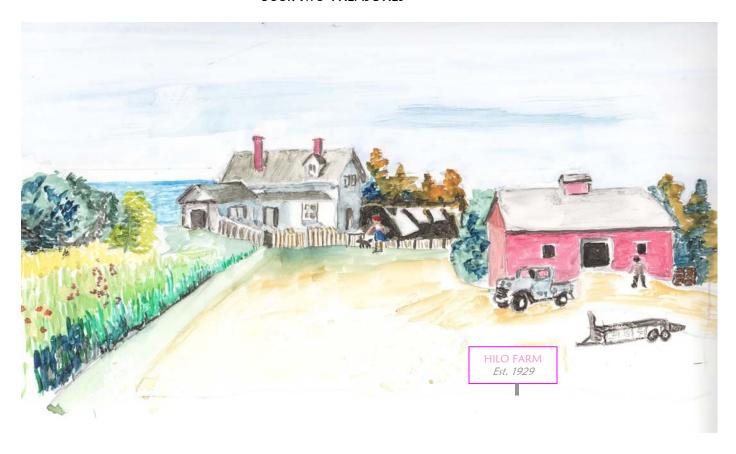
Book two TREASURES



Chapter One

The Martinez house with its blue roof, known far and wide as the Blue Martin, was decked out that spring in wondrous azure. The purple martins came back to their multistoried blue roofed mansion in the sky and began their work of raising babies and devouring mosquitoes. The Martinez family was delighted when they arrived with the little ones from the year before all grown-up. Though their choice of blue shingles and a contraction of their family name, Martinez, resulted in the name "Blue Martin," it was the purple martins that had inspired Papa. A hassle took place as to what bird family would take what apartment, but finally settlements were made and peace reigned.



Surrounding the base of the birdhouse pole, the delphinium reached a height of seven feet that spring and burst out in a flurry of every shade of blue. To think that these little straggly plants had been planted just two years before by Papa Evelio from leftovers of the highway billboard plantings he had designed! With his tender care they were now monsters that joyfully swallowed up his big frame when he went in among them. With these blooming giants against the electric colors of the lake and sky, the whole world seemed to be painted blue. Glorious as blue can be, though, it can also be a color of sadness; Papa liked to play his guitar going from gay Mexican sounds to something he called "the blues." However, even they had a ranchera sound that was better suited to a mariachis band than to a slow trumpet's wailing of "St. Louis woman."

Though it was the end of her senior year, and her success at school continued, sometimes Sue would find "the blues" suited her feelings better than the joyous alternatives. She appreciated all the more the soft lilac fronds drooping on her bedroom wallpaper, and retired to that room still shared with her sisters, Dolores and Juanita, whenever she could. When Mama Maria hollered, it was reluctantly that she joined the family out weeding their sandy plot. The lettuce, swiss chard and beets had made a good start, the beans were curling up around their branch teepees, and right alongside, the peas were sending tendrils out feeling for the fence.

Mama Maria was quick to notice. "My Suz, what is it, caro? Are things not going well at school? Or is it something here at home?

"It's nothing, Mama."

But Maria had seen the change. The events in Detroit had reached down into Sue and rearranged her very being. She had come back a different person. Even though she tried to fit back into life at the Blue Martin it simply wasn't possible. Nothing made Sue sadder than not to be Suz. Finding her maternal grandparents she simply had found her roots. Roots are very important to a plant; Evelio knew that. That's why he tended those weak seedlings so carefully with fertilizer and water. They had to put down healthy roots in order to grow up the way they had. Sue had been transplanted when she was a very little girl. She couldn't really remember it, but her very ill mother had brought her and brother Jody to live with Uncle Joe. It had been a difficult planting.

But then there were new happy roots with Maria and Evelio. She often thought back on that morning when looking down from the rickety loft, Maria Martinez' broad back was bending down to pull out sweet smelling biscuits from the oven. A miracle! Uncle Joe at that point was bed-ridden. This wonderful Mama and Papa had come in to take over an impossible problem facing her and Jody – how to go on as very poor children caring for a bed-ridden man. But the Martinez's, risking everything they had, as little as it was, stayed to become loving parents. She was more than content to be a child without her own heritage, dependent on the goodness of these others; she wanted their roots to be her roots.

What a jolt to have these roots ripped off and another graft attempted. She didn't even like being a Rogers. Though her grandmother and grandfather were fine people, and she could say she loved them in a certain way, nevertheless, she really loved ...oh dear, what difference did it make? Who she was now, was not what she wanted. She cried some tears quietly at night. The rosary from the bedpost, held without any prayer, gave a kind of comfort until sleep came. God knew what was in her heart; telling him would be silly. He had changed everything and she must accept it . . . somehow. She remembered, of course, the saying often offered in the family, "All will be good." Sometimes that was too hard to believe. The treasure box that had meant so much when she was a little girl, she kept, but now it was powerless to lift her spirits.

Occasionally, she did get out the bit of stone called chert and rubbed it the way she had when Mama had first told her "all will be good." But she held the rosary for comfort now and not a piece of stone as mysteriously beautiful as it was.

The pressing worry would waken her in the night. Her dear Mama Maria. How could Sue prepare her and Papa Evelio for the visit of these long lost grandparents? Grandmother Lois had caught cold shortly after Sue left Detroit that rainy Saturday in March. Otherwise the grandparents had planned to visit Beulah within the week of her return. They were anxious, of course, to meet their only grandson, Jody. They also had concerns about their grandchildren living with Mexicans. No matter how they tried to think about it, nothing about such an arrangement fit into their outlook on life.

Providentially it was that eight weeks had passed before her grandmother had shaken off bronchitis and felt well enough to travel north. Her grandmother and grandfather were expected in just three days. That was why Maria had the family out weeding that early June day. She wanted the Blue Martin to be at its best. After all, from the whole amazing story Suz had told, these were important people and what they thought, well, she knew it could change everything for her family.

It was a concern. She and Eb sat up nights again with the *rosario* praying to find comfort with this big development. How would it all work out? She had had enough experience in life to know that an impossible gulf lay between the ways of life of her family and these privileged American people. They didn't look at the world the same. Eb loved his faith, his wife, his family, his work, his pickup truck, and his flowers. Though he looked at pictures and studied diagrams in his gardening books, he wasn't a reader; he still handled English clumsily. The Ohlers, owners of the big fruit farm next door, had accepted the Martinez's as neighbors, but more comfortably as

their employees, not really as their equals. Living in Detroit and coming to the lake country only in the summer, they were good to the children, all of them, but more in the way that Maria would call *grandees* - those with more, giving to those who had less. And it was simply the truth. So how could that change? This was why Suz was withdrawn, because she knew this, too. Her grandparents came from a different world.

Out of his second year at college the end of May, Tom Ohlers was up at his family's HiLo farms preparing for the new cherry season. Sue had looked forward to his arrival, watching for the activity to begin over on the neighboring farm. Usually the spraying equipment would be heard in the orchards as soon as the first leaves appeared. But when the old pickup he drove around the farm came out of the shed and she saw him driving on the highway, his next door presence didn't do much to chase away that blue feeling. He had waved, but hadn't come over to the Blue Martin. Obviously he was too busy, or else didn't really care enough to see her.

There was only one thing to do, Maria told her husband, "We must sit down with the children before the grandparents come and bring all this *disdichado* out into the open. Otherwise, none of us will stand on solid ground and being *nerviosa* about ourselves will keep us from loving. It is only *amare* 'like Jesus that this miserableness we feel will go away. And we can only love like him if we feel loved by the only one who really matters - *nuestro Señor*."

The next evening, with only one day to go before the guests arrived, the Papa gathered his family around the table. Yes, the eighth chair remained empty, to remind them of the most important of their guests who was with them at every meal. Papa brought out his guitar. He was getting quite good at playing things by ear. He asked Jody what song they should start with.

"The Michigan State Fight Song?"

"Oue?"

"Yes, Papa, the Michigan State Fight Song. We play it with the band."

"Bueno, ok, how goes it?"

So Jody sang it with Francisco joining in. Evelio picked it out on the strings.

"Now, to sing it, we have to stand up and yell it out."

"OK," Papa, worked it through again, and the boys really got into it. They both wanted to go to Michigan State to play basketball. The girls laughed, and pretty soon joined in, "Fight, Fight," Juanita, the oldest sister next to Sue, ran from the table bringing back a cheerleader's pompom, and then the singing and shouts got raucous.

"How would they ever talk serious." thought Maria. "I wonder what the grandparents think of this - what kind of bringing up?" By now the boys were prancing on top of the trestle table leading cheers with the pompom. "Down, get down, now!" *Bastante*!" Principe, the dog, vacated his usual spot underneath the table and slunk out to the quiet kitchen.

"Bastante! Enough!" The bright sparkling eyes around the table were just right. It took a rousing good time to frame the serious talk after all. "You know, mi querida, tomorrow is a very special day for us. Good to be alegre to get ready, for Jody and Suz's abuelos are to be our visitors. How will it be, do you think?

Things got very quiet. "I've wondered what they will be like, Suz," Dolores, the quiet one, asked. "Are they like the Ohlers? If they are like that, it should be fine. I know that we are different in lots of ways from them, but it is still OK. They seem to like Papa and Mama a lot . . .and us kids. Tom and Cindy," she stopped, "Oh, Mama, how I will miss Cindy! She was my best friend."

"Oh, it will be very empty around here this summer without her," Sue touched her sister's arm sympathetically. After some quiet moments, she continued, "Our grandparents are older and like I told you, they have a home that compared to the Blue Martin you would think quite amazing and strange. I suppose you'd have to say they have never known what it is like to be

poor like we have, so they don't really understand some things. Grandmother Rogers has a kind heart; I don't know enough about grandfather. He was ...well, I don't know yet."

"Are you worried that he won't like us?"

"I am not sure that he will understand us."

"I will tell you *que mas*," Mama took over. "Do you remember when you first went to school? The time you were late starting school and the teachers were cross? Do you remember the children teasing you about being different from them? What did you do that day? What did you do?"

Francisco stuck his elbow into Jody's ribs. "I kept you from fighting a boy that said something mean about our jeans and our orange sandals. I had to remind you to smile with your eyes. Remember?"

Jody laughed, "I remember, what a brat that kid was. You should have let me punch him."

"What do you mean? Al is the center on our team and one of your best friends. I probably kept you from a wrong move, brother!" And he emphasized this with another teasing punch.

"Mama, you showed us how to smile with our eyes, to look right at people, never to hang our heads or try to get away. I remember that as clear as day, and it worked." Like this, and Dolores smiled till her brown eyes crinkled at the corners. "I wanted to go and hide, but I remembered and I did it, and it worked."

That's right," Juanita chimed in, "Sandy even told me she liked the skirt that Mama had made, and wished she had one like it. Coming home on the bus she wanted to sit with me. She's has been my friend ever since. I've done it lots of times when people have acted . . .well unfriendly, and it works."

Mama Maria smiled. "You do remember. That is what will help you the most mañana when the grandparents come. For them to be happy here, your smiles, friendliness, and good feelings about the Blue Martin and this family are *mas importante*. We want them to be happy with us."

"Forget never, nuestro Señor! Papa pulled out the chair meant for Jesus. "He is with us. Christo is here at meals and his holy meal at iglesia. We are one together. Todos es bueno. You say, 'All be good.' Now, not to worry." He began to strum out the family's favorite Mexican folk tune. For the next half hour four part harmony took the place of talk, and Prince came back to lie in his usual place. "We should sing them that last song," said Sue, "I think they might like it."

Chapter two

Beulah's waterfront hotel had opened early and had undergone spring improvements preparing for the tourist trade of the coming summer. The rooms were freshly painted, and new bedding blended with warm muted colors of upholstered furniture and draperies. The upgrade didn't include room televisions; that would be some years in the future. But the view out on the lake more than made up for the coming diversions of television. The sunset on the first evening of the grandparents Rogers' stay was breathtaking. Low clouds on the horizon were charged with rose, then ascending with pinks and violets they became crimson-edged as the great orange ball dropped slowly into the lake. Across the pinky-red water a wide spreading golden avenue led out to that sinking fiery globe. Then gradually the colors deepened, the golden causeway dimmed away and the rosy lavenders finally faded into dusk.

Lois sighed. "What a glorious sunset; the end of a glorious day, don't you think, Charles?" He was silent. "You do think it was a wonderful day, don't you, Chuck?" "Wonderful? Well, I suppose so."

"You suppose so? How could it have been better? Those children! That dear woman and that dear man."

"For Mexicans."

Lois looked puzzled and didn't say more while Charles Rogers went into the bathroom. She thought back over the day from the hour they turned into the drive at the Blue Martin. Such an interesting house it was, all stone work and multi-paned windows, and those flowers! Whatever it was they called them. "I've never seen flowers that grew that tall – that man must have the original green thumb. And he built that house – the cut fieldstone, the quaintness of it all framed against the pinky sanddunes and dancing lake. But those wonderful children, so polite and friendly. Didn't they walk right over when Sue introduced them, offered their hands with such warm smiles? Wasn't their grandson Jody just something! So tall like his grandfather, such depth to his eyes - he looked wise beyond his years. And he wants to play basketball at Michigan State. She laughed at herself feeling so happy. But then that shadow fell – why was Charles so . . . so hesitant? How could he look at those beautiful girls and just think "Mexican." True they had the thick dark hair, beautiful tawny skin, and nearly black eyes, but the shine of them! They were gorgeous! Suz was lovely; blonde was definitely good, but all those charming young women were fine! Maria! To think how she and her husband had chanced everything to step into that sad situation to care for the children. They were certainly remarkable trusting people, and Catholics! She brought out her rosary and decided to pray a prayer of thanksgiving for everything. Charles couldn't be really unhappy; he just had to think about the goodness of the situation a little more, and how God's goodness had triumphed over the misery they had inflicted upon themselves. They had found their grandchildren after years of grief! God be thanked!

She was at her prayers as the evening darkened. Charles emerged from his bath and clicked on the light. "Oh, sorry! Did you want to pray in the dark? I would think you have enough to pray about. What are we going to do about this?"

What did he mean? Lois was quiet as her husband went on.

"It is impossible, just impossible!"

"What do you mean? What's impossible?"

"Why, our grandchildren being under that roof!"

"What? What? I don't understand?"

Charles looked at her puzzled. Then shook his head. "I can't believe ...oh, I can't believe that you ... that you really aren't totally in shock over this. Our grandchildren of our own flesh and blood, American back to the Revolutionary War, being turned into something

totally alien – Indian blooded Mexicans . . . not even Spanish Mexicans. That might have been all right, but simply rough Mexican peasants! Can't you see, Lois? Are you blind?" They are bottom drawer peasants!

Under the lamplight Lois flushed and began to stammer. "B...B...Blind? If anyone is blind it is you, Chuck. I don't know where to begin. I don't believe I have heard you right. If that is the way you see things you certainly are the most to be pitied!"

Her words were met with a hard look. "I see. I will simply have to take things into my own hands. "

"Now wait! Wait a minute, Charles! Are you about to make another miserable mistake? A painful mistake to live with the rest of your life. Do you remember leaving your daughter behind one night? Your daughter, your very own, one and only daughter? Why did you do it, why did you disown her, never to see her again alive? Think of all the years you. . . we, have suffered." Lois burst into tears, sobbing, "Are you about to do this to us all over again?"

Charles stood dark and quiet. Lois finally whispered. "Oh, Chuck, please, look in the mirror, look at your pride. I just can't bear it!"

The room was small. There was no place to go. At home Charles at this point would have stalked off and spent the night on the sofa in his study. Instead he went back into the bathroom, came out fully dressed, said nothing, but left the room. His wife wrapped herself in a blanket and sat by the window sobbing and waiting. Outside the moon rose over the lake and she soon noticed his tall form walking out on the breakwater. "Dear Lord, don't let him do anything so wrong. Please, speak to his heart. Mary, Jesus and Joseph! Speak to his heart."

About eleven, just before the corner drugstore was to close, Charles walked in the door and asked if they could make him a chocolate soda. The proprietor looked at the clock, sighed, and agreed. After all there was another customer in the store and another half hour wouldn't hurt. When the other man came to pay at the cash register, he noticed Charles sitting alone at the counter nursing his soda. "Well, hello there, are you a visitor to Beulah?"

Charles really didn't want to visit with anyone; he mumbled, "Yes." But offered no other encouragement for a conversation, but it didn't work, the man sat down on the tall stool beside him, and . . . "oh Lord, that white collar" the man was a Catholic priest.

"Where are you from? And what are you doing in Beulah in May? Not quite tourist season yet, just black fly season," and he grinned. Charles had to answer, though briefly. But this priest picked up on who he was immediately. He knew all about the Rogers and Martinez situation evidently. Charles' thoughts were angry about that – "it was nobody's business." Though he didn't want to talk, he had to listen, and what he heard was hard to ignore. Of course priests were supposed to think well of people, even . . . even different kinds of people. But he didn't have to go on and on about this industrious, loving and devout family. He even said that if other fathers were the kind of parent that Evelio was there would be no runaways or problem children. How fortunate, he said, that Sue and Jody had been saved by such people. He'd heard the whole story, he said, from old Father Smythe, may he rest in peace. "Saved," he said. "And you? You are Jody and Sue's grandfather? A strange situation, indeed, that you were separated from them for so long. But God certainly took care of them."

Charles walked slowly back to the hotel thinking about "saved." He hadn't thought about it in just that way. He knew the story. This man Martinez and his wife had risked everything to take care of his grandchildren and that disreputable old uncle Nettle of Lois's, without money and with no promise of any help. Maybe he had to rethink this thing before acting. He had been prepared to take no nonsense from Lois or anyone, and pack those two up to take back to Detroit immediately. No reason to protract the agony, just pack them up and take them away.

Lois' words came back to him, "Look at your pride." Yes, he had made a mistake about his dear daughter Jean . . it probably was just pride . . but wasn't a man supposed to have pride?

Pride enough to save his daughter from a foolish decision, and his grandchildren? Yet the priest had said this Mexican was the best of fathers; look at him, he was a man without pride. Oh, he held himself well and was proud of his work, those flowers, and his family, but that wasn't what Lois meant by pride. What did she mean? He knew. Meeting this priest had somehow made him more honest. His kind of pride was more to be called arrogance. "Blessed are the poor in spirit." He knew his Bible and had to admit it - Jesus would love Evelio and Maria; but then, he would love Lois and Charles, too. But he saw His eyes, severe towards him to warn him. All right. He would talk with Lois and something would be worked out. He swallowed hard opening the door to his hotel room. His wife had fallen asleep in front of the window. He sat down on the edge of the bed facing her.

Sue and Mama Maria sat together. The light was dim and the sorrowful mysteries on that Garden. The agony of Jesus know that Maria was suffering that her grandfather Charles Blue Martin. His face had been



at the long table praying a late rosary moonlight streamed across the room. It was Friday night beginning with the Agony in the seemed too alive right in her heart, and Sue too. It was very evident to both of them Rogers disliked everything he had seen at the closed, his eyes hard under dark brows. He

had had almost nothing to say. Though Maria had cooked a great meal of roast pork and browned potatoes – an American menu just for them, he had declined the warm invitation to stay for dinner. This first visit of her grandparents appeared to have been a disaster. But Maria wouldn't have it that way. Prayer to Mother Mary and trust in Jesus were her weapons to fight all disasters. "Fight, fight, fight," the *niño* had chanted; they couldn't have known that it was a spiritual fight to be won. After the rosary both women felt their spirits lift, gave each other a loving hug and went off to bed confident of the outcome of the battle. Evelio was snoring; he never fell into emotional bogs. His trust in Jesus he wore like his own skin; but of course, it was Maria's love who kept it so. She positioned her plump warm body next to the sleeping man.

But the battle was not over. As Charles Rogers sat at the end of the bed looking at Lois, the old argument rose again in his mind. So the Martinez's were good people . . .well did that make them the people who should be raising his grandchildren? They were also superstitious people, all that repeating, "Mary and Jesus and Joseph," and that big portrait of whoever it was supposed to be pinned to the wall. Wherever there were ignorant Mexicans that picture turned up. "Our Lady of what . . .Guada . .something?" My God! Where was the culture his family had always been nurtured in, generation after generation of white, Anglo Saxon Protestants? Yes, W.A.S.P.; everything dependable lay in those letters. Now he had this Catholic thing to contend with, even Lois! Where had he been when that happened? Well, he had been busy. Money took a lot of care, it didn't just happen, and Lois didn't dislike money either. But she even said that if the grandchildren were ever found he'd promised to become Catholic. Impossible! He could remember no such thing, besides what chance had there ever been of that happening? But it had, only to raise this snarl of a problem. That firm glance of Jesus he'd sensed, he put aside for now. His reasons were sound. God would approve.

They had sung a song for the grandparents, they said. What kind of music was it? He had been raised on the three B's - classics: Beethoven, Bach and Brahms. What was this twangy, sentimental guitar stuff? No, no, it was simply wrong! It wasn't his pride that was the problem, it was this clash of ... of the right way to live rather than utter low-brow strangeness. There was no future for his granddaughter and grandson if they were not rescued from this ... this foreign-poor kind of living. He might have been wrong about his daughter, granted, he might have been wrong then, but that didn't make him wrong now. He looked at sleeping Lois who had a pained

look across her forehead. "I hate to make her angry with me, or to have her be sad, but there are worse things than that. I simply must rescue those children. Eventually she will see I was right." He touched her shoulder, and she woke.

"We will talk about it in the morning," he said, and they went to bed. But neither of them slept well.

Saturday morning found Suz up early. She lit the water heater in the side porch Evelio had built off the kitchen, then rolled the Maytag wringer washer into place beside the double sinks. Running the water into them for rinsing, she began to sort the clothes into piles, colored, dark and white. She could well remember having to pump water, and it would always amaze her that now there were so many clothes. She clearly remembered Mama Maria bringing in the one set of school clothes that had been hand washed in a big basin, then hung out to dry the night before. How she would heat the flat iron on the wood stove, and press them carefully. The smell of her crisp white blouse had been delicious and lasted most of the day.

Suz started the first load and went into the kitchen to help with breakfast. The brothers were at the table first; they seemed unusually quiet. There were not the usual jokes and harmless punching. She made them lunches; basketball practice would make them hungry before they got home. It used to be just a half of slice of bologna between two slices of bread. Maria would cut it in strips to fill out the space. But now, they had a full slice. Papa's job with the celery farm had made a difference, and driving the truck for the lumber mill gave him steady work all year long. The boys grabbed their lunch bags and were off up the lane to meet the bus sent out to pick up the players.

After throwing down sheets from the loft, Maria followed them down the ladder. It was "change-the-bed day" for the boys. Suz and she exchanged glances, but nothing was said though they were both thinking the same thing, "How would today go? By evening, would they be happy or sad?"

It was when she was out hanging sheets on the clothesline that Sue caught sight of Tom across the fields. He was heading toward the machine sheds and waved. She put in a last clothes pin and took the old path that connected the two properties. When they had been children the path was well worn, Cindy coming to their house, and the three girls going there; now it was still visible but the weeds were growing in. As she pushed her way along avoiding a few tall nettles with their hanging heads, Sue was wondering: Was there any way that Tom could help in this situation? He knew the whole story; he'd been there when she had found her grandmother Rogers and had heard from her own lips that whole reason that the two children had been lost from their family for all those years. Maybe he would have an idea.

His family must still be reeling from Cindy's death. Dear Cindy, she felt tears forming still as she recalled that shining face. She hadn't had a chance to talk with him since the funeral and she had left Detroit over two months before. She patted down her curly hair, and smoothed her sweat shirt wishing she had worn something else. "Oh, well." He came around the corner and she thought he looked wonderful. "Oh, Tom! I'm so glad you are back, we have . . . well, I'm just so glad you are back."

"I'm glad to see you, too. How have things been?"

"OK here, well, almost, but how is your family managing? Is your mother doing all right? I mean, without Cindy and all. It must be so hard."

