision was Van. The thought of Van showing up alone at Ginger's tonight and Bennie not being there to greet her tore at Bennie worse than anything Amelia or Hannah could say.

Hannah was right. Van was Bennie's worst temptation, and Bennie had no power to resist her.

Chapter Thirteen

Van - 1989

VAN HAD NOT been to a bar since...well, since 2008, when she went with Bennie. The older Bennie. The Bennie that didn't exist. When she returned from 2008 last July, Patsy had stopped drinking, and Van stopped as well in order to make it easier for her, though Patsy hadn't asked her to. They hadn't been to a bar since.

There was no reason Van couldn't go out with friends for a drink now and then in the evening, now that Patsy worked the swing shift. Except by the time Patsy got on that shift, Van's friends had started hanging out with Bennie. That was something Van couldn't do. She didn't dare.

Bennie would be at Ginger's tonight, though, along with Amelia Earhart. Van couldn't see passing up a chance to hang out with Amelia a bit before she had to go back to 1933. Yeah, that's why she was going. She'd kick herself forever if she didn't go to the bar tonight, to see Amelia.

Who the hell did she think she was fooling? Amelia could be on the moon, for all Van cared. She wanted to see Bennie.

Van had been strong for eight months, since last July when she returned from 2008. Even after what happened in the tower, she was strong. She'd done everything she could to keep Bennie out of her life and Patsy in it, but she wasn't feeling very strong anymore. Something had changed in her. She needed to see Bennie. God bless Kendra. Somehow she had picked up on Van's need and invited her to join them tonight.

The only parking spot available was a parallel one, and it was right in front of Ginger's. Shit. Van had successfully parallel parked on the first try only once in her life and that was during her driver's license exam. She'd always been lucky on tests. Since that one time, though, she only managed to wedge her car into curb spots by jockeying back and forth and back and forth, and that's what she had to do this time. It flustered her, and she was already nervous. She imagined Bennie standing in the doorway of Ginger's watching her, and she felt like a fool. When she finally emerged from the car, though, no one was around except for a couple of drunk baby dykes making out in front of the door.

"Excuse me," she said.

The baby dykes broke apart, and the little butch opened the door for her with a gallant bow.

The room was dark and loud and smoky. There was no band, only a deejay, so there was no cover charge. Van stood alone just inside the door so her eyes could adjust. The place was busy for a Tuesday night. She'd heard trivia night was popular. Winning answers earned free drinks and appetizers. A group of women in office wear sat at one table, college girls at another, and several small tables were occupied with two or three women of various ages.

She felt someone looking at her. She turned her head and met Bennie's eyes. She felt a jolt in her gut, like she'd been lifted by an elevator.

Bennie smiled, rose, and adjusted the chairs around the table to make room for one more. Amelia, Jill, and Kendra were already seated at the square table, which was only made for four. They hadn't really expected her to show up, Van realized.

"Van!" Kendra hollered. "Is that really you? You got off your leash?"

"Sit here." Bennie tapped the back of her chair, and Van sat. Jill was on her right, Amelia on her left, and Kendra across from her. "Be right back," Bennie said.

So. Van was sitting at a table in a bar with her friends, something she had done dozens of times before, but never had her heart raced like this. Guilt, excitement, fear, and a measure of relief at being out with people instead of home alone listening for noises. It had been a long time.

Amelia leaned forward. "I'm glad you decided to come out tonight."

"Thanks. I wanted to hang with you some before you have to go back. Is that a Bloody Mary?"

"No, it's just tomato juice," Amelia said. "I don't drink alcohol, usually. It's still illegal when I come from."

"Isn't it funny how she says to-mah-to?" Kendra asked. "She sounds like Katharine Hepburn."

Kendra was working on a tall blue drink with a chunk of pineapple skewered on a sword. Van had a feeling it wasn't her first. Jill drank water and looked sulky.

"No, I don't," Amelia said. "Katharine Hepburn sounds like me. I'm older, and besides, she was playing me, really, in that awful movie George made."

"What movie is that?" Kendra asked.

"*Christopher Strong*," Amelia said. "It's not been released yet, but they let me see it at an early screening. It was not very flattering."

"I think Katharine Hepburn is beautiful," Van said.

"She is beautiful," Amelia said. "It's the story I object to."

"Who's George?" Van asked.

"My husband. He produces Hollywood films, now and again, among other things."

Kendra plunked her glass on the table. "You're married?"

"Yes." Amelia laughed. "You didn't know either? Oh, poor George."

"I've never even heard of that movie," Kendra said. "I thought I'd seen all of Kate's movies."

"I've seen it," Jill said. "I've seen everything made about Amelia Earhart."

"It wasn't really about me," Amelia said. "The main character flew around the world and got pregnant and died young, and I haven't done any of those things."

Bennie returned and placed two martini glasses with pink liquid in them on the table. She leaned over to a nearby table. "You using this? Thanks." She dragged the chair over and wedged it in the corner between Van and Amelia. She slid one of the pink drinks in front of Van.

"Thank you," Van said. "What is it?"

"It's a Mary Pickford," Bennie said. "Sort of. The bartender doesn't know how to make one, so we're guessing." She lifted her glass to Van, smiled, and said, "To your coming out."

Van touched the rim of her glass to Bennie's and took a sip. "It's good. Rum and pineapple, I think?"

"And grenadine," Bennie said. "It's sweeter than the one I had at the speakeasy, and not as strong."

Van smiled. "Yeah, you were pretty lit up when you came out of there."

"She shouldn't have been in there at all," Jill said, scowling. "That money was for emergencies."

"I said I'll pay you back," Bennie said. "I just need to find some silver dollars."

"Those Morgan's cost ten dollars each," Jill said.

Bennie choked on her Mary Pickford. "Holy shit!"

"I had to go all over town to find them," Kendra said.

"Perhaps you shouldn't have bought that girl a drink at the speakeasy," Amelia said.

"What?" Van stared at Bennie. "You bought a girl a drink, while Amelia and I were out there searching for Kevin?"

"Through a blizzard," Amelia added as poignantly as Katharine Hepburn ever could.

Bennie shot Van a grin that was half embarrassed, half proud, and shrugged. "I'm a sucker for a pretty girl."

Van sipped her Mary Pickford. The drink went down very easily.

"It was like I was in a movie," Bennie added. "She came on to me in this flapper dress. I felt like I was Jay Gatsby or something. I had to buy her a drink."

"I didn't realize you were such an easy touch," Van said.

"Well, you weren't there," Bennie said.

"Attention lezzies!" the deejay called from a microphone. "Er, I mean ladies! Listen up. It's time for the next trivia question. Listen up if you want a chance to win a gigantic plate of nachos for your table. Are you ready?"

"Yes!" the crowd shouted.

"Here's the first question. Shout the answer if you know it. First table I hear with the right answer wins the nachos. Ready? How did the Unsinkable Molly Brown get her nickname?"

"Titanic!" shrieked an office woman in a black and white striped dress. "She was on the Titanic, and she didn't die."

"And we have a winner! Nachos for the zebra lezzy. Stay tuned for the next trivia question in thirty minutes. Enjoy your dancing, lezzies. I mean ladies!"

Van noticed her drink was empty, and almost simultaneously Bennie rose and left the table. It took her a moment to realize Bennie was buying her another drink. She jumped up and followed Bennie to the bar.

"This round's on me," Van said.

Bennie looked surprised to see Van at her elbow. "No, I'll get them."

"You can't afford it." Van pulled her credit card from her pocket. "Not with that huge speakeasy bill you owe Jill."

Bennie smiled but pushed Van's credit card away. "I want to buy your drink, Van."

"I know," Van said, "but I can't let you. It would be too much like...a date."

They exchanged a look. Bennie nodded and put her wallet away, and Van relaxed. When the bartender arrived, Bennie asked for a beer, but Van ordered another Mary Pickford and another round of drinks for Kendra and Amelia. "And a large plate of nachos," she added.

The bartender grinned. "Works every time."

They carried the drinks back to the table.

"Bless your souls," Kendra said, reaching for her drink. "I was starting to feel sober."

A woman passed their table, paused, and pointed at Amelia. "Hey, you look like someone famous," she said. "Who is it?"

Amelia gave a small smile. "Amelia Earhart?"

Jill groaned and dropped her forehead to the table.

"That's it," the woman said. "You look just like her. Do people tell you that?"

"Frequently," Amelia said.

The woman continued on her way, apparently contented. Jill raised her head and dropped it to the table again. "This night is going to kill me."

Kendra patted her on the back of the head. "You should drink something besides water, honey. It'll make you less nervous. Here." She nudged Jill's hand with her drink.

Jill raised her head. She looked resigned. She took Kendra's drink and sipped.

"Is Hannah not coming tonight?" Van asked.

Kendra choked and spit a mouthful of blue ice back into her glass. "Her? She'd never be caught dead in a place like this. We're just lucky she let Bennie come."

"Hey," Bennie said.

"Isn't Hannah a lesbian?" Van asked. "I thought you and she had a thing."

"Me and Hannah?" Bennie looked shocked. "Oh, God, no! No, Van, no. No. No."

"Is that a no?" Kendra asked.

"It's a no," Bennie said, seeming to calm down. "But Hannah's all right. She's just got some religious stuff that gets in her way sometimes, that's all."

The song changed, and Pat Benetar's "Hit Me With Your Best Shot" came on.

"Hey." Van turned to Bennie. "We used to play this on your Wii."

"On my what?" Bennie asked.

Van bit her lip. Her second drink was stronger than her first. It was already making her lips tingle and her tongue loose. "Oh, it's just a game you had in 2008. Pretend guitar. It was fun."

"Do you want to dance?"

"Uh..."

"Since this isn't a date or anything, there can't be any harm in just dancing, right?"

Still, Van hesitated.

"I mean, it is our song," Bennie added, "from 2008."

Van laughed. "All right, then. Since it's not a date."

They danced. They didn't touch, but it seemed to Van she could feel Bennie's body anyway. She'd made love to Bennie in 2008. Bennie didn't know about it, but it was still her body, and Van remembered the way it felt, the way it moved, the way it smelled. Every jerk of Bennie's shoulders, every sway of her hips, made Van's pulse thrum in response.

The song ended and they returned to the table without a word. Van sat and gulped her drink. Before Bennie could sit, though, one of the college girls approached and grabbed her arm. "Bennie, dance with me."

Bennie glanced at Van, and Van waved her away. "Go, dance," she said. "You have a reputation to uphold." Bennie grinned and followed the girl to the dance floor. Van ordered another round of drinks.

By the time Bennie returned to the table, Van and Kendra had plaited each other's hair into loose braids over their ears and were waving their pink and blue drinks in the air as they sang, "We are Viking women, we drink lots of beer." They laughed until they cried at the joke that they couldn't explain but knew somehow was at Hannah's expense.

From there, the evening became a series of episodes that Van remembered, though their sequence was fuzzy.

"You're a good dancer," she recalled telling Amelia as they danced together.

"All pilots are good dancers," Amelia said. "We dance with the air from our cockpits. Dancing on land is a cinch."

"Lezzies!" Van heard the deejay say later on. "Why was Joan of Arc burned at the stake?"

"She wanted barbecued ribs," someone called out, and the crowd laughed.

Jill jumped up and shouted over the laughter, "She was burned for heresy because she was Catholic and led the French army against the English in 1431," and she won a free drink.

Van remembered at one point leaning forward with her elbows on the table having an earnest, half-shouted, conversation with Amelia about fidelity.

"Do what you want to do," Amelia said. "You have to do what makes you happy. No one has the right to ask you to continue in unhappiness, least of all someone who cares for you. If someone asks that of you, that person doesn't really care, and you must simply refuse."

Kendra taught Amelia some moves from *Dirty Dancing*, while Jill slumped in her chair and watched gloomily. "Ask her to dance," Van suggested, but Jill shook her head and sucked on Kendra's drink.

And always there was Bennie, looking at Van, watching her, smiling at her, shaking her head and laughing at her. Every time Van looked at Bennie, Bennie was looking at her, making Van's nerves vibrate like violin strings.

They slow danced. "Every Breath You Take" by the Police accompanied them, and Van was aware of every breath of Bennie's mingling with her own. The musky smell of Bennie's sweat reminded Van of the first time they made love. Bennie's arms were strong and soft around her. Through their damp shirts she felt Bennie's heart beat as well as her own, and she couldn't tell which beat was whose. When the song ended, Van was surprised at how easily their bodies separated, so sure was she that they had become one.

Another trivia question was called out. "Lezzies! What was Amelia Earhart trying to do when she disappeared in 1937?"

"Land her plane," shouted someone in the crowd amid more laughter.

They never heard the real answer because it was drowned out by Jill's anguished cry. "Nooooo!"

In a stark moment of sobriety, Van saw Amelia's face turn white and Jill's turn red and teary.

"I'm so sorry," Jill said. "I never should have let you come."

"There you go again," Amelia said, "thinking you can let me do things."

"Are you all right?" Bennie asked.

"Certainly," Amelia said. "But perhaps we can leave now?"

"Yes," Kendra said, "let's get the hell out of here." Everyone at the table rose.

Van stared at Amelia and then around the bar at the laughing crowd. Her thoughts were muddled with drink and Bennie, but she understood well enough the horror of what

Amelia had just heard. No one should know her fate. Van knew that better than anyone, after her own trip into the future.

"I need to drive Van home," Bennie told Amelia. "Do you think..."

Amelia held her hand out for the keys to the bug. "I'll follow you."

"You sure you're okay?"

"Of course."

"Bring her over first thing tomorrow," Jill said, her eyes still teary. "I need to send her back."

"Right after breakfast," Bennie said.

Chapter Fourteen

Bennie - 1989

BENNIE GLANCED IN the rearview mirror frequently. For all Amelia's talk about not being afraid to "pop off," she'd not been pleased to learn that she disappeared in 1937. She hadn't seemed as upset as Jill had, but it did bother her, Bennie could tell. She was reassured every time she saw the bug still behind her. She probably shouldn't have let Amelia drive it by herself.

But Bennie had precious cargo to get safely home. She looked sideways at Van, who stared nearly unblinking through the Honda's windshield into the night. Bennie had never seen Van like she'd been that evening. She'd started out all uptight and nervous, but with every drink she became more relaxed, looser and sexier, until by the end of the night she had no trouble slipping into Bennie's arms as if she belonged there. It was the alcohol that let her act that way, of course, but the feelings were real. Bennie felt them too strongly to doubt it. Van loved her.

Bennie's gut glowed with warmth when she thought about it. She'd loved Van, longed for her, and been denied her for so long, it was like a miracle to find out now that she was not wrong. Van did love her. But what did that mean for them? Would it make a difference in their lives? Would Van let it?

"You know what Amelia said to me?" Van asked suddenly.

"What?"

"She said do what you want to do," Van said. "She said do what makes you happy, even if it hurts other people."

"Yeah," Bennie said. "She said something like that to me too."

She didn't pretend not to know what Van was talking about. They both knew what they wanted to do, though the details weren't clear. Have an affair? It would be the easiest thing in the world to do, with Patsy's new schedule keeping her busy five nights a week, but Van might not want to do it. Not that long ago, Bennie would have pressed her advantage on a night like this, and tried to talk her into it. Amelia would say she had every right to do so.

"Amelia says other people don't have the right to ask you to be unhappy," Van said.

Bennie nodded. What Amelia said sounded so reasonable.

"I can't tell if she's wise or stupid," Van said.

Bennie laughed. "Me either." She grasped Van's hand and felt Van's fingers wrap around hers. The pleasure the simple gesture gave her was intense, but would it be enough, Bennie wondered, if it was all she ever got?

"You think she'll be all right?" Van asked.

"Sure," Bennie said, though she wasn't sure at all. "She's got a lot of courage. It'll take more than death to scare Amelia Earhart."

Bennie pulled off the highway onto a paved two-lane road. Shortly after that she turned onto a dirt road carved through tall pines, and finally onto Van's gravel driveway. Van's house was only thirty minutes from the city, but it felt like they were in the middle of a forest.

Bennie let go of Van's hand and turned off the engine. Amelia drove up behind her and stopped the bug. Its headlights lit the interior of the Honda. A moment later, in what seemed a courteous afterthought, the bug's headlights went out.

Bennie gave a soft laugh. "Thanks, Amelia." She handed the keys to Van, but Van didn't move to take them. "Van?" Bennie opened her car door so she could see Van's face.

Van stared wide-eyed at the house as if it were on fire. Bennie looked over her shoulder, half expecting to see Patsy emerge from the door, but the house was dark.

"Van?" Bennie touched Van's cheek. "Are you all right?"

"Yes, I'm fine," Van said, but automatically, like she was talking to a bank teller. Then she blinked and looked at Bennie. "Will you come in with me? Just for a minute, while I check it out?"

"Of course," Bennie said. She should have offered. She'd brought enough girls home late at night to know that lots of them were skittish about going into an empty house alone. She'd never thought of Van as one of those girls, but when it came right down to it, Bennie didn't really know Van very well.

They got out of the car. Bennie walked back to the bug to tell Amelia she was going to see Van in. "I'll be right out," Bennie said.

"Of course you will," Amelia said, but not as if she believed it.

Bennie joined Van at the back door. A dog barked inside. "Hush, Sadie," Van said. "It's only me."

Bennie unlocked the door, opened it, and walked in first, so she would be the one to confront the imaginary bad guy. She flipped on the light switch. They were in the kitchen, which was empty of intruders. Bennie moved to check out the living room, but Van put her hand on Bennie's arm.

"Wait," Van said. "I do this first." She opened the door to the pantry, which was nothing but a closet with shelves, far too small to hide a person. She closed the door, turned, opened the cabinet doors under the sink, bent down and checked the space, closed the doors, then reached over the sink to check that the latch on the window was secure. Her movements were graceful and smooth for someone who'd had so many Mary Pickfords, and Bennie had the feeling Van had done this a thousand times.

"The bathroom next." Van opened a door just to the left of the kitchen, checked behind the shower curtain and underneath the sink, peeked behind the door, checked the window latch, and stepped out, closing the door behind her.

"Nobody could fit under that sink," Bennie said.

"I know." Van flipped on the hall light, checked the linen closet, and moved into the living room. She grabbed a broom that was tucked behind the door, scanned the room, peeked beneath the coffee table, and poked the broom handle behind the entertainment center and the couch.

Bennie watched. This was nothing like the giggling tipsy girls who normally asked Bennie to check out their homes for burglars. This was bizarre.

"What are you looking for, Van?"

Van shrugged. She used the broom handle to flip the curtains out from the windows to make sure nothing was behind them, and turned to face Bennie. Her hair was a rosy halo down to her shoulders, her cheeks were flushed, and her eyes glittered. She looked beautiful and miserable and scared. "I know it's crazy," Van said. "I just can't help it. I have to check all the hiding places. I can do it in less than ten minutes. I tried skipping the little places, like under the sink, but the problem is I just keep thinking about them. I can't stop thinking about them until I check. But once I've checked everything, then I'm all right and I can relax. I don't have to check more than once a night, unless I hear noises."

"You do this every night?"

Van nodded. Her eyes flitted to the dining room and Bennie could tell she was itching to continue her search.

"How long have you been doing this?"

"Since Patsy started her night shift."

Bennie pieced together what she'd heard of Patsy's promotion. "Since the tower?"

Van bit her lip.

Fuck. Bennie didn't know everything that happened to Van in the tower, but she'd been in there nearly two days with the two prisoners. It was no surprise that she was traumatized by it, but it ripped Bennie's heart to think that Van still lived with this fear every day. She crossed the room and pulled Van to her. Van pressed her face to Bennie's chest. She felt Van shudder. She wrapped her arms tightly around Van and held her.

When Van stilled, Bennie asked, "Does Patsy know?"

"No." Van pulled away and shook her head fiercely. "She can't know, Bennie. Please don't tell her."

"I won't tell her." Bennie and Patsy were not exactly on speaking terms. "But don't you think she'd want to know?"

Van shook her head again, but not like she was sure at all. "I'm going to get over this," Van said. "It can't go on much longer. It gets lighter earlier in the day now. Pretty soon, I'll be okay."

"What time does Patsy get home?"

"Twelve-thirty."

They looked at the wall clock. It was ten after twelve.

"I have to finish this," Van said. "It won't take long. Will you stay 'til I'm done?"

"I'll stay," Bennie said.

"But only until I'm done, right?" Van asked. "You have to be gone before she gets home."

"Right," Bennie said. "Only 'til you're done."

Bennie walked through the house and let Van check the closets, the cabinets, and under the beds. When Van was satisfied that not even an elf could be hidden in the house, she visibly relaxed and even smiled.

"Thank you. I'll be all right now." She walked Bennie to the door.

Bennie had been planning a kiss at the end of this night from the moment she saw Van walk into Ginger's, but that was before Patsy intruded. Patsy was due home in ten minutes, and Bennie had to have her bug off the side roads before Patsy came onto them. Patsy loomed so closely over them it felt to Bennie almost like she was watching them already. It was an unpleasant preview of what their lives would be like if Bennie and Van chose to have an affair. Bennie didn't like it, but when it came down to it, she felt helpless. She was bound to Van. It didn't matter that they hadn't kissed, hadn't made love, hadn't taken vows. They were in love.

But she did not kiss Van good night.

