Paullina Simons was born in the Soviet Union and immigrated to the United States as a child. She has lived in Italy, England, Kansas, and Texas, and now lives in New York with her husband and half of her children. She has recently published a memoir, *Six Days in Leningrad*, and will soon publish a children's book called *I Love my Baby Because*.

By the same author

FICTION

Tully

Red Leaves

Eleven Hours

The Girl in Times Square

Road to Paradise

A Song in the Daylight

Children of Liberty

The Bronze Horseman Trilogy

The Bronze Horseman

Tatiana and Alexander

The Summer Garden

NON FICTION

Tatiana's Table

Six Days in Leningrad

Paullina Simons

Bellagrand

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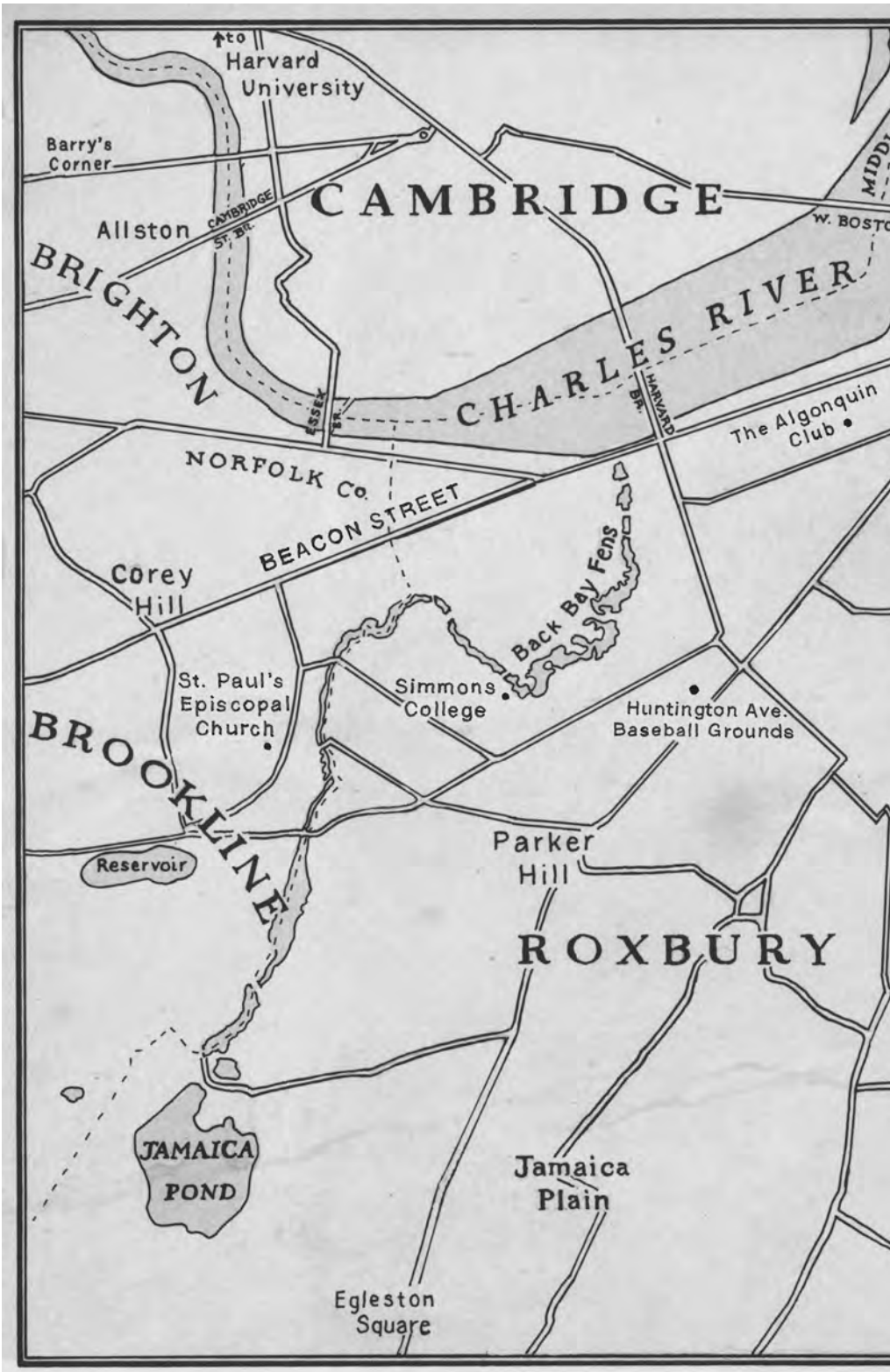
For my mother,
An engineer
A teacher
An immigrant
A romantic
A dreamer
A giver of life
Who looked for Paradise
Every place she lived.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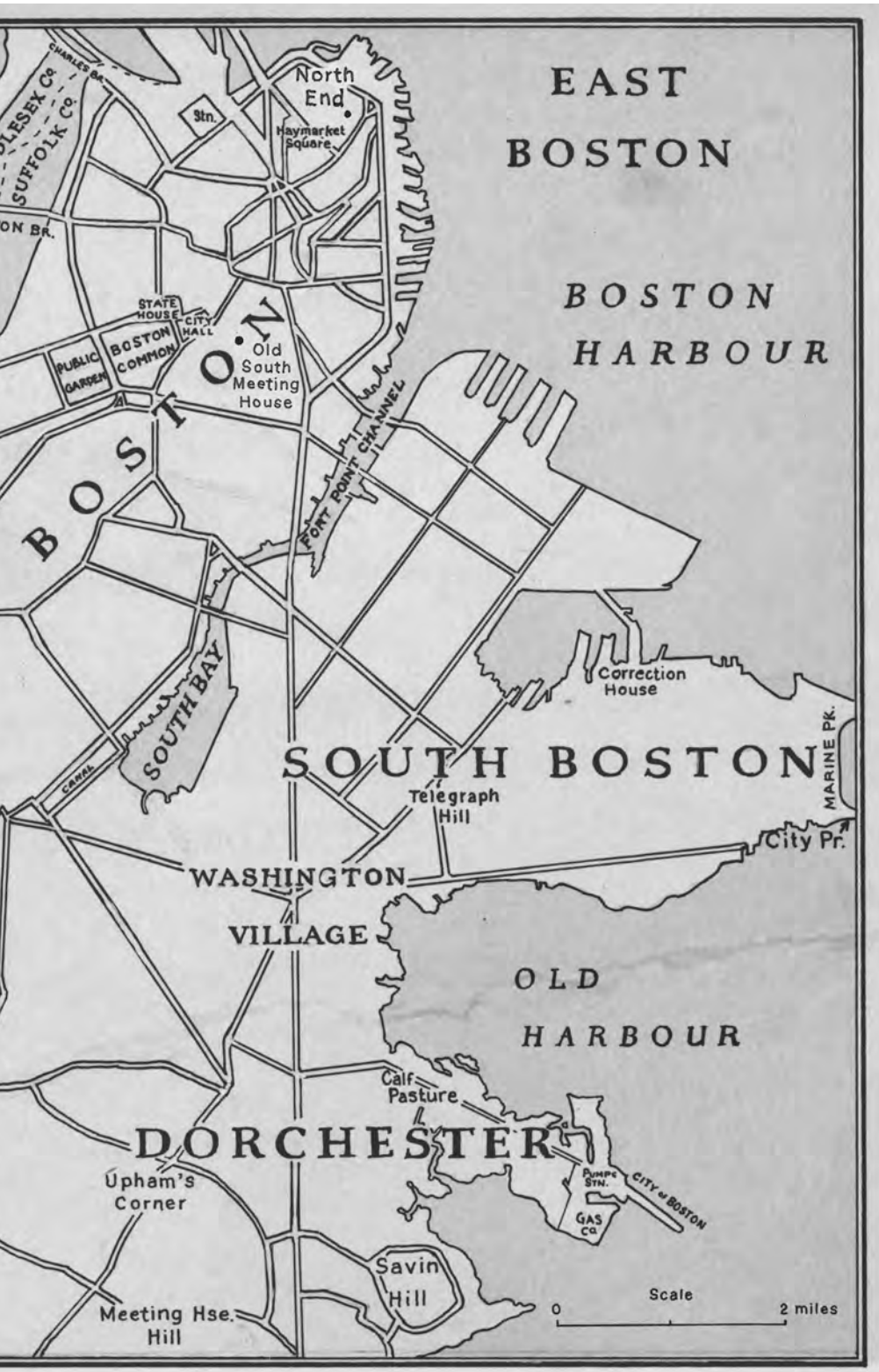
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North End
Haymarket Square
Stn.
CHARLES BR.
SUFFOLK Co.
STATE HOUSE
CITY HALL
BOSTON COMMON
PUBLIC GARDEN
BOSTON
Old South Meeting House
FORT POINT CHANNEL
SOUTH BAY
CANAL
Correction House
SOUTH BOSTON
MARINE PK.
Telegraph Hill
City Pr.
WASHINGTON VILLAGE
OLD HARBOUR
Calf Pasture
DORCHESTER
Upham's Corner
PUMPS STN.
CITY of BOSTON
GAS Co.
Savin Hill
Meeting Hse. Hill
Scale
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2 miles