"It sure is miserable at times. Of course I'm not home a lot. I try to call Mom every few days. I know she is feeling lost. I feel lost, too, a lot of the time, but school and all the work keeps my mind off it. Dad, on the other hand, is so caught up in business that he manages better until he gets home at night, then he kind of sits . . . moody, occasionally he watches some TV. He never was a talker, but now he doesn't have anything much to say. I think he is putting off even coming up here. He's asked me to supervise the orchards this year. Of course Foreman

Torres is totally reliable, and knows the operation forward and backward. I've learned all I know from him. Your dad, too, when he is free, but I think we can handle it."

"I suppose it is really because of Cindy that he doesn't want to come. She was such a happy spirit in this place. She loved it so much. He must dread being here, looking for her, expecting her to come singing out of the trees, and then remembering. It breaks my heart."

Tom put an arm around her shoulders and with the other hand wiped the few tears that wet her cheeks. "We all have broken hearts, but we will get through this together. I am so happy to have you as a friend, Sue. Please, don't cry. Now how are things at the Blue Martin? You said, 'well, almost.' I can see those great flowers from our yard."

"Oh, Tom, we have trouble, I'm afraid. My grandparents are here from Detroit."

"That's the black Cadillac, then. I wondered. So they are visiting?"

"They're staying in the hotel, and I expect them out here yet this morning before they head back to Detroit. But, Tom, my grandfather is not happy with us."

"How can you think that? Maria is such a great homemaker and mother; Evelio is so resourceful and clever, why would there be a problem?"

"You know why."

He looked thoughtful. "Oh, that! I see."

"You do see."

"You mean the difference . . .the culture thing."

"Yes, that."

"What do you think will happen?"

"I'm afraid that grandfather will take us away from our home."

"Can he do that? Doesn't Evelio have legal custody of you? Isn't that the reason that he has possession of the house and land, because he is the custodian of the persons and the property until you reach twenty-one?"

"Oh, gosh! I didn't think of that. Really? Oh, what a relief! Maybe grandfather can't take us from here."

"I wouldn't think so, not without going to court."

"Going to court? Oh, dear. Grandfather would do that, too. And he would know how to work the whole thing in his favor; Papa would never know how to do that."

"It can't happen today, anyway, Sue. It would take time, and maybe my dad can think of something. Maybe if someone . . . well, someone with influence, and unfortunately someone 'white' came to testify to Evelio's character the grandparents' claim could be put aside, and especially if you and Jody want to be under Evelio's guardianship."

"I couldn't love Maria and Evelio more! Oh, thanks Tom, for giving me this hope. I had a feeling you might." She squeezed his hand. And he continued to hold it.

"Come back over here, Sue, as often as you can. You mean everything to me." He lightly kissed her on the forehead.

Sue went home through the sweet-smelling field walking on air almost right into the nettles. The crisis seemed far away and mendable, not nearly as impossible as when she had walked the other way just a few minutes before. Besides, Tom was . . . , he was . . . well, he was wonderful. He wasn't just a wiry kid anymore, but had grown tall and looked manly. She touched the spot on her forehead and made a promise to feel that kiss always. It was so pure and well meant.

She had gotten half way home when startled out of a dreamy cloud, she heard Tom hollering, "Wait, wait! I have another idea!" He overtook her. "Sue," he was out of breath, "Sue, you must have two grandfathers?"

"What? What?" She didn't understand. "Two grandfathers? What on earth does that mean?"

"You must have two grandfathers. If this one is going to give you trouble, well, maybe the other one can help. He would have just as much say as the Rogers, wouldn't he? Actually he'd be your paternal grandfather."

"I don't know what you are talking about. I don't have two grandfathers. I didn't even know I had one."

"Wait a minute," Tom's face was flushed, "I was there, remember, when your grandmother told the whole story about your mom and dad. How they had run away together, been disowned by your grandfather, then your dad dying in the war, and your mother dying of . . . what was it? . . . tuberculosis and dehydration. All that. Well, if you had a dad, you also had a grandfather. What was known about that Kelly family? Your grandmother said that your dad's family owned a bar down near the Ford plant. Of course, if your dad really didn't ever marry your mother, then perhaps the Kelly's wouldn't have much of a say. You and Jody do have the Rogers name; but we can't be sure about all that unless we do some research."

"Tom, I think you are crazy. Another grandfather? Somebody else to worry about. I can't. Besides, where would there be any information."

"Well, we knew the Kelly's had that bar. Wouldn't that be the place to start? I have to go back to Detroit the end of next week, and you could come with me. We would start a search, at least over that weekend. I will call Mother and tell her. I am sure she will be happy for you to come. She likes you almost as much as I do. I'm so excited about this thing, I could . . may I . . kiss you . . . again?" He looked at her so tenderly, she wanted to melt into a puddle.

"No, please Tom, don't. I am sure that I wouldn't want to go to Detroit with you if there was anything like this going on. We just can't. In fact, I don't think I can do it. Let me think about it and talk to Mama."

"All right. You see what Maria thinks. See how today goes with the Rogers. We will talk about it again. But at least give the idea a try. Also, tell Evelio he has rights, and tell him before the Rogers come over." He touched her sleeve; she turned around and started walking back to the flapping sheets with that arm tingling.

Lois stayed in the car. She wouldn't get out.

"All right," grumbled Charles, "I will do it myself. I expected this."

He walked determinedly up to the Dutch door, the upper half hung open, and knocked. Maria who had seen the car drive in was there immediately. "Bueno dias, Mr. Rogers, come in." Looking out she cried, "Oh, won't Mrs. Rogers come in? Let me go out and invite her."

"Never mind, Mrs. Martinez. I would like to talk to your husband."

"Si, si, he is right here." And she called, "Evelio, Mr. Rogers is here."

The conversation between the two men took place outside because Charles Rogers declined the invitation to come in to the table. He didn't want the children to become involved, or Maria either. The decisions to be made were to be done by the two who had responsibility for these others. Evelio agreed with that. With Sue's warning, he was prepared to stand his ground.

Charles began, "Now, sir, I hear only good things about you. Your priest talked with me last night, and he has nothing but praise for your fathering these children. I don't want you to think I am ungrateful for all you have done. However, Sue and Jody must have a better life than you can give them; they must be brought into the society that we keep because they are of our own flesh and blood. They can no longer be raised as Mexican children are. I hope you understand. But I am firm on this. I will not allow them to remain here."

Evelio was quiet for too long.

"Did you hear me, sir? Do you understand?"

"Si, si, Mr. Rogers. I know. The court say Evelio be the guard. I think you not know that."

"Oh, I understand that perfectly, sir. I am prepared to contest your guardianship. Yes, I know it will mean that you have no further claim on this property, but you have been used to migrant work, and I am sure you can find another place. After this legal thing is settled in my favor, we will sell this property for the children's estate. You have had a few good years here, and have improved the property some, though it won't have much value in the eyes of the kind of people I know who will want to buy this property for its lake front. Probably tear it down. However, I am prepared to be fair and make some kind of allowance. I hope to take Jody and Sue back with us today."

"No, not right. No go today. I am Papa, they stay here."

"I was afraid you would say that. You know I will win this case. You are merely delaying what must happen, and the sooner these two get into decent schools, into decent society, and begin to be refined, the better. I was hoping that you would see the sense of it and not obstruct my way."

"I no ob . . . struct. Evelio papa now. Until police say no to me, they stay with me."

"Well, so be it! Be prepared to hear from the court after I get custody, and be prepared to take your family and move on. Maybe it would be a good time to move back to Mexico." Charles turned on his heel. Lois was holding her head and crying into a handkerchief when the car backed out of the drive.

Evelio went into his flowers and sat on the cedar bench he had made. Through the kitchen window he could hear Maria crying along with the chug chug of the washing machine. Sue ran out and sat beside him, putting her arms around his big shoulders. "Papa, don't worry; we will find away. Tom has an idea his father may help and we will find a way."

At Mass the next morning the Martinez family brought all their anxiety to Jesus. As they knelt together, Evelio and Maria, Jody, Francisco, Dolores, Juanita and Sue, they could feel the bonds of God's love and thanked him that all would be good.

Chapter three

The weather closed in the next week as weather in June has a way of doing. It dripped rain for days. The delphinium loved it, and the grey fog lying on the grey lake matched the feelings of those who lived at the Blue Martin. School festivities went on regardless of the weather and sad feelings. Sue was graduating with honors.

All three girls took part in the choir program; the boys in the band. The family had afforded two second-hand instruments; a cello for Jody and a clarinet for Francisco. This suited the girls who were happy to sing in the choir. Their music teacher, Bradley White, had checked out the second-hand instruments and found them adequate, also good buys for the money and had arranged a helpful payment plan. Over the past year Evelio's guitar occasionally had been joined by the boys on their instruments once they had gotten over the squeaks and growls; though for family singing, it was Papa's place to accompany.

For the first graduate of the family, Mama Maria sewed a pretty outfit of a pale blue polished cotton top with a white skirt. The fabric she had found on the remnant table at the Five and Dime, as she still called Ben Franklin. Without a pattern, she used ideas taken from the dress that Sue brought home from Detroit. She was clever about making patterns from grocery bags. When the house had been wired for electricity, Evelio had bought her a small Singer sewing machine; she no longer sewed everything with needle and thread by hand. So with the dress from Detroit, and the new outfit Sue was able to wear something different under her graduation robe at the Baccalaureate and at the graduation ceremony. The pink sharkskin suit the Ohlers had provided for Cindy's funeral, was too dressy. It was important not to look overdressed amongst her peers. She had always been sensitive to drawing attention to herself. She had the gold honors tassels to wear, and with the traditional cap and gown looked very beautiful. Papa drew in a big breath when she came out to the car the evening of graduation. "I am so proud of you, caro mio." She had hugged him, and said, "And I am so proud of you, Papa. You have made all this possible." With damp eyes, she squeezed in with the others in the station wagon, and off they went.

Sue gave a tribute to her teachers and her parents as part of her Salutatorian address, and admonished all her listeners to believe, "all will be good" in their future. She explained this saying and the meaning it had for those growing up in her family. She even explained that the seeming poor English – the use of an adjective instead of an adverb had proved just right for the ways her family had of thinking about the good God. Everyone laughed when she mentioned Mrs. Brandt's objections to this; they all had stories of Mrs. Brandt's rigorous English lessons with the blackboard covered by diagrammed sentences dripping with dangling participles. At the end she received a loud response of applause. Her class mates all loved Sue. Though she was beautiful and bright, she was never anything but friends to all without a bone of pride in her body. Her humble home life with all its struggles had formed her well. She knew what was important and better yet, what was not important at all – like attention and praise, and of course, much money.

Tom came over to the house when they were all back home. "Sorry, I couldn't make it, Sue, we had a major electrical breakdown that had to be fixed. Torres is a genius. How did everything go?"

"All was good!" Jody answered with a laugh. "But school is out! Hurrah! And you promised me a job over at HiLo – I'm ready to start Monday morning."

"Just see Torres, he'll get you started. We've got all kinds of work over there. Machinery that needs fixing, lugs and ladders repaired, as well as the orchard work itself. We are just hoping that this weather front going through won't be backed up by frost. The forecast is pretty

iffy, it might drop to freezing when the front passes, and the blossoming is beginning. It could be bad."

Maria said, "Pray about it. What saint is for orchards? Then there is no problem." Tom shook his head and looked amused. "For sure. A saint for orchards. Who would that be?"

"I am sure there is one," and Maria went into the kitchen to bring out her special chocolate-cherry cake. After singing "Happy Graduation to you!" led by Evelio's bellow, Suz cut the cake and passed it around. Tom stood up and gave her a hug in front of everybody.

"Really proud of you, Sue! Really proud of you!" and he kissed her lightly on the forehead. Sue blushed to the roots of her hair.

"Gosh, Tom," she giggled and rubbed the spot. Big smiles circled the family as each one dug into his cake. "Thanks, Mama. It's really good!"

Juanita was opening her report card which had been handed out that morning. In it was a note from Mr. White addressed to Mr. and Mrs. Martinez. She handed it to Mama, "Oh dear, what did I do now?" Mama took the folded paper, and read it slowly. "What he writes is that you are so musical, can read music so well, that we should give you piano lessons this summer. See, Eb? That is what it says, and, she read, "I will be happy to give the lessons at half the usual price."

"Good, good, but no piano. Clarinet and cello - that ok. But no piano. Can't be, I think. Sorry, Juancaro."

Juanita looked as though she already knew the answer, and just replied with a mild shrug. It was time to pass the report cards around. Next to the excellent final report that was Sue's, Francisco surprised everyone with a nearly perfect report card. Juanita and Dolores had a solid B record with some A's, and Jody came in last with a sprinkling of C's. Their parents were all aglow over each one. Jody began to explain he needed to work harder, but Evelio stopped him. "No, no! You do good, You, with all other things. You do good!"

He loved these children, but now always at the back of his mind was the threat that not only was there no piano for Juanita, but they might soon be packing and trying to find themselves another place to live. After the Rogers had returned to Detroit last week, a letter came stating again just what Charles Rogers had determined to do. It was the kind of letter that required him to sign that he had received it. So now that miserable thing had been stated in writing and acknowledged. Of course, this worry cast a shadow over his usual happiness, a deep shadow.

"Sue, have you asked your folks about this weekend?" Tom saw the worry cross Evelio's face and that had prompted the question.

"About this weekend? Oh, you mean about going back to Detroit with you. No, no I haven't. I really don't see any reason for doing that."

"What is this?" Maria looked at the two of them. "Why would you be going to Detroit?" "Oh, Tom had a rather silly idea."

He responded, "What's silly about it?"

"Well, really. I have had enough of grandparents. The chances of our finding this grandfather when there are probably pages of Kellys in the phone book, what chance do you suppose?"

"Any chance at all. Isn't it worth it?" Tom looked serious.

"I can only see more trouble all the way around."

Now both Maria and Evelio were looking at them, Papa with raised eyebrows, which was always a sign.

"Another grandparent? What does that mean?" asked Maria.

"Oh, Tom thought we could look for my father's father, and maybe there would be something he could do to keep the other set of grandparents from doing what they are thinking.

I just don't see how it could work. If there were such a grandfather Kelly, why would my mother have brought us up to Uncle Joe's when she was dying? Have you thought of that, Tom? Why wouldn't she have taken us to her husband's family – his father and mother. No, there must have been something very wrong there, or she would have done that. She wrote them off as being unable to help, so I have, too."

"Well, ok, then. I thought it would be worth a try."

"Have you forgotten that my father never married my mother? In any case, the Kelly's would have no claim on us kids, and they obviously were not interested. Our birth certificates say that we are Rogers."

Tom said his goodbyes and left to cross the field in the dark. Because of the low thick clouds that the moon could not penetrate, it had gotten pitch black so Evelio loaned him the big flashlight. Sue watched the light of it bounce across the darkness, and knew it was just the way she felt. Darkness closing in, but ... not quite. .. there was that beam of light that was showing Tom the way. Maybe she shouldn't have denied any possibility of a path appearing through their dark night. Maybe she should give Tom's willingness to help a chance.

She looked over at her Papa. He was studying her with his dark eyes.

"Suz, *querido* Suzie, I never thought you be ...*espantada* You always ... *verdad*. How can the truth hurt you this time? A chance to help. Try. You try."

Maria only nodded, "Si, si. The Bible say, 'be not afraid."

"Am I really afraid? I just think it is a wild goose chase."

"Think again, *querida*. Aren't you afraid of what you will find if you go looking for your Kelly family? Are you keeping away from some more hurts? We will be here, *querida*, no matter what."

That night Sue had a dream. She was dancing with Tom. He held her tightly and she felt utterly at peace; his strength surrounded her – or was in God's? All will be good. When she awoke it was still and dark, her sisters breathing was all she could hear, but she knew she would go to Detroit.

All the celebrations of graduation were over. Her friends were out finding summer jobs at resorts and restaurants in Traverse City because the few opportunities in Beulah had been taken. To help the family out and to save something for college in the fall, Sue knew that she needed to find some work, too. It was true that there was the Nettle Trust, money tucked away for her first year in the state college, but there would be other expenses and she was always aware of causing the slightest unnecessary burden to the family finances. Occasionally Evelio would want to buy them all a five cent ice cream cone, and she would be the one of the five who would say, "Papa, we don't need it." He would smile and buy it anyway. She expressed her concern about taking a few days before finding summer work. But both parents encouraged her with - "All will be good." It was important that she follow any leads that might cause Charles Rogers to change his mind, or at least modify his plan. Never was a harsh word spoken about him; only prayers were breathed with his name.

On Friday afternoon of that second week in June, Tom pulled up the drive in the old pickup. It was his vehicle of choice, not the nice sedan he had brought up from home. Sue had first packed the pretty little suitcase that had been Cindy's. The Ohlers had given it to her to bring home the new clothes, but Maria's frown made her reconsider. No, that was not a good idea. It would immediately bring sad memories to the surface for the Ohlers. So she took the older cardboard one that was battered on the corners and put the things in it for the few days she'd be away. Tom put it in the back and put a safety strap around it tying it to one of the flanges on the side of the truck so that it wouldn't blow away. Then he put in his leather case and did the same.

They didn't talk much until they came to the by-pass around Cadillac.

"Would you like to stop for something to eat or drink?"

Tom didn't wait for a reply and pulled in at the front of the Blue Gingham Inn. A charming place, the windows were hung with tie-back, ruffled blue gingham curtains, and inside each table had a square of blue gingham centered by a squat blue candle. Tom ordered a coke; Sue was thinking about the few dollars in her purse and regretting spending any now, but the cozy room, the warm, friendly presence of Tom, and a cheerful waitress made her decide for a mug of tea and a cinnamon roll. She would be more careful after today.

"This is really a wonderful place."

"Yes, our family makes it a part of every trip to stop here. Just helps to break up the time. I've looked forward all week to stopping here with you." He reached across the table putting his hand on top of hers. "You know this is going to be a splendid week. I have a feeling that it is a great adventure; and being with you . . .well, it just couldn't be better. You know, Sue, how very fond I am of you, don't you? True, the duties around HiLo have absorbed me these few weeks, and when I get back we will plunge right into the heart of the season. The migrant workers will be moving in with all that that means. Lots of people to be concerned about then – they are, after all, each one an individual that must be thought about and cared for, along with all the children. So we must make the most of these days together. Aren't you excited?"

"Days? I'm not planning on but one or two at the most. I hope we can find out what we need to know quickly. I really don't expect much to happen, so I don't know if you would call it excitement. I am a bit worried, and if Evelio and Maria hadn't thought it was right, I wouldn't have wanted to do it. Besides, I must tell you Tom, that part of the reason I didn't think it was a good idea is that I feel strongly for you, too, but I don't want us to . . .well." And she withdrew her hand.

You mean you don't want a romantic involvement? Just being with you for however many days is a romantic involvement for me. I have had some girl friends over the years, but I am always looking past them and seeing you. They get tired of my talking about Sue real soon. So what are the ground rules for this time together? You make them. I'll do just what you want. Do you mean no holding hands, even?

Sue didn't answer for a few minutes while she sipped the hot tea. She looked out the window at the lengthening shadows. The sun set late in the Eastern time zone – almost ten o'clock in June. She would love to have him hold her hand from now to . . .whenever. But, no, it wouldn't do. She was a weak willed person and it wasn't just her hand she wanted held.

"I think it must mean no . . no touching. Not this time." She had a brief image of coming around a corner and bumping into Tom and immediately his arms were around her. She practically sank to her knees. "No, not any touching this time, Tom. After all we must honor your folk's home and their trust in us. I may actually . . . "She was about to say, "I may actually be in love with you," but stopped just in time. "I may actually have to take the rest of my cinnamon roll in this napkin."

As she reached in her pocket for the small purse, he pushed her arm down and went to the register to pay.

"Tom, we need to keep this business-like. I want to pay."

"Well, ok, after this. But it was my idea."

Back in the truck, he turned and said dejectedly, "I thought this would be a great adventure, and I guess it won't be quite as great as I hoped. I don't see how a few kisses or watching TV together on a sofa would be any harm, but as I said, 'you set the rules and I will follow them."

"Thank you, Tom, I know you are a gentleman." At that he winced, but she pretended not to notice.

The Ohlers greeted her as warmly as ever. Tillie came from the kitchen throwing a dish towel over her shoulder and gave her a hug.

"There you are! How wonderful you look! What can I get you two to eat? I have some lovely ham and will make a couple of sandwiches. Do you want tomato and lettuce? How about some milk?"

"Thank you, Tillie, it sounds great." Tom grabbed the suitcases, "We'll take Sue's case up to the room and we will be right down. She'll be in the same guest room, Mom?"

"Yes." With her glance at Tom and then back at her, Sue caught just a short worry line cross his mother's brow. So, even the Ohlers might be less than happy about any attachment between herself and their son. They needn't worry. And Sue was glad that she had made the rules to govern their time together.

It was a warm early summer morning, bright and breezy. Sue had not seen the beauty of the Ohlers' yard when she had been here in March. Now the area had been planted in row after row of impatiens and begonias which were the perfect patches of cheery colors of white, rose and pink under the shade of the big trees. As she looked out of the bedroom window, it was clear that she would wear her pink sweater with the white skirt Maria had made for her graduation outfit. She dressed and found the family at breakfast. Taking her place, she greeted Tom's mother and dad, "What a beautiful morning, and your yard looks so lovely."

"Here, sit beside me," said Lucy Ohlers, pulling out a chair.

Tom was thumbing through the yellow pages. He had brought out the big Detroit telephone book explaining to his mother that the hunt was on to find the other half of Sue and Jody's family. After explaining the need for this, that the Rogers had become antagonistic toward their grandchildren living with the Martinez's, Lucy Ohlers response seemed a bit cool. Just how did she feel about it, Sue wondered? Perhaps she was sympathetic with the feeling that being raised by Mexicans was not ideal. She had always been most friendly and helpful as a neighbor, but again as Maria would say, more as a grandee. It was hard for these wealthy Americans to feel truly comfortable with the south-of-the-border lifestyle or with the simplicity of the faith that they didn't understand at all. And that would explain that worry line when Lucy Ohlers saw Tom and her together. She could see the immense obstacle that was rising between any relationship they might ever develop. She wondered in that few seconds what Tom really thought their future might hold, and she thought about her Catholic faith – how central it was to her very life. All this went through her mind in a fleeting second.

A small map of Detroit was a frontispiece to the Yellow Pages and he marked out the area of the Ford factories with his finger. "Mrs. Rogers told us that this Robert Shane Kelly, Sue's father, was the son of the owner of a bar down near the Ford plant someplace. Lots of streets around there because the place is huge. First, I suppose we should just see if any Kelly's Bar is listed."

Opening the book, he ran his finger down the long list of bars, but there was no Kelly among them.

"You might try names that sound Irish, like the Shamrock Bar," said Sue, "What else?"

"Oh, 'lil' ol' Mama McCrea's, I suppose," Mr. Ohlers' voice was sarcastic as he looked around his newspaper. "Sometime, Tom Boy, if you can give me some time, we need to go over the plans for this year's operation of the farm. That is if you can spare me a minute from this other pressing operation you've got going."

Sue hadn't had any clues about how he was feeling about this quest of theirs, but this response wasn't encouraging. She wanted to say that it wasn't her idea, but said nothing.

"Dad, we've got it all under control, Torres and I."

His father looked skeptical. "Well Torres, maybe, but here you are during one of the busiest weeks just goofing off."

Tom got up stiffly, put the phone book back in the drawer, "I guess we will just have to drive down there and see if we can find anything that might have been, or still is, an Irishman's bar," Tom was put off by his parents' lack of interest, but he was always respectful. "If we have some luck we will be back up north in just a day or two. Everything is in good shape, Dad, I wouldn't have left if it wasn't."

Bud Ohlers grunted and put his head back into the newspaper. "Well, good luck then, Son."

"Oh, by the way, Mom, what would you think if one of the Martinez girls used our piano this summer for music lessons? I think it's Juanita whose music teacher is offering to give her lessons. Without you and Dad being there much, nobody is using the house except me. I'm just in and out. Practicing her lessons would be no problem to anyone. What do you think?"



