Chapter 1

Looking Back

Seattle

Present day

Houses have a feel. They give you the impression of safety or a sense that danger might be just outside your front window. Recollections, good and bad, stick to the walls, settle on the furniture, waiting to trigger a memory.

I grew up here. Got married here. But I wouldn't miss this place now that Mum was finally moving out. I stood in the living room surrounded by boxes crammed with the bits and pieces of her life. I tried not to look at the hardwood floor where the body had lain all those years ago. Some memories refuse to be packed away.

I struggled to shake off the ghosts. The sooner we were done, the sooner I could leave and never come back. I turned to my eighteen-year-old daughter, who had managed to pack one box in the four hours we'd been here. She handed it to me, and I froze. An old black spiral notebook lay on the bottom. It crinkled with age as I pulled it out and hugged it to me. I was holding the past in my hands.

My throat tightened with the flood of memories of sitting on my bed and writing well after I should have been asleep. The paper was yellowed and curled; my handwriting faded in spots. I sat on the couch and began looking through my find. My own words drew me in, casting their spell on me, pulling me back to 1968. I was unaware my daughter had slid in next to me until her breath brushed my cheek.

“What is that?” she asked.

“My old journal." An echo of the old fear filled my heart, but I kept my tone light. “It’s about Grandma’s life growing up in Scotland during World War II, about second sight and—”

I swallowed, wondering if I should say the rest. But I was the same age as Sheilla when I first heard the secret my mom had guarded for so long, when we both faced her past. I couldn’t keep from stealing another glance at the floor before I looked Sheilla right in the eyes. “And about Grandma catching a serial killer.”

She shook her head. “You’re teasing me, right? My grandma?” Her grin faded. She reached over to touch one of the notebook pages. “What are all these loose pages stuffed in between?”

“I added my part later. The part about me and your dad.”

“I want to hear the whole thing. Can you stop for a while and read it to me?” Her enthusiasm was hard to ignore.

I held up the notebook. “Look how long it would take. There’s a lot to tell.”

“Tell it to me then, like you’re telling a story. Only, it all really happened, right?”

My mum came in from the kitchen with three cups of tea and a plate of cookies. “What’s that, Wendy?” I saw the moment she recognized the notebook; she sat down hard on her rocking chair. “Oh,” was all she said.

Some of our memories were still raw, close to the heart. I felt vulnerable sharing them out loud even with these dear women. But the three generations—my mom Christina, myself, and my daughter—had always been close even during teenage years. I looked into my mother’s eyes and saw a kind of acceptance.

"All right, but this will take a while," I said, "so let's keep packing whether we're listening or talking. Sheilla can read it later if she wants."

Mom nodded to the pages stuffed in the front. "Looks like you go first, Wendy."

Wendy

Seattle

1968

I shook my head in bewilderment. "Why did John have to break up with me on Grad Night?" It felt good to be mad at him, better than the sadness that came later. When I got home, I slammed the back door so hard it bounced back and hit my bottom. I didn't seem to care what a ruckus I was making. Tears clogged my nose as I said, "High school graduation should have been a night to celebrate."

The house was so quiet I thought everyone was in bed, but Mom's voice called to me from the kitchen.

"What's happened?"

I hadn't thought of waking her.

She stepped into the light at the end of the hall and checked her wristwatch. "You're home earlier than I expected. It's only eleven."

I couldn't get my answer past the lump in my throat. Instead, I wiped my sleeve across my eyes.

"Come on, lass, we'll have some tea, and you can tell me what a rotter John's been." I almost smiled at her words.

"Why John?"

“Easy, it’s always the ones we care most about that can make us that angry.”

She walked me to the kitchen table. A pile of old pictures covered the surface. My vision clouded with tears that pooled under my lashes, ran down my face. Mum pulled a hankie out of her pocket and handed it over. I wiped my eyes, blew my nose, and began my complaints.

“I took in a movie with Sherry and Stephen. John was waiting by my car when we came out.”

Mum looked so concerned. “You decided not to go to the grad party?”

I scrunched my face in distaste. “I don’t think his friends like me and I—”

Mum answered her own question. “You don’t fit in. Here, I just made a cup.”

