

At Bay

Lisa Torcasso Downing

THERE ARE NO WAVES on the bay side of the peninsula. The tide simply licks up and back, up and back on the sand shore. Beyond the shore, tall sailboats of vivid blues, greens, and yellows ease across the bay and out to sea. Two young-bodied windsurfers own the center of the bay. His body ripples as his muscles manage his sail, but hers plunges and dips as she fights to keep her sail erect. It falls and fills with salt water. She bends, struggling, fighting to lift the sail again. He glides and passes, glides and passes.

Across the bay, at the far side, the *Jesus Saves* is docked. In less than an hour, with its fresh-voiced crew, it will begin its pattering journey up the bay shore and down the coastline. A lone man will stand on its deck, calling all sun worshippers to repentance through his bullhorn. A few on the ocean side of the peninsula will look up, and some may even follow the boat with their eyes, but those on the bay side—the handful of locals who bother appearing before the *Jesus Saves* passes—will not hear the message again. Instead they will watch their neighbors, mostly singles, young and middle-aged, arrive one by one, each returning to his or her own summer sand niche. Barb will stretch herself out below the small, sand-docked sailboats which separate the bay from civilization. Maurice will be near the water. The high school students will cluster together, facing east, the bay, and west as the sun journeys through the sky. Jack will be on his rooftop, sketching. And so on and so on.

But this season the bay has attracted a new local, Charlotte Brown-

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ing. Charlotte will arrive after the *Jesus Saves* passes, wearing her skirted yellow one-piece bathing suit and that same white hat which flops over her face. Her rounded body will have glossed still pinker overnight, and she will drown herself with a bottle of sunscreen. All day she will sit beside Barb, feeling a kind of warmth she hadn't imagined possible on the day she had made her debut here.

That morning everything should have been clear for her, but it had not been. The ocean haze had hung thickly. Looking out of the window, she had considered going back to bed. Instead she drank an instant breakfast, dressed in her tan capris, and wrapped herself in the navy, nearly black sweater her husband had given her once upon a time. *The children should start rodeo camp today, she thought, if Peter remembers.* She resisted the temptation to call home and slipped on the flip-flops she had purchased last night at a K-Mart near LAX. Out the door. *Breathe.* The sandals clucked loudly as she walked between the rows of stucco houses. Climbing the four steps to the sand, she paused. *Breathe.* The salt breeze kissed her cheeks, and she let her eyelids shut tight. She felt a nudge against her arm.

"Excuse me."

Charlotte opened her eyes. A long-legged beauty in spandex shorts and an oversized man's red shirt jogged away from her, across the asphalt.

"No problem," Charlotte muttered. She watched the young woman run and felt sadness.

Charlotte left her flip-flops on the wall, then walked through the cold sand to the water's edge. Across the bay, the *Jesus Saves* left the dock, and she watched it as it sailed free and clean toward the center of the bay. "Come unto Jesus!" it called, then turned toward the ocean. She couldn't help but wonder, if she stepped onto the water, could she cross it? Then she felt the tide swallow her toes.

"Jesus saves!"

A child's scream shattered the wind-chimed air, and Charlotte turned, watched as a father grabbed his pre-schooler just as she leaped off the wall toward the bay sand. Face sulking, the child was carried back to the corner beach-front home. Charlotte sighed. Nothing was saving her. She began her trek back to her little blue bungalow, knowing that no one would be on the sand on this cold day.

It had drizzled most of that first day and Charlotte had cried along with it, then Peter called to ask where she'd hidden the dog food. She told him to look in the garage. He said, "Thanks," and she said, "Did the

kids enjoy camp?" but he had hung up. Just like that. She ordered pizza with pineapple, which she ate in the bedroom, and watched reality TV. The day and the night blended and she fell asleep atop the covers. And dreamed . . .

Worms on the peach tree; broken dishes across the lawn; children without hands; and pianos that explode. . . .

"Oh dear God," she wept in the middle of the darkness, "let the morning come soon."

And He seemed to hear, for He brought the morning in dancing with silver and gold, lavender and blue, all in the wake of the *Jesus Saves*. Following after it, the locals flocked to the bay. Charlotte left her dreams behind and joined them. She nestled a folding chair near the stairs, just below the sand-docked boats to facilitate a quick departure should her state of mind betray her. Nearby was spread a towel with a Hawaiian floral motif. Charlotte let her sweater slide from her shoulders. She hoped the woman who returned to the towel would mind her own business. She folded her sweater gently, nape over hem, and tucked it under her chair. Then she saw Barb.