She got in her car. Amelia had already transferred over to the passenger seat so Bennie could drive. Bennie started the engine, reversed the bug, and took off up the driveway, spewing gravel. Only moments after she turned onto the highway, she saw Patsy's truck pass her, coming from the other direction, coming home to Van. She hoped Patsy didn't recognize the bug.

Bennie slammed the steering wheel with her fist. "God damn it!"

"I'm sorry," Amelia said.

"I don't know if I can handle it," Bennie said.

Amelia didn't answer for a moment, but then she said softly, "Me either."

Chapter Fifteen

Kendra - 1989

KENDRA WOKE TO the feel of lips pressing soft kisses to her temple, her forehead, the side of her mouth. Kendra smiled, but she didn't open her eyes.

"Oh, Amelia," she sighed.

The bed lurched as Jill sat bolt upright in the bed.

Kendra opened her eyes and laughed. "Kidding!" She tugged at Jill's arm. "I'm just kidding."

Jill narrowed her eyes, but she let herself be drawn down into Kendra's arms.

"You like her, though," Jill accused, resting her head on Kendra's shoulder. Her lips grazed the top of Kendra's breast as she spoke. "You danced with her. You dirty danced with her."

"Of course I did." Kendra smoothed Jill's hair down so it didn't poke her in the face. "I like to dance. You were too busy glooming into your drink to dance with me."

"You flirted with her."

"I flirt with everybody, honey," Kendra said.

"Yeah," Jill said. "But not like that. You flirted a lot, even for you."

"She's Amelia Earhart," Kendra said. "When will I get another chance to flirt with her? Besides, why do you care? Flirting with Amelia is like I'm flirting with you, right? Since you are Amelia."

Jill raised her head and gave Kendra a don't-be-stupid look.

Kendra laughed again. It was nice to see Jill get a little jealous. She didn't normally mind when Kendra flirted, and Kendra never knew for sure if it was because Jill was so certain of Kendra that she wasn't threatened by anyone else, or if it was because she truly didn't care. It was nice to know Jill cared.

"Anyway," Kendra said, "she's going home soon, so you won't have to worry about her anymore."

"I wish I could have sent her back last night," Jill said.

"You were in no shape to send her back last night. She'd have ended up with the dinosaurs."

"I didn't even have anything to drink."

"Yeah, except for all the sips you took from mine. You were as buzzed as I was."

"Bennie said they'd come over right after breakfast," Jill said. "It's probably still too early."

Kendra glanced at the clock radio. Seven-thirty. "Too early," she agreed. "They still had to take Van home after we left. They wouldn't have been home 'til one o'clock or later."

"I'd better call in sick again," Jill said. She stretched out, snagged the phone from the bedside table, and pulled it to rest on her belly. She dialed the number for the lab, got a recording, and reported stomach flu. She hung up. "Amelia didn't seem very upset, did she?"

"No, she's fine," Kendra said for the hundredth time. They'd talked about it all the way home and after they crawled into bed until they both fell asleep. Thankfully, Jill had sneaked enough sips from Kendra's Blue Hawaiians that she'd dropped off quickly, or she would have chewed on it all night long. "You were more upset than anyone."

"I didn't want her to know. Can you imagine what the next four and a half years will be like for her, knowing she's going to die?"

"I know," Kendra said. "But Amelia's not normal. I mean, not in a bad way, but she's not like everybody else. If she was, she wouldn't have risked her life so many times already."

Jill nuzzled Kendra's chest, but not like she was serious.

"What did you think about Van and Bennie last night?" Kendra asked.

"What do you mean?"

"I always knew Bennie was crazy about Van," Kendra said, "but I never knew for sure how Van felt about her, 'til last night."

Jill raised her head from Kendra's breast. "She was drunk."

"Yeah, that's why she let her feelings show," Kendra said. "But the feelings were already there."

"You think she likes Bennie?" Jill's voice was anxious.

"She more than likes her. I think she has for a long time. That's why she wouldn't have anything to do with her the last few months."

"But Patsy..."

"You can't tell her," Kendra said.

Jill lifted herself to an elbow and frowned. "I won't lie to Patsy."

Kendra raised a hand and rubbed a finger along the crease between Jill's brows. "I know you won't, honey. But you don't have to volunteer the information, either."

"If it was you, I'd want to know."

"If it was me, I'd tell you," Kendra said. "You have to give Van a chance to tell Patsy herself. Or to change her mind. It's not our place to interfere."

Jill's frown deepened. After a moment, she lay back down. She folded her arms behind her head and stared at the ceiling. "They didn't do anything but dance, anyway," she finally said.

Jill could tell herself that, if it made it easier for her, but Kendra didn't agree. Even if they didn't do anything after leaving Ginger's, Van and Bennie did much more last night than dance.

There was a sudden knock at the front door. Jill sat up. "Is that them already?"

Kendra jumped up. "Maybe it's the boys." Paul should have called first, if he had another problem getting the boys to school, but he didn't call last time. She pulled her robe on over her nightgown. Jill, who slept in the nude, grabbed sweatpants and a t-shirt. Kendra beat her to the door.

It wasn't the boys.

"Is she here?" Bennie asked, without saying hello. Her hair stuck out in all directions, like she'd just woken up.

"Who?"

"Amelia. She didn't come here?"

Jill came up behind Kendra and put her hands on her shoulders. Kendra could feel the tension emanating from her body.

"What do you mean?" Jill asked. "She's not with you?"

Bennie ran her fingers through her hair. "She slept on the couch, just like before. When I woke up, she was gone. My motorcycle's gone too."

Jill's fingers tightened.

"She probably just went for a ride," Kendra said, hoping to keep Jill calm. "She won't get to ride motorcycles when she goes back."

"She took her coat."

Kendra tilted her head back to look at Jill. She looked stunned. And frightened.

"She's probably just planning to come straight here, then," Kendra said, less certainly. "She knows she'll need her coat to go home."

"She knows her way here," Bennie said. "I guess we should just...wait?"

Kendra nudged Jill backward with her butt. "Come in. Have you eaten? Let's have breakfast. She'll show up, I'm sure of it. Where else would she go?"

She made scrambled eggs and toast. Jill ate silently, her eyes glazed and her thoughts distant. Kendra and Bennie discussed possibilities.

"She wanted to ride in an airplane," Bennie said. "She was disappointed when we couldn't go up yesterday."

"Does she have any money?" Kendra asked.

"Some. She has a few paper dollars from the '30s in her pocket. I don't think it was enough for a plane ticket anywhere."

"Paper dollars from 1933 might be worth something. She could sell them," Kendra said.

"She'd have to find someone to buy them."

"Or she could have just driven your motorcycle somewhere. Maybe she wanted to do some sightseeing before she went back home."

"She was interested in Grand Coulee Dam. If she went there, she'll be back before dark."

"That's a long drive for a motorcycle this time of year. She'll be freezing."

"Not if she's wearing her mink coat. Besides, I don't think Amelia cares if she's cold. She's used to sitting in an open cockpit, flying for hours in goggles and a leather helmet."

Abruptly Jill rose from the table, a piece of toast dangling from her clenched teeth. She returned with a stack of books: three slim volumes written by Amelia about her flights, a

recent biography of Amelia, and volume 4 of the Encyclopaedia Britannica, *Delusion to Frenssen*. All the books were dog-eared and highlighted, with Jill's tight handwritten notes in the margins. The toast was gone, and Kendra suspected she would find it on a shelf someday all dried up and crumbling.

"Where would I go, if I were her?" Jill asked, but not as if she expected an answer. "Boston, Atchison, Los Angeles, Rye, New York. That house burned down, but Amelia doesn't know it."

"She can't expect to ride a motorcycle to any of those places," Kendra said. "Not in a fur coat."

"She's Amelia Earhart," Bennie said. "Who knows what she thinks she can do?"

"You could call the police," Kendra said. "Report that your motorcycle was stolen and let them find her."

"No police," Jill said, proving that she was listening. "If they find her, they'll want identification. They may arrest her. We can't let that happen. I need to send her back." She slapped a book shut. "We have two tracks to follow. First, we can track her down from here. From Bennie's, I mean. Second, we can try to anticipate where she'll go and intercept her there."

"Or she might come back on her own," Kendra said, but she was ignored.

Jill dug her fingers through her hair and stared at the books. "I'm going to work on the second track. I think like she does. I'm going to examine all the places she's been, the people she's known, and try to figure out where she would go. Bennie, you track her down from your house."

Bennie's jaw dropped. "How do I do that? I have no idea where she went."

"That's what tracking's for." Jill sounded impatient. "Check the airport. See if someone wearing a mink coat bought a ticket. How much gas did your motorcycle have in it? Call around, see if anyone's bought gas with old money. See if anyone's *bought* old money. Be creative. Kendra can help you." Jill gathered her books and stood up. "I'll be in the shop. Call if you find something." She left.

Kendra stared at Bennie, who stared back, looking as helpless as Kendra felt.

"I think the gas tank was about half full," Bennie said finally, hesitantly, reaching for the phone book. "She could make it to Canada with that much gas. You know how many gas stations there are in a three hundred mile radius?"

"No," Kendra said. "I don't even know what a radius is."

"And where do you sell old money?"

"I bought the Morgans at a coin shop," Kendra said. "They might buy bills."

"Would Amelia know that?" Bennie thumbed the phone book.

They needed help. Kendra looked at the clock. "It's after nine. I'm calling Van."

Bennie looked up. She said nothing but watched Kendra dial the phone, licking her lips like she wanted to crawl through the wire.

"Van Hollinger, please," Kendra said when the receptionist answered.

"One moment." The woman put Kendra on hold.

"She might not be in yet," Bennie said. "She was out late last night."

"We all were. It wasn't that late." Kendra raised her brows at Bennie. "Unless you know something I don't?"

Bennie shook her head, but she looked self-conscious.

"Van Hollinger here."

"Wow, I got straight through. That never happens. Where's Frieda?"

"She's on a break," Van said. "They won't let her smoke at her desk anymore."

"Bennie thought you might not be in," Kendra said, "since you were out so late last night."

Van said nothing, while Bennie watched the receiver avidly. It felt almost cruel to be the one talking to Van, when it was so clear Bennie was desperate for her.

"Amelia's gone," Kendra said. "She took Bennie's motorcycle this morning and left."

"Oh no," Van said. "Because of what she heard last night?"

"You remember that? I thought you might have been too drunk."

"I wasn't drunk."

Kendra laughed. "She says she wasn't drunk," she told Bennie.

Bennie smiled. "Ask her how she's feeling."

"Bennie wants to know how you're feeling."

"I'm fine," Van said. "I hope--"

"What?"

"Nothing. Do you have any idea where Amelia went?"

"No. Jill's doing some research. She wants me and Bennie to trace her steps, like ask around at the airport and gas stations for a

woman in a mink coat."

"She took her coat? On a motorcycle?"

"Yeah, that's why I think she might be planning to come back here. She'll need her coat to go back to 1933."

"She's going to sell it," Van said, "if she hasn't already. I told her she could get a lot of money for it at a vintage clothing store."

"Oh oh. Why did you tell her that?"

"We were in 1933 when I told her. I didn't know she'd be coming to now. I didn't know...Shit, Kendra. She doesn't want to go back. Why would she? She knows she's going to die if she does."

"She has to go back," Kendra said. "Jill will go crazy if she doesn't. She might not even..." Kendra stopped. She couldn't share Jill's theory about reincarnation. She didn't want Van and Bennie to think Jill was nuts, even though Kendra thought she might be.

"Oh, I agree," Van said. "She has to go back. We can't let her change history. But how do we make her?"

"We have to find her first," Kendra said.

"Right. I'll go check the vintage clothing stores," Van said. "There are only a couple in town, and Amelia won't know where they are. I can probably beat her to them. Then I'll come over."

"What about work?" Kendra asked.

"Fuck work." Van hung up.

"What did she say?" Bennie asked.

"She said 'fuck work.'"

"I mean about Amelia."

"Oh. She's going to check some vintage clothing stores. She thinks Amelia's going to try to sell her coat. Then she's coming here."

Bennie tried not to smile, but her eyes gleamed.

"You little whore," Kendra said.

Bennie laughed.

Chapter Sixteen

Van - 1989

VIVIAN'S VINTAGE MERCANTILE didn't open until 10:00. Van got there at 9:59. There was no way Amelia could have sold her coat to Vivian already, but Van waited for the doors to open anyway. When they did, she gave Vivian her business card, with Jill's number written on the back, and asked her to let her know if a woman tried to sell a 1930's era mink coat that was like new.

"I'd love to buy a coat like that in good condition," Vivian said. "We have old minks, but look at them. Even the best is pretty ratty."

Van looked around. She was older than she'd thought. Half the toys and books on the shelves she remembered from her childhood. How long before they transitioned from vintage to antique? Maybe she should find out if her mom still had any of her old things. She could start up her own vintage store. Van's Vintage Values, she'd call it. Give Vivian a run for her money.

She was going to have to find a new line of work, after all. Her "emergency" absences from work were getting out of hand. True, she'd been at work early that morning, despite the late night dancing, but only because she didn't feel up to explaining to Patsy why she had a headache. Even if Patsy didn't mind that Van went dancing, she'd be bound to ask who was there. Van would have to decide whether to lie or tell the truth, and she wasn't ready to do either. For once she was glad Patsy hadn't quit smoking. She wouldn't smell the bar smoke on Van. Still, it was easiest just to escape to the office. Once there, though, she was useless.

The workload in the Prison Department of the state attorney's office was always heavy, and it demanded a quick turnaround and focused attention. It wasn't unusual to have several briefs due on a single day. Once the work got behind, it was nearly impossible to catch up, and critical deadlines could slip past unnoticed. Missed deadlines meant lost cases, which, in Van's line of work, meant prisoners being released when they shouldn't be, or money lost for the state.

Van knew there were deadlines buried in the growing stack of documents in her in-box--she may even have missed one or two already--but it grew harder every day to care. So much of the work was unpleasant. Responding to discovery requests from attorneys or, even worse, from prisoners who were representing themselves. Their demands were handwritten in pencil on smudged, wide-lined school paper, and every time a new one came in, Van imagined someone like Rudy writing it with his dirty hands, and she couldn't touch it. Instead, she'd pull an easy task out of the stack, an agreed dismissal or a notice of appearance, sign it, and stick it in the out-box, pretending she was doing real work. She wasn't fooling Sylvester anymore, and she definitely wasn't fooling Frieda. It was only a matter of time before the shit hit the fan.

After last night, Van couldn't even pretend to work. She sat at her desk, stared out the window, and thought about Bennie and Patsy. When Kendra called, it was a huge relief. She had something to do.

The second clothing store, Twenties Appeal, was open when Van got there, but Amelia had not been there. Van gave her card to Loren, the owner, who was obviously gay, and wondered what to do next. They were the only two vintage clothing stores in town.

"You know," Loren said, "if that coat was in as good a condition as you say, she should probably take it to a consignment shop. She'd get more money for it there."

"But she needs money in a hurry," Van said. "A consignment shop wouldn't pay her up front for it, would it?"

"They might. Something like that, they know they're going to sell it. I have a list of shops, if you want it. I give it to customers who bring in clothes that are nice, but not vintage."

Van took the list. There were five shops on it. She started with the closest and worked her way out, but it wasn't until she reached the last shop that she found the coat.

"Who brought this in?" Van asked. "Was it this morning?"

The proprietor was a small woman in her sixties. She smiled, but without feeling. "I didn't take her name. She sold it to me outright," the woman said. "She didn't want to put it on consignment. I had to give her a lower price, of course."

"How long ago?"

"She was here when I opened at ten o'clock."

Van checked her watch. It was nearly twelve-thirty. "Did she say anything about where she was going?"

"We didn't have that sort of conversation."

"Did she say anything?"

"Just that she wanted to sell her grandmother's coat," the woman said. "Normally I wouldn't buy something like that, but it is in excellent condition."

"How much did you give her for it?"

"I don't share that information."

"I think you'd better this time." Van pulled out a business card with the state seal embossed in gold. She flashed it like it was a badge. "I'm an attorney for the state. This is an unusual circumstance. We need to find that woman and we need to know how much you paid her for the coat."

Van could get fired for using her business card to intimidate information out of this woman, but she really didn't care. She was probably going to get fired anyway she was doing such a shitty job at work. Besides, she'd already left her card at four consignment shops and two vintage clothing stores, a serious violation of business card protocol. What was one more?

It didn't work anyway. The woman took the card, glanced at it, and dropped it on the counter. "This says you're a lawyer. I don't know any law that says I have to turn that sort of information over to a lawyer."

There wasn't one, of course. "I can get a warrant," Van lied, "but it would be a lot easier for both of us if you just tell me."

The woman sighed and crossed her arms across her chest. "I gave her four hundred dollars."

"May I see the receipt?"

"Without a warrant?"

"I can get one."

The woman stomped over to the cash register and pulled a green receipt, tissue paper thin, from a spindle. "My mistake," the woman said, thrusting it at Van. "It was five hundred."

Van took the receipt. "\$500.00 purchase outright of brown mink coat, exc. cond." She handed it back and reached in her purse. "I need to buy it back," she said.

"I'm selling it for a thousand dollars."

"What? You just bought it for five hundred!"

"I'm entitled to make a profit."

"A hundred percent?"

"That coat is in excellent condition," the woman pointed out. "I can sell it for a thousand, easy."

"I can confiscate it," Van said.

The woman raised her chin and stared Van in the eye. "I don't think you can."

They agreed on seven hundred and fifty. Van put it on her credit card and wondered how she was going to explain the transaction to Patsy. She laid the coat across the back seat of the car and drove to Jill's. Bennie's car was not in the driveway.

Van drooped with disappointment. She realized she'd been imagining herself triumphantly presenting the coat to Bennie, like it was a golden fleece or something. What the hell had she been thinking? Possessing the coat wouldn't help them find Amelia any sooner. She'd just wasted seven hundred and fifty dollars. She grabbed the coat and went to the front door of the shop.

A DO NOT DISTURB sign greeted her. Huh. That was new. She followed the sidewalk from the shop to the back door of the house and knocked. Kendra let her in.

"Oh my God, you've got her coat," Kendra said. "Where was it?"

"She sold it at a consignment shop for five hundred dollars."

"How did you get it back?"

"I bought it."

"Whoa." Kendra's eyes widened. "I hope we find Amelia before she spends it all, so you can get your money back."

Van felt more foolish than ever. "No luck finding her?"

"Not yet. Bennie went to look for her at the airport. She thinks Amelia's going to fly somewhere."

"As a passenger or a pilot?"

"Oh God, I hope as a passenger. If she tries to steal a plane, we're in deep shit."

"What's with the Do Not Disturb sign on the shop?"

"Jill's 'researching'." Kendra curled her fingers to make quotes. "She's trying to figure out where Amelia would go."

"What are you doing?" The phone book was open. A felt pen rested in the crease and black X's were marked across both pages.

"I'm calling gas stations," Kendra said. "Jill's idea. It's a stupid waste of time. Nobody pays any attention to who buys gas. But I don't know what else to do."

"I'll help you." Van picked up the felt pen. It might be a stupid waste of time, but it would keep her there until Bennie returned.

A half hour and ten gas stations later, Bennie walked in without knocking. Her eyes met Van's and she half smiled.

"Look what Van found." Kendra pointed to the coat draped over a chair.

"Cool. Where was it?" Bennie asked.

"She sold it to a consignment store this morning at ten o'clock," Van said. "For five hundred dollars."

"Van bought it back," Kendra said.

Bennie's brows rose. "Wow." She pulled the fourth chair from the table and sat down. "She could buy a ticket to just about anywhere with five hundred dollars."

"No luck at the airport?" Van asked.

Bennie shook her head. "The motorcycle's not in the parking garage or in the lot. I asked about her at a couple of ticket counters, but I felt like an idiot. 'Her name's Amelia Earhart and she, uh, looks like Amelia Earhart.' They thought I was crazy."

"She wouldn't use her real name, would she?" Kendra asked.

"What else could I say? If she's using a fake name, I don't know what it is."

"Did you check Felt's Field?" Van asked. "That's where the airport was in the 30's. It's where Amelia would have flown into."

Bennie sat up straight. "I never thought of that. It's still used as a private airfield, isn't it?"

"Yes. And they have a really good restaurant out there," Van said. "The Skyway Café."

"I'm hungry," Kendra said.

Bennie rose. "Let's go."

Chapter Seventeen

Bennie - 1989

IN THE MONTHS since Van first got under her skin, Bennie realized she'd only seen her in bars, at parties, and in large groups of people, and Patsy was always there. Even back when Patsy still got drunk all the time, she was there, and Bennie had to be careful how close she got to Van and how much she looked at her. They had never just gone out to eat, sat at a table, and chatted, a setting where not only was she allowed to look at Van, but it would have appeared strange if she didn't. Bennie savored it.

They sat at a window table, Van and Kendra on one side and Bennie across from them, where the view was better. Van was dressed for the office in a dress and heels. Bennie hadn't even showered that morning. When she saw Amelia was gone, she'd just pulled on a sweatshirt and the same jeans she'd worn the night before, and now she felt grungy. A beam of sunlight shone on the table and lit up every hair that curled away from Van's head, so that a rosy halo glowed around her head and shoulders. Her freckles, which were so prominent in the summer, were barely noticeable, and she had lines at the sides of her eyes that deepened when she smiled. She had tender gray circles under her eyes too, and she bit her nails, Bennie saw. Had she always done that, or was it a recently acquired habit, like poking broomsticks up the chimney? She ate pancakes drenched in syrup, and it coated her lips with sweet gloss after a particularly big bite. She licked most of it off, but she missed a bit in the corner of her mouth, and it glistened when she talked.