Lucy Ohlers pursed her lips for a moment. "Well, why not? It would be good to have the piano used again. But, Tom, you will need to arrange to have the thing tuned. It probably is in need of it with the heat turned down most of the winter. I guess if we come up for a week now and then - well, what difference would it make if someone was practicing

an hour or two, as long as it wasn't in the evening or too early in the morning. Yes, sure, go ahead and get it tuned and tell the Martinez girl she's welcome to use it. I've always been fond of Juanita."

Sue was surprised that Tom had thought about this arrangement, but felt happy that her sister would be able to go ahead with her music. The Ohlers were really good right through!

"We should get going. Don't plan lunch for us, Tillie. And let's hope we can accomplish something worthwhile. Do you mind if I take your car, Mom?" In her mind, Sue changed "hope" to "pray." Prayer was so much a part of everything at home. The Ohlers didn't even seem to say grace at meals.

Chapter four

The first hours that Saturday morning were frustrating to both. Sue would have quit looking after the first few visits in these establishments. The stale beery smells mingled with dank cigarette smoke, the darkness with the only illumination being red and blue beer signs in the small windows, the long dark bars with a few limp men cradling glasses this early in the day, it was all too depressing. She always looked for the evidence of Jesus in the lives she knew. Maria had taught her that every human being had the capacity for the love of God, and she should always look for it. The God antenna could look rusty and unused, but if she looked carefully, she would see it. Every human being had that link to God - the capability of loving Him. Such an effort in these oppressive dens seemed impossible from the moment she stepped through the door.

About noon they pulled in to a diner. Though it was a far cry from the Blue Gingham Inn, Tom called it a "greasy spoon," the waitress had a clean apron, and the silverware passed a visual test, so they ordered a sandwich and talked over the morning's work. The bartenders, men in three places, and a woman in the fourth and fifth, had been past middle aged with sad faces and eyes that looked out in bored fatigue upon their dismal scenes. Their questions had a same response in each place – "No, never heard of him, this Kelly. How along ago? Eighteen or nineteen years? Well, I've been around a while, but not that long. Better ask at Gasco's place. He's been down here forever. Kelly's bar, huh? Nope, never heard of it."

They took up going from bar to bar again after lunch. At Shorty's Pair A Dice Bar again they were told to go to Gasco's place. "And where is Gasco's place?" One of the men put his feet down from the bar stool, and stood rather like the leaning tower, his red eyes looked them over. "I was just going there and you can give me a lift." Outside he crawled into the back seat. The car filled with an odor only overcome by rolling down the front windows.

"Hey, that's a bit of wind, there. Can you roll um up. Don't want to catch P. .monia!" He coughed such a ragged cough it sounded as though pneumonia were a steady companion.

"Here, now, turn right! At the next light turn right again. Yah, yah, that's it! See that house with the bar sign on the porch – you'd never know it, but that's Monk Gasco's. Good I was around to show you how to get here, right? I'm a very handy guy. Everybody says, 'Get Elmer, he'll help ya.'"

Sue had a sudden inspiration. "Elmer, did you ever know anyone by the name of Joe Nettle?"

The question was met with silence.

"Say that again."

"Joe Nettle, did you ever know a man named Joe Nettle?"

"Well, well, maybe, maybe. A fiver might help me remember. Memory not so good anymore. A fiver might help."

Five dollars was just a little less than Sue had. She said, "Never mind then."

"Well, how about a couple of bucks?"

"No, it was just a thought. Thanks anyway, but forget it."

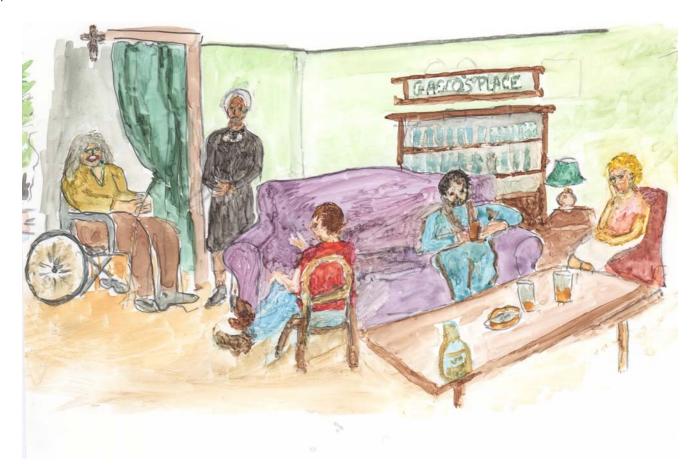
"Even fifty cents would help me get over feeling so bad this morning. Fifty cents here at Gasco's and I could be myself again."

Tom reached back and put two quarters into the arthritic hand that reached over the seat. "There. What do you know about Joe Nettle?"

"Honestly, my memory is shot. I don't recall the man. But weren't it worth my getting you here?"

Tom looked at Sue and smiled. "Just saved yourself five dollars. But let's see if this Gasco has a memory. Why did you ask about your uncle Joe?"

"I've always wondered, Tom, how my mother knew where to find her uncle when she was worried to death about what to do with Jody and me. Joe Nettle was the black sheep of the Nettle family. His reputation, though he never drank that I knew of when we were little, was that he was a total alcoholic. He just disappeared from Detroit, evidently. My grandmother Rogers hadn't heard anything about her brother for many years, and when she found out that it was to him my mother had taken us she was shocked. Her first question was how did her dear daughter Jean ever find her uncle up there on the lake? No one else knew anything about him for eons. It just occurred to me that one of these old men might have been drinking buddies with him years ago, though probably any that old have died from their alcoholism. Somehow Jean was able to find out where her uncle lived. That will be another mystery to solve if we have any luck, but I doubt it."



Inside Gasco's they found a makeshift bar in what seemed to be a dingy living room with overstuffed sagging sofas and a few tables with reeking ashtrays; the same suffocating odors substantiated that it was indeed a drinking establishment and more unkempt than any. A very thin stick of a black woman in a dark dress with curly white hair pulled severely back in a bun seemed out of place – she might have been a school teacher except when she spoke. Her voice was pure gravel, grating to the ear. "What do you want here, Elmer Dix? You better have some money."

"Careful there! I got money and I need a shot. And these here preppies - they brought me."

Tom stepped forward toward the woman who looked at him with a squint, pulling up the eyeglasses that were around her neck on cord.

"Are you friends with that guy there?" She pointed to Elmer Dix who had put a dirty handkerchief around the small shot glass to get it to his lips, his hands shook so.

"No, he just offered to bring us here. We are looking for information."

"Yeah? Well, what? I'm busy."

"We are trying to find someone who might have known a Kelly who owned a bar in this part of town about eighteen years ago."

The woman shook her head, "No, I don't know no Kelly."

Elmer croaked, "Ask Gassy."

She looked at him with disgust, "Gassy ain't good. He's sick, don't want to see nobody." She certainly didn't speak like a teacher.

From behind the stained brocade curtain that hung in fits and starts across the arch between the front room and what might once have been a dining room a low voice spoke clearly.

"Well, I ain't deaf, Flossie."

Pushing the drapery aside, a lump of a man rolled out in a wheelchair. He had the appearance of shapelessness that spoke of years of confinement to that chair. His grey hair hung down to his shoulders and over part of his face.

"Why do you want to know about Kelly? What's he done now?" He began to laugh, his open mouth showing only a few teeth. "Yeah, what's he done now? Really funny, really funny."

The woman, Flossie, went over to him, pulling back the lank hair, and after patting it in place, reached in her apron pocket and fastened it with a clip.

Sue said with a choking sound, "I am looking for a Kelly who would be about your age, I suppose, who may be my grandfather." She swallowed on the last word.

The open mouth gaped wider. The woman turned quickly and looked at Sue, "Well, it can't be the Kelly we know, eh Gassy. Nothing this sweet could ever come from that old souse. My God, what a stretch! Joseph Kelly a grandpa to a prissy little lady all duded up in a white skirt."

Tom looked angry. "I don't see any reason for your being rude. Do you know how we can find this Kelly?"

"OK, OK, cut it out, Florence. She is a cutie all right." Gassy wheeled closer to Sue who stepped back. "No need to fear me, I don't bite. See?" he opened his mouth laughing again and pointing to the toothless gums.

"Can you tell us anything," Tom's impatience was showing.

"Sure, I can tell you. Joe has been in the State Hospital at Wolf Creek for probably ten years now. His brain went soft. We're in a dangerous business, you know. We handle stuff that can make your brain go soft if it don't eat up your liver first. Look at that Elmer there, you can already see he's on his way to the State home for drunkies! It's just good I got me a woman who don't drink. Eh, Flossie?"

Her reply was, "Oh, hush it up, Gas!"

He winked and said, "She's good woman and she takes good care of me."

Sue's heart had sunk. She'd felt slightly nauseous with each entrance into these horrible dens, but now all her energy faded away. She could hardly look at these people and her eyes scanned the ceiling. Something odd caught her eye. She looked again. Above the sagging curtain was an object. She looked hard at it, but it really was . . .it was a crucifix. Jesus hung there on the Cross. Sue blurted out, "You have a crucifix!"

"Yeah, so? Gas is Catholic. So much the pity!"

Sue looked at him while he proceeded to cross himself in a mocking way. "Let's go, please, Tom."

He said, "Sure, we are going, but don't you want to ask about your Uncle?"

"No, I've enough. I want to go."

The black woman stepped in front of her with a softer edge on her rough voice,

"Come on, honey, we really do love the Lord here. I know we don't have good manners, but we try to do the right thing. Don't take Gas serious. He prays a lot for all of them." And she motioned toward Elmer who scowled.

"In our own way, we do. What's this about your uncle."

A cloud of confusion seemed to suffocate Sue. Someone had referred to Gasco as monk, but none of it fit. She could barely gather her wits to say,

"It was my great-uncle who brought me up. His name was Joe Nettle. You probably haven't heard of him."

"Really, now? Joe Nettle? Really? Well, I'll be switched," and Gasco began to cough.

"You tell em, Floss." Between his convulsive coughs, he added, "We knew him."

Flossie took Sue's arm. "Did you know your grandmother Kelly then?"

"What? Why no."

"You didn't know Sadie Kelly?"

"No I didn't even know her name. But what she got to do with this?"

"Well, now, honey, Sadie, we used to say," and she and Gasco exchanged a knowing look, "had a thing for Joes. When her son was grown up, I suppose that's your father, she got restless tending bar and left Joe Kelly for Joe Nettle. She got him to take her north somewhere on a great romantic adventure. They both were into the sauce. She was a true red-haired, high spirited Irish Colleen who had a thing for Joes."

Sue felt weak and sank into a chair. "My grandmother Kelly went off with my great uncle Nettle? I don't believe it! That is just too unbelievable; it's too unbelievable. I don't believe this! Tom, do you hear what she is saying?"

"Yes, I hear. You thought they might have been drinking buddies, so I don't see what is so impossible about it. Your dad, Robert Kelly, remember, got a job at the Rogers' house as a gardener. Don't you suppose that this Sadie through Joe Nettle might have had something to do with him getting a job over there? Your Uncle Joe may have suggested him to his sister, that is to your grandmother Rogers."

Sue repeated stupidly, "She had a thing for Joes? She had a thing for Joes. I can't believe this."

Then after a pause, "I always thought it was odd that my brother was named Joseph – we always called him Jody. But, of course, he was named by Robert and Jean after Robert's father, Joseph, not Uncle Joe. But if Sadie went north with my great uncle Joe, there was no woman with him that we ever knew about. And we never heard Uncle Joe ever speak of any woman.

"Well, that's the real story anyhow, cutie," Gasco said between coughing spasms, "the real story if there ever was one. And we don't lie." And he crossed himself a trifle more reverently.

Sue got to her feet though her knees wavered, "Thank you, thank you both for your help. I do want to go, Tom, please."

As they went through the door, Florence called after them, "Hey, won't you take this drunk with you?"

Tom called back, "We don't know what to do with him, sorry."

Flossie shrugged, and they hurried to the car and drove away, all the while Sue repeating, "She had a thing for Joes. Well, I certainly found out more than I ever wanted to know."

Tillie looked them over as they came in the back door from the garage.

"Whew, what's that smell? You both look like something the cat dragged in."

Sue said nothing, but headed for the front stairs. All she wanted was a shower and to lie down.

"It's OK, Tillie. Sue is worn out and doesn't feel good. It was quite a day. You wouldn't believe."

"Oh, I believe all right. I believe that you have both been through the wringer. Did you find out anything?"

"I guess so, but I don't know what good it was. I'll tell you later, but I've got to get cleaned up, too. What's for dinner?"

"Never you mind. Just don't be late. I'll be serving in about an hour. Your folks are out tonight so I'm making it simple."

After a dish of baked macaroni and cheese served with a big Romaine salad, Sue helped Tilly do up the kitchen while Tom went off to the den to watch TV. Tilly respected her silence. Sue obviously didn't want to talk, and when Sue excused herself, saying that she was tired and heading to bed, Tillie, too, went to her rooms over the garage. Walking by the den on the way to the stairs, Sue saw Tom sitting on the big leather sofa, his feet on the ottoman. She could see herself curled up beside him with his arm around her. A few soft kisses. She would like that. She walked on toward the stairs, but then turned again and went back into the room. He looked up, patted a spot beside him, and against everything she had promised herself, she sat down stiffly on the edge.

"Just wanted to thank you for everything, Tom. I couldn't have managed any of this without you. I could hardly stand it. Who would believe how people live, how they spend their lives? It is just miserable and heartbreaking. Anyway, what good did it really do?"

"Come on, sit back here. What's the next move? To echo Gassy, 'I don't bite, see?" And he showed his beautiful row of white even teeth.

Sue laughed and relaxed. She realized in this weary state she was feeling vulnerable. The day had worn down any strong resolve. Really, to be fair to herself and Tom, she should never have come in here. He put his arm around her and she leaned against him even putting her head on his chest.

"Whoa! What has happened to the rules?"

"What rules?" She heard herself say.

"Ahh, wonderful!" He kissed her, turned down the lights and kissed her again. She felt she was in heaven.

In the warmth of each others bodies, they watched a John Wayne movie, with only an occasional kiss but rather lost in each other until they heard the garage door open. Then Sue slipped out without saying a word, and went to her room. Bud and Lucy found their son looking a bit flushed, but that wasn't unusual considering the story he had to tell about the day he and Sue had spent slumming.

Sunday morning Sue knew the Mass times at St. Teresa's from her first visit to Detroit. She got up early, showered, dressed and walked to the church. It was warm, though she felt warmer than the weather could cause. All the way she wondered about whether she had broken her promises to Jesus about being chaste. Did the kissing, the love she felt for Tom, take her from a state of grace? Why did she feel so guilty? Was it just that she had broken the rules that she had set up for herself? Though Tom had been quite passionate, had they broken any commandments? Could she take communion, and if not would there be any opportunity for confession? The real

problem about all the affection they had given each other was that it could go nowhere. The Ohlers would be outraged. She really loved Tom, but as soon as he had to confront his parents' horror, he would bend to their concerns. He would be wise that way.

The Confiteor said at the beginning of the Mass took the edge off her feelings of guilt. She couldn't really see that their warm affection had exceeded any limits. A few kisses, some snuggling – it had been so good. Nothing was done that was inappropriate, she thought. But she would have liked to talk to a priest. She would see Father Forette as soon as she got home. And it wouldn't happen again. She would be careful not to get that tired or emotionally stressed again.

All this compounded the unhappiness about finding that her grandfather was out of reach, and that that whole Kelly side of the family had been in such disarray. She had been right, she should not have come; she and Jody must make up their minds that they were bastard children of an unmarried mother. Even the Church that had come to nurture them so lovingly through Maria and Evelio had had some hard things to say about children without a legal father. Maybe God was indifferent to this problem, but just thinking that, she heard Maria in her head, "Now Suz, cesar! All will be good! God is good!" And she saw again in that squalor of Gasco's bar/house the crucifix above the arch. How do such things go together? Where was the beauty of holiness? What would Evelio think? He had such insight into things like this. He was so spiritual, though he wouldn't ever say so.

Then, O dear Lord, that story about Uncle Joe and her grandmother? How could that be true? But why would those people lie about it? Her head was in a muddle. Uncle Joe had never said a word about anything concerning her and Jody's background, and he would have known both the Kellys if that story were true. More than that, he knew them more intimately than she dared think. But at least, she now understood why her mother had in desperation of her last days brought them to the shores of Lake Michigan and to that hut that was home all their growing up years. Jean may have thought she was bringing her two dear children to the only person who could help her, Sadie Kelly, but was that woman ever even there? She had more difficulty than ever in concentrating on the holy beauty of the Mass that always touched her profoundly, and so, when it came time for communion, she remained in the pew. She needed to talk to a priest.

By Sunday afternoon, Tom had called the State Hospital mentioned at Gasco's. Using Susan "Kelly" as the name of a granddaughter inquiring about her grandfather, he was finally able to get an affirmative response from the visitor's desk at Wolf Creek State Mental Hospital that was near Grayling. "Yes," the volunteer had responded, "we do have a Joseph Kelly as a patient here. Will you be visiting today?" "Within the week, we will," Tom had replied. Grayling was just forty miles from Grand Traverse Bay. It would be convenient to get there whenever they could arrange it for both he and Sue. That released them both for any longer stay in Detroit, and they packed quickly starting out for HiLo farm about 3:00 that Sunday afternoon. Bud Ohlers was relieved that Tom would be back at work on Monday morning; and Sue was relieved that there would be no more occasions for her lack of self-control. She didn't like Tom's self-satisfied smiles in her direction, and only hoped that his perceptive mother hadn't noticed. For her part, though Tom had said they'd visit Joseph Kelly, she had no plans to ever visit there.

Chapter five

That Monday Sue made the rounds of all the motels and restaurants that were gearing up for the tourist season filling out applications. After a day she was called in to be part of the cleaning staff at the Star Motel. Juanita had been delighted when Tom came by and offered the use of the piano. He had made arrangements for the tuning, and she called Mr. White setting up her first lesson that very afternoon. Francisco and Jody were hired on by Foreman Torres as field hands and pickers for the season. He came by and asked Maria if she was ready to make cherry pies and jam for the booth on the highway again this year. She had been doing that for the HiLo sales booth for five years, and received half of the proceeds, a dollar for each pie and seventy-five cents for each jar of jam sold. The cherries came from the operation, but the cost of sugar, flour, lard and other ingredients she paid herself.



Juanita had been helping in the little red ball-shaped stand with its jaunty awning through the past summers, and Dolores would be her assistant this year. They were up there early in the week opening the booth, swatting with screams of panic at the spiders, throwing things at the ceiling to bring down the webs, and beating everything with the broom till the little Cherry Hut, as it was called on the highway advertisements, gleamed. Dolores

noticed a few patches of the red paint that were peeling so when Tom came by she asked if there were any cans of red paint around. He promised to have a look and bring down anything he found. He had been busy from early morning till after dark ever since their return from Detroit, and only waved when Sue glimpsed him from a distance.

Papa Evelio went over to HiLo after his work at the celery farms each day and gave Torres a hand with machinery repairs in the evenings. So the family anticipated helpful additional income that would prepare all the children for another school year. Gone were the days when Maria had to inveigle a store owner to let sale sandals go for less than the marked price. Sue especially needed to have some additional money for her first year's college expenses. She was grateful for Uncle Joe's legacy. Without it she wouldn't be considering college, even the state school she would attend in Traverse City.

Motel work meant rolling a cart full of cleaning supplies and clean linens from one unit to the next. Sue was allowed just twenty minutes per unit to clean the bedroom with vacuum, duster and disinfectant cloths, emptying any waste, changing the sheets and bath linens, and scrubbing out the bathroom: floor, tub, sink, counters, and toilet. The supervisor actually timed the girls and then checked out their work when they were done. Even a small hair overlooked and their pay was docked. Because they could not begin until after check-out time at 11:00am, she had a leisurely morning at home to help Maria with pie baking. The rooms were to be ready by 4:00 so it was only part-time work until the supervisor asked her to take on the laundry responsibilities that added more hours. The busiest time at the motel was weekends. Going to Mass meant attending the Saturday evening mass by herself. With the station wagon and Evelio's truck always in demand, she rode one of the boy's bikes to and from work, and to Mass. On rainy days she wore a yellow mackinaw that had been hanging in Ohlers' shed. It was not

especially beautiful but it did the work of keeping her dry. Tom had offered it, and when she had gone to get it, he'd been there expecting an affectionate thank you. Even in coveralls he was handsome, so again she failed in her resolve and went away, mackinaw in hand, feeling the same irritation at her weakness, but the warm press of his lips on hers.

As often as she could be away from the Cherry Hut, Juanita went to Ohlers' house to practice on the wonderful piano. It sat in the alcove of their front room which faced the lake. It was a perfect setting, and there was no drudgery to practicing. Even with her beginning efforts, her soul took flight with music. The notes on paper communicated themselves right into her fingers through her heart, she felt. The meld was complete; she could hear the music right from the page and her fingers rarely betrayed it. Bradley White was amazed at her seamless identity with whatever he presented to her to practice. She was soon out of any beginner's books. Juanita's musical ability was a rarity. Her love for the piano drew her every minute she was not busy with work. In the morning Tom was leaving the house by 5:00 when she arrived with her piece of toast and mug of coffee. She did not dare take them into the living room, but bolted down this breakfast, washed her hands carefully, and settled down to this new love of her life. The four hours flew past and by 9:00 she was off to the sales booth, where Dolores had already opened up for the day bringing up the drive and along the edge of the highway the fresh pies and jams in an old wooden wagon.

The two girls were beautiful and were themselves an attraction to the Cherry Hut. Tourists found them outgoing, and were enchanted by their graceful ways of moving and the way they spoke with musical voices and that slight Spanish accent. Most of their customers had come to HiLo for fresh cherries since Sue and Juanita, with Cindy, first served there four years ago. Now seventeen and fifteen, they had burnished thick black hair. Juanita braided hers into one fat braid that went down to her mid-back, and Dolores wore hers with bangs and a shoulder length page boy. Neither had ever been to a beauty shop; Maria cut their hair, and did the boys' as well. They both had more height than their mother who was only five feet tall. Juanita was the taller. Neither carried any weight too much; both turned heads because of their radiant faces, bright eyes, and youthful bodies. Sue, looking at them, saw the light of faith instilled by their parents shining out in their gracefulness, but others, not so perceptive saw only two beautiful young women.

Because business was brisk through the evening, staying open till 10:00, Juanita and Dolores took turns running home for dinner. Some evenings they ran out of pies. Maria was kept busy day after day pitting cherries, making her flaky crusts and baking as many as twenty pies a day. After dark when the boys were home, she had them sit at the kitchen table with the cherry pitters, and do as many quarts as they would tolerate. By that time they were sick to death of cherries. At the end of the day it meant a \$20 profit for her, not counting the jam money.

An inevitable summer storm struck just after midnight on Friday, the first week of July. Pouring rain with lightning and high winds kept the pickers in their cabins, and Tom at the kitchen table when Juanita burst in the door covered up head to toe in the yellow mackinaw. Tom immediately thought of the lovely encounter with Sue when he had loaned it. Juanita looked beautiful even in it.

"Whew! What a storm! I'm scared to death of lightning. Once when we were living in one of the picker's cabins – I was really little – it got struck by lightning, and Papa went out, got a bucket of water and threw it against the side of the building that had started to burn. I was terrified. I simply hate it like this. If it weren't for practicing you'd never have got me out this morning." She ducked her head as another crash shook the house. "Oh, help! I want it to stop. It this keeps up, Sue won't be riding the bike, for sure. Papa promised to drive her to work even if he has to drive home for a few minutes. But maybe it will stop."

Another bright flash had Juanita down on her knees, holding her ears. The sizzling bang sounded like a gun fired into her head.

"My gosh! I think we might have been hit!" Tom yelled. While Juanita shivered nearly under the table, Tom ran through the house and up the stairs. When he came down again he had found nothing wrong anywhere – no sign of smoke, no smell of anything electrical or burning. Perhaps the strike had hit a tree nearby or the chimney. At the moment the house seemed safe.

"Come on, sit down Juanita, just until the worst is over. I know you want to get to your piano, but at this rate you can't practice anyway. You didn't bring your coffee this morning, but I've got some on. Come on, sit down. We are safe, I think. I've even got a doughnut I'll share."