I sipped the hot tea and settled, but grief threatened to overwhelm me. “He said we were too different.”

“It might be for the best.”

I snapped to his defense. “John’s always good with me. But his friends all drink and smoke and swear.” Throughout school, people pointed out what opposites we were. I believed that worked well for us.

“He doesn’t do that with you?”

Now I was impatient. “No, we’ve stopped hanging around with them. I felt bad about that.” I didn’t want him to lose his friends. Should I have pretended to be like them? I cut off that thought. “Guess we’re too different. I thought, well, he was . . . that we were . . .” My face crumpled as I began to weep again.

After a minute, I took a long sip of the hot tea. “I’m so angry he chose tonight to break up.” Guilt settled in as I glanced at Mom for a reaction. “I burned rubber out of the parking lot.” I couldn’t help a grimace. “Sherry and Stephen were with me. Guess I scared them. I heard them

praying." I looked up enough to catch her scowl. "I got them home safe, and I'm sorry about frightening them."

Mum said nothing as she took a seat next to me. An old shoebox sat open on the table. Pictures scattered haphazardly before me, and I picked up an old photograph.

"I was looking at these while I waited for you to come home," Mum said. She smiled, but her eyes were sad. "If there's one thing I've learned, it's that strength, actual strength, comes from God, but He mostly gives it to us during hard trials."

This wasn't comforting at all. I sniffed and blew my nose. I wanted to say, "Well, I'm not you." Before I could voice the thought, I realized that except for my red hair, I was a lot like her. Instead, I hiccupped a sob. "I realize you lived through the war and all that."

She stopped me. "I didn't think I was strong either. But I came through so many things—bombings, losing people I cared about." She patted my arm. "Even helped to catch a serial killer spy."

I gave her a double take. "You never told me about that."

"I've always been a little afraid to talk about it." She looked into my eyes. "You are stronger than you realize."

Already shaking my head, I said, "I'm not strong. Not at all."

Mum reached out to squeeze my hand in sympathy even though John wasn't a favorite of hers. She thought he was moody. I had to admit she was right, but she didn't know the deep attraction we had for each other, or maybe it was more one-sided than I'd imagined.

"It's always up to us if we choose to be stronger or sink into weakness." She rose. "I'll make you some toast." I always ate peanut butter toast when anything really upset me. There was comfort in her company. I sighed and looked at all the old pictures on the table. A

black-and-white photograph of a young girl caught my eye. “That’s you, Mum? How old?” For as long as I could remember, I had listened to her stories about growing up in Scotland during the war. I lost myself in those stories.

“Almost nine.”

I teased her. “That was ages ago.”

“Seems like another lifetime, over thirty years now.” She studied it with a hint of a smile. “That’s my first life before I left Scotland, the year my world changed.”

I turned it over to read faded writing on the back. “Christina Cowan Finlay.”

“Christina, that’s what my mum called me when she was put out. No, back then everyone called me Chrissy.”

I moved my thumb to reveal the date. April 1936. “What were they like, your trials?”

Mum picked up another picture and spoke the way you do when you’re reading from a book. Like you’re watching it all before your eyes. Her words drew me away from hurt and loss.

Chapter 2

Grandma Chris

Greenock, Scotland

April 1936

I remember that year so clearly. It was the first time I heard the name Hitler. He was often in the news, and portions of his speeches played on the radio. I didn’t understand German, but the sound of his voice filled me with foreboding.

That year, the eyes of the world turned to Germany. The eleventh Olympic games were coming to Berlin in August. Our papers ran pages full of stories about the athletes, and Dad never missed an opportunity to give us extra facts. He knew all about the original Olympics in Greece. My six-year-old sister Isabelle and I could listen to Dad for hours; he made everything so interesting.

We also heard stories about Hitler's hatred of Jews. The chancellor's racial policies demanded living space for the Aryan race. We listened to interviews of German Jews who fled their homes to seek asylum in other countries. One night, the radio commentator said, "A great evil is growing in Germany. Hitler is a building storm that will move outward, swallowing up innocent lives as it spreads across Europe." A shiver ran up my spine. I looked at Dad. His grim expression didn't offer me any reassurance.