Unfortunately, Bennie was so absorbed in watching Van talk that she missed what she said.

"What do you think, Bennie?" Van asked.

"Huh?"

"She asked if you were going to eat those fries," Kendra said.

"I did not."

Kendra took some of Bennie's fries anyway and squirted a pool of ketchup next to what was left of her chicken fried steak. "Have you even been listening to us?"

"Sure." Bennie replayed in her mind the last few words that still hung in the air. "Van said we should just wait for Amelia to come back."

"I'm not saying we should," Van said. "I'm just wondering. Maybe she wants to see a little more of the future before she goes back."

"You can't blame her, after what she heard last night," Kendra said.

Bennie looked out the window and watched a small plane land. The Skyway was right on the edge of the private airport, and planes taxied as close to the window as cars did passing by on the adjacent street. The decor of the place was aeronautical, with dozens of photographs of airplanes and pilots on the walls, and model airplanes of all sizes hung from the ceiling. They'd looked for a photo of Amelia while they waited for their table, but they didn't find one.

"I feel like it's my fault she's gone," Bennie said.

"How could it be your fault?" Van asked.

"She was staying with me. Jill said I was supposed to keep her safe."

"Amelia's going to do what she wants to do," Kendra said, "no matter what Jill says."

"Maybe we should just let her stay," Bennie said. "It's her life. Why should she go back if she doesn't want to?"

"No, she has to go back," Kendra said.

"Why?" Bennie asked. "So she doesn't change history? I'm not sure that's even possible."

"It is," Van said. "The future changed when I disappeared last summer, and now it's changing again because I didn't disappear after all."

"How did it change?" Bennie asked, hoping to get a glimpse of the future they'd shared then, at least for a while.

Van looked at the table, shook her head, and bit her lip. She found the bit of syrup in the corner of her mouth and lick it away.

Bennie sighed. "Anyway, that was different. That was the future. What we do now might change the future, but that doesn't mean we can change what already happened. When I went back to '74, Jill was worried sick I was going to do something to change the past. Hell, I--" She looked around the café, leaned forward, and lowered her voice. "I killed a man, and I didn't change history. Turns out I was just part of it."

Van looked up. Bennie thought that might be sympathy in her eyes. "So you think we can't change history?"

Bennie shrugged. "I didn't. And what I did back there was pretty...big."

"We can't take the chance, though," Kendra said. "There's more at stake than you realize."

"Like what?" Van asked.

Kendra pursed her lips, stared at the ceiling, and tapped her fingernails on the table, as if she were struggling with whether to speak, but Bennie knew how it would turn out, and she was right.

"Okay." Kendra leaned forward and spoke in a soft voice. "Jill has this theory. It sounds crazy at first, but the more I think about it, the more I wonder if she might be right. She thinks she is Amelia Earhart. Reincarnated."

Bennie and Van exchanged a look.

"No, listen," Kendra said. "It's possible. Amelia Earhart disappeared on July 2, 1937. Jill was born almost exactly nine months later on March 29, 1938. Now think about how alike they are. They're both scientists. They're both women who do things people think are impossible and they prove that it's not. And remember their argument when Amelia first got here and Jill was trying to make her go back right away? They were so much alike it gave me goose bumps. Even physically, they have the same build. They wear the same size shoes."

Kendra sat back, her argument complete, and took some more of Bennie's fries.

"That's crazy," Bennie said.

"Yeah." Kendra nodded and waved a fry at her. "As crazy as time travel, right?"

Bennie and Van exchanged another look, this time less skeptical.

"They both hate wearing hats," Bennie offered.

"The reason Jill's been acting so weird lately, even for her," Kendra said, "is that if Amelia doesn't go back and disappear on July 2, 1937, Jill might not even be born. Think how much that would change history. Let alone my love life. Maybe even your love lives."

Bennie's eyes met Van's again and what she saw there mirrored her own feelings. Not now. Not when they were so close.

Van looked away first. "Well, whether Jill is Amelia or not," she said, "she still has to go back. History without Amelia Earhart is...it's impossible. Think how influential she's been to girls and women ever since she disappeared on her flight around the world. If she disappears in a snowstorm in Spokane, it just won't be the same."

Before they left, they stopped at the airport office and Van gave the manager her card. "Will you let us know if you see her? She looks a little like Amelia Earhart, to tell the truth."

"Sometimes," Kendra said, "she thinks she is Amelia Earhart." She twirled her finger on the side of her head.

The manager grinned. "I'll know her then. Amelia Earhart was here, you know, in 1933. Look there." He pointed to a frame on the wall behind them. "There's no picture of her at the airport, but this proves she was here."

It was a copy of a newspaper article, like the one Jill took with her to 1933, except this one had a grainy photograph of Amelia. She wore her fur coat and a hat that looked like an inverted soup bowl. She smiled shyly at the camera. Hah. What a faker. There was nothing shy about Amelia.

They checked the parking lot one more time for Bennie's motorcycle, still with no luck, and climbed into Van's Honda. Bennie got in the back seat. She preferred driving, but if she couldn't, she'd just as soon sit in back. She leaned forward, rested her elbows on the backs of the front seats, and rested her chin on her forearms. Van's curls tickled her cheek. She breathed deeply, but instead of smelling Van's hair, she got a whiff of herself. She brought down her arms and leaned back. She really needed a shower.

"So what's next?" Bennie wanted the day to last, even though she stank. "Gas stations are a bust. Airports are a bust. Check the train station? The bus depot?"

"She could just be driving the motorcycle all the way to wherever she's going," Van said.

"Riding the motorcycle," Bennie corrected.

Van's eyes met Bennie's in the rearview mirror. "Riding," she said slowly, and Bennie sucked in her breath like she'd said something dirty.

"I like the train idea," Kendra said. "It sounds old-fashioned. But passenger trains only come through town in the middle of the night."

"Would Amelia know that?"

They checked the train station and the bus depot, but if Amelia had been there she was long gone. Neither station kept records of who bought tickets.

"We could go back to the main airport," Bennie suggested. "At least you have to give a name to get on a plane, even if it's not your own. Maybe we'll recognize an alias."

"Like D.B. Cooper," Kendra said.

"Would they let us look at their passenger lists?" Van asked.

Nobody knew, but they decided to try. They drove through the parking garage again, in case Amelia had put the motorcycle there since Bennie had searched that morning, then parked and went inside. The ticket agents were busy and in no mood to answer their questions. Even the threat of Van's gold-embossed business card wouldn't persuade them to turn over their passenger lists.

"Get a subpoena," they said.

"Can't you write a subpoena?" Kendra asked Van.

"Not without a court case."

"These aren't even the same agents who were here this morning," Bennie said. "They wouldn't have seen her unless she just bought her ticket. I think morning's our best bet. We'll have to check back again tomorrow."

It was getting dark, and chances of finding Amelia that day were growing slim. They drove back to Jill's, hoping they'd find Amelia waiting there for them.

At first they thought they had. A tall, slim woman strode toward them as they drove up, her strides long and confident, and Amelia's mink coat flowed from her shoulders. Then they saw the dark corkscrew hair and the cigarette dangling from her lips.

"Jill," Kendra said, hopping from the car, "don't smoke in that coat."

Jill looked down at herself, as if surprised to find she was wearing the mink. "Why not? I'm channeling Amelia. It'll help me figure out where she went."

"She didn't come back, then?" Van asked.

"No," Jill said. "You didn't find anything?"

"No luck," Bennie said. "What about you?"

"I'm getting it narrowed down," Jill said. "She knew a lot of people."

"We'll try again tomorrow," Van said. "I should probably get home."

Bennie heard the reluctance in her voice. "Do you want me to come with you?"

She did. Bennie saw it in her eyes, but she shook her head. "Better not. I can manage by myself."

"But you don't have to," Bennie said.

"I'd better," Van said. "For now."

For now. That was enough. Bennie watched Van drive off and wondered how long it would be before they took the next step.

"I'll come back tomorrow morning," Bennie called to Kendra and Jill. She hopped in her bug and drove home.

Her motorcycle was parked at the curb.

Bennie jumped out of the car. "Amelia!" She ran up the stairs. Amelia didn't have a key to the apartment. How long had she been waiting for Bennie to come home?

But Amelia wasn't waiting on Bennie's doorstep. Instead, propped against her front door was a manila envelope with Bennie's name written on the front. Bennie opened it and reached inside. There was her motorcycle key and a note.

"Bennie, thanks for teaching me to ride. I've found I'm not ready to pop off yet. Tell Jill I'll be in touch. Good luck rescuing your princess. --AE"

There was more in the envelope. Bennie tipped it to its side and into her hand dropped five shiny Morgan silver dollars.

Chapter Eighteen

Jill - 1989

JILL PACED IN a loop from RIP to the counter, around the couch, and back to RIP. She smoked and circled the time machine, her thoughts running like a rat in a maze, turning down one corridor and then another, only to be blocked each time by a blank wall. She still wore Amelia's coat and it flapped behind her as she walked. It made her feel closer to Amelia to wear it, easier to get inside Amelia's head and figure out where she could have gone.

She needed all the help she could get. After more than twenty-four hours of reading and research, she still had no idea where Amelia might have run off to.

Jill had always been a solitary person. She was fifty years old before Kendra entered her life. Before that, she was alone. If Jill was suddenly transported fifty-six years into the future, she would look for Kendra. Kendra would be ninety-five years old by then, but she might still be alive, and Jill would want more than anything to find out how her life had turned out. But if she was transported to the future and she didn't have Kendra, what would she do?

Amelia didn't have a Kendra. That was the conclusion Jill came to after all her research. Amelia's life was filled with adventures and achievements and encounters with kings and presidents and movie stars and athletes. Anyone who had ever been in the spotlight shared it at one time or another with Amelia Earhart, but it seemed there was no person who was so special to her that she would be compelled to track that person down fifty-six years later.

She was married, of course, but it wasn't a love match, at least not on Amelia's side. Her husband was her business manager, more than anything else. It was the 1930's. Amelia had a boyish figure and short hair, and she wore men's clothes half the time and flew planes. She had to marry in order to preserve her marketable ladylike image and reassure people she wasn't a lesbian, but she didn't love her husband. So where would she go? If she didn't have a loved one to track down, what would Amelia do?

Jill put herself in Amelia's coat and smoked.

Two overriding interests consumed Amelia's life: flying and the empowerment of women. In fact the former, which is what made her famous, was really just an offshoot of the latter. From the time she was a child, Amelia pushed the boundaries of what women were expected to do, and she never stopped pushing. Even her last flight around the world, when she disappeared, was undertaken because Amelia wanted to be the first *person* to fly around the world at the equator, not just the first woman.

That's where Amelia would be--someplace where women pushed the boundaries.

Great. From the perspective of 1933, that could be just about anywhere. Washington DC? Shoot, even the capital of Washington State. Only ten years earlier, the governor of Washington was a woman, and there were plenty of female senators and representatives.

But aside from her friendship with Eleanor Roosevelt, Amelia hadn't shown much interest in politics.

She might have gone looking for female pilots. There were some, but not of major airlines and not in the military. If that's where Amelia went, she was likely to be disappointed. In any event, Kendra and Bennie and Van had already investigated Felt's Field, and, even as Jill paced, Kendra and Van were back at the Spokane International Airport checking again to see if Amelia had been seen there.

Amelia had studied to be a doctor once. Would she have gone to a hospital or a medical school, perhaps, to see how women were represented there? She was interested in education for women and actually taught at Purdue University, but not until after 1933. She was a social worker as well, and worked with inner city children. There were so many possibilities. Jill's thoughts scurried from one to another, but didn't stop for long at any.

The door to the shop opened, and Kendra and Van walked in.

"Hey," Kendra said. "No smoking in Amelia's coat, remember?"

"I think better when I wear it," Jill said.

"Then don't smoke." Kendra kissed her, took the cigarette from Jill's fingers, and swatted at her chest. "Look at this. You've got ashes on it."

"I think better when I smoke, too." Jill glanced down at the fur on her front. It looked all right to her.

"Nobody remembers seeing her at the airport," Van said. "We checked every airline. They get too many people to remember them, and they don't have the names of yesterday's passengers. We'd have to get them from their main office, and that'll take days."

"We found out she sold some old bills, though," Kendra said. "She didn't get very much for them, and she spent most of it on Bennie's silver dollars."

"When?" Jill asked.

"Yesterday around noon."

"Okay." Jill resumed her pacing. "And she returned Bennie's motorcycle at six. So between noon and six she found some other way to get around. Have you called the taxi companies?"

"When have we had time to do that?" Kendra asked. "Besides, is your finger broken? Why didn't you call?"

"I've been researching," Jill said. "When do the shifts change at the airport? The people working in the afternoon are the ones who would have seen her."

"I'm not going back there," Van said. She flopped onto the couch like she was exhausted. "It's pointless. They don't remember anybody out there. They acted like we were crazy even for asking."

"Lots of people know what Amelia Earhart looks like," Jill said. "They'd remember someone who looks like her."

"You do it, then," Kendra said. "We're tired and we're hungry. After we eat, we'll start calling taxi companies."

Jill sighed. She was the idea person. She wasn't good at talking to people. People didn't respond to her like they did to Kendra or to Van. It only made sense for her to do the thinking and for them to do the talking, but getting them to do it was another matter.

Just then Jill heard a motorcycle pull into the driveway. Her heart sped up and she turned to the door. Amelia!

Van beat her to the door and opened it. "It's Bennie."

Jill slumped. Of course it wasn't Amelia. She didn't have Bennie's motorcycle anymore.

Bennie paused in the doorway, her helmet under her arm. Her hair was slicked back, still damp from her shower. "Any news?"

"Yes," Kendra said. "She bought your silver dollars at Coins and Nuggets yesterday around noon."

"No luck at the airport, though," Van said.

"Sorry I couldn't help." Bennie placed her helmet on the coffee table. "It's pothole season. If I don't go in to work when they call me, they'll stop calling."

"Hey, you have to make a living," Kendra said. "Van and I did fine without you."

"What exactly did Amelia's note say again?" Jill asked.

"It was short," Bennie said. "It just said, 'Thanks for teaching me to ride. I'm not ready to pop off yet. Tell Jill I'll be in touch.'"

"Tell Jill I'll be in touch," Jill repeated. "She didn't say when?"

Bennie shook her head. "I would have told you, Jill."

"Okay." Jill grabbed her cigarettes and shook one out.

"Not in the coat," Kendra said.

Jill stood a moment, torn between the coat and the cigarette. Finally she tossed the cigarette down and paced again from the living room to RIP. "Okay," she said again. "She dropped off the motorcycle before six. She was at the coin shop at noon. She had to have called a cab to pick her up at Bennie's and take her to the airport. How else could she have gone anywhere? You'll have to go back to the airport and check with the afternoon ticket agents."

"No," Kendra said. "They already think we're crazy. They'll call the men in white for us if we go back there again."

"They won't even recognize you if they have different agents on shift," Jill said. "Besides, you don't have to question all of them."

There are only a few places she's likely to have gone. I've made a list." She grabbed her notebook from the counter where her books were stacked and read from it. "Los Angeles, Boston, New York City, Rye, Atchison, Kansas. Possibly Toronto, Philadelphia, Chicago, or Hawaii."

"Oh, is that all?" Kendra asked.

"Unless she was interested in Europe," Jill said. "Or Mexico. If we can't get a lead at the airport, we'll just have to spread out and search those places to find out if she went there."

"I'll take Hawaii," Bennie offered.

"What a waste of money," Kendra said. "Where would we get the money for all those airplane tickets? And it would take forever."

"Maybe we should just wait until she comes back on her own," Van said.

"No." Jill tried to quell a sudden chill. "She might like it here. She might not want to go back."

"She has a will of her own," Van said. "She should get to make her own decision. It's her destiny."

"But..." It's my destiny too, Jill wanted to say. But maybe it wasn't.

"Why did you come back from 2008, Van?" Kendra asked. "Whose decision was it?"

"Mine," Van said. "Well, Jill wanted me to, but she didn't pressure me."

"She didn't?"

Van smiled. "Jill was a lot calmer in the future. Wise, almost."

"Wow." Kendra looked at Jill and raised her brows.

"I came back because it was the only fair thing to do," Van said. "My disappearance destroyed Patsy. It wasn't fair to leave her like that."

"Leave her like what?" Bennie asked.

"After twenty years, she hadn't recovered from my disappearance," Van said. "I had to give her another chance."

The sound of a car pulling into the driveway made them all look up. A door slammed, and Jill's heart sped up. They weren't expecting anyone. Who but Amelia would show up at the door at one in the afternoon?

Kendra opened the door and stepped back to let their visitor enter.

It was Patsy.

Chapter Nineteen

Van - 1989

VAN FELT THE blood drain from her face. Oh fuck.

Patsy stood in the doorway wearing her uniform. Her face was granite. Only her eyes moved as they shifted from Jill to Kendra, flicked briefly over Bennie, and finally rested on Van.

"Your office called," she said. "They said you haven't been in all week."

Van stared into Patsy's eyes but was keenly aware of Kendra, Jill, and Bennie watching her. She wasn't ready for this.

"I worked on Tuesday," she said. It was a child's argument, but it was all she had. "I went in on Monday and Wednesday. I just left early, that's all."

"You didn't even call in today," Patsy said. "They're worried."

Van hadn't done any actual work in weeks, and nobody had even noticed. She'd known it would all come crashing down around her eventually. She was lucky she'd gotten away with it for as long as she had. But it seemed unfair that they only noticed there was a problem when she didn't show up at her desk. "They have no business worrying about me."

Patsy's eyes narrowed. "Of course they do." She glanced around the room. "What the fuck's going on here?"

Silence lasted until it grew awkward.

"You know Amelia Earhart was here, right?" Kendra finally said. "She ran off before we could send her back. We're trying to find her."

"By sitting on your asses? Good job." Patsy turned back to Van. "Why didn't you tell me she took off?"

"You didn't want to hear about Amelia," Van said. "You said so."

"Oh, for Christ's sake, Van," Patsy said, her voice rising, "you know God damned well I didn't mean something like this." She gestured at the room with her arm, but it seemed to Van that she meant Bennie most of all. She was glad she and Bennie were on opposite sides of the couch. "Something so important you couldn't even go to work? You should have told me."

Van did not like being yelled at ever, but being yelled at in front of her friends, in front of Bennie, was unbearable. She jumped up and moved to the door, pushing Patsy backward so they both ended up outside. She shut the door behind her and leaned against it.

The hard look was gone from Patsy's face. Now it was flushed and frowning. "What the hell is going on with you, Van?"

"I'm trying to help *your* best friend," Van said, going on the offense. "Jill is frantic in there. She needs to get Amelia back, and she couldn't turn to you for help. You've made it clear to everybody you don't want anything to do with RIP. Somebody has to help her."

"So it's you and Bennie to the rescue?" Patsy's sneer was ugly. "That's just great, Van."

"It's not about Bennie," Van said. But it was. "If you want to help us find Amelia, you're more than welcome to. We can use all the help we can get."

"Don't give me that shit. If you wanted my help, you would have asked me," Patsy said. "You deliberately kept it from me."

"When was I supposed to tell you?" Van asked. "I never even see you. Did you want me to wake you up in the middle of the night to tell you Amelia ran away?"

"Is that what this is about?" Patsy asked. "Me working nights? You told me to take that shift. You can't be mad at me for that now."

"I'm not," Van said. "I'm not mad at you, and that's not what this is about. I'm just..."

"Just what? Why didn't you call your office and tell them you wouldn't be in today?"

For the first time, Van looked away. Patsy had touched her weak spot.

She didn't call the office that morning because she couldn't. She couldn't bear to talk to anyone there, not even to make an excuse, to lie any more about being sick or claim another emergency. She couldn't blame that on Amelia or Bennie or Patsy.

Something inside Van was breaking, maybe was already broken, and she didn't know what to do about it. All she knew to do was what was squarely in front of her, which seemed to consist of two-word directives. Find Amelia. Ignore work. Explore Bennie. Avoid Patsy.

But Patsy wouldn't be avoided, and Van didn't know what to do about that either.

"Van?"

Van shook her head. "I don't know."

"You don't know why you didn't call in? How can you not know? Did you forget?"

Van shook her head again. "I don't know."

"You don't know what? If you forgot? What the--" Patsy broke off, wheeled away, and ran her fingers through her hair.

She didn't understand. How could she, when Van didn't understand herself?

Patsy turned back. "I don't get it. Something's going on with you, but I can't... I have to get to work. At least one of us has to keep our job." She moved to the door of her truck, but stopped and looked at Van again. "Are you going to the office tomorrow?"

Van shrugged, though she knew the answer.

"Save me some time in the morning," Patsy said. "We need to talk." She climbed in the truck, backed out to the street, and was gone.

Van stood in the driveway and stared vacantly at Bennie's motorcycle. She couldn't talk to Patsy tomorrow. She couldn't go to work. At that moment, she couldn't even go back into Jill's shop. She was paralyzed. Her life was collapsing around her and she had no idea what to do about it.

The door to the shop opened, and Bennie stepped out. "Hey," she said softly. "You okay?"

Van looked at her. Whatever was in her face caused Bennie to step forward and wrap her arms around Van.

