



Heart Song

By V.C. Andrews

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When Melody Logan's mother died in a car accident, Melody lost the last shred of family she had ever known. She was practically a stranger to the Logans, her wealthy relatives on Cape Cod, where she now drifted on a sea of dark secrets. In the eyes of gentle Aunt Sara, Melody was a replacement for her dead daughter, while for Uncle Jacob she was a reminder of the family's shameful past. Only good-hearted Cary seemed to care, and since it was revealed that she and Cary weren't truly cousins, the affection that had always surged between them now crested in thrilling waves.

But Melody knew she could never truly echo Cary's loving promises until she discovered her own buried identity. Despite Grandma Olivia's daggerlike threats, Melody sought out Belinda, a mysterious, half-crazy woman who was her *real* grandmother. Belinda gave Melody hope -- and a glimmer of the pearls of truth she knew were hidden in the shifting Cape Cod sands. Somehow, someday, the story of her past would be her hard-won treasure, to be savored in a world of sunshine and happiness...where she truly belonged.

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Heart Song By V.C. Andrews Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #206104 in Books
- Brand: Pocket Books
- Published on: 1997-05-01
- Released on: 1997-05-01
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 6.75" h x .90" w x 4.19" l, .41 pounds
- Binding: Mass Market Paperback
- 384 pages

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Editorial Review

From Library Journal

Another posthumous tale from Andrews that continues the best-selling Logan Family series (e.g., *Melody*, Pocket, 1996). Here, Melody strives for her own identity.

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About the Author

One of the most popular authors of all time, V.C. Andrews has been a bestselling phenomenon since the publication of *Flowers in the Attic*, first in the renowned Dollanganger family series which includes *Petals on the Wind*, *If There Be Thorns*, *Seeds of Yesterday*, and *Garden of Shadows*. The family saga continues with *Christopher's Diary: Secrets of Foxworth*, *Christopher's Diary: Echoes of Dollanganger*, and *Secret Brother*. V.C. Andrews has written more than seventy novels, which have sold more than 106 million copies worldwide and been translated into twenty-five foreign languages. Join the conversation about the world of V.C. Andrews at [Facebook.com/OfficialVCAndrews](https://www.facebook.com/OfficialVCAndrews).

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Prologue

As a little girl, I'd spend hours looking out our trailer window, dreaming of the life I'd have when I grew older. I dreamed of all the friends I'd make, the parties I'd attend, the special boyfriends I'd bring home to meet Mommy and Daddy. Oh, if I'd only known that the coming years would bring more sadness and pain than I could ever imagine. If only I'd wished harder, dreamed longer, maybe my life would be different, maybe I wouldn't be sitting on this beach so lonely and confused.

Instead of parties and friends to occupy my time, I spend many of my days here, staring out at the ocean, thinking about Mommy and my step-daddy, about how they're gone now, dead and buried, leaving me all alone, an orphan. Of course, I'm not completely alone. I have my new family, the Logans: Grandma Olivia, Grandpa Samuel, Grandma Belinda, Uncle Jacob, Aunt Sara, and Cary, too, but they all have their own reasons for making me feel unwelcome, unwanted. After all, they hadn't asked me to come live with them. In fact, in all my sixteen years they hadn't asked for me at all.

When Mommy first brought me to Provincetown after my step-daddy died, I couldn't believe she was going to leave me with strangers. I didn't know them, and, family or not, they made it clear they didn't want to know me. They couldn't get past the fact that I was Haille's child and the Logans had nothing but hate and contempt for my mother. I begged Mommy to take me with her, not to leave me grieving all alone. I had just lost the only daddy I had ever known, and now she was leaving too! But nothing I did or said would make her stay; she was determined to become a famous actress or model and she said I would just stand in her way.

At first I believed Mommy would come back for me. Surely she would miss me as much as I missed her. Didn't she cry herself to sleep each night as I did, missing Daddy, missing our old life back in Sewell, West Virginia? But no, Mommy was too self-absorbed to miss me or think of me or even to remember to call when she said she would. I finally realized that I was stuck in Provincetown for good. Oh how I hated Mommy for being so selfish, for running off with her lover Archie Marlin and leaving me with this family who hated me, hated her, and wanted me to be someone I wasn't. It seemed the only way I fit into the Logans' life was if I replaced my cousin Laura, Cary's twin who had died in a boating accident.

But I didn't want to be Laura, I wanted to be me! But who am I? When Daddy died and I learned he was really my step-daddy, I was left with a million questions. Who was my real Daddy? Did he think of me? Did he even know I existed? I thought I could find some answers with the Logans, but they refused to discuss my search for my father and became more secretive with each question I asked. Cary was the only one who would help me, and together we learned that Kenneth Childs, a local artist and friend of the family, was once in love with Mommy and could possibly be my father.

