

In the Night of Memory

ALSO BY LINDA LEGARDE GROVER

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The Road Back to Sweetgrass

Onigamiising: Seasons of an Ojibwe Year



In the Night of Memory

a novel

Linda LeGarde Grover

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Minneapolis
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To the missing Native women
and all who grieve them

*Tho' you are singing somewhere still
I can no longer hear you.*

— LEONARD COHEN



Contents

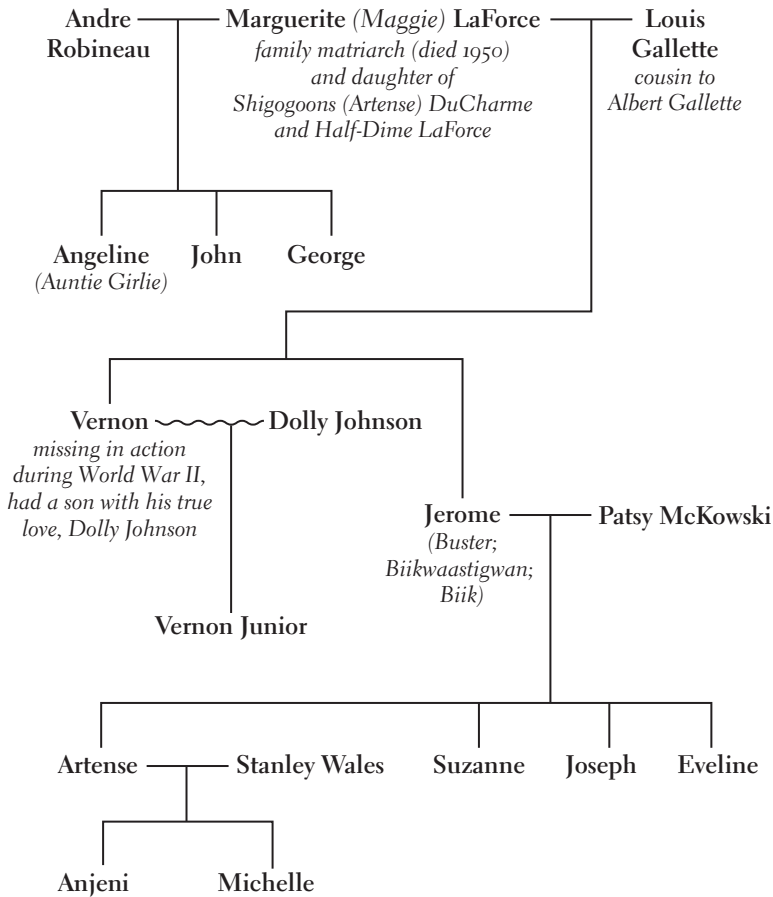
The Surrender of Children	1
Miskwaa	17
Mesabi	51
Duluth	83
Tannenbaum Green	125
Golden Manor	159
Ladyslipper House	191

Gakina Awiya— *All Who Are Here*

bound by blood, by name, by love, by spirit
to Loretta Gallette and her daughters, Azure Sky and Rainfall Dawn

LAFORCE RELATIVES AND FRIENDS OF MOZHAY POINT RESERVATION LANDS

Family of Marguerite LaForce



Other LaForce Family and Friends

Earl LaForce, *Maggie's brother*

Margie Gallette, *cousin to Artense*

Crystal Washington

Fred Simon, *Sweetgrass representative
to the Mozhay Point tribal government*

Freddie-Boy Simon, *Fred's son*

Joseph Washington (*Zho Wash*)