Although Hitler's evil was spreading, our attention shifted away from him as disease blew in ahead of his storm and touched us even in the foothills of Scotland. The outbreak of spinal meningitis in our small Scottish town made 1936 devastating for me.

Greenock was a busy little town with shipyards and even a distillery, but life was peaceful before the meningitis. Grandma Cowan lived in a grey stone Victorian house on a hill facing the wide River Clyde. But it was only a short walk from my house on Dempster Street to her house on Wellington. Grandma was my favorite person in the world. She saw me, saw my heart.

Her home fascinated me. Everywhere you looked, treasures from the Far East filled shelves and hung on walls. A samurai sword sat on the mantle in its own stand. There were paintings of Mount Fuji, done by Grandfather himself.

Grandfather died before I was born, but Grandma told me stories about his adventures. I could see it all in my imagination. A ship's carpenter by trade, he served with the Canadian Pacific Rail Line on the Empress of Asia, a cargo and passenger ship based out of Vancouver, Canada. My mum said it was like Christmas when her father took leave from sailing to come home.

Although it was 1936 and most of our town had electricity, Grandma said she preferred the softer glow from candles and gaslights. Her house stood on a hill at the edge of town, and behind it she had a high stone wall around a beautiful garden. Beyond the wall, the Highlands rose first as foothills, wild and empty as they had been for centuries. On the weekends, my sister and I took turns going to Grandma's to dust her treasures and spend special time alone with her. Sometimes I sat on the window seat in her bedroom and watched the fishing fleet come home with a day's catch.

Even though my little sister was nearly three years younger, we were constant companions—until one sunny day in April when she came home from school with a headache and mild fever. Our regular doctor was out of town, and the young doctor taking his calls assured my mum that Isabelle would be right in a few days. But she wasn't. When he came back to check on her, he told my mum that Isabelle was pretending to be sick. I knew that wasn't like my little sister. But when the doctor ordered her sent back to school, Mum sent her.

I took her little hand in mine, and we walked to the Highlanders Academy just down the street. She was so pale it scared me. When the whistle blew, I walked her to her room.

Isabelle looked up at me with such sad eyes but managed a smile. "I'll be all right." Then she marched into class with the other first-year students.

She didn't make it an entire day. She collapsed, and they rushed her to the hospital. I was surprised when my very pregnant Aunt Jean came for me after school. She couldn't take me to see Isabelle because Isabelle had the meningitis. Instead, she took me to Grandma Cowan's. I never saw my little sister again.

The night Isabelle left this world was the same night my wee cousin Jack was born. Since my parents were at the hospital with Isabelle, I was still at Grandma Cowan's when Aunt Jean started her labor pains. With so many meningitis cases, Aunty Jean decided to stay with her mum to deliver. Grandma Cowan had given birth five times and helped with other deliveries. Grandma had me wait by the fire in her living room, but I couldn't help listening to my aunt cry out. I wrung my hands and looked toward the bedroom. I was so relieved when my Uncle Jimmy came through the door. Even before going in to his wife, he came to me.

"Chrissy, luv, I've just come from the hospital. Your mum wanted ye ta know that our wee Isabelle was too sick. She's gone to heaven." That was all, and he rushed in to Aunty. It stunned me. The house was silent. Then we heard the first cries of wee Jackie from the bedroom.

I sat alone next to the fire, trying to get warm. It was like I'd been out in the cold for a long time. I guess I sat there for a half hour staring into the flames. When I looked up, Grandma Cowan was standing there, a bundle of blankets in her arms. She bent down, handing me little Jackie. Tears flowed down my cheeks. Less than an hour old and this little life was already so precious to everyone. My heart ached as I realized I'd never see Isabelle's sweet face again, never curl up in the big bed we shared and feel the comforting warmth of her small frame next to me. It was as if God took Isabelle but left us Jackie in her place. I kissed his little forehead, wishing I could hold my little sister like this.

My Grandma sat next to me and wrapped her arms around me and wee Jackie. She whispered, “Luv, I ken this is hard.” Her tears fell on my head as she snuggled us closer. “We will all miss our lassie.”

