

Saturday Evening, Sunday Afternoon

Helen Walker Jones

AT THIRTY-EIGHT I'M STILL SINGLE. Actually, let me be perfectly frank: Possibly Steve Young and I are the only people in the Western Hemisphere who have remained celibate until such an advanced age, and he finally got married at long last. Both my brothers are bishops, my Aunt Louisa (not her real name) was once on the General Board with Belle Spafford, and all my great-great-grandparents were converted to the church when Wilford Woodruff swept the British Isles with his mesmerizing mode of preaching. A lot of good it did me. Tonight, I'm all dolled-up, ruby-lipped, legs waxed, sitting in a bar on the Orem hill, quietly sipping my Diet Coke with a man I fully expect to at least hug and kiss and become a bit more intimate with, before this Saturday night is over. Long-term celibacy was once my strong suit. Recently, I've begun to wonder if I can hold out any longer, or if I want to.

"Let me guess: You're Mormon?" the man says, leaning back against the padded seat of the booth we're sitting in. When he takes a swig of Moosehead beer, I notice his moustache is the size of a walrus's, his sandy hair is getting a bit thin on top, and he has the weathered, lined face of a shepherd. Still, he's definitely the best looking man in the place. He has the rock-hard biceps of a man who works with his hands. I met him twenty minutes ago, when he challenged me to a game of snooker. Not knowing the rules, and lacking any experience or talent, I lost big-time.

"Yeah," I say. "But just semi-active. I go to sacrament meeting only. How about you?"

"Fifth-generation handcart builder." He smiles slyly, touching the wet rings on the table until they blend with each other. His moustache glistens with foam. In between swigs of beer, he drinks water. In an hour, he's had only half a bottle of beer. He begins to sing, in a soft lilting tenor frail as tissue paper, "Then wake up, and do something more than dream of your mansions above. . ."

I laugh, surprised. "Doing good is a pleasure. . ." I say tunelessly, not wanting to let on that I'm a voice teacher.

"A joy beyond measure. . ." he chimes in.

I finish it off: "A blessing of virtue and love."

"Duty and love," he corrects me. "Fetch me a hymnbook and I'll prove it." His cigarette burns itself out in a gilded ashtray. The air in this dark room is a nicotine cloud. Men with yellowed fingers and unfriendly grins slouch past in low-slung jeans and tee shirts with slogans. I've known men like them—men who finish with a woman and leave her on a faded motel bedspread with her legs bare and her heart pounding and Jerry Springer haranguing his guests on the TV. One of my old BYU roommates got caught up in internet chat rooms last year and ended up sleeping around like that. It broke my heart, as well as hers. A woman of my age who has dated at all becomes well-acquainted with false hopes and humiliation. If she's sensible, she learns to approach every opportunity for romance with caution.

"Still with me?" my companion asks. (Notice I say "companion"—like missionaries, inseparable, kneeling morning and night in humble supplication. Or eternal companions, bound in holy wedlock throughout all time.)

"I suppose you realize I'm approaching thirty-nine," I say tentatively.

"So? I was forty-one last birthday." He touches my cheek. I'm beside him in the booth, my thighs stuck to orange padded naugahyde beneath my black wool mini-skirt. "You ain't over the hill yet, darlin'," he says fondly.

"Actually, I feel like I'm on the downhill slope." There's an uncomfortable silence.

"Well, I figure I've still got a good forty years before I need to make my death-bed repentance," he says.

For many disenfranchised Mormons, the topic of death is a prelude to a gospel discussion, so I take a stab at it. "Ever been to a Mormon funeral?"

"Get real, hon," he says. "My dad's, my grandparents', aunts', and uncles'. I've been a pall bearer probably ten times, including last month."

"A relative?"

"Nah. Next-door neighbor. At the stake house. Five dozen floral tributes. Had to open the sliding shutters into the rec hall. I think it was one of the apostles gave the valediction."

