

CHAPTER 9

The New Hope Baptist church was large and recently built, with a brown brick front and a tall, hopeful spire and cross. Sweeping lawns and flower gardens surrounded the building. On the approach up the wide sidewalk, granite stones birthed a waterfall that cascaded a distance over smooth river rock and emptied into a round green pool. On this Saturday morning, goldfish and koi retreated under lily pads as the sidewalk filled with mourners.

Under an opaque gray sky, the full flock from Grace Community Church, couples from bingo night, fishing buddies, and the group from DEQ made their way into the church. Even Rudy from Rudy's Fishing Supply attended. The rain held back in respect.

Meagan wore a dark dress and black wool coat with a small black purse and heels. Over a white shirt and black tie, Ryan wore his only suit, a gray pinstripe, the same suit he had worn to his job interview at DEQ with Gabe.

Organ music drifted through the open doors and mourners filed slowly in. As Ryan and Meagan entered, Evelyn appeared at Ryan's side. She had been waiting for them. The three made their way to an open spot in the right, the sixth row back.

As they walked up, something happened that Ryan didn't expect. People turned. Whispers and raised eyebrows pointed them out and the hum of quiet conversation paused. Ryan was initially puzzled, but then understood. He had found Gabe. If the whispers were true, Ryan had seen Gabe at his worst. He took Meagan's hand and looked ahead to the altar and the cascade of flowers.

Finally, the pastor approached the altar. The organ music ended and the whispering subsided. Ryan turned to see that the balcony was half empty, but the main floor was completely filled.

The pastor introduced himself. A tall man with thick gray hair and black-rimmed glasses, Patrick Jolsen welcomed the crowd. He commented on the size of it, how this man they came to honor was obviously greatly loved. Jolsen's voice put the crowd at ease. He embarked on a sermon about the value of a life well-lived. He had known Gabe for decades. Gabe had given time to maintenance work at the church, painting, landscaping, and performing minor electrical work. Pastor Jolsen talked about Gabe's large circle of friends and how much he gave to each of them, at work, at church, to people in the community. The pastor went on to reveal something that few knew. Gabe and Mavis had met in Argentina while performing missionary work in isolated villages in the Pampas. They had helped build schools, dig wells, build shelters, and mid-wife mothers. And of course, the young couple had brought many to the saving grace of the Lord. And all for what, Jolsen wanted to know. For what? He paused.

The church was quiet except for the sniffing noses and an occasional crying child.

Jolsen stretched out his arms and answered himself. "The giving itself. That was their reward. Gabe and Mavis never sought recognition for their devotion, they rejected it. They never gave in order to receive. The joy they found in giving was their reward. Gabe was the man Christ wanted him to be. So I'll close with this. Count yourself blessed to have known them both. Honor Gabe by celebrating his life. And perhaps by looking at

your own life and taking a lesson. Because it is the giving that matters. And keep *that* memory.” Pastor Jolsen struggled for a moment; his own words nearly choked him. “Most of all, keep that memory.”

The large gathering was moved. Meagan and Evelyn dabbed their tears.

After a minute, Jolsen invited anyone who felt so inclined to approach the altar and share a memory of Gabe. Initially, only handkerchiefs answered him. But first a Sunday school teacher, and then others that Ryan didn’t know, walked up and offered their memories, stories of generosity and humor. The place was full of tears. Ryan briefly pondered getting up and saying something. He could have prepared a gentle lie. He could announce that Gabe had passed peacefully in his wicker chair on the back porch while watching a thunderstorm race through the hills. Shakespeare had been at his side. Or he could tell them that Gabe’s brains were spread all over the inside of his dead wife’s car, that suicide was a horrific way to die, and that he, Ryan, craved more than anything to have never found him that way. The image had its own life. But neither story was true.



After escaping the traffic departing the church, Meagan punched the gas. The little tires chirped and the car quickly accelerated. “Let’s pack for an overnighiter and head for the coast.”

Ryan fastened the seatbelt and turned to her. She continued. “We need to get out of town.”

“Do you drive like this when I’m not with you?”

“We need a break.”

“We can’t afford it.”

THE MINE

“Sure we can. We have the gift from Alex and Anne. We have the coupon book from the credit union. The rates are off-season.”

“What about Sophie?” Ryan asked.

“We’ll sneak her in with groceries.”

“I need to finish the bathroom floor. You wanted to paint the kitchen.”

“The house can wait.”

Ryan exhaled a long breath. “Okay. Just keep the car on the road.”

At the house, Meagan searched the coupon book and found what she was looking for. The Pelican’s Nest was a hotel in Cannon Beach. Yes, they had a room. Yes, at the coupon rate.

Everything they needed for one night fit into a single soft suitcase. While Meagan locked the house up, Ryan put the suitcase in the trunk and tossed rain jackets and sweatshirts into the back seat. Sophie jumped in the car. Shakespeare had been taken in by Meagan’s boss, John Kinsey, who owned a home with five acres and who already had a black Labrador that needed company.