I was sure I would never be happy again.

My aunts and uncles said, "Don't cry. You're almost nine and a fine, strong lass, too old to carry on. You mustn't let your mother see you crying." So, I learned to hold it in. I kept all the grief and loss locked away in my heart. Only alone in my cold bed could I let it all out and cry myself into exhaustion.

What I didn't understand was why I didn't die instead of Isabelle. She was so beautiful. I was gangly. My nose was too long and my thick, black hair too curly. There was something special about Isabelle. Everyone loved her.

I couldn't talk to my parents; they were so grief stricken. Only Grandma Cowan knew I needed to cry. In her arms, I found comfort. She heard all my questions without scolding me for thinking such thoughts. "I don't think I can do this, Gran. I'm not brave. How will I live without her?"

But Grandma said, “There now, Chrissy, you're stronger than you think. I ken that sometimes we need to grieve on our own, work things out and let God talk to our hearts. What you’re needing is a guid walk.”

In happier days, I spent hours exploring the hills behind Grandma Cowan’s house. Sometimes my little sister would come with me, but mostly I enjoyed wandering on my own. Not now, though. Nothing appealed to me now.

My heart was full of loss and emptiness. I didn't see how God could show me anything tromping the hills behind Grandma's house. Grandma was insistent, so I took the wee bag of snacks she gave me and looked back at her as she shooed me out of her house.

“Go ye now. Take yer jammy and a flask of water. Ye need time alone. The Highlands can gi’ ye that. While yer about it, pick some flowers for your mum. It'll cheer her heart ta see something bright in her kitchen."

A short walk from my Grandma Cowan's, the land sloped upward above our town. The hills were full of early purple-and-white heather and wild rhododendrons in deep red and pink. I loved the bright yellow of the broom, now in full color. For a while I forgot to pick flowers, caught up in the wild beauty of this place.

Although the sadness was never far from my heart, Grandma was right. This solitary wandering was helping me.

A footpath traversed the grassy hill, winding around large boulders, past clumps of broom, always climbing higher. By mid-morning, I'd eaten the jammy—bread with butter and jam—that Grandma had packed. As I reached the crest of the hill, I stopped to wipe my sticky fingers on my pants and turned to look over Greenock. Despite my heavy heart, I smiled. From here, I spotted Grandma’s house, my house on Dempster Street and my school, the Highlanders Academy. Only a month ago, Isabelle and I had walked to the corner and crossed Mount Pleasant Street to enter the schoolyard. I bit my lip. Never again.

I turned away from the memory to walk down the other side of the hill to my special place, a glen where an old stone tower stood in ruins. A sanctuary for me. I liked to pretend it was my castle keep. Scotland is littered with tower ruins. Not much of a watchtower, it sat below the hill, but the place was magical to me. From where I stood, a stream ran through the grass,

passing the path to my secret place and winding its way toward the River Clyde. Rowan trees grew along its banks. It was still too early for the clusters of bright red berries, but the fern-like leaves still hid the tower from the casual hiker. That was one of its charms; no one but me ever came here. It was mine.

I stopped short, hearing the excited barking of a dog. I'd never seen a dog up here. I wondered if a crofter's sheep dog had gotten lost. I hurried on. Laughter floated on the breeze from my magical castle. Not a lost dog then. It sounded like children playing. I stepped across the stream, overwhelmed by the urge to play, desperately wanting to stop feeling so sad, and worrying about my mum.

As I came through the trees, I noticed a colorful red-and-yellow caravan with a rounded top and double doors. I realized it belonged to the Gypsies who came to town selling jewelry or mending pots and pans. I'd seen the way the townspeople looked at them with suspicion, even hostility. But I never understood why. They seemed carefree to me.

A pot of something that smelled delicious bubbled away over a small fire. Barefoot children flushed with fun played with their dog. A woman with long black hair that covered her shoulders and curled down her back smiled at their antics. I touched my own bobbed black hair. Mum always cut my hair short. She didn't like it messy. But I wanted to look like this lady someday. I stood there taking in the scene, wondering how these visitors found my castle.