"The benediction, you mean?"

"No. The farewell address. This dude had contracted that Agent Orange, or whatever it was, in Saudi during Desert Storm. He lived with it for years, but ended up sticking a pistol in his mouth."

"How awful. Were you in the army?"

He shakes his head. "Naw. I thought of enlisting in the Reserves, but I was married already, and a daddy, before I was twenty-two."

"Oh."

"I only seen her once in the last year," he remarks. "We never got sealed in the temple or nothin'. My boy, Jack, was the only good thing to come out of that union. The two of us used to hunt together in the Uintas, fish the Weber Canyon, ride our dirt bikes in Goblin Valley."

"That's great," I murmur. "I hope you stay close to your boy." Then I add, "The valediction. Did you make up that word?"

"I don't hardly think so. Might be just a Utah-ism."

"Enough about funerals," I say, abruptly changing the subject to BYU football. He's a fan.

"I favor Jim McMahon over Ty Detmer, Steve Young, or Robbie Bosco, as the greatest BYU quarterback ever," he announces. "To me, college football's the purest sport there is. I'd like to die watching a touchdown pass and be buried in a royal blue casket. None of that purplish navy blue for me. I don't care how many times they change the uniforms." He scratches his left ear and smooths the collar of his golf shirt, which is a drab tan, but looks good on him, with those muscular arms. He is a ruggedly handsome man, not cute in the movie star sense, but definitely what my students would call a "hottie."

"I went to a funeral last week," I tell him. "Returned missionary. His goal was to paint murals for a temple."

"What'd he die of?"

"AIDS."

"Times change," he says, attempting to slide along the booth in my direction, subtly nudging me with his hips, paying no attention to the sucking sound as my bare legs peel away from the orange naugahyde. "Thinking about eternal life don't give me much consolation, neither," he says. "The only thing that does is knowing I own my house outright, my business is in the black, I got more work than I can handle, plus both my vehicles are paid off, and I don't owe nobody a cent."

I wonder why he's presenting his financial statement to me. When we're standing, he kisses me, his cool fingers touching my neck and hair, his nose pressed against my cheek, his moustache tickling my nostrils. "Well," he says, "how 'bout it? Wanna see my place?"

"Yes," I say, not knowing exactly what I'm agreeing to, but realizing I'm in deeper than I should be.

He lives on a tree-lined street in a two-story house. I was expecting a dingy, unkempt apartment, but his living room is large and furnished with wine-colored leather couches, a walnut coffee table, and stained-glass lamps which fill the place with dim, shadowy light. It's definitely a man's room, with an enormous television flanked by towering speakers and four remote controls lying on a neat pile of sports magazines.

"My place is nowhere near as immaculate as this," I admit. "I'm not the world's best housekeeper."

He confesses to having a cleaning lady. "I bet I know one difference between your place and mine," he says. "You keep your scriptures on your nightstand, no?"

"No," I say.

"Don't try to fool me." His hands are on my shoulders, his walrus facial hair brushing my cheek. "I know you," he says. "You unmarried Mormon women, saving your physical favors for the long run, for all eternity. Don't wait till it's too late, hon."

My great-grandmothers both left Utah at the turn of the century to help settle outposts for the church—one in Star Valley, Wyoming; the other in Cardston, Alberta. You can't stand in a room full of Mormons and stretch your arms in a circle without touching somebody whose roots are in one of those settlements. How provincial we all are, how tied to the soil, how small-town oriented, how predictable, how easy to become acquainted with.

"I've tried forsaking sex," I say, "but I lack resolve."

"Mansions above," he whispers as he draws me gently down to sit on the couch beside him. In this dimly lighted living room nothing surprises me: not the faint buttermilk smell of stale laundry, not the ember of his cigarette in the darkness, not the tingling I feel as he strokes my knee and then cups my breast with his big workman's hand, not the pictures of his ex-wife and grown son on the mantel or the hand-written script in the lower right corner, "Our deepest love, Carolee and Jack Always," as though "always" were their last name.