The smile Charlotte had applied earlier that morning vanished, became lost in feelings of inadequacy as Barb, the bay's own unfound celebrity, a rarely employed fashion model, sat on the towel. Lying down, she stretched long and the milky edges of her breasts puddled below her bikini bra. This was the woman who had been out jogging yesterday morning. Charlotte felt keenly aware that she didn't fit in, not with her cellulite and knee-length shorts. She pulled an Anita Stansfield novel from her purse and began page one.

She was only a few paragraphs in when her feet were trampled and, almost simultaneously, sand flew onto the page. She looked up. The little girl from the corner house was dashing away, her auburn hair bouncing, her bottom naked.

Over his shoulder her father called back to Charlotte, "Sorry, this one's wild," and he laughed. He snatched his girl up and threw her over his shoulder so that her bum touched his ear. He tickled her. "I've got you now!" And the little girl said, "Ow," then farted and laughed.

Charlotte cringed, remembering Brian and Josh.

The father twirled his girl up until her feet rested on his shoulders. Her back stooped, they held hands.

"I don't believe him."

Charlotte pivoted her attention toward the beauty and saw that even a scowl did not make her less attractive. Thinking she ought to respond, Charlotte said, "Is he always so rough with her?"

The young woman looked Charlotte over. "Not him," she said, tugging at her bikini top. "Him." She pointed upward with her chin. "On the roof. White house." She flopped, fish-like, onto her tummy. A narrow stretch of material ran along her natal cleft, exposing her bronzed buttocks. "That's Jack."

Charlotte squinted up through the brilliant sunlight. She saw Jack, silhouetted against the blue sky, a man on the roof, third house down. Before him stood an easel. She flicked the sand off her book. Page two.

"You better cover yourself."

Charlotte looked over at the woman and the woman, head cocked, looked back. Embarrassed, Charlotte tugged at the bottom of her shorts. Were her garments showing?

"No," the woman chuckled. "I mean, you're so fair. I have some sunscreen you can borrow, but it's only got an SPF of 15."

Charlotte examined her arm. She could already detect a patch of crayon-colored pink. "Thanks, but I have some sun block. I thought I'd jump start my tan today."

"That's bad for your skin, makes you wrinkle, causes cancer." The young beauty was up, dragging her towel closer to Charlotte, her perfect behind in Charlotte's face. "Is this your first day with us?" She sat back down, grinning through teeth which were slightly off-line.

"Not exactly," Charlotte said, pulling her sun block from her canvas purse. "I came out yesterday."

"Cold day."

"Yes, I think you finished jogging about the time I came."

"Was that you?" She leaned toward Charlotte. "Sorry, I get kind of focused when I run. Maurice calls it my Zen state of mind."

"Maurice? Is he your boyfriend?"

The young woman threw her head back, laughing. "God, no. You'll meet Maurice. No, I'm unattached and loving it. What about you? Boyfriend? Husband?"

There flickered a moment of silence.

"Maybe a gal pal?" the young woman winked.

Charlotte was taken aback. "Husband," she said and blushed.

The woman nodded, indicating she had expected as much. She said, "I take it you've got time off. Where are you staying?"

"In the blue house down the street." She shrugged. "Who knows? Maybe I'll never leave."

Barb smiled. "Lots of us consider this the next best thing to heaven. My name's Barb."

Charlotte accepted her extended hand. "Charlotte, and thanks."

"I look forward to meeting your husband."

"He stayed home."

"Will he be coming out today?"

Charlotte hesitated. "No, I mean he's back home."

"Oh." Barb shrugged, smiled again. "That can be a good thing. So, what is it you do? Don't tell me. You're a teacher, a professor maybe. No, an electrician!"

"An electrician?" Charlotte giggled. "Actually I don't—I mean, I haven't worked. For a while. But I have an associate's degree in business."

Barb nodded. "Impressive." Charlotte wanted to bury herself.

"I mean it," Barb said. "I took one class at Orange County Community and flunked. Algebra." Her eyes softened. "Kids?"

Charlotte took in all of Barb's face, from her perfectly shaped nose to the gentle look behind her eyes, and saw clearly that this woman was kind. She couldn't blame Barb for feeling curious, so she answered, "Two boys, five and seven."

"Well, I look forward to meeting *them*. God, I bet you're squished in that little house. It's just a one bedroom, right?"

"They're with their father."