I hadn't had long to rejoice in my news when word came that Mommy had been killed in a car accident in California. Was I never to be happy again? It seemed that whenever anything good happened to me it was always followed by some horrible tragedy. What could be worse than losing Mommy? I thought a part of me died with Daddy, but it wasn't until Mommy was gone too that I realized how truly alone I was. If only I could find my real father I knew he would make things different. Better. I would have a whole new life with him, a life where I was loved and cared for, a life like the one I remembered in West Virginia. Kenneth Childs just had to be my real daddy. He had to be.

pard

Chapter 1: Curiosity Killed the Cat

"I'm leaving, Aunt Sara!" I shouted toward the kitchen as I hurried to the front door after hearing Kenneth Childs blow the horn of his jeep. Cary had introduced me to Kenneth at the beginning of the summer, and it wasn't long after that Kenneth hired me to be his assistant. Kenneth was mostly a loner and a bit of a slob, so I helped him around the house, cooking, cleaning, generally keeping him organized, as well as helping him around his art studio. As I cleaned and swept and dusted I waited, waited for him to open up to me, to tell me if I was his daughter.

When Grandma Olivia revealed that my true grandmother was really her sister Belinda, I realized that Uncle Jacob and Aunt Sara were not actually my uncle and aunt; they were my cousins, as were Cary and May. But because Jacob was my step-father's brother, I continued to call him Uncle and call Sara, Aunt Sara. Cary was happier knowing we weren't as closely blood related as we both originally thought. Ironically, this made him behave more shyly toward me, as though now that a true relationship was not forbidden as some unforgivable sin, he wasn't sure how to proceed.

I put these thoughts of Cary and our blossoming friendship behind me as I grabbed my gear and headed outside to meet Kenneth.

As usual, Kenneth's dog, Ulysses, was sitting in the rear of the jeep. His pink tongue was out, and he was panting, looking as if he were smiling in anticipation of my arrival. His ebony coat had streaks of gray running through it, especially around his snout. During one of Kenneth's rare warm moments, he told me Ulysses had become sprier since I had begun to look after him. "Despite his age," Kenneth added, for Ulysses was nearly a hundred in human years.

So far, that remark about Ulysses was the closest Kenneth had come to giving me a compliment. He had merely grunted his approval when he saw how well I had cleaned and organized his home, and he simply nodded when I did the same in the studio. Most of the time, he was so absorbed in his work, we barely spoke. He made it clear from the beginning that he wouldn't tolerate any interruptions to his concentration, so once he stepped into that studio and began something, I had to move like a ghost.

"An artist has to step out of the real world and dwell in the world of his own creation if he is to succeed," he

explained. "It takes a while to get there, and when he's jarred out of it, for whatever reason, it's like starting all over again each time he goes back to what he was doing. Understand?"

I nodded and he seemed satisfied.

"Morning," he said as I stepped up and into the jeep.

"Good morning."

I had my hair brushed back and tied with one of Laura's mauve silk ribbons and I was wearing what was to become my summer uniform: a sweatshirt and dungarees and a pair of sneakers without socks. The sweatshirt was navy blue with Provincetown printed on it in faded white lettering and it, too, had been Laura's.

When I had first arrived in Provincetown to live with Uncle Jacob and Aunt Sara, I felt funny wearing Laura's things. I saw how much it bothered Cary, but if I refused to wear anything Aunt Sara suggested I wear, she became very hurt. Now, Cary accepted it and I...I had the feeling Laura would want me to wear her clothes, even though I had never met her and knew her only from what I heard and the pictures of her I had seen.

Ulysses leaned forward for my hug and licked my face.

"Good morning, Ulysses." I laughed. "Don't eat me for breakfast."

"I think it's going to be overcast all day today. Might even rain," Kenneth said as he turned the jeep around and we bounced over the road.

For New Englanders, especially Cape Codders, I thought, the weather was the safest topic to discuss. Everyone had something to say about it, and it usually had nothing to do with politics or religion, although I had heard Judge Childs at one of Grandma Olivia's formal luncheons recently blame the Democrats for too much rain last year.

"I don't mind the thunderstorms. We had them in West Virginia, but I wouldn't want to be in a hurricane," I said.

"No. I've been in a few and they're not pleasant."

We turned onto the highway and headed out toward the Point, where Kenneth lived and had his studio. Although the jeep rode well enough, it looked as weathered and worn as an old pair of shoes, the sort you hated to give up because they were so comfortable. Despite his success as an artist, Kenneth had few of the trappings of wealth. He just didn't look as if he belonged in a shiny new luxury automobile. It would be impractical for him to drive it over the beach road to his home anyway.

I had been working for him only a little more than a week, but I already knew that he didn't spend much time relaxing by the ocean. Occasionally, he went for a walk to think through something artistic that confused him, and it was mainly from those walks and the driving he did in the open jeep that he got his bronze color. His darkened complexion brought out the hazel specks in his otherwise often dark brown eyes, especially during the morning hours, when he looked so bright and alert.

As usual, he wore a pair of leather sandals, ragged jeans, and one of his faded blue T-shirts. This one had some small holes down the right side. With his full beard looking a bit more straggly than usual, he could easily pass for a homeless man, I thought. However, he did keep his dark brown hair neatly tied in a pony tail. Most of the time, he simply had it tied with a short piece of string. Today he had it bound with a thick rubber band. He had a small gold dot of an earring in his right lobe, and wore a shiny piece of black driftwood shaped in a half moon tied around his neck with a string of tiny sea shells.