Michael Washington, *Zho Wash's son*

Beryl Robineau Dulebohn *married Noel Dulebohn*

Grace Hubert Dionne, *who is from the South, married Roy Dionne*

Dale Ann Dionne *married Jack Minogeezhik*

Pearl Ricebird Minogeezhik *married Frank Minogeezhik*

Jack Minogeezhik *married Dale Ann Dionne*

Boy Dommage

Lucy Dommage, *Boy Dommage's daughter*

Annie Dommage, *Boy Dommage's cousin*

**GALLETTE RELATIVES AND FRIENDS
OF THE MISKWAA RIVER SETTLEMENT**

Albert Gallette *and Frances Dommage*

Loretta Gallette

Rainfall Dawn

Azure Sky

Louis Gallette

Lisette Gallette Schoening, *sister to Louis Gallette*

Babe Gallette Warner, *Lisette's daughter*

EXTENDED FAMILY AND FRIENDS IN DULUTH, MINNESOTA

Howard Dulebohn, *friend of Junior Gallette*

Rose (*Sis*) and Florence Sweet, *cousins to Gallettes; friends of Dolly*

Nolie Dulebohn, *grandson of Beryl Dulebohn*

FRIENDS FROM MINNEAPOLIS, MINNESOTA

Ingrum Viken

Winifred (*Winnie*) Schmidt





The Surrender of Children





AZURE SKY

Our mother, Loretta, gave us the most beautiful names she could think of. She gave us a memory, one that I have told to Rainy so many times that to her it has become real—though I wonder if it never happened at all and is only one of my dreams. And when Rainy was four, and I was going on three, our mother gave us to the St. Louis County foster care system. It was the same year that Duluth’s mining heiress Elisabeth Congdon was murdered by her daughter and son-in-law. The crime was spectacular, and although it happened decades ago now it is still talked about around town, and every time it comes up, I think of my mother. She and Miss Congdon, whose lives never intersected, are linked in this single way.

Rainfall Dawn and Azure Sky are our real names, the ones Loretta wrote down for our birth certificates, though she called us Rainy and Azure most of the time. When she wanted something, or was stressed, or had been drinking, or all three—Baby and Sister. Rainy was Baby because she was born first, and I was Sister because I came second, a year and a half later. Nobody has called us Baby and Sister since the morning Loretta was getting us ready to go on

that cab ride to the County. We haven't seen her or heard from her since. I think. I am not sure.

Although Rainy and I have forgotten Loretta's face, Rain occasionally thinks she sees our mother in the gracefully bending woman at the butcher counter, whose long hair sweeps to the side as she looks at a tray of pork chops. She might see her in a traditional dancer wearing a dark blue calico dress at the Mozhay Point spring powwow who, turning to face the flags during Grand Entry, is in fact our Auntie Margie, or in the bundled-up homeless woman picking aluminum cans from the trash barrel at the bus hub in downtown Duluth.

I have forgotten our mother's voice, yet I still hear her husky whisper from the night she woke us to see the northern lights and watch her dance, and it is this memory that I choose for us to keep, whether it was just a dream or really happened. And so my mother still whispers to me: when it starts to rain and drops of liquid quench the thirst within the sparse leafiness of the old maple tree in the front yard, the wet patter deepening on saturated leaves, rolling water onto the dryness of exposed roots. She whispers to me in the absence of rain, on days that the wind picks up and scatters dried leaves across a sidewalk; in the braking of a city bus or in the weighty freedom of northern lights in the night sky. Sometimes I hear her all day and at other times not for months, and I think that she is gone for good after all. And then once again she whispers, and on the air grown warm and damp with her breath is what I had forgotten, the perfume of cigarette, the yeasty sweetness of white bread and red wine. *Azure . . . Azure Sky, Sister . . . Rainy . . . Rainy Dawn, Baby . . .*

The night of the memory I woke to our mother whispering through my dreams of a buffalo nickel glowing in the sky, its shine dulled through the flyspecked and finger-smudged windows. And through the fog of interrupted dreams, Rain, who slept on the other end of the couch, kicking me across the chest and asking, Is it morning, Mama?

Rainy . . . Rainy Dawn, Baby . . . I would recognize the sound of her voice today if she sat behind us on the bus. It is a young voice that I remember, lightly husky with just the start of cigarette smoke settling tar into her throat. Today, it would be lower in pitch, I suppose, but I would know the urgency and loneliness of our mother's solitary life and plaintive speech. Would she remember who we were, Rainy small and Azure tall? Would she recognize what we have become, two halves of one sister?

Our mother, if she is still alive, would recognize us. There is no doubt about it, she would recognize us. She is our mother after all; of course she would. From the bus seat behind mine and Rainy's she might see only the backs of our heads but would know us anywhere. She would remember the color of Rainy's hair, the darkest brown shot through with red highlights, this morning combed and parted by me exactly down the middle. Rainy is so short that in turning my head I can see the entire top of hers, where her braids have been crossed and tightly pinned from ear to ear. Where her hair is parted, her vanilla-caramel skin is slightly reddened from the sun. My own hair, a cloudy brown as dark as Rain's although not as red, waves and sways from its high ponytail with the movement of the bus; I am so tall that it clears the bus seat and brushes the hand that our mother lifts to touch the back of my shoulder as she says our names in her voice that is now older, rougher. I turn toward her voice and the perfume of her warm breath, the cigarette smoke and yeasty red wine, and because she was never really there, she is gone.