NEW HAMPSHIRE
to Hampton Beach
NEWBURYPORT
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ANDOVER
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BAY
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BOSTON
BOSTON HARBOUR
NORFOLK
MARSHFIELD
PLYMOUTH
PLYMOUTH
RHODE ISLAND
Scale
0 7 miles. 14 miles. 21 miles. 28 miles.

But heard are the Voices
Heard are the Sages,
The Worlds and the Ages:
Choose well; your choice is
Brief, and yet endless.
—Johann von Goethe

Prologue

1936

On a train a once beautiful woman sits shivering in an old coat. Next to her is a young man nearly at full bloom. He doesn't shiver. He stares straight ahead, stone cold, his face inscrutable. So is the woman's. Except for her shivering, neither of them moves. She wants to speak but has nothing to say. She glances at him. He has nothing to say either.

Their ride is long. Eight hundred kilometers. Five hundred miles through bleakest terrain. The rivers hardly move, the melting ice crushing down the flow, the waters heavy. The flattened fields are black, old speckled snow clinging to the trees gray and bare. It's grim, desolate, barren, and it's all flying by. *O World! O Life! O Time! On whose last steps I climb.*

The young man stares out the window purposefully, single-mindedly. A boy yet not a boy. His hair is black upon his head, his eyes the color of coffee. He wants nothing less than to discuss the unspeakable. The train car is almost empty. They deliberately took the later train, the one no one takes, because it gets in late at night. They don't want to be noticed.

The woman tries to take his hand. It's cold. He gives it, yet doesn't give it. He wants to be left alone. He wants to shout things he knows he can't, say things he knows he can't. He stops himself only because of her, because of his reverence for her—still and despite everything. The things he wants to whisper, she is not strong enough to hear and doesn't deserve to. How could you bring me here, he wants to ask her in

his most frightened voice. Knowing my life was at stake, how could you come here with me? It's too late now for if onlys. Why didn't you know enough back then?

Listen to me, she whispers intensely after the train screeches to a stop and the few remaining passengers shuffle out. There's nothing to be done. You can't think about what's past.

What else is there to think about? The future?

I want you to not look back. Forget where you came from. Forget everything, do you hear?

That's the opposite of what you've been telling me my whole life.

The train speeds on.

It's a long way between two metropolitan cities. They have ample time to sit, to stare speechlessly at the countryside.

He wants to know about only one thing. He wants to ask about the place he can't remember. She refuses to entertain his questions, hence her new commandment: stop looking back. His entire life, he has heard only: never forget where you came from. Suddenly she wants him to forget.

He asks her about the place he forgot. To help him remember what he can't remember.

Stop asking me about what's meaningless, she says.

The past is now meaningless? Why can't you answer me?

Why do you keep wanting to know? What does it matter? God, you've been on and on about it lately. Why?

Why can't you answer me?

She turns to him. Promise to remember about the money?

You just told me to forget everything. So that's what I'm going to do.

Remember only the money. Make sure you hide it again. Keep it secure. But don't forget where it is. Don't keep it in the house in case they come, but hide it somewhere close to you, somewhere safe, where you can easily get to it. Do you have such a place? If you don't, you'll need to find one.

The money! The money is what makes him want to rail at her more, not less. The money is the thing that brings cold to his heart, and cold toward her. The money is what screams to him the brutal

truth: You did know what you were doing when you brought me here. That's why you saved the money, took it with you, hid it, kept it hidden all these years. Because you knew. You can't claim ignorance, which is what I want to believe in most of all, your ignorance of the way things might turn out for us. Turn out for me. But you keep reminding me about the money. Which reminds me that this act on your part—bringing me here—was for my destruction.

He says nothing.

Do you hear me?

I'm trying desperately not to.

Promise me you'll remember.

I thought you just told me to forget? Make up your mind.

It's not about the money.

You want me to remember it's not about the money?

Stop joking.

Who's joking? After what happened today, how do you think your money will help me?

Here not much, you're right. But elsewhere it might buy you another life. It might free you. It's not magic. You must participate in your own salvation. Strength. Resoluteness. Courage. Will they be the hallmarks of your character? I don't know. She shrugs her crumpled narrowing shoulders. I hope so.

He shrugs his widening ones. Perhaps instead I can misspend it. Drink it away, maybe? He stares—glares—at her. Buy myself fancy shoes and red wool overcoats?

Where are you going to get those here? she asks.

Anything is possible with money. You just said.

Please don't jest. This isn't the time.

They whisper under the relentless hum of the wheels, under the hiss of the steam engine.

Tell me about that place, he says. Tell me or I'll promise you nothing.

I know nothing about it.

The warm white place with the boats and the frogs. The carnival wheel across the blue water. What am I remembering?