He drove quietly, his eyes fixed on the road, his face so still, it reminded me of the faces on his statues. There was just the slightest twitch in the muscles of his jaw. I thought he had the type of face that would make any woman's heart flutter when he looked her way, or even when he didn't.

Despite the cloudy sky, the air was warm. Provincetown was crowded with summer tourists. There was much more automobile traffic than usual, and even at this early hour, there were people walking along the streets. Kenneth didn't rage about the invasion of outsiders as did so many other Cape Codders I had met. He spent so little of his time in town, he didn't seem to notice or care. And then, of course, there was the prospect of his works being sold faster when the tourists arrived. Their dollars were just as good as local dollars he told me when I mentioned Uncle Jacob's attitude.

"Did you see anything in the marble block yet?" I asked as we approached the beach road that wound around and over the dunes to his home and studio.

He glanced at me quickly, looked forward, and then shook his head.

"Nope," he said. "Nothing."

"How can you be sure it will come?" I asked. It took him so long to respond, I thought he wasn't going to answer.

"It always has before," he finally said.

The first day he brought me to the studio to work for him, I saw he had a six-foot-tall by nearly four-foot-wide block of marble. He told me it had been delivered the week before.

"It's just like a blank canvas," he explained. When I said I didn't understand, he approached it, put his hand on the stone, and lowered his head as if in prayer. Then, he walked around the piece as he began his lecture.

"The ancient Greeks believed the artistic work was already in the stone. The artist's job is to free it, to bring it out."

"It's in the stone?"

"Yes," he said, almost smiling at my incredulity. "This is what is meant by the artist's vision. In time it will appear to me."

I stared at the marble, looking for some hint, some small indication of a shape within, but I saw nothing. At the time I wondered how long it would be before he saw something. According to him it had been over two weeks and he still hadn't, but he didn't seem upset or nervous about it. He had a patience, a calmness, I had already come to admire.

Although I had been trying to ask him casually about himself all week, I still knew very little about him. He never volunteered any information and getting him to answer my questions was like pulling porcupine quills out of a hound dog.

The house and studio came into view.

"Were you always artistic?" I asked. "Even as a child?"

"Yes," he said. We pulled up to the house and he turned off the engine. Then he reached back for a bag of groceries he had bought before picking me up.

"Did my mother ever see anything you created?" I asked quickly. He didn't pause. He opened the door, the groceries under his arm.

"Everyone I know has seen something I did one time or another," he said and headed for the house. I watched him in frustration as he walked away from my questions. I keep giving him opportunities to open up a conversation about the past, I thought, and every time, he shuts the door in my face. No matter how hard I struggled to find a common ground, a topic of conversation that would lead us to talk about the past and maybe produce the revelations I expected, Kenneth either ignored me or changed the subject. So far, he had succeeded in keeping himself shut up in his work and his private thoughts.

I got out of the jeep, Ulysses following behind me.

Kenneth paused at the door.

"Just put all this away and then come to the studio. I want you to prepare some clay. I've decided to do those vases for the Bakerfields to kill time while I wait for my vision. They've been after me for months and they have so much money, it's obscene. Might as well help them lessen the burden of their wealth," he added dryly and entered the house.

Were all artists as disdainful of their customers? I wondered. He acted as if he were doing everyone who liked his art work a favor, instead of being grateful for all the attention he was receiving. Hundreds, probably thousands of artists would die to be in his shoes, I thought.

I was beginning to wonder if I even liked the man who could be my father, much less ever come to love him. Was it possible for me to love him anyway? Is blood enough to bind two people? Surely love had to come from other things, the most important of which was trust. Trust was coming hard to me these days, as one by one everyone and everything I'd come to believe in had let me down.

When I decided to take the job and work for Kenneth, I hoped that just being around him, seeing how and where he lived, would make it possible for me to understand him, but Kenneth's house, furniture, clothing, and possessions were as inscrutable as everything else in his life. The day Cary first brought me to the house, I ventured up to the front windows and peered in. Cary had described Kenneth's furniture as something from a thrift store. When I looked in, I realized he hadn't been exaggerating.

I did the best I could with the thinned and frayed rugs and the worn easy chair, settee, and scratched wooden tables, however polishing and cleaning only seemed to bring out their age and damage. But the house did need a good onceover. I found cobwebs in almost all the corners and sand tracked in everywhere. The windows were clouded with salt and dust and the kitchen was a disaster. The stove was caked with grime, the

stove top stained. It took me most of my first week just to get the kitchen clean enough to use. Again, I wondered if all artists were like Kenneth Childs, and if they were, why would anyone really want to be one?

His bedroom wasn't any different from the rest of the house. I could have planted flowers in the dirt under the bed and behind the dresser. I swept and washed the wooden floors. I took all of his clothes out of the closet and organized them, after I had washed and ironed most of them. I emptied the dresser drawers and arranged everything in an orderly fashion and then I washed the windows and polished everything I could.

At first I really thought he was absentminded. He didn't seem to notice any difference, or if he did, he behaved as if he expected it. I had to fish for approval.

"Is the housework all right?" I finally asked. That was when he gave me his grunt.