The rain that day was so heavy that the orchard was a sea of mud, the pickers' cabins had inches of water on the floors, the celery fields, always thick black ooze, were inaccessible, and the Star motel was closed because the corner of a roof had been ripped back by raging winds that had churned the lake into mountains of crashing water. Tom agreed with Foreman Torres to call off operations for the day so that the workers could clean up their homes, allow the floor of the orchard dry out, harden up the driveway into the farm so it could take the tractors without sinking to the wheel hubs, and get some men to dump out the piles of wooden lugs full of water, drying them for service the next day. Evelio had set out to work in the blinding sheets of rain, braving the highway that was hub deep in running water in places, but was sent home on a paid vacation day. When the Star manager called to tell Sue not to come to work Papa was already home.

"All right, bien, I wait for this day, Suz. We got a date. Right, Mama?"

"Oh si, correcto, if you mean what I think," Maria replied. Her forearms were white with flour as she began the days' pies, cutting in the lard with the special cutting tool Evelio had bought for her. Rain or no rain, people would be coming for the pies.

"Now, Papa, what is this?" Sue was working through her kinky hair with a brush. Her kind of hair tended to become corkscrews of yellow curls when the humidity was high. I thought I could help Mama today here in the kitchen – the black cherries are ready, and the demand for her good jam will begin at the Hut."

"No, no. We have this date. So get ready for un viaje pequeño."

"A little trip," echoed Maria

"In this storm? Where are we going?"

"You will see. Can your Papa do a secret, no?"

Sue laughed, "Well, if you both want me to, I will. Just a minute, I want to change my shirt." And turning to Maria, "Mama, I can't think we will be gone long in this weather, and I'll be back to help with the jam."

The pickup turned out onto highway 31 going south, while Sue tried to guess their destination. Nobody was about, the highway still ran with water like a stream. They took a cutoff around Elk Lake which churned like a giant eggbeater was at work, and headed through the downpour for Williamsburg. After that as they turned east again against gusts of wind, Sue was bewildered.

"Papa, there is nothing this way that I can think of. Where are we going?" Again, Papa replied that it was all right, he knew where he was going. The wipers were still clicking at high speed across the windshield, and with the steady rain it was difficult to make out much of the landscape, yet she could see the storm had left some damage to outbuildings and many trees were down. However nothing obstructed their progress and after forty-five minutes they

entered the outskirts of a town. Sue just caught sight of the sign as they slowed down, *Grayling*. Then she knew. With her mouth hanging open, she stared at Evelio.

"Papa, Papa, what is this? Why are you bringing me here?" She held her head with both hands, and closed her eyes. "Papa, why?" She wanted to cry, or really to scold. She loved this papa of hers, loved him, loved him, but why would he want to prod again into this open wound?

He was reading her mind. "You have a big hurt, my *pequeno caro*, A big hurt. It can not get well, you get it clean. It not clean, now. I bring you to finish clean. Don't be angry. Jesus, we trust you! You know?"

Sue was quiet. Sometimes it seemed that Evelio's faith was just too simple. He had had faith when she went to Detroit, and look how that had turned out. Things were too complicated to always be *bueno*, like he was always saying. He crossed himself a couple of times, stopped at a gas station to ask the way to the Wolf Creek Sanitarium, and came back to the truck ducking his head against the wind-driven rain. Sitting next to her wiping his face with his big white handkerchief, Sue wanted to hurt his feelings the way she felt he was hurting hers. She wanted to turn to the window and not speak to him again ever, but one look into his dark eyes she saw such a depth of trust in God, she couldn't do it.

"Dear God, help, have mercy on me a sinner."

The interior of the State Hospital smelled of antiseptic, green soap, or something and the long barren halls of linoleum flooring with their closed doors leading off all along were anything but reassuring. They followed the directions given at the main desk where Sue had declared herself a granddaughter of Joseph Kelly, and after two turns came to some elevators. Taking the one numbered "Three" that they had been directed to use and pushing the 4th floor button, they came out on a hall with double doors on both ends, to the right and to the left. A person in a white coat stood behind the windows of the doors to the left, and as they approached they heard the click of the locks before the doors opened. The orderly was a big man with a round face and close cropped hair. His eyes were close together and the look he gave them both was piercing. Sue wondered if people ever came here to visit because this fellow didn't seem to think they should be doing it. His brow was furrowed as though visits like theirs were unheard of.

- "Are you the folks to see Joe?"
- "Joseph Kelly. Yes, he is my grandfather."
- "Is that so? You never been here before."
- "I know. I just lately found out about him and where he was."
- "Oh, I see. Well, he won't know you. What did you hope for in seeing him? I thought maybe sister sent you, or else that you were just curious."
- "No one sent me." What did the fellow mean about sister sending her Sue couldn't imagine.

By this time they had gone through a connecting hall and entered a ward with five beds on each side. Two of the beds had bodies lying on them, bodies with arms and legs and heads, heads with tongues lolling and eyes blank or rolling. In the front of the room along the row of big windows five or six wheelchairs were lined up with more bodies propped in them. Heads hung down or drooped sideways, or in one case slung back with the mouth gaping open. One man paced the floor talking to himself. The strong smell of green soap attempted to cover the odors of urine.

Another orderly looked at them curiously, "Zis the visitors for Joe?" and he began rolling a wheelchair towards them.

All that went through Sue's mind was "Jesus, dear Jesus," The man in the chair was tied in around his middle by a big blue sash; he wore stripped hospital type pajamas and a white terry cloth robe. He had a mop of white hair that was cut bowl style framing a mottled red face with a raw red nose. His eyes were a pale blue but were just as blank as a piece of paper is blank. If he could see her or Evelio who was holding her tightly by the arm it wasn't apparent. The mouth was turned up in a perpetual smile so that the whole effect was not as frightening as some of the faces of the figures in the room, though there was more than a hint of insanity about it.



"This is your grandpa Joe," said the black orderly who pushed the chair. "His is dementia of alcoholism, as are the rest of these poor bums. You seen him, now what you goin'a do? You goin'a do what sister do when she comes? You goin'a pray ovah him?"

"I don't know who you mean." Sue was scarcely able to form the words. "But I guess that is about all we can do. I'm glad you mentioned it."

She was shaking, but Evelio helped her down on her knees beside her grandfather's knees. She took one of his surprisingly smooth hands, hands that had done nothing for many years. Her tears began to splash on them and she rubbed them off with the corner of her T shirt.

"How do we pray, Papa, how do we pray?" Evelio's deep voice was reassuring; it was so right that he was there with her.

"We pray Señor's prayer." Looking at the orderly he asked, "You say Lord's Prayer, too?" The fellow looked embarrassed, "Well, sure. I know it. You know it too, Ed. You can say it."

So Sue on her knees, Evelio and the two orderlies standing beside the wheelchair prayed the Our Father as it had not been prayed there in recent memory. When they said the Amen, the two moved off, but Joseph Kelly actually put his fingers around one of Sue's fingers and held it like babies do with their prehensile grip. His hand was warm and childlike. It was an eternal moment. Brain dead though he might be, some spirit still moved and moved strongly. How could it be possible to feel such love otherwise?

When Sue stood, wiping her eyes, the orderly named Ed came to escort them to the door. "Sister comes usually on Wednesday. I thought maybe you came to meet her here and that she had sent you."

"No, I don't know a sister. Do you mean a nun? Why would a nun come to visit?"

"Oh, you know. Sisters sometimes come to . . .well, I'm not Catholic, to do whatever it is they do."

"Do they bring communion?"

"You mean that little wafer thing in the gold box? Sometimes some of them do. Usually though a priest does that. We don't see many priests here, but now and then one comes."

"But you think that this sister you are speaking of comes just to see Joseph Kelly?"

"Yes, that's who she always sees. She don't stay long, but she do what you do. She gets down on her knees and prays. And then she leaves."

As they approached the double glass door, and the orderly was sorting on his belt for the right key, they looked down the hall and saw the elevator doors open. A small woman dressed in an ankle length black habit with a black veil trimmed in white over her head and covered with a black raincoat stepped briskly out and headed toward them umbrella in hand.

"Well, my gosh, there is sister now!" exclaimed their escort. "Wouldn't you say that was a coincidence? This ain't even Wednesday."

With Signor no be what you say, co cidence, no," said Evelio.

As he opened the door for her, the nun said cheerfully, "Hello there Ed. Surprised to see me? Pretty nasty weather to be out, but it worked out that I had some errands for the convent this way, so I thought I'd stop. And who are your visitors today?"

She was a vivacious sixty plus year old, Sue guessed, if it was appropriate to think of a nun as vivacious. She simply meant that she oozed personality of high energy. Her features, though beginning to show wrinkles were even and animated. Yes, she was pretty, very pretty for a nun who was well past middle age.

"They come to see Joe, like you, sister. They just come to see Joe. This little lady is his granddaughter."

At that the woman stopped, took a step back and leaned against the door.

"Ed, we don't mean the same Joe do we?" Sue saw her composure fall away. Her face was stricken, her eyelids nearly closed. What was this? Evelio stepped forward and put his arm around the little woman for support.

"We don't mean the same Joe do we?" she repeated weakly.

"Why, yes, sure, sister. Joe Kelly. This here is his granddaughter. I saw with my own eyes that he took a liking to her, you might say."

The nun took hold of Evelio's sturdy arm gratefully and steadied herself. Her years of training in self-discipline took hold, her years of self-denial and of iron-clad resolve, living for Christ alone, stiffened her sagging spine. She too whispered under her breath, "Jesus, Jesus, Jesus." But to Ed she said, "Are the doors down the hall open? Do we have access to the visitor's sitting room?"

"I got the keys, and I'll take you down there. Are you all right, sister?"

"I will be fine. Just let's go there, please. And you two, please, come, too."

So began the most amazing afternoon since the one when Sue had found Lois Rogers her grandmother in the mission along the Detroit River that afternoon in March. The sister introduced herself as Sister Michael Mary, OCD. She explained that she was an ex-tern for the Carmelite monastery of Traverse City. She was a full nun, but unlike most of the sisters in the monastery who were cloistered, her position was to serve the cloistered nuns and for this she was authorized to come and go from the convent, driving the convent car, acting as a purchaser of goods needed, transporting sick nuns to the doctors and hospitals, and all the other chores that necessitated a sister who was able to go out and about in the community. Before explaining herself, the little nun first questioned Sue closely about just who she was and why she thought that Joe Kelly was her grandfather. Sue told about how she learned that she was the daughter of Jean Rogers and Robert Kelly. Also that her father Robert was killed in the allied invasion at Omaha beach, and Jean died of tuberculosis shortly after receiving notice of his death.

When she mentioned being taken to Joe Nettles' by her dying mother, and of his relationship to her and Jody – oh yes, she told about her brother Jody – the sister shuddered, stood up and walked to the window. It was quiet for a while, then she came back, sat down and asked Sue to continue. Sue introduced her Papa Evelio and explained how he had rescued her and Jody when Uncle Joe Nettle was sick and died.

At this Sister Michael again rose, walked to the window fingering the big rosary that hung from her waist. Sue looked at Evelio questioningly. He smiled at her and put his big finger up to his lips, closed his eyes, and they both waited. After what seemed a long time, Sister Michael came back and resumed her seat.

"So you are the daughter of Robert Kelly? And then she dropped the bombshell. "You may have heard of me? I am Sadie Kelly! Yes, yes, I am. I am your grandmother, Robert Kelly's mother."

This, the year of 1957, was the year of finding lost grandmothers! Sue looked at Evelio with bugging eyes, and even his jaw had dropped. For herself, Sue felt as though she had just been whirled on a ferris wheel at a hundred miles an hour, up and whoosh down, up and whoosh, whoosh down, over and upside down. "Oh, help me, Jesus," she said this in unison with the other woman's voice in the room. Evelio had actually gotten down on his knees and was thanking his Signor in exuberant Spanish. Turning to Sue, he exulted, "See mi querida, how Señor loves you. He cause big storm just to bring you here today. Oh, mi Señor!"

But how, how? How can you be Sadie Kelly. She had a thing for Joe's. She never never would have been a nun."

"Oh, yes, she did. But who told you that?"

This took further explanation. There was so much. At one point when relating the story about Gasco and his companion, Sr. Michael said, "Oh, monk Gasco. We thought he was crazy, and maybe he is. On the other hand, I would think differently about him today."

She related how she had run away from Joe Kelly and gone north with his drinking pal, Joe Nettle. Those were days of another woman, a woman that did not know God, a woman who did only what she pleased. She neither loved nor was loved. She was always looking for love. She wanted love with all her heart, and played her good looks to the hilt. It didn't take two weeks with Joe Nettle to know that it was all wrong. She had no money, no place to go, but she would not stay with that man. She had walked from his place to Traverse City, almost thirty miles.

With no place to go after the second night on the streets, early on a morning she sat on the steps of a big church, hungry and cold; it was early April. With her head in her hands she did something she never had done - prayed, or at least not since she had been a child when her Irish grandmother, after having the priest baptize her, had taught her a little song, "Hear me, gentle Jesus, bless your little child tonight."

Her prayer was simple words: "Help me. If you are anywhere around. Help me." Looking up, her eyes rested on the ornate church sign decorated with angels that announced the Mass times, and what was the name of this church? St. Joseph. Could it really be that a saint had the name of Joseph. She knew nothing of the Bible. Actually nothing. She'd married a believing Catholic; he'd raised their son Catholic, but she'd avoided everything connected to religion. There was no fun there, she was convinced. She needed fun, big time fun. But her drinking friends had teased that she had a thing for Joes, and here she was down and out on the steps of a church named Joseph. She tried the door, it was open. No harm going in to get warmed up.

The interior was dimly lighted. Alongside the aisles near the front were banks of candles glowing at the feet of some tall statues. As she walked towards them, the face of the nearest appeared out of the darkness and with a startling kindness was looking down on her. It was a robed man holding what looked like lilies. Strange, she thought, a man with lilies, but his eyes were fixed on her with such kindness! No man had ever looked at her like that. She wanted to sit there; so she did, slipping into a pew. His eyes followed her. She was so at peace, so very peaceful with him, and so very tired that she fell asleep. How ever long it was, suddenly the lights went on. There were people gathering and a priest came out of the room on the side with robes on like the statue – whatever they called them. He saw her, and came right over reaching out his hand to welcome this stranger to morning Mass.

"I didn't know what to do. I felt like in intruder. So I mumbled an apology, and got up to leave. 'Oh stay,' he said. 'Perhaps we can talk afterwards. Please, stay for a cup of coffee.' He was so sincere about it; he could see I was in trouble, and the cup of coffee sounded so good, I stayed. I didn't know what was going on in the half hour, but there were no demands on me. I sat when the others sat, stood when they stood, but sat when they knelt.

"Afterward this priest took me over to his attached home. At this I was really nervous, men were pretty predictable, and he was, after all, a man. But it turned out to be the beginning of the beginning for me. I found out that I was a sinner that the Almighty God who lived in this place loved me. I could believe it - the sinner part a lot, and the rest a little because of the kindness of those eyes. Asking about the statue, he told me, of course, that the lilies were always a sign of St. Joseph! So ..there it was again my thing for Joes! And their thing for me!

"The rest of my story of conversion would take a long time to tell. But this priest, Father Alfred Conners, was a LaSallette priest, an obscure order that originated with children being visited by the Blessed Mother in the Alps. He was Irish, too, with a wonderful sense of humor. We exchanged Irish stories, and I laughed, really laughed for the first time in ages. He phoned that day and found me a position with the Carmelite Sisters as a handyman, well handywoman, for their monastery. Why he was so certain that I could work out there is still a mystery – the kind of thing that only God can explain. They had a room set aside for outside helpers, and this

was given over to me. I had nothing, and these nuns were women who lived with nothing, but they did provide me with the basic things, sheets, towels, toiletry necessities, and one of their benefactors, being alerted, brought me some articles of clothing. I ate in the kitchen with the working sisters – there were different grades of sisters in those days in that convent. This all happened in 1943. It's been fifteen years of a whole different life, thank God! I thank him constantly. Now – look what he has done!" She looked at Sue. "Just look what he has done! O dear Lord, I thank you."

"After three years working for the nuns, and taking instructions to become Catholic, Father Conners insisted I go back to Detroit to ask forgiveness of Joseph Kelly and my son, Robert, before receiving my First Communion. When I had left, Robert was living with a rich girl, Jean Rogers, of course, Joe Nettles' niece, and her parents had disowned her. Robert had met her when he got a job as gardener at her house. Joe had put a word in for him. But I had to go back to make things right with my family. I hadn't cared when I left, but I wanted to straighten things out now if I could, because now I cared a lot. Jesus had given me a new heart, and I cared a lot. Maybe I always had, but . . . alcohol makes you crazy. I have seen God's hand on my life in so many remarkable ways, I see now that He loved me even when I didn't know or love Him.

"This next part of this story also is about you. Back in Detroit, I found Joe had begun to deteriorate mentally. His alcoholism had caused him to lose the bar and he was living on the street, spending nights in flop houses and begging for his drinking money. I could see right away that something had to be done for him, I didn't know what. I wasn't yet a nun, that took more years, but I knew that the Church could help me. So I went to their charity people in the storefront there on Woodward Avenue, and explained the problem. It took their help and my signing to commit him to the State Hospital. At least he would have a roof over his head, meals, and what I hoped would be decent care. It seemed the only thing I could do. I knew that Wolf Creek was close enough to the monastery to make visits, and I promised God I would never forsake Joe as I had done.

"But the amazing thing was I had help with this! Robert, my dear son Robert, was home on leave from the Army! We were right in the midst of the war and he was to go overseas after this leave. I met him with the help of old Monk Gasco, if you can believe. After striking out at the old bar site, and finding his dad was pretty much on the street, Robert hoped Gasco would know, and I went there, too, looking for him. My son Robert was home! God made it possible to reconcile with him. I thank Jesus every day! Though I was to meet Jean, I didn't meet you children then, you were about three years old and Jody a year; he told me about you. He was so proud – and I must say, so handsome in his uniform. He only had a short time to live, less than a year. Your mother was lovely."

At this point in her story, Evelio became restless. "We must go home, caro. I will take you to this monastery to your grandmother more time now. But question, the *importante* question. Your son Robert, did he ever do right for Jean? Did they go to the priest for *boda*?" For wedding?

"That was another thing that made him so excited about my being there; they were arranging a rectory marriage on the next Saturday – a rectory because Jean was not a Catholic yet. And I was to be there. Wouldn't you say that this was a miracle? My wedding present to them was from Joe and me; it was a rosary that Joe still had though he had nothing he hadn't pawned, a family heirloom and real ivory. Through all the destitution he had kept it safely in the pocket of his old coat – it was all that he had left. Even need for drink hadn't forced him to give it up."

"Información milagro," said Evelio. Sue knew it too. It could only be God, a miracle, with perhaps St. Joseph's intercession, and she visualized the rosary that Lois Rogers had shown

her. It was the rosary she had found in the apartment where Jean had died – a carved ivory rosary that Lois had learned to use and which had brought her into faith in the Catholic Church. God was good. God hovered over all with love, all the time. All will be good! And her parents had married! She just wanted to get home and tell Tom all about it. He had been right from the first. Was there any chance that Robert had adopted Jody and her making them Kellys and not Rogers? Probably not. It was enough that he had used his leave to marry Jean, and that was very consoling. She wasn't sure that this would make any difference to the plans of Grandfather Rogers. Again, probably not.

Chapter six

It had been a slow day at HiLo. The continuing rain delayed even the attempts at cleanup. Evelio left Sue at the door of the Ohlers' farmhouse at 3:00. When she knocked, Tom came to the door looking disheveled as though he'd been napping. That was all right. A day's rest would do the whole working crew good, so many hours of continuous work absorbed all the energies. He needed a rest. Even the Cherry Hut had closed early; no one had come all morning. Juanita was practicing; Sue could hear the simple Chopin piece - as new as she was to the piano Mr. White was matching her extraordinary ability with pieces usually given to third year students.

"Tom, you were right to make me go to Detroit. Papa took me to Grayling today and the most amazing thing happened."

"Grayling! Well, come on in and tell me about it." He called in toward the front room, "Juanita, your sister is here."

The music stopped, and in a few seconds Juanita appeared, her honey toned skin was blooming. Sue plunked down on a chair and held the two in rapt attention at the kitchen table as she poured out the surprising developments concerning Sadie Kelly.

Tom just sat shaking his head, "You never know," he said. "To think that our adventure in Detroit on just one day led to all this. You just never know. But is it going to be helpful for your defense of Evelio and Maria as your guardians? That's what we were hoping for."

"I don't know. I don't think it makes much difference, but it makes me feel better. At least my dad and mother were married, and in the Church. That means a lot to me. In my heart it means that my father when, or rather if, he came back from the war meant to be a family with us. He loved my mother and really meant to come back to her, and she loved him and before God promised him to be his lifelong wife and friend. That's really immensely important, don't you think? Maybe our names are Rogers but in my heart I know that we were meant to be a family if only. . if only things had been different. Only God. .only He knows why they died so young. But now I know why my mother took us to Uncle Joe's and how she knew where to findhim. It was all because of Sadie. She thought she was taking us to our Kelly grandmother, but she had left there long before. Then she had no choice, she could only leave us with Uncle Joe. I am pretty sure from what Father Smyth hinted at that she stopped at his church afterward and went to him because of fear and guilt, but she didn't have any choice. At least all that is cleared up, and I am grateful.

Juanita and Tom were silent. Then Tom changed the subject, "Juanita would like to go to Detroit to a concert she saw advertised in the drug store. Who's playing again?"

Juanita answered, "This wonderful young man from Texas, Van Cliburn. Have you heard of him? Mr. White told me about him and I saw the poster in the drugstore. He's coming to Detroit in August. He won the Tchaikovsky competition this year with an amazing piano performance."

"By August, I'll need to get down to report to Dad about the operation anyway," said Tom. "Mr. White is trying to get Juanita a student ticket through the school, and I'm offering to take her so she can go to this concert. It's a Friday night and I think it will be fine with Mom for her to stay with us." Then he added, "Wouldn't you like to come along?" We could make it a

threesome and maybe you could visit with the Rogers? That might be a kind of friendly gesture. Best if you can be somewhat friendly till this thing works itself out."

Sue had never thought of going to her grandparents again, or going anywhere as a threesome, but on the other hand it would make things easier as far as Tom's persistent attentions were concerned, and perhaps a visit to the Rogers was a good idea. Juanita was eager to go and looked very happy. It was interesting how Tom tended to ignore Juanita at the table, only looking steadily at Sue, as if he couldn't get enough of her. It was almost embarrassing.

"Ok, then, I'll call Mom and ask if she can have us all for overnight. You two wouldn't mind sharing the guest room. We'll come back on Saturday, that way none of us will miss too much work."

"I am hopeful I can visit Grandmother Kelly, that is, Sister Michael, at the monastery soon. Would you come with me, Tom? I'd love to have you meet her."

"Sounds interesting. When you know the time let me know. I"ll see if it can work out."

As it was, Tom couldn't go. After phoning to be sure it was convenient for her to visit Sr. Michael Mary, and asking directions, Sue took the family station wagon after work and found the lovely monastery sitting contentedly upon a hill in a nest of trees overlooking the bay. A light breeze coming in off the water was welcome on the hot, humid August afternoon. A large rock painted with daisies and the word 'Welome' sat beside the front door, marking it as the right entry into the sprawling complex.

Sue stepped into another world. The cool vestibule was large with a coat rack along one side, a ceramic vase-like affair to hold umbrellas, and pictures in heavy frames of nuns in a variety of head gear from fantastical wing-like projections, to simple wimples, who must have been worthies of past generations. Many held rosaries, and with eyes averted none smiled but all exuded peace. In a corner a white statue of a lady held a rosary with her eyes on heaven. The very smell of the place was unearthly: Sue couldn't place it, but a combination of candles and cleaning oils were not in the least unpleasant. She took a deep breath. Perhaps sandalwood? To her right, a box-like protuberance hung from the wall with a shelf, above which appeared a sliding door that was closed. There was a doorbell just to one side with a small neatly printed sign, "Welcome in the name of Our Lord. Please ring for service. Thank you."