They all looked up and saw me for the first time. I felt shy and waited to see if they were friendly. The woman motioned for me to come ahead. "Welcome," she said, and I stepped into the clearing in front of the tower but stopped when I saw a man poke his head around the far end of the wagon. He was carrying a bucket of something for his horse, but he nodded to me. His smile was friendly.

The children, a boy about my age and a girl about the age of my little sister, walked toward me, their dog in step behind them. Despite their ragged clothes, their faces were open, approachable.

"What's your name then?" asked the girl. I couldn't stop thinking how like Isabelle she looked. Afraid I might cry and ruin the moment, I bit my lip and said in a small voice, "Chrissy."

She didn't seem to notice the sadness I carried. "I'm Donka, and this is my brother Bo. Now we can play tag." Donka reached over to tag me and ran off. I stood there, startled by their invitation. Well, it was more of a command.

Bo called out, "You're supposed to chase us."

I shook bewilderment off, smiling in delight as I dropped my empty lunch sack and the flowers I'd found and ran after them. For a full hour, I abandoned my heartache and played with Bo and Donka. Then their mother called us to the fire. We sat on little three-legged stools. She handed us each a bowl of steaming stew. It tasted like heaven. I looked at Donka next to me and smiled at her cheerful face.

We chatted as we ate. "Why are ye camped here?" I asked.

Bo jerked his head up sharp. "Is this yer land, then?" His face was wary for the first time.

"Och, no, I just come here to play."

Relief softened his expression. He shrugged. "We needed a place to stay the night and followed a wagon trail off the road."

For that afternoon, Donka became my sister Isabelle. After lunch, Donka picked up my flowers, now wilted. "These won't do for yer mum. Come on, we'll get some fresh flowers." We spent another thirty minutes gathering wildflowers. When I got ready to leave, I looked at my colorful bouquet. It looked so alive and beautiful, the old bouquet faded and dead in comparison.

It reminded me of how I'd felt before I found my new friends. The afternoon had been magical, and for a little while Isabelle had come as Donka to comfort me.

The sun was low in the sky, and I knew Grandma Cowan would expect me.

When I left, they waved goodbye. Bo said, "Come again."

I would never tell my mother or father about my afternoon with Bo and Donka. I knew the townspeople suspected Gypsies of stealing. I never understood why. Bo and Donka and their parents welcomed me without question. I knew I'd always be grateful for the time I spent with them. Maybe the meningitis hadn't touched them because they didn't stay in towns but in the hills and glens. Solitary places were their homes.

I went back the next day, trying to recapture the peace I'd enjoyed with the Gypsy family and to spend another secret afternoon with my little sister. I'd felt Isabelle near me as I played with Donka. I raced across the stream and through the trees to find the small glen empty.

I sat by the remnants of their cold campfire, proof I hadn't imagined it all. Dusting off my pants, I left, but halfway up the hill I looked back toward the old watchtower. For a moment I imagined Isabelle waving goodbye, but the Gypsies were gone and so was my little sister.

Wendy

Seattle

June 1968

Lost in Mom's story, I forgot my grief over John and thought of her as a child dealing with the hurt of losing her sister. My voice shook with emotion. "Oh, Mum, that's so sad."

I sipped my tea to cover my distress. The doors to all our bedrooms lined one side of the living space. My eyes wandered to my little sister's room. How would I feel if I lost Heather? I asked, "Did you ever see Donka again?"

"Other Gypsies came through town but never Donka's family." It shocked me to see tears in her eyes. After all those years, her grief still rose to the surface. But Mum's tender smile never faltered as she added, "I like to think Donka was God's gift to me. You know, helping me say goodbye to Isabelle."

I'd never lost a loved one. Even if John and I weren't seeing each other, he was out there doing whatever he thought would be better without me. I'd been so angry with him, but at least he wasn't dead. Death's heartbreak is permanent.

Inhaling the steamy tea made it easier to breathe. How could she take my loss seriously? She'd gone through such heartache.

Then I realized she'd never once said I was overreacting. I'd had no sign she thought my grief foolish. Again, I felt grateful that she wasn't just a mom; she was a genuine friend. I changed the subject before I could feel sorry for myself again. "When did the war start?"