Kenneth's lack of appreciation for my work made me furious, and I left to walk Ulysses on the beach and blow off some steam. In many ways Kenneth was as selfish and self-absorbed as my mother. He was so oblivious to others around him that I thought I could probably up and quit and it would take him three or four days to notice that I wasn't coming around anymore. But I couldn't just give up and go home. Kenneth could hold all the answers I'd been searching for. If only he'd just notice something other than his damn art. He wasn't like my step-daddy, who took the time to praise the little things I'd done around our little trailer, even things I thought were too insignificant to notice. It seemed as if nothing mattered to Kenneth but his art, and if I didn't fit neatly into the world he'd created around his talent, then I would surely be left out of his life, no matter whether I was his daughter or not.

In my short time with Kenneth I'd found that walking along the beach had a soothing effect on me. The rhythm of the waves, the sheen on the surface, the vastness of the horizon put everything in perspective and made me realize I needed to be patient, to wait calmly for answers. If Kenneth were truly my father, he would let me know in his own time, in his own way. No matter how long it took, I would wait for him to tell me the truth; it was coming as surely as the next wave would wash upon the shore.

So I swallowed my pride and returned to keep Kenneth's house in order, prepare his meals, and help with his artistic materials. Occasionally, he left me alone in his studio, and when he did, I wandered about gazing at some of his drawings and sculptures, always looking for some clue, something that would tell me more about him. And maybe, just maybe, about myself.

The studio itself was mainly just a large room. On one side were tables and a kiln, and on the tables were his tools and materials, which I had recently reorganized. There was a beat-up tweed settee in the far corner with a driftwood table in front of it. When someone sat on the settee, a cloud of dust rose from the cushions, so I spent a lot of time vacuuming it.

The only truly curious thing in the studio was a door set into the back wall that Kenneth kept locked with a combination lock. I assumed it was where he kept his hazardous chemicals and asked him if he wanted me to do any cleaning in there. He virtually barked at my question. "No. Leave that room alone."

But I couldn't help thinking about it. Why was it necessary for him to keep that door locked? He didn't even lock his house, nor did he bother to lock the door to the studio. One afternoon, when I was alone in the studio, I tried to peek through the locked door, but it was too dark behind it to see anything. I told Cary about it and he was intrigued, too.

Today, I spent most of the morning working with Kenneth in his studio, watching him shape and mold the

vases. The first few times I had been in the studio while he worked, he simply acted as if I weren't even there. Of course, after hearing his warning about it, I didn't make a sound, but twice, and now a third time, he talked while he worked, but it was always about art.

"Yes, I've been artistic for as long as I can remember," he said, returning to the conversation we'd started that morning, "but I'm primarily a sculptor now. Sculpture is probably the oldest art form and has undergone only minor variations. Real sculpting, that is," he added glancing at me. I sat on a wooden stool and watched and listened. "I don't go for this new, radical stuff, welding, using neon tubes. A gimmick is not art. An artist has to be authentic. That's the most important thing. An artist must always be true and as pure and simple in his impulse as he or she can be," he lectured.

He stepped back and looked at the vase he was shaping. It was different from any I had ever seen. It was almost shaped like an S.

"I don't recall seeing any of your works in Grandma Olivia's house," I said. "How come she doesn't have anything? She's such good friends with your father and he's so proud of you."

Kenneth paused and stiffened as if I had lashed him with a whip. He never talked about his father, nor, as far as I could tell, did they ever spend time with each other. Without answering my question, he turned back to his work.

"By using soft, yielding materials like this," he explained, "a sculptor can capture and record fleeting impressions much the way a painter does in a quick sketch."

"It's very interesting," I said.

"Everything I do is different. I don't believe true art can be mass produced. It's a contradiction to reproduce it. If it's art, it is by definition one of a kind."

"But then how would people who can't afford them ever have nice things? Not everyone can afford an original."

"Let them go to museums," he replied. Then he paused and glanced at me. "I've given things away to people who can't afford to buy them if I believed they really appreciated the art. Lawyers do pro bono work; so can artists," he added. "This town is full of business people disguised as artists. If you're in it for the money, you're a hypocrite," he added bitterly.

"But everyone needs money to eat, to live," I protested.

"That just follows," he said. "You don't make it a priority. The art, that's the priority." He paused and really looked at me. "Don't you feel that way about your music?"

"I'm not really that good," I said.

He turned away with a shrug.

"If you say you're not, you're not," he muttered. "You have to believe in yourself if you want anyone else to believe in you," he added. The hardness of his words brought tears to my eyes. I felt a lump grow in my throat and had to look away for a moment, but he didn't notice, or if he did, he chose not to pay attention.

"I'm actually working up an appetite," he said. "Why don't you go think about lunch."

I nodded and slipped off the stool. I looked back once before leaving the studio. He was working on his vase, seemingly oblivious to the questions his words brought to my mind. Would I ever find something to believe in so strongly? Kenneth had his art, Momma'd had her acting, even Uncle Jacob had his fishing business. But does believing in yourself mean you become so distanced from others that no one can believe in you?

It was the first, but far from the last time the thought occurred to me that Kenneth Childs hid behind his art, used it like a shield or a fortress to keep anyone and everyone away from touching him. Why? I wondered, and understood that when I found the answer to that, I would find the answer to everything there was between us.