The expression on Barb's face told Charlotte that, in spite of her young age, Barb felt plainly the weight of her statement. "Listen," Barb said, "why don't we go to my place? I have a hat that will protect that pretty face of yours." Charlotte blushed and Barb winked at her. "Maybe have a drink? I've got Miller Light, or wine, or something harder if you want."

"Thanks, but I don't drink." Charlotte had thought no one drank in the morning.

"What are you, some kind of Mormon?"

Charlotte shrugged and grimaced with a smile.

"Oh, shit. I'm sorry."

"It's fine." She didn't want to scare off her new friend. "I really could use the hat, though."

Barb gave one firm nod. "Okay. We'll have iced tea. It's early anyway." Barb was up, flinging the sand from her towel.

Charlotte rose. "Maybe water?"

"I've got Arrowhead," she said. "That good enough?"

Charlotte picked up her purse. "Tap is fine." Barb made a face at that suggestion, and off they went, chatting their way to Barb's house. Their words rose delicately, creating that first sky-blue layer of their friendship. This friendship, which filled them with a sort of soul-giving oxygen, grew as the summer grew, day after day, night after night, wine cooler and bottled water after wine cooler and bottled water.

Charlotte accepted Barb's flopping white hat and has worn it ceaselessly. As a result, her face has whitened while her body has ripened. She has burnt and peeled, burnt and peeled. The summer has passed with much the same rhythm. Time has brought Charlotte additional acquaintances. She soon met Maurice. He had approached her, not Barb, which surprised her, and said his mission in life was to know all the beautiful ladies he saw. She stammered a nervous hello and thank you. Then Maurice squatted in front of her and rested a palm on her thigh, making it wag against the bone. "Got any beer?" he asked.

"Back off," Barb said. "She's Mormon."

Maurice examined Charlotte, who was still blushing.

"Repent tomorrow," he said, not skipping a beat. "Let's go have a beer." He had a dashing smile.

Suddenly her mind issued a memory of her last date night with her husband. Dressed in layers, they'd sat on opposite sides, repeating, repeating without communicating anything. She looked squarely at Maurice, wondered that he knew nothing about it all, and felt a hollowness within the never-ending circle of her eternity.

Barb tapped Maurice on the shoulder. "Those kids over there," she said, pointing to a group of high schoolers, "have beer."

"Thanks for the tip." He rose and to Charlotte added, "I'm not an alcoholic or anything."

Barb laughed. "Just a freeloader."

"How do you think I keep from being an alcoholic?" He bowed to Charlotte. "Hope to see more of you soon, babe." He trotted toward the circle of laughter.

"God knows that man tries hard to be a cad," Barb said as the two women watched Maurice catch a beer and flick it open one-handed.

Just as Maurice began to chug, the two teenage boys jumped up and grabbed one of Maurice's arms. Barb softly back-handed Charlotte, then pointed toward the scene she was already watching. "This should be good."

They heard Maurice say, "Whoa, there," and laugh as a blond girl pulled at the waistband of his red trunks. That is, until she dropped in a handful of sand.

"Shit!"

The teens scattered back several paces.

"What'd you do that for?"

"Fun!"

"Damn it!" Maurice yelled. Charlotte noticed heads turning and smiles as the locals watched Maurice waddle toward the water, beer can in hand and sand slipping hour glass-like from his shorts. He muttered as he waded waist deep and shook himself. Charlotte cocked her head. As unpleasant as the scene became, each moment of it belonged to the whole of the bay in much the same manner each incongruent brush stroke belonged in a Van Gogh: jarring singly, yet flawless and fluid when considered all together.

"Don't worry about him," Barb said. "Tonight he'll be telling the story in a bar. And he'll get a free round for it!"

Charlotte drank it all in, mesmerized. Life at the bay was life at last.

That night when her husband called to ask where she kept the Raid, she asked to speak to her children. Peter hung up. She cried for hours, cried as she ran laundry, cried over cold spaghetti, cried until she walked to the corner and bought a six-pack of Coors and a small cooler.

The next day she tossed Maurice a beer. The way her stomach fluttered surprised her more than the gift seemed to surprise him.

"Hold on there," Barb said. "Isn't there a Mormon commandment against a woman giving beer to a man who isn't her husband?"

"Naw," Maurice said, popping the top.

"Actually, there's a Mormon commandment against giving beer to a man who is your husband," Charlotte smiled.

"That-a-girl," Maurice said. He offered her a swig from the open can, but of course she declined. Later that afternoon he took her for a sail.