I twist my body a bit, freeing myself from his fingers. Not that I want him to stop, but I feel compelled to do so. Gentle as he is, he scares me. I have too many regrets. After we kiss for a while, he gets up and lights another cigarette. Finally he says, "I don't wanna spoil this by moving too fast, you know? I think there's something worthwhile going on between the two of us. And I don't mean just that I think you're the sexiest woman this side of the Rockies." He's not pressuring me, but still I feel like a naughty teenager, expecting my parents to switch on the family room light at any moment. I wonder if he always dates prim Mormon spinsters who pretend to be hip by wearing their skirts too short.

He hands me a mug of foamy hot chocolate with miniature marshmallows melting into its depths. I can't recall what his name was, even though he told me in the noisy bar. I didn't catch it over the noise of the jukebox and clinking glasses. So, for now, I'll just think of him as Mr. Always, the ex-husband of Carolee Always. He sips pale brown coffee, taps cigarette ashes into the heavy-duty glass tray with "Courtesy of Geneva Steel" etched on the side. The ashtray looks perpetually unwashed, carrying with it the rank odor of Monday morning in airless nightclubs. Apparently, the housekeeper forgot to wash it.

At my age, Mom was the mother of seven. Leading the Singing

Mothers in their annual spring concert was the highlight of her existence. She pressed her best white blouse and navy blue skirt every Easter, and pinned a sprig of dusty silk violets to her bodice. Pin-curled hair made a tight frame around her beautiful, angelic face. Music transported her to the higher realms, she said. Hearing Mendelssohn, she always pictured the actual pearly gates opening inward upon the celestial kingdom. If, with all your hearts, ye truly seek me. . . .

He strokes my shoulder with his callused thumb tip. "How old is your son now?" I ask.

"My son," he says flatly. "My son woulda been nineteen in November."

"He died?"

"Yup. Killed in a car wreck a year ago. Coming back from a debate meet in Vegas. Him and his partner had just won the Western States Championship. A drunk hit'em, doing better'n a hundred miles an hour."

"Oh, I'm so sorry." I'm trying not to become tearful. Everything that pops into my head seems like a cliché but I want to comfort him somehow. So I put my arms around his neck.

"He was a good kid. A lot better'n I deserved. We were buddies." His breath is hot on my face. He hugs me back, and we just sit like that for a long time, not saying anything. I feel his breath on my hair and his broad hands below my shoulder blades.

"I can't think of anything worse than losing a child. You must miss him terribly." Listening to myself talk, I sound like a cheap greeting card, but there's no other way to voice these sentiments.

"I don't tell people about him," he says, his moustache twitching against my cheek as he speaks. "I hardly ever mention him. Even now, a year later, I can't do it without getting choked up." He looks at me for a long time, then kisses me in a sweet and non-threatening way. "I don't know why I told you. Except I had to do something. I want you to trust me, but I can tell you're not ready to have sex with me yet," he says with an ironic little laugh. "That's fine. I don't mind going slow. Hell, I haven't dated a woman in over a year. Haven't even given a woman the eye in all that time." I wonder why his wife left. Was it because their son died? Or before that? He seems like a tender man, and considerate. My blouse tugs snugly under my armpits. I still have my arms draped loosely around his neck. Tonight, I was only looking to have a little fun, to find some physical affection while still retaining the upper hand. This is much more than I bargained for, emotionally.

"So you're telling me you've been celibate a whole year?" I ask him.

"Yeah," he says.

"Does it feel like a lifetime?"

"You better believe it."

"Well then," I say, "maybe we *are* made for each other."

"What is it you do, honey?" he wants to know. There's not a trace of impatience or frustration in his voice. He seems genuinely interested in me, or maybe he's just deflecting his attention from the topic of his son's death.