I don't know, she says, letting go of his hand, falling back against the seat. A nightmare perhaps.

He shakes his head.

She closes her eyes.

Promise me you'll find a way to keep the money safe, she repeats in a breath. Everything else, including the marble palace with the white curtains, will one day be revealed.

Not today?

Nothing is clear today and won't be for a long time.

They sit so close. He is slumped down, deep in the crook of her arm. He turns his face to her, away from the icy window. Tell me honestly, do you think we'll be okay? His tremulous voice is too small for his body. Or do you think because of what we did we might be in danger?

She meets his eyes, a beat, another, a blink, and then she smiles. No, she says. We'll be fine. She kisses his forehead, his hair, his face. Don't worry. Everything is going to be all right. They sit with their heads pressed together.

Ti voglio bene, she says. You are what I love most in life.

Now maybe. Once you loved someone else too.

Yes, my son, and still do, she says, her voice trailing off, the marsh grasses outside, the taupe and gray towns flying by. Klin, Kalashnikovo, Okulovka, Luka. Once another Calais lay on my heart. Once I loved more than just one someone.

Sic Transit Gloria Mundi, she whispers. Thus passes the glory of the world.

Part One

Bread and Roses
1911–1918

If you press me to say why I loved him,
I can say no more than because he was he,
and I was I.
—Michel de Montaigne

Love is not blind;
that is the last thing that it is.
Love is bound;
And the more it is bound
The less it is blind.
—GK Chesterton

Chapter 1

Wine into Stones

One

All love stories end. Who said that? Gina heard it once years ago. But she didn't believe it. That hers never would is what she believed.

Gina set her internal clock by two things. One was the train schedule to Boston, a shining city on a hill if ever there was one. And the other was her monthly cycle. She'd been marking the calendar for the last three years. She'd been making the trip to Boston for twelve, and she was making it still, setting store by it, anticipating it. She would put her long-fingered hands in black silk gloves on the train window to touch the towns she passed and would dream about other cities and cradles, parks and prams, annual fairs and lullabies.

Her gauzy reflection in the glass returned curls and dark auburn hair, hastily piled up because she was always late, always running out of time. Returned translucent skin, full lips, bottomless coffee pools for eyes. Her rust-colored wool skirt and taupe blouse were not new but were clean and pressed and perfectly tailored, a custom fit for her tall, slender, slightly curvy figure. She always made sure, no matter how broke they were, that whenever she went out she was dressed as if she could run into her high society father-in-law and not look like

an immigrant, could run into her husband's ditched and furious former fiancée and not look like steerage, could run into the King of England himself and curtsy like a lady.

Where else besides Boston might the train take her? If she stayed on past North Station, where might she ride to? Where would she *want* to ride to in her velvet hat and leather shoes? If the train could take her anywhere, where would it be? She spent Monday mornings imagining where she might ride to.

Every Monday but today.

Everything was different today, and was going to be different from now on. Everything had changed.

Gina was running down Salem Street past the lunchtime peddlers, breathing through her mouth to avoid the pervasive odor of the North End—fish and molasses—that today was making her subtly queasy. The train had been delayed and she knew her brother would be upset because until she arrived to look after his little girl, he couldn't go to work.

By the time she got to his cold-water flat, all the way in the upper-north corner of Charter and Snow Hill, he was fit to be tied, pacing about the tiny living room like a caged lion, carrying Mary, who was cooing merrily. She clearly thought it was all in good fun, daddy carrying her back and forth, back and forth, rocking her in his arms as if he were a swing.

"I'm sorry," Gina said, extending her arms to the child. Salvo had dressed her, but like a dad would. Not only did nothing match, but he had dressed the child in shorts—in December.

He didn't want to hear it. "You're always sorry." He swung the baby upside down. She squealed more more and then cried when he handed her over. Not to be outdone, Gina held the girl upside down by her ankles. Mary chortled, and this allowed Gina to speak.

"I have to talk to you, Salvo."

"You've made that impossible. Should've thought of that before you sauntered in two hours late."

"It's not my fault."

"Nothing is ever your fault."

"The train was late."

"Should've taken an earlier train."

"Salvo, *basta*."

There was no more talking after that. He left, after kissing Mary's feet.

"Let's re-dress you, angel, shall we? What was your daddy thinking?" Gina dressed the girl warmly and wrapped her snug, then took her out in the carriage so they wouldn't be cooped up all afternoon playing patty cake and staring out onto Copp's Old Burying Ground. "At least in the graveyard there are trees she can look at," Salvo would say. "Anywhere else, poor thing would just be looking at a tenement."

Trees and graves.

They walked slowly to Prince Park, with Mary suddenly deciding she wanted to push her own carriage, which added nine to thirteen years to their already lengthy excursion. They got a sandwich they split in half, caught the end of a late afternoon Mass at St. Leonard's and then bought a few gifts for Christmas. Money was tighter than ever. Gina didn't know how they would manage. Even the holiday ham was too much. She bought new knitting needles for her mother and a scarf for her cousin Angela, a beautiful red silk she spied in a tailor's window. It was damaged on one side and imperfectly loomed, but the craftsmanship on the rest of it was superb. It was a real find.

She returned with Mary after six, fed her some cheese on a piece of bread, stacked blocks on the floor, waited. Salvo wasn't back. Was this revenge for her own inadvertent lateness? He often did this. Stayed out knowing she absolutely *had* to catch the train home. She would be late returning to Lawrence, and then Harry would be upset with her.

Did her brother do this so her husband would be upset with her?

Mary's mother finally strolled in around seven. She was a piece of work, that one. God knows what she got up to, out all hours day and night.

"What, he's not back yet? Typical." Phyllis yanked Mary out of Gina's arms.

"He's working."

"Sure he is."

"Mama, we got you Christmas things!" the little girl said, clutching her mother's leg.

"You shouldn't have bothered," the blowsy, bedraggled young woman said rudely to Gina. "It's tough this year. Where's her coat? I have to go."

"Maybe you can speak to Salvo when he comes back …" Gina said.

"I'm not waiting. You can wait until a cold day in hell for him to grace this apartment. No, we're leaving. Come on, Marybeth, where's your coat?"

"Goodbye, Aunt Ginny," Mary said, hugging Gina around the neck. "Come tomorrow?"

"Not tomorrow, baby. Wednesday."

Phyllis pulled her daughter away from Gina and rushed out without a goodbye. Gina stared after mother and daughter with a sick longing. What must it be like to have the right to pull your own babies out of other people's arms. She stuck around for a few more minutes, hoping Salvo would return, and when he didn't, she put on her coat and went out to look for him.

She hated walking past the brick wall separating the burying grounds from the street. It made her heart cold knowing that though she couldn't see the gravestones, they were lurking there, behind a deliberately erected wall, as if they were so terrible that she shouldn't lay eyes on them.

She found her brother in a tavern down Hanover, shivering in a huddle with drunk men spilling their brew onto the sidewalk and blowing into their hands to keep warm.

