

**ONLY  
BIRDS  
ABOVE**

**P O R T L A N D J O N E S**



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On the day the war ended Arthur rode the young horse for the first time, all shivery-skinned and taut with in-held breath. *Steady there*, he said. And again, *steady*. The dark ground going past him and the world no more than what he could see between two ears.

When he pulled up he laid his hand against the horse's neck, feeling the soft coat swirled with sweat and heat. And there, when he swung down from the saddle, along with the stab of landing in his thigh and the first few steps like he had hobbles on, was the familiar double tap of his heart and the feeling like a wire inside him. He closed his eyes and breathed the grassy, salt smell of the horse, taking each breath and holding it till his hands stilled and the blood in him slowed.

When he opened his eyes, the pollen-coloured morning was coming down through the trees, and the fine horse was quiet at the end of the reins. Sometimes, he knew, there were moments when he could remember without his heart going pullet-quick and shallow. Sometimes, he could press a feeling up against the cracks in him hard enough to fill them.

And sometimes no amount of anything would do it.



On the day the war ended Ruth woke to a sly wind under the old tin roof and the first of the daylight pinking the window. She pulled the blankets close around her and wondered if, in Sumatra, Tom could see the same sun rising.

There were letters after he left, and even parcels at Christmas. Tea chests packed with bright patterned fabric, teak carvings and bundled photographs. And the smell in the kitchen when they prised the lid off like wood smoke and the once a year spice her mother had kept for Christmas cake. But that was before Pearl Harbor. After that, at the post office and the general store, people she barely knew would stop and ask after Tom with lowered voices. When Singapore and then the Dutch East Indies fell, they stopped asking, though she could feel their eyes follow her as she walked along the street. Even when it seemed to her that every week the name of a boy she'd known at school would appear in the lists of those lost, there seemed to be a special kind of pity left for her family. She could almost hear them as she passed. *First the mother and now the son, it's no wonder the father's like he is.*

Later that day, she hung washing on a wire strung between two trees. Two dresses, a blue shirt washed to almost white and three pairs of socks with darning-spidered toes. And afterwards, she let herself into her father's room and made the bed, smoothing the blanket with her hands – the smell of leather and shaving soap and the midday light clear through the bare window. As she was leaving, she noticed something under the bed and she kneeled down to reach it.

It was a small wooden box that she'd never seen before, lidless and filled with odds and ends. Just rubbish it seemed to her – a crumpled handkerchief, a cockatoo feather and a fragment of tile. A piece of quartz, some pumpkin seeds, some strands of

black horsehair and a small piece of paper that might once have been a photograph. Things, she thought, that you might find in a jacket pocket on the first cold day of autumn or at the back of an old dresser drawer.

Underneath the scraps she found a photograph of Tom at eighteen with his back to the house and his hair in his eyes. She remembered the shirt he was wearing and the old belt that had once been their grandfather's. His long arms and the soft shadow on his top lip. She remembered the day that he left and how, that evening, the creaking of the old house cooling was loud in the sudden silence.

At the bottom of the box, underneath everything, was a photograph of a small, smiling woman in a long dress with lace at the collar. A tall girl standing beside her held a parasol with scalloped edges and, behind them, a long stretch of grass edged with white painted rails. Across the top was written *Helen and Anna, Helena Vale Racecourse 1914*. Ruth held the photo with one hand, looking at her mother with thin eyes, like she was reading in the half dark.

Just then there was a knock at the back door. Ruth quickly pushed the box back into place and hurried out to open it.

'Did you hear the news, Ruth?' said Mrs Pritchard, filling the doorway with her bustling weight. 'I wasn't sure if you'd still got your wireless so I said to Mr Pritchard that I would come and tell you myself.' She wiped her hands on an apron marked with grease and flour and said, 'It's wonderful news, dear, just wonderful. The war is over. It's finally over.'

# 1

Helen often wondered why she had not felt the moment of her father's death. At noon that day she had stitched a flower onto a cotton handkerchief, pulling skeins of vein-blue thread through her hands, a song of bees and the sky through the open window of the schoolroom. At noon that day he had left the bookshop for lunch and, under the same sky, had fallen to his knees, his hands tearing the fabric of his shirt as his heart broke itself against his ribs.