We haven't seen her since that morning of our surrender. Rainy, who sees impossible sights, sees our mother everywhere.

I listen for it, and when in the sound of rain on dry leaves she whispers our names, I turn.

The front room where we slept had no curtains, and all through the night the street lamp outside shone onto the couch where we lay, one on each end. I slept on my back with one forearm across

my face to block the light. Rainy slept in a C-shape with her face turned toward the back of the couch, her knees pressing against my side and her backside sticking out into the room. Sometimes she rolled and fell off. To this day it comforts me to lie on my back, with one arm across my face, and that is how I fall asleep. Sometimes during the night, if I have changed from that position, she whispers from somewhere, perhaps from a corner of the room, *Rainy Dawn, Baby . . . Azure Sky, Sister . . .*

Her whisper wakes me and I am returned to the front room of our apartment, where Rainy is four and I am going on three. From the back of the apartment a door slams; bare feet brush bare wooden floors toe to heel, and that is how I know it is our mother because that is the way she dances, toe to heel, and the way she walks from the kitchen to the front room. Since it is the middle of the night, I am afraid. What woke her and what could she be looking for? What dreadfulness follows and chases our mother through the apartment in the middle of the night, causing her to wander from her bedroom to the front room and then the kitchen, checking the doors to ensure that they are locked, fretting and muttering, pacing, translucent under the moonlight and streetlight in her white T-shirt and gray sweatpants? Loretta, who I reach out from my end of the couch to touch as she passes and wonder if perhaps she is not really there at all but only a continuation of my dreams of weeping, wandering ghosts and a ghost, herself.

The night of the memory, the ghost who is really our mother enters the front room, blocking the glare from the street lamp; Rainy wakes on the other end of the couch and, kicking me across the chest, asks, Is it morning, Mama?

“No, no; it’s still the middle of the night, but you have to see this.” She wraps the blanket that we share around Rainy and picks her up because Rain is so small and easy to carry. She takes my hand. “Azure, are you awake? Come on, big girl, come to the back porch and see.”

The back porch is the fire escape off the door from the kitchen. Through the window over the kitchen sink I can see that the sky from the back of the apartment building is bright, not streetlight bright but a silvery glow that, advancing from the north, changes the edge of the sky from green to purple. I'm afraid, but *Come on, come see*, our mother says, and is it trust or a leap of faith? We follow her out the kitchen door to the small fire escape, a landing large enough for one man, but the three of us just fit. Our mother takes the blanket she has wrapped around her own shoulders and spreads it on the wooden floor; she wraps the other blanket over the three of us.

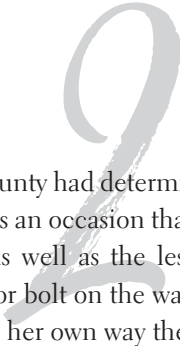
"Waawaate," she says. "Waawaate; it's the northern lights."

Wrapped in blankets we share body warmth as well as our body scents that rise from where the blankets open just below our necks: my mother's perspiration of yeasty white bread and red wine and fearful grief; Rainy's faint steaminess of urine and hair that our mother plans to wash in the morning; my acrid uneasiness mixed with the staleness of jeans that have been worn and slept in and worn again. We are nearly hypnotized by the shifting lights: Rainy's face is tipped up toward them, her opal eyes changing colors silver to green to purple with the lights; her mouth is open and smiling slightly; her small broken teeth, blackened and crooked, are ghostly in the night. Mother is ghostly, too; her face is a reflection of the lights. She rises, and I am again frightened but draw up from my shaky bowels my trust, or again, a leap of faith. She is Mother, she knows what she is doing, I tell myself without words, in the inarticulate way of small children.

"Biizindan, little sweethearts; shhhh . . . Can you hear them?" Pulled close, closer, our heads lift like our mother's to listen to the low rumble that is the singing wind of Waawaate. Rising, Loretta pulls the edges of the blanket from the floor and wraps them around me and Rain, then turns to face the lights. She sways, and then she is dancing in the style of Ojibwe traditional women, hands on hips and feet kneading the fire escape floor, its boards softened with age

and weather, pivoting half-circles left to right, right to left, lifting the invisible eagle feather fan in her left hand to return the song of prayer that is the Creator-given gift of Waawaateg.

Rainy reaches for my hand and slides hers under mine, the way she would back then, when she was four and I going on three, just the same way she does today. In the warmth of the blanket and the stillness of the night air we fall asleep, eyelids closing slowly, because there is all the time in the world to watch our mother dance with the northern lights.