The couple drove Sunset Highway west, past Beaverton and past the small high-tech corridor and into the country. The Sunset took them through rolling hills of fir trees, vineyards, and farms. Billowy dark clouds overhead barely contained themselves. He opened the sunroof and turned up the heat. She put a CD into the stereo and turned it up, Dire Straits. They drove up into the coast range and wound into the forest. The cold alpine air rushed in and clouds chased through the treetops. They spoke little.

The road wove through the mountains for a time and then joined Highway 101. Oregon’s 101 follows an endless series of turns, climbing steep hills to reveal sweeping views of cliff and sea, and then descending as a roller coaster back down to the beach. Stunted pine trees all pointed eastward, deformed by the wind. In the spring, gray whales that have birthed their young in

the Sea of Cortez are sometimes visible just off the shore, migrating north. Today the coast was cold, gray, and windswept.

The Cannon Beach exit dropped down off the highway, down into the trees and deposited them on the north side of town. The Saturday afternoon crowd was light. Couples in jeans and coats strolled the sidewalks. Restaurants and small shops were open for business, quaint bookstores, art galleries and quirky little places that carried an assortment of items to attest to the trip. Except for a few eateries, it would all be buttoned up by 6:00.

They parked the Prius in front of a restaurant called Morris' Fireside. The place was a log structure, built of large timbers. The ceiling was open timber up to the rafters. A generous stone fireplace was positioned in the center and they took a seat near it. They had eaten there before, even sat at the same table the previous August. Today, he ordered a burger and a pint of ale; she opted for a salmon filet sandwich and ice water with a lemon wedge.

She spoke between bites. "My mom called. They want to drive down for a visit."

"We just moved in," he protested. His muffled voice was void of enthusiasm.

"She left a message on the recorder."

He swallowed and mopped up the juice on his chin with a napkin that was falling apart. His face expressed complete disinterest. "We just moved in, Meggy. I want to get the bathroom floor done. We should paint the house and have the curtains up before they drive down to do their inspection."

"I told them to wait a while."

"Good. Say ten years?"

She gracefully ignored the comment. "They need to come down."

"We should take them to some ancient cattle barn in the country, tell them that's where we live."

THE MINE

She smiled at the image. “They’re not that bad.”

“They think I’m a bum.”

She patted his hand. “But you’re my bum.”

Ryan’s family had shallow roots. His younger sister, Julie, had died at age seven. She was chasing the family spaniel in front of their tiny rambler one Saturday and was hit by a passing truck. Their father, Jesse Evans, had worked as a dockworker at the Port of Portland. Jesse had perished in a climbing accident on Mount Hood when Ryan was twelve. Aside from Aunt Sirrey in Seattle (on his late father’s side), Ryan’s few known relatives were sprinkled across the country to invisible little towns in California and Nevada, as though hiding from each other.

In Ryan’s youth, his mother had worked as a receptionist and nurse’s aide at Emmanuel Hospital. But after the death of first her daughter and then her husband, Kimberly retreated to alcohol. As a teenager, Ryan worked nights at a Safeway store to help with bills. When he left for college on scholarships and loans, she was alone. After foreclosure forced her out, she moved to Alaska and married an alcoholic fisherman.

Meagan Evans came from a wealthy family near Seattle. Her father, Stanton Lewis, was a successful commercial real estate developer—malls and large office complexes. Her parents rejected Ryan from the start, never mind that he had graduated summa cum laude with a master’s degree in microbiology.



The hotel was on the south end of town and perched on a bluff overlooking the beach. There were two wooden row houses, two stories each, painted beach-sand gray. Each unit had a patio or a second-floor balcony that faced the ocean. They registered, paid a small fee for the dog, and went to their first floor room. Meagan did a quick inspection: a large single room with a queen sized bed and a sleeper couch. A gas fireplace

wrapped in stone. Along the wall opposite the beach was a fridge, stove, and cupboards. The place was clean.

Ryan stepped through the slider and called to her. Past the patio was a sand and wild strawberry lawn. Wooden steps led through tall brown grass down to the beach. The winter sun, brilliant orange, was resting just above the ocean and blanketed under thick overcast. Wind tossed the ocean about and threw spray up as far out as they could see. She zipped up her jacket and pulled him close and they watched the sun slowly succumb to the Pacific. The glow receded into the water, but then lit the bottom of the clouds on fire. The very last rays seemed to sear the gap between the earth and the sky. And then the color drained out, turning the air a cold, dark gray.

“Let’s go in,” she said.

A gust rattled the slider. The approaching nightfall was bringing another storm.

“Come inside,” she repeated. Sophie whined, agreeing with her.

Ryan faced the sea. “I need to walk.”