"I teach school," I admit. "Choral music."

"I never finished my degree. Never made it past my freshman year in college, truth be told. That botany class got me where I lived, and anthropology—I couldn't hack that Samoan stuff. Margaret Mead, you ever heard of her?" I nod. He continues, "I may not talk like much, but I'm no dummy. I built up my own business from scratch—P.A.C. Welders—and now I got eight full-time employees. I used to work for Mountain Fuel, you see, but there's no future if you're not your own boss."

"What's P.A.C.?" I ask.

"My initials," he explains. I'm still wracking my brain, trying to remember what name he told me in the bar. So he's a welder. I picture an acetylene torch beneath his bed. Maybe we'll both ignite before the evening's over, our flesh melded in sexual congress, our skeletons coupling in the ashes of his smoky bedroom. I have to think of sex in these terms, to keep my distance, so I can remain in control with anyone who wants to sleep with me.

He massages the furrows in his forehead, working up his courage to ask me something. "I don't meet many women like you," he says quietly. "Hell, who am I kidding? I never meet women like you—a teacher, a church-goer, a teetotaler. You're a good-hearted person, I can tell. I respect your morals. You're somebody I could introduce to my mother."

"Yes," I answer, "mothers have always liked me more than their sons do."

He laughs. "I think maybe you worry the sons," he says. "You're a contradiction in terms. You can't make up your mind if you're Sexy Sadie or Sister Relief Society President. And you just might be the perfect woman, aside from your terrible lack of snooker skills." There's a pause. "So how about Sunday dinner at Mama's?" he suggests.

"Today?" Saturday night is over. It's two a.m.

"Why the hell not?" he asks. "Mashed potatoes, gravy, roast beef, green peas, jello, and whipped cream, devil's-food cake. I got a standing invitation. She always invites a few of her widow friends over, and me. I'm her baby, the only one of her six boys that's gone astray. The only one without a good, solid wife to roast beef for me, and whip my cream. Mama's seventy-seven, fit as a fiddle, plays table tennis on Tuesdays, does her own housework, hasn't missed a visiting teaching month in fifty-two years. Used to swim laps at Deseret Gym every weekday, before they tore it down. Even got herself a boyfriend the last year or so. He wants to build a garage for her, so she doesn't have to scrape her wind-

shield in the winter. Wants to marry her, if truth be known, but she says she's sealed to the best man ever put on earth, so why fool with a good thing?"

"Your mother sounds intimidating."

He laughs. "Hell, no," he says. "She loves everybody. Totally without guile. She'd love you the minute she laid eyes on you."

"A woman you met in a bar?"

"We could say it was at the church."

"Doesn't she know better?"

"Wishful thinking covers a hell of a lot of sins."

"All right," I agree.

We talk all night long, discussing the Philadelphia Eagles, the science of welding, the congressional race, Brahms (his mother's favorite composer), clarinet lessons (he studied for five years and loves Benny Goodman), the merits of wader boots for fishing the Weber river, the fact that his son Jack grew to be six-foot-two, ran cross-country for his high school, plus being a champion debater, and loved to bicycle on the Alpine Loop.

He fixes us toast and eggs at dawn, and we fall asleep, sitting side-by-side on the big leather couch. Then, shortly after noon, he calls his mother, who has just returned from church, and breaks the news to her that we're coming. He drops me at my apartment for a quick shower while he sits in the car with the engine idling. I dress hurriedly, and when I get back in the car, we're oddly shy, as though we'd never sat on a couch in a darkened room and thought about making love to each other, or spoken of the death of his grown son. He left his pickup truck at home; we're driving in his big, new, four-door sedan, a family man's vehicle just made for carpools. The freeway shimmers in the late autumn rain.