"Germany stayed in the news, but it was two years later before things got scary."

My emotional storm wasn't ready to blow over. I could feel sadness and loss swirling around my heart, so I teased more from Mom. If she told me stories about her life, I could keep myself from thinking about how my story might end. I asked, "You were only a child. How did you know what was happening?"

"My dad. Your Bampa is a firm believer in knowledge, all kinds. He was like that when Isabelle was alive and even more so when it was only me to listen."

Chapter 3

Grandma Chris

Greenock, Scotland

August 1938

Every night, my dad would read the paper from the comfort of his easy chair by the fire while we cleared away the dishes. One night, he read something about German Chancellor Hitler's plan to take some land.

I said a bit peevishly, "But that's in Germany, not here." People were always talking about what Germany would do next. I didn't see how that would affect us. Remembering something he'd read a few days ago, I asked, "And doesn't the PM say there'll be peace in our time?"

Dad always explained to us what the news meant. He'd been doing the same thing long before Isabelle died. It was like he wanted me to consider grander things than our own hometown or our friends.

My dad was brilliant, and deep down I was proud he explained things to me. He wanted me to live up to his expectations. With Isabelle gone, it was all up to me to make him proud, but sometimes desires got in my way.

"Chrissy, you need to understand what's happening in the world." Then he launched into his teaching mode. "Yon Hitler is a bully, but he's a canny one."

I tried not to roll my eyes. It's not that I didn't want to listen; what I wanted was to ride my bicycle before dark. I sighed as I realized this was going to take a while, so I flopped down on the footstool next to his overstuffed chair.

He continued. "Six years ago, they elected Hindenburg to his second term as president of Germany, but Hitler was the head of the Nazi party. They received quite a few votes, and they were growing in power. President Hindenburg appeased them by nominating Hitler as chancellor of Germany."

Sometimes Da could read my thoughts. I was getting lost, and he explained, "We have a prime minister and a king." I nodded for him to go on. "Hitler would be the prime minister, an' yon Hindenburg would be the king." I cocked my head and scrunched my face, trying to figure out what he meant.

"Yon Hindenburg represents the country, but Chancellor Hitler runs the government, and Hitler's man Hermann Goering presides over their parliament. They call it the Reichstag. Just after that, the Reichstag building burned down. Hitler blamed the fire on the other powerful political party, the Communists." My dad raised a finger and challenged me. "Now, Chrissy, who do you think would do such a thing?"

My eyes wandered to the window. My friends were laughing and playing outside, but when I looked up into Dad's face, he was waiting for me to speak. Times like this I wished I could learn to sidestep his questions.

"What happened next might give you a clue. Hitler encouraged Hindenburg to revoke the civil liberties of the German people to protect them and quell civil violence."

Even though I was only ten, he'd piqued my interest with his challenge, but I needed to know more. "What are civil liberties?"

“Well, your right to believe differently from your government. The right to work where you want, go to what church you choose, that sort of thing.”

I couldn’t imagine someone telling me what to believe when my dad didn’t. “That’s a bad idea. Did Hinden-something do that?”

“Aye, he did in 1933. They called it the Reichstag Fire Decree. He said it would protect the people from the Communists. After the decree, the president died.”

He had me now. I tried to puzzle it out. “Wait, are you saying Hitler burned this Reichstag place?”

“Nay then, Chrissy, he doesna have ta do it himself, but if his people burn down the building and then point a finger at his greatest competition, yon Hitler looks like a hero.”

“But, Da, you don’t know that he or his people did it. You only think he did, right?”

My dad gave me his signature wink. It usually meant he was pleased with me. “Things are not always as they appear, but it’s not such a leap to guess how they might be.” Sounds from the street faded from my consciousness as Da’s face grew serious. “There were riots all over, and Hitler said it was the Communists. A lot of working people like us had their autos and even homes burned.”

I stopped him by asking, “Wait, Hitler did that?”

“If you wanted the people to join the Communist party, would you do it by burning their homes or even breaking their windows?” Dad shook his head. “Then Hitler used the decree to restrict the people to a one-party government. Hitler said they made this decree to protect the people.”

“But it took away their rights?”

Dad just nodded.