That night, she called Peter to thank him for covering her credit card bill. No one answered. No one cried. And life went on.

Life went on because Charlotte felt connected, finally. Everything,

everyone at the bay was connected: Every day had a purposeless purpose. Warm days were for basking and gossip, and Charlotte loved them. But it was the cool days that she looked forward to. On them, Barb changed Charlotte's look, inch by inch. It began under a hazy sky with a folding ceremony held on the tiny back porch, complete with vanilla-scented candles and mood music—Alanis Morissette.

"You're telling me you wear these everyday?" Barb held the garment bottoms up.

"You get used to it."

Barb folded the legs together, then folded up at the crotch. "Not me."

"They're comfortable."

"This is the beach," Barb said. "Show some skin."

"I'm too fat." Charlotte rolled a garment camisole into a tight bun.

"All women are too fat," the model said. "But when it comes to hoochie-koochie, men don't care." She took the bun from Charlotte and added it, along with the garment bottoms, to the others in the unused suitcase.

"Hoochie what?"

This freeness was what Charlotte came to love about Barb. That's why she allowed Barb to burn her oversized sleep shirt in one of the fire pits on the ocean side. That's why she trusted her to pick out sun dresses and shorts for her to wear, even in public. That's why she agreed to try on bathing suits, even a bikini. That's why Charlotte had the gumption to step outside the dressing stall wearing that bikini and ask, "What do you think? Maybe if I wear a cover-up . . ."

"I think Maurice will really like it."

Charlotte's eyes widened in mock terror. "Anything but that!" Instantly she yanked the bikini bra over her head.

"Damn. You need a boob lift."

Charlotte closed the dressing room door. "It'll happen to you."

"I hear Maurice does them for free."

"That's nasty."

"That's Maurice."

Charlotte settled on the skirted, yellow swimsuit with the updated 1940s line, the era of Maurice's mother.

Yes, this was connection. Charlotte had slipped so easily into the scenery at the bay that she began to think less and less of the outside

world. She lived in the moment in a way that few people have dreamed possible, much less experienced. It was a glorious moment of rest and relaxation that can neither be hurried nor slowed down. No beginning, no ending: Simply living. Simply breathing it all in and feeling your chest swell. Nothing to write down, no goals to strive for, no forethought or hindsight required. Life here simply happens. No one holds their breath.

So it is no wonder that, on the cusp of yesterday evening, the subtle change in pressure brought by the sun's slow exhalation meant nothing more to Charlotte than that she should hold her place on the shore a little longer than the usual rhythm of the day allowed. Barb, whose heart beat with the bay's rhythm, rose before the sun could finish dousing itself; but Charlotte reached for her arm. "Let's stay," she whispered, her eyes leading Barb's gaze over the water which simmered like a pot of gold. "Tonight will be so clear."

Barb did not reply, simply smiled and eased herself back down. Together they watched the bay-goers drift slowly from the sand. Together they blew Maurice kisses and wondered over the black eye he pretended not to have. Together they watched the *Jesus Saves* launch from the opposing shoreline. Together they watched the sailboat captain sway as he waved one hand over his head and lifted his bullhorn with the other, calling out, "Come unto Jesus!" Charlotte removed her white hat, raised it, and waved back.

"Don't do that." Barb batted down her arm. "It means you're saved. You'll encourage him."

A light post behind them buzzed, then flickered.

"Saved?" Charlotte chuckled, then quieted as the memory of her baptism seeped in, the image of her father's beaming face appearing through the water cascading over her mind's eye. "Maybe we should go in," she said, her voice lowered.

Barb shook her head. "He's nearly passed, and it's such a beautiful night." She smiled as she winked at Charlotte, then said beguilingly, "Besides, this is your idea."

Charlotte acquiesced, consciously letting all tension slip from her shoulders. The two women waited silently as the *Jesus Saves* harbored, feeling the cool air caress their sunned bodies, like wind against a sail. Charlotte watched the man from the *Jesus Saves* walk out of the marina, another day done, then she rested her head back. The stars peeked one after the other and the moon blossomed. She heard the faint crackle of water as it

gently slapped against the shore. Then laughter, a summer's laughter, rolled from the well-lighted home two down where a party was beginning.

"I say we have our own festivities," Barb said, rising.

Charlotte gazed over at her friend.

"Be right back." Barb was climbing the steps to the street.

Charlotte nodded and felt herself sink even more deeply into her chair. She felt these moments alone as sweetly as she had felt her first kiss. Though welcomed, Barb's return seemed a breaking of something whimsical. She smiled as Barb, who now wore that man's red button-down shirt, tossed her her sweater.