"Oh, Van," Bennie whispered.

Van rested her head against Bennie's shoulder and closed her eyes. She did know what to do next.

Find Amelia. Ignore work. Explore Bennie. Avoid Patsy.

Chapter Twenty

Kendra - 1989

VAN ARRIVED AT the shop at eight o'clock sharp the next morning, as if it were her job. Kendra suspected she left home at the regular time in order to trick Patsy into thinking she was going to the office. Who did she think she was fooling?

Shit was hitting Van's fan big time.

Kendra intercepted her before she could go to the shop. It was time for a little girl talk. "Have a cup of coffee with me, Van."

Van glanced at the shop and the spot where Bennie had parked her motorcycle the day before.

"She's not here," Kendra said. "She got called to work again this morning."

"Oh." Van flushed. "Okay."

Kendra placed sugar and a carton of half and half on the kitchen table and poured them each a cup of coffee. "Sit."

Van sat, stirred a spoon of sugar into her coffee, and gnawed a fingernail.

"You look tired," Kendra said. "Didn't sleep much last night?"

Van shook her head. "Spent most of it pretending to be asleep."

Good. She wasn't going to act like nothing was wrong. "What's going on, Van?"

A pained look crossed Van's face. "Everything."

Kendra waited, but Van didn't say anything else. "Where did you and Bennie go yesterday, after Patsy left?"

"We just rode around." Van smiled faintly. "Last time I was on a motorcycle was with a boyfriend. In the seventies."

"You rode around a long time." They hadn't returned until after dark, and then it was only to drop Van off so she could get her car.

"Yeah. I just needed some time to... I needed some time."

"I know what you mean." The pump needed priming. "When I started falling for Jill, I was a wreck. I couldn't stop thinking about her, and I needed to talk about her, but I couldn't. I didn't have anyone to talk to. Definitely not Paul and not my friends. If she was a guy, maybe, but they wouldn't understand me falling for a woman. It all got bottled up inside me and I started acting crazy. I swear Paul thought I was going through the change early, but it was just love."

Van's lips parted like she wanted to speak, but they closed again.

"If you ever need anyone to talk to," Kendra said, "I'm a pretty good listener."

Van looked down and whispered into her coffee cup, "I think I'm falling in love with her."

Kendra let the words sit for a moment. "There," she finally said, "you said it, and the world didn't end."

"Not yet," Van agreed.

"You're worried about Patsy?"

"Of course I am." Van looked up, her eyes filled with misery. "I do love Patsy. I don't want to hurt her. It's not her fault."

"Have you told Bennie?" Kendra asked.

"Hell, no," Van said. "But she knows."

Kendra nodded. They all knew. Even Patsy, on some level, must know.

"So why haven't you been going to work?"

Van gave a short laugh. "That's a whole different story. I'm a mess, that's all."

The back door opened and Jill came in. "Kendra, where's my coat? Oh, hi Van."

"I hid it," Kendra said. "It's not your coat."

"I need it. It helps me channel Amelia."

"I'm not going to let you stink it up any more with your cigarette smoke," Kendra said.

"I thought you had to be dead to be channeled," Van said. "Amelia's still alive."

"Actually, she died in 1937," Jill said.

Maybe, Kendra thought. Maybe not.

"No work again today?" Jill asked Van. "How would you like to go on a little trip?"

"Where to?"

"I think I have it narrowed down to Los Angeles, Boston, or Rye, New York," Jill said. "I figure we can each go to one of them, you, me, and Bennie."

"What about Kendra?" Van asked.

"I have the boys this weekend," Kendra said. "I can't back out of that, not with our custody hearing coming up."

"Amelia told Bennie she'd be in touch," Van said. "Don't you think you should wait for her to do that?"

"I can't wait." Jill ran her hands down her sides as if stroking mink. "Every day that passes is a day when something could change the course of her life. She could be in an accident. She could get food poisoning. She could fall in love."

"That would be terrible," Kendra said.

"You know what I mean," Jill said. "It could derail her."

"What if she comes back here and you're off in New York or something?" Van asked. "How will she get back?"

"I can show Kendra what to do."

"I've made all these arguments too," Kendra told Van, "but she won't budge. She wants to fly all over kingdom come looking for Amelia. I still don't know how she's going to pay for all those airplane tickets."

"There's equity in the house," Jill said.

"Are you crazy?" Kendra was thunderstruck, and a little bit scared. She'd taken a leap of faith in Jill when she left Paul. She didn't have any money of her own, she had no job, no car, and she couldn't count on any help from Paul. If Jill sold her house, where would they go? Where could she put the boys when they came for their visits? "You can't sell the house. This is a wild goose chase, Jill. You can't just fly all over the world looking for her."

"I'm not selling the house. I was just talking about a second mortgage," Jill said. "And it wouldn't be all over the world, only to New York, Los Angeles, and Boston. I'm pretty sure she would have gone to one of those three places."

"Pretty sure isn't sure enough to risk the house," Kendra said.

"I have some money," Van said. "Enough for plane tickets, anyway."

Jill's eyes lit up. "Really? I'll pay you back."

"That's not necessary," Van said. "You've done a lot for me."

"You can't do that, Van," Kendra said. "You'll be lucky to have a job, if you're not careful. Honey, you're making a mountain out of a mole hill. Really, just wait for Amelia to come back. You don't need to waste all this money on airline tickets. She'll come back."

"What if she doesn't?" Jill's expression turned tragic. "Don't you care? Don't you even care if..."

"Oh, honey." Kendra rose, pressed a kiss on Jill's neck and rested her head on her shoulder. "Of course I care. I love you." But it was hard to enter into Jill's crazy scheme all the same. Deep down, Kendra didn't believe Jill was Amelia.

THE ONLY WINDOWS in the shop were security windows set high in the walls to prevent anyone from peeking in at Jill while she worked on RIP. They also prevented

anyone from seeing out. The only way to know what was happening outside was to open the door and look out.

Van hovered around the door and peered out every two minutes like the boys did when their dad was late picking them up on Sunday night. The weather was typical for March. Each time Van opened the door, it seemed to be a different season outside. When the sun shone, Van slumped. When hail pounded, she perked up. When a steady downpour of rain appeared, she nearly bounced with excitement. Pothole repair would have to be put on hold when it rained.

Jill was just as antsy. Van had insisted they wait for Bennie to show up before assigning destinations. Jill had called three different travel agencies to gather comprehensive flight information, and she had it listed in her notebook with certain words and numbers underlined in red ink. She was ready to book the flights as soon as she knew Bennie was willing.

Kendra sat on the couch and watched Days of Our Lives, trying to block the nervous energy radiating from both of them. The flights Jill had found all left that night, which meant Kendra would have the boys to herself that night and the rest of the weekend. Part of her mind was focused on Justin and Adrienne's issues on TV, and part of her was wondering how she could turn cleaning out Jill's creepy basement into a game the boys would like.

Jill was great with the boys, in spite of herself. She didn't have a clue how to treat children, so she generally talked to the boys as if they were miniature adults, when she needed to talk to them at all. The boys responded to her, and they all got along fine, so far. Still, the weekends were difficult. Jill's house only had one bedroom and one bathroom, if you didn't count the one in the shop. Sleeping bags on the floor was fun at first, but it got old fast. Kyle was already hinting about sleeping on the couch in the shop, which Kendra knew Jill would never allow. It was only a matter of time before the crowding got to them all.

Jill's basement was unfinished concrete. It was dirty and dark and downright scary. There was nothing much down there except a furnace, a hot water heater, spiders, and a ton of junk, but it was dry and it spanned the whole length of the house. Finishing it would take a lot of work, but there was easily room for two bedrooms, a bathroom, and even a playroom.

"She's here," Van called suddenly from the open door.

Kendra looked up. Rain pelted the driveway. Jill rose to join Van in welcoming Bennie, who stopped at the door to shake her jacket off before entering.

"Cats and dogs," Bennie said. Drops clung to her face and hair, and the legs of her jeans were wet.

"You didn't ride your motorcycle," Kendra said.

"No, I drove the bug." She ran her hands through her hair and wiped them on her thighs. "I got this wet just running for the door. It's really coming down out there."

Jill asked abruptly, "Would you rather go to New York or Boston or L.A.?"

Bennie moved farther into the room, briefly touching Van's arm as she passed. "What happened to Hawaii?"

"We have to spread our resources where they'll have the most effect," Jill said. "Hawaii just isn't as likely as the other three destinations."

"By resources, she means us," Van said.

"Where are you going?" Bennie asked Van.

"It depends on where you go."

Bennie's face lit up, but it fell again when Jill said, "You get first pick. Then Van, then me."

"Oh. You're splitting us up."

"Of course," Jill said.

"Spreading those resources, you know," Kendra said.

Bennie moved to the TV. "Is anyone watching this?" She changed the channel without asking, assuming, just like a man, that no one could really be watching a soap opera. A basketball game appeared. "Good. Auburn's winning." She turned back. "How are we getting there? Flying?"

"Yes. There are flights leaving tonight for all three places," Jill said. "New York and Boston are red-eyes. I'll call the travel agent and book them as soon as I know which one you want."

"Tonight?"

"Have you ever been to any of those places?" Van asked.

"I've only been to Disneyland," Bennie said. "How are we paying for this?"

"Van's credit card," Kendra said.

"Can't you just send us in RIP?" Bennie asked. "It'd be a lot cheaper."

"I don't know yet how to pick up or deliver remotely," Jill answered seriously. "I can only send people to different times, not places."

"Maybe you should just go back to 1933 again and stop Amelia from coming forward in the first place," Van said.

"There's only one Amelia," Jill said, "and she's here. Going back won't change that."

"Why not?" Kendra asked.

Jill frowned. "There's a slight possibility that going back would remove her from the present, but there are risks involved. I don't have any evidence to show what would happen if two versions of the same person are in the same place at the same time."

"Like when I went back to Expo '74," Bennie said. "I was there on the same day when I was a kid, you know. I went with my mom to hear The Carpenters."

Jill looked surprised. "I didn't know that. Did you see yourself?"

"No, I skedaddled before I could. I was afraid to see myself," Bennie said. "What if it made my brain explode or something?"

"I don't think that would have happened," Jill said, "but that's the problem. Nobody knows what would happen. Even I don't know. And the reverse is true, too. What happens if *neither* version of a person exists at a particular time? That's what could happen if I go back to 1933 and still can't get Amelia back. What if she vanishes for good?"

"But it's possible, isn't it honey?" Kendra asked. "That you could stop her from coming forward?"

"Slightly possible," Jill said. "But it's not worth the risk. Not when we have other options." Jill moved to the telephone. "So which do you want, Bennie?"

Kendra watched as Bennie and Van exchanged looks. They didn't want to do it, she could tell, not separately anyway. If they could have traveled together, they'd probably jump at the chance, but it didn't make sense to spend the time and money to send both of them to both places.

Oh, it didn't make sense at all. Jill should just drop the whole scheme and let Amelia come back on her own, but what Jill should do and what Jill would do were sometimes worlds apart. In the silence, the sound of a car pulling into the driveway was loud. Van turned white and stepped away from Bennie.

"Don't worry, that's not Patsy's truck." Kendra opened the door. Hannah stood in the doorway, rain pelting her cheap plastic raincoat. "What the hell?"

Hannah looked past her to Bennie. "I called your apartment. You weren't there. I thought you might be here."

Bennie stepped forward. "Is something wrong?"

"No, nothing's wrong." Hannah pushed past Kendra into the shop, letting water drip from her coat onto the floor.

"Sure," Kendra said. "Come on in."

"I knew you couldn't be working in this weather," Hannah said. She shot a look at Van. "I thought maybe we could reschedule movie night."

"Really?" Bennie looked surprised.

Van sat on the couch and pretended to watch the basketball game. Kendra joined her but made no pretense of watching the game. She hummed the tune to the Viking Women song they'd made up at Ginger's Tuesday night and saw Van try not to smile.

"Uh, that would be cool," Bennie said, "but I can't tonight. We have a...a situation."

"A situation?" Hannah glanced again at Van and looked around the room. "Where's Amelia? Did she go back?"

"Not exactly."

"Oh?" Hannah raised her brows at each of them.

Kendra shot her a shit-eating grin, while Van continued to stare at the television.

Jill, oblivious to any undertones, said, "I'd better take Los Angeles, since there are so many places she might have gone there. I think it's best if I take that leg. Bennie?"

They all stared at Bennie, who glanced uneasily from Hannah to Jill to Kendra and finally to Van's impassive face. "I've always wanted to see Boston," she said finally.

"Good." Jill picked up the phone. "Bennie to Boston, then, and Van can go to New York." She dialed.

"You're going to Boston tonight?" Hannah asked.

"I guess so." Bennie seemed glum. "We're looking for Amelia."

Hannah's jaw dropped. "You lost Amelia Earhart?"

"She's not lost," Kendra said. "I'm sure she knows exactly where she is."

"You don't know where she is," Hannah snapped. "That sounds a lot like lost to me." She turned to Bennie. "I told you that time machine is dangerous."

Kendra narrowed her eyes. "You can leave any time, Brunhilda."

Suddenly Van caught her breath, clutched Kendra's arm, and sat upright. "There she is!" She pointed at the TV.

"What?"

"Who?"

"Amelia!" Van said. "I saw her on TV. She's at that basketball game."

Bennie moved over and stood behind the couch. "Are you sure?"

"Yes, I'm sure," Van said. "Jill hang up, we found her!"

Jill dropped the phone. "What? Where?"

"Right there. The camera panned the crowd," Van said, "and there she was. She was screaming at the ref. She was wearing an orange shirt."

"Oh oh," Bennie said. Everyone stared at her.

"*What?*" Van asked.

"She's a Tennessee fan," Bennie said.

Kendra leaned across Van to slap Bennie's arm, but Van just smiled the way women do when the person they're falling in love with acts like a brat.

"Where is this game being played?" Kendra asked.

"Tacoma," Bennie said.

"Tacoma, *Washington?*"

"Yes. It's the Final Four. I mentioned it to Amelia, but I didn't think..." Bennie shrugged.

Kendra turned to Jill. "Honey, did you hear that? Amelia's in Tacoma. We can drive there in half a day."

"Less than that, now that we can drive over fifty-five," Bennie said.

Jill's cheeks were pink with excitement. "Let's go."

"I have to pick up the boys in two hours," Kendra said. "We can take them with us."

Jill stood with one leg raised, like she was poised to run all the way to Tacoma right then. "I can't wait. I'll go without you."

"No you won't."

"There's no rush," Bennie said. "This game will be over by the time we could get there, no matter how fast you drive, but there's another game on Sunday. We'll find her then."

"She might not be at that one." Jill looked like she might cry.

"She'll be there," Bennie said. "They sell the tickets as a package. The semi-finals are today and the championship game is Sunday. She went to all the trouble to get there and buy the tickets. Why would she miss the championship game?"

"You're not going without me," Kendra said. "Not when it's so close. We can drive over tomorrow and be there bright and early to get tickets on Sunday morning."

Jill looked like she might shatter from nervousness. "What if we can't get in? What if it's sold out?"

"Women's games hardly ever are," Bennie said.

"No, Jill's right," Van said. "We can't take any chances. How about if Bennie and I drive over this afternoon and pick up the tickets first thing in the morning? You can follow tomorrow with the boys."

"You and me?" Bennie asked, and her voice squeaked.

"There's no room in RIP for the boys," Jill said.

"Take my car," Van said. "Bennie and I can go in hers."

"Yeah." Bennie nodded. Her voice was still high. "Van and I can go in mine."

"No." They'd forgotten Hannah. She still wore the stupid plastic raincoat and a frown on her face. She put a hand on Bennie's arm. "Don't go, Bennie. You know that's just putting yourself in the path of..."

She hesitated, and in the silence Van rose and stood beside Bennie. "In the path of what, Hannah?"

Hannah dropped her hand from Bennie's arm and took a step back, like Van had cooties. "You know," she said, glaring, "if you were a Christian woman, you'd leave her alone."

Van followed with another step. "If you were a Christian woman, you'd stop trying to change her into something she's not."

"I am a Christian woman." Hannah stopped retreating and stepped forward until she was nose to nose with Van, though Hannah's nose was four inches higher. "How dare you, you, of all people accuse me--"

Kendra shivered at the excitement. In a fair fight, Van wouldn't stand a chance, but it would never get that far, and they all knew it.

Bennie stepped in. "Whoa, whoa, whoa, hold on." She put a hand on each of their arms and drew them apart. She turned to Hannah, but kept her hand on Van. "Hannah, I have to go."

"You don't have to," Hannah said. "You want to. Be honest with yourself, at least."

"Fine, I want to go," Bennie said. "I don't want Van to go by herself, and I don't want Jill to drive herself crazy waiting for the tickets."

"Van doesn't have to go," Hannah said, "and it's Jill's own fault Amelia's here in the first place."

"Now that's a Christian feeling," Van said.

"What do you know about Christian feelings?" Hannah asked. "You're the one luring her into--"

"Oh for God's sake," Kendra interrupted, unable to listen to Hannah any longer. "They're driving to fucking Tacoma. It's not like they're sacrificing a virgin to a pagan god in Mount St. Helens. Chill out." Kendra got her share of Hannah's glare then, before Hannah spun and slammed out into the rain.

Kendra sighed. "I love dyke drama."

Chapter Twenty-One

Bennie - 1989

THEY TOOK TURNS driving. Bennie drove from Spokane to Ritzville, where they stopped to pee and buy some Diet Coke, Doritos, and red licorice for the trip. Van drove through Moses Lake to George and stopped at the Martha Inn Café.

"You want to eat at this greasy spoon?" Bennie asked. "It's not far to Ellensburg."

"I've always wanted to eat here," Van said, "just to say I ate at the Martha Inn, George, Washington."

"Are you being nasty?"

"Hey, I didn't name the place."

They laughed and chose a booth. The dining room was immense, since the restaurant doubled as a Greyhound bus stop and often had to accommodate busloads of customers at once. There was no bus at the time, though, and they had it nearly to themselves. The menus were thick and sticky, and the silverware was bent. Bennie wedged her knife between the crooked tines of her fork to straighten them and tried not to be nervous.

The conversation on the trip so far had been of the first-date variety, which was strange, since they'd known each other for more than a year. In all that time, though, they had never been alone together, except for the night Bennie drove Van home from the bar. And the motorcycle ride last night, but aside from 'Take me for a ride, Bennie,' and a polite thank-you at the end of it, they hadn't talked then. Van had climbed on the bike, wrapped her arms around Bennie's waist, and held on. They rode like that for hours, the bike rumbling between their legs, just touching.

Even for first-date talk, though, the conversation was strange. Bennie had lots of questions for Van. What was your childhood like? When did you figure out you were a lesbian? What's your coming out story? But when it came Bennie's turn to share, it turned out Van already knew the answers. Bennie had shared her stories with Van in 2008. It was disorienting, like waking up with amnesia. Van told of conversations that Bennie didn't recall at all, but Van couldn't have known the things she knew any other way.

"It's not fair," Bennie said. "I don't know what you know about me. How am I supposed to know when I'm repeating myself?"

"I'm sorry," Van said. "I'd tell you if I could, but I can't remember everything you said to me. There was too much."

"We really lived together?"

"For a few weeks."

In the same bed? Bennie didn't have the nerve to ask. "What are you having?" she asked instead.

"I think I'll have breakfast for dinner," Van said. "I want the whole truck stop experience."

"Pancakes, right?" Bennie asked and grinned when Van looked surprised. "I'm getting to know you pretty well too. I have some catching up to do."

They didn't talk about Patsy or Hannah, and they didn't talk about what was paramount in Bennie's mind, which was what they were going to do when they rolled into Tacoma at ten o'clock at night, nearly a whole day ahead of the others. Bennie could think of only one thing.

"I like it when you eat pancakes," Bennie said after Van had taken a particularly large bite.

Van raised her brows as she chewed. Bennie let her eyes rest on Van's lips, which glistened again with syrup. She could tell the moment Van realized what Bennie meant. She tucked her lips in, sucked off the syrup, and blushed.

The sexual tension that had been an undercurrent in the car, and that had thrummed through their bodies on the motorcycle, surfaced again in the booth of the Martha Inn Café. For the first time, though, they were able to look at each other without the distraction of the road.

Van's blush faded and left her cheeks white. Bennie longed to stroke a finger along them and raise that blush again. Van's eyes seemed darker green than normal, her pupils large. Bennie had never stared into someone's eyes so long without blinking, but she couldn't bear to look away. Apparently, neither could Van. They stared without speaking for a full minute, maybe more.

Finally, Van blinked and looked at her plate. She put her fork down, as if she'd lost her appetite.

Bennie took a breath that shook and looked away as well. She was surprised to see the business of the truck stop go on as usual. Her world had shifted.

It was real. They hadn't said it in words yet, but it was true. She and Van were sneaking out of town. They would get a hotel room. They would spend the night together. It ought to feel dirty, but it didn't.

They would make love.

She couldn't stand it. "Are you finished?"

Van looked at her barely touched plate and nodded.

They paid and went out to the car. Bennie drove. The Columbia River Gorge was normally Bennie's favorite part of the trip across the state. It was a mini Grand Canyon, the rock walls striated evidence of volcanic eruptions and floods and earthquakes. She liked to imagine Lewis and Clark riding their raft through the gorge with Sacajawea and her baby, not sure what would be around the next curve in the river or how long it would flow before it reached the sea.