"Salvo," she said, coming up behind him, prodding him with her hand. She pulled him away from the others, but saw he was in no condition to talk, or even listen. Gina didn't have the answer to the eternal question: did he drink *so* he could become unhappy? Or was he just an unhappy drunk?

Gina didn't have answers to many eternal questions.

"Where's the baby?"

That she knew. "With her mother."

Salvo spat.

"You were supposed to come back by five so we could talk."

"I got busy."

She saw that. She was cold. "I have to run now. I'll miss my train. I'll come back Wednesday."

"Come earlier. Please. I'll lose my job if I can't work lunch. How is Mimoo?"

Gina shrugged. "She lost another domestic job. She keeps dropping things. But Salvo …" She struggled with herself. This wasn't the time. But it was Christmas soon. "Will you come with Mary, spend Christmas with us? Please?"

Salvo shook his head. "You know I can't. Also her damn mother takes her."

"Don't talk like that about the mother of your baby."

"Have you met the beastly creature?"

"All the same. Just … swallow your pride, Salvo. For our mother. Bring Mary. Bring Phyllis too. One day a year, on Christmas, let's bury the hatchet."

"You know where I'd like to bury the hatchet," her brother said, lucid enough.

"Oh, Salvo … what are you going to do, be angry forever?"

"*Per sempre*."

"Please. Mimoo cries every night. She wants to see her grandchild for Christmas."

"Her mother has her, I told you. Her mother, who, by the way, has found herself another fool to pay her rent." Salvo swore. "Instead of talking to me, why don't you tell that common-law husband of yours to go visit *his* family for Christmas? Tell him to go spend some time with them. Or tell him to go get a fucking job. Then I'll come."

"He is not my common-law husband."

"Did you get married in a church?"

"Salvo."

"Exactly."

"You know he can't," she finally said.

"Can't get a job? What a great country this is." Salvo laughed. "Where one can live without doing any fucking work whatsoever. Can the immigrants do this? How many generations must we toil before we're able to do nothing but sit around the table and pretend we're smart?"

"Stop it, Salvo, you know he's been working. He's trying hard. It's not easy for him. I mean, he can't visit his family."

"Oh, he can't, can he? Well, I can't either."

"He can't visit them because they don't want him. That's the difference. They want nothing to do with him. His father made that very clear. You know that."

Salvo sighed. His black eyes glistened. "I can never set foot in the house where that man resides."

"The man who's your sister's husband?"

"Whatever you call him." He blinked, shrugged, deflected as always. "Tell Mimoo I'm thinking of changing professions. Look at this." He showed his sister a pipe inlaid with intricate carving. "The Battle of Bunker Hill is carved on it," he said with incredulity. "Isn't it fantastic? I want to be a pipe carver. I know a guy. I'm trying to get in as an apprentice." He shook his head. "There's an idiotic rule, though, we're trying to get around. I have to apprentice for twenty-five years before I can become a carver. Can you imagine?"

She gazed at him fondly. "You gonna become a pipe carver, Salvo? Do you even hear yourself?"

They chuckled, they hugged. Turning her around, Salvo pointed her down the street. "Go. Quick. Or he'll think you're stepping out on him. Although maybe then he'll leave you and you'll finally be free like Papa wanted." He stuck some bills into her hand. "Kiss Mimoo for me. Tell her it's for Christmas. I'll have more on Wednesday. I'm trying to get hired by the Purity Distilling Company. They make molasses here in the North End. I get a job there, I'd be set for life. Union and everything. Tell Mimoo that so she stops fretting. Now go."

Two

ON THE TRAIN BACK, Gina thought about Salvo's words. She didn't think Harry would interpret her lateness as faithlessness. He wasn't that kind.

Her hands were on the cold glass, her palms. The train was stopped in the well, waiting for a signal.

They tried hard to make the best of it. Did Gina ever complain? How could she complain when she had been given what her heart wanted most. You'd have to be an ingrate to complain after that, wouldn't you?

Mill workers were being laid off left and right, though it was nearing the holidays. Gina was lucky to have her job. Talent and style, Angela had said to her with approval. But how much style did Gina need to work in the mending room? She wore white to work, she didn't dye wool anymore. She worked with ladies at a table, dressed in a skirt in a room full of windows.

Then why did she sometimes wish the buildings would burn to the ground?

Once, in 1886, there had been a fire. Why did she recall that wistfully?

So many blessings. She sewed handmade costumes, walked in city parades, dressed the nurses, supported their floats.

She worked on Mill Island, but she wasn't a carpenter, wasn't a machinist. Her long curly hair didn't get tangled in heavy equipment. She wasn't hospitalized for months with a near-fatal injury like her friend Pamela.

She wasn't a child anymore. The child labor laws no longer applied to her.

Many things no longer applied to her.

For a time Gina had worked at Duck Mill, making cloth out of specialty cotton called canvas that was also used to make sails. Tonight on the train it came back to her. Making a sail. For a boat on the ocean. Having the wind take her away. In any direction. She dreamed about the sails as she spun the cotton. She worked blazing fast, as always, but dreamed languidly of warm water and boats and the wind grabbing hold of her with the sail up. Well, why not? Harry was such a dreamer. It's one of the things she loved most about him. Why shouldn't she allow herself a dream or two? What, only the young and the (formerly) wealthy were allowed to dream?

Things hadn't quite turned out as she thought they might, planned they would, dreamed they could. It was cold on the train. Like in their house. She closed the coat tighter around herself, breathed into her woolen scarf, curved into a ball.

For one, she truly had believed in her Italian, family-centered heart that after a few months Harry would make amends with his family.

They had spent the summer after they were married at her mother's house in Lawrence while they figured things out. She continued to work with Salvo in his restaurants. A few nights a week she helped out at St. Vincent de Paul's mending their donations. She had intended to return to Simmons College in the fall to finish her degree. She expected to move to Cambridge when Harry started teaching at Harvard again and to commute to classes from there.

It took him until the morning she was rushing off to register for her fall semester to show her the letter from the head of the economics department terminating Harry's relationship with Harvard University.

He said he didn't have all the answers. She hoped he had some. He had been reading so much, out on the porch in a rocking chair, his nose always buried inside one thick educational tome or another. Surely he could have read a morsel that would solve just one of their problems. But he couldn't solve her senior year in Simmons.

"What do you propose we do?" he had said. "Live apart? I live here with your mother, brother, cousin, while you live on campus close to Archer?" Archer was a boy who had liked Gina.

She suggested they both move to Boston.

"What would we live on? Your bookstore salary?"

Gina didn't know what to say. She cocked her head this way, that, looked out on to Summer Street, chewed her lip. "You could, oh, get a job."

"Doing what?"

Gina wanted to point out the sewing machine, the looms, St. Vincent's, St. Mary's, Salvo's restaurants, the houses Mimoo cleaned, the quarries, the lumber yards, the printing presses, the textile mills. She wanted to gently remind Harry of his black contempt for indolent Dyson, a boy proud of his desire to work only five hours a

day. She wanted to tell him that Canney's, the basket-weaving factory, was hiring. She didn't say any of these things. Because you couldn't say them to a descendant of one of the Founding Fathers, an aristocrat. "How are we going to live?"

