

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

COMMENCEMENT

Maggie's birth is the center of my eye, the clear dark precis of void where reality begins its forming. The doctors had no confidence in me, I was too old. I would end up a cesarean, a casualty, toxemic, weakened-for-life, invalid. I resisted their negativity, I was brave, I believed in myself. But sometime in the seventh or eighth month I was overcome with grief. I couldn't stop thinking about death. I went to Jenny's mother's cabin on the beach for a week by myself. Everybody thought I was crazy. Except you. You said, "Whatever she needs is ok with me." You took care of Josh and Lizzie while I went to be alone with myself, my baby and my grief.

It was as if a hole had opened up in my heart and everything was draining out of me. But everything was coming in as well. What I was finding out about my fear was that sadness and joy themselves weren't scary to me, it was the fluxations that were scary. The sea of change itself was scary. I felt inferior to you because you love the sea, the chaos of it. You feel at home in its challenges, confusion, hardship. I want my life to be orderly. I want things to make sense. I love feeling in control of myself and my circumstances. Maggie threw me. I could not contain her peacefully. I could not hold her inside me and not confront, well, everything. She was so like you in there, she was calling to herself all the circumstances she loves, which you love, which make me sick with fear. How could I marry you, I thought? How could I have chosen to live my life with a wild man?

Isn't that funny? The people who build civilizations are so different than the people who live in them. You and Maggie are civilization builders. Josh and I live in the world as it is made. Lizzie, well, Lizzie communes with spirits, I think. Creative people aren't civilized or wild, are they? Something in between, somewhere and nowhere.

There I was, in Jenny's mother's two room beach beauty of a house. Peace and quiet everywhere, and I feel Maggie's (your?) longing, for the sea, I wanted to throw myself in it. Drown, for God's sake. I screamed at her, out loud, as I walked on the beach, on a drizzly, sunny grey day, screamed loud, to this unborn baby. "Stop trying to drown me! You need me! I am your mother, you idiot!"

I loathe swimming. Here I was feeling an ache in my bones for that water. My blood pulled to return to her mother.

You never understood why I came home early. I could not reconcile Maggie, myself and the sea. I came home defeated, made little cups of tea and gardened. I tried to keep my mind from dwelling, my mother's philosophy, if the mind does not dwell, it can not build a foundation, nothing can be established. I find it

is useful advice to let negative states of mind and confusion flow past, to move on, instead of digging down deep into uncomfortable or haunted states of mind. Dwelling on unpleasantness is like building a home over an old graveyard. Best not.

And then the day came. I remember thinking, *today*, and preparing myself mentally for the worst birth ever. Emotionally I was as flexible as I've ever been. I had been reconciled to myself through months of dire dis-orientation, sharing my body with an opposite nature.

I knew in the morning. I was watering the blue flowers that we call the no-name-wilds. The sun was low and glittering, climbing. I heard a bird sing a long bird song. I looked at the sweet blue sky and I knew. My body was still in stillness. Maggie must have been sleeping late, her last day of rest. She's been going full tilt ever since.

We got breakfast and I sent you all off. I labored in the garden, on my knees in the dirt. The sun was unusually hot for those early days of spring but the ground was cool, I buried my hands down in the juicy quickness of newly turned soil.

I planted and planted. I picked bulb browns so the new green shoots would have more freedom, easier access to the sun. By the time you came home, you could tell too, remember? You made me tea and met the children and took them to your sister's house and we walked and we talked about our childhoods. I felt very peaceful. The pain seemed to be happening on another continent. It was as if I had already done my suffering.

I never really like you seeing me all sweaty and splayed out, but when her head, when I could feel her head between my legs, I was transported into my animal self. Not my animal in the sense of something less than my civilized self but something beneath, some underpinning to my normal everyday self, something always there, always hidden, who I am, stripped of all vestiges of upbringing, class, education, looks, status, love, stripped to the essence of bodily existence, and I loved it. I loved it. Me. Me, who is so not that at all. I found an animal in me and I love her. I recognized her as soon as she came to me, and, in that recognition I was launched into my true life. This is what you and Maggie did for me. I have never thanked you. This is the still point of the center of the whirlwind of my life. As I pulled her out from between my legs, myself, I pushed you away, remember? It was fun, all the muck, the bloody body mucus, wet stuff oozing, the new body breaking out from neath the other, bigger body, mine. I was astounded by the power of us. Our unity. Us three.

We forgot to look at her sex, remember? We saw her beautiful hands. We told her hello. She was wrapped in the receiving blanket and we were checking the time when I said, we haven't seen the sex. Oh we laughed and saw and loved

her and hugged her. She must have thought she had been born into a lunatic asylum. You cut and tied the cord, the placenta came schlurping out.

Then we thought we ought to call Henry. He came over all huffy and puffed out, outraged, beside himself, furious. A woman my age, a man of your intelligence, didn't we have sense enough to go to the hospital, to have an attendant? He checked the placenta, eagerly expecting to be able to send me to the hospital in an ambulance hemorrhaging, torn placenta, imminent death saved by the timely intervention of the A.M.A. would have suited him, a fine punishment for the crime of our blatant independence. Placenta fine. Baby's cord? You could not have tied it properly. At the very least we ought to suffer the ignominious embarrassments of an infected, mis-tied umbilical. Cord fine. Mother fine. Baby fine. I wasn't even tired. The exhilaration of the experience carried me in a halo of life pleased with itself. Henry spluttered. He could not get his words out properly. You tried not to laugh at our old friend, you were very gentle with him. Maggie was nursing, named. Henry filled out the certificate of live birth. You said quietly, "Henry, it was because of her age and my experience that we felt able to attempt this Everest. We were careful. We would have called you if we'd had difficulties."

Then I knew why I had married a man who lived in grace in chaos. I knew why I had to be initiated for months. I knew I would never have your natural appetite for the wild but I touched my wholeness in that birth. I met and loved and worked with and united myself with my self, my wild animal self, the wise repository of millennia of evolution. She is with me now, still. We climbed that Everest together, we stood and looked around at the old world from a new perspective. We were altered because of the view. Altered also because of the climb itself. Maggie's birth was your gift to me. Were my gifts commensurate? Was I able to give you something of equal value? Did you know then, what I am only able to tell you now, that, by standing by me, you gave me a view of the world that I never could have seen alone?