“And Hitler was in charge?" I stared into the flames, imagining the fires in Germany. “Then what happened?”

“He arrested anyone who disagreed with him.”

“Aye, because the old president made the decree to protect the people. But it dinna do that, did it?”

“Nay then, taking away a person’s rights rarely protects them. Here it gave Hitler power over them.” Da winked at me again when I understood.

He was like that. He always wanted me to decide for myself. Da smiled. “Off ye go now. You still have plenty of daylight to ride bicycles wi’ yer friends.”

“Thanks, Da.” I smiled. So he knew I was eager to get outside. I left with a thankful kiss planted on his cheek.

After that I listened whenever adults talked about the news around the world. Hitler was often the subject of conversations. People whispered about his racial policies and his greed for more territory. I didn’t see how the bully of Germany mattered to us in the foothills of the Scottish Highlands.

That August, Hitler required Jews to change all non-Jewish first names to Sara if you were a girl or Israel if you were a boy. We even discussed the German notion of racial purity in class at school. No one liked the idea. Della had six younger brothers and sisters. She blurted out, “Och, if we were all called Sara, how would they know who I was calling a dunderheid?” The class laughed, but in the end none of us liked the idea of losing our names.

We talked about it after dinner, and I remember Dad said it wasn’t safe to even appear Jewish. That sticks in my mind. The next day, a boy at my school said I looked like a Jew.

“And you, Albert, look like a fool.” Everyone laughed at Albert’s expense, but after dinner I asked, “Mum, do I look Jewish?”

She stopped clearing dishes and scowled. “What makes ye ask such a thing?”

“Oh, nothing,” She didn’t look away. “It’s just that Albert Campbell said I looked like a Jew.”

My mum put down the dish and led me to the mirror. “Ye ken we Scots are all different even if people say we all have red hair and freckles.” I nodded. “It’s that way with most countries. Still, Hitler says all Jews have dark hair and eyes and big noses.”

I laughed, “Like Da, he has those.”

“Aye, but his mam has bonnie red hair.” She turned me to face the mirror. “We both have dark hair, and I have blue eyes and yours are brown. That doesna make us Jews. It makes Albert a . . .” She paused, looking for a word.

“A fool. Aye, that’s what I said.” Mum went back to the kitchen chuckling and shaking her head. Something occurred to me. “If I were in Germany, would they arrest me for looking Jewish?”

Mum frowned. “I don’t know, maybe so, but dinna worry, that’ll never happen here.” I wondered if dark-eyed, dark-haired, big-nosed Germans told themselves the same thing.

Wendy

Seattle

June 15, 1968

3 a.m.

Mum pulled a faded photograph from those scattered on the dining-room table and slid it in front of me. There she was, older than the last photo but still recognizable as my mum.

I asked, “How old were you here?”

She smiled down at the skinny girl with short black hair and enormous eyes. “Eleven, I think.”

My little sister Heather was eleven, and I couldn’t imagine her being so serious. “Did all those stories about Hitler scare you? Did you even understand what was happening?”

She patted my hand. “It’s hard to explain. My dad’s a very special person. He graduated from high school at fourteen and planned to attend the University of Glasgow. Then his father died, and he had to give up college. As oldest, it fell to him to support his mother, three brothers and sister.”

“Support—you mean he got a job?”

She nodded. “He also helped raise his brothers and sister. You know, discipline, advice—everything a father would do.”

“So his strength came from trials too?”

A gleam of pride lit her face. “His dream was to be a marine engineer. And eventually he became one. He worked his way through Scotts Shipyard until they saw his genius. During the war, he took every submarine built at Scotts on its shakedown cruise before it was turned over to the navy. To make sure it was seaworthy and battle ready.

“I was so proud of him. My dad spoke to me like another adult, capable of discussing world events. He expected me to understand, so I guess I did my best not to disappoint him.” Mum’s tone was contemplative. “Trust me, trials change you. They give you strength.”

I sighed as her words reminded me that my heart was still sore from losing John. I wanted to change the subject away from reminders of my trial. I picked another picture off the pile on our kitchen table. My mum as a ten-year-old. “That’s you in front of your school?”