They brought him home, cleaned and in the black serge suit he kept for church. Helen pictured him on Sunday mornings, his finger hooked down the collar front, too tight, and the starch scratching the thin shaved skin of his neck. He would wink at her and roll his eyes as her mother pecked lint from his jacket with dark-gloved hands, her heels clacking on the floorboards like stones.

She remembered him next to her at the piano, his hands soft on the keys and the smell of his shaving soap, sweet and warm.

'Ah, Helen,' he would say. 'You don't have to look far for the beauty in this piece, it's there, right beneath your fingers.' And some days the keys were just where she needed them to be and her wrists were perfect and he would sigh and she could feel him close his eyes beside her, smiling.

In the mornings, when she was small, he would share his breakfast with her – sips of black tea from his cup and toast, cut into squares.

One winter morning, still dark, with the wind hard behind the windows he said, ‘Isn’t this marmalade wonderful? You can taste the orchard in it.’ And she had pictured tree limbs heavy with fruit above her head, the sunlight in the leaves and the brush of grass against her ankles.

Holding a dab of marmalade on the end of a butter knife, he said, ‘It’s amazing, isn’t it? To most people this is just something to eat for breakfast, but really – it’s a kind of miracle. In the spring the orange tree gathers up the sunlight and stores it in her fruit. And here we have it, months later,’ his hand on her arm and his kind eyes smiling. ‘Sunlight in a jar.’

He passed the knife over and on her tongue she tasted the long days of slanting yellow light.

‘There is joy to be found in everything,’ he said. ‘Even when it is dark,’ and he waved his hand at the black glass of the kitchen window. ‘There is always light somewhere,’ he said quietly. ‘You must remember that.’

Later, though her mother had tried to stop him, he began to share his morning paper with her, smoothing it out on the table between them. They would read and eat and he would point out things that interested him, tapping the paper with his finger, a piece of toast or the edge of a teacup.

‘George, please,’ her mother would say. ‘The crumbs will go everywhere. And, what’s more the girl will never find a husband if her head is full of current affairs.’

‘Ah yes, Agnes, but that is part of my plan, dear. If Helen marries, I will have no-one to keep me company at breakfast and share my paper. So, she is to stay at home forever. And anyway, I have never yet met a man good enough for her.’ And he would

wink at Helen while her mother glared.

After his death Helen would say to people, 'My father died,' just to feel the weight of the words leave her mouth. She was sixteen and the fact of his death lodged somewhere in her body, cold and hard to breathe around. She felt like a dog circling in straw, trying to find a comfortable place to lie. Only she never could.

Her mother mourned in dresses of hard black crepe that were smooth across her bust and waist. Three days short of the anniversary of his death she folded them into boxes, paper between the layers and the petticoats bouncing up under her hands. Helen watched, the missing of him close up in the front of her throat and her mother's new dress an early summer sky with the blue still in it.

Nineteen months and five days after her father died, her mother remarried. Helen walked through their house as her mother packed their things into wooden crates padded with straw and crushed paper. The fresh-sawn wood was rough, the ends beaded with resin and she ran her fingers along the boards until their tips were black and sore from splinters. In her bedroom she hoarded the sliver of sea that had always been hers. The corner of the window sea-coloured, and the afternoon wind in the lilac bushes of their neighbour's garden.

In the front garden Helen's mother waved and coughed as the furniture was loaded onto a dray. The sea wind in her skirts, one hand holding her hat on.

'I simply can't wait to leave here,' she said. 'The wind is enough to drive me mad, whining like a child.'

Her mother's new husband, Edward, lived miles from the coast in a house that looked out across the river. Silver gulls kited above the dark water and jellyfish quivered and washed ashore, their bodies dissolving on the river's edge. The house

was new – threadbare lawn, short shrubs and a bright long street bare of trees. In the morning Helen would find the prints of small animals in the garden and her shoes echoed down the long brown hallway. She missed the pine-scented shade and the faintest smell of salt in the linen.

Edward owned a canning plant and the first automobile in the area. On Sundays they would drive around the water's edge, Helen on the buttoned-leather back seat, the crushed limestone road so bright she could still see it on the backs of her eyelids when she closed them.

One afternoon as they drove along the river he pointed to a row of wooden posts standing out of the water. The tide ebbed between them and cormorants perched to dry their wings.