This time it was just too damn big. The bridge over the river had never seemed so long. It would take forever to reach Tacoma. Lifetimes.

Bennie's crotch pulsed. She wanted to stop the car, grab Van, and hold her and kiss her and touch her everywhere and be touched by her and make them both moan. But there is no place to pull over when crossing the Columbia River Gorge, and Bennie was still, in spite of it all, too uncertain of Van to make such an abrupt move anyway. She knew what Van wanted to do, but if Bennie made the wrong move too soon, she could still scare her off.

They drove through Ellensburg and started up Snoqualmie Pass. Conditions over the pass in March could still be treacherous, but so far the roads were clear of snow and ice.

"I don't want to cheat on Patsy," Van said abruptly.

Bennie's heart plummeted.

"But the thing is," Van continued, "I already did."

It took a moment for Bennie to understand what Van was saying. "With me, you mean?"

Van reached into the back seat for the empty Doritos bag. "Yeah. You didn't do anything wrong. I did."

"Was it so wrong?" Bennie asked.

"No." Van wet her finger, stuck it into the crumbs on the bottom of the bag, and licked it, sucking the tip. "Not then." She did it again, and again. Her finger turned orange, and so did her lips. Did she do that on purpose? "It seemed pretty right, actually."

"What do you mean?"

Van turned her head. Bennie took her eyes off the road to see Van watching her with a tiny suggestive smile, and the throbbing between Bennie's legs grew to an ache.

"Here's Indian John Hill." Bennie turned into the rest stop. "I have to go."

"Again?"

"Yes. It's all that pop."

"You've hardly had any."

Never mind. Bennie parked the car, hopped out, and rushed to the restroom. **WOMEN**, the large blue sign said. Beneath it a smaller sign, in red, said **CAUTION: *Slippery When Wet***. Hah! No shit.

Bennie went into a stall, pulled down her pants, flushed the toilet to mask any noise she might make, and plunged her fingers into herself. Oh God. Oh *God!* It wasn't easy getting herself off while standing in a bathroom stall, but she was desperate. She'd nearly come just sitting next to Van in the car. How was she going to make it the rest of the way to Tacoma? Van was driving her mad.

Her legs clenched and she shuddered as waves of the orgasm shook her. She caught her breath, peed, and wiped her hands with toilet paper as best she could before exiting the stall. She washed her hands with powdered soap and cold water and dried them on a soggy roller towel.

"It's my turn to drive," Van said when Bennie returned to the car.

"No. We might hit snow." Bennie took her jacket off and threw it in the backseat. Despite the cold air, she was sweating.

"I can drive in snow."

"I know you can, but I'm more familiar with the car."

They got in, and Bennie pulled back onto the interstate. The bug had manual transmission, of course, so Bennie shifted with her right hand while steering with the left. She wore a short-sleeved t-shirt and her arms were bare. Van reached over with her orange finger and ran it along Bennie's bicep.

Bennie flinched.

"That's where you had a tattoo," Van said. She continued tracing the line around to the underside of Bennie's arm, and her hand brushed Bennie's breast.

"Jesus!" Bennie said. "Do that again, and I'll pull this car over right now."

"And do what?" Van asked. "Make me walk?"

"Make you do something. You're killing me here."

Van laughed softly. "It's déjà vu all over again."

Bennie thought. "You were a tease then, too?"

Van shrugged and didn't deny it.

Fortunately, Bennie supposed, they hit snow. Driving took all her attention for the next hour, and even Van sat forward anxiously to watch the road. They talked little until they reached Tacoma.

Chapter Twenty-Two

Van - 1989

THEY FOUND A Travelodge at the edge of the city. While Van booked the room, Bennie called Kendra and Jill and told them where they were. Van reserved a room for the next night for them.

"I got the rooms," she said, when Bennie joined her at the desk. Bennie's face grew slack. "One for us and one for them," Van said, and Bennie smiled. If she thought Van was going to back out now at the last minute, she was dead wrong.

Van entered the room first. Bennie closed the door behind them and leaned against it. There were two double beds. Van turned and faced Bennie. Her heart pounded. She had an edge over Bennie, and she intended to use it. Bennie, at twenty-eight, still had walls and rough edges and a cockiness that prevented her from showing the vulnerabilities that made her fully who she was. By the time she'd turned forty-eight, though, the walls had come down and the rough edges were smoothed. She was a little cocky still, but it was softened by her acceptance of her own weaknesses and her willingness to share them.

Van knew the woman Bennie would turn into, which made Bennie's walls invisible to her. When Bennie assumed an impudent expression, like the one she wore right then, Van was able to see through it to what she was trying to hide. Bennie was scared.

Van smiled. Besides, she knew what Bennie liked in bed. She stepped forward, so they stood only inches apart. She could almost feel Bennie's pulse through the air between them.

"Should we be doing this?" Bennie asked.

"Well," Van started, "you know what--"

"--Amelia says," they both finished at once, and they laughed.

Bennie placed her hands on Van's cheeks and lowered her head. They kissed. For Van it was a sweet coming home. She hadn't kissed Bennie since last July, and she missed her. For Bennie, it was their first kiss ever. Her lips trembled.

Van parted her lips and let Bennie's tongue in. Bennie dropped her hands from Van's face and wrapped her arms around her waist instead. Their tongues were rough and wet and warm. Bennie brought one hand up again and buried it in Van's hair and dropped the other to the small of Van's back and pressed their hips together. She couldn't seem to keep her hands still. It was as if she wanted to touch all of Van at once.

Bennie's hips gave a reflexive thrust, and Van pulled away. She knew how she wanted this first time, for Bennie at least, to go, and that wasn't it. They stared at each other, both gasping.

Bennie licked her lips, as if tasting them. "Yum," she said. "Doritos."

Van gave a little laugh. She pulled off her jacket and tossed it into a chair, kicked off her shoes, and sat on the edge of the nearest bed. She held out her hand.

Bennie stripped off her jacket and kicked off her own shoes. She moved to Van and leaned into her, using her body to press Van down to the bed. They kissed again. Bennie reached for Van's shirt, but before she could unbutton even a single button, Van slipped her hands inside Bennie's t-shirt and pushed it up. Taken by surprise, Bennie broke off the kiss, sat up, and let Van pull the shirt over her head.

Bennie wore no bra. Her breasts were small, smaller than they were twenty years later, and the nipples were brown and erect. Van sat up and ran her hands along Bennie's sides, up the outside of her breasts, and lightly across the front, teasing the nipples. Bennie caught her breath. Van leaned forward and placed her mouth over one and sucked, while she played the palm of her hand across the other.

"Oh, God." Bennie's chest rose rapidly and fell. She put her hand on Van's head.

Van dropped her other hand to the top of Bennie's jeans and fingered the button.

"What are you--" Bennie asked. "I'm supposed to be the one--"

Van raised her head to whisper in Bennie's ear, "I know what you like."

"Oh, Jesus," Bennie said hoarsely. She let Van unbutton her fly, but before Van could push the jeans down, Bennie grabbed Van's shirt and tugged it up. She got it up over Van's breasts, but it was too tight to remove completely without undoing the buttons. Bennie left it bunched up at the shoulders, unhooked Van's bra, and pushed it up as well. She ignored both bands of material, pushed Van down to the bed again, and pressed her mouth to Van's breast. She sucked one nipple, then licked and kissed her way to the other, stopping in the middle to nuzzle Van's breast bone.

While she was so occupied, Van unzipped her own jeans and pushed them down as far as she could with Bennie's body pressing against hers. She reached for Bennie's jeans again and tried to push them down as well, but she could get neither pair past their pubic bones.

Bennie raised her head. Her eyes were black. "Are you trying to get me naked?"

"Yes. Please, Bennie. Help me."

Bennie leaned down and kissed Van again, a long deep kiss, but after a moment Bennie's hips jerked again, and Van pushed her away. "Naked," she said. "Please."

Bennie rose and pulled off her jeans and underwear. Van sat up and pulled down her blouse so she could unbutton it. Before she was finished, Bennie tipped Van back, grabbed the top of her jeans and pulled them off. Bennie dropped to her knees in front of Van and parted her thighs with her hands.

"Sweet Jesus."

Van clapped her legs closed and threw her blouse and bra aside. "Not that," she said. "Not yet. Come here."

Bennie climbed up beside Van and they lay against each other, touching each other, savoring the feel of skin on skin. Van sat up, spread her legs, and lifted her knees high, with her feet on the bed, so that her vulva was wide and welcoming. "C'mere."

Bennie's eyes widened. She scooted forward, spread her own legs, and tucked them around Van. They nearly touched.

"Closer," Van whispered.

Bennie wrapped her arms around Van's hips and pulled her closer. Van watched Bennie's face as they touched, wide, wet lips touching wide, wet lips. Bennie looked shocked. Her jaw dropped, her eyes glazed, and her head fell back. Her pelvis thrust against Van's opening, and Van felt Bennie's clit, as thick as a thumb, stroke inside her. She thrust and stroked again, and again, and Van felt their mixed fluids pool on the sheet beneath them.

"Van." Bennie's voice was choked. "Van!" Veins in her neck stuck out, and her chest and face grew dark.

Bennie pushed Van back and rolled on top of her. Van widened her legs even more, and Bennie settled herself between them. Bennie buried her face in Van's hair, raised her hips, and brought them down again and again, stroking the inside of Van with her clit. She kept her hands on Van's hips and pressed them tightly to her. Finally, she arched, gave a choked scream, rocked her pelvis hard against Van's, and pulsed against her in a final, urgent thrust.

She collapsed, panting, on top of Van. They were both sweating. Van ran her fingers through Bennie's silky hair and smiled. She was filled with feelings of love. She imagined the Bennie she'd known in the future smiling a thank you to her from wherever she existed, but the image faded and merged into the Bennie Van held in her arms. They were the same.

Bennie lifted her head. Tears dripped from her eyes.

"Why are you crying?"

Bennie sniffed and rested her head on Van's shoulder. "I've never felt anything so wonderful," she said. "I've never done that before."

"I know, baby," Van said. "I know."

"You didn't come." Bennie ran a finger around Van's nipple.

"I nearly did," Van said. "But don't worry about me. We have all night."

"I just need a little rest."

"Okay." Van reached for the covers, but they were gone, fallen to the floor. Bennie leaned over the edge of the bed, yanked up the sheet, and pulled it on top of them. Van settled her head on the pillow, and Bennie put her head again on Van's shoulder. Van gave a soft laugh and said, "You were right."

"About what?" Bennie asked.

"You said if I thought you were good at forty-eight, I should try you at twenty-eight."

"You haven't seen anything yet. Just wait 'til I get my breath back. And I'll be twenty-nine next week."

"Happy birthday."

Bennie raised her head and grinned. "I'm good when I'm forty-eight?"

"You're great."

"I'm almost jealous of me."

Van smiled. "You're both you."

Bennie ran a hand down Van's body, stopping at her hair line. She snaked a finger along the top of Van's thigh and down along the inside.

"Your favorite place to kiss a woman," Van said.

Bennie gave her a look, sat up, and threw the sheet off.

"Already?" Van asked.

"I'm young." Bennie leaned over, gently pried Van's legs apart, and placed a kiss on her inner thigh.

Van quivered.

Bennie placed her hand on Van's mound and squeezed it gently. Van gasped and felt a surge of moisture wet Bennie's hand. "Atta girl," Bennie said. She slipped her hand farther down between Van's legs, slid her thumb inside her vulva, and tucked the tip of her pinky into Van's anus.

Van gasped and clenched. She thought she knew Bennie, but this was something new.

Bennie's smile was wicked. "Just a touch. Don't worry." She wiggled her pinky a bit and pressed from inside with her thumb.

Van opened her mouth, but could form no words. She moaned.

Without removing her hand, Bennie bent forward and licked one side of Van's opening, then the other, and the top.

Van clenched at Bennie's thumb and wanted more.

As though hearing the request, Bennie removed her hand, shifted position, and slid two long fingers inside Van. She brought them in and out, caressing the inside and the outside simultaneously. Van hips moved, and Bennie's strokes matched her rhythm.

Bennie leaned forward again and joined her mouth to her fingers. Her tongue licked where the fingers entered, lapped upward, and caressed Van's clit. Her fingers stroked deeper inside Van, as if to make sure they didn't miss a single spot, and then she removed them and replaced them with her tongue. She lapped inside, out, and up, flicking gently at the clit, then harder as Van writhed.

"Oh, God, Bennie. Oh, my God." The walls of Van's vagina contracted and she burned all over. Her toes clenched, her jaw clenched, and her fingers balled into fists. She moaned as the contractions pulled at her in waves, until finally, with one last deep shudder, the orgasm ended.

Van lay on the bed, spent and sweating, and tried to catch her breath.

Bennie wiped her face on the sheet and crawled up the bed. "It's a good thing they gave us two beds," she said. "This one's a soggy mess."

Van was too exhausted to answer. She let Bennie pull her into her arms and cradle her.

She felt wonderful and truly safe for the first time in months, and yet she felt like crying.

Thoughts of Patsy, kept at bay for the last several hours, suddenly surfaced. By now she would be home from work. By now she would know Van was gone.

Van didn't want to be anywhere but in Bennie's arms at that moment. She didn't want to hurt Patsy, but it was too late to prevent it. She had done it, and Patsy was going to be hurt. Van would have to deal with that at some point, but not yet. Not yet.

But, as if she'd picked up on Van's thoughts, Bennie asked, "Are you attracted to me because I remind you of Patsy?"

"You don't remind me of Patsy."

"We're a lot alike."

"You're nothing alike."

"C'mon." Bennie gave her a gentle shake. "Even I can see it. We're both tall, both butch, both athletic. I'm younger, that's all."

Van smiled. "Well, I do like a strong woman." But she knew what Bennie wanted. She pulled out of Bennie's arms to face her, crossed her legs, pulled the sheet over her lap, and examined Bennie. "Okay, for starters, you're a little bit taller and you're darker and you're prettier. Yes you are," Van said, when Bennie shook her head. "You have beautiful bone structure and gorgeous coloring. If you wanted to, you could be a model."

"I'd die first."

"I know, baby, but you could, if you wanted to. But that's all superficial. You're wonderful to look at, and your body is...well, look at it."

Bennie sat on the bed, naked and unselfconscious, one long leg crossed in front of her and the other stretched out across the bed. Her hips were slim, her shoulders broad, her belly flat, and her breasts pert.

"If you keep looking at me like that, I'm going to attack you," Bennie said.

"Just wait a minute, horndog, and let me finish what I was saying."

"Horndog?"

Van ignored her. Bennie had started it, but now it was important to Van to explain. "It's not about looks. Patsy's rough around the edges, I know, at least with everyone but me. She doesn't care what anybody thinks about her. She sees right through their bullshit and calls them on it, and I love that about her."

Bennie's eyes narrowed.

"But there's a downside to that," Van said. "She's opinionated and unpredictable and...and not always kind. She hurts people sometimes, and she doesn't care."

"But you love her," Bennie said.

Van took Bennie's hand and held it to her bare breast. "You and Patsy couldn't be more different. You're sweet. Not just to me, but to everybody, all the time. Whenever anyone needs help, you drop everything and come running, and you're never unkind. Never."

Bennie waited.

Van's eyes stung. She tried to blink them back, but tears pooled in her eyes. "I love her," she confessed, "but she doesn't make me happy anymore."

Chapter Twenty-Three

Jill - 1989

KENDRA TOOK THE boys in Van's Honda, and Jill followed in RIP. They made it as far as the first rest stop before Kendra stopped and insisted on separating the boys.

"They won't stop fighting. I'm going to drive straight into the Columbia River if you don't take one of them."

Jill chose Kevin. His legs were shorter. If she strapped him in tight, he could kick all he wanted and his feet would still not reach RIP's dashboard.

There was really no need to bring RIP. They would all fit comfortably in the Honda, and when they found Amelia they'd have to drive back to Spokane anyway, in order to return her to the same place she left from in 1933. Jill could have ridden with Kendra and

helped control the boys. It would have been less expensive than taking two vehicles, especially with RIP's poor gas mileage.

But Jill couldn't shake her nagging dread of leaving RIP behind, though she couldn't pinpoint why. She had a vague idea of finding Amelia, locking her in the back of RIP, and speeding back to Spokane to send her home. She would never do that, of course. Kendra wouldn't let her.

"Dad won't believe we went to Tacoma," Kevin said. "I can't wait to tell him. I've never been anywhere. The only place I ever went was to Coeur d'Alene Lake. Did you ever go there? We watch fireworks on the Fourth of July, and we swim in the lake. Kyle went to Seattle once with our cousins, but I was too little. They stopped at a restaurant with waiters and ate lunch. Can we do that? You know what I'm going to order if we go to a restaurant? A milkshake. Just for me. Once Kyle got a milkshake that came with extra in a big silver thing because they made too much to fit in one glass. I forgot to order a milkshake that time, but Mom made him share."

The kid talked nonstop. Jill tuned him out.

They'd left early that morning. Not as early as Jill wanted to, since she was ready by six. Kendra insisted on letting the boys sleep, and then she made everybody eat breakfast, and they didn't get out of there until eight-thirty. Still, it was too early for Van and Bennie to have bought tickets to the game.

Jill glanced at her watch. It was after ten. The ticket office would be open, finally. If they couldn't get tickets, they'd have to find some scalpers.

"A kid in my class stayed at a hotel once, and you know what?"

Kevin said. "It had a pool. It was inside the building, and they played in it all night. I hope our hotel has a pool. Kyle and me will swim for hours. I hope it's not too deep, though. I can't really swim."

Jill kept an eye on the mirrors, half expecting to see Patsy's truck roaring up behind them.

Poor Patsy.

It was a good thing Kendra answered the door last night when Patsy showed up. Jill meant it when she told Kendra she'd never lie to Patsy. She and Patsy had been friends for more than thirty years, and she'd never lied to her once. She probably couldn't get away with it even if she tried. She didn't mind if Kendra lied to her though.

"Where's Van?" Patsy had asked.

"She's not here," Kendra said.

"That's her car out front."

"She loaned it to me. I'm taking the boys to Seattle tomorrow."

"Where is she then?"

Silence.

"Fuck. Come on, Kendra, where she'd go? She's with Bennie, isn't she?"

"They went to find Amelia."

"Where?"

"I can't tell you."

"The hell you can't. Is she at Bennie's?"

"No, but that's all I'm going to tell you," Kendra said. "If she wants you to know where she is, she'll tell you herself."

"Where's Jill?"

Oh oh. Jill put a pillow over her head.

"She's not here," Kendra said, flat out lying, to Jill's great admiration.

"Fuck," Patsy said again. Her voice turned sad. "Van's avoiding me. She won't even talk to me."

"I'm sorry," Kendra said. "She will when she's ready."

"What's going on with her? She seems so sad all of a sudden."

"It's not all of a sudden," Kendra said. "She hasn't been herself since the hostage thing."

After more silence, Patsy said, "That long?"

"Yeah."

"That's about when I started my new shift."

"Yeah."

Patsy left after that, but she'd sounded more sad than angry.

"My teacher said I have a good imagination," Kevin said, "'cause I used all five senses. There's seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, and touching. Those are the five senses, and I got an 'A' because I said what my blister felt like and what the horse sounded like and what Amelia looked like and, um, oh yeah, what the mean lady's mush tasted like and...I forget what the smell was, but it was something, and my teacher said I was something else."

Jill looked down at Kevin. Somehow he had squirmed his way out of the seatbelt and was lying across the front seat, his feet propped against the window and his head in Jill's lap.

"What did you say?" she asked.

"My teacher said I was something else. I never had a blister this long that I didn't pop."

"You told your teacher about Amelia Earhart?"

"That's what I just told you. Aren't you listening to me, Jill?"

"Sorry, my mind was wandering. What did you tell your teacher?"

"I told her I went to the olden days and all the things that happened to me. I can't remember what I said something smelled like, though."

"What did your teacher say about Amelia Earhart?"

"She said she was famous and she told us all about her life," Kevin said. "It was kind of sad because she dies in the end, but she was pretty old by then anyway. And at least she got to be famous. When we find her at the basketball game, I'm going to ask for her autograph."

"No!" Jill practically shouted.

Kevin looked surprised. He sat up and scooted back to his side of the seat, sending her a wary look.

"We have to send her back to the olden days, Kevin," she said more gently. She hadn't meant to scare the poor kid. "And you can't tell anybody else that she was here. It's a secret."

"Can I tell Dad?"

"Not even your dad."

Kevin looked out the window and said nothing, and Jill had a horrible suspicion. "You already told him didn't you?"

Kevin shrugged.

Why didn't they think to talk to Kevin before they sent him home for the week? "What did he say?"

"He said, 'That's nice.'"

Well, that was one advantage about the kid being such a talker. It sounded like Paul didn't listen to him much either.

"Why do you have to send Amelia home?" Kevin slumped down in his seat and propped his feet on the dash.

"Put your feet down," Jill said. "Sit on them. And put your seatbelt on."

Kevin got onto his knees and pulled the seatbelt out, swiveled himself around, and latched it while facing backward. He turned back around, sat down, and tucked his feet up under his butt. "If Amelia stays here she won't have to die."

"But then she'll never get to be famous," Jill said. "It was what she was doing when she died that made everyone admire her so much. She flew almost all the way around the world, and back then, women weren't allowed to do very many things. The fact that she was a woman doing something no man had ever done was amazing to people. Besides, everyone has to die someday, even Amelia. Staying here won't keep her alive forever."