He shrugged and she saw in his face that he didn't have a plan. "I'll figure it out. This is new for me, uncharted. Give me time."

She stood in front of him in her smart coat and hat, her walkabout shoes. She had her green purse in her hands, that's how close she had been to going to the train station to catch the 9:45 to Boston to register for senior fall. Slowly she put down her purse and untied the ribbons of her hat.

That was six years ago.

"I was going to become even more politically active on campus," Gina told him when she still told him things. "I was going to form a club to advocate for women's suffrage. Perhaps other rights too. Advocate for women to be allowed to attend Harvard University one day. Maybe even teach there."

"Women teach at Harvard?" Harry laughed. "What are you saying? That's not a right, that's folly."

"I wanted to get my masters."

"I wanted things too," he said.

"Yes," she said. "They're sitting in front of you in a skirt and blouse."

"Indeed." The verbal conversation ended and another conversation, less verbal but no less intense began.

"I've already worked in Salvo's restaurant, Harry," she said, picking up the topic of work a few days, weeks, years later. "I kept books, hired and fired, hosted. Washed dishes. Made pizza. I did all that."

"So now you want me to take a job even *you* don't want?"

"You want to continue living with my mother?"

"You know I don't," Harry said quietly, in the little bedroom they shared, with her Shaker nightstand and dresser, her narrow wooden bed. "You're too quiet in your mother's house. As if you're afraid she'll hear us."

"I *am* afraid she'll hear us."

After they had tried hard to make sure Mimoo didn't hear them, Gina tried again. "We both want it, we have to find our own place, darling."

"Well, we can't find our own place," Harry said, "without money."

She hung her head. "Not money," she said. "Work. We can't find it without *work*."

He stared at her blankly. "That's what I said."

"No. You said …"

"What's the difference?"

"Without work," Gina said, "there is no money."

"Oh the miseries of constantly toiling for a subsistence!" he exclaimed. "How does one ever have a *moment* to discover his path in the forest if one is always scrounging a penny or two for his next meal?"

"Immigrants don't have the luxury of paths in forests," Gina said. "They're too busy working."

"But I'm not an immigrant."

She didn't want to remind him he was also without luxuries.

The train ride was too long.

She would prefer not to be cold.

She would prefer not to have to work so long, so hard, so late that when she fell into bed she was too tired for dreams, for nightmares, for love.

Though in some ways raw exhaustion was preferable to having time to sit and think when the trains were stalled and the miseries multiplied.

Blessedly the train began moving. She would try again tonight. Everything had changed. He had to know that.

Three

GINA DIDN'T GET BACK to Lawrence until after nine and walked with her eyes averted past the establishment that used to be her brother's dream, where the crowds used to mob him for lunch because he made the most delicious pizza in town. She kept her eyes to the ground and rushed the mile across Haverhill, past the Common, to

Summer Street, a mile back to Mimoo's small folk Victorian home they had been renting since 1899.

Braced for questions about her late arrival, she climbed the porch stairs and opened the door. Harry was sitting at the kitchen table with his back to her, papers and maps in front of him, huddled over them with Angela, Joe and Arturo. He turned his head to her, smiled absent-mindedly, distant intimacy in his eyes, and turned back to the table. Indeed there were loud words, but they weren't for her. The four of them were animatedly discussing something problematic. But they always animatedly discussed something problematic.

"What is more important?" Arturo asked. "Freedom or equality?"

"Why can't we have both?" said Harry. "Why do we have to choose? I don't want to choose. And I want the people of Lawrence to have both. I want them to be free, to live in harmony, to be selfless and happy, and I want them to have economic, material equality. Not one or the other. First Lawrence, then everywhere. Right, Gia?" Harry wore a flannel shirt untucked and had a four-day growth on his face, there since Friday. His sandy hair was long, almost long enough to tie back. No one had hair like that, she kept telling him. That's why I like it, he told her. There is no one like me. His clear gray eyes were as lovely as ever, his voice strong, calm, droll.

She bent to kiss his cheek. "Right, *tesoro*."

Lightly he leaned his head into hers. "You're home late. Have you eaten?"

"I'm not hungry. Salvo was working and Phyllis didn't get the baby until after seven."

"Did you talk to Salvo, Gia?" Angela asked. "About Christmas?"

Gina hung up her coat and hat, put down her small purse. She took off her shoes, put on her slippers. She went to the cast-iron stove and lit the kettle. Then she spoke. "I did talk to him," she said. "Anyone for a cup of tea?"

But they were buried in the labor laws of Massachusetts. No one replied. She made one for Mimoo, and when it was steeped and sugared, she walked past the round table at which the radical knights sat, plotting and planning, and headed upstairs to her mother's bedroom.

"Arturo says *he'll* come for Christmas," said Angela, her hand over his.

"I'll come too," Joe said. "If I'm invited."

"Of course, Joe," said Harry. "The more the merrier. Gina, you're all right with Joe coming for Christmas dinner?"

"If he brings the turkey, why not?"

"Is your wife joking?" she heard Joe say. "Where am I going to get a turkey?"

"She's joking," said Harry. "She fancies herself as a bit of a comedienne."

Mimoo was lying on the bed, still in her street clothes. She was salt and pepper gray now, heavier than when she had first come to America, but no quieter.

"About time you came to see your mother after being gone all day. How is he?"

"Why don't you get under the covers, Mimoo?" Gina said, setting the cup of tea by the bedside.

"I'll get under the covers when I'm good and ready. What did he say?"

"Who? Joe?"

"Don't play dumb with me. What do I care what that fool has to say about anything? What did my son say?"

Gina sighed.

Mimoo turned away.

They sat for a few moments while downstairs boisterous voices planned unrest and street action.

"Help me get ready for bed," Mimoo said. "I'm tired."

Gina helped her mother up. "Don't worry," she said. "1912 will be better."

"You sure about that?"

"I am."

Mimoo laughed. "Do you not hear what's going on in your very own kitchen? What are they conspiring about? Mark my words, it will be the worst year yet."

"What are they always conspiring about? Strikes. Demonstrations. Petitions for better wages. It's all talk, don't worry." She squeezed

her mother's hand. "I only know what I know. It'll be a good year. You'll see."

"You know what would make next year a better year? If my son and that no-good husband of yours made amends, put the past behind them, sat down at the same table."

"I'm working on that." Gina unhooked Mimoo's dress and underskirts, took off her stockings. She slipped the nightgown over her head and brought her a basin filled with water. When her mother was in bed, Gina laid Salvo's money on the nightstand beside the cup of tea.

"He thinks money is going to make up for it?" Mimoo said. "Tell him I don't want his money."

"We tried that," Gina said. "He didn't speak to us for a year. He had a baby and didn't tell us."

"The way your brother gets around, how do you know he had just the one?"

"Mimoo!" Gina covered up her mother and kissed her.