Sue pressed the bell and heard a far off sweet jingle, not like the door bell at her own house that Papa had installed which could wake the dead. After a few minutes the sliding door opened, but instead of seeing someone, through a dark curtain a voice said, "Welcome to the Carmel. May I help you, dear? Are you the visitor for Sister Michael Mary? Then you must be Sue. Will you please walk through the doorway in front of you, and find a place in the parlor? She will be with you in a few minutes. The door slid closed again, but very gently, like it was apologetic about closing her out.

Walking into the parlor was entering into indescribable beauty of silence and holiness. The room itself was not the bearer of beauty. The furnishings were obviously gifts of wealthy patrons who had bequeathed their Victorian sofas, chairs and tables to the monastery upon their deaths. Some tall fern-like plants stood as sentinels near the several windows; old paintings, some copies of the Masters — Sue recognized a crucifixion scene of Rembrandt, and some very sentimental depictions of Jesus and others of Mother Mary completed the decor. No, though neat and not ugly, it was not the room that held the breath-taking beauty, it was something else. A low vibration seemed to fill the silence, for it was a silence that beggared description, an electric silence that carried upon the air a kind of power. Not the power of this world, but a



living breath, nevertheless the force of the beauty of holiness. Sue moved in a way she recognized to be new to her; she might call it a feeling of floating or just what 'graceful' is meant to imply. "Grace full." She wasn't a clumsy girl, but never

thought of herself as graceful. Here she didn't think of herself at all. No one had ever told her about monasteries, especially cloistered ones, or what exactly the nuns were doing with their hours. If she had known, it would have explained this spiritual hum that lifted her feet and made her light as a feather. Looking up, the ceiling itself floated above with light that played across it; something ethereal happened within these walls.

She found a chair in a far corner and waited. It was not really like waiting. Here even hours passed would make little difference things were so completely at rest. Any anxiety could not live in this atmosphere, but fled back to the outer world where such things ruled. Sitting buoyed by the current of faith-life that owned this place, she said to herself, "I think I have found where I really belong." She thought of roots; none of the roots I have lived on have been my real roots. I have found where I really belong." She closed her eyes for what seemed like only a few moments, and when she opened them was surprised that without hearing a footstep, Sr. Michael had come in and was sifting opposite her on a small loveseat. Her face was alight with that grace. She recognized at once that Sue had fully entered the Carmelite mystery, even on her first visit. She said nothing for what seemed to be a long time, and Sue kept her silence. Then at last, Sr. Michael spoke, "Ahh, ahh, dear Sue, now you know, don't you?"

"Yes, I know."

"You know what God can do?"

"Yes. I know what God can do."

"So, you know how Sadie became Sr. Michael Mary?"

"Yes, God changed Sadie into Sr. Michael Mary." "He took away all her sins?"

"Oh, yes, he took away all her sins, and brought her here. It is too wonderful!"

"Do I sense you may have a call to become one of us?"

"I think so"

"It happens sometimes that His call is that emphatic and undeniable. But still you would need a long discernment before you can be sure." They talked together for an hour about what life it was that seemed to be opening up at her feet; and how Sr. Michael had become a nun.

Finally Sr. Michael went to the grillwork that was along one wall covered by drapery. She talked to someone unseen on the other side of the curtain for a few minutes, and then called Sue over. Mother Agnes of God will talk to you through the curtain. She is our superior and can best outline the necessary steps for discernment of a call to become a Carmelite."

Between the three of them, the conversation went on another half hour. At the end Mother Agnes was called away. Sr. Michael walked with Sue out into the vestibule, kissed her solemnly on both cheeks, and whispered, "My dear Sue, nothing... nothing can make me happier than if our God has truly called you, my granddaughter, to become my sister in Christ. It would be the completion of His goodness to me." Tears came to her eyes.

"There is one thing yet that I pray for, and that is to meet my grandson Joseph. They used to say in my old life about having a thing for Joes, and I found that thing in St. Joseph who is my patron. Now I would like to meet my Joseph grandson. Robert must have loved his father to name his son after him. Back then I didn't know what love is — they both, Robert and Joe were deprived of any love from me. Things could have been different." She paused, "But God brings good out of the worst. Will you be visiting your grandfather again? Will you come with me sometime?"

"I will bring Jody soon. I promise. Yes, I will want to go with you often to visit grandfather. And thank you, grandmother; for everything."

On the way home a dark blanket of despair came into the car as suddenly as an unbidden storm. As euphoric as her experience had been in the monastery, it was immediately balanced by a weight of misery she could hardly bear. She thought of pulling off the road, refusing to go another mile, never to take another step, or breathe another breath, simply falling into a small heap of dust that the merest stir of air could blow away into nothingness. She hated herself, she hated her life, she could not bear to think of the monastery. Everything there seemed impossibly grim. Rebind the scene she could see a mocking face that had totally deceived her, It was fake! A clever but diabolical deception. She would never, never go back there again. Sr. Michael's face disintegrated before her eyes into a woeful pit of two eyes borne up by a twisted mouth. A twisted, red mouth that had kissed her on both cheeks. She reached up to rub off the memory, the hateful memory. She had promised to bring Jody there; and to visit that miserable grandfather? You didn't have to keep promises to the devil! Where was Tom? Tom was all she wanted.

She was crying when she arrived home. Avoiding Mama she went to her room and closed the door, flung herself on the bed and sobbed herself to sleep. It was dark when she woke to a knock on the door, Papa stuck his head in the door. "Mi querida, you ok? So tired, Maria let you sleep, no cena. Come now, have copa de crêma tomates. Very good."

With no response from Sue, he called, "Maria, vienespor favor?

"What is it querida Suz?" Maria sat down on the side of the bed while Evelio stood looming over her.

"Mama, go away, please. I am sick."

"Sick? How?" Maria put her hand on Sue's forehead. "No fever." Papa pulled up a chair. "Something happened at casa monje?"

Without wanting to say it, Sue blurted, '1 just want to marry Tom! OK? Now, please, leave me alone!"

Both her parents were quiet. They didn't ask the obvious question. "Has Tom asked you?" Instead, Evelio cocked him head as though listening to someone. Finally he said, "Ahh, Signor has asked you to marry him, eh?" He gave his wife a knowing look, and after a few more minutes they left the room. Sue couldn't get this question out of her mind though she tried, waking on and off all night the words repeated, "Signor has asked you to marry him?" She heard herself say, "No, No!" Then she sank back into her restless sleep.

The summer weeks were winding down; the trip to Detroit to take Juanita to the piano concert was just a week away. It had been raining again, and Sue had come over before going to work on a pretext to see how the plans for the Detroit overnight were working out. She and Tom and Juanita sat at the kitchen table and Tom still encouraged her to visit her grandparents as a friendly overture to them. Again, never looking at Juanita, he didn't take his eyes off her. Sue was happy that he was so taken up by her because she always loved to look at his handsome face, right into those thoughtful, loving eyes. "It's too bad that we ignore Juanita," she thought, "but how can we help it? We just aren't seeing each other enough these days."

"Dolores will take care of the Hut. It will be near the end of the season anyway. The cooler is nearly empty of cherries, and I'm sure it will be fun! I can't wait," Juanita rose and went back to her practicing. For a moment Sue thought that Tom was coming around the table and anticipated a nice kiss, but he walked to the telephone instead. "I'll call home now and be sure Mom still expects us."

She let herself out and walked the muddy path through the dripping grass, ruining her shoes and wetting her skirt up to the waist through the high weeds. As she neared the house she noticed a car in the drive. "Oh, my goodness, it was the black Cadillac! Speaking of the Rogers - what was the saying? "Think of the devil and he'll appear?" She was ashamed to have such a thought, certainly her grandparents were not the devil, but her heart was alarmed and beat like a war drum.

A fellow in livery sat behind the wheel of the car. Her grandfather hadn't driven, but James had driven them on a rainy day. This meant one thing. Grandfather Rogers now had the authority to take her and Jody away from their only home. Why else would they be here? She didn't know which way to go. Part of her wanted to run back to Tom, but the wise part won, and she walked, or squished forward, slipping out of shoes and stockings on the porch and going into the house barefoot.

Her grandfather sat at the trestle table with his back toward her. She would never have guessed who it was. His big shoulders looked apologetic and he had definitely lost weight. His hair was not trimmed so closely around his bald pate, and was whiter. Sitting facing her was her grandmother, who smiled and said, "Charles, it's Sue." Like the gentleman he always was, he rose, turned and held out his hand. Sue took his hand, "Grandfather!" "Hello, Sue." His hand was warm and his grip firm.

At the end of the table in his Papa chair sat Evelio with his big hands folded in front of him; Maria came from the kitchen wiping her hands on a towel, and sat down at his right hand. She took in the scene and felt sure that something important was at hand. When Evelio greeted her with "Todos inajadai Take off the wet; bathrobe is good. Call Jody. He in a while. Call him, par favor."

"Oh dear Jesus, oh dear Jesus, Mary, Joseph, the litany began to run through her head as she went to call up the loft ladder. "Jody, our grandparents are here, please, come on down." And then she went in her bedroom to slip off the wet skirt and put on a bathrobe.

"Mrs. Martinez, would you mind getting me a glass of water, please?" Grandfather's voice seemed weak. Maria popped up and fairly ran to the kitchen, coming back with a tumbler full of water just as Jody with a questioning look came from the other direction. "You wanted me Papa?"

Evello nodded, "Your Grandfather wants you to be here." Jody walked over and extended his hand, "Hello, Grandfather."

"Yes, hello, Jody. Thank you for coming. I need to talk to you and Sue with your guardian."

Jody said, "You mean with our Papa."

"Yes... yes, with your Papa."

"Charles, may I please tell the family about what has happened since we last were here?" Lois leaned across the table taking his hands. "I want you to explain the legal part of it, but they should know the serious time we have had of it since we were here last, dear."

"Do you think it is necessary?"

"I think they had something to do with the outcome, so it is necessary."

"All right then."

Lois reached into her purse and pulled out a small multi-colored silk purse with a strange closure that ended in a small gold toad disguising a snap. She released the toad and out fell an ivory rosary. Sue had never seen it, but she knew immediately what it was. It was her parents' wedding present from Sadie and Joseph Kelly, the Irish rosary.

With Sue's sigh, Lois smiled at her. "You know about this?"

"Yes, grandmother, you told me about finding it after Jean's death, and how it brought you into the Catholic Church, but I know even more than that about it. I will tell you sometime."

"Well, now I credit it, along with the witness of you and your family to bringing another person to faith — your grandfather! Charles had a heart attack in July - a serious heart attack. At his bedside in intensive care I prayed the rosary for him constantly. The doctors didn't give him much chance of recovery, but I knew he needed to find Jesus in his fullness before God took him, so I prayed with Mother Mary for him to find the Lord and the whole wonderful Truth.

"When a priest stopped by one day. Charles opened his eyes. I heard him say, yes, with my own two ears, I heard him say, 'What must I do to become a Catholic? I promised my wife and have broken my promise until today. What must I do?'"

Charles' head was bowed. He didn't look up.

"He was received into the Church just two weeks ago. We are so happy! God is good. Don't all of you say something like that?"

"All will be good!" And Maria began clapping her hands with joy; Papa's eyes glistened, Sue and Jody just sat amazed. Her grandfather looked up with a smile.

"Yes, we are happy! My dear, good wife! You must know that when I was sick I had to face what was really important in life. This family, that is you people, became a sign for me. A sign that pointed to what was important. However you want to think about it. Your lives appeared to me to be in order like no other family I have known. I could see love here. It wasn't

just human, but it had to be God. There's a lot I don't understand, but I'm happy for the first time." He paused and then added only, "There, now! That's enough!"

"Thank you, dear heart, Grandmother Lois again clasped his hands across the table, and he leaned over and kissed her small blue-veined hands and the diamond rings on her left hand.

"But Charles has more news, legal news. You'd better tell them."

"Well, now. You know my lawyers have been busy these past several months, preparing the way for my taking over guardianship of you two, Sue and Jody. As grandchildren with my paternal name on their birth certificates, nothing would stand in the way of my claiming them as legitimate heirs, and seeing that they had the education appropriate to being Rogers. I had plans for putting Joseph, that is Jody, into the same military school where I had received my precollege education, and Sue would certainly do best at an eastern girls' college like Radcliff. I would still like to carry out this plan, but legally we have run into a snag. He reached down into a briefcase, snapped it open and pulled out a sheaf of papers and envelopes. Sue felt a shudder sweeping down her spine. He carefully removed folded letters from one envelope and smoothed it out in front of him on the table.

"These letters are the snag. They are the formal adoption papers of Suzanne Elizabeth Kelly and Joseph Edwin Kelly! I am sorry. I am really sorry, but I do not have the authority to take over your lives. You are Kellys, not Rogers. So there it is!"

Suzanne and Joseph were so stunned by this that they didn't hear their grandfather continue. "However, if you would let me, I would still offer to send you, Jody, to military school and you, Sue, to Radcliff.

"Wait, wait!" Sue had found her voice, "How can this be? I have found out that Robert married Jean, but he went right back to the war, and was killed. How did this happen?"

"It appears that before the end of his leave, during which time he had married our Jean, he also applied to adopt you two children. By the time the application had been processed and the adoptions complete, he was gone, Jean was. . . . was dead, and the attempted contacts with either of them all failed. Everything sent to their last address was returned to the Probate Court of Wayne County where these letters lay for the last fifteen years or so. My lawyers came across them when attempting to substantiate my claims as your grandfather. Jean, because of my grievous sin, yes it was, of disowning her, had filled in no names or addresses for her parents on the applications. All attempts then, came to a dead-end. Kellys, too, were not to be found. No one knew what became of them. But the adoption papers were found because of the name Robert Kelly I had given the lawyers, and the date of his death on Army papers recovered from Jean's apartment."

At this point, Sue with tears, told the story about the Kellys and their connection with the rosary, which lay spread out so innocently on the table. Who would have thought of the power of prayer that surrounded it? The grandparents stared at her with amazement, then looked at each other, shaking their heads. "God alone, God alone," said Charles. "Sue, I think you should have the rosary."

"Yes, yes." grandmother Rogers was emphatic. "You must have it. It is certainly yours!"

Sue tried to protest, pushing it back toward her grandmother, but then Maria, who had

been very quiet except for her exultant clapping, rose and leaned her stout body over the table, turning Sue's hand over and putting the rosary firmly into its palm.

"Mi querida, it must be yours! Don't argue, now. The blessing of your mother, your father, your four grandparents are together here. It must be yours!"

Cupping both hands to hold it, Sue took the lovely circlet of beads, each one a carved rose. "If a mere thing can hold that much blessing, I mustn't refuse. Thank you, thank you. Grandfather and grandmother, I will pray for you with this rosary."



Turning to Jody, Lois said, "Joseph dear, I have a small framed picture of your mother, and I will be sure that you get it."

"It's ok, grandmother, I want Suz to have the rosary, it's ok."

"What a dear boy you are! You shall have the picture!"

When the Rogers walked back to their car, the sleeping chauffeur was roused by the clamor of happy voices. Lois and Charles were accompanied by their grandchildren, by Evelio and Maria and by a barking Principe who seemed to know it was time to celebrate. Everyone was talking at once. Yes, Jody and Sue would think about the generous offer of schooling.

"Please, come back soon!"

"Please, come to visit us!"

"Grandmother, I am coming with Tom Ohlers and Juanita in just a week, and I'll visit you then."

"Evelio, I could use some advice on gardens at Stone-tears. The gardener doesn't have the touch."

"Here, Mrs. Rogers, take a pie. The season is nearly over, but we still have sugared cherries in the cooler. You will enjoy!"

"We love you, grandpa!"

"Hugs and kisses, grandma."

"Stay well, we'll see you soon!"

After the car had backed out, the horn honked several times, and the black Cadillac that had caused so much consternation, now the bearer of an incredible joy, drove away. Sue found herself saying. "Sanctissimum Cor." It was an inscription under the Sacred Heart of Jesus in the church. "Sanctissimum Cor."

After hugging her Papa and Mama furiously, she took her Bible, the silken packet with a toad clasp, and went out in the evening light to her favorite place in the dunes. It was a climb, but from the top she looked out over the lake and watched the failing sun sink into the far reaches, and knew again how good God is.



As the darkness settled in, her heart ascended to Jesus, Sanctissimum Cor. He was her lover. The beads of the rosary slipped slowly through her fingers. Her eyes traveled down the edge of sand where the waves were breaking softly. From her perch she could just hear the slow swish and rush of the water far below. In the dying light, far down at the point, she watched a couple walking on the sand, playfully jumping back to avoid the sweep of the waves. As they approached

a cluster of seagulls, a great flight of them arose like white feathers into the dusk. Now and then the two figures would stop and their silhouettes would merge. How lovely are lovers, she thought, and she imagined being with Tom. She watched the couple turn and head up into the small poplars that grew along the sand hills in front of the Ohlers'. She knew these lovers! Tom and Juanita!

Chapter seven

Sue lay quietly on her bed unable to sleep. The scene observed from the dune replayed over and over in her head. She thought back to the last few times she had been with Tom. Juanita was always there, too. The way he had looked so intently at Sue now began to mean something other than what she had thought. Now the look was too deliberate, his ignoring Juanita too obvious. She recalled the rainy day when Tom had come to the door looking rumpled and breathless, and Juanita coming from the piano so glowing. It all began to fit. Of course, Tom would take Juanita to Detroit to the concert! She was just an intruder on their plan. Of course, Tom would want her to visit her grandparents while they were there! It was all so clear. Why had she not seen it at all?

But then if she had realized the problems ahead for any serious relationship between her and Tom, what could Tom and Juanita be thinking? The Ohlers would . . .well, it was an impossible situation for the two of them. Alone in the house with Tom every day for several hours? Had no one wondered about the possible involvement between the two? Two such attractive people? It had never occurred to her, and certainly not to Papa or Mama Maria or they would never have allowed Juanita the freedom to be there.

Her parents had given their teen aged sons and daughters some private and rather obscure talks about the guarding of their innocence. Something about keeping their bodies pure and clean to be given as a gift to one person. Something about loving only one person of the other sex, and making sure that Jesus was always there as a Third Person. Any friendship blossoming into love could have only the object, that of marriage in the Church. Something about not being alone with a girl or boy friend because . . . well, because alone meant Jesus and Mary were not . . . no, it meant that they were not conscious of them, especially Mother Mary. All things like that. It hadn't always seemed to make sense. But these talks were so seriously meant by Mama and Papa that even when they were just children they knew that something very important was being said, especially when Papa would pray for their future espousos (spouses). Jesus wanted them to be holy children and be kept holy right into marriage.

Maria had helped each of the girls when their periods had started, and had explained in her own way how the woman's body was meant for babies. But babies were not to be made until God had joined each of them to the man God had chosen for them – not to just anyone. It was to be one and one, she said, never another. Oh, she had warned that when a young woman loved a man it was natural to want to give her whole self, but, and she said BUT very strongly, it could only be that way after Jesus had blessed them together in front of everyone at the altar. Only then. Never, never any other time! But waiting for this blessing would make them very happy when they could finally give themselves to the one they loved.

What Evelio had told the boys, Sue didn't know. She would like to know because anything that Papa explained to the boys would have been very direct without long explanations or reasons. She smiled to herself.

Then it occurred to her that she was taking all this very calmly. She should be crying her eyes out. She should be hurt down to the soles of her feet. She should be sick! In a sense all this was true, yet she wasn't really shedding a tear. She tried to stir up the feelings that should be natural – she tried to feel angry, to feel betrayed by Tom. She even tried to cry. She thought of how she loved Tom. Yes, she did love him. She tried to think of never having his firm lips on hers. Yes, she would miss that. But still other than a kind of emptiness, she couldn't come up with the height of emotion that this betrayal called for. So she replayed in her visual imagination all the times when she and Tom had loved each other; the evening at Ohlers' watching TV, the encounter with Tom in the garage when she'd borrowed the yellow slicker, the other warm

kisses, even in front of the family on graduation night. Still, she could not bring out real tears from her eyes.

Juanita was not in at midnight. Sue continued to wait. What would she do, or what would she say when her sister finally came in? Dolores was sleeping quietly on the upper bunk. Sue's thought went forward to the next weekend. It was impossible to go to Detroit. Would she confront Tom? Suddenly she felt too tired and closed her eyes.

The next time she opened them bright sunshine filled the room. The stormy weather was over except in her heart which took some seconds to communicate to her brain. "Oh, that!" Juanita was sound asleep on the lower bunk with her back toward Sue. It took more moments but all the events of the last night poured into her mind. She looked at the clock. Dolores was up and gone. It was time to get started on the Saturday chores. She thought of poking that sleeping back, and at the moment, poking it really hard. After all that sister, well, she had been a louse . . .she had been knowingly betraying her for how many weeks, and besides, it was girlschange-the-bed day. So she walked over, grabbed Dolores' sheets and then rolled Juanita off her bunk unto the floor, pulled off her bedding and left the room with her sister crying out sleepily, "What the . . . Suz . . .What's going on?" That's what I should ask her, thought Sue, feeling anger take the place of the confusion she had felt the night before. When Maria joined her at the washing machine she wanted to pour out her growing feelings, but simply turned on the gas water heater and went on into the kitchen. When Juanita came in for breakfast she looked at Sue with a question mark hanging over both eyebrows, but said nothing. Suz looked away.

Hanging out sheets this breezy morning, she kept an eye over at the HiLo farm, trying out several long speeches in her head if she should see Tom, but probably because he was avoiding even being within sight, he never appeared either around the sheds or in the drive. "What a coward!" The Cherry Hut had closed for the season, so Dolores was helping with the weekly house cleaning, singing her head off. She often was singing the family's folk tunes. Juanita had eaten and gone across to practice. "Practice what?" thought Sue with growing bitterness.

At mid-week enrollment began at college, so she arranged with Papa to borrow the station wagon to drive to Traverse City. Before leaving home she called to the monastery asking to speak to Sr. Michael. "I'm sorry," said the nun on the other end of the line, "Sr. Michael is ill. She won't be able to have visitors today. Is there something I can do for you?"

Sue had never thought of it, but heard herself saying, "Would the Reverend Mother be able to talk to me through the grill?"

"Whom would I say wanted to speak with her?"

"This is Suzanne Rog. . uh, Kelly, Sister Michael's granddaughter."

"Oh yes, of course. Just wait a moment Suzanne. I will see if Mother can be with you today. What time do you think you will be here?"

"Would noon be all right? I do need to get over to the college, but I'll take whatever time Reverend Mother can see . . .that is, talk with me."

"Hold the line a moment, please."

When the voice returned, Sue was advised to come at 11:30. This made it possible to go through the enrollment process at the college, and buy two books she needed for Sociology 101 and English Literature at the bookstore. It was a satisfaction to have her own money saved from the summer's work. She considered buying herself lunch, but felt that caution inside her head that said, "Save the money. Just buy a candy bar."

Chewing the last of a Hershey bar, she drove up the long drive to the monastery, parked in the now familiar parking spaces in front and again become enveloped in that sanctity that greeted her inside the big oak door. She breathed in the air laden with a fragrance that was as embracing as the first time she experienced it. Going to the little sliding window, she rang the

bell, hearing again the faint jingle. The voice, probably the same as the one on the phone, said, "Oh, welcome Suzanne. Mother will be with you at the grille in just a few moments. Please, go into the parlor over near the grill and make yourself comfortable. God bless you, dear." The little door reluctantly closed away the voice behind the curtain. Sue felt she already dearly loved the projector of that voice.

There was no wait. Mother Agnes' voice was warm and inviting. "Today, we will talk face to face, Sue. I am so happy that you are back. You will pardon me if I have only a short time to be with you." The curtain behind the grill was pulled back to reveal a very small person in a brown habit and veil sitting close to the grill. Her tiny feet were clad only in open sandals. Her face was very wrinkled with the kind of lines that speak of many years of smiles. Lines radiated from her eyes and from around her mouth, and above them all sparkled bright blue eyes. She looked like a small, joyous elf. Sue wanted to laugh at the sight of her, but contained herself with only a broad smile.