‘That’s all that’s left of a breakwater built by timber merchants to deepen the river,’ said Edward. ‘Their paddleboats couldn’t get past that point because it’s too shallow and it slowed down the timber trade, so they used convicts to sink those jarrah posts into the riverbed and fill the spaces between them with sticks and branches. They’d stand in the river filling baskets with silt and emptying them behind the breakwater – each man digging till he could only just keep his head above water.’

He slowed the car and Helen imagined the men working, their feet slippery in the weed and the water thick with silt on their skin. Edward laughed and the doughy middle of him pressed against the buttons of his shirt. ‘At the end of the day they were often a man or two short, on account of the current.’

That night Helen dreamed she dug the riverbed for silt. The dark current spooled around her, mud-smelling and the brush of things unseen against her legs. The bottom of the river was pitted with gravel. She bent beneath the water, filling her basket and dislodging small, loose rocks that swirled around, settling slowly in her pockets and the cuffs of her jacket. With each



basket she grew heavier. She stumbled and suddenly there was only water – her feet finding no purchase on the tide, her vision fractured by bubbles and her chest a wedge of pain. Then a cold sharp inhalation and she was sinking, the stones returning to their bed of silt. In her dream she opened her eyes to bronze shims of light through the water. And above her a cormorant with its wings held out against the sky.



Helen never grew to like her stepfather – the large house, the car, the heavy silk drapes and bone-china plates from England were, to her, just gaudy ballast for a man who already carried too much weight. On Sunday afternoons he would lead her mother to the bedroom, his thick hand curled around hers, and lock the door. Afterwards she found it hard to look at their faces, concentrating instead on the puckered skin above Edward's collar and the shiny buttons of her mother's new dress.

When her mother announced that they were going to travel to New South Wales to visit Edward's parents, Helen pictured weeks of claret-stained teeth and shiny waistcoats, and cried until she was sick. Eventually her mother, after alternating days of silence and shouting, agreed that she could stay home with her aunt and cousins instead. Helen packed her father's brown leather suitcase and, as Edward drove them to Guildford, ran her thumb along the rows of brass rivets, up and back, up and back, until her mother, who had been still and quiet for most of the drive, her shoulders tight beneath the muslin of her summer dress, turned around and shrilled, 'Oh for God's sake, Helen! Why must you always be so bloody difficult?'

Living with her cousins Anna and Richard was never dull. They were loud and they fought, like siblings do, and they had friends, it seemed to her by the dozen. There were parties and picnics and on Thursdays they met at Mrs Taylor's house with a dozen others to knit socks – the muffled percussion of the needles and balls of khaki wool at their feet. But though her days were full, each night she dreamed of the river, feeling herself flattened beneath the weight of tannin-coloured water, her body heavy with pebbles. In the mornings when she woke to the thin early light chinking in through the curtains, the dream seemed so real she could almost taste the brine on her lips.

After she had been in Guildford for a month it was decided that they would all go to the races. Helen wasn't sure if she would enjoy it but as they pulled into the Helena Vale siding and she saw the people shoulder to shoulder on the grass – the curve of the white running rail, bright dresses and the ladies' hats like a field of fabric flowers against the thick turf, she felt a lift in her chest.

Her cousin, Anna, grabbed her by the hand as they pulled in to the racecourse siding.

'Come on, Helen. We'll miss the whole thing if you don't hurry up!'

'Oh, you do exaggerate,' said Helen. 'I'm fairly certain we won't miss much by walking. Unless it's not just the racing you want to see,' and smiled gently at her cousin.

'Seeing the boys in uniform is a small compensation for the months of boring conversation that I've had to put up with. War, war, war – so dull and I never want to hear the words "Kaiser Wilhelm" again! Really, Helen, nineteen fourteen is a terrible year for us both to turn eighteen. But at least now I can muster a small degree of enthusiasm for the war effort.'

'You are terrible, cousin,' giggled Helen.

Anna shook her head. 'Not at all. I'm simply being patriotic,' she said.

Helen followed her cousin, skirts jostling, through the crush of felt hats, sunburnt faces and uniforms, some with the crease marks still on them and the dusty green of freshly fallen leaves. It seemed to her as though every second man had already joined up. The crowd was three-deep at the fence and cheered as the starters in the first race turned for home.

Anna pulled her until they were both at the rail. Helen saw the horses galloping, their shiny skin, and the riders bent up high on their shoulders. Their hoofbeats felt like a kind of music in her chest – the skin on her arms tight and the back of her neck all shivery with sound. Then they were gone past in a blur, the glint of metal at their heels, and the smooth grass pocked and dotted with clumps of upturned turf.

