

CHAPTER EIGHT

SALIENT

"True stories are far more unbelievable than fiction because people do the most extraordinary things in real life but the rules of fiction demand that people behave reasonably, or no one will believe it. Strange."

When I think of the things that I am sharing with you, without her there, without the sound of her clear voice, the toss of her fiery black hair bouncing into her eyes and being thrown out again by a toss of her head, fierce stroke of her palm, or a pensive comb with her fingers. She tries to get her hair to be less revealing of the life pouring through her. And the stories. I think, there were so many, which ones to tell you, which ones will you believe. What was happening to me on that plane. Flying through the night, flying into the stars, as if traveling into space, into the future. Think of our descendants sailing through the galaxies. Will they love any better than we do? Will they know how to nurture life? Why do I feel that this woman was a gift to me, to us? The fluid altering of definitions fascinated me. I hope to convey this heady feeling to you.

I might have come home after accepting the prize. It was crazy to go straight into the field but I thought I would be energized by receiving the award, able to work better for the recognition. But it makes no difference. The work is the work. It takes the time it always took. Hey, I'm a poet now. It must be the glass of wine I had with dinner tonight. The gown was lovely, thank you, you spent more than I would have. I imagined that the cool, smooth, satin lining, moving, sliding, over my hips and breasts, were your hands, painting me with love and security. I didn't shake. I was incredibly calm, even when I was making my speech, especially during the speech, I think, because I had this sense of the podium giving me, not only permission, but encouragement, to speak about the welfare of children. You were with me, our love, our life together was part of me at the podium. I did keep that part, the part you wanted me to cut, about my husband, the power of intimacy being to transform the soul to its power to transform the world in its image. I added something you didn't see in the draft I showed you. I said that you gave me strength when I thought my cause hopeless, that, both by your example, and as a constant irritant, by never loading the dishwasher right, no, I'm kidding, I didn't talk about domestic chores. But I did tell them you bug me to surpass myself both by your overt encouragement and by your obtuse disregard for things that I consider essential. In short, I do things to show you up, darling, to prove that you are wrong. But you knew that all along, I suspect. I'll show you the speech when I get home. That seems an eon away.

So much work to do here to set things up properly. I have mixed feelings about retiring. One of the most fascinating things about reaching an exalted age is that

I have waited in vain for absolute clarity. I am still confused. I can't believe it, a woman of my age and stature (pun intended!) and every day is an absolute mystery to me. I am in a constant state of wonderment and, honestly, just between you and me, I am often bewildered. I don't find bewilderment intimidating, I find it stimulating, invigorating, like air conditioning, it makes my passions functional. It's as if there was an engine, or engines, inside me and they move on their own impetus, creating heat and desire. I would be wild and incoherent except for the puzzling nature, the ever changing challenges, the ever renewing complexity, the realities that ceaselessly confront me, and cool me off, by giving using the heat generated by these engines in perpetual motion. God, I love you, you pull things out of me I didn't even know were there.

We enjoyed our dessert, dark chocolate scrumptious brownies with flippant whipped cream, and mediocre coffee, while Jacqui finished her story of the violinist.