Passing American Fork, I wonder what kind of crazy notion this is, going to visit somebody's mother in a short skirt and clingy cashmere sweater. I just grabbed the first clean things I saw in the closet. I should be wearing a floral print dress with a tatted collar, and Mary Jane patent leather shoes with white anklets. How many years has it been since anyone took me home to meet his mother? Twelve? Fifteen?

He has freshly-combed, wet hair, slicked back on the sides like Elvis Presley's, only shorter. It's dark brown when wet. Lovely, the way it curls over his lined forehead. At the Point of the Mountain he pulls onto the shoulder by the gravel pit to kiss me, touches my knee beneath my skirt as though it were Bavarian crystal. "Damn, your legs turn me on," he says. "Think we could do it up in those gravel pits without the Smokeys catching on?"

"We'll be late," I say, amused at his teasing. "Your mother."

"Oh, yeah. I hate cold gravy."

We pass the prison, Riverton, Sandy, Murray, the Denver turn-off. He takes the Thirteenth South exit, heads east to Foothill. We cruise through the Monument Park area, home of the general authorities. His mother's house is massive, brick, landscaped to a tee. There's a potted bougainvillea on the porch, a white-slatted swing suspended on heavy chains, a pitcher of iced lemonade on a lace-covered table. It seems rather cool and autumnal for lemonade, but so be it.

His mother stands and offers her hand to me. Her smile is genuine, her white hair flawlessly coifed. "Hi," I say. "I'm Charlotte Ridgeway." She holds my hand between hers, assesses my face, ignoring the reek of stale cigarettes rising from my clothing after having ridden in the car with her son. She hugs me, pressing me against her estimable bosom as though I were the prodigal daughter come home after years as a wastrel.

"Call me Martha," she says, her eyes bright and wet. She motions to the swing. "You two kids sit here," she says. "I'll be right back with the appetizers."

"No widows today?" I ask her son quietly after she goes back inside.

"She cancelled them. Wants to concentrate on just you."

His mother offers a tray of bacon-wrapped water chestnuts alongside Cheez-Whizzed celery sticks with chopped walnuts lined up on top. Actually, very tasty. We munch away, even though walnuts give me canker sores. She sits near me in a wicker chair, the hem of her chiffon dress wispy in the breeze. "I hope you like lamb," she says. "I bought a nice leg of lamb yesterday. Phillip actually prefers beef, don't you, dear?"

It's the first I've heard his name clearly, though I saw some smudged white lettering on his mailbox and a partial name on the peel-off label of his *Sports Illustrated*—P. A. Carpenter. Secretly, I was afraid his name would be "Parley."

"You teach music?" she asks, ecstatic. "Come in and play my Steinway, please. Something by Brahms, if you don't mind."

"I'm really a singer and vocal teacher," I admit. "I did study piano, but it's been years and basically I'm barely good enough to plunk out the melody for my students."

"I'll accompany you, then. Are you an alto or soprano? We'll perform for Phillip. Of course, I'm sure he's heard you dozens of times, but for me it will be your debut." Obviously, Phillip is not in the habit of bringing women home. She assumes we're on the cusp of commitment.

The house is filled with the delicious smell of browning meat, yeasty rolls, steamed green beans—Sunday dinner. In the living room, Martha hands me a stack of music books—arias, art songs, anthems for low and high voices. I choose "The King of Love My Shepherd Is," because it will please her. Phillip—"Phil" suits him better—watches from the tapestry-covered couch, his arms stretched out along the top ridge. He's tapping his foot nervously, anxious at not being able to smoke. I can't look him in the

eye when I sing, "Perverse and foolish, oft I've strayed." Again, I feel silly, embarrassed, like an adolescent caught passing notes in class. His mother's playing is sensitive, heart-felt, technically fine. She's a natural accompanist.

"Thank you, Sister Carpenter," I say as she closes the book.

Phil claps politely. His mother's eyes fill with tears again. "You have the voice of an angel," she says, while he nods, a wisp of a smile turning up the corners of his mouth.