She had always loved horses. When she was small her father would lift her up so that she could stroke the grocer's pony as he passed and she loved the coarse fur and the warm smell, after, on her hands. As she watched the racehorses jog out to the track with the sun in their coats she thought how different they were to the grocer's pony. They skittered and their snatched-up legs were corded with muscle, the taut skin fine and glossy. They moved like water across the ground and she imagined the heat of them.

'Isn't it exciting?' her cousin said and Helen nodded.

'They're so beautiful.'

'Yes, they are rather lovely aren't they,' said Anna who looked towards a group of young men in uniform, then turned to Helen and winked. 'Oh, look over there,' she added, waving. 'There's Mother and Richard. I wonder if it's time for lunch yet?'

After lunch there was another race and then another. Anna made Helen pose for a photographer. 'We might be in the social pages,' she whispered as they smiled for the camera.

It seemed to Helen that her cousin had friends in every corner of the grounds and she moved between them – dragging Helen behind by the hand or shooing her along in front. By mid-afternoon she was tired of new faces and of smiling. She answered questions about the end of school and helping her mother at home and nodded as men with khaki cuffs and badged felt hats talked of the future – training, shipping out and the adventures to come. For Helen the future felt like an unopened room at the end of a hot day – she could never quite get a full breath in but the heat made it hard to care. She imagined a kitchen window, a dusty new street somewhere, visits to the grocer and an apron barely ever dry. She would press shirts and starch collars and complain about the price of fish. She supposed that when it came she would find the beauty in it and pride at the whiteness of a cloth or her face reflected in the back of a spoon. But for now it seemed an empty road – a stretch of never-ending sameness as far as she could see.

After a while she drifted away from her cousin's kindness and followed the border of the crowd around, listening to the edge of conversations and the afternoon breeze across the grass. She stood and watched the horses in their stalls, tied in place, and the smell of manure and the dust from under their feet. Out the front was a grass area where the horses in the next race were walked, waiting. She liked the percussion of their teeth on the bridles and the swing of their brown satiny tails.

As the horses went out for the last race the stalls emptied of people and she walked along in front of the horses, wishing she was bold enough to stroke their necks or feed them some of the long stalks of grass from beside the path and feel the whiskery weight of their muzzles in her hand.

In the last stall stood a tall brown horse with hay in his mane and small pinched eyes. It looked to Helen as though he

reluctantly held up one of his legs for the blacksmith, bent over beside him.

‘C’mon Bill,’ the man muttered with the shoe in his hand, the nails ready in his mouth. ‘If you keep pulling your shoes off the least you can do is let me nail them back on.’

The horse wrinkled his nose and jerked his leg away.

‘Don’t be a silly bugger,’ the blacksmith said, stroking the horse’s shoulder. ‘If you just settle down it’ll be over quicker.’

Bill snorted then stared into space with his ears against his neck as the nails were tapped into his hoof. When the shoe was in place, the blacksmith stood up and rubbed the brown horse on the neck.

‘Bloody hell, it wasn’t that bad, was it, mate?’

Helen noticed that his thick leather apron was buckled over a uniform and that there was a khaki felt hat sitting on a hay bale next to the stall. As he straightened up he saw her watching and smiled.

‘Pardon my language, Miss. I didn’t see you there.’

‘Please don’t apologise,’ she said. ‘I’ve never been to the races before and I was enjoying looking at the horses.’

He reached over and stroked the horse’s neck. ‘They’re alright, aren’t they,’ he said.

Helen smiled back and noticed that he was older than her, his blue eyes crinkled at the corners and creases in the tanned skin of his neck. He unbuckled his apron and picked up his hat.

‘But I’m biased, I suppose. I was a blacksmith till two months ago. Till I joined up.’

‘What regiment are you with?’

‘The Tenth Light Horse.’

‘Of course,’ she said. ‘So where’s your horse?’

‘She’s in Guildford. But for the moment us blokes are stuck a couple of miles away at Blackboy Hill, learning about soldiering.’

Funny thing is, what we mostly do is march.’ He reached over and pulled some hay from the horse’s mane. ‘Do you live round here?’