Kevin looked out the window again and sighed. "Even I have to die someday, huh?"

Jill didn't really think about Kendra's boys much, despite the fact that they were always underfoot. Jill loved Kendra, and Kendra loved the boys. Therefore, Jill loved the boys. It was a matter of simple logic. But now and then one of them would say something that made her heart clench a little, and she realized that more than logic might be involved. Seeing Kevin perched obediently on his feet, looking slightly mournful at the thought of his impending doom, Jill realized that she truly loved the little guy. She may have started loving him because Kendra did, but he'd wormed his way into her heart all on his own.

She ruffled his hair. "Not for a long, long, long time."

He smiled.

They stopped for lunch in Ellensburg. Kevin got his milkshake, but Kyle ordered a banana split that filled Kevin with envy and robbed him of half his pleasure in the shake. Jill called the Travelodge where Van and Bennie had booked their rooms, but there was no answer. Jill and Kendra traded boys and continued on their way.

They reached the Travelodge at 2:30. The clerk called Van and Bennie's room from the desk. Moments later, as Jill pocketed the key to the room she'd share with Kendra and the boys, Van and Bennie stepped out of the elevator into the lobby. They were laughing.

"We got the tickets," Bennie announced. She practically glowed.

"Good." Jill fully relaxed for the first time all day.

"How much were they?" Kendra asked.

"Ten dollars each," Van said.

Kendra winced. "Whoa. For the kids too?"

"Yep. That was the lowest price. But don't worry about it. My treat."

"That's not fair."

"No problem. Hey, I just saved hundreds of dollars on airline tickets." Van seemed to glow too, and Jill was more thankful than ever that Patsy hadn't followed them after all.

"Mom, Mom!" Kevin and Kyle ran in from a side door. "They got a pool!"

"Okay, hang on, guys. Let's get settled in first."

"Where are your bags?" Bennie asked.

"In the trunk of the Honda," Jill said. She and Bennie headed for the door but it opened before they reached it.

Walking through the hotel's front door were Hannah, Ben, and Patsy.

Chapter Twenty-Four

Van - 1989

"I MADE IT." Patsy smiled and dropped a backpack on the floor. "Have you found her yet?"

Van felt light-headed. She didn't answer, and neither did anyone else.

"Amelia," Patsy prodded. "Have you found her? That's why you're here, right?" Patsy's face was pale. She was sweating, and her voice, though hearty, was brittle. "I thought I'd come help. After all, people have been searching for Amelia Earhart ever since I was born. It would be a blast to be the one to finally find her. Any luck so far?"

Jill made an answer, but Van couldn't hear it. Blood roared in her ears, and the only sound making it through was the sound of Patsy's voice.

"Where's your room, Van? I'd like to stash my bag."

The room spun. All Van could see was Patsy's face, her agonized smile and pleading eyes, and she thought she might shatter.

Rather than faint, Van resorted to a trick she'd learned as a child. She pulled an invisible bubble around herself, a force field to shield herself from hurtful things, but it didn't work this time. She could still see the tortured grimace on Patsy's face. She imagined a bucket of paint being tipped over the bubble from above, red paint, that dripped down the sides of the bubble and blocked her view. Everything turned red. There. That was better.

It couldn't block Patsy's voice, though, or the feel of her hands on Van's shoulders, shaking her. "Snap out of it, Van!" The bubble popped. Van looked around. The lobby was empty of everyone but Patsy and Van. Even the desk clerk had vanished.

"You did it, didn't you?" Patsy's face was angry, but still desperately hopeful. "You cheated on me."

She should have known Patsy wouldn't shy away from the truth. Another woman might have worn blinders, at least for a while, and played tricks with herself to ease the hurt, but that was not Patsy's way. She would confront the truth head on, no matter how painful it might be. For once, Van wished Patsy would let herself be a coward.

"Tell me, Van. You did it, didn't you?"

"I did it," Van said, the words choked out like rocks.

Patsy deflated. Her face went slack and gray. She dropped her hands and took a step back. "I didn't think you would really do it." Her voice had lost all its strength. "I didn't think you would really do it."

"I did it." Van closed her eyes against the pain in Patsy's face. When she opened them a full minute later, Patsy was gone.

Van's heart wrenched like it was being twisted by a giant hand. How could she have caused so much pain to a woman she loved? Van's feelings for Bennie were genuine and strong, but they didn't excuse what she did to Patsy. Van wasn't a woman who treated

badly the people she loved. She realized suddenly that there were better ways she could have handled the situation, better ways she could have handled her feelings for Bennie, that wouldn't have been so hurtful to Patsy, but she hadn't thought of them then. She hadn't thought of anything, really.

Something was wrong with her. Perhaps she should look into that. Perhaps she should try to find out what was making her act in the strange ways she was acting and fix it, before she fucked anything else up, if there was anything left. That would be the smart thing to do.

Van didn't do it. Instead, she did what she was becoming expert at.

She ran.

Chapter Twenty-Five

Bennie - 1989

BENNIE LET HANNAH drag her away, though the look on Van's face tugged at her all the way to the convenience store on the corner.

"Let's have a cup of coffee," Hannah said.

There was a plastic booth tucked into the corner of the store beside the flavored ice machine. They each bought a cup of coffee and sat down. Bennie could use the coffee. She'd hardly slept the night before. Neither of them had. They'd talked and made love until dawn, slept a bit, and got up early to buy the Final Four tickets before Jill and Kendra arrived.

Van looked horrible standing there in the lobby with Patsy. She was clearly terrified. What was it she'd said last night? *Patsy wasn't always kind*. Bennie shouldn't have left her there to face Patsy by herself. On the other hand, Van also said last night that she still loved Patsy. She and Patsy had some things to work out that really weren't Bennie's business. Bennie forced herself to stop thinking of Van's face and tried to focus on Hannah.

"So, since Patsy planned to go after you, I knew it was part of God's plan for me to come along with her," Hannah was saying.

"What do you mean? How did you two run into each other?"

Hannah looked down and blew on her coffee, and Bennie realized she must have already explained. "Sorry," Bennie said.

"That's okay," Hannah said. "You were distracted. I was just telling you that I ran into Patsy at Jill's. I was hoping to catch them before they left, but we were too late. So Patsy showing up like she did looking for Van seemed very much like God was guiding our steps."

Bennie almost laughed. "You and Patsy in the car together for five hours? And your ears didn't fall off?"

Hannah smiled. "She did use some language I didn't want Ben to hear," she admitted. "But when I asked her to stop, she only got worse. Anyway, Ben had his Walkman, so I just made sure he kept the earplugs in."

They had talked about Hannah a bit last night. Or was it this morning? At some point, between bouts of lovemaking, Bennie had asked Van, "Do you believe in God?"

"No," Van said, without hesitation. "I don't believe, but I accept the possibility."

"You don't believe in the Bible?"

"It exists," Van said. "I believe that much."

"You don't think it's the word of God?"

"No. The Old Testament's just stories of mythology with a little bit of history thrown in. The New Testament's mostly letters written by men who were trying to explain something they believed." Van raised her head from where it had been resting on Bennie's shoulder and looked at her. "What about you?"

Bennie brought a hand to Van's hair and nestled her fingers in it, tugging gently at the tangled curls. "I'm not sure. There are things in the Bible that I don't think are right."

"Is this about Hannah?"

"No." Bennie frowned. "Not really."

Van dropped her head again to Bennie's shoulder. "Kendra said she's got an unhealthy hold on you, that you let her try to get you born again and make you give up women."

Bennie gave a soft laugh. "After yesterday, I think she might give up on that last part." She felt Van's lips smile against her shoulder.

"Good. Because I know something Hannah doesn't know."

"What's that?"

Van brought her lips to Bennie's ear and whispered, "You're God's gift to women."

Bennie had flushed with embarrassment and pleasure then, and she flushed again now at the memory of it. To distract Hannah, she asked, "Why did you come here?"

"I prayed most of the night for you," Hannah said. "I knew you were putting yourself in danger by coming over here yesterday, just the two of you, but I thought, in the long run, maybe it was a good thing. I thought at first that God might want you to come over here with Van, so that you could wrestle with your demons and win. But I couldn't be sure, so I prayed. By morning I knew I had to at least try to find you and stop you before it was too late. So Ben and I packed our things and went to Jill's, but they were already gone. We almost left, but then Patsy drove up. It couldn't have been more clear. I'd asked God for guidance, and he told me what to do and even provided a ride for us. I couldn't ignore it."

Hannah's gray eyes glowed with fervor. She was earnest, and she meant only good, Bennie knew, but she was wrong. The whole long night while Hannah had prayed for Bennie, Bennie and Van had been making love, and nothing was ever more right. If God had a plan for Bennie, it was Van, not Hannah.

"I don't need saving," Bennie said.

Hannah started to smile, but it faded when Bennie shook her head. "No, I don't mean that," Bennie said. "What I mean is, I don't want saving. Not the way you mean it. Not if it means I have to change who I am."

Hannah dropped her voice to a whisper. "Bennie, why do you think God sent you back to 1974, then? You have to acknowledge it was part of God's plan for us to meet."

"Maybe," Bennie said. "Or it might have just been random."

"What about my stepfather? What about Stu? They're dead. You don't think God planned that? And your part in it?"

"Maybe," Bennie said again, "but just because God has a plan doesn't mean we get to know what it is. Maybe God wanted them dead, and he used me because I was handy. Maybe he picked me because I'm a lesbian. He probably didn't think a straight girl would have it in her to do what I did. The thing is, how can we possibly know what God's plan is, if there is one? We're only human."

"If you would pray, you would have a little more insight into what God wants for you."

"If that was the case, wouldn't everyone who prays agree with each other about what God's plans are? It seems like people who pray all get different messages from God, and they all think their message is the right one. They can't all be right."

Bennie had never spoken so bluntly to Hannah about her beliefs. She usually just let Hannah talk, and Bennie would say noncommittal things like, "I'll think about what you said," or "I'll try that." She'd never argued with Hannah, partly because she was so uncertain. She was too worried that Hannah might be right. But after last night, Bennie knew better.

"You won't talk me out of my faith," Hannah said.

Bennie sighed. "I'm not trying to talk you out of your faith, Hannah. I just don't want you to try to talk me into yours anymore." She leaned back and tossed her cup into the trash can at the end of the counter. "I'll tell you this, though. If you think it's a sin for a woman to love a woman, you're dead wrong." She rose. "Let's head back. I have to pee, and I don't want to use the restroom here. You never know what people do in public bathroom stalls."

They walked back to the hotel without speaking, but when they reached the parking lot, Hannah said, "Patsy's truck is gone."

Bennie had an uneasy feeling. She hurried into the hotel. The lobby was empty. Hannah looked for the pool, while Bennie took the elevator to the room. The maid had been there, and clean sheets stretched across both beds. Bennie looked in the corner where Van's bag had been. The corner was empty.

Heart pounding, she rushed to look in the closet, the dresser, the bathroom, even under the beds. Nothing. Aside from Bennie's duffel on the chair and her toothbrush in the bathroom, there was no sign the room was occupied.

Fuck.

She ran downstairs and found the pool. The three boys and Jill were in the water, shrieking and splashing. Kendra and Hannah sat at the edge of the pool kicking their feet in the water, looking oddly companionable.

"Where's Van?" Bennie demanded.

Kendra looked up. "I don't know. Last I saw she was in the lobby with Patsy."

"Patsy's truck is gone. So is Van."

A sad look crossed Kendra's face. "Oh, I'm sorry. She didn't say anything to us."

Bennie clenched her fists. "Patsy didn't let her. She didn't let her say goodbye to any of us."

"Patsy wouldn't do that," Jill said. She pulled herself up onto the edge of the pool and sat beside Kendra, dripping wet in her jeans and t-shirt.

"Van wouldn't have left like that, without a word," Bennie said.

"Jill's right," Kendra said. "Patsy wouldn't force her to go. If Van left, it was her own choice."

Bennie's stomach turned. She felt like crying.

"Are you sure she didn't leave a note or something?" Kendra asked.

Maybe in the duffel. Bennie ran back to the elevator.

There was no note in the duffel, or anywhere else. Bennie was wrong, though, when she'd thought there was no other sign the room was occupied. On the dresser were the tickets they'd bought for the Final Four.

Bennie picked them up. The tickets were for the cheap seats at the end of the court, Section 13A, Row 4, Seats 11 through 16. She flipped through them. There were only tickets for seats 11 through 15. Seat 16 was missing. Van had taken one of the tickets.

JILL CALLED PATSY that night--she was the only one who dared--and confirmed that Van had not returned to Spokane with Patsy.

In a rare display of diplomacy, Jill said, "I won't tell you what else she said."

Hannah and Ben stayed in Bennie's room that night. It aggravated the hell out of Bennie that she had to share the room she and Van had made love in, but it only made sense. Nobody had extra cash to pay for a separate room for Hannah and Ben, and they had to sleep somewhere. Jill and Kendra already had two cots in their room, and there was no room for any more.

They prayed on their knees beside the bed before climbing in.

"God bless Bennie and may her path lead her to Jesus," Hannah said and waited for Ben to repeat it.

Ben squinted up at Bennie. She could tell he was mortified just to be praying in front of her. Being asked to pray for her in front of her was about to push him over the edge.

"You don't have to pray for me, buddy," Bennie said.

Hannah clenched her lips but did not open her eyes. "And God, please make Ben strong so that he can resist the temptations of nonbelievers. Amen."

"Amen," Ben whispered. He climbed into bed and hid himself under the covers. He was too old to sleep with his mother, and he knew it. Hannah was going to have to loosen her reins on Ben pretty soon, or he was going to bolt.

Bennie didn't have pajamas, but she couldn't sleep in her jeans. She crawled into bed and undressed under the covers. Wearing only her t-shirt, she turned out the light and rolled away from her guests.

She didn't think she would sleep. How could she? She was worried sick about Van. She didn't leave with Patsy, so she had to still be in Tacoma somewhere, but why did she run off like that, and would she really show up at the game tomorrow? It was driving Bennie mad. She wanted to pace. She wanted to punch a wall. She wanted to cry, but she couldn't, not with Hannah and Ben sleeping in the next bed.

She was forced to lie still, her head on the pillow, and eventually her weariness took over. Right before she dozed off, though, she prayed to the God she wasn't sure she believed in anymore.

Please, God, keep her safe.

Chapter Twenty-Six

Kendra - 1989

LESBIANS EVERYWHERE! THE Tacoma Dome was filled with them.

Kendra's gaydar was still fairly unreliable, since she came so late to the party, but even she could tell that the arena was filled with dykes. There were plenty of straight women there, too, and Kendra couldn't always tell by looking at the women themselves who was straight and who was not. Too many straight women had short hair, and her own hair waved past her shoulders, so that was no help. Nearly everyone wore jeans and t-shirts supporting one team or another, and even the straight girls wore hardly any makeup at the game. It was the way they acted in pairs that tipped her off.

Straight women stood straight, at least when they were with other women. Lesbians leaned into each other constantly and hugged each other with full-body hugs that lasted more than a few seconds. Their bodies bent and moved and wiggled, a lot like straight women's did when they hung out with men, now that Kendra thought about it. When they were with other women, though, straight women stood stiff as Barbie dolls, and when they ran into old friends they just said hi or, at the most, gave a stiff little hug with only their forearms.

Also, straight women bought their own popcorn. Lesbians bought popcorn for each other, shared drinks using the same straws, and even ate off the same hotdog.

"Look, there's another one," Kendra said when she saw two women with matching jackets settle into their seats.

"Stop pointing," Jill said. "You're supposed to be looking for Amelia."

"And Van," added Bennie, who looked like shit.

"I am," Kendra said, but it seemed hopeless to her. There were thousands of people in the arena. If anyone wanted to hide, it was the perfect place to do it, and they didn't even know for sure that Amelia or Van was there.

Besides, Kendra was busy becoming a women's college basketball fan. The excitement in the arena was contagious. Bands on both ends of the stands played their schools' fight songs, and Kendra found herself singing along with "Good old Rocky Top."

Kendra had never played sports in school, and she'd never really thought about female athletes except for women like Nadia Comaneci and Dorothy Hamill. Sports had always been for boys.

Looking now at the amazing muscular thighs and shoulders of the young women warming up on the court, she realized she'd been missing out.

"Kendra," Jill said. "You're not going to find Amelia on the court. Aren't you going to help me look?"

"I am," Kendra said, "but she's not in this section, and I can't leave until the boys get back from the bathroom."

"I'll wait for them," Bennie said. "I'm not going anywhere. If I leave, Van won't know where to find me."

"Okay," Kendra said, "but make sure the boys stay here with you. I don't want them running all over the place. Oh wait, here they are."

Kyle hopped down the steps. "Mom, can we have some cotton candy?"

"Where's Kevin?"

Kyle looked behind him and seemed surprised to be alone. "I don't know."

"Kyle, I told you to stick together."

Kyle shrugged. "I thought we did."

"Great. We've already lost Amelia and Van. Now we have to look for Kevin too."

"Don't worry, Mom," Kyle said. "He can't really get lost in a place like this."

Chapter Twenty-Seven

Kevin - 1989

KYLE WAS RIGHT in front of Kevin when they left the bathroom, but somehow or other Kyle got lost. They were supposed to stay together, so Kevin decided he'd better look for Kyle before heading back to their seats, or he might get in trouble. Besides, it gave him a chance to scout out the food.

Mom made them eat sandwiches before they headed to the game so they wouldn't ask for any food there, but the smell of popcorn and hotdogs had Kevin starving again already. He squirmed his way past the people in line to reach the counter where he could see better. Nobody paid any attention to him. Nobody ever noticed kids.

Kevin looked at the menu. He was a pretty good reader, and anyway popcorn and hotdog were compound words made out of two littler words, so they were easy to read. He wasn't quite sure how to sound out nachos, though, and he hoped someone would order it so he could see what it was. Actually, what he really hoped was that someone would order something really good, like a giant pretzel, and then forget to take it off the counter when they walked away. If that happened, Kevin would pretend like he was that person's kid and just pick it up and walk off with it.

Five different people must have made it to the front of the line and ordered food and not forgotten anything, and Kevin was getting tired of hanging around. He was about to leave when a tall woman stepped up to the counter.

"I'd like a large bag of popcorn, please, and a paper cup that I can fill with water from the drinking fountain."

"I have to charge you for the cup," the counter man said.

"No doubt. I'm only grateful no one has thought to charge for water."

"Hi Amelia," Kevin said.

Amelia looked down and seemed kind of surprised to see him there. "Hello, Kevin." She looked around like she was looking for his mom or something.

"Jill's looking for you," Kevin said.

"Oh crumbs. How did she know I was here?"

"They saw you on TV."

Amelia frowned like she was mad, but not mean. "She should have waited for me. I would have come back." She turned away from the counter. "Probably."

Kevin couldn't believe his rotten luck. Someone finally forgot their popcorn, and it was one of his friends. "Don't forget your popcorn."

"Oh." She grabbed her popcorn and the empty cup. "Thank you."

Kevin took off after her. "I can show you where our seats are."

"I don't want you to show me. Can you just tell me the section?"

Kevin looked in both directions of the arena. Come to think of it, he might not be able to show her after all, since he wasn't really sure which way to go. "I don't remember. They're at the end."

Amelia stopped at a drinking fountain. "Will you hold my popcorn?"

Would he ever. The bag was huge. He held it up to his nose and sniffed. The buttery smell was killing him. He peeked at Amelia. She was busy filling her cup with water. The popcorn was just inches from his mouth. He stuck his tongue out and pretended he was a frog.

Snap! One popcorn fly was in his mouth, and it was good.

He peeked up again and saw Amelia watching him. She took the popcorn back.

"Go ahead and take a handful." She held the bag low for him.

"Really? Thanks."

She didn't say one hand or two, so he dug both hands into the bucket and grabbed as much as his two hands could hold together. Some popcorn fell onto the floor.

"Good thing I got the big size," Amelia said.

"Sorry."

"Can you keep a secret, Kevin?"

"Sure," he said.

"I don't really want your mom and Jill to know I'm here. Not until I'm ready to tell them myself. So you won't tell them you saw me, will you?"

"Uh uh." His mouth was full, but he had to eat the popcorn fast, before he dropped any more of it.

"Good."

He gulped. "What about Bennie?"

"She's here too?"

"Uh huh."

"Oh, for crying in the sink. No, don't tell Bennie either."

"Okay." He finished the last bite and licked his hand. "My teacher said you made a roller coaster in your back yard when you were little."

"Oh?" Amelia looked surprised.

"Yeah. Don't you remember?" Kevin took some more popcorn, since she wasn't paying any attention.

"Yes, I remember. It was wonderful. I'm just surprised your teacher knew about it. Why did she teach you that?"

"'Cause I told her about you, so she read a book to us. She said you taught girls that they can do anything a boy can do. People didn't used to know girls could do everything. I'm sorry to tell you how it ends, though."

"I know how it ends. Maybe I'll change how it ends."

"That's what I thought. But Jill says if you change how it ends, you won't get to be famous. Besides, everybody has to die sometime. Even me."

Amelia frowned again, but only like she was thinking. "Hey, leave some popcorn for me."

"Okay." He opened his hand and let popcorn drop back into the bag. He was getting pretty full anyway. "I better go find my mom."