Mimoo took her daughter's hand, looked her over, touched her pale face, pushed the strands of her dark curls behind her ears.

"I'm good," Gina whispered. "Don't worry. Just tired."

"What else is new? Did you hear? Your friend Verity is with child again."

"*Dio mio,* no. How do you know this?"

"I play bingo with her mother every Saturday. She told me. What is that, her sixth baby now?"

"Fifth, Mimoo. Stop it." Gina rubbed her eyes. "How does she do it?"

"Clearly you haven't taught Verity your foolproof methods of family planning," Mimoo said. "Someone should tell her that human beings in many ways are like vegetables: quality and not quantity is what counts."

Gina smiled, leaning down again to kiss her mother. "I learned that well," she said. "No one can accuse me of disastrous overbreeding."

"*Mia figlia*, no one can accuse you of any breeding at all."

The smile gone from her face, Gina stepped away to the door.

"Tell them to keep it down," Mimoo said, clutching her rosary beads. "Some of us have to get up in the morning."

Four

HARRY WAS TRYING TO sleep, but she wasn't having any of it.

"Don't give me this tired business," she whispered. "You weren't too tired for revolutionary blather."

He put his hand over her mouth. "It was just blather. I'm exhausted." He kissed her. "Tomorrow we'll talk. As long as it's not your usual Christmas sermon."

"Which is …"

He mimicked her. "Harry, when oh when are you going to make amends with your family?"

"What a good question."

"I'm sleeping. I can't hear a word you're saying. I'm dreaming you're quiet."

She shook him.

He groaned.

"Shh," she said. "Or Mimoo will think we're up to no good."

"If only," said Harry, his fingers pressing into her.

"First we talk, then we'll see about other things." They were conjoined under the covers of their small bed. It was cold. They pressed against each other to stay warm.

"I won't be awake for the other things."

But something was signaling to Gina that he might be.

"Why aren't you nicer to Arturo?" Harry murmured into her neck. "Angela feels deeply wronged that you and Mimoo aren't more friendly to him."

"I'm friendly." But it was true her mother was intractable when it came to Arturo. As if she saw black ravens above his head.

"American polite. Not Italian friendly."

"I'm trying to be more American and less Italian in all my ways."

His hands were over her body, under her nightgown, his mouth finding her mouth. "Please don't. Anything but that. Be Italian, I beg you."

"Italian then in *all* ways," she murmured back. "Not just in this one way you love."

"I'll take the baby with the bathwater." The blankets came

off slightly as he clung to her, his mouth on her bare shoulders, the nightgown pulled away. She squirmed away from his mouth, she was hypersensitive, and what to say about that? Nothing really, except …

"Speaking of babies … um, listen … I wouldn't mind a little baby, Harry."

"What?"

"You mentioned babies."

"I didn't mention babies. I mentioned a metaphor."

"I was thinking of an actual baby."

"Since when?"

She didn't want to confess that for a long time she had been counting out her days, crossing them off her womb's relentless calendar. "For a little while now."

"I thought we agreed no. We both said no."

"We did agree this," she said into the pillow.

He had been lying on top of her back. Now he climbed off. "Well, then."

"Well, then nothing. I changed my mind. That's the prerogative of being a woman."

Harry sat up. He was perplexed in expression and body. Gina had to suppress an affectionate laugh. "How can that be?" he asked. "Every other week you're distributing illicit pamphlets about some reproductive freedom thing or other. Just this morning I saw in your bag an article from Lucifer the Lightbearer."

"Okay …" she drew out an answer. "Reproductive freedom also means *having* a baby, does it not?"

"Not according to your pamphlets. Have you read them?"

She didn't want to admit she had stopped reading them. "I don't know what to tell you. I want a baby."

"So sudden?"

"We're married six years. That seems sudden to you?"

"It doesn't seem *un*-sudden," Harry said. "Besides, you expressly told me no babies. Remember Chicago?"

"Yes, I remember Chicago. Our few brief days of rainy honeymoon bliss." The only honeymoon they'd had, she wanted to add, but didn't.

"I was twenty! You can't imagine that at twenty and still in college I would not want a child?"

"I thought it spoke to a larger state of your independent character."

"It spoke to me being twenty and in college."

"And going to hear Emma Goldman sermonize every week? Did you not hear her say babies are slavery?"

"Like I pay attention. She also says God is slavery. And marriage is slavery. And work is slavery. We must choose carefully what to agree with."

"Oh goodness, but is the bloom off the rose!" Harry half-feigned shock. "Quite frightening. Is this what's ahead for me, too?"

"No, I'm still fond of you. Do you want me to show you how fond?"

"Kill me if I ever say no."

He took from her some sweet, not so quiet love, and afterward in the dark, in bed, held her close, caressed her face, her body, and softly whispered to her, as confounded as before. "I simply don't understand your precipitous change of heart."

"Yes, it's like falling off a cliff," she whispered, tired herself, relaxed, sated, happy, and yet still needing to say what had to be said.

"Are you being facetious again? I can't tell with you."

"Me? Never." She half-listened, gently rubbing the arm that embraced her. "But Harry, in our current circumstance, Mother Jones may be right. *You* can't have a baby. Only me. That's the law of the prophets. I can't do what I do now and take care of a baby."

Mary Harris Jones, or Mother Jones, was one of the co-founders of the Industrial Workers of the World and a tireless labor union organizer. She was also detested by most of the prominent women of the day for being vehemently opposed to abortion and women's rights. She told everyone who would listen that the main reason for juvenile delinquency was mothers working outside the home. This endeared her to no one.

"I suppose *I* could take care of it," Harry said, in the tone of someone who might say, I guess I can try making ice cream.

"I don't want you to take care of it. I want to have a baby because I want to be a mother. I don't want to be *called* a mother. I want to *be* a mother. I want to *mother* a child. I want that to be the work of my life."

With an everlasting sigh, he kissed her lips, kissed her between her swollen breasts, kissed her head, closed his eyes, breathed deeply. "Tell you what," he said. "How about we cross that bridge when we get to it?"

He settled in for sleep. Gina was quiet, lying in his arms, barely breathing, listening for the rhythmic rising and falling of his heart.

"Harry," she whispered at last. "*Amore mio*, I think we're about to cross that bridge."

Lightly he laughed, squeezing her. "Why don't we give our coupling a few weeks to seed, sugarplum."

She raised her head from his chest, looked up at him in the dark. "Crossing that bridge now, *mio marito*."

Finally he understood.

For a long while didn't speak, his back to her. She stroked him. He didn't move away.

"Why didn't you tell me?"

"I *am* telling you. This is what I'm doing right now."

He put on his overshirt and slumped on his side of the bed. "Gina, what are we going to do?"

"We'll be fine. Isn't that what you always say about everything? We'll be fine."

"You're not worried?"

"Are *you* worried?" She ran her fingernails down his back tapping and scraping her fingers over him to rile him. "*Caro*, you're not ready to move out of my mother's house, you're not ready to get a job, you're not ready for a baby. Before me you weren't ready to be married. You're thirty-four years old. It's time. Time to take your one life by its unformed horns. You aren't going to get another chance to swim in this river again."

