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The sun began its afternoon descent and dusk brought with it a bone-numbing cold. The gusts of wind that accompanied it just added insult to injury. The cold crept between Kathleen's ribs, caressing her heart, her lungs. Those same gusts whistled through the dilapidated shed's walls as if made of cardboard and tar paper. The smell of smoke and moisture hung in the air. It all signaled the impending nor'easter was on final approach and there would be no rest this evening for the weary. The primary task would be to keep the small wood stove stoked through the night and well into the dawn hours. It would require more of Kathleen's attention and fuel than the previous two nights, but the stove was her only source of heat and light in the cramped shed. Add in the expected steep drop in temperature tonight, her infant daughter, Evelyn, would need both to survive.

Kathleen lugged firewood in from the outside pile over the late morning hours. The pathway took her around the large pig pen, then along the backside of the barn and to the opposite corner where wood deemed not worthy of burning in the main house was discarded. The ground was hazardous, uneven in most spots and filled with mud ruts frozen in place. The route was too treacherous to navigate for someone who had given birth less than forty-eight hours ago. Kathleen then spent the afternoon trying to shore up the uneven boards that made up her home's walls. She searched the old barn for newspapers, rags, or anything else she could find to fill the large cracks between the planks of half-rotted wood. She addressed what areas she could reach and said a prayer that the snow the incoming storm brought would not collapse the roof.

Kathleen's living space was only eight feet by eight feet and that, she thought, was being generous. The day's work had resulted in a stack of firewood that took up most of the wall to her left and for the moment was close to chin high. It would shrink considerably during the night, and force Kathleen out into the snow the next morning to replenish it.

It should do for the night, Kathleen thought. That is all I can concern myself with now. There will be time between chores in the morning to worry. Her right hand unconsciously reached up and gripped the silver cross that hung from her neck and gave it a tight squeeze.

As for the rest of the living space, against the far wall, opposite the door, sat an army cot with an old wicker baby bassinet perched atop it. The paint was peeling and the side strips were beginning to fray, but like the shed; it was part of their temporary home. The constant cries of hunger and cold

that emanated from Evelyn served as a reminder of why the upcoming storm could only take up so much of Kathleen's attention. She had to stay strong for her daughter.

A few more days, she kept repeating to herself, reaching down to pull Evelyn close to her chest. A few more then we can be on our way, away from this godforsaken place and town.

Kathleen's tears had long dried before the storm hit and she promised herself, no more crying, even if things continued in a downward spiral for her and baby Evelyn. Kathleen would fight back the tears with all she had. Her agreement with her emotions was one where it was okay to feel sad from time to time, but there would be no nightly self-pity parties. She had made her bed willingly, and slept in it, figuratively.

No one pushed me into that car's backseat, Kathleen thought. It was my decision to bring Evelyn into this world, an act I would repeat one thousand times, knowing we'd end up in this shed. But I need to stay strong and persevere. For Evelyn.

Kathleen's eyes were on the endgame and that was to provide her daughter with a good life and loving home like her parents had raised her in, before the great shame caused them to throw her out on her pregnant bottom.

Kathleen had grown up in a small house with her parents, the middle child to an older brother and younger sister. They had it all, the white picket fence, a Cocker Spaniel named Woody, and plenty of toys. Her parents doted on each child as if they were the only one, and all three siblings got along so well, most times no one could remember the last time they fought. As they'd grown older, Kathleen and Gertrude drew closer, especially after Tim graduated high school and enlisted the day after Pearl Harbor.

Kathleen's trip to the shed had started the previous May, coincidentally after the Mother's Day dance at the school. The irony was lost on no one. That evening David McCutchin sweet-talked her into the backseat of his father's Ford with talk of his own enlistment and impending boot camp at Fort Jackson, outside Columbia, South Carolina. Ten hours by car, but a lifetime to a teenager in love. Things only got worse on July 4th when Kathleen had smacked her mother across the face when she suggested a particular doctor across the bridge in Philadelphia could put an abrupt end to

the shame. Shame that would eventually be bequeathed on the entire family by their so-called friends and neighbors. That slap had prevented Kathleen's mother from even mentioning the second and more palatable option of adoption through a contact in the church and an eventual, faster return to normalcy. But with the slap and the aftermath, it was full speed ahead with no options remaining on the table.

Kathleen's parents had let it be known this outcome was her decision alone and they wouldn't hear differently. Both parents reinforced the point with each conversation until they essentially washed their hands of what they called 'the entire mess.' The swelling in her mother's face had not yet receded when they calmly informed Kathleen that she and whatever was inside her was dead to them. Dead as their loving son Tim, who passed the prior April from a stumble in the Philippines during the infamous Bataan Death March. Lest the two be confused, her father reiterated, Tim's death was the only one for which they would hold their heads high. And with that, he firmly closed the front door and locked the deadbolt.

Kathleen and her future baby were now alone, and it terrified her. She'd remained on the front porch for a couple of minutes, unsure where to go and what to do when she got there. The small suitcase slipped from her hand and she collapsed next to it, sobbing uncontrollably.

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The shed and its ramshackle condition were courtesy of Mary D'arnaud, the midwife that assisted in Evelyn's birth, but it wasn't Kathleen's first destination after being kicked out of her girlhood home. With the sound of the deadbolt sliding into place and her father's ultimate words still careening around between her ears, Kathleen had eventually gotten up. She knew she couldn't stay there and hope someone inside would have pity on her, so Kathleen composed herself, picked up her suitcase and had walked down the driveway. County Route 538 lay ahead.