‘Not usually,’ she shook her head. ‘But I’m staying nearby with my cousin for a few months while my mother and her husband visit relatives in New South Wales.’

He picked up his hat and brushed the hay from it with his hand. She noticed that he was shaped like the horse. Long back, straight, and the sinew showing in his arms.

‘Well, Miss. I best be off. I’ve got to get back for dinner.’ He smiled. ‘If I was a betting man I’d be putting all my money on mutton stew. It’s kind of a one-horse race though – we’ve had it every single night for the past two months.’ And rolled his eyes.

He settled his hat onto his head. ‘It’s been a pleasure,’ he said.

‘Unlike the army dinner, apparently,’ grinned Helen. She held her hand out to him. ‘Mr ...?’

‘Sorry,’ he said, shaking his head. ‘Bit of a drought on manners around here. I’m Arthur Watkins.’

‘And I’m Helen Chisholm. Nice to meet you, Mr Watkins.’

‘I save my afternoons off for race meetings, Miss Chisholm, so I might see you at the next one.’

‘That would be nice,’ and she turned and waved, calling over her shoulder. ‘Goodbye! Enjoy your stew.’

She could hear him laughing as she walked back towards the crowd.

At the next race meeting Anna was shadowed by William Landsdale, a young naval officer whose sister had been in her class at school. He talked to her in a low voice and his shoulders were broad beneath the seams of his uniform and he touched her hands and Helen found it easier to drift into the crowd than start a sentence and know that no-one was listening to the ending.

In her pocket was a letter from her mother, the paper thin

like onion skin. She opened it and read again. In her mother's perfect hand the words *totally unencumbered* and *finally able to enjoy each other's company* and *starting a family of our own* looped elegantly across the page. Helen had the feeling she was dreaming, her body cold and the dark tide at her back. She shivered despite the hazy summer sun.

'Good afternoon, Miss Chisholm,' said a voice beside her. 'Are you alright?'

She nodded at Arthur though her throat felt clogged with silt. He cupped her elbow lightly in his hand and led her to the stables. Once she was sitting on a bale of hay he carefully wiped the rim of his canteen with his sleeve and offered it to her.

'Can I fetch someone for you?' he said and she could feel him solid beside her, his long legs bent and the veins in the backs of his hands. He took her handkerchief, a small flower stitched on washed white cotton, and held it to her forehead and his hands were sure.

She closed her eyes. 'My father died,' she said. 'Four years ago today.' And she was crying then with her face against his shoulder and the smell of soap and warm sun on wool between them like a promise.

Years later, she realised, it was that moment that changed everything. He led her back home that afternoon, offering his hand stepping up onto the train. She liked the way he turned his hat in his hands when he spoke to her, his fingers on the brim and his quiet voice. And standing next to her, his boots on the ground like they were meant to be there. Six weeks later, when they heard his regiment was leaving for England, they married – the fifteenth couple of the day and every single groom there in uniform.



Arthur reined in the pony and opened the gate. Half curls of loose wire hung from the metal frame, and white ants, in mud-coloured hills, made their homes along the sagging fence line.

He nodded. 'Needs a bit of work, I know. It's been hard going since my parents. Since I've been on my own. But once this war's over, I'll get on top of it. I've got plans.'

He smiled quickly and swung up beside her on the trap. His hands were kind on the reins, he clucked the pony and she watched the way his fingers curled and the flat bones of his wrists.

'You could play the piano with hands like yours,' she said.

'I don't know about that, I've never had much of an ear for music. But when we breed some nice horses, I'll buy you a piano.'

'Then I can teach you.'

'Well, you can try.'

'I'd like that.'

'So would I,' he said. His eyes were blue, like the early morning sea – still, with the light clear down to the sand. He smelled like warm skin and shaving soap, and the trap bounced up the track and his thigh was against hers.

The house was small and clustered round with fruit trees, the grass growing thick between and the leaf shadows shifting on the whitewashed wall. He jumped down from the trap and held out his hand for her.

'I have to see to the pony, but you go on in. There's water out the back and wood too, for the stove.'

She watched him walk away and pushed open the door. The house was low and had settled on the ground unevenly, the doorframes slanting and gaps where the ceiling met the walls. But it was clean, and the hard-packed floor was swept, and the water when she tasted it was cold and sweet. She left her bag by the door and found mugs and a lidless tin of black tea. The windows were smudged with late afternoon light and dust.