"I thought you were happy with us, with the way things are."

She didn't want to pause, but couldn't help an ever so slight hesitation. "I'm not *un*happy. But I wouldn't mind not living with my mother. I wouldn't mind a little privacy with you, just you and me and our baby. I wouldn't mind not having to work two jobs, be away from you all these hours during the day."

"One of us would still have to be away," he said. "If I was working."

She nodded in quiet non-judgmental agreement. "*Ti amo.* But I would like for that person to now be you."

"Gina … we agreed."

"Okay. We agreed."

"And then you went to hear one feminist after another talk about free love, birth control, women behaving like men, and so on."

"I did."

"And?"

"And what? I got tired of it."

"You didn't tell me."

"You got tired of it so long ago, you haven't come with me for years. Which is why I've had to keep dragging Angela with me to all those meetings. Which is why she met Arturo. Which is why my mother blames me for Angela's current predicament."

"What predicament? Love?"

"Something like that."

"My point is," he said, "we never talked about *having* babies. We only talked about *not* having babies."

Gina sighed. "When was the last time we talked about not having a baby?"

She saw by his silence he couldn't remember. And he usually remembered everything.

"In any case," she continued, "what would you like me to do about it?"

"Nothing, clearly."

"All right then."

"Where are we going to live? We're still at your mother's house."

"I can't make enough, that's true," she said. "I'm not a man. But you are. And you can."

"Did you do this to force me to get some menial job?"

"No, Harry," said Gina. "I just want a baby. I wish you still had your father's bank accounts to fall back on. I know things were easier for you when you could just buy what you wanted and send on the bill to your father's accountant. I won't object if you decide to get in touch with him."

"You know that will never happen. Not after what he did, what he said."

"You can tell them about their grandchild. Esther—"

"Never."

"Your sister might be happy to hear from you, no?"

"I don't know. I don't care."

"Babies smooth over a lot of things."

"Not this."

"Mimoo says …"

"I don't care. Baby, no baby, my father, my sister are gone from my life. Just like they wanted."

She fell back on the bed. "Why are you pushing them away, *caro*? Your family, my brother. Your friend Ben. You used to be so close. Why have you not written to him? You don't even know if he's still in Panama."

"If I don't know where he is, how can I write to him?"

"I bet your sister knows. You could ask her."

"Stop it."

"His mother must know. You could get in touch with her. You got along with his mother so well."

"Yes, but she gets along too well with my father. I'm not going to reach out to her, Gia. Besides, I don't think Ben wants to hear from me anyway."

"You can't be on the outs with everyone, Harry."

"Salvo hates me so much he won't step foot in his own mother's house. How is this my fault?"

Gina said nothing, biting her lip, *forcing* herself to say nothing. Why did she have to be a Sicilian? They always blurted out every damn fool thing on their minds.

"Do you know what Mimoo says?"

He fell back on the bed too. His hand went over her belly. He spun toward her, bent over her, kissed her. "No. Tell me what Mimoo says."

"She says the baby brings his own food."

"Mmm." He kissed her bare stomach, caressed her hips, fondled her breasts. "You know who brings her own food? You."

Five

SHE MAKES HER OWN tomato paste. She is dressed in some shimmering gauzy summery thing, and her hair is tied up. The dress has to be loose and sheer because she is about to undertake heavy physical labor. She might perspire. All he does is sit and watch her, his mouth slightly open, his whole soul short of breath. He has watched her make the paste so many times. He never gets tired of it.

She has been simmering tomatoes all morning, boiling them down. She has strained all the pulp, removed their seeds, their skin. She has undressed the tomatoes.

Now she needs his help, and that's why he's been sitting at the kitchen table gaping at her.

They drag two plywood boards from the porch down the stairs and to the back. The boards take up nearly the whole overgrown yard. But that's where the sunshine is. It's late summer and warm, and it's the only way to make enough paste to last the winter. The tomatoes she grows are always splendid. In his father's house he never ate tomatoes the way he eats them now, raw, cooked, boiled, steamed, fried. Any which way he relishes the tomatoes. It's the fruit from the Sicilian tree of life.

They carry the two pots of stewed tomatoes to the boards. She spreads the thick messy pulp over the boards, tilting them slightly to drain off any remaining liquid. There is much liquid. They set the tomato boards in the sunshine to dry.

Mimoo is cleaning houses, Salvo is sweeping the streets. Harry and Gina make love all afternoon, as the sun moves forty-five degrees in the August sky. They can barely stumble down the stairs to bring her boards back inside. All he wants *now* is to take a long nap, but it's almost dinnertime, and she is forcing him to help her. But now, *after*, he doesn't want to.

They roll the dried-out paste into large balls. He tries not to make any off-color jokes, but fails. He doesn't particularly want to make jokes. What he wants is to nap and then make love to her again. Their hands are sticky with gooey sickly sweet paste, red and overripe.

They clean their hands as best they can. Sometimes they make love again, with all their clothes on to save time, though it's so late, and any minute everyone else will come home—Angela, Mimoo, Salvo, Rita for Saturday night dinner. Panting and disheveled, with the hands that just loved one another, they coat the balls of tomato paste with a layer of olive oil, cover them tightly with cheesecloth and pack them into large glass jars. It's work for a whole Saturday afternoon. She grows enough tomatoes to feed them the whole winter. They never have to worry about sauce for anything they cook. They always have plenty.

Harry associates tomatoes with love. He gets a physical throb in the pit of the place that makes him a man, a flame of fire about two pounds large whenever she opens one of those jars, whenever she feeds him from them, when she asks him what he wants for dinner. What springs to his mind is the heady, acidic sweetness of their sweltering summer afternoons.

Six

IF HARRY EXPRESSED BOTH inwardly and outwardly a certain quarrelsome ambivalence about the regeneration of his future, no one had any doubt how Mimoo felt about it. It was as if all her ailments had left her bones. After Gina told her mother the blessed news, she jumped out of bed, threw on nice clothes and *ran* through the streets of Lawrence, carrying candles to the church and chocolates to her friends. "Finally she's having a baby! She's having a baby!" Mimoo bought flowers, went to the market, made a feast, had a celebration to which she invited what seemed like half of Lawrence. "You didn't give me a chance to celebrate your pretend wedding. At the very least I can rejoice in the fruit of it."

Harry leaned into Gina's neck. "Why does your dear mother insist on calling it pretend? Does she want to see the judge's papers?"

Gina kissed his nose. "I think she'd prefer to see the priest's papers."

He grabbed her around her still slender waist and pulled her out onto the porch. "So she thinks we're improperly married." He laughed. "Does that mean you're a kept woman?" He kissed her. "Why do I find that *so* enticing?"

True to her roots as a good wife and true woman, Gina returned his open-mouthed kiss and tamped down the other Sicilian part of herself and didn't say what she was ashamed to be thinking when he was being all flirty with her and kind, which was: of all the things I am, and I am many things, one of the things I'm absolutely not is a *kept* woman.