"Remember our secret," Amelia said. "Don't tell anyone you saw me."

"I won't." Kevin took a drink from the water fountain, waved good bye, and took off running. He couldn't wait to tell Kyle he got some popcorn.

Chapter Twenty-Eight

Van - 1989

THE LOWER TIER of the Tacoma Dome was packed with thousands of fans, but only a few rows in the center of the upper tier were occupied. The top fifteen rows were empty, and those on the ends were in shadows.

Van leaned back in her seat, the lone occupant of section 5B, and watched Amelia climb the stairs and settle with her popcorn into an aisle seat in the next section over. She didn't notice Van, two rows behind her and half a row away.

Amelia looked like any modern 1980's basketball fan, and nothing like a 1933 aviatrix. She wore a baseball cap, jeans, sneakers, and the royal blue Final Four t-shirt they were selling in the arena. She threw a leather jacket--Bennie's, Van suspected--onto the seat next to her.

The announcers could still be easily heard in the top seats, but the speakers weren't pointed in their direction so it wasn't overpowering. There was no one else around.

"Amelia," Van said.

Amelia jerked around. "Oh, for crying in the bucket. Kevin didn't tell me you were here too."

Van got up and moved to the row behind Amelia. "You've seen Kevin?"

"Yes. I bribed him with popcorn not to tell on me. I don't suppose that will work with you?"

"I won't tell," Van said. "If you don't want to go back, don't go back."

"Thank you. I think I'd rather not. Popcorn?"

Van leaned over the seat and helped herself to a handful.

"You don't think I'll change history if I stay here?" Amelia asked.

"No, I'm pretty sure you will," Van said, "but it won't be the end of the world. Probably. It's not like you're the only person who could fly around the world. You were just the first."

Amelia turned around completely to look at Van. "I fly around the world?"

"Uh..." Oh fuck. "No, I think I misspoke. I think maybe--"

"First?" Amelia grinned. "You said I'm first. I beat the men? Oh, hotdog!"

"Well, uh..." Now that she thought about it, Van seemed to remember that Amelia didn't actually make it all the way around the world. She could hardly tell Amelia that now, though. "You know, Jill hasn't been very honest with you about why she wants to send you back. I mean, it's true that she gets all bent out of shape about people changing history, even a little, but that's not her main reason."

"I'll bite," Amelia said. "What's her main reason?"

"Jill thinks she is you. Reincarnated. She was born exactly nine months after you, uh, disappeared."

"Reincarnation? Really?"

"Well, no, not really," Van said. "I mean, Jill thinks it's real, but that doesn't mean it is."

"Wouldn't it be thrilling, though?" Even in the dim light, Van could see Amelia's eyes gleam. "If I come back as Jill, that means I invent time travel in my next life."

Amelia's reaction was exactly what Jill's would have been, Van realized, and for the first time she wondered if Jill's theory might be right.

"Why are you hiding up here?" Amelia asked. "You look like you've been crying."

"Only half the night." Van crossed her arms on the back of the seat beside Amelia and rested her chin on them.

"What happened?"

"It's a tawdry story," Van warned. She blinked hard. She was tired of tears.

"I'm all ears."

"Well, the short version is I cheated on Patsy, with Bennie, and Patsy caught us."

"In the act?"

"Well, no. It's not that tawdry."

"Oh." Amelia seemed disappointed. "Well, we all knew you and Bennie were going to happen. Even I could see that. It was inevitable that Patsy would have to know. Your short version just speeded things up a bit."

"I hurt Patsy. Badly."

"You hurt her quickly, is what you did," Amelia said. "It's like pulling off a Band Aid-- do you still have Band Aids? You pull it off with one quick jerk rather than tug at it painfully slowly. It's best this way, in the end."

"I guess," Van said, but she wasn't sure.

"So you're hiding from Patsy?"

"No, she's gone. I'm just hiding," Van said. "It won't make sense to someone like you, but I just feel like I can't face things anymore."

"Where's Bennie?"

"Down there." Van pulled out her ticket and read it. "Section 13A, Row 4, Seat 15. You can see her from here."

"Where?"

"There." Van pointed. "See the big guy in the red shirt in the front row? Go up four rows from there and over to the end."

"I see her," Amelia said. "She's wearing a white shirt. And there's Kyle and--oh, look, Kevin found them. Where are Jill and Kendra?"

"I suspect they're wandering around looking for you."

"Not Bennie?"

"Bennie's waiting for me to show up, I think."

"She doesn't know you're here?"

Van's eyes stung again. "I freaked out yesterday, after Patsy showed up. I just took off. I didn't say goodbye or anything."

Amelia was silent. "Poor Bennie," she said finally. "Why did you do that?"

"I don't know. I just felt so bad. Patsy didn't deserve what I did to her."

"Bennie doesn't deserve what you're doing to her right now."

"I know." Van let a few tears fall, but she didn't have very many left. "I know. I can't believe I did that to her. I want to take it back, but it's too late. I hope we do get reincarnated, because I sure need a do-over."

"So you're just going to leave her down there?"

"I'm trying to work up my courage."

Amelia handed her a paper napkin. "I'll go with you, if you like."

Van blew her nose. "Really? They're going to want to send you back."

"Yes." Amelia draped the jacket over her arm, gathered her popcorn and drink, and rose. "I think I may let them. I don't want a man to beat me around the world, do I?"

Chapter Twenty-Nine

Bennie - 1989

IT WAS IRONIC, Bennie thought, that she'd finally made it to a Women's Final Four, and she was too distracted to even watch the game. The Tennessee Vols coach Pat Head Summitt was down there, as well as Auburn's coach Joe Ciampi. Bennie thought Pat Head Summitt was a great coach, but she was rooting for Auburn, since Tennessee had already won a Final Four championship a couple of years before. Bennie liked rooting for the underdog.

It was hard to enjoy the game, though, when she kept seeing women who looked like Van in the stands. Sometimes she thought she saw Amelia as well, but it always turned out to be someone who just had the same hair or the same build. Really, no one else looked like Van, or Amelia for that matter.

The boys distracted her too. She'd only volunteered to keep an eye on them because she knew damned well she wasn't leaving her seat, not until Van found her. She never would have done it if she'd known what a chore it was going to be to keep them from each other's throats.

"He keeps making me smell his hand," Kyle complained.

"Gross," Bennie said. "Kevin, stop making Kyle smell your hand."

"I'm not making him," Kevin said, waving his hand in front of Kyle's nose. "He can hold his breath if he doesn't want to smell it."

Kyle slapped Kevin's hand away and put his own hand over Kevin's nose and mouth. "I'll hold your breath for you."

"Kyle, stop smothering your brother. Kevin, stop sticking your hand in Kyle's face or I'll--oh for God's sake, trade me seats." She put herself between the boys and remained standing to create a barrier, grateful no one had the seats behind them, but it didn't stop their wrangling.

"He's just jealous 'cause I got popcorn," Kevin said.

"I'm not jealous. I just don't want to smell your stinky greasy hands."

"Where did you get popcorn?" Bennie asked. She knew they'd both eaten lunch before coming to the game, but they acted as if they were starving. She was willing to buy them some popcorn just to shut them up, but she didn't dare leave her seat, and she'd promised Kendra not to let them out of her sight.

Kevin looked guilty. "A lady gave me some."

"Huh uh," Kyle said. "It wasn't a lady. It was A--"

"Shut up!" Kevin shrieked, lunging for Kyle behind Bennie. "I'm gonna kill you!"

"Stop it!" Bennie grabbed Kevin's arm and thrust him back into his seat. "What is your problem? I thought you guys liked each other."

Kevin looked surprised. "We do."

"Huh." Kyle sat back in his seat and crossed his arms. "I don't."

"Where's your mother?" Bennie scanned the stands again. "I wish they'd just find Amelia already and get back here." And where the hell was Van?

"Hey," Kevin said, "there she is."

"What?" Bennie's heart leapt to her throat and pounded there. "Who?"

"Amelia," Kevin said, "and she's got Van with her."

Bennie looked where he pointed. Amelia and Van were on the walkway between the upper and lower sections, heading toward 13A. They turned to the stairs. Van looked up and met Bennie's eyes.

Relief flooded through Bennie and made her weak. Her legs gave out and she dropped to her seat. She turned her back on the approaching women and buried her face in her hands. She hadn't realized how worried she'd been until that moment. Horrible images came to her of Van lost on the streets of Tacoma, Van being assaulted by strangers, Van lying bleeding and hurt, Van unconscious in a hospital bed, or worst of all, Van throwing herself off a bridge or a cliff in her despair. Images Bennie had pushed away with all her might since Van disappeared, images kept at bay only by the thin thread of hope hanging from the missing basketball ticket, inundated her now.

A sob shuddered through her.

She felt the boys move away, and someone sat beside her. It was Van. Bennie could smell her, but she didn't look up. Van's hand touched her back, reached up, and wrapped around her shoulder.

"Bennie," Van said softly. "I'm here."

Bennie removed her hands, sat up, and faced Van, heedless of the tears that poured down her face. All the anxiety of the last twenty-four hours turned into burning anger, and she said harshly, "Don't you ever do that to me again. Not *ever*."

Van shook her head, tears on her own cheeks as well. "I won't. I'm sorry." Her voice was thick from crying, her eyes were swollen and red, and her nose was raw from blowing. "I'm so sorry, Bennie."

Bennie's anger evaporated and all that mattered was that Van was safe. She stood, drew Van up with her, and wrapped her in her arms. She closed her eyes, let her face rest in Van's hair, and held her. Countless minutes passed as she absorbed Van into herself, every cell of her soaking up Van like water.

Finally she noticed movement in the seats around them, and both bands erupted simultaneously into their fight songs. Bennie looked up. It was halftime, and Bennie and Van were the only people in their row.

"Where are the boys?" Bennie asked.

"Amelia took them," Van said.

"Oh, great. Now I've lost all of them. Kendra's going to kill me."

"She'll bring them back," Van said. "I think she was going to get them something to eat."

Bennie released Van, and they both sat down. She wondered what the crowd around them thought of their drama, but she didn't much care.

"Why, Van? Why did you leave? Where did you go?"

"I found a motel," Van said. "It was clean. I...I wish I could explain why. I just felt so bad. That's the best explanation I can come up with. I felt so bad about hurting Patsy. It wasn't her fault, what happened. I just couldn't face you so soon after..."

"You could have left a note," Bennie said. "You could have called the hotel."

"I know. I should have. I wasn't thinking straight."

"Do you have any idea how worried I was? We all were. You could have been hurt. You could have--" Bennie broke off, unable to voice her biggest fear.

"I know. I'm sorry," Van said again. "You didn't deserve that."

"I don't give a shit about what I deserved," Bennie said. "I just can't help but think, if you really cared about me, you would have called."

"No," Van shook her head and fresh tears spilled. "Oh, no, Bennie, that's not it. I do care about you, so much. I love you." She put her hand on Bennie's cheek. Bennie put her hand over it and held it there. "I didn't want to hurt you. I didn't mean to hurt you. I just freaked out. It was like I didn't know what I was doing. And I'm so, so sorry."

Bennie reached over the armrest of the chair, hugged Van to her, and let her cry into her shoulder. She didn't understand what was making Van act so screwy. Something was chasing her, that was for sure. It was the same something that made her peek in the breadbox for bad guys and skip out on work and freak out when Patsy showed up. Something was making her fall apart.

Bennie couldn't help but wonder, as she rocked with Van in their awkward seats, was the love Van professed for her real? Or was it just part of Van unraveling her life?

Chapter Thirty

Kendra - 1989

"IF I KNEW you were just going to ogle women's bodies, I wouldn't have brought you along," Jill said.

"You didn't bring me along," Kendra said. "I just came." It was true she could barely take her eyes off the players. She loved watching them run so fast and bump into each

other hard, trying to knock each other out of the way without looking like that's what they were doing. They reminded Kendra of the boys roughhousing with their friends, or puppies wrestling for position at mealtime, but these were women. Strong, tall, vigorous, and beautiful women. Her jaw dropped as a player leaped in the air battling for a rebound. Her shirt rode up and Kendra saw skin. "Did you see that? How did she get her belly like that?"

"She's twenty years old, a hundred and thirty pounds, and six feet tall. Now will you please help me look for Amelia? She's why we're here, remember?"

"I am looking for her," Kendra said. "I can look at more than one thing at once, you know."

But they'd been all around the arena twice, climbing every single flight of stairs both times until Kendra's legs burned, and they'd had no luck at all. They had no idea what Amelia was wearing, so they had to look at the face of every tall thin woman they saw, which annoyed quite a few fans, and still they must have missed some. Everyone kept moving around, going to the bathroom, buying concessions, even changing seats when they spotted better ones unoccupied.

"She's hiding," Jill said. "She must have seen us, and she's avoiding us."

"If she's here at all," Kendra said.

"Bennie said she wouldn't come to the semi-finals and then miss the finals. People don't do that."

"Does Amelia know that?"

Jill didn't answer. She squinted up at the dark upper level of the arena. "Maybe she's sitting up there."

"In the make-out seats?" Kendra asked.

"Yeah." Jill headed toward them.

Kendra followed. "All right. But don't get any ideas, now," she said. "We're here to look for Amelia."

Jill chuckled, which gave Kendra a small glow.

They had no better luck in the upper tiers, though they did surprise a couple of women taking advantage of the darkness to do a bit more than just make out. "Don't mind us," Kendra told them when they looked up, panicked looks on their faces. "We're family. Carry on."

By the time they'd finished checking the upper tiers, Kendra's legs were trembling. She stopped at a vendor's table to catch her breath. The vendor had a variety of shirts for each team and one in royal blue that named all the teams in the Final Four.

"Which one do you like best?" Kendra asked.

Without taking her eyes off the wandering crowd, Jill pointed to an orange Lady Vols shirt. "That one."

"You aren't even looking," Kendra said. "It is pretty, but I really don't look good in orange. I'd look better in that blue one, and it's got all four teams on it."

"Are you going to buy one?"

Kendra sighed. "No." She couldn't afford a shirt. The cheapest one was ten dollars, which was nearly all the money she had on her, and the boys were going to want some popcorn.

As if she'd conjured them up, Kyle and Kevin suddenly skidded to a tumbling stop before her.

"Mom!"

"Whoa, what are you guys doing here? Where's Bennie?"

"Back there. Mom, we found her!"

"Found who?"

"We didn't find her, dummy," Kyle said. "She found us."

"I found her first," Kevin said.

"Who?" Jill asked.

"Me," Amelia said.

She was simply there, suddenly, standing behind Jill, nearly unrecognizable in a baseball cap, leather jacket, t-shirt, and jeans. "And they're both right. First Kevin found me, and then I found them."

Jill was not a demonstrative person. She often had difficulty even knowing what her feelings were, let alone expressing them, but when she saw Amelia she gasped, clapped her hands together, and squealed like a giddy girl. She turned to Kendra. "Honey, look, Amelia's here!"

"And she's wearing my shirt," Kendra said.

"Your shirt?" Amelia looked down at her Final Four t-shirt. "I just bought it."

"I mean that's the one I want."

Jill took Amelia's hand in hers. She clasped it to her chest and looked at Amelia with glowing eyes, like a woman about to propose, and said, "Will you let me send you back to 1933? Please?"

Amelia shot Kendra a glance. "Ought I to have her get down on one knee?"

"I will," Jill said eagerly, and moved to do so.

"Not on your life." Kendra grabbed Jill's arm to keep her upright. "You're not getting on your knee to anyone but me."

"Oh." Jill looked startled a moment, but then she turned back to Amelia. "Will you?"

Amelia sighed. "Well, we all have to die sometime. Right Kevin?"

"Right," Kevin said. "Even me," he added, and Kendra felt a pang.

Amelia shrugged. "I'd rather die flying than anything else."

Jill looked as if she might cry from happiness. "Oh, thank you."

"Mom, can we have some cotton candy?"

"I want popcorn too. Kevin got some."

They made their way to the concession stand.

"Now all we have to do is find Van, and all will be well," Kendra said.

"I found her," Kevin said.

"You did not find her," Kyle said in his pushed-to-the-limit voice. "She found us."

"Where is she?" Kendra asked.

"With Bennie," Amelia said. "They're, uh, talking."

"Ooh. More dyke drama."

"We'll leave right after the game," Jill said. "We should be home by nine, ten at the latest, and I can send you back tonight. Kendra, where's her coat?"

"Can't we fly?" Amelia asked. "I flew over from Spokane. It only took an hour and was great fun. The passenger seats these days are far too cramped, though."

"No, I have to drive RIP to Spokane. I need it to send you back."

"You drove RIP here?"

"Yes. Unfortunately it doesn't go much above sixty."

"Why don't you just take me to Portland, then?" Amelia asked. "It's much closer, and that's where I'm supposed to end up tonight anyway, isn't it? I mean, in 1933?"

"I can't," Jill said. "The newspaper said you took the train from Spokane to Portland. We can't change history."

Amelia sighed, and a frown crossed her face. "Haven't we already? Didn't I ditch a rented car in a snowstorm?"

"Maybe that's what really happened," Kendra said. "In the original version, I mean. Bennie thinks you can't really change history. What we do when we go back is what really happened."

"What does Bennie know?" Jill asked in her grumpy voice.

"Maybe what really happened," Amelia said, "is that I arrive in Portland and tell everyone I arrived by train from Spokane, and so that's what they report in the newspaper. Who's to know the difference?"

"It's too risky," Jill said. "Besides, your coat's in Spokane. You can't go back without that."

"Oh piffle," Amelia said. "I sold it to buy my plane ticket."

"Van bought it back," Kendra said, "but it's here. I put it in RIP."

Jill looked shocked. "It's in RIP? I had it all the time?"

"I really don't feel like driving six hours tonight," Amelia said, "only to be sent back into a snowstorm in Hillyard to make my way, by foot apparently, back to the Davenport in order to catch a night train to Portland. Sounds miserable, frankly, and I won't do it." She crossed her arms. "I may decide to stay in 1989 after all."

"No!" Jill said. "Okay, okay, I'll take you to Portland. Just go back to 1933, please."

"Good," Kendra said. "That's settled. Now let's get the boys some cotton candy and get back to our seats. The second half has started already. Go Lady Vols!"

Chapter Thirty-One

Van - 1989

BENNIE WAS TAKING them home, she'd said, and Van wondered, where is that?

She felt raw inside, like she'd been scraped with a cheese grater, and she was exhausted, but she couldn't sleep. She leaned her head against the passenger side window and closed her eyes, pretending, while Bennie drove them back to Spokane.

It was dark. Kyle lay sprawled in the back seat of the bug, dead to the world. Kendra had Ben and Hannah in the Honda with her, along with Kevin, who she refused to let out of her sight. She wasn't happy about having Hannah in the car with her, but Bennie had insisted. She didn't want Hannah and Van in the same car.

The cabin was home. Patsy was there, and Sadie, and everything Van owned in the world except for her car and the little that was in her travel bag--her toothbrush, deodorant, and dirty clothes.

Bennie was home too. Despite her misery, Van felt safe with Bennie, and she didn't want to be parted from her. She'd never been to Bennie's apartment before, though. Was Bennie taking her there? It would be strange, and hardly home.

"Have you ever heard of post-traumatic stress disorder?" Bennie asked quietly, speaking for the first time in over an hour. She hadn't been fooled by Van's closed eyes.

"Of course," Van said. "Vietnam veterans get it."

"Not just Vietnam vets. Anyone can get it, I think."

Van had heard of former soldiers who'd gone on rampages, shooting off guns in crowds or beating their wives, excused for their behavior because they suffered post-traumatic stress disorder. PTSD, they called it.

"You've been through a lot," Bennie said. "Anyone would be traumatized."

Van sat up and blinked. They had passed the gorge, passed Ellensburg, and were nearly to Moses Lake. They'd be home in two hours. Well, they'd be in Spokane, anyway. Van didn't know when she'd be home again.

"You need help, Van."

Van looked at Bennie's face in the light cast from headlights of oncoming traffic. She could see Bennie's jaw clench, could see her blink, like she was trying not to cry. "You think I have PTSD?"

"I love you so much," Bennie said, and her voice cracked.

Van trembled. There was more to this. "But..."

When Bennie spoke again, her words were as awful as Van feared they would be.

"I can't do this," Bennie said. "Not like this. Something's wrong with you, Van. It's understandable after all you've been through. Going into the future, being held hostage and all that, but..." Tears fell and Bennie wiped them with the sleeve of her sweatshirt. "I can't live through another night like last night, wondering if you're all right, wondering if you're alive or dead. I can't go on loving you, wondering all the time if you really love me or if you're just...confused."

Van felt dizzy, like the bug had just been sideswiped and spun in a circle, three hundred sixty degrees. She braced her hands against the dashboard to keep herself upright. This couldn't happen. She couldn't lose Bennie, not now. Bennie was all she had.

She was going to throw up.

"Van? Are you all right?"

The car stopped. Van fumbled with the door, got it open just in time, and leaned over to vomit in the gravel at the side of the highway. Bennie was there, then, kneeling before the open door, her knees barely missing the mess Van had made. She no longer cried. Her eyes were wide with worry.

Van wiped her mouth with her hand. "Don't leave me, Bennie." Her voice was a whimper.

Bennie put her hand on Van's knee. "I'm not going to leave you," she said, but the emphasis suggested an alternative just as alone. "I just need you to be sure. I need to know that, if you leave Patsy--for me--it's for the right reason."