Sometimes Kenneth chose to eat his lunch in his studio, staring at his work in progress and thinking as he ate. If he did that, I ate my lunch on the beach with Ulysses at my side. But it was when Kenneth and I ate lunch together in the kitchen that he was the friendliest and the warmest. At these times I had the feeling he was trying to relax with me, ease himself into more personal conversations, almost the way someone might lower himself into a hot bath.

This particular afternoon, we ate together in the kitchen. I made us cheese and turkey sandwiches on Portuguese bread and some fresh lemonade.

"How do you like going to school here?" he asked.

"It's all right. I've had good teachers. Mama Arlene used to tell me school was like anything else -- it's as good as you make it, as you want it to be."

"Who are this Mama Arlene and Papa George you've mentioned? I don't recall any Logan relatives by those names," he said. When he grimaced, the lines at the corners of his eyes deepened and cut through his temples, almost as if someone had taken a pencil and drawn them.

As I explained who they were, he ate, listened, and nodded.

"Despite what I have learned about my family, I still think of them as my grandparents," I concluded.

"But Papa George died and Mama Arlene moved away from Sewell?"

Yes. I visited his grave when I visited my step-daddy's."

He stared at me intently and then looked out the window. I thought he would grow interested in something else, the glide of a tern, the shape of a cloud, and drift off in his own thoughts as he so often did. But instead he turned back to me.

"What exactly have you learned about your own family?" he asked. My heart began to thump. Was this it? Was this the moment I had been waiting for?

"First, I was surprised to discover Mommy had been brought up with my step-daddy, the two of them living as brother and sister. Neither of them had ever told me that."

He nodded.

"Yes," he said, "they were like brother and sister. Brothers and sister I should say, for Jacob was there, too. When I was little and I used to play with them, I didn't realize Haille had been adopted by the Logans. As far as I knew, she had always been there, part of that family. And then one day, I think I was about nine or ten, something like that, Jacob told me. He just blurted it out like kids do. He said something like....Haille's not really our sister. She's a waif."

Kenneth laughed to himself and I didn't move or utter a sound for fear he would stop and I'd never learn anything about my past. He continued, "At the time I thought he said 'wave.' But he said it again, and finally I asked my father what that meant and he explained that the Logans adopted her, but I didn't learn who her mother was until much, much later. No one has a better lock on the door to their closet of skeletons than the Logans, especially Olivia Logan."

"How did my mother feel about being an orphan?"

"I think it bothered her only because Olivia made a point of reminding her," he said.

"Maybe that's why..."

"Why what?"

"She was so wild," I said reluctantly. I hated saying anything bad about her, especially since she was no longer here to defend herself. "She was just rebelling."

Kenneth didn't agree or disagree. He just glanced out the window again then said, "I like Olivia. She and I have a healthy respect for one another when we see each other, but she is like the dowager queen of Provincetown. There's no one with bluer blood. Haille was never impressed with all that. In a sense you're right. The truth is I think she hated not knowing where she came from, hated who Olivia wanted her to be."

"No one likes not knowing who their parents are," I said "No one wants to be an orphan."

He turned to me again, and again I held my breath.

"Sometimes, you're better off not knowing," he finally replied.

"How can you be better off not knowing?"

"It's like you have a clean slate, no one's sins to overcome or forget. You can be yourself, and anyone who can be an individual these days is lucky, especially if he can make a living at the same time. Speaking of which, I've got to go into town to get some supplies," he added and stood. "Got to earn money. I'll be back in a few hours."

I sat there fuming, feeling as if I had hit another wall of silence about my past. How could he be so cold about it? If he was my father, why didn't he just admit it? Was he afraid I would ask to move in with him? Was he afraid he would have to provide for me?

Maybe, just as he said, I was better off not knowing. I could create my father out of my own imagination and make him perfect. He would have no skeletons in his closet and no sins to weigh on both of us. He could be like some mythical god, who sailed in on a cloud of sea mist and strolled confidently into Provincetown and when he saw Mommy and she saw him they fell in love instantly and spent warm nights on the beach. One

day, he was just gone and then I was born.

Now that I was here, one day or one night I would be on the beach and my mythical father would appear and tell me everything was all right. I wasn't an orphan and I had a destiny.

Dreams, I thought. They're the riches of a poor person, stashed in treasure chests buried deeply in the imagination. But are dreams enough?

I cleaned up and took Ulysses for his afternoon walk. The clouds had broken up and the sky had become a quilt with deep, large patches of blue. The breeze was still strong, making my hair dance around my face. The breakers were high and sparkling, and once again I turned to the sea for answers.

I was so lost in my own thoughts and the surf was so loud, I didn't hear the horn or the shouts until I turned to look back at the house and saw that Cary had driven up in his truck and was waving wildly from the top of a dune. I waved back and started toward him.

"What are you doing here?"

"The water is too rough today. My father decided to come in early, so I thought I'd take a ride over to see how you were doing. Where's Kenneth?"

"He went on an errand he said would take him a few hours," I replied.

Cary knelt and patted Ulysses, but kept his eyes on me.

"Has he said anything?"

"Very little. I thought he was going to say something at lunch today, but -- "

"But?"

"He said some people are better off not knowing who their parents are."

