

CHAPTER NINE

THE POWER

I remember once I left you and went to my mother's and she was so hateful about it, I came right back. By then we had an identity as a family and my mother told me horror stories of what my life would be like without a man, a husband, how my children would resent me and grow up scarred mentally and emotionally and maybe even physically, they might be so distraught that their bones would grow crooked. "All men are the same." I'd just have to start all over again. I'd end up in the same situation because men don't come any better. I had the best I was going to get. Anyway she liked you better than she liked me. Divorced? "Don't even mention the word." She would stay your friend if we separated so if I thought I would escape you, I was wrong, because between the children and my mother, I'd be seeing you as much, or more, than if I was living with you.

She never asked me what was wrong. Everybody was so horrified and trying to keep it looking like a holiday for the sake of the children, no one paid attention to my state of being. I was very disappointed. I cried a lot. Left to my own devices my mind kept going in circles. Do you remember this? You didn't even call me. You must have been furious, scared? We never talked about it when I came home. It seemed better to just start fresh, not go over issues that we couldn't resolve without tearing at each other, without tearing at the fabric of our love for each other.

I came home because I didn't know what else to do. I came home because I thought I just might be as wrong as you were and maybe if we began again we could come through with our better selves instead of the petty cruelties that were emerging, like spores all over the walls of a disintegrating structure. It worked. I've always wondered if you talked to anyone or worked it out alone or ignored it, cried. But I thought that my curiosity would be interpreted as a bid for control so I never asked. Do you think it's long enough ago now for us to talk about it when I get home? I'd like that.

I'd like to tell you what you were doing that made me feel less than fully human. I'd like to hear, because now I think I can hear, what I was doing that made you feel smothered. I'd like to tell you about what happens to a girl with promise who finds herself with two little children, no help, facing an infinity of insignificant days and loneliness, who finds herself incapable of eliciting authentic conversation from the man she loves. who finds herself reduced to existence so physically determined, bound and gagged by a dimension crucial to the well being of her children, radically diminished by other adults. What it's like to hate your children and your husband. To feel opposing passions in the same instant. To have the weight of the inevitable pressing. To think that others think that you have now fully served your purpose by pushing two beauties out

from between your legs, head first into their first breaths. That you can now wither like the fruit no longer needed by the seed now planted and flourishing with flowers of its own. To be a secondary character in a play you began as the star.

I'd like to hear how you felt being relegated to second or third rank in a battle for your lover's body, for a touch from your beloved. Did you feel insignificant in relation to all that life budding, building, growing? Did you wonder if your seed and your money, more seed, was all anyone was interested in? Were you flooded with feelings unawares, unmanned by them? Did you crave the company of men, to re-establish a central reality, a core? Did you feel your core sliding into the emptiness of the nursery? Did the sucking creative void pull you, take you away from your forward pushing career conquering independence? You did not want to become soft. You were aware of the sticky sweetness of human milk, the bloody richness of placentas, the fresh tenderness of baby skin, their heady perfumes were poisoning your concept of manhood. Am I right?

And you didn't want to think about it. I was supposed to do that. You wanted to feel it, your manhood. I was supposed to modify, become older, be changed by motherhood. You were to maintain your youthful vigor, sustain all your body parts in their tight youthful packaging. I could sag, you would still love me. If I said that was patronizing you were furious with me. You loved me, could not love me more, how could I question your love? Even pondering the levels was a betrayal. You were right, my self doubt was bleeding uncontrollably, hemorrhaging into our relationship, you were covered with my blood, the house was filled with it, in two small packages. Not my literal blood, they have their own, I have not forgotten my basic biology, but yet and still they are my blood and it was rising high in my brain, this fluid of life, carrying in its tides, more puissant than any ocean you have sailed, all the knowledge true and false that has ever been. And when I overflowed in my confusion, the wave overcame you, already desperate, trying to keep afloat.

Have I put words in your mouth again? I apologize. How close am I? I am trying to prick your interest so that you will want to elucidate when I get back. You can say, "Darling, I had hemorrhoids then. Those two lusty babies took everything for themselves. I couldn't sit properly. When I stood up, you thought I was patronizing you. And we had no money because you couldn't work. I was terrified that I would let you down by bankrupting us. We would be forced to send the children away so you could work. Of course I dreamed of that sometimes too, so we could be alone together. The winter was exceptionally wet, everything was damp, my clothes never felt comfortable, nothing was right." Something like that, a plenitude of reality to balance, confirm and deny, my passionate fantasies.

I do trust you now. I am wiser, able to hear words of unrecognizable design, words not of my making, of unrecognizable design. I love you with the purity of

time making smooth the craggiest rocks overlooking the wildest sea. I love you as we intertwine, two separate realities so intricately laced and knotted as to appear to others, and even to ourselves occasionally, as one fabric of indescribably beauty and inevitability.