She clutches my hand to hers and I feel the smooth linen of her hanky against my palm. "Phillip, dear," she says over my shoulder, "would you mind going down to the storage room and bringing up a devil's-food cake mix? I'm running a little late today."

As he disappears down the stairway, she clasps me to her again and says, "Between us, I know we can get him on the right track again. He's a good man. Things just didn't work out last time. She wasn't. . . well, there are always two sides to a story. But you, dear, are perfect for him. Perfect. He's had such a hard time since Jackie died. I didn't think he'd ever recover. I honestly haven't seen him with a woman once since it happened, and before that—well—Phillip has always been a lady's man. I'm so glad he found you. And I won't ask where, because I know you're the right one, regardless."

Phil is back with the cake mix. She takes it from him and goes off, humming, into the kitchen. So she guesses that I met him in a bar. He puts his hands on the small of my back, inching them down onto my butt, and presses me full-length against him. I squirm uncomfortably, afraid his mother will interrupt us. I listen for the whirring of the mix-master. "She likes you," he says, "almost as much as I do. What say we leave right after dinner? I can't wait to get you alone again."

His mother's humming grows louder, nearer, then stops. She must be standing in the doorway, watching us kiss, smiling approval because now his hands rest demurely at my waist. The kiss is soft and quick. She clears her throat. "Just let me pop this cake in the oven, and we're ready for the main course," she says.

He nuzzles my ear with his lips and whispers, "Ten years from now, you won't even remember how we met in a beer joint."

"She knows," I say.

"She's a smart old cookie."

"Charlotte, dear," his mother says, "you take this chair, and Phillip and I will sit on either side of you."

"What a lovely table," I say. English bone china, crystal goblets, real silverware. Coming from this background, how did Phillip end up in a cheap Orem bar, dragging on cigarettes? But look who's talking.

"I hope you don't mind kneeling for the blessing," she says, puffing as she settles her bulk at the side of her chair. "It's the way we always did it in Star Valley."

I beam, breathless at the coincidence, smiling open-mouthed at Phillip, forgetting until I see his blank expression that he doesn't *know* yet where my grandparents were from. We have no shared history, except the history of his son, plus the heavy breathing and hurried caresses we shared last night.

The food is mouth-watering, old-fashioned Mormon cooking. I can tell that, in her mind, Martha Carpenter is already planning the ceremony, wondering if the bishop will perform it here in her lovely home, Wagner's march from "*Lohengrin*" played on her Steinway, the civil ceremony a stop-gap measure on our journey to the temple.

Phillip is smiling at me over his hot roll. He nods his head as though we share a secret, as though he has just eased a glass slipper onto my foot and found it a perfect fit.

After dessert, I wash the dishes by hand in steaming water. Martha dries so she can put things where they belong. "I have a perfectly good dishwasher," she says, running her fingertips over the word, "Kitchenaid," "but there's nothing compares to a couple of women, standing side-by-side, washing and wiping. It's one of the purest forms of fellowship, don't you agree?" Phil has made himself scarce.

The dishes done, we adjourn to the porch again. His mother admires my appearance. "I had hair like that once," she says, "gold as honey, down past my shoulders. And those knees, my goodness, how can anybody have knees worthy of showing off? They're lovely, Charlotte, dear. I don't blame you for wearing your skirt short. I'm sure Phillip likes it. He's always been a 'leg man.'"

"He told you that?" I say, amazed.

"Oh no, but a mother overhears these things now and again, you know, when a group of young men are eating pizza in her kitchen at midnight."

Phil comes back and, as the afternoon sun slants sideways through the picture window, the three of us lapse into a silence as uncomfortable as the gaps in testimony meeting when the microphone hums vacantly. By five o'clock, Phil has still made no move to get up. Finally, I stand and say, "Well, we should be going. Thank you so much, Sister Carpenter. It was lovely meeting you, and the dinner was delicious."