"He said that?"

I nodded.

"Strange."

"Something's making him very bitter. I wish I could get him to tell me more."

"I guess he will, in time."

"I'm afraid I might be old and gray by then," I wailed.

Cary laughed and stood up, reaching out to help me climb up the knoll.

"Somehow I can't imagine you old and gray." He continued to hold my hand even though I was beside him. His eyes washed over my face. "The sun's bringing out your freckles," he said. When I started to moan, he

quickly added, "but that's cute."

"Cute? I'm too old to be cute," I snapped, pulling my hand from his as I started for the house.

"Hey," he called, but I just kept walking. Suddenly I felt like screaming at everyone and everything. "I'm sorry," he said catching up. "I didn't mean --"

"It's all right," I said. "It's just that I'm so sick of everyone treating me like a child."

"Huh?"

I walked slower, my arms crossed under my breasts. The blood that had rushed into my cheeks warmed my face. I couldn't explain why I was suddenly so angry. Maybe I wasn't angry; maybe I was just afraid, afraid that no one would ever take me and my questions seriously. Cary seized my arm at the elbow and I spun around.

"If you want," he said, "I'll just confront him. I'll just come right out and ask him. I'm not afraid of him," he bragged.

"If he won't tell me anything, what makes you think he would tell you?"

"Then maybe you shouldn't work here anymore," he said.

"Maybe I shouldn't. Maybe I shouldn't have let you talk me into coming back to the Cape in the first place."

I had run away when Grandma Olivia told me about Mommy being raised a Logan. I had gone back to Sewell, but that was when I found out Papa George had died and Mama Arlene had gone to live with her sister in North Carolina. I had no one in Sewell, either, except my best friend Alice Morgan. But I couldn't live with her. Her mother couldn't understand how a daughter of hers would befriend someone raised in a trailer park.

"Of course you should have come back. This is where you belong," Cary insisted. "People care about you here."

"People care about me? I've got a grandmother who wishes I would wash out to sea so I don't embarrass her, an uncle, your father, who thinks I'm the daughter of Satan; a man who could be my father but is unwilling to tell me -- "

"I care about you," he said. "A lot."

I tried to hold on to my anger but instead I took a deep breath and let my shoulders sag. I believed Cary, but somehow it wasn't the same. I needed someone to love me the way my daddy did. Of course this thought made me feel guilty, as if I were trying to replace him in my heart. But wasn't that exactly what I was doing?

"It's all just confusing," I said. "Confusing and frustrating."

He nodded.

"Well, you've been here a while. You clean his house, see his things. Are there any hints, clues? Pictures,

letters?"

"Nothing I've seen." And then I remembered. "There's only one place I haven't looked."

"Where's that?"

"Remember I told you about that door he has locked in the studio?"

"Oh, yeah. Let me look at it," he said. My heart began to pound.

"Kenneth doesn't like anyone going into his studio when he's away."

"He keeps it unlocked, doesn't he?"

"Yes, but -- "

"We won't touch anything. Let me just look," he said.

I looked toward the dune road and thought about Cary's plan. Kenneth had said he would be away for hours.

"Okay," I said, "but don't touch any of his things in the studio. Even though it's usually a mess, he would know if something had been moved an inch."

"Fine," Cary said.

We walked to the studio, pausing momentarily to look into the fish pond.

"When did he add the turtle?" Cary asked.

"I don't know. Maybe last weekend. He calls him Shell."

Cary laughed and we went into the studio. He saw the block of marble and asked about it immediately. I explained the artistic vision just the way Kenneth had explained it to me, but Cary squeezed his eyebrows toward each other, smirked, and asked, "How can you see anything in a block of marble?"

"You can if you have an artist's eyes," I said. He again and then went to the closet door. For a few minutes, he studied the lock and the hasp.

"Just a combination lock, but it would take forever to figure out the combination. However..."

"However what?" I asked coming up beside him.

"This hasp is attached with only these four screws. It would be easy to unscrew them, take off the hasp, leave the lock in place, and open the door. I could do it in five minutes," he claimed. I started to shake my head. "And I can put it back just the way it is so no one would notice. It's easier than finding seaweed on the beach."

"No," I said, turning away. He seized my wrist.

"You haven't gotten him to say anything important and you haven't found anything that would give you any clues."

"He wouldn't have put a lock on it if it wasn't very private," I said.

"You have a right to know about yourself. No one has a right to keep that under lock and key, do they? Well?" he pursued.

I thought a moment.

"You can put it back just the way it is?"

"Easily." He reached into his pocket and produced his Swiss Army pocket knife to show me the small screwdriver. "Okay?" he asked.

I looked at the lock again. Maybe there was nothing behind this door. Maybe it was just filled with some of his vases or statues, but Cary was right. I would always wonder.

"Okay," I said. He smiled and put the screwdriver to work. In minutes, just as he had predicted, the hasp came free of the wall and with it, the lock. He folded his knife and turned the handle.

"Ready?"

I took a deep breath and nodded. He opened the door. It was a deeper closet than I had anticipated. Apparently, no one had been in it for a long time. There were cobwebs across the doorway. Cary cleared them out of our way and we stepped into the closet. We saw an easel on the right, a carton filled with brushes, and another carton filled with carving tools beside it. There was an artist's smock hanging from a hook on the wall above the cartons.