"I love you," Van said.

"I know you do," Bennie said, "but you love Patsy too. I need to know you love me as more than just a safe base from whatever it is you're running from."

It was déjà vu. Again. The last time they had this conversation it was 2008 and Van was the one telling Bennie she had to be sure, that if she was going to be with Bennie, she had to know it was for the right reasons. But this Bennie didn't remember that conversation. She hadn't had it.

"I won't leave you," Bennie said again, tears falling once more down her cheeks. "But you need to figure things out with Patsy. And you need to go to a doctor, a psychiatrist or something. I'll be here for you, Van, but you have to take care of your shit first."

"You...you want me to go back to Patsy?"

"You never gave her a chance, love," Bennie said. "You didn't tell her what was going on with you. You didn't let her help you. What if things are different between you if you do? What if you get better and wish you'd tried? I couldn't take it if you got better and changed your mind. I hate saying it, Van, but I need you to give Patsy a chance."

Going home, home to Patsy, was terrifying. Van wasn't afraid Patsy would hurt her. She was afraid Patsy would love her. Van didn't know if she was strong enough to hurt Patsy again. Amelia was right. She'd already hurt Patsy in one quick jerk, which was awful, but it was done. How could Van bear to go back to Patsy, only to have to rip the Band Aid off the wound again? Patsy could make it impossible for Van to leave, just from loving her too much.

Besides, Van had already given Patsy another chance, though Bennie didn't know it. It was why she'd left Bennie in the first place, back in 2008. How many chances did Patsy get?

"Don't send me away," Van sobbed. "I'll do anything. I'll do whatever you want. Just don't send me away."

Bennie stood and drew Van to her feet. Van buried her face in Bennie's shoulder and felt Bennie's arms tighten around her. "All I want you to do is get better," Bennie said. "I need you to be sure. I need you to get some help. Will you do that? For me?"

"I will. I will." As scared as Van was of going home to Patsy, she was even more scared of losing Bennie. Van was sure about what she wanted, no matter how it looked. She'd just fucked everything up trying to get there. Yes, she'd been acting crazy, running away from her job like that, leaving town without a word, skipping out last night. Bennie was right to be leery of her. To be honest, that was one of the things Van loved about Bennie. She was loving and sweet and smart, but she was also strong and healthy, emotionally as well as physically. Bennie knew she had to take care of her own heart, for both their sakes, even if it meant sending Van away, and she was strong enough to do it. Bennie would even send Van away for good if she had to, Van suspected, and that was more terrifying than anything.

Bennie was right. She deserved a lover who had her head screwed on straight. Van's head wasn't straight, but she could fix that. She would face Patsy, she would see a doctor, and she would get better. She would become the woman Bennie deserved. She would do it for Bennie. After all, Bennie deserved her chance as well. One of the last things Bennie said to her, before Van left 2008, was to give her a chance in the past if things didn't work out with Patsy.

Van lifted her head. "I'll do it," she said and sniffed. "I'll figure things out with Patsy, and I'll get better, and then I'm coming back to you."

"Thank you, my brave love," Bennie whispered and bent her head to Van's.

It might be their last kiss, for a while anyway. Van put her hands on Bennie's cheeks and tried to memorize everything about it. The softness of Bennie's lips, her tongue, her taste, her smell.

A horn blast from a passing semi startled them apart.

"Jesus!" Bennie said.

They turned back to the car. Kyle sat in the backseat, his arms folded on the headrest, wide awake and watching them. Crap.

Van climbed into her seat. "How long have you been awake?" she asked.

He shrugged and looked embarrassed. "Kevin gets carsick too," he said, politely pretending that was all he'd seen.

Bennie climbed into her seat as well, reached back, and ruffled Kyle's hair. "You're a good kid."

He settled back in his seat looking pleased. They buckled up and were soon underway again.

A few miles later, Van said, "You've been through a lot too, you know. In 1974. The shooting and all."

"Yeah?" Bennie asked.

"Maybe you have PTSD."

"You think?"

"How else do you explain Hannah?"

All three of them laughed.

Chapter Thirty-Two

Jill - 1989

AMELIA WAS WORSE than the boys when it came to riding in RIP. She didn't kick her legs, but she ran her fingers over every button and gage on the dashboard until Jill thought she would scream. Perhaps she did scream, just a little. She thought she muffled it in her mouth, but Amelia heard it.

"I'm not hurting anything," Amelia said. "I fly airplanes, after all. I do know better than to push a lever without knowing what it will do."

"These instruments are very sensitive," Jill said. "More than you're used to, I think."

"Have you flown an airplane?"

Jill didn't answer. She hadn't flown a plane, of course, but she couldn't help thinking that running a time machine was a bit trickier than flying a 1930's era airplane. It took hours, sometimes, to get RIP set up just right for an experiment, and Amelia could throw everything off by nudging one gage with a fingertip. But she could hardly order Amelia to sit on her hands.

Amelia took Jill's silence as an admission, and she touched a dial. "What does this do?"

"It sets the range." Jill's throat was tight with frustration. If she answered Amelia's questions, it would only encourage her, but Amelia had the upper hand. She seemed only half inclined to return to 1933 at all. If Jill annoyed her too much, she might change her mind altogether. It was best to humor her. "When I'm picking people up from another time, I have to set the range to make sure I pick up the right person. And the whole person."

"The whole person?"

Jill nodded. "If the range is too small, there's a risk that a person's arm or foot might not be within RIP's range. I don't know what would happen if that were the case. It's too dangerous to risk an experiment of that sort, at least with humans. Kendra won't let me try it with animals. If the range is too large, though, it risks picking up too much. If there's another person in the range, for example, RIP could pick that person up accidentally."

"Like me."

"Yes, sort of," Jill said. "I expanded the range when I set it to bring Bennie and Van back from '33 because I knew they would be bringing Kevin with them, so there was certainly room for two people in it. That part was no accident. I just didn't expect you. I've never been able to experiment with a range larger than the interior of RIP. It's theoretically possible to pick up several people. Dozens or even hundreds. More, maybe."

"Why did you make RIP so small?"

"It's just an experiment. When I started, I had no idea if it would work, and the materials are expensive and hard to come by," Jill said. "Why was the first airplane made of wood and cloth?"

"Was it?" Amelia asked, but she didn't seem to expect an answer. "Have you experimented with reincarnation as well?"

Jill clenched her hands on the steering wheel. "How do you know about that? Did Kendra tell you?"

"No," Amelia said. "Van mentioned something, though."

"Van?" That meant Kendra had told her. Jill was embarrassed, which was an unusual feeling for her. Her friends had ridiculed her time-travel experiments constantly, and Jill had never been embarrassed then. But she had confidence in those experiments. She knew her theories were sound and were solidly grounded in science, even if she wasn't able to make time travel happen. Which, it turned out, she was. Reincarnation, though, was still just a theory, and she was uncertain enough about it that she didn't feel comfortable sharing it. What if she was wrong?

"I'll be glad if I come back as you," Amelia said.

Jill felt a hot glow in her chest, like she'd just had a cup of tea poured inside her. "Really?"

"I'm a bit of a scientist myself," Amelia said. "I conducted experiments in the medical field before I took up flying. I hope you don't stop experimenting. Have fun with it. There's no point to it if you're not having fun."

Jill grinned, and the hot glow spread to her fingers and toes.

Jill was a serious person. Her experiments could have major consequences, and she took them seriously. If any of her friends were asked to describe her in one word, she expected they would all-- well, all but Kendra, perhaps--describe Jill as, more than anything else, serious.

Jill herself would probably have said the same thing, until now.

Until Amelia said it, and Jill felt the glow, Jill hadn't fully realized that the real reason she experimented with time travel was because it was fun.

"Are you having fun, Jill?" Amelia asked.

Jill laughed out loud. "I am. I am having fun."

"Good." Amelia sighed. "Now you'd better get me to Portland lickety split, before I change my mind and stay here to play with you."

Jill pushed RIP to go as fast as it could, though that wasn't very fast. The time machine itself was so heavy that even the specially constructed V8 engine had a struggle keeping up to the speed limit.

RIP was always kept in tip top shape, always, right down to the minutest detail, like the windshield wipers. Jill used only the best quality, and she changed them every six months. She didn't drive RIP much, but she couldn't risk an accident or a breakdown. The thought of what a state patrol trooper or a tow truck driver might do if the contents of RIP were discovered was too horrible to contemplate.

She was grateful for the wipers on the drive from Tacoma to Portland, since it rained heavily nearly the entire way. Just as they reached the Columbia River bridge between Washington and Oregon, though, the rain stopped, the sun peeked out, and an immense rainbow arced over the river.

"Look at the rainbow," Jill said. "Rainbows are a diversity symbol now. Gays and lesbians put rainbow stickers on their cars to signal other gays and lesbians."

"That's clever," Amelia said. "When I'm flying, I can see the entire rainbow in a circle, like a ring."

"Kendra has a rainbow necklace made of rings."

"A rainbow signifies a promise," Amelia said, "or a bridge between two worlds."

"Like a bridge from the present to the past," Jill said, pleased with the analogy, considering their mission.

"Or from the past to the future," Amelia said.

Jill nodded and drove in silence into the city. They neared the train station.

Amelia slipped out of the leather coat she wore and laid it on the seat between them. "Will you return it to Bennie?"

Jill nodded.

Amelia took hold of the bottom of her Final Four t-shirt and pulled it over her head. Underneath it she wore a long white tank top. She placed the shirt on the seat as well. "I want Kendra to have that."

Jill nodded again.

"And I have a request," Amelia said.

"What is it?"

"There's one more teensy experiment I'd like you to try."

Chapter Thirty-Three

Jill - 2013

JILL LED THE way from the shop to the kitchen through the enclosed sunroom they'd built in 2004. There was no need to walk outside anymore to get from the house to the shop and back again, which was only practical, since they made the trip dozens of times a day.

They entered the kitchen. It was the middle of the night, 2:18, according to the digital numbers glowing from the stove, though the microwave said 2:19, the coffee maker said 2:17, and the ice-maker in the door of the fridge said 2:21. It was hot outside, but the air conditioner hummed and kept the house a cool 64 degrees, just right for sleeping.

Kendra's computer, an old one of Jill's, was tucked into a corner of the dining room. It was off, but an amber circle glowed on the tower, and the modem and the router blinked a variety of lime green dots. In the living room, more digital numbers and dots flashed at them. The cable box, the wall thermostat, the security alarm keypad. Jill had never realized before how surrounded they were by electronic embers.

The digital frame was still on. They paused before it, not speaking, and watched pictures flash by, a new one accordioning in every few seconds.

In one photo, Kyle beamed, shirtless and tanned, from the seat of his monster truck, the photo taken right before he wrecked it. His hair was long and knotted in dreadlocks. Dreadful locks, Kendra called them, which only made him laugh.

The photo vanished and a new one appeared. Kevin wore a kilt at the Riverfront Park Highland Games. He never would tell if he had undies under there. His beard was bushy

and red with a few white threads in it already, though he was only thirty-two. His wife and the girls, dressed as Highland lassies, leaned against him like he was a tree.

The next photo showed a pile of grandkids leaning against Kendra on the couch. The girls had put barrettes and giant ribbons in Kendra's hair as well as their own, and they all grinned as if they'd just won a beauty pageant. The baby had rolled half off Kendra's lap, already learning to fend for himself.

A woman resplendent in dress blues flashed by. She shook the governor's hand as she was appointed Chief of Washington State Prisons.

"Is that Patsy?"

"Yes."

"Funny. I never met her, but I recognize her anyway."

A teenage girl in baggy white shorts leaped in the air, her legs a blur, attempting to dunk a basketball.

"That girl looks like Bennie."

"That's Emily. Their youngest." Jill pointed to the well-dressed coach crouching on the sidelines with her mouth open in a giant silent scream. "That's Bennie."

But the screen had already moved on. Jill and Kendra stood in a crowded courtroom in Spokane Superior Court, dressed in their best with flowers in hand, finally able to legally marry after nearly twenty-five years together. Even Van, formal and dignified in her black judge's robe, wept as she officiated the wedding.

Jill moved on through the living room and was followed. They reached the bedroom.

Kendra slept so much better now that she had a CPAP machine, but she slept hard. She hadn't heard them. Jill sat on the bed and caressed Kendra's hair, having learned over the years the best way to wake her wife.

"Wake up, honey." She nudged Kendra's shoulder. "Wake up. We have a visitor."

Kendra opened her eyes. Jill turned on the bedside lamp and placed a hand between its glare and Kendra's eyes so she wouldn't be blinded. Kendra pulled off the CPAP mask, wiped her mouth, and sat up.

"Hello Kendra." The woman in the doorway stepped toward the bed and into the light. She looked older than she had the last time they saw her, but not by much. She was not quite forty years old when she disappeared. The bold plaid blouse she wore was familiar. It appeared in hundreds of black and white photos in books and documentaries, including the

last photo of her ever taken right before she took off on her last voyage, the voyage from which she never returned.

"Hi Amelia," Kendra said drowsily. "I didn't know that shirt was red."

"I hope you'll let me crash on your sofa for a bit," Amelia said. "I've been flying for more than twenty hours straight, and I'm bushwhacked."

Kendra blinked and sat up. "Holy shit! Honey, it's Amelia. She's here." She turned to Jill. "And so are you!"

Jill grinned. "Yeah. It looks like I was wrong about the whole reincarnation thing."

"I, at least, am glad you were wrong," Amelia said. "As much as I would have enjoyed coming back as you, I'm grateful to have been rescued from a tragic death in the Pacific, and I'm relieved that I get to live to see another day. Though I am disappointed that I didn't make it all the way around the world. I need to have a word with Van about that."

"Let's call them." Kendra snatched her cell phone from the bedside table. "They'll be thrilled."

"Honey, it's the middle of the night."

"Perhaps in the morning?" Amelia suggested. She yawned, and her jaw cracked. "I really do need to put my head on a pillow for a bit."

"Oh, okay." Kendra put the phone back. "I'm sorry it took Jill so long to figure out how to do it. It's been twenty-four years."

"It wasn't all that long on my end," Amelia said. "Only four years and a smidge."

"Actually, I figured out how to do it about six years ago," Jill said.

"What?" Kendra grabbed Jill's hand. "You knew, and you didn't tell me? Why did you wait?"

"I wasn't ready," Jill said. "I've been having too much fun. I didn't want to miss out on any more time with you, in case I really did disappear."

Kendra looked up, smiled, and they kissed.

"Why now, then?" Amelia asked.

Jill shrugged. "I'm seventy-four years old, and I'm not getting any younger. I didn't want to wait so long I forgot how to push the button."

"Oh you," Kendra said. "You're a young seventy-four."

Jill smiled. "Besides, I needed to give myself enough time to train Amelia."

"Train me?"

"The boys aren't interested, and who better to leave RIP to when I die than you?"

Tired as she was, Amelia's eyes sparkled. "I get to play after all?"

"If you want to."

"Oh, I do."

"I'll show you the guest room now," Jill said. "It's in the basement."

Amelia followed a step, paused, and turned back to Kendra. "You said they would be thrilled. That's Van and..."

"Bennie," Kendra said. "For more than twenty years now."

Amelia smiled. "Good. Now I'd better get some shut-eye. I have a feeling I'll need it before I rise again to take on the twenty-first century."

The End

About the Author

Kate McLachlan is the Goldie award winning author of several novels, including the *Rip Van Dyke* time-travel series. Kate lives in Eastern Washington with her wife, Tonie Chacon, who is also a Regal Crest author, and their two dogs and two cats.

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More Kate McLachlan titles

Rip Van Dyke

When Van is suddenly transported twenty years into the future, she is dumfounded--and furious. Jill's silly time-travel experiment wasn't supposed to actually work. But it did, and now Van is stuck in the future. 2008, that is. A future in which Van's friends and lover have all aged twenty years, but Van has not. Jill, an old woman now, promises to recreate her time-travel machine and send Van back, but Van is skeptical and decides instead to try to make a life for herself in 2008.

It isn't easy. Patsy, her lover, never recovered from Van's sudden disappearance in 1988 and is now a deeply troubled old woman, in no condition to offer Van any help. Van has no home, no job, no money, not even a driver's license. But help and hope arrive in the form of Bennie, the steamy young woman whose intriguing overtures were off limits in the past. Van wrestles with herself. Does she remain faithful to Patsy despite the sudden chasm between their ages, or does she let herself accept the life, love and laughter that Bennie offers?

But when secret agents learn of Van's leap through time, Van faces an even tougher decision. This time one of life or death.

Rescue At Inspiration Point

Rescue at Inspiration Point is the second book in the *Rip Van Dyke* time-travel series. Van is taken hostage at a local prison, and Patsy is stuck in the role of hostage negotiator. Jill sends Bennie back to 1974 to learn more about the hostage taker and his crime. "Do nothing," Jill warns. "Just observe and report back." But the instant Bennie lands, she breaks Jill's #1 rule. As Bennie pursues her own agenda in 1974, the hostage crisis in 1988 escalates. Can Bennie rescue Van from fourteen years away? Or will her actions only make things worse?

Heats, Dead and Alive

When fifth grade teacher Kimberly Wayland finds a human heart in the middle school dumpster, she has some explaining to do. Like why she was in the dumpster in the first place, and why she didn't tell the police about her gruesome find. But after giving the police a fake alibi, explaining is the last thing Kim wants to do. Instead, with the help of her friends--hot "best friend" Becca, coworker "lesbian wanna-be" Annie, and lawyer "stickler-for-rules" Lucy--Kim sets out to solve the mystery of the missing heart. Along the way, she unexpectedly solves another mystery, the mystery of her own heart.

Murder and the Hurdy Gurdy Girl

It's 1897, and Susan Bantry is on the run from the law. She ends up in Needles Eye, Idaho, where she works in a hurdy gurdy as a dancing girl.

Jo Erin, Susan's childhood friend, is the cross-dressing Pinker-ton agent sent to track Susan down. Before she can complete the job, a mining war breaks out and interferes with Jo Erin's plans. Complicating matters even further are the feelings that resurface between Susan and Jo Erin, as events from their past come back to haunt them.

Coming in November 2014

Christmas Candy Crush

Jazzy's Fresh Christmas Trees is Jasmine Oliver's last ditch attempt to rescue the family finances and send her little sister to college. She did some research, selected a prime location, and bought the very best Christmas trees available. What she didn't do, though, was check out the competition.

SleepSafe Youth is Darcy Gabriel's baby, her way of paying back the help she received when she was a teen. The charity she established gives homeless kids a safe place to sleep,

and *SleepSafe's* annual Christmas tree sale is the organization's biggest fund-raising event of the year.

When Jasmine learns that *SleepSafe's* Christmas tree lot is only a block away from her own, she turns her dismay and anger into determination and vows to give *SleepSafe* a run for its money. Sparks fly between Jasmine and Darcy as they compete for the Christmas tree business. Before long, sparks of a different sort fly, and they find themselves experiencing a Christmas they'll never forget.

Other Silver Dragon Books You Might Also Enjoy

Partners: Book One

by Melissa Good

After a massive volcanic eruption puts earth into nuclear winter, the planet is cloaked in clouds and no sun penetrates. Seas cover most of the land areas except high elevations which exist as islands where the remaining humans have learned to make do with much less. People survive on what they can take from the sea and with foodstuffs supplemented from an orbiting set of space stations.

Jess Drake is an agent for Interforce, a small and exclusive special forces organization that still possesses access to technology. Her job is to protect and serve the citizens of the American continent who are in conflict with those left on the European continent. The struggle for resources is brutal, and when a rogue agent nearly destroys everything, Interforce decides to trust no one. They send Jess a biologically-created agent who has been artificially devised and given knowledge using specialized brain programming techniques.

Instead of the mindless automaton one might expect, Biological Alternative NM-Dev-1 proves to be human and attractive. Against all odds, Jess and the new agent are swept into

a relationship neither expected. Can they survive in these strange circumstances? And will they even be able to stay alive in this bleak new world?

Fractured Futures

by S.Y. Thompson

Detective Ronan Lee has just solved the crime of the century, or has she? The case of the copycat killer plunges her into an ancient mystery, but solving the murders raises questions about the world government's true objectives. An unexpected invention gives her the chance to travel to the past. Her target is the 21st century and her mission is to save the woman at the heart of issue. This same woman, Sidney Weaver, is a warm, personable and accomplished actress that Ronan would give her life to protect.

Unaware of what fate has in store, Sidney's life is boringly predictable until a mysterious stranger comes out of the darkness of night to protect her. She knows there's something unusual about Ronan, but despite her misgivings, she can't deny the mutual attraction. All of this takes a backseat when she's plunged into a harrowing game of cat and mouse that could destroy everything she holds dear.

To Sleep

by Paula Offutt

To Sleep is told through the journal of Karen Miller, a nurse and student from Philadelphia. The journal begins the night three alien ships appear above Earth. When Karen awakens, she is told Earth was destroyed by a space phenomenon called the Rift and she is to be the leader of a small group of women tasked with assisting their alien rescuers in awakening the four billion or so surviving humans who are in cryogenic suspension.

Each time Karen goes to sleep, she doesn't know exactly what it will be like when she awakens. The line between what is real and what is not real becomes so blurred that Karen and the other women can only trust each other. When reality is finally defined, the six of them learn truths that will forever change not just themselves, but every genetic homosexual on Earth.

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