The County had determined that Loretta's surrendering of her children was an occasion that merited a taxicab. It was that determined merit, as well as the lessening of the chance that Loretta might renege or bolt on the way to Social Services should she be allowed to make her own way there, that brought the garnet-colored Buick, with *Norman's Taxi Service* stenciled in script on the sides, to the curb in front of the apartment building.

Anticipating the possibility of delays in getting Loretta and the children into the cab, Norman had arrived ten minutes early; he had done this before. He sat for a few minutes in his immaculately clean cab, with its pleasant scent of tobacco and pine, waiting for the client to see him if she looked out the window, before he would go to knock at the door. Sometimes that seemed to help, in Norman's experience; most of the time it at least didn't seem to make things any worse. Most of the time. He opened the driver's side window and lit a Marlboro.

Inside the apartment Loretta, who had been up for nearly a half-hour, gagged slightly as she stuffed a heavy, overfilled disposable diaper into the bottom of a brown paper bag of trash under the

kitchen sink. Most mornings she pretended sleep as long as she could, eyelids clenched shut and wrinkled as she listened for whispers, tumbling on the couch, the opening and closing of the refrigerator door, small voices arguing, and then, finally, two small girls looking at her, she could feel it—Rainy, older but still in diapers, and younger but taller Azure, who had worried and fretted since the minute she was born. Then Rainy would lose interest while Azure would still be staring, then asking Loretta if she was awake, tentatively at first then insistently over and over and eventually tapping her head until, Loretta was ashamed to admit even to herself, she occasionally slapped her own baby girl. This morning might have been like one of those times, but instead Loretta slept hard, blessedly dreamless and oblivious to the sounds of children waking and stirring, then asking was she awake yet and could they have something to drink, something to eat? She had finished the inch or so of Chianti left in the jug before she went to bed the night before, and so after an hour or so of sleep had awakened and been awake off and on for most of the night, watching the clock and finally falling asleep again sometime after 4:00. And so Loretta didn't hear the alarm, overslept, and awoke to the sound of small voices and with not enough time to wash up the kids. And now the three of them had ten minutes left of the life that Rainy and Azure had no reason to think might be changing.

Opening the front room window in order to clear out some of the smell from the diaper, Loretta saw the beautifully shined cab pull up to the curb in front of the apartment building ten minutes early and moved away from the window unseen, she hoped, by the driver. As far as he was concerned, she wasn't home and didn't have to be until 8:45; until then Azure Sky and Rainfall Dawn were still hers. And as far as they knew, this morning was like any other, and the girls would wander the apartment as they had every morning for as long as their short baby memories could remember, which would be five months in real, adult, Loretta time. Loretta watched

the driver extend an arm out the window and tap ash from a cigarette to the street. The passenger side window opened; strains of Nat King Cole drifted to the apartment's open window as he waved cigarette smoke from the cab's interior with a folded newspaper. The driver tapped the horn, twice.

After waiting another five minutes for Vicki Lawrence to finish singing "It Must Be Him," he tapped it twice again and then got out of the car, extinguishing the cigarette in his palm and tucking it behind his ear as he walked quickly up the sidewalk and took the outside stairs two at a time, an older man long-legged, spiderlike in his movement and very thin. At the building's entryway, out of Loretta's sight but not her hearing, he tried the front door, opened it. Inside, grit on unswept tile crunched under his feet; when he reached the stairway to apartment 2A, the sound muffled to a hollow toll of wooden-heeled and leather-soled cowboy boots, mournful on balding, carpeted steps.

His knock was four solemn beats. A wait, a clearing of his throat. Four more solemn beats. Loretta listened; his breathing, an old man's, heavy from the stairs.

"Somebody's at the door, Mama!" Rainy, sputtering her S's.

He would have heard Rainy; she would have to let him in. They each had their instructions from the County, his to help her carry luggage, hers to cooperate if she didn't want the police called.

Loretta opened the door, and the odor from cooking, sleeping, and the diaper at the bottom of the brown paper bag under the sink rolled out into the hall. The man didn't seem to notice the smell or the mess; instead, he politely removed his hat. "Norman's Cab. What do you need me to take, missus?" he asked her, as if she were a regular paying customer who might tip.

Rainy tells me that she doesn't remember any of this, but one day she might, all of a sudden, the way she French-braided her hair ten years later, when Dolly took us to the beauty school, as if she remembered how to do it from one of her previous lives. I think that

somewhere inside of her mind, our previous life with our mother and our surrender is as real as if it is happening right now. Just as it is to me, Azure. I remember; it is a memory and it is real, both at the same time. I am in her bedroom half-hiding.