"Oh, Mother! May I call you 'mother?' Or 'Reverend Mother'?"

"Yes, yes, Mother Agnes is just fine. Tell me, how have you been since you were first here? Was it about two weeks or so ago?" Her voice was distinctive – loving and soft in a high pitched way.

Oh, Mother! I had a very bad time after leaving here. I don't know what came over me, but it was frightening. Actually, if something else hadn't come up, I

might not have come back."

"Tell me about this very bad time."

"Maybe I had eaten something that didn't agree with me, but I became very sick on the way home. I had to pull off the road for some time before I could go on. It seems very strange to say, but I was so sick I actually thought it would be better to die."

"You don't mean you thought of taking your own life?"

"Ahhh, nooo, no I don't think so. Or did I think something like that? I really don't think I would have. But I do remember some very strange thoughts."

"Did this sickness seem to affect the way you thought about us here at the monastery?"

Sue was silent thinking this over. Then it became clearer. "Yes, it really did. I was determined never to come back here again. Everything about this place was dark in my mind. But it must have been the nausea that made me think that way. Because obviously it all passed."

"Well, dear, it was probably not nausea. It was something else and it isn't the first time it has happened. Rather than your sudden sickness causing you to think dark thoughts about us, it was us that caused your sudden sickness. You were very touched by our monastery life, if I

remember our first conversation. You were so touched by it that you spoke about becoming one of us. Isn't that right?"

"What? I don't understand. And something else odd: my father said the strangest thing. I was lying in bed more miserable than I have ever been, I think, and all he said like a diagnosis was, had Señor asked me to marry him?"

The little brown elf curled up in laughter and clapped her tiny sandals on the floor. "What a perceptive father you have! Had Señor asked to marry you! Oh, that is rare, very rare." Her laugh was that infectious musical kind and it was all Sue could do not to laugh, too.

"I'm sorry Mother, I didn't understand him then, and I don't understand you now."

"I suppose that you have a boyfriend that you, well, that you like a lot, even maybe love?"

Sue was surprised at the direction this conversation was taking. But she was always direct, and felt that with Mother Agnes being as honest as she could be was the only way to go. She did hesitate, thinking of Tom, but sadly seeing him in her mind now with Juanita.

"Mother, I was in love with a young man then, but no longer."

"I see. What has changed in this short time."

"I found out by accident that he had fallen in love with my sister."

"Oh, I'm sorry. That must be very hard to accept."

"It should have been, but I have been surprised that though the discovery was shocking and miserable my heart seemed not to be as pained as it should have been. I have been very angry at my sister because she knew I loved Tom, and she did this behind my back. But as much as I have gone through my feelings looking for real misery over Tom it hasn't been there. I do have an ache when I think of what has happened, but not the deep sorrow over it that I would have expected."

"Don't you suppose that some other love maybe sneaked in and without your knowing it took his place? Could that be?"

Now like a jigsaw puzzle, pieces began to fit together for Sue. "My Papa, did he know that my sickness that night was because his Signor, that is the Lord Jesus, had become the love of my heart? Did he guess that I had been claimed as a bride to Jesus here in this monastery that day? I remember telling him that I wanted to marry Tom!"

"Oh, I think that is exactly right! But what you didn't realize and couldn't know is that a third party had to do with the misery you experienced that evening on your way home from here."

"A third party? Not you, Mother or Sister Michael?"

"Oh, no, neither of us, for sure. There is one who cannot come within these walls, but who can work havoc outside of them, for sure. When a young, open heart experiences what you did, that the Lord Jesus takes over your heart as His own, calling you to be his bride, and that you in your deepest self found yourself saying, 'yes,' to the life He was wooing you to – that is, to become his bride in the deepest sense, then this enemy of His attacks."

"The enemy."

"Yes, the soul's enemy will do anything to keep you away from here. You may even experience him again today when you leave here, but now you will be prepared. Do you carry a rosary?"

"Always. It is a special one that Sister Michael knows about. See, here it is." Sue pulled out the silk purse and handed it through the grill.

Mother Agnes took it out of the little purse, running her fingers along the ivory crucifix and the string of flowers. "Did you have this with you when you left here the last time?"

"Let's see. No, I received it after that."

"It would have made a difference if this had been with you. You might still have felt an upheaval, but not nearly as threatening as it was without it. Satan is thwarted with the rosary, and this is a blessed one. I feel it was blessed by a very holy priest, perhaps even a bishop. And today when you leave, just be sure to hold it in your hands, and better yet, say the rosary on your way home."

"But Mother, did Satan know that I was called by Jesus to become, well, to become a nun-bride?"

"No, he knows nothing inward of what goes on with the soul and the beauty of Jesus and His call. But he guessed that you might be being courted, and he knew of your attachment to the young man, so he played on it. He will always use our earthly attachments if he can. And he will entice us away from divine encounters by glamorizing our earthly loves. That is very easy for him. Of course, the fact that at that moment you did love the young man, or thought you did, made you vulnerable to Satan's hatred of us. So it was that battle that engulfed you. But you were always safe because we here were praying for you."

"You sisters knew that I would be in danger?"

"We always pray for the young women who come inquiring about our life because we know the conflict that can arise all around them. Sometimes it is not a loving family like yours, who understands the ways of God, sometimes it is a very disabled family, disabled in love, and the poor young woman has a real battlefield to enter. Some of our sisters can tell you how God was able to overcome truly terrible circumstances.

Now, what are you thinking about the future? I should explain that we do want you to have some college before entering our life. It wasn't always this way, but we see the advantage of a contemplative life that is based on a more developed consciousness, so we have begun to ask the young women who inquire here to complete at least two years of school beyond high school. How does that sound?"

"I have thought that I would like to enter right away."

"Is that because of the young man and your sister? You see that wouldn't be a good thing – to run away and hide."

"Ummm, yes, it has been part of idea, to just leave them and not be around. But I also am anxious to begin this new life."

"Sue, you really will have a much better life as a cloistered sister if you have further education. Has your family the means to help you?"

"My grandfather has offered to send me to school. And my Great Uncle left trust money to help, too. So God has provided that."

"Good. Very good! God is good. Now, it will also be important that as you go through these next couple of years that you keep in touch with us. We should set up some spiritual direction for you every month, perhaps beginning with St. Ignatius' Nineteenth Annotation. Just a moment, I have a little booklet about this special retreat that you can do at home. I will be right back."

The lovely silence closed in around Sue. She thought over what Mother had said and felt only a profound peace. Even the image of the two lovers in the dusk on the beach as they merged into one shadow did not disturb her serenity. She could only see a future of herself merged into one with *el Señor*. She only wanted to begin this life today. She did not want to leave this sanctuary. Let others face the world with its disappointments, she was ready to leave it all behind. Especially Juanita and Tom. They wouldn't have such a peaceful life – not at all. But she wouldn't have to know about it. But Mother had said that there was something there still that she couldn't avoid. Oh, dear. . .

That elfin voice broke into her reverie. "Here, Suzanne dear, take this little booklet and pray with it. Then when you can, call the monastery and ask for me. If this seems like a devotion

that would be helpful, we will work together on it for the next months. It does take at least nine months, and perhaps longer. But depending on your time, and only if you go to school right here in Traverse City, we can go at our own pace. The booklet will tell you about St. Ignatius of Loyola who was inspired to create this special kind of a retreat for persons who were not in a monastery or convent, and so could not do this steadily, day after day, for a whole month. It is arranged for people who are still very much in the world as you will be for at least two years. You see, dear, this will be a great help as we discern whether you have a vocation, a calling, to be a contemplative religious. There are other kinds of religious life – even being married can be a religious life. We must be certain about just what God wants you to do. It will be an exciting adventure for both of us ahead. I do thank God for you! You are quite wonderful. Of course, I would want God to confirm, 'Sue is meant to be a Carmelite, right here.' But that is only my desire and we can't go by that, can we? Now, I must go back to my silence, and you must go back to whatever God wants in your family and with your friends. You will try to forgive Tom and Juanita, won't you? Perhaps a visit to the Blessed Sacrament, or arranging a Confession?"

Sue thanked the little brown garbed nun. Reaching for her hand through the grill, she pressed it fondly, then as the curtain was pulled back into place, she found her way out to the car. The slightly rusty old station wagon suddenly looked peculiar to her. Was this really part of her life? Everything outside seemed strange. Mother had given back the silk rosary case; it was safely in a pocket. She felt it and knew that there would not be any black cloud frightening her today on her way home. The school books she had purchased sat there on the seat. They, too, seemed to belong to some different planet. Who really cared about Sociology or English Literature? There was another universe where those things perhaps had a place, but not so important that someone should study them. Yet, Mother said it was important that she go to school so that she could be a better nun. OK. Sue was open to see how a human education could really do that. At the moment it seemed that only religious things were things to know. But she didn't doubt Mother Agnes' wisdom. She could see that tiny person clapping her small sandals on the floor in joy, with those little bare toes looking like rows of pink buds, and she laughed out loud. Then she wondered if in winter those pink buds were ever blue with cold, or if the nuns were able to wear socks. She knew she didn't like her feet to be cold, and thought, 'Gosh, will I really get to like cold feet?'

Chapter eight

College had started for Sue who now drove the old aqua and white Chevy wagon, that now groaned up hills, to Traverse City three days a week for her classes. Dolores was in tenth grade, and Juanita was in line for graduation as a senior. Francisco because of his excellence in studies had been allowed to skip a grade by making up a math class during the summer, so he and Jody both entered eleventh grade.

Maria had carefully gone through the clothing in the barrel kept on the back porch of outgrown clothes that could be passed down. Occasionally a woman in their church who had children about the ages of the Martinez would bring out things that her family didn't need. She had carefully asked Maria after Mass one day if this would be all right, and she explained that their family had a relative who owned a clothing store and who was always sending things for the children. They couldn't use everything, and . . . she had seemed embarrassed, but Maria had given her a hug.

"Oh, see there, Sylvia, of course, I would be very happy for clothing for the children. And if there are things that we can't use, I will pass them on, too. *Gracias, mi querida*, for thinking of us."

And Sylvia's face had brightened. "You know, Maria, that no one has seen these on my children, so . . ."

"That doesn't matter at all, and thank you for thinking of us."

So the barrel had some very nice things as well as hand-me-downs, and on a Saturday morning, Maria ordered the boys and girls to gather on the porch so that the barrel contents could be distributed. The process brought out the best and the worst in everyone complete with laughter and moans. Out of this developed three piles. Because of general discomfort the first pile was to give away to someone else. It either didn't fit anyone, or had a personality that didn't fit anyone. The second pile needed a stitch, or a button, or an alteration that Mama would make, and the third pile was for the laundry, things that a freshening-up would help. Maria kept a pencil handy and jotted herself notes, and at the end she knew where the gaps were in each child's wardrobe, and with each one she planned what would be purchased that would complete their needs and wants. A small store connected to St. Joseph Catholic Church in Traverse City handled good used clothes.

The girls would each have three skirts, three tops, and one or two dresses. Sue regretted it, but the dress purchased at Hudson's in Detroit was too tight across the bust, so it went to Dolores. The pink sharkskin suit she wore to Cindy's funeral looked terrific on Juanita, though they all wondered for what occasion it would be appropriate. It was too dressy even for their church, so it was rewrapped in paper and put at the back of the girls' closet. Each one needed a pair of jeans worn only for work or play, and one pair of good slacks that would also go with the tops. A sweater, a sweatshirt, socks and underwear, with a nightgown or pajamas, made an ensemble of clothing that took care of the season's needs. Even shoes would be passed down if not worn out.

Because Jody had grown taller than Francisco, last year's school pants could be handed down if the knees were good. When they were little that was always a problem, but Maria had patched knees and let down hems galore. When skirts were too short, a girl growing up till her knees showed, she made borders of contrasting fabric. It was considered improper for knees to show. No modest girl would ever want that, and no parent would allow it. Tight clothing also brought an emphatic Spanish 'no, no' and certainly anything cut low in the neck. Maria had become expert on this barrel sorting, and clothed the children in a way that even they appreciated - usually. They went to school "neat, clean, guapo and hermoso," said Maria.

Occasionally there was something she had put together that caused tears in the one for whom it was made, "No, Mama, I can't wear that! It is awful!" Then the family tried to help.

Either the other children agreed, and the item went into the give-away pile, or the protestor was persuaded that it really looked good on him or her. The second alternative was rare. Maria wasn't infallible in her taste. A short skirt was given a ruffled flounce, and Dolores' protests were echoed by everyone. Maria was surprised, "What can be the matter with a pretty ruffle. I think it is cute on you, Doddie." But Sue and Juanita had agreed, "Mama, nobody wears things like that. Nobody! Dolores would be laughed at."

"Laughed at? Realidad? Well, then, out it goes!" But Maria reconsidered; she hated to throw anything useable away. "How about I put a different kind of border on it? After all it is a good blue skirt and Juanita only used it a few times. I have a piece of blue plaid. How would that be?" A conference of the girls when the two fabrics were compared was favorable for another try. "Maybe cut the border on the bias, Mama," Juanita suggested. She was becoming proficient at the sewing machine herself.

When the drawers for each were filled adequately, and each one's closet space hung with his or her garb, all was ready for school to begin. The barrel would be brought out again when winter jackets were needed, and the box of boots behind the water heater would be sorted through again, but for now the family was organized.

In the middle of the second week of school stomach flu hit the family. It was only a one day bug, but one by one, first Jody and then the rest had a miserable twenty-four hours. Even Evelio missed a day's work which was rare for him. Mama was kept busy at bed-sides with bowls and cold cloths for foreheads, laundering bedding, and then ministering crackers and tea until the afflicted one finally came back to the family table for a tentative meal. Then it caught up with Mama and she had her bad day.

Jody, Fran, Doddie and Suz each missed two days of school, the first was spent in the bathroom, and the second regaining strength and taking care of Mama. But Juanita was hit the hardest. At the end of the week she was still sick to her stomach, pale and weak. Nothing seemed to help, although a few crackers first thing in the morning seemed to ease the worst of her nausea. She was throwing up even when there was nothing in her stomach.

Maria was worried. After the fifth day, she called and talked to the doctor. He suggested that Juanita be brought to the office. It was known that this intestinal bug could cause complications, and it would be wise if he checked her out. Dr. Flynn had cared for these children since they had all settled down together as a family at the Blue Martin. It wasn't often that he was called on; they were a healthy lot, but Evelio had needed help with a hand infection, Maria had a corn on the top of a toe that bothered her and kept growing back, and the children had all gone through the usual childhood diseases – mumps, measles, and whopping cough. Dr. Flynn was always impressed with the vitality of their bodies, but linked it with the vitality of their faith. He, too, was a member of St. Albans.

Juanita had had her driver's license since she was fourteen, and felt well enough to drive. Maria had never learned. So it was that on Saturday morning, Maria sat in the doctor's waiting room reading The Ladies Home Journal. She rarely saw a woman's magazine. It had a recipe for a new thing that she had never heard of - a taco salad. It had all the ingredients she would have on the shelf, and looked like something the family would eat. The cover date of February made the magazine six months old. The receptionist was a woman she knew, so she asked if she could take out that page.

"Oh, take it, Mrs. Martinez" said Mrs. Taylor. "We will be throwing it out soon anyway."

Maria had just taken her seat again, when the nurse came from the inner room, "Mrs. Martinez, Dr. Flynn would like to have you come in."

"Oh, dear!" Maria was immediately worried. What could be wrong?"

Clutching the magazine, her purse and sweater, she followed the white shoes ahead of her and was led to a chair opposite Dr. Flynn who sat at his desk with Juanita sitting on his right. The doctor was a stout man with a pleasant round face and a bald head. He had a habit of looking over his reading glasses which sat low on his nose. He was very serious, not beaming as he usually was because for ordinary things he was a cheerful person. Maria glanced at Juanita. Her face was pale and she had been crying.

The doctor was gentle. He could see Maria's anxiety. "Now, Maria, everything will be all right. Please, this isn't a matter of life or death, but Juanita has something to tell you. Go ahead, Juanita."

Her dear Juanbonita burst into sobs. "Oh, Mama, I can't tell. I can't tell!"

Maria's heart sank. She stared at her daughter. "You, you my dearest *niño*, you are going to have a baby? Oh, *querido Señor*, *no*, *no*, *no*!"

"It is true, Mama. I am. It is true," and Juanita buried her face in her hands. "What can I do? What can I do?"

Dr. Flynn let the sobs continue while Maria with her hand over her eyes kept repeating softly, "no, no."

Finally he cleared his throat, "Now, this is not the end of the world. A new life is a wonderful thing. As Catholics we believe that God has already instilled a soul into this baby. As far as I can tell everything is in good order, Juanita is healthy, and the new life seems to be coming along just fine.

"I know that a pregnancy such as this brings a kind of suffering to everyone, but in the end this little baby will bring you all great joy. You know that. We must do everything we can to make things right now so that this child will enter life as happily as possible. I strongly suggest that you as a family prayerfully find the best solution for both the baby and Juanita. The stigma of a young woman who is pregnant outside of marriage is very strong in our community, even in our church. I don't have a solution for that. We have this happen every now and then, of course, human nature being what it is. I have suggested adoption for some girls, but unless you have a family member outside of this town, someplace where Juanita can go for the next seven months, there will be that stinging condemnation of people to face.

It is sad, but true, that people will blame you, Juanita, and your parents for apparently not having been as careful of their daughter's associations as they should have been."

Maria looked up and then stared at Juanita. In a choking voice she asked, "Is it Tom's baby? It must be Tom's baby. There is no other young man around. The piano. How can we ever tell Evelio? And then the Ohlers. Oh, dear God, help us!"

"Mama, he loves me. He loves me; he said we would be together forever."

Maria just looked at her daughter and shook her head. Dr. Flynn went out of the room for a moment, and coming back said, "The waiting room is clear, so it is a good time. Juanita, can your dry your eyes now? Are you able to drive your mother home? Of course this information will not leave this office and I will be praying for you and for the family. But Juanita needs to come for a check-up every month the next six months, and then more often until the baby arrives. Her due date is May 20th. For now, this pamphlet explains about a good diet and how important that is. If there is anything unusual, you will call me, Maria. I hope that everything works out for the best."

These last words swirled around in Maria's head all the way home. "For the best." Wasn't it too late for that now? Then she heard the whisper she had heard nearly all of her life, first given to her by her grandmother in Spanish, "Todos sera bueno" "All will be good." For the first time in her memory she pushed the words away. She looked at her daughter. Juanita was driving with one hand and wiping her nose with the other. It came into Maria's thought of how

like a sad Madonna she looked. She was so beautiful – her dark hair pulled back into a clasp at the back of her neck, her lovely skin now so pale, her dark eyebrows over those eyes which seemed to hold the serenity of the ages in their depths.

"Mother of God, here is a young woman, my sweet *Juanbonita* who is facing something that you faced. Although she is a sinner and you were not, still you understand her anguish because people thought you had sinned. Even St. Joseph thought you sinned, and you had to bear that, innocent as you were. Now, here is your daughter Juanita, she must bear that burden; and her family, too. Oh, dear Mother, help us!" And again tears flowed. "Todos sera bueno." Those words again!

Maria answered back, "All right, todos sera bueno but how? She had said it out loud. Juanita nearly stopped the car. "Did you say, 'all will be good,' Mama?" Did you say that?

"Don't stop now! Perhaps I said it, but I don't know how. I don't know how I said it and I don't know how it can be that all will be good. But just don't stop the car!"

They hadn't talked about what faced them next, how to break this news to the family, especially to Papa Evelio. First, he must be told. As they drove down their meandering gravel driveway toward the house, they saw him working among the remains of the delphinium that had long since lost their innocence, turning into long stalks with drooping brown leaves. He was whacking at them with a sickle, then chopping up the remainder for compost. Emerging from the parked car, Maria and Juanita looked at each other, and then walked over to meet him. Smelling a bit sweaty, he greeted them with hugs and then stepped back with a puzzled expression.

"Like hugging big wood. Oh, the doctor. . . querida Padre celeste! Oh, not bad. . .no, no, no malo, my Juancaro. Maria, no bad!"

"She will be all right, *mi querido* Eb, but come in, we must talk." Maria took him by the arm and with Juanita walking behind, they went into the house.

When the boys came in with a clamor of laughter from playing basketball on the court that Evelio had made for them, they found their parents and sister in a strange prayer time at the dining table. At least that is how it looked. Sobering up, they prepared to tiptoe through the room. But Papa raised his head, looked up and said quietly, "Fran and Jody, *por favor*, find your two sisters and bring them *aqui*."

"Wow!" said Jody as they made their way to the girls' room, wonder what is going on? It's like somebody died. Hey, Doddi, Suz, Papa wants us right now at the table. OK?"

While they assembled in unaccustomed silence, Papa like a piece of statuary sat with his eyes closed. Mama looked at each one with glistening eyes. It was she who spoke first.

"Mi hija, if ever we were asked by el Señor to be a strong, loving family, it is now. Would your Papa ever turn away from any one of you, no matter what you had done? Neither would our heavenly Father."

Juanita had been crying steadily into a wet Kleenex; Sue got up and brought a full box to the table.

"Now! Eb," and Maria stopped talking.

Papa Evelio opened his eyes and looked around the table. "You are *mi orguloissimo*. But, be simple here. *Juanbonita* have mistake make sad, but to be ok. She forgot *Señor momento* and forgot Juanita. She forgot because she *creiá amor*."

"She believed love, Papa? Is that what you mean? She believed love about what?" Dolores was staring at her sister.

"She believed love about Tom, amigo, Tom."

At this Juanita began to sob. All eyes turned toward Sue.

"But, Papa, Suz is Tom's girl, not Juanita. I don't get it." Jody seemed angry and impatient. "What's all this about, anyway."

"Paciente, paciente. Juanbonita amó and gave Tom her whole self. Now bebé viene. Baby comes.

Ohh! Everyone breathed it at once. Sue's head dropped to the table. The boys' faces flushed red. Dolores' mouth hung open. Juanita covered her face, then attempted to spread out a wad of Kleenex for her running nose. Only Maria seemed calm.

"Children, we will be all right together. Do you understand? We must be together with our faith in Jesús. Do you remember he would not let a stone be thrown at a poor woman who had made a mistake. Juanita has made a simple mistake . . . maybe only one. Eh, *Juanbonita*? One?"

With a choked voice, Juanita answered, "Only one, Mama."

Evelio echoed, "Si, uno, where is Tom? I talk to Tom."

"Papa, do you have to? Can't we keep him out of this?"

"Out of this? *No, no,* Tom up to here in this." And his hands went over his head. His bebé! He start familia; he responsable padre from now on. We will have una boda con un anillo de boda."

"A wedding? He said he would love me forever, but Papa, he is in school. He can't get married. What will his parents do to him? You can't tell him," Juanita's sobs turned into a howl of anguish. Her brothers and sisters twisted on their chairs.

"Please, Mama, can we go now?" Jody asked. "What can we do?"

"You can tell your sister you love her, and will do everything to protect her. You will tell her that you will never hold this against her. Never. Go over there and do that, and then you can go."

Papa added, "When amor comes upon you strong, you remember - no take what not yours! Tom did! Now pain - now *pena*."

The boys both went to the other side of the table, put their arms around Juanita and spoke softly to her, one after the other. She looked up at them with big red eyes, "Thank you, Jody; thank you, Fran. I love you, too."

"Papa, may I be excused?"

"Si. Papa love you, too!"

Juanita went around to him and put her head on his shoulder. He reached up and patted her head, then held his hand firmly on it and gave a blessing in Spanish.

"Jesu cristo, Mi roca, en Ti he de confiara. Amen"

The two girls remained sitting.

"Suz, how is it with you?" Maria reached over to her two hands which were spread out helplessly on the table. "You will forgive her?"

She didn't reply.

"You will be all right?"

With a sigh, Sue answered slowly, "Mama, I knew they were lovers. I saw them one night out on the beach. So I knew that Tom no longer was thinking about me. I never thought this could happen. Never. Of course, I feel hurt about it. But, well, I no longer was really in love with him either. But how could he do this? I just don't know."