"Nothing unusual," I said, my voice tinged with disappointment.

"Isn't there a light in here?" Cary asked as he groped through the air for a pull chain. He found a string and pulled it to turn on a single, naked bulb dangling from the ceiling. The illumination washed away the shadows and revealed a pile of canvases under a white sheet. The sheet was caked with dust. Cary curiously lifted one edge and gazed under it, but I had been hoping we would find a box of letters from Mommy or a diary, something I could read to discover information.

"It just looks like some pictures of someone, but I can't tell anything. I'll hold this up. You pull one out," he instructed.

"We shouldn't, Cary. He's going to know."

"We'll just put it back the way we found it," he said. "Go on," he urged. "Aren't you curious?"

I was, but I was also afraid. Ulysses stood in the doorway behind us, watching, and to me it was as if he were wondering why I had betrayed his master.

"Let's just back out of here and put the hasp back in place, Cary."

"We're in here already; we might as well look at everything," he insisted and held the sheet up with one hand while he worked the first canvas off the top of the pile. As it came out, I stepped closer.

First, we saw a pair of legs and then, as more and more of the canvas was revealed, we saw it was a naked woman sprawled on a beach blanket. The picture was done in a most realistic style; it was practically a photograph. Cary got so excited, he dropped the sheet entirely and used both hands to lift the canvas and place it on the floor.

We both stared down, neither of us able to speak, for we both recognized the woman. She couldn't be mistaken. It was Mommy, and the picture was done when she was much younger, perhaps in her late teens.

"Wow," Cary said.

"Put it back, Cary," I urged, my throat quickly closing. Instead, he reached in and pulled out the next canvas. This, too, was of Mommy, only in this one, she was standing, completely naked, gazing at the ocean. It had been drawn and painted very precisely. I recalled the small birthmark just below her left hip.

Cary said nothing as he continued to look at the other paintings.

"They're all of her," he said. "Different poses, different places. Here's one on a boat. She could have been a Playboy centerfold."

"Put it all back!" I cried, tears burning my eyes. I turned away. Suddenly, the small room had become stifling and I couldn't breathe. I rushed out and threw myself onto the settee. Cary put everything back the way it was and shut off the closet light.

"Are you all right?" he asked.

"No," I wailed. My tears were freely carving wet lines down my cheeks.

Cary hurried to replace the hasp on the door, and after he had tightened the last screw, he came to me. I raised my eyes and wiped the tears away, a pit of bitterness growing inside me.

"You were right. Those paintings are so explicit they belong in one of those magazines. No wonder he's keeping them behind a locked door."

"Well, no one ever said your mother was shy," Cary offered with a smile.

"Thanks for reminding me," I spit back. I got up and charged out of the studio, my arms folded, my head down. Cary hurried behind, but I kept walking. Ulysses trotted alongside.

"I'm sorry. I just don't know what to say. I was just as surprised as you were."

I stopped by his truck and stared out at the sea.

"Obviously, they were very close when they were younger, for her to have done that. That must mean something," Cary continued.

"Maybe," I said. "Maybe she was just being his model. She never told me anything so I can only guess."

"Just come out and ask Kenneth," Cary suggested.

"And tell him what? That I went spying in his closet?"

"Well....."

"I don't want him to hate me," I said. "He'd never tell me anything then." I spun on Cary. "I don't want anyone to know about this."

"Sure," he said quickly. "Who would I tell, anyway?"

"It's not that you would tell anyone. It just might slip out one day."

"It won't," he promised.

"It would be better if you weren't here when he returns," I said nervously, checking the road into town for signs of Kenneth's jeep.

"Okay. We can talk about it all later, if you want."

I nodded. Quickly, before I realized what he was going to do, Cary reached out and put his arms around me to draw me closer and hug me.

"Everything will be all right," he promised. Then he got into his truck and started the engine. He smiled and waved as he backed it up and drove away. Ulysses and I stood watching the truck bounce over the dune road until it disappeared from sight.

I returned to the house to do some cleaning, and nearly an hour and a half later, I heard the sound of Kenneth's jeep and the quick honking of its horn. Curious, I came out of the house, dust rag still in hand, and watched as Kenneth drove his jeep faster than usual down the dune toward the house. He shut off the engine and leaped over the driver's-side door without even bothering to open it. From where I stood I could see that he had a small package under his arm. I had never seen him so excited.

"I've got it!" he cried, his face beaming.

"What is it?" I asked nodding at the package.

"Not this," he said. "This is just a new tool I needed," he added quickly and took my hand. "Come, quickly!"

"Where?" I asked, starting to laugh at his newfound enthusiasm.

He pulled me along, around the corner of the house and back toward the studio. He thrust open the door but stopped after we entered. We were facing the block of marble. He stood in the doorway, still holding my hand and staring at the marble block. Then he nodded and said, "Yes, yes, yes." He looked at me, nodded again, and looked at the marble.

"What is it?" I asked, now holding my breath.

"The vision. It finally came to me. It happened as I was on my way back home. I was thinking about you."

"Me?"

"And then I looked toward the ocean and it just burst before me, the whole finished work."