Loretta nods toward the corner next to the door. “Those two things,” she answers the driver.

I don’t want to get out from under the bed.

“Azure Sky, come out of there, Sister; time to go.”

Loretta had intended to wash the girls up really good at the kitchen sink, because the shared bathroom was down the hall and she didn’t like to see or talk to the other tenants who wanted to get in, the always pin-curled elderly woman who would ask again if it was her kids who peed on the seat and could she remember to watch for that and clean it up because nobody likes a dirty bathroom, or the overweight man who carried a bottle of Lysol with him and wiped the doorknob down with a rag before he touched it but who didn’t put the seat down after and didn’t always flush. And the bathtub, pitted porcelain so stained you couldn’t tell which streaks were already there and which smears might have been new, and you didn’t want to find out by using it.

She had intended to wash their hair, to brush it until it shone—Rainy’s dark brown with those red highlights and Azure’s springy waves—and then comb and section and braid so smoothly and perfectly that the people at the County might say, “There must be a mistake here. Anybody can see that their mother takes good care of them.” And they would return to the apartment, perhaps even in another cab ride, all three. The County would leave them alone, and the old lady in pin curls would tell Loretta that she was a good mother, and the fat man with the bottle of Lysol would report to the landlord what quiet, well-behaved children Loretta had, no trouble at all and a pleasure to live next door to. The folks from Mozhay Point would come to visit, and Auntie Beryl would remark on how nice Loretta kept the apartment. Loretta would finish school, go to

college, become a teacher, and her girls, growing up, would have nice teeth and pretty clothes.

And then she overslept.

Well, they were dressed, anyway. Loretta bent Rainy's pot-bellied little body into a faded red corduroy jumpsuit, the tiny girl's wrists and ankles flexing compliantly in her hands. She smoothed the knots of fine auburn and brown hair that had tangled into an egg-sized wad at the back of Rainy's head as she slept.

"Want help with the kiddies, too, Missus?" the cab driver asked, as though he thought she was Queen Elizabeth. Rainy went right to the man, held her arms out to be lifted up onto his hip, wrapped her legs around his waist. Loretta directed him to carry the cardboard box that she had folded, flap over flap, across the top.

"Give me a minute." She ducked into the kitchen and quickly ate a slice of bread, this to settle and weight her stomach and absorb the smell of wine on her breath. The bread rose, rose, backing up; Loretta swallowed again, hard, and it stayed down. She breathed into a cupped hand, inhaled. Yeasty, fruity, not too winey, she decided, and returned to the front room, where Norman was holding Rainy with one arm and the cardboard box under the other.

"All right, let's go." Loretta picked up her leather suitcase, the kind that used to be called a grip.

"I'm hungry, Mama." Azure said this in the same whiney voice she used to ask if Loretta was awake, those mornings just before she had slapped her, Loretta recalled, which caused tears to drip down the back of her throat onto the slice of bread, which they salted. She swallowed both and pulled the last of the bread, the heel, from her pocket and handed it to her younger, bigger girl.

"I'm hungry too, Mama." Rainy reached for the bread, starting to cry when Loretta slapped her hand. Azure tore a piece from the heel and held it out to Rainy, who dropped it onto the floor. Loretta dug between the couch cushions for Rainy's pacifier, which her smaller, older girl slid between her lips and began to chew.

The man is kind to me, calls me little lady. I want to sit in front but he tells me I need to sit by my mother. I tell him what I had heard Loretta tell the landlord: we're going for a ride, that we're not gonna live with our mama no more. Sitting next to Mama I kick the seat back of the driver's seat. He doesn't say anything. Loretta, holding Rainy, moves my foot and takes my hand. Her own hand is damp and hot, and the nails are chewed. The cab smells nice; there is a little cardboard pine tree hanging from the radio knob. He asks if we are warm enough back there, says he can turn up the heat. Rainy falls asleep in minutes; the pacifier falls out of her mouth. Loretta opens up a tube of Life Savers and tells me I have to have the pineapple because it won't leave my face stained.

Loretta remembered that she hadn't brushed her teeth and rubbed her sleeve across them. She wondered how she looked. *Too late now.* She put the thought of her teeth out of her mind and read the taxi license. Norman McNeil was the owner-operator, it said.