"It was the piano, the *musica*. How did you, Eb, and me - not think about it? All those hours with no one there. I knew that Tom liked Sue, and never thought a thing about Juancaro being there so much. And what can we do now?

"Must see Ohlers, *presto*. I talk to Torres to see if they come up here soon. If not, we go to Detroit."

"When do we tell Tom?"

- "His Papa tell Tom, not us. Querido Suz, you drive Detroit?"
- "I suppose I could with a map. I have an idea about where they live."
- "I talk to Torres and see if they come here soon, or you drive, Suz, Mama and me. Domingo."

Chapter nine

The holy silence seeped into her heart and spread out through her tired body that welcomed it like a dry garden welcomes spring rain. Things at home had been tense and unsettled since the trip to Detroit. Nerves were keyed up in a way that was new to a family which usually experienced a routine that was ordered and seeped in prayer and love. Juanita stayed in her room when she wasn't at school. School days would come to a close soon. No pregnant girl went to school in the 1950's. Her sisters tried to be kind to her, to seek her out, but she was withdrawn and they didn't know how to reach into the strange life she had entered. Though he now knew that he had fathered a child, Tom did not call. It was painfully awkward. The boys simply were quiet around her and found nothing to say. Evelio and Maria tried to stimulate some conversation at meals; they all sat down together as they always had, but topics about school, about friends and basketball, about Suz' new college experiences, about the old Ford truck repairs, about the A&P grocery store closing and a new SuperValu coming in its place, about Mr. Ellison's heart attack, about the dog that came chasing through the yard after a deer, about the giant catfish washed up on the shore – none of these could get off the ground. Everyone ate in a hurry and asked to be excused right after Maria had served the chocolate pudding.

The monastery atmosphere reversed all that. To believe that even all this misery would pass, was not hard here. Sue sat waiting near the curtained grill for Mother Agnes. In the meantime she soaked up the blessed clarity of all that was around her – as clear as glass was the peaceful assurance. The air seemed to be alive with quiet which was always a strange thing in itself. *Todos será buenos*.

After a longer wait than usual, the curtain was drawn back and behind the grill both Mother and Sister Michael were arranging themselves by bringing up chairs.

"We're sorry to be so slow this morning, Sue, dear, but we had a community meeting that took more time than usual. But here we are." And the little woman in brown laughed her high elfin laugh which made Sue laugh out loud for the first time in weeks.

"Glad you are so cheerful. It is a lovely morning after all that stormy time last week. We don't like lightning around here. Have you ever seen nuns hiding under beds?" The sandals smacked the floor in high amusement, Sister Michael smiled, and Sue laughed again. These nuns were so funny! So good to laugh again.

"Sister Michael wasn't busy about all her outside tasks this morning, so I thought she should come. I've been telling her about your progress through the Ignatian Exercises, and I didn't think you'd mind if she sat in with us this time. How has this week gone? My, time goes fast. Seems like we just sat here an hour or so ago." She looked up, "Heavenly Father, bless us!"

"Yes, bless us! Mother Agnes, it has been a long week for me, for my family. And I'm so happy that grandmother, that is, Sister Michael is here. My family is facing something so unexpected, it feels like a calamity at home."

"My dear Sue!"

"Yes, my sister Juanita is pregnant."

The two nuns were quiet.

"The sad thing is that the father of the baby is my boyfriend. At least I thought of him as, well, as even someone I wanted to marry. That is until I began to come here. Without the family having even a hint of something like this . . .it has been devastating for us all. Most of all because of a trip we took last Sunday to Detroit. Mama didn't end up going, but I drove Papa down."

"You see Tom Ohlers, our neighbor who has always been our friend, is at college in his third year, and his parents, who own the big cherry orchard next door to us, live in Detroit. Papa

insisted that he go to Detroit to tell Mr. Ohlers that his son had fathered Juanita's baby. He was determined that it was Mr. Ohler's job to inform Tom and to make sure that the right thing was done. By this Papa means that Mr. Ohlers makes sure that Tom marries Juanita and makes the baby a legitimate child, and Juanita an honorable wife and mother."

"I was always worried about this. I knew from experience that upper class white people – I hate to designate people that way, but it is the way they think, not me – had deep underlying feelings about Mexicans. The Ohlers have been wonderful to us over the years, but I know that those feelings are there anyway. I was afraid that Papa would meet even more disgrace. He doesn't deserve it, but, well, he was badly treated."

The two nuns were still silent. For a second Sue feared that they would be more sympathetic to the Ohlers' shock than to her brave Papa. But she continued, "Mrs. Ohlers, who has been wonderful to us, was instantly cold and bitter at the news. She was the first to respond to Papa when he told them why he had come. I don't want to tell you all that she said, but she called Juanita a common tramp who had used their goodness for her own advantage, to trap Tom. She said that Tom would never have been involved with a *decent* girl that way. It was awful."

She needn't have worried about how the two nuns would respond.

"Oh, Sue! I am so sorry for you and for your family! What a sad affair. The community here will go to work with intercessions for you all. Mr. Ohlers, did he defend his son, too?"

"Oh yes, he was terribly angry. At first he told Papa it was all his fault having raised daughters who everyone knew were 'sex-pots.' Yes, that is what he said. Look, he said, how men hung around the Cherry Hut when they were out there! (That really wasn't true.) That it was not Tom's fault, and that Papa should just get out right then – 'Get Out,' he said, 'and take care of your problem, your promiscuous girls, the best you can.' My father sat there like an immovable piece of granite. He took all this abuse without taking his eyes off Mr. Ohlers. Then he said, 'I not go. You call Tom right now.' It was obvious that unless they had a crane somewhere they would not move my father.

"The Ohlers tried to stare him down and shout him down. But he was a rock, everything they said slipped off of him like wet snow. He kept saying, 'You call Tom. I not go.' I wonder if they thought of calling the police – Mrs. Ohlers said something like that. But thinking that through they began to see, I think, that they were not in a good place. They began to calm down.

"Eventually Mr. Ohlers went to the phone. He chose to call from the kitchen so I really don't know what that conversation was like, but when he came back he was quieter and had a more reasonable voice. This seemed to irritate Mrs. Ohlers who wasn't ready to back down. She kept the crescendo of accusations about Juanita going until her husband finally asked her to stop. At that she angrily left the room. Then it was the two men who talked, ignoring me which was fine.

"Mr. Ohlers new tack was that there could be another solution. They had a wonderful family doctor that could take care of things like this. Certainly Mr. Martinez didn't want the stigma for his daughter that she was sure to face. Tom couldn't get married and ruin his future. He had to finish his CPA degree and then he talked of going into engineering which took even more years at school. Besides, there was this cultural divide. It just wouldn't work for Tom to marry a Mexican girl, even though he admitted that Tom had told his father that he loved her and would do that. That, he said, was just like Tom, trying to be noble. But he, his father, couldn't allow it."

Papa said, "A doctor. What you mean a doctor?"

"Well, you know," Mr. Ohlers flushed, "surely you Mexicans don't bring every .. well, every early accidental thing ...whatever you call it ...bit of ... of fetal tissue into the world

after this kind of incident. You have ways of getting rid of it. I know you do! And we have a safer way. .

"Papa loudly interrupted him. 'No, no. Baby is baby, not to be rid of. Nunca!"

"Now, that is unreasonable! But it you mean it, then the whole thing is back in your court."

"My court?"

"I mean the whole thing is your problem if you won't be reasonable."

"Reasonable for baby to be baby. God give baby life and soul."

"No, no, my friend, God didn't do this. These two silly kids did this."

"Is that how you came living? By two . . .what you say? . . .silly kids? God no give life?"

"Well, I suppose maybe somewhere along, but not . . .well, I don't know the answer. But that this is all wrong is certain."

"Why no marriage, no boda? Tom ok with marry."

"Tom is an idealistic idiot. He has no idea the trouble ahead with a a . . . well, with a wife out of his class and without an education. I told him I would disown him if he thought that way. He quieted down. He knows which side his bread is buttered on. You see, Mr. Martinez, it doesn't do any good for you to fight me for that. It simply won't happen."

"Tom old enough to be man. He good enough to do good thing. He decide. I talk to Tom. You, his Papa told him. I talk to him."

"Do you really think he will give up his family and his education for Juanita? You are mistaken. Sorry, sir, but you are sadly mistaken."

"And then, you won't believe it, but the phone rang, and it was Tom calling back. His mother talked to him for a while. I could hear her high pitched protests, and finally she called her husband. He was gone a long time. Finally he came back, 'He wants to talk to you, Evelio. But, I'm telling you for the last time, no matter what, this isn't going to happen!'"

"Papa told me on the way home that Tom promised to marry Juanita even if it means his parents wouldn't support him. But I don't see it happening. Tom wants to do the right thing, but he has huge obstacles in the way. And in the meantime, our family is struggling to see it through. We really feel at sea."

"Will you excuse us for just a few minutes, Sue? Sister Michael and I will be right back." The two nuns went through a door at the side and closed it, leaving Sue wondering what it could mean. When they came back, Mother Agnes smiled with that pixy twist to her mouth which never turned down and always turned up, "Sue, we may be able to help. When Sister Michael first came to us, she lived in a small room that we have in one of the outer utility buildings. It has provided a place for a number of people over the years that have needed a bit of help for a while. In exchange, they often work around here to help us. Though we can't afford to pay them much, we do give them a minimum amount as well as the room and board."

She turned to Sister Michael. "When you first came, Sister, weren't you were one of our kitchen helpers?"

"Yes, for several years. It was a good time."

"Also, when it is a young woman like your sister, we have an arrangement with the St. Francis hospital to care for her and her baby at the time of delivery. Their social workers offer adoption assistance when it is asked for. Right now we have a girl named Julie who is living in our space out there. She, too, is expecting a baby in just another month. Her parents are parishioners at St. Joseph's in town and we were able to take her in for her internment. We could offer Juanita this room in just a month. Do you think your family would consider this?"

"I know they would! This is wonderful! It will take so much pressure off of the family just knowing there can be some help! Of course, it means she won't be able to graduate, but that was already accepted."

"We may be able to help there, too," Sister Michael offered, "We have tutored girls. Often when they go back to school they are able to step right into the classes they left without trouble. We have so many well educated women here who are delighted to tutor. I would think we could prepare Juanita to graduate with her class next spring. Living here, too, she can say that she has been with her family who lived away and needed her help for the past months, and not have it be a lie. I am her family by being your grandmother, and we will find a spot where we need her. Her life can then go on without embarrassment; not of course as though this didn't happen, but at least free from the bitter criticism than is often the cross of the young women who find themselves in these predicaments. The man never needs to feel this painful renunciation by his peers, but the woman always does. Juanita will have as little of this as possible if she decides to come to live with us."

Sue's heart had lifted, "Oh, my goodness, Sisters, this seems too good to be true!"

"Now Sue, there is still much spiritual work to be done. Do you . . . of course, you do, still have the ivory rosary?" The blessing of that ring of flowers has brought the family special graces over the years. Let's resort to Jesus and ask His pure Mother to intercede with Him for Tom and Juanita that the very will of God be apparent to them, and the way to do it be opened, especially for the Ohlers. We here in the monastery will begin fervent prayer for them, and you and your family, too. Knowing Evelio and Maria as you have described them, their prayers are powerful because they are so in love with Our Lord and so obedient. How fortunate you are to have parents like them!"

At that lovely home in Grosse Pointe another drama centered around Juanita - a drama which had been in formation from the Sunday that Evelio had burst into their peaceful existence with his mustache bristling with righteous indignation and fortitude. Since that day it seemed as though Lois Ohlers could not get rid of him. He had seemed too big for their house. What was it about that man that made him so huge? In his own environment at HiLo farms Lois had known him around the workshops, sheds and barns and he fit the spaces without seeming out-sized, but in her living room with the spare English he spoke, he remained a monumental hulk that wouldn't budge from her memory.

"Tillie, let's rearrange the living room furniture this morning. Will you help me?"

"Mrs. O., why in the world? It looks just right the way it is." Tillie never minced words with anyone. Her mistress was more like her daughter after all the years she had worked for her; she was fifteen years the elder.

"Ever since that great big man was here, he continues to loom, and I just think a change might get rid of him."

"You mean Mr. Martinez."

Tillie hadn't been part of the conversations of that Sunday, but she had overheard enough from the kitchen, especially during the phone calls to and from Tom, so that she knew the whole sad story, and she had never been out of ear shot of that convincing voice with its Spanish accents that spoke with such authority in abbreviated English.

"Yes. Why won't he leave us alone?"

"I suppose it's the Truth that won't let you alone."

In midair Lois' foot paused before taking the next step. "Tillie! Tillie! You aren't on their side are you?"

"Just because it is Tom, you haven't been able to be truthful with yourself, Mrs. O. When Juanita was here overnight last August, remember for the music concert? What did you think about her then?"

Lois stared at her. She had tried to block out the face of that lovely young woman, her serene dark eyes, her straightforward look, as straight as the eyebrows across her forehead, the

modesty of her demeanor, the softness of her voice. Everything about her spoke of goodness and purity. And she had called her a seductress and worse . . .a tramp. But she never would have thought that Tom would look at her twice; she was a . . .another race after all. Tom had been totally disinterested in her – she had watched him closely. He had certainly known how to deceive her about this love of his life. He even had Sue with him, whom she thought the real object of his affections, and had her visit over at her grandmother Rogers.

Tillie pushed on, "I remember other times more clearly than you. I won't bring them up, because you know them all too well. And you were forgiving then. You have done well to make a good marriage when ...well, you know. None of us can claim such a pristine background, can we?"

"Shame on you for even thinking of this, much less of mentioning it. Shame on you, Tillie!"

"There is no shame on me, or on you, or on Mr. O. Jesus has taken away our sins, remember?"

"Jesus. Ahh. Jesus," Lois passed her hand over her eyes. "I had a dream the other night. It's hazy. He might have been speaking in Aramaic or Hebrew. Very hard to understand. But Jesus was very hard to understand. He never answered a question directly."

"Probably looked like Evelio Martinez, too."

"Stop that! I won't have it! You will have me positively whacky! Help me with this sofa. I want it over there."

"I'll help you with the sofa, but it isn't going to help you with getting that man out of your house."

"All right, wise one. What is the solution? And don't tell me that Tom should marry

Juanita."

"Why not? I know all your reasons, but they are full of holes."

"How dare you, Tillie!"

"I dare."

"Don't say another word. Go back to the kitchen. We'll do this some other time. I can't stand your acting like God Almighty!"

So there was Tillie to face every morning. She still whistled as she dusted and vacuumed – it was always the same tune. She still served them good meals; was as dependable as a clock. But occasionally Lois wondered at the peculiar smile she noticed crossing her face. What did she know that amused her? It was maddening because Lois surmised that

it was a know-it-all-ness about Tom and Juanita, and that could be only



that she thought eventually she, Lois, would weaken and drag her husband with her.

When her words came back to her, the words she had spoken in anger, the names she had called Juanita, she did feel ashamed. One morning at breakfast she started talking despite herself.

"Bud, do you remember that weekend when we sneaked away from our boarding schools, lied to our teachers and to our parents and went to Traverse City?"

His head popped out from behind the newspaper with a face as full of joy as a big orange sun. "Gosh, how would I ever forget that! Let's do it again, Lo. How about tonight!"

"Oh stop it, Bud! It was pretty good though. I sometimes wonder how with all that, I didn't get pregnant. That would have changed everything."

"Yeah. We were lucky. Did your folks ever find out?"

"No. Good thing, too. There would have been no big wedding."

"What makes that so different, though, from what Tom . . . "

"Now wait a minute! You are skating on thin ice. There's all the difference in the world between you and me, and Tom and that Mexican wench."

"Bud! I was wrong to call her those names. You remember her when she was here. You even commented on her politeness and graciousness."

"She's beautiful enough. I'll grant you that."

"What makes you think she is promiscuous, or that there was ever any other man in her life but Tom?"

"I just know that there were fellows who came around to buy cherries up at the Hut who liked to look at those girls, and took their time about it, too."

"Remember our Cindy worked up there, and she was looked at, but you never accused her of being loose with men."

"Well, she wasn't. She was as pure as the driven snow."

"But Juanita and Dolores weren't?"

"I can't say. Probably they were. But they had the propensity for it being Mexicans. Everyone knows that they are highly sexed."

"Everyone knows that, really?"

"Oh, Lo, It's what I hear people say."

"But you haven't had that experience."

"No, not really, but our workers do have lots of children. You know, the migrants."

"Maybe they just like family life. Nothing wrong with married couples having children. It's something about their being Catholic."

"They do take good care of their own, I'll say that. Best behaved children on the planet were those little kids playing in the sand in front of their places, babbling away in Spanish – really funny. Probably some of them were conceived under our noses right in those huts."

"So, you don't really know that the Martinez children have been raised to have poorer values than your children?"

"What is all this leading to, Lo?"

Tillie was whistling her tune at the sink.

"Tillie, please stop that infernal whistling. I don't know. I just think we need time and more open minds. It is important because Tom is coming home this weekend, and we will have to listen. Not jump to conclusions, and I think that's what we have been doing. And, Tillie, if you don't stop that I am coming over there to stuff the dishrag in your mouth!"

Tillie's smile widened into a quiet laugh. She leaned over her dishpan with shaking shoulders.

When Lois walked into her living room later that day, she found Evelio had left.

Chapter ten

The great expanse of water that always drew the family's eyes out to the horizon, and often caused them to pause in the midst of daily activities to soak in the beauties of the changes in nature's moods, was more and more displaying the dark ferocity of November. That was the month that the Great Lakes sailors respected with a tinge of fear for in November the roiling depths had claimed many of them over the years. At the Mass for the Blessing of the Fleet each summer in the harbor at Fayette the bell was tolled for those whom the lake had claimed, the tolling and the names would go on and on and on. The turbulence of atmospheric lows could continue for days; the wind made loud screams through the trees, finalizing the death of the old birch on the edge of the beach that had tried to hold out against its slow decay. The sand blew from the tops of the dunes, making neat patterned ridges down the driveway, and assaulting the runner between the car and the porch with a stinging blast. The white capped waves bounded in unchecked, fighting each other as their crests blew off and they wrestled each other unto the eroding beach.

Inside the Blue Martin, however, though the upheaval of October had opened a suffering that its occupants had never wanted, something new was appearing. Ground that remains dormant, undisturbed, may grow quite crusty and unresponsive, only hospitable to hardy, tough-stemmed weeds. A gardener like Evelio knew that in order to have fruitful soil, it could not remain that way. Someone had to come along to dig it deeply. He used a long handled spade, shunning those mechanical things called tillers, and had a method of trenching, turning the soil over, stepping back, then beginning the next row. In this way he never worked over his own footprints. There was no pressing down on the newly turned soil. When he was through, the spot was smooth as velvet, airy, and ready to seed.

Over Juanita's weak objections and the other children's apathy, Evelio and Maria kept the punctual habit of family dinners. At this critical point in family life, it could have been more comfortable for everyone if they had relaxed about it, allowing the members to take their plates of food and eat, some in the kitchen, some at the table, some in their rooms. Sitting around the table as they always had was too close, too awkward; too demanding of conversation when there didn't seem to be anything to talk about. Congenial life had collapsed, so why pretend?

But this was not allowed. They had always said grace before taking the first forkful, but now Evelio brought a small book of prayers in Spanish to the table, positioned his reading glasses, and read one along with the family grace. Most of the words they all knew, everyone knew what they were about. They sought forgiveness and love, begging for the intercession of Mother Mary, the angels and the saints. After a few evenings of this, he added another one. Now they prayed the grace together and Papa read two prayers. By the end of the first week, it was three, the last rather a long one. At this Jody and Fran, who shared a bench, elbowed each other and stifled a giggle. Sue caught their look and frowned. Evelio saw this exchange, "What?" Outside the wind howled.

"Oh nothing," Francisco shrugged. "We just wondered how many prayers, Papa?"

[&]quot;Too many prayers? You that hungry?"

[&]quot;Well, sort of."

[&]quot;We make it short then. Go around the table and say gracias a Dios for something, eh?

[&]quot;If you say so, Papa."

[&]quot;Rapdio then! Si, now! Start with Juanbonita."

Juanita looked at her Papa with surprise. "Me?"

[&]quot;Si. vou!"

[&]quot;Well, um, thank you for . . . for . . . well, for a warm house."

[&]quot;Siguiente! Doddie."

- "Thank you God for . . . for good food."
- "Heh, that was mine," Fran whispered.
- "Francisco!"
- "Thank you, God, for todos será buenos, that all will be good."
- "Jody!"
- "Thank you *Señor* for shorter prayers." There were some snickers, a bit on the weak side, but laughter hadn't been heard at the table in weeks.

"Suz!"

"Dear Father, thank you for our praying Papa, and a Mama that doesn't pray long prayers!" The laughter was a bit stronger.

Maria!"

"Gracias, Señor, gracias for everything! For todo. You are suerte bueno!"

With this last exclamation, Juanita began to sob. As though a single current raised them all from their chairs, the family gathered around her, Jody even laid across the table in front of her. Arms intertwined, breathing in unison, heads touching, was it crying and weeping or giggles and laughing. The first seeped into the second until it was time to come up for air. There was an explosion of "I love you," "I love you, too." One of the boys even said softly, "I love the baby!" And the others all took up the refrain, "I love the baby!" Something wondrous, green and growing sprang up from that plowed ground, and from that day on the Blue Martin regained normality, but with a richer family spirit than ever before.

Papa insisted on Saturday noon that they pile into the station wagon and go to church for confession. The boys protested that they didn't need to go, they hadn't sinned. But Maria reminded them of some words she had heard from a competitive game of Horse when the basketball had smashed a garage window, and a missing piece of ham meant for another meal, and . . . in the fifteen minutes it took to drive to St. Albans, everyone remembered more than a few ugly things that needed to be taken away by the Lord Jesus. As their papa entered the confessional the children could not imagine what he could have to confess; their mother, maybe. She had a fiery temper and could even could throw things and say some Spanish words not worth saying, (that frypan with the unreliable handle that had dumped fried potatoes all over the kitchen floor), but their dad seemed to them to be just full of El Signor. He, however, knew himself to be a sinner gravely in need of grace. The first and second commandment worried him. He did not love the way Jesus loved, and he was sorry! As for Juanita she came away from twenty minutes with Father Forette at peace. The twisting conscience, so tied in knots, unraveled into the state of innocence that brought a joy that she didn't think she would ever feel again with Father's final words "I absolve you. . . ". A baby was a wonderful thing, Father assured her. That tiny human was now able to freely develop in serenity.

Even though Tom did not come, or call, which was painful to all, Juanita, who had always been buoyed by a quiet self-assurance, came back to that place of comfort because of her faith and her family. The news that Sue had brought from the last visit at the monastery gave her a more peaceful prospect of the next months than she could have imagined, and from that, with her anchor in Jesus, she believed that "all would be good" though it remained hidden what that could possibly mean. She, Doddie and Suz had begun to share a nighttime rosary. Sue had that lovely one given to her by her two grandmothers.

Sue had taken Juanita one Sunday afternoon to meet Sister Michael for the first time. Mother Agnes did not meet outsiders; Sue was an exception because she was contemplating becoming a religious of their community, but Sister Michael as an extern was able to show Juanita and Sue the room that had been offered. Julia, the young woman who now occupied

the room was close to her delivery time and had given the sisters permission to have Juanita come by. She and Juanita were drawn to each other from the first. They commented that even their names began the same. Julia was as fair as Juanita was dark haired; her education was meager, she spoke poorly, but she was full of smiles. She had a shape, even without a ballooning full term baby, that was round. A more open person would be hard to find. She was, of course, lonely; most of the kitchen and servant sisters were kind to her, but busy about their duties and were not there to be chums with young women. The head cook disapproved of her and made that evident by constantly remarking about her weight.