“Now?”

“I won’t be long.”

“It’s getting dark fast. You could get lost.”

“The hotel is lit up. I won’t get lost.”

Before she could counter again, he was into the sand and moving away. She watched as he disappeared down the steps. Frustrated, she turned inside with the dog.

The wooden steps were dark and slippery with the rain, but he made his way down the many turns and finally stepped into the sand. Above and behind him, the windows of the hotel glowed in the blowing mist. He turned into the wind. It pushed a steady spray into his face, but he trudged on over dunes and pieces of driftwood, and finally, flat packed sand. The howling wind cut through his jeans and dark waves crashed into the shore with a repeating roar. He sucked in the thick, salty current of air,

THE MINE

took it deeply into his lungs. There was something here in the dark that he needed to feel, to understand. This ocean had been beating on this shore for an eternity. Timeless, it witnessed everything, the wants and the needs, the living and the dying. It crashed around him in the dark, drowning all else in the roar.

Far out, a single light pierced the darkness. It shone briefly on a wave crest and then vanished in the trough. Truth was in the sea. The cold Pacific surged around his ankles, sucking the sand from under his shoes. Truth was here, about life and death, who stays and who goes, and why.

A second wave, numbing cold, crashed around his knees and pulled hard. Reluctantly, he withdrew and turned back to the hotel.

CHAPTER 10

The color of his skin was a problem. He was dark, probably Mexican, and Darlene Lochner didn't really like Mexicans or whatever. They looked at her as they tended the flowerbeds, when Arland was at work. At 41, she was still trim, just like her younger sister, Ruthie, who lived in San Francisco. Pacific Heights.

The Lochner home was a beige brick two-story on the Westside, an "executive property" she had told Ruthie, with eight bedrooms, four garages, and a large lot. Out the library windows and between wooden blinds, she watched him rake up the last of the wasted winter leaves that had fallen across the emerald lawn. It was oddly warm out, much too warm for late January. And they were lucky today; it wasn't raining. But they came out even in the rain.

The day lilies would be planted there, bright yellow blooms to surround the 12 cherry trees that bordered the wall along the sides and back. She had insisted that they build the brick wall six feet high for security. But for godsake what good was it, she wondered, when they were already inside the gates? Two more of them were blowing bark dust around the side of the home and they blew it everywhere. It wound up in the potted gardenias on

THE MINE

the patio. And this was bad, but not as bad as the twins. When Scotty and Benjamin came home from college last summer and threw the party in the back? What a disaster! She had led the ladies from the Rotary through the back to show off the new pool and the Italian tile work, only to find that the twins had beat her to it! And with all their frat friends! Empty beer cans and marijuana butts were strewn about, even a condom! The ladies snubbed her for months!

Through the window, muscular arms raked the compost. Thick arms, no stomach. A perpetual tan against a white t-shirt. On a day covered in clouds, the brown shirt lay on the grass. She opened the blinds a bit more, the room needed light. He stopped working the soil and turned toward the house. To her. He was staring at her.

She had just finished talking with Ruthie about her new Louis Vuitton purse, and now the ringing phone jumped from her startled hands. She crouched below the window and grabbed it off the floor. "Hello?"

A man's voice. "This is Senator Phillips. Is Arland Lochner in?"

"Oh yes, yes! Just a minute."

Darlene, still crouching, covered the mouthpiece and turned. "Arland! The phone! It's Senator Phillips!"

Arland Lochner was in the den at the opposite end of the house, busy in the final construction of an aircraft carrier, the *USS Coral Sea*. CVA-43. Lochner had never been in the military, but lately the notion of serving far out on the water for months, maybe years, seemed appealing. He was attempting to attach a delicate radar antenna with a drop of glue that glistened at the tip of a toothpick. But his hands wouldn't stop trembling.

"Arland?!" she called from the library.

Lochner relented with clenched teeth. "Shit." He picked up the portable phone and yelled. "I've got it!"

"It's Senator Phillips! Do you have it?"

Lochner's hand covered the mouthpiece. "I've got it!"

He had never spoken with Senator Phillips and the man was calling his house? He spoke into the phone. "This is Arland Lochner."

The caller waited. Darlene lingered for several seconds, but the Senator was a private person. Finally, a noisy click.

"Hello, Arland."

Lochner's throat seized. The plastic antenna collapsed in his hand.

"Lochner."

"Wha, why are you calling me here?"

"Should I call you at work?"

"Jesus, no!"

"Approve it."

Lochner grabbed his forehead and whined ever so quietly. "*They killed him?*"

"Shut the fuck up. Approve it."

Lochner closed the door to the den and clutched his forehead. "It's too soon!"

"Approve it!"

"Wait until March, that's all! Let things die down!" Lochner was cowering in the corner of the room, now. "For God, how, how could—"

"Four weeks." The caller hung up.