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For my father, for his kindness

PART ONE

CHAPTER ONE
ARRIVALS – TRINIDAD JUNE 2009

On the day that Ruthie returned home, six people were killed in the beautiful Valencia Valley. A popular pigtail vendor was amongst the six. According to police reports, Mr. Phillip Michael Beharry, 54, was shot in front of his barbecue pit at 6 pm on the evening of June 19th, Labour Day. It was alleged that the shooting was an act of revenge since Mr. Beharry had apparently been involved in an altercation with a young man the previous evening at "The Den", a bar opposite Beharry's pigtail outlet. The young man allegedly returned the following evening and shot Beharry three times in the head and once in the stomach. On arrival at the Southern Presbyterian Community Hospital, Mr. Phillip Michael Beharry, popular barbecued pigtail owner, was pronounced dead.

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Charles had read the article on Beharry earlier that morning. The seven o'clock radio news was giving the story a longer life than most murders on the island, but it had nothing to do with Beharry himself; Beharry was murder number 360, doubling the murder toll on the same date from the previous year. 360 murdered in six months; this was an island record. Beharry's biography even took up more time than the slight mention given to Uriah Buzz Butler and his famous protest march on June 19th 1937. Charles's father had been a great fan of Butler and had spoken to his young son of Butler's courage. Charles remembered little of what his father had said to him but he'd liked the name "Buzz Butler".

Charles was still trying to get the football score. He had missed the sports report, and now it was only the weather forecast for the following day. He almost knew it by heart: "…waves up to two

metres in open water, one point five in sheltered areas…" The only numbers that mattered was the result of the USA – Brazil match at the Confederations Cup in South Africa, on which he'd had a bet with his good buddy, Chow. Charles was about to complain to his wife that he was tired of the toll number on the front page of every newspaper every morning, as though there was nothing else happening in the damn country, or around the world, but he said nothing and consoled himself with the idea of finding the score on the FIFA website later that evening, or maybe sneaking a call to Chow at the airport. He didn't dare to take his eyes off the road for even a second (the carnage on the roads competed with the murder toll) but he managed to glance across at his wife at a red traffic light. She looked far away, her thoughts no doubt with their daughter who was flying in that evening.

"We'll be late," she said, breaking away from the trance.

"We have time; the flight doesn't get in until eight."

"I was thinking about her name. She's always hated her name. 'Why did you call me Ruth? It's such an ugly name.' Remember she used to say that all the time in primary school, in high school as well. I can't remember why we chose Ruth instead of something prettier, like Nicole or even Nina. Marie Claire Nicole Butcher. But then we still had to deal with your hatchet of a name. Isn't that right, Mr. Butcher?" Mrs. B tried to force a smile but Charles knew she wasn't joking. It was why she was known as Mrs. B and never Mrs. Butcher, and she was the one who'd insisted on Ruth, a name she had found in a novel she was reading at the time. Charles knew better than to say any of this, not now, not tonight, and luckily she didn't demand an answer or talk again until they reached the airport car park at 7:30 pm.

"Remember not to say anything about Boston," she said after closing the car door in the parking lot.

"What would I say, Elena?"

She didn't reply, just kept walking a step or two ahead of her husband, quick short steps, high heels click click on the paved ground, her black dress swishing slightly, enhancing her neat figure and small waist. Charles wanted to tell her that she looked lovely, that she should relax, that everything would be okay with Ruthie. April was April. This was June; it was over now; she was

coming home, she was better. But he just followed his wife mutely, trying to tuck his shirt into khaki trousers that were too tight.

The night before they had dinner with friends who toasted Ruthie's return. No one mentioned what had happened during the spring break, though they all knew at least part of the story – the part about the nervous breakdown. They congratulated Mrs. B on having such a brilliant daughter, graduating summa cum laude no less. They reminded Mrs. B of the fabulous party she'd had for Ruthie after the Open Scholarship award was announced. On that evening everything shone, except Ruthie herself, who never wanted the attention. Mrs. B had invited fifty guests to the party on the verandah of their sprawling five-acre home in the valley: waiters, waitresses, champagne, samosas, smoked salmon, dim sum, shrimp, sushi. The front lawn was lit with tall bamboo torches; heliconias, tall red gingers and blood-red anthuriums filled huge clay pots on the verandah. Everything seemed perfect and even the two mosaic dolphins at the bottom of the pool seemed to smile with pride. Mrs. B, elegant and gracious, greeted each guest warmly, as though they were the most important person to enter her home. This was four years ago. So much had happened since then.

Ruthie had a few friends there. She didn't surround herself with a troupe like her mother, didn't like too many people around her. Though she was not a head-turner like her mother, Ruthie's face could pull you in the more you looked, but she seldom smiled and usually had a serious look, as though she was resisting her prettiness. When people complimented her light brown eyes that seemed to sparkle against her olive skin, she barely acknowledged the compliment. Ruthie was not impolite, always said "Uncle this" or "Auntie that", but she was not what her Martinican aunts would call *souriante*. Ruthie just looked as though she didn't see the point of the perpetual grin that most of her mother's friends always wore, like their lipstick. Ruthie did well in school, she had a good memory, one that could help her pass exams, help her cram – that was her true talent – so she won the end of term prizes, moved up easily from one standard to the other, crossed from one's Dean's list to another, but always without passion or pride. She knew she was bright but she certainly wasn't the genius

her mother claimed she was; all the light shining on her made Ruthie want to disappear. Mainly she felt like a fraud.