Julia was not a reader. She had been taught to knit; through her months of solitude she had made several baby wraps with wool scraps she'd brought with her, and some skeins provided by the sisters. Her other occupation was to play Monopoly by taking the part of two other imaginary persons. Her family, who visited seldom, had brought her a movie magazine annual which was well thumbed. She spent some time walking around the grounds, feeding pigeons with stale bread from the kitchen, and when the seagulls caught on to free food, feeding them, too. But to have two young women come to her rooms to visit was a total delight. She could scarcely let go of their hands. She had not been told much about what having a baby would be like; did they know? Neither Sue nor Juanita could tell her, but Sister Michael began to understand the problems faced by this simple boarder, and determined that some one of the younger sisters who had nursing experience be permitted to help this naïve youngster face what was soon to happen to her. The rules should be bent for charity's sake; or at least a sister from another non-cloistered order should be contacted to help Julia. The hospital itself had a contingent of Franciscan religious – all nurses. Sister Michael was quite appalled that the poor young woman had suffered such isolation all the while the sisters felt they were doing such a good thing by sheltering her. She resolved that this problem would be addressed before other young women were taken in, beginning with Juanita. At the next community meeting she found that Julia had declined any academic help; she had already dropped out of high school.

Sunday mornings at 6:30, the community's Mass was open to outsiders. The sisters were served by a retired priest who came in from a local rectory. They prayed the Mass in an enclosed end of the divided chapel which was open to the rest only at the top of a carved ten foot wooden screen. The words and prayers of the priest, the songs that were sung could be heard so that the lay people assembled could follow along, though none of the cloistered participants were ever seen. Communion was served through an opening in the grill. Julia was expected to be present; several times she overslept.

The space offered by the monastery was a plain sitting room and a small bedroom. Meals would be taken in the monastery kitchen, and the bathroom facilities were also in that wing of the main building, which was inconvenient for any young woman, but an adjustment that had to be made. Juanita was grateful for a safe home to await the baby, but seeing the suffering of Julia sharpened her realization that the five months in these rooms would be without familiar, comforting routines of home, and would come with a special loneliness of being without Mama and Papa and the family. She felt that constriction in her throat that was a prelude to tears, but held them back for Julia's sake.

Would Julia's mother be with her during her delivery? No, her mother worked and probably wouldn't take time off. Did she have a relative who would be there? No, they were from Tennessee, just living in the area for the past year. Her father was an over-the-road trucker and was only home infrequently. Besides, when he was home he slept most of the time. So, she would be alone? Juanita turned to Sister Michael.

"You will know when Julia goes into labor, won't you?"

"Well, yes, of course. I will be called to take her. We keep track of her through the kitchen aids. When the due date is close, we send one of them out to the room every day, and

then several times a day. We don't let this just happen. At least I don't think we do. I can call you if you like."

"I do like! I wouldn't want to be alone through this."

Julia's face lighted with joy; her fingers that hadn't loosened their grip on Juanita's hand clasped tighter. "Oh, I prayed like the sisters do in chapel, and God is answering my prayer. He has sent me a friend." She leaned down and kissed Juanita's hands.

Julia's baby girl was born the first day of December. Sister Michael called at lunchtime. She had just driven Julia to St. Francis Hospital if Juanita or Sue would want to go there. Maria had gone to town for groceries, the only vehicle in the yard was the old Ford truck, but the girls hurried off. On the maternity floor, they were greeted coldly by a nurse, but when they explained that their friend had no one else to be with her, she took them reluctantly down to a room where screams were echoing out into the hall. Julia was writhing on the bed. The nurse loomed over her, "Stop that yelling. You don't have to do that! Here are some friends of yours. You don't want them to think you are just a big sissy!"

Juanita gently pushed the nurse aside. "Yell if you want, Julie, we are here with you, and we don't think you are a sissy." Actually she was frightened at the scene. She had never thought having a baby would be so terrible. When Julie grabbed at her like a drowning person grabbing for a lifesaver, she was pulled nearly onto the bed. "Oh, Juanita, you came! You came! Help me! Please, help me!"

Juanita looked for the nurse, but she had gone.

Telling about it afterward, Sue and Juanita described the near neglect they witnessed until a shrieking Juanita had been wheeled to the delivery room. Occasionally a nurse would come to check the progress of the baby down the birth canal, but otherwise Julie received no encouragement or attention. When the ordeal was over, the two girls were weak with attempts to soothe and comfort her, and with anger and frustration at the nursing staff. Finally, one of the nurses asked them to come to a window. After a few minutes another came holding up a very red faced bundle, a squalling baby wrapped in pink - a baby girl. Where were the Franciscan sisters in this Catholic Hospital who would act charitably toward poor Julie and her poor baby? Was it because the young mother had no husband, and was blamed - a flagrant sinner? Was this to be the fate of Juanita? After a visit to the exhausted Julia, the girls turned the Ford toward home with heavy hearts, but not saying a word to each other.

Because Juanita was still wearing her usual clothing and looked no different to the uncritical eye, she remained in school up to the Christmas holidays. On her visit to the monastery, Sue told Sister Michael that Juanita planned to move into her quarters after New Years.

Decorating the house for Christmas had become a custom for the Martinez's that grew from very little the first years as a family when they lived in the three room hut. Now in their larger house they had room for a Christmas tree and followed the customs of their American friends. Evelio with the two boys would go out into the woods behind the house and find a tree – usually not a very well developed one, but once decorated with homemade ornaments: frosted ginger cookies hung from strings, ropes of popped corn, painted cardboard figures of Mary, Joseph and the baby, angels with fluffy cotton-batting wings, pinecones painted with glue and rolled in powdered sugar (their favorite), the effect was very satisfying. Maria had broken a mirror. When broken into even smaller pieces, and handled with gloves very carefully by Jody, these glittering shapes took glue and strings and gave a bright reflection to their efforts. A year before, the first string of lights was purchased – ohs and ahs had greeted the lighting.

This year their papa found a jack-pine with two trunks. Fran crawled under with the saw while Jody and Evelio put tension on the trunks bending them for the cut to be easier. Jack pines are sparse trees; the branches are far apart and the needles are too long for any kind of full effect, but the two trunks of this tree made it much less straggly than otherwise. Papa even bought another string of electric lights to reflect off the mirror pieces promising this to be the very best of Christmas trees.

In the week before Christmas, the weather became vicious against both man and animal. When they let Principe out, he was gone just minutes and came back covered with snow, lying down to lick his snow packed paws. The roar of the waves against the ice castles now forming at the water's edge, and the snarling of the wind made the fireplace and the group around it with their glowing faces a picture fit for a Christmas card. The beautiful tree, beautiful in their eyes, centered the room and aside from the red dancing flames was the only light. On the ceiling the different colors of tree lights reverberated, dancing around the beams. The musical instruments were brought out again, and the evening was full of the sound of beloved carols. Some, Feliz Navidad, and ladelante Fiel they sang lustily in Spanish. It was in the middle of one of these songs that there had been a loud knock on the door. A joyful scene greeted the visitor brought in by Jody who had been sent to the door.

Who would be out and around during this storm? In the dim light six pairs of eyes squinted at the hooded form that followed Jody into the room. It was Juanita who shrieked out, "Tom!" He rushed towards her, stumbling over Principe and nearly knocking down Evelio who had jumped to his feet. "Stop there, Tom!" His big hand grabbed a sleeve stopping the forward rush. "Wait, now! Juancaro, sit down! *Desordinardo!* Things right! Now, take a breath – here, right here," and he pointed to his empty chair. Tom obediently sat where he was directed.

"How is it Tom? Why are you here?"

Tom stuttered to find words. "I...I.. know. I know you are angry with me. I am so sorry! There is so much to tell you. Please, I...I don't know how to begin."

"Why did you not come before?"

"That's what I want to explain. It was not because I didn't want to."

"But you didn't . . . Juanita . . . she suffers."

She had buried her face in her hands. Sisters on both sides had one arm around her and with the other were touching her head and arms, trying to soothe and comfort without any effect. Maria stood and walked over hands on hips in front of Tom who was half out of the chair with anxiety.

"Tell me! Why have you kept Juanita in such misery? You told Evelio that you would make it right . . . that you would become honorable man and marry this dear Juanita. Dear, dear Juancaro, what did she do to you that you should treat her so all these months. We wait and wait. Nothing!"

"Please. I know it seems wrong. It was all I could do. But I will make it right now." "How make it right."

"We have four days before Christmas, and the marriage license takes three days of waiting. I want to marry Juanita the day before Christmas. Father Forette has said he will marry us."

"Wait! Wait! You see Father Forette?"

Juanita's hands fell to her lap, her body leaning forward in astonishment. The sisters' hands had dropped. The three looked like ballet figures held in a poised position ready for a next synchronized move.

"Yes, yes, of course, but I haven't told you all."

"Tom stop! I get chair, too." Shaking his head, Evelio moved into the dining room and brought back his big arm chair from the head of the table. Sitting heavily in it, he motioned Tom to go on, "What is story?"

"When I told you on the phone in October that I would marry Juanita, I was sure that because you knew me, you would believe my promises. I had to depend on that because my father and mother made me make them promises. I went home the next weekend after you were there.

After hours of bitter argument, they finally half believed that I was sincere in my love for Juanita, that I truly wanted to marry her – none of their objections about the cultural chasm between us, or about my need for education – none of this could sway me. All right, my father finally said, if I would promise them to neither talk to any of you, or write, if I would pass that test – actually I think they were testing Juanita, too, and I still felt that way in two months, they, too would give the matter more thought. They were disappointed, they said, that neither Juanita nor I would think about a medical solution. The idea sickened me, and I was sure it sickened you. Our Episcopal priest had encouraged them to propose abortion. Over that time when I was forced to pray more than I had ever prayed before, I came to another decision. I would become Catholic. I have never known a more religious family than this one. Besides whatever religion Juanita is, I want to be."

At this Jody and Fran looked at their Papa seeing him anew. Certainly, it was he who kept them all faithful even when they didn't feel like it. Tom's opinion, that of an older fellow than themselves, one whom they had always respected, broke over them like waves. For his part Evelio had become speechless.

"I saw a priest at the Catholic center at school. When I told him the whole story and what I wanted to do, he gave me six weeks of instruction, I went to my first confession – believe me, it felt good, and had my First Communion. I had to get my baptism record from my Mom. It was then that they finally realized that I would not turn back. Over the last couple of weeks they have gradually become more supportive. I called them yesterday about the wedding date – in Father Forette's rectory the day before Christmas, and they have promised to come. That is, if Juanita will have me?"

He got up from the chair and moved towards her. This time Evelio made no move. Tom got down on his knees in front of her, reached up and took her damp hands in his, "Dear Juanita, I am so sorry for all I have done to make you suffer. Will you forgive me? And will you marry me? Will you be my wife?"

Maria had stepped back and plunked down on a chair in the midst of this explanation. She was as stargazed as a deer caught in a headlight. For her part, Juanita, looking more like a Madonna than ever before, leaned over and kissed Tom on the forehead. He reached around her and pulled her face down to his, kissing her firmly on the lips. "Oh, thank you! Oh, thank you! Oh, thank you." With his head in her lap, she stoked his hair.

"Gracias Cielo Padre." Evelio's eyes had closed and his chin was resting on his heaving chest.

Chapter eleven

After Tom left at midnight, the household was far from sleep. The whole story that Tom had told was gone over again and again, each detail analyzed and savored. Juanita glowed with an inner light like a votive candle on the Christmas altar. The others all radiated her joy. What a Christmas this would be! Thank you, Jesus, Mary and Joseph. St. Joseph had always been Evelio's personal saint. The family had a picture of him holding little Jesus on one arm up against his strong chest with his other great workman's hand cradling the baby's head. To the youngsters in the family that picture had always been their papa. The two were indistinguishable in their minds

Finally the boys became quiet; Evelio was nodding in his chair. While Maria sent them all off to bed, the three girls put on pajamas and robes. Then they and their mother retired to the girl's bedroom. Doddie climbed up to her bunk, the others sat on the two beds.

"What will I wear? We will have to go shopping." Juanita got up and was looking into the wardrobe.

"I know!" Sue pushed her aside and reached toward the back pulling out the hangar whose contents were wrapped in paper. Tearing off its protective layer there was the pink suit that she had worn to Cindy's funeral, she added, "We have never known what this beautiful thing was for. It was way too dressy for anything here in Beulah. But it is wonderful for this wedding! Up there in that hat box is the rose velvet cloche they bought for me to wear."

Doddie ventured, "It will look spectacular on you Juan. Come on! Try it."

"I don't know, do you think it will go around my middle?"

It was true – it did look spectacular. Maria went out of the room coming back with scissors and a pin. She snipped off the button on the waistband, measured a new place for the button and marked it with a pin. "All we need to do is move that button an inch and it fits you just right. I don't know where that little person is in there" and she tapped Juanita's tummy, "but he or she is not making much of a bump yet."

"Mama!" the girls laughed in unison. Such happiness! "All will be good!" went through Sue's mind as she felt for the silk packet holding the rosary in her pocket.

"But wait a minute! This suit was purchased for Sue for Cindy's funeral. How will the Ohlers feel when they see it on Juanita?" Doddie was worried.

"That's something to think about all right," said Sue thoughtfully. "I suppose we should see what Tom thinks. Maybe tomorrow, but right now I'm going to bed. Juancaro, I am so happy for you and for Tom, too. God is so good! Prayers are answered!" She kissed her sister and climbed into her bed.

Tom was back at the house before the sleepy ones were out of bed. Maria found him sitting at the kitchen table, the coffee pot was on, and Principe was enjoying half of a piece of toast Tom was sharing. "I hope it's ok to start the coffee. I saw it was all ready and just put it on the stove. I just couldn't sleep, but everyone around here seems to be able to."

"We stayed up quite late. You brought us quite a surprise, you know?"

"Oh, I am so glad that awful wait is over. I knew it was an eternity for my poor Juanita, and it was ten eternities for me. Every day was agony thinking of what she was suffering. I could only hope that Evelio was able to encourage her to believe that I really meant what I said."

"Tom, your mother bought Sue a lovely suit for your sister's funeral. Do you remember it"

"No, I never notice things like that."

"It hasn't been worn since. It is as new as the day it was bought. We tried it on Juanita last night for the wedding. It would be appropriate. She should not wear white, of course. The pink looks so lovely on her, and the soft rose hat is perfect. What do you think? Would your parents be upset if Juanita wore it?"

"At Cindy's funeral? Sue wore it then?"

"That's right."

"I don't know. It's kind of keeping the important things on the same plane, don't you think? You know what could be more appropriate than Cindy's new sister choosing to dress commemorating her that way. In fact, how about if I order a special bouquet matching the flowers I've ordered for Juanita to carry. It can be placed wherever we are to be in the rectory in special memory of Cindy. That would seem to tie everything together in just the best way. I can talk to Mom about it today; I'll be calling them. They are coming tomorrow. If she has any hesitation, I'll let you know, but it seems perfect to me. When will Juanita be up? We need to get to the Court House this morning to take care of the marriage license; then Father Forette wants us to stop over to go over the service and to choose our scriptures. It won't be a Mass, of course, but actually my folks have enough to take in stride without a Mass, too."

"You drink your coffee, Tom. I will get Juanita up."

The day before Christmas the dawn sky was streaked with pink until the sun rose up out of the east as full of vigor as though it were summer. Not even the eighteen degree air could subdue it's exuberant energies. The time to assemble at St. Alban's rectory was 10:00.

The evening before the whole farmhouse at HiLo farm was alight. The Ohler parents and Tillie had arrived by noon, starting their six hour drive at six in the morning. After arriving, the cleaning didn't end until nearly midnight – woe to the dust and grime! Through the summer Tom had done as most young men do, only keeping up with what he stumbled over. Bud and Lois Ohlers had not come to their farm once through the whole summer, and now Lois and Tillie, enlisting Mercedes, Torres' wife, went over the whole place, not resting until they were satisfied with shine and sparkle. The washing machine, a new automatic, one of the first to be sold from Oxley's, had been installed just the day before, and it was kept busy with load after load of towels, bedding and everything else that was washable. The other new appliance was a wonder! A dryer! Who had ever heard of such a thing? The Ohler residence in town had just been equipped in this way. Without it the extensive laundering would have been impossible. No one would try to dry coverlets, blankets and bedspreads, sheets and towels outdoors in winter weather.

After midnight, the three women sunk gratefully into their beds. Bud Ohlers, too, had gone over the sheds and machinery with Torres. He was pleased that Tom had done so well the first year, managing the cherry operation by himself. Of course, as foreman, Torres couldn't be beat. A man of integrity and accustomed to hard work, he was a respected overseer of the workers. He could be tough when necessary, but he was also fair. His was the only Mexican family that lived on the farm all year. The clapboard five room house just off the highway on the drive was home to him and Mercedes. They had no children. The morning of the wedding Maria ran over and invited them.

"What will I wear?" Mercedes lamented. She was a trim, small woman with grey hair she wore curly all over her head. "Your navy blue church dress with the white collar. I'm wearing my gaudy one. That's what the children call it, 'the gaudy one.' It's an English word I don't know, I guess that means colorful. But I like yellow flowers!"

The simple service was as beautiful as anything Lois Ohlers, with all her years in social life, could remember. Certainly Mercedes wiped her eyes more than at a funeral for her aunt the

week before, and not for sadness but for the beauty. Maria and Eb stood arm in arm after Evelio walked back to her from leading Juanita up to Father and Tom. As for Tom, he stood there in a dark suit with a blue stripped tie, as handsome as a young man could be. Everyone took a second look, he suddenly seemed so manly. Dolores was her sister's attendant, and Francisco stood with Tom. Juanita, shining with happiness, her black hair pulled back under the rose cloche that matched the rose of her cheeks and lips, was as lovely in the pink sharkskin suit as a graceful stem of blushing larkspur. The bouquet that Tom had chosen for her, deep pink roses with baby's-breath, she carried in both hands at her waist. A large vase of the same flowers was the only décor in the room, and stood just behind the priest; the ribbon said *In Memoriam*. It was for Cindy.

If Lois Ohlers had not been informed about the connection to Cindy in the bride's clothing, she would never have remembered. "I was so wrapped up in my sorrow that day, I scarcely knew where I was." So there was no problem about any unhappy connections with this day and the day that had been only ten months before. Quite otherwise. Cindy had been brought into the occasion, a beloved, never to be forgotten member of the family.

After the vows were made, the final blessing prayed, and Tom had kissed his blushing bride, Mr. Ohlers with his arms outstretched strode to the couple and putting his arms around them both, in a broken voice said to all, "Friends! What a happy moment this is for Lois and myself. We thank each one of you. First for being such good people that you can forgive the mistakes, yes, real mistakes in judgment we have made, and then for loving and caring for our family, now grown to include this lovely Juanita. We hope that you will all be our guests at the hotel for a luncheon – and a little surprise we have for the bride and groom. So, please, come along with us, and thank you, Father, for your blessing on this marriage. Won't you come with us, too?"

Within the hour the group reassembled in the hotel dining room. A very large table decorated with holiday candles and greens had been set up in the center of the room. So close to Christmas, the hotel housed only a few guests, and these were guided to chose another luncheon spot. Bud Ohlers placed Juanita and Tom at the head of the table with himself and Lois on the side next to Juanita, and Maria and Evelio on the side next to Tom with Father Forette next to the Martinezes. The rest found their places. Tillie had known Mercedes for all the years the two had served the Ohlers. Together they herded Inigo Torres, who would have sat down at the foot, up near the head of the table. The children, Sue, Dolores, Francisco, and Jody sat together on the other side. After waitresses bustled in with trays, Evelio stopped the forks in mid poise as he did at home, and offered the grace, putting a hand on the heads of bride and groom. Soon all were engaged with conversation and food.

As the last bite of a delicious dessert concoction was consumed with sighs, and a wine toast made to the bride and groom by Jody, prompted by Sue, Mr. Ohlers rose from his place.

"Lois and I have a gift for the bride and groom. As you know last year was a year of great change for us, even as it is ending with great change for us. The first change was because of a deep sorrow. Our lovely, beloved daughter Cindy died in March. At that time your family provided indispensable support in Sue. Thank you, Sue. You will always be very dear to us. Somehow the light went out for us at HiLo. Neither Lois nor I had the desire to be at a place that had been our favorite place on earth. Without Cindy it held only the aching memory of the joyous child she was – the summer days were full of sunshine because of her. We chose to stay away, and we entrusted the whole operation to Tom for the first time. He had grown up working on the place: the machines, the orchards, the whole thing. Inigo Torres! We could never have survived as a business without you! You were there to guide our greenhorn son into taking

charge. I could trust you! It is a wonderful thing to have a man like yourself who would be so trustworthy that I could turn my back on things and know that it was in good hands.

"Today, Lois and I are relinquishing HiLo farm. A good deal of lawyer work has gone into this. The paper work is complete. When we realized finally that Tom and Juanita were meant to be – now it seems even more clear, we went ahead. First, we are deeding to Inigo and Mercedes Torres the home they live in and twenty acres of land to the north along the bay. Someday I am told this land will be valuable. It gains in value every day. I did not set aside retirement funds for the Torres's, but I hope they will stay on where they are, and that this land will aid them in their retirement. So then ... Merry Christmas! Inigo and Mercedes!"

Everyone's faces turned to the embarrassed couple who looked at each other in consternation, then toward the Ohlers, while the group burst into applause! "Speech, speech!" Fran and Jody started the chant, and the girls took it up. Mercedes rose and then sat down quickly, Torres, as everyone called him, stood, wiped his brow, gulped and said, "I don't speech. I was a prize fighter once, I feel like someone should come over here and raise my right arm! Somehow, I won a contest I didn't even know I was in. Somebody has sure punched me quite silly this time! All I can say is . . . all I can say is . . . "His wife's voice was clear and strong: "Gracias! Gracias!" "Yes, that is all I can say, 'Gracias!" And Mercedes pulled him down into his chair. The room filled with laughter while the two looked at each other again in complete amazement at the gift they had just been given, and they were not the bride and groom!

"Now, to the bride and groom." Byers Ohlers stepped around the table in order to face them. "We have a little something for the bride and groom.

The little something is – the HiLo farm! And never has the place been so clean, at least the house!

Gasps and exclamations around the table drowned out anything further that he said as he mouthed some words toward Tillie and Mercedes, and went back to raise his wife to her feet.

"Yes, to Thomas Chad Ohlers and his lovely wife Juanita Teresa Ohlers, Lois and I are deeding the whole of HiLo farms and all their operations!"

These words were met with complete silence. Then for so few people, there was a great clamor of voices, and applause broke out again. "Speech, speech!" Tom rose, turned to Juanita bringing her to her feet. She had turned quite pale. "You aren't going to faint on me, are you, darling? You see, I knew about this for the past week. There were papers to sign. But please, are you all right?" With his bride's nod of assurance, he turned to his father and mother, walked over, took first his hand, and then the hand of his mother. "How can I express what I feel? You two! After the disappointment I threw into your laps, to be able to forgive me! Not to just forgive me but to open a door like this for us. It is just unbelievable! Dad and Mom, may we be somehow worthy of this trust you have in us. "At the end of these words, Tom wiped his eyes. Juanita, still looking stunned, held his hand. "And I want to tell you that I will continue taking classes at Traverse. I've looked into it, and though it may take a little longer, I still plan to get my degree."

That Christmas eve when the partying was done, and the Ohlers and Tillie had driven off, Tom and Juanita moved into their new home. On the last Sunday of May, Cynthia Rosa Ohlers was born. She had Tom's coloring and two years later, on her birthday, all four of her grandparents celebrated the little Cindy who was bringing a renewed joy to HILo. On the same weekend, her aunt Sue entered the novitiate at the Carmelite monastery. Tom and Juanita with Cindy, Evelio and Maria with the two boys and Dolores attended a Mass in the monastery

chapel. Then expressing their love and goodbyes they watched as Sue accompanied by Sister Michael entered the cloister through a door where the community priest greeted her in the name of her new Carmelite family. The ivory rosary was the one possession she was allowed to take with her. In a few minutes she reappeared at the door dressed in a plain brown habit reaching down to her bare feet. Each came to her in turn giving her a prolonged hug, and the door closed again. On the other side of the great screen a hymn sung by the angelic voices of the nuns, now joined by Sue, rose to the glory of God. All will be good!