"Mormon girls always help with the dishes," she says. "Have you ever noticed?" She pats my back. We're exactly the same height. Her eyes are dry now. She stage whispers, "Don't you dare let this one get away," as Phil leans to kiss her.

In the car, he waves to her across the street with one hand while with the other he's cupping my knee and trying to move his fingers higher onto my thigh. Sister Carpenter blows a kiss and stands with her hand extended as we drive back down the hill, descending into the valley from the east like true pioneers.

On the way back to Orem, we're both very quiet. Everything I can imagine talking about seems trivial. I keep thinking about his son, dead on the highway at age eighteen, his career in debate and cross-country and whatever else he cherished, gone. His dad's pride in him, their shared love of fishing and bicycling, vanished. I picture an ambulance, flashing lights on a desolate stretch of I-15, the car overturned in the ditch, the boy's body on a stretcher, covered with a ghostly sheet, oozing blood. The boy's poor mother, who had already lost her husband, would have received the news via telephone that her only child was dead on the interstate.

"Would you ever want to have more children?" I blurt out, turning to look at Phil's profile as we speed along the freeway. I'm conscious that every car we pass may be driven by a drunk.

He takes my hand and urges me to sit close, then tucks his arm around my shoulder, cradles my head against his chest and says, "I've thought about it a lot. Jack hated being an only child." He's quiet a moment, then adds, "My mom's right about us. She's always right. I want you to live with me."

He waits for me to say something, but I don't. I'm not sure exactly what I think.

"If it feels too sudden, just don't worry about it. I won't push you into anything," he tells me.

At the back of my mind, I'm harboring fond wishes about telling my children that I met their father on a summer evening in autumn, at a fire-side where iced lemonade was served, Cheez Whiz and walnuts on celery sticks turned the inside of my mouth white with canker sores, and we all knelt to say the prayer. But truly, nobody ends up happy, do they?

My Toyota is still parked on the slab of pavement east of the beer bar on the Orem hill. Phil drives me there. It's night again. We've spent twenty hours together. He gives me a thick-tongued kiss in farewell, then pats his shirt pocket. I can see the tattered edges of the paper on which he wrote my phone number and address. "I'm in the book, anyway," I tell him.

"Look, I sat in front of your place for twenty minutes. Don't you think I could find it again? Say, tomorrow's Monday, right?" he asks. "How about getting together for Family Home Evening?" He grins, but now I can see melancholy behind his smile.

"Should I prepare a gospel lesson, or are you taking me bowling?"

"Either," he says, "long as it's followed by a little lovin'."

I wonder if his attraction for me will die down in a week or two if I'm not willing to sleep with him. Maybe he'll be taking some nice exotic dancer up to Salt Lake for a leg of lamb next Fast Sunday. "Fine," I say half-heartedly. My brother, the bishop of a ward in Sacramento, just dis-fellowshipped a woman for having an abortion. I was surprised; I would have expected excommunication.

"So you live alone?" he asks me.

"Yes. My apartment's tiny."

"When's the lease expire?"

"I don't have a lease."

"I'll be there tomorrow with my pickup," he says. "Get your furniture ready to move to my place."

I gaze at him steadily and smile. "I couldn't do that," I say. "I'd get fired for shacking-up with a man."

"Quit your job, then," he suggests. "I'll support you. Always did want a stay-at-home woman."

"Your mother wouldn't approve, and neither would mine. But call me," I say, "if you're serious about Monday night." I open the passenger door.

"I am nothing if not serious," he says.

"We're just so different," I protest meekly. "Now your mother and I, we're peas in a pod."

"So what's the problem? You can spend your Sunday afternoons in social intercourse with my mom, singing your anthems, doing your dishes, plunkin' at the Steinway. The rest of the week you can engage in the other kind of intercourse with me. We'll keep each other happy, in and out of bed. I can tell you're a damn fine woman, and passionate, too, if you'd give yourself half a chance. I could be real happy with you, Charlotte. Listen," he grabs both my hands and holds them in his, "if you're hung up on getting married, let's run off right now to Vegas. We can have the ceremony at dawn in one of them little chapels." For the first time, I notice the urgency in his voice. He's not kidding. The road to Vegas. How can he think of it without grieving?