The entire world lay ahead for me, she thought, but it only emphasized her loneliness and with the recognition the tears had flowed freely again. Kathleen's initial thought had been of the church. All she learned each Sunday, since she was a young girl, was God loved her no matter what and would always be there for her, although he had been darn silent the past two months when she reached out before bed each night. Doubt had soon crept into that option, and along with the possibility of having to see her family each week at Sunday mass, Kathleen instead took a left turn onto Evergreen Drive. She would consider the church a fallback plan, only should her second choice

not welcome her in with open arms. David's house became the destination and in Kathleen's mind, there was no way his parents could turn away their son's unborn child.

What were the odds that the second set of grandparents would be as unforgiving as the first? She thought.

After all, the McCutchins were Methodists, so there was absolutely no chance of Kathleen coming across her parents every Sunday and making a scene. Most of all, the McCutchins had their only child about to head off to war. By God, they would need somewhere and more importantly someone to focus their love and attention on. Kathleen was partially right in the long run, but it took more convincing than she ever thought in order to get David's mother to open the front door. Sadly, it wasn't long before Kathleen realized that the primary concern of what others might think was not an ideology lauded solely by her parents.

Once she crossed the McCutchins foyer, Kathleen spent almost all of the last two trimesters confined to David's childhood bedroom. She slept in his bed, read his collection of Hardy Boys books, and even wore his old shirts when hers became too tight. David soon graduated from basic training and only to Kathleen's surprise, did not come home prior to shipping off for the European theatre. Kathleen never received so much as a postcard from Ft. Jackson or anywhere else in the world, but that did nothing to dissuade her from diligently writing her future husband daily during the entirety of her seven-month stay. In the end, Kathleen absolved David of any guilt, and instead solely blamed Mrs. McCutchins.

I know she's keeping David's letters from me, she thought. Hidden away in a box somewhere I'd never find them. Kathleen's mind then went one step farther. What if she had never mailed my letters, instead just walked outside and dumped them in the trashcan? She fought back the tears at this thought.

There came a point in time where nothing exemplified the commonalities shared between the McCutchins and her own parents regarding grandparental disdain than when the contractions started. In less than six hours, Kathleen was fittingly packed up and driven to Mary D'arnaud's farmhouse with Mr. McCutchin having spoke the only words during the trip. He stated to never contact them or their son again. Kathleen died inside but gritted her teeth to not show how deeply those words had hurt. She didn't say a word in response and hoped that her silence had not been

taken as agreement. She remained quiet and slouched in the back seat, staring out the window as the world she knew flashed by.

The drive had taken Kathleen through a part of Elk Township she was unfamiliar with. Soon she would be alone and lost. Here, the panic started. It churned deep within and came close to rising to the surface when they passed a police car parked off the side of the road. Kathleen needed to alert him and she instinctively reached for the door handle. If the door opened, Mr. McCutchin would have to hit the brakes and come to a stop. That would be her cue to jump out and run for help. She had debated the idea a minute too long. Before she could act, the car then turned onto a winding dirt road that led to the D'arnaud farm. Her opportunity disappeared before her mind and body could agree on the plan.

Prior to this late-night introduction, Kathleen had not heard of Mary's name while growing up or seen the woman walking around town. When Mrs. McCutchin knocked and the front door opened, Kathleen understood why. She had been dropped off in the part of town her father had referred to as The Lawns. You see, Elk Township in 1943 was as segregated as the rest of the country, and never the two parts shall meet. A large man ushered Kathleen and Mrs. McCutchin inside, where Mary D'arnaud waited at a small table. Kathleen could still hear the engine running, so she didn't expect a long, tearful goodbye. After all, it was wartime and gasoline was heavily rationed.

Once Kathleen was inside and seated, they exchanged pleasantries. Not to mention, cash. Mrs. McCutchin removed a wad of bills from her purse that Mary accepted without counting. Mary placed the money in a Maxwell House coffee tin and with a nod, Mrs. McCutchin was out the door without so much as a farewell.

Mary then turned her attention to Kathleen and tried to make her feel at ease. Mary said she was the loyal friend of the unwed and unwanted mothers of the area and a midwife for when it was time to deliver the baby. But what Kathleen didn't know, and would never learn, was that there was so much more that Mary was involved in.

The McCutchins had simply paid for this woman to deliver Kathleen's baby and to get the young woman on her way, far away, once back on her feet. There was a small shed out back where Kathleen and baby could stay. Mary would bring meals out to the shed and Kathleen was permitted

to stay until she recovered her strength. Or unless the next paying unwed mother showed up and at that point, Kathleen would be expected to vacate the premises.

Mary shuffled her chair closer to Kathleen and draped an arm across Kathleen's shoulders. "Don't you worry your little head none, I got a hunch you won't be leaving before you're ready. You just focus all your worrying on that little bundle you're going to have and let old Mary take care of the rest."

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The night the nor'easter landed was only Evelyn's third day on the planet and Kathleen was drop-dead exhausted. Tired of it all. Tired of the crying, the cold, the chores to survive, and especially the loneliness. So much so, she had already convinced herself that as soon as the weather broke, she would head out for home. Her real home with the suitcase under one arm and Evelyn under the other. Her proper home. On bended knee or whatever it took for her father to reopen that door, her mother to take pity and sneak her in through the cellar door, or her younger sister to leave a window unlocked.

If I can just get back inside, I'm dropping anchor and they'll never get rid of us, she whispered to Evelyn. She kissed her baby on the forehead and swore on it.

Unbeknownst to Kathleen, only half her plan would be executed and there would be no waiting for the snow to cease. That night would be her last night in the shed, but it would also be her first at the bottom of an old well on the far end of the farm. A place where her body would be kept company by the three previous residents of the shed. As for Evelyn, within twenty-four hours she would be handed off three times and renamed Yola. By the time the sun set and the wind picked up again the next night, she would be safe and warm. Yola would be tucked into her new crib, within her own room, on the second floor of a three-story row house in South Philadelphia.