"Go to Boston, you two," Mimoo ordered them, not a day later. "You tell your family, Harry, and you, Gia, go tell your brother."

Gina agreed. Harry amiably shook his head.

"Salvo will come around, Harry."

"He won't, Mimoo."

"He will."

"He won't."

"God, why are you such a stubborn mule?"

"*He* won't come back and *I'm* the mule?"

Mimoo pressed her son-in-law: "Salvo is waiting for you to beg his forgiveness. He just needs to hear repentance from you."

Harry shook his head. "I've tried already. It's no use."

"How many years ago did you try?"

"Your son has too much pride," Harry said.

"And you?"

"I'm not your son."

"Charming, Harry," whispered Gina, sitting nearby, listening.

Mimoo bristled. "You're my daughter's so-called husband."

"I'm actually her husband."

"In our country, husbands, even such as you are, are considered family. Not in your country?"

Harry said nothing.

"Like I was saying. Besides, you're still somebody's son, aren't you?"

"Not anymore."

Seven

HALF-HEARTEDLY HARRY SEARCHED THROUGH the job ads in the paper. "What a burden it is," he exclaimed one night, "to keep needing paid work."

"Welcome to real life," Gina said. "Not the pretend one you've been living."

She was right, of course, and he didn't like to argue with her. He certainly wasn't going to argue that he did indeed once live what had seemed to him a fake life. To fall in love was one thing. But to *choose* her was another. He married her because she was the realest thing he had ever found. There was no calibration in his life with her. There was no pretense and no temperance. Every ball was up in the air at once. It was always too hot or too cold; there was too much wine or not enough. His bed was never empty, and that made up for many other missing things—the conjugal union of two kindred spirits, two poles apart when it came to their station in life, but one in the only way it counted. One of body, one of soul.

Still … unmitigated smells and labor, constant labor. There was no time to ever think, make long-term plans, figure things out, barely even read!

"Perhaps you'd like to move to Kalamazoo, Michigan?" Harry asked Gina. "So I could work on Henry Ford's assembly line."

"The man will pay you five dollars a day, Harry," Gina said. "That's ransom for a prince."

"Five dollars?"

"A day!"

"Florenz Ziegfeld spends three hundred dollars on stage pillows!" Harry said. "Three hundred dollars *each*."

"Perhaps then you should be the one selling him these magical pillows."

"There you go, always turning every conversation back to money."

"I don't do that."

"Yes, you do."

"You mean lack of money?"

"Whatever you want to call it."

And just like that, another casual spousal back-and-forth turned into intemperance. No calibration ever.

Harry found a day job that lasted a week, delivering paper goods to local restaurants. He drove a small truck, picking up supplies from Weston and delivering them to Lawrence and Andover. The job ended a week before Christmas. Gina said nothing. He said nothing, but went out looking again. A few days later he returned home excited, and told her he had found work. She was still in her first trimester and throwing up all the time.

"Full-time work?" Gina tried to sound excited herself.

"Absolutely," he said, getting the corkscrew for the celebratory red wine.

"That's wonderful! With who?"

"Bill Haywood."

Gina stepped back from the table at which she had been about to sit. "Big Bill Haywood?" she repeated incredulously.

"Is there another?"

She fell quiet. Bile came up in her throat.

"I already help Joe and Arturo with organization, ideas, planning. I'm always helping them with this speech and that. Now I'll be paid for it. Better than doing it *pro bono*, no?"

"I don't know how to answer that," Gina said. "What could one-eyed Bill possibly want with you, Harry?"

"Why wouldn't he want something to do with me?"

"What's the job?"

"I don't know. He needs something, I do it."

"See, *that's* the part that worries me."

"It shouldn't worry you." He opened the wine and fetched two glasses. "It should make you happy."

"Big Bill!" she exclaimed again. "You do know that he recently stood trial for blowing up a man with a bomb, right?"

"Come on, you know he wasn't convicted."

She shook her head, but not hard; the nausea was making it difficult to react properly. "This is a terrible omen. Why is he in town? What is he planning here? This isn't a mining town." Bill Haywood had been the president of the Miners Federation before it joined with the Socialists to become the Industrial Workers of the World. "The man's had nothing but trouble with the law, and has wreaked nothing but havoc every place he's been. Every town he goes to, someone dies, gets shot, stampeded, beaten, bombed. Every single one! He has never passed through a town without taking half a dozen scalps with him. You want to get involved with that?"

"It's not his fault he's hated by the police. It's because he's so effective. And you told me to get a job."

"Harry," said Gina. "There are a number of jobs I could get that might not be palatable from your perspective, if you know what I mean. If you said to me, get a job, and I came back with something less than maritally appropriate, would you be blasé about it?"

"Okay, you're comparing Bill Haywood to Miss Camilla's merry girls by the railroad tracks?"

"A man acquitted on a technicality for murdering another man in front of his own home is going to pay you for doing whatever he tells you?" Gina tightened her grip on the chair. "Yeah, I'd say it's worse."

Harry put down the wine glasses without pouring.

"Since when did you become so fastidious?" he asked coldly. "I don't recall you turning up your nose at your radical anarchist Emma Goldman whose speeches inspired a man to assassinate a president."

"Emma Goldman is all talk," said Gina. "Bill Haywood is violent action. He calls it direct action. But we know what he means, don't we?" She put her hands together in supplication. "We're having a baby. We have to think about these fine distinctions."

"Did you think about those distinctions as you illegally distributed Goldman's pamphlets on birth control in felonious violation of the Comstock Act?"

"That was obviously a major failure," she said, placing her hands on her churning and twisting abdomen. She didn't have the stomach for a fight.

"On her part or yours?"

"On mine."

He watched her warily for a few moments. "Don't be upset," he said. "We need the work. I don't want to disappoint you. It'll be all right. I'll stay with Bill just until something better comes along. He gave me a small advance for Christmas. At least we'll be all right until the new year."

Grabbing the bottle, Gina poured the wine herself. "Better count your Advent blessings now, Bill Haywood's flunky," she said, raising her glass to her husband. "If I've read about him correctly, there'll be precious few of them soon."

They clinked, drank their wine. The fight always fizzled out of the both of them. Intimacy was a salve to smooth the sharpest edges.

"Big Bill thinks I'm too involved with you," Harry said that night in bed. "He says I can't be of help to him if my allegiance is divided."

Gina wrapped her arms, her legs around her husband. "Did you tell him your allegiance isn't divided at all? It is wholly to me."

"You're just making his point. Bill told me that great men cannot be great or become great when they are surrounded"—he groaned—"by their women."

She did not unwrap herself. "And you believe him?"

"Right now, I can't think straight."

The covers went over their heads. The covers flew off their overheated bodies.

Afterward: "Can you think straight now?"

"I fear he may be right."

Gina shook her head in exasperation, in muted affection. "Truly," she said, "and in this case literally, in the kingdom of the blind, the one-eyed man is king."