"We don't even know each other, Phillip."

"The hell we don't. When you come from a background like ours, you know each other in less than a day. We spent all night talking. Most married people don't talk that much to each other in a whole year. I'll bet your mother and my mother are interchangeable. Am I right?" I nod reluctantly. "It's better'n one of them arranged marriages in Thailand or China, or wherever. So let's do it. Whaddaya say?"

I step out of his car and close the door behind me. Leaning through the open window, I say, "I really can't do that, but ask me again, will you? In a month or two?"

"You're not gonna ask me to quit smoking?"

"No."

"I been trying for twenty years to give it up. Can't do it."

"My great-grandfather smoked," I say, warming to the subject, not wanting to leave him, "but he always went to church, anyway. One day he drove his team from Star Valley down to the Logan Temple with a load of deacons in back, going to do baptisms for the dead." I rest my

arms on the chrome of his car and flip the black rubber window lining with a fingernail. "Grandpa stood outside the temple grounds, waiting for the boys, smoking one cigarette after another."

"Was this grandpa married in the temple?"

"Yes."

"Did he smoke all his life?"

"As far as I know."

"Maybe him and me'll be buddies in the eternities. But Charlotte, darlin, we're in the here-and-now. I'll ask you again in a month, and I want the answer to be yes. And by the way, I plan to call you 'Lottie.'"

As I walk to my car, I feel his eyes on me. This is all part of our story, our folklore, the tale that every long-married couple is capable of relating sixty years down the line when asked the question, "How did you and your sweetheart meet?"

The chances of our staying together may be extremely slim. It would be an unlikely marriage, to be sure, but not necessarily a bad one. I've just about decided I'm not the type to hold out until the next life, panting after an eternal husband—some good man who already has a wife or two. I might as well take Phil, if he's still around in a month. I could do worse.

He waits for me to start the ignition of my own car, then blinks his headlights, a corny but charming gesture. I like him. I don't want to get married in Las Vegas, but I do want to get married. They'd have to get a new nameplate for my door at school—"Ms. Charlotte Carpenter." It's not politically correct to say "Mrs." in our district.

I'm not too old—Phil and I might still have a couple of babies. Would he truly want that? Or is he secretly worried that he's too old to start a new family? He's old enough to be a grandfather, and I a grandmother, if we'd started young. He'd be sixty before the first one graduated from high school.

Who knows what will happen in the next month? I might be standing in white satin beside a Steinway with stephanotis twined in my hair, or sitting once again in a no-name beer bar on the Orem hill, staring at the bottom of a Coke glass, listening to the thrum of a guitar, feeling my own pulse race whenever a grim-faced, unshaven steelworker walks by. Regardless of which it is, I'll never turn out the way my parents expected me to. I'll never be holy enough to suit my brothers. I'll never rise in the first resurrection, upright and unashamed, my garments washed pure in the blood of the lamb, my conscience unscathed, the film of my life one continuous round of faith-promoting episodes.

I slam on my emergency brake, fling my car door open, rush back to the big Pontiac, and stick my head inside Phil's window, catching his breath in my mouth, feeling the softness of his lips, the brush of his whiskers, relishing the physical pleasure this man gives me. I have never

been beautiful, except for my hair and legs; I've never been righteous, except for my silent prayers and acts for the helpless; I've never been loved, except by my own parents. But now, in this deserted parking lot with two motors running, two sets of headlights intersecting in the buzz of air beside this multi-laned highway, just for a moment I'm awash with the frantic needs of the flesh and I can testify, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that I will not let this good and sexy man get away from me, anywhere on this side of the veil.