"It was on your porch."

Charlotte snuggled into it. Barb let a canvas backpack slip from her shoulder.

"Did you check your website?" Charlotte asked.

"Over twenty hits already. I'm making money tonight." Barb opened the backpack and produced from it a bottle of blush and two glasses. "This should warm us a little."

Charlotte half-groaned, half-grinned, half-shook her head, and held up her water.

"Oh, come on. There's hardly any alcohol in wine," Barb teased. "Who's gonna know?"

"God." And Charlotte laughed.

"Jesus drank wine."

"This sweater warms me all I need, you know that." She tugged the collar higher on her neck.

"Can't blame a girl for trying." Barb sipped. "Your loss is my gain."

Charlotte stretched her legs, smiled. The easy sounds of cars rolling down Beach Boulevard swam about her and, as Barb sipped away, she found herself wondering how she had lived without the bay, how she had tolerated the intricacies of her life; how she had withstood all the endless meetings and endless talk of obedience and service; the annoyance of being called sister by those she hardly knew, and the guilt over store-bought jam. And then there had been the breast feeding, the diaper changing, the whining and the whining and the whining. And all this had gone on when everything was so beautiful at the bay. She watched a small flock of seagulls circle the shoreline. Even the gulls here seemed to glow under the moonlight.

Charlotte watched one in particular as it soared low, flying toward

them from the water. The bird glided up, up a little more. Laughter from the second house gave rise to the wind, and the seagull turned upon its stream and sailed straight over Jack's rooftop. He stood, still sketching.

Charlotte held her bangs back. "How long has he been doing that? Up there, I mean."

"Jack? Long as I've been here." Barb pulled a twig from the sand and placed it between her toes. "I swear his walls are an inch thick with drawings." She took another sip.

"You've seen his place?"

"Aren't you a curious cat? Go see it for yourself."

Charlotte shrugged. "I'd feel funny about it. Not being invited or anything."

"Invited? By Jack?"

Charlotte looked down.

"Honey, you have to *ask* Jack. He doesn't exactly come down to socialize. But don't worry, he doesn't bite." Barb laughed. "He's vegetarian."

"Come with me."

"No way, been there, done that."

"Is he drawing you?"

"Better not be."

"You're a model."

"For hire. Now go on, get up. Be a brave little soldier. Everyone here has to have the 'Jack Experience' sometime."

Charlotte stood reluctantly. "Come with, please. For me."

"Nope." Barb held up the wine bottle and swished its contents around. "'Tis my sacred duty to guard the vintage from reckless marauders."

Charlotte kicked sand at Barb and conceded with a toss of her head. "Don't drink it all. 'Tis not meet for thine liver."

"Meet? What planet did you say you're from?"

"Kolob," Charlotte moved away. "Go easy on the juice," she called back.

"Studies show this stuff is good for the heart!"

Charlotte waved off her comment. "Yeah? So's grape juice!" She turned around, straightened her back, let the sleeve of her sweater swing below her fingertips, then moved east with the wind. Jack's house was a mere twenty yards off. She felt self-conscious as she pressed onward, knowing she was under his scrutiny. Arriving all too soon, she cautiously as-

cended his wooden porch, her hand on the rail, and wished his house were lit. She came to his front door, a sliding glass door, and she pressed her face against it, but made out nothing. If only she could see clearly what lay beyond the glass, she wouldn't have to bother him. But alas. She backed up, rapped, and waited. . . . Surely he had seen her coming. Waited Wasn't he going to let her in?

Suddenly the door slid open, startling her. Before her stood a little man in cut-off shorts. His chest showed bare and dark. His long, graying hair was pushed behind his ears.

"Hello," she said. He stood firm, like an unerasable error. "I hear you're an artist." He stared at her. She gathered in her hand her wind-tossed hair and held it against her neck. "I thought, maybe, if it wouldn't be too much trouble, I could perhaps see some of your work? I've heard you're pretty good."

He moved aside. Bravely she stepped into the dark room and instantly felt assaulted by the warm, unvented air. Jack moved again and the lights bloomed on.

Rows of portrait-carrying easels lined the center of the otherwise objectless room. On the walls, from floor to ceiling, hung more portraits, all of bay-goers, many of whom she knew, each captured in either pastel or charcoal. In these portraits, the children of the bay played while their mothers looked on. Men lounged or laughed, their heads thrown back. Windsurfers soared; sailboats glided. The *Jesus Saves* passed by a child.