Passionfruit leaves like small hands pressed against the glass.

She walked outside, stepping through the thick stalky grass and saw him leaning up against the gate. He was watching the pony graze and she stood beside him.

‘I haven’t been home for a few months. Not since I joined up,’ he said. ‘I sold the horses, sold the hay and locked the house up. The neighbours have got the use of the paddocks while I’m gone and the house, well it’s stood for forty years, I expect it’ll still be standing when I get home.’

The pony cropped the grass. ‘My parents loved this place,’ he said. ‘They thought they’d never have kids. Then I was born when they were both past forty. I was their only one,’ he said and squinted into the slanting light. ‘If they were disappointed about that, they never let on.’

‘In the end, they went in the space of three weeks. It’ll be three years last June. Dad was first. He’d always had weak lungs and that’s what got him. Then Mum not long after. She was healthy, but her heart broke I reckon. With Dad gone, there was nothing left for her here.’ He rubbed a rust spot on the gate with his thumb. ‘And it’s not a tragedy. They’d had their time. It’s just, sometimes I miss them.’

Helen pushed a strand of hair behind her ear as a cool wind shuffled the grass.

‘Once they were gone it felt like there wasn’t anything holding me here any longer. Joining up was the right thing to do and like everyone says – it’s a chance to see the world. But, since joining up I’ve started to think that maybe this is the part of the world that I want to see the most.’

She put her hand on his arm and he touched it with the backs of his fingers, gently, like he would a bird.

‘Anyway, I didn’t think I’d get to see the old place before I shipped out. So today is a good day in more ways than one.’ He

smiled at her and turned the thin metal band on her finger.

‘I’ll get a better ring, I promise. Once this war is over. I’ll do better.’

‘It’s not important,’ she said. ‘Just come home safe, that’s what I want.’

‘I want that too, more than anything.’ He put his arm across her shoulders and drew her close. ‘I’m not frightened, but I don’t suppose I’ve had much to lose, till now.’

He was warm and she leaned in against him, the solid edge of his body against her ribs and the weight of his arm. He bent his head and she could feel his breath in her hair and her throat tight and in her stomach the whirl of small birds flying.

He cleared his throat. ‘Well, Mrs Watkins, I’m parched and that bread and mutton won’t eat itself ...’

‘Oh,’ she said. ‘I started making tea but I decided to come out and find you instead.’

‘And I’m very glad you did. But it’s getting dark now and I don’t want you to catch a chill. Go on, back inside with you.’

Later, after she washed their plates, they sat together at a wooden table. The candle made an island in the shadows, and he touched her hand.

‘I wish I could have taken you out for tea. But I have to keep my head down. My mates are covering for me and my sergeant’s a good bloke, but if the brass realise I’m missing it won’t go down too well. I’ll be fined at the very least.’

‘That’s okay. We’re lucky to have this time. Just the two of us.’

‘Yes, we are,’ he said and smiled. He stood up and, taking her hands, drew her to her feet. ‘It must be nearly time for bed. Would you like to change?’ Helen wiped her hands down the sides of her skirt. She nodded and her mouth was papery.

He opened a door. ‘This was my parents’ room,’ he said. The bed was made with a woollen blanket pulled down tight, a

yellowed picture of an English garden on the wall in a frame, the edges curling where they had been clipped from a magazine. She changed into her nightdress and climbed into the bed, settling into a hollow made by years of someone else's sleep. Not long afterwards he knocked and let himself in, slipping into bed beside her. She could feel her own heart beating and she closed her eyes.

'It's alright,' he said. And he reached out and stroked her hair softly and his voice was low. His hands were slow on her arms and she could feel him breathing. She wriggled closer to him and pillowed her head on his shoulder.

'That's right,' he said. 'Sleep now.'

When she woke, the window was dawn-tinted and he held her, his belly at her back, the heat of him in the blankets. She turned within the circle of his arm and studied his face in the half-light, the fine skin across his cheeks and the lighter creases beside his eyes. She reached out and touched his chest and felt the smooth flesh there and the rhythm of his ribs. His breath had the night in it still and she breathed him in, the warm smell of him and hair on his arms the colour of corn husks. He pulled her closer without opening his eyes and his hands were light down her back and his leg across hers. She pressed her face to his chest, all fingertips and skin and her breath shallow in her throat like she was running into the wind.