"He owns his own cab," she thought to herself. "No wonder the outside is so shined up and the inside so clean." The mingled scents of cigarette, Norman's leather jacket, and the little green cardboard tree hanging from the radio knob were as smooth as the ride's feel of good tires on blacktop. Norman's radio was turned to an oldies channel that he hummed along to in a deep rumble so low it might have been the engine, except that Loretta could recognize the tunes. The heater hummed with Norman, blowing air that warmed her feet, and she relaxed, thinking that she could ride there forever listening to Perry Como and Norman and watching the West End and then downtown sliding smoothly past the side window. "Can you girls see the lake?" she was going to ask, but before she had a chance the cab turned left and up the avenue to the civic center, where it stopped in front of the County building.

"I'll get the doors for you, Missus," the man says, but although my mother swings her legs down to the pavement she seems unable to get up. He offers her his hand, which she grabs, rising with Rainy in her

arms. He reaches back into the car for the handle of the grip; with a grunt he hoists the cardboard box up under the other arm. "Come on out, little lady," he says to me; I take his hand, which he gently removes to place in my mother's. We walk, almost like a family, up the sidewalk and stairs and through the double glass doors of the County building where we are met by the social worker, who can smell the wine on Loretta and the diaper, old cooking, and sleep on me and Rainy and looks disgusted. She takes Rainy from our mother's arms and stands her on the floor, then takes my hand from my mother's. Rainy's arm, thin-boned inside her red corduroy jumpsuit, brushes mine and stays there.

Loretta told the social worker that she would be back as soon as she had taken care of things at the hospital. "After I finish treatment, I'm getting my tubes tied, then I get my babies back," she said and wrote down her address and her cousin Artense's on the back of a drugstore receipt. She held the receipt out until the social worker took it. "You can bring the babies to Artense's if I'm not home, but you'll have to call first," she said. "Don't forget; the addresses are right here. The hospital will let you know when I'm out."

Norman figured the mileage and fare on a small billing tablet, tore it out, and gave it to the worker, who accepted it more willingly than she had the drugstore receipt with the instructions about Artense. "Thanks, Missus," he said to Loretta, nodding to her children. "It's a pleasure," he said, without a smile. As he walked, smoothly spiderlike, back to the cab he paused to pull the cigarette from back of his ear and a book of matches from his jacket pocket, turning and bending to shield the match from the wind as he lit up. Then he got into his cab and drove away.

Loretta kissed her children. As the social worker brought Azure Sky and Rainfall Dawn to the elevators and pressed the Up button, Loretta waved at them. Then the elevator doors opened, the social worker took the little girls inside, and pushed a button.

"Hurry up, Mama, the door's gonna close," the smaller girl said.

The taller girl took a step towards the mother.

"Be careful," the social worker said as she tightened her grip on both sisters' hands.

Loretta kept waving until the elevator door slid closed. And then she was alone.

Outside the glass doors she looked for a rock to throw at the civic center fountain; seeing none she grabbed the handle of the trash can next to the County building doors, ready to pull it across the drive and up over the edge of the sidewalk and into the water. As she set foot into the street an oncoming car braked, the driver tapping the horn twice; looking up, Loretta saw Norman's taxi circle back to the civic center and the County building.

Norman offered her a ride. "It's free," he said. "Got to go back that way anyway; no trouble at all."

Loretta was silent during the ride back to the apartment; noticing a small handprint on the side window she touched it gently, then rubbed it away with her jacket sleeve. Norman spoke twice, asking, when the cab was stopped at a red light, if she would like a stick of gum and then offering, after humming along with Doris Day, that "Que Sera, Sera" was his favorite song.

Pulled up at the curb in front of Loretta's apartment, Norm handed Loretta a ten-dollar bill. "Get yourself some groceries," he said. "There's a brighter day out there."

Inside the apartment building the day was, as Norman had predicted, brighter. The window shade on the usually dark landing had been raised, and bright sunlight shone on the man who knelt at Loretta's doorway. The landlord turned at the sound of her step, then silently continued to change the lock set.

Loretta pivoted and ran, down the stairs and out the front door of the apartment building, down the sidewalk and into the street, where she chased the maroon cab, waving her arms until it turned the corner and disappeared. She stopped running; a car honked and she moved to the curb.

On the sidewalk, a young man waiting for his dog to finish urinating against a dead elm tree hawked and spit on the sidewalk.

“Mornin’,” he said to the woman who was holding her side and muttering, *Shit, shit*.

“Pig,” said Loretta. “You ever think somebody’s little kids might walk on this sidewalk?”

Then she walked back towards downtown, the ten-dollar bill a sweating mass wadded into the center of her fist.