"They're beautiful," Charlotte said, removing her sweater. She had long since become comfortable walking about in nothing more than her bathing suit. She moved toward a portrait of Barb sitting in the sand, knees pulled up, her red shirt blown against her body, her long hair wrapped noose-like about her neck. "Oh," she murmured, unsettled, as her eyes scanned the whole of it, saw that Barb's image was bottomless, her shaven labia exposed between her legs. Charlotte felt Jack's hand clutch her sweater. She gave it to him and he hung it carefully on the high point of a vacant easel. "Follow me," he commanded.

She obeyed, but it was her own trepidation which moved her, not his desire. He led her to the door at the far end of the room and nodded for her to enter.

Timidly she pushed it open. Darkness. He reached in and clicked another light switch. Instantly she saw the bed: Her throat tightened. A double, with a coarse khaki blanket, military issue, and an uncovered pil-

low. Her stomach fluttered; she folded her arms across her chest. Thumb-tacked over the raw pine headboard was a large charcoal of a faceless, Renaissance-style nude. Charlotte buried her fingernails in her forearms. Surely Jack had the wrong idea . . . She turned for the door.

“Stop,” he said, rolling both arms forward. “Look.” She could not move beyond him, so she did look, her head turning first left, then right as it rode the sickening wave of recognition which tore through her. He backed away.

Every inch of the walls in that man’s bedroom screamed herself back to her. Dozens and dozens of herself hung in imperfect rows around the room. From her first day to the current day. Charlotte bore in harder with her fingernails and moved from one portrait to another. She saw herself in her white hat, the sides turned down like blinders; in her bathing suit, the skirt flipped up in back; She saw herself with Barb, with Maurice, and alone. Usually alone, getting pinker and pinker and pinker. Her face, still white.

Then she stopped, gasped. Before her hung a pastel of her standing at the water’s edge, dressed as she had been on that first day, staring out at the *Jesus Saves*. Her arms, held horizontally, ended in sand-filled fists, palms turned upward. The wind carried the tiny pebbles from one hand down toward her thigh in the shadowy form of an angel’s wing. The sand from the other hand blew away from her body, landing in a pile where the tide would later taste it. The work was shaded over with a charcoal pencil, giving it a darkness, a coldness; not a cloudiness or mistiness, but a combination of day and night.

“This is how the bay sees you.”

She pivoted. Jack’s eyes were cast up, up to the ceiling over the bed. She willed herself to resist chasing his gaze, but she could not help herself. There above her was a blueness, the color of the heavens, yet it was not sky. She climbed atop the bed for a better look. Water. Bay water, water like uncut glass; water so perfectly drawn it appeared as though it ought to be pouring down upon her and upon the bed. And floating just below the surface, a figure; a large, fleshy, pasty, nude figure stared down at her. Eyes glazed. Her eyes. Her colorless face, wrinkled in the water, showed deep shadows along her crease lines. Deep shadows accentuated her body’s folds and tucks. Folds and tucks.

Eyes glazed, her hand raised overhead as though to touch this woman drawn just beyond her grasp. With her hand still in the air, her

eyes rested upon her ring finger and she saw how it had pinkened along with the rest of her body. Charlotte stepped back, lost her balance on the mattress, and collapsed.

Jack touched her bare shoulder. She wheeled on him, her hand now a fist. His arms shot out in innocence and he said, "Easy," then pushed her hand down. A drop ran down his cheek. "Go back where you belong." He led her to the front door and out to the bay. She stepped out. He shut the glass door. Her shadow disappeared when he switched off the light. Alone on his porch, she felt the wind stop dead. She gazed across the bay.

Back where I belong.

The water glistened in the moonlight. She thought of Brian and Josh.

Maybe Peter will tire of them, send them.

The slurping of the tide mingled with the laughter next door.

Maybe not.

She waited and listened . . . and waited some more for something, for someone that could not return. She dared not move. Suddenly the wind kicked back up and she felt it pass through her, east to west, right, left. Quickly she turned toward the ocean, as though the wind was something she could follow with her eyes or grab with her hands. But it was gone. It had passed. And as she looked across the vast expanse of the sea, she knew she never would get it back, never would catch the wind that had once sailed her. She stepped onto the bay sand and chilled as her feet sank. She turned her face into the wind and rubbed her arms against the night as she walked back to her place near Barb. Together they shared that bottle of wine, there in the night, on the bay shore while the *Jesus Saves* slept.