"But why me?"

"Because you're the center of this work," he said, nodding at the marble.

"I am?"

"Sit," he ordered, and pulled me toward the settee. I did as he instructed and watched him pace around the block, as I'd seen him do a hundred times before. Except this time there was a peculiar light shining in his eyes.

"Out of a wave emerges this beautiful young woman. I want to catch that transition, that birth from the water, which I will call, The Birth of Neptune's Daughter!" he exclaimed, whirling about to face me.

I had never seen Kenneth's face filled with more excitement. His eyes were positively luminous. He seemed so full of energy, I thought he might just burst before my eyes. The veins strained in his neck and around his temples.

"It's almost as if the muses, the gods and goddesses of art, sent you here," he declared.

I smiled. At last he was looking at me, talking to me, not at me, not through me, or above me. He stepped forward and took my hands into his, pulling me to my feet again.

"Kenneth are you sure?"

"Just stand there," he said bringing me to the marble block. He placed me where he wanted me and then stepped back and stared so intently at me, I couldn't help blushing. He nodded. "Yes, yes," he said. "This is it."

"I don't think I completely understand," I said.

"You will. First, I'll draw the picture and then I'll figure out a method, materials I want to use to make a mockup. You'll be more than just the model. You'll be my assistant. I'll show you how to start on the block and you'll do some of the preliminary work. Artistic assistants often help with the rough cutting and chiseling."

"Model?" I said.

"Of course. It's you I see emerging. Think about it. You came back here to start a whole new life. It is as if you were emerging from the sea. You've been reborn."

He was so excited he could hardly contain his words.

"I'll explain more to you as we go along, but this work is more than just a classical piece about the god of the sea; it's about the birth of femininity, of a woman, the depiction of a young girl's transition into maturity, blossoming, blooming, exploding in her sexuality. Just the way you are right now," he added.

I didn't think it was possible for me to turn any more crimson than I had, but my skin felt as if it were on fire.

"Me?" I said again, horrified at the thought that Kenneth could see all those emotions brewing inside me.

"Of course you. This might very well be the most important work of my whole life, the pinnacle of my career," he said. He grew serious as he stepped closer. "You'll do this with me, won't you? You're not too shy or afraid?"

"I -- "

"I'll take my time with you and I'll show you everything you need to know every step of the way." He took my hands into his again. "We're going to do this together. You'll be part of something very significant, Melody."

I nodded, slowly, still in a daze, bowled over by his exhilaration.

"We'll start tomorrow," he said. "First, I want to spend some time thinking, envisioning. I want to go down to the sea and stare at the waves until I get the shape and the movement I need. In the morning, I'll show you how to use the tools for the rough cut. You can practice on another piece first, okay?"

"I guess," I said. He laughed and slapped his hands together. Then he went back to the marble block and put his hands on it as if he drew some sort of energy and power from it. He stood there with his eyes closed and whispered loudly.

"Yes, yes. I can feel it. This is the vision I've been waiting for."

I guess I was wide eyed, for when he looked at me again, he laughed.

"I'm scaring you, huh?"

"No, I'm just surprised," I said. "Is this what happens to all artists when they get an idea?"

He laughed.

"I don't know about other artists; I know only about myself." He approached me and again took my hands into his as he fixed his intense eyes on me. "Are you afraid you can't be a model?"

"I've never done anything like that."

"We'll go about it slowly. I won't rush you into anything until you're comfortable because if you're not comfortable, you'll be sending out the wrong emotions and I won't be able to create what's in my mind and what's in the marble," he said. "But once we start," he added, smiling, "you'll see it's nothing to be afraid of or ashamed of. You'll feel the power of your own intrinsic beauty and you'll flourish."

His words exhilarated me and I wondered if this was what he had said to my mother? Was this the way he had gotten her to model? Or was there something else between them, the love I suspected? Perhaps what Kenneth really had discovered was his way, his path to follow to tell me about himself and about me and all that had occurred.

I couldn't deny that the idea made me tremble. He must have felt my hands shaking. He squeezed a bit tighter and held his gaze on me firmly as he continued.

"Few people really understand the artistic vision," he said. "Or appreciate it. Somehow, I think you do."

"Why?" I asked, curious to know what he had seen in me.

"It's just a feeling I have, an instinct, and my instincts have always been accurate, especially when it comes to people," he added, his eyes darkening to tell me some of those accurate instinctive readings were unpleasant.

But what was he really telling me with these words and those eyes? Was he saying I would appreciate the artist's instinct because I had inherited it from him?

"For now," he continued, "I think it would be best if you didn't mention this to anyone else, especially your uncle Jacob and the rest of the Logans. Their thinking, like too many others', I'm afraid, is quite narrow. They just wouldn't understand. Can you do that? Can you keep a secret for a while?"

"I'm used to secrets," I said pointedly, but he just smiled and nodded.

"Good." He turned back to the marble. "I know I haven't been this excited in years," he said. And then he looked at me again, "And I know now it's because of YOU."

I looked at the block of marble and just like him, I suddenly saw that it was more than stone.

It was possibly the way to my father and to the truth, and to the happiness I hoped lay just behind it.

I couldn't wait to begin.

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