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On that Labour Day evening, Ruthie was barely showing, but her face betrayed the anxiety she was trying to hide. From the plane, across the tarmac, into the cold building, feeling nauseous, she made her way through the long immigration lines (no stopping at duty free for gifts); picked up her baggage; lined up (nothing to declare) to emerge from the no man's land between Custom's officer and country, between what she left behind and what she brought home.

She walked out from the stale, air-conditioned, suitcase-smelling room into the thick hot island air to face the exhaust fumes of idling car engines. No more the broad Bostonian "paark the caar in Haarvard yaard", but Trinidadian sing-song, up and down intonations; a "Taxi Miss" here, a "Taxi Miss" there, a crowd bunched together looking wary and hopeful, as each new traveller emerged from those magic doors, to face whatever it meant to be home.

Ruthie later claimed she had no idea that she had smuggled a baby (smuggled was the word she used) through the Customs, but Mrs. B couldn't believe that her daughter didn't know. She could not bring herself to say her daughter was a liar, but was unable to stop herself thinking that more trouble had arrived with her daughter, and that soon all her friends would know. Later, Mrs. B confided *in confidence* to her dear friends Jackie and Kathy, who passed on the news until everyone knew, but pretended that they didn't. When Ruthie really started to show, no one was surprised, although they all pretended that they were.

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Mrs. B nudged her way to the front of the crowd at the exit doors. She wanted to see what condition Ruthie was in. Charles had not accompanied her to Boston two months before; his excuse was the business. Charles' cowardice no longer surprised her; she'd had to deal with many stressful, sad, even tragic incidents throughout their marriage without him, although this time it did seem strange

since he seldom hid behind the excuse of business when it involved Ruthie.

April would go down as one of the worst months in Mrs. B's life, cruel in every way. Boston was still very cold and Ruthie's attitude towards her even colder. Ruthie was distant, like a stranger; she barely spoke to anyone in the psychiatric clinic. The day Mrs. B arrived in Boston she visited Ruthie's roommate, Alice, who gave her the entire story. Alice had found Ruthie on the floor of their bathroom at four o'clock in the afternoon. Alice, short, stocky, effusive, Jewish, insisted on describing the unnatural position of Ruthie's body which had made her think that Ruthie was dead. The vomit had streaks of blood in it, a thin watery string flowed out of Ruthie's mouth, and the floor was slimy, the empty bottles of pills right there. She had puked in Ruthie's vomit before she called the concierge, who called the security guard for the building. Mrs. B did not want any more details, but Alice seemed to need the repetition, for she described this scene several times during Mrs. B's stay in Boston.

Mrs. B tried hard to erase the image of her daughter on the bathroom floor, with the horrible mess everywhere and felt irritated, embarrassed and ashamed that it was *her* daughter who had collapsed in front of everyone. She felt even more ashamed for feeling ashamed. Still, she was grateful to this chatty friend who had saved her daughter from God knows what. "Thank you, Alice," Mrs. B said, and had Alice been Caribbean and not American, Mrs. B would have hugged her there and then, but instead she took Alice's hand and held it in her own.

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As she left the safety of the airport, Ruthie suddenly wanted to vomit. Her stomach was churning around a mixture of guilt, anger and embarrassment. Then it hit her worse than anything she had been through in recent months – and God knows she had been through a lot – it hit her like a slap from an old boyfriend, or a fall on hard ice: she still had feelings for the Professor, still felt something for *le loup* – the code name used by her dear friend Eddy.

Eddy was one of the few American friends she had made and cared about during her time in Boston; from the first time they

spoke in an English Literature class, she trusted him instinctively – which surprised her because trust did not come to her naturally. When she found out that Eddy was gay she loved him even more; there would be no pressure. Eddy had helped her pack up in the last few days, getting her ready to leave Boston, getting her ready to leave *le loup* behind. Now, just when Ruthie thought she had finally escaped, the old feelings re-emerged, threatening to spoil the composure she had managed for her return home.

But now, here – the reunion with her parents imminent – she had to pull herself together. She could not re-enter this life looking as sick as she felt; she took deep breaths, hoping to suppress the desire to vomit the horrible, tasteless curry she'd had on the plane. She moved towards her parents without really seeing them. She thought she saw her father's full head of greying hair towering over most of the people, then suddenly he disappeared and she sensed that her mother was close by because she smelled her oppressive perfume, the one she had always worn since Ruthie could remember. Then her mother appeared, trim as ever, black wrap dress, shiny dark brown hair cut just above the shoulders, deep wine lipstick on her light macadamia-coloured skin (all the women on her mother's side had this colour, except Ruthie herself who was darker) moistened with her Lancôme, not a blemish, still looking lovely, even in her late forties.

"Sweetie, let me take that," she said, kissing both of Ruthie's cheeks, relieving Ruthie of her carry-on bag before she had a chance to respond, looking carefully at her daughter's face for any signs of mental instability.

"Taxi, Miss?" An Indian taxi driver hovered, repeating the question.

"No, no, thank you, we have a car." Mrs. B replied curtly. Where the hell was Charles? "How was the trip? Your father must have spotted you and gone to bring the car around. I never understand how he just disappears like that without saying a word…"

Her mother continued to talk, complaining about her father's disappearing acts; Ruthie didn't really focus on what she was saying. She was used to her mother's nervous chatter; it was always her way of dealing with uncomfortable situations, and this

was obviously one. Ruthie's nausea had passed for the moment, but it was replaced by a lightheaded feeling, even a lightness of being, allowing her to float above the entire scene; she looked down on an amazing aerial view of the airport, the people, the cars and the highway leading into the lights of Port-of-Spain. She could even see the Stollmeyer's Castle facing the Queen's Park Savannah, the Queen's Royal College, the Archbishop's residence, but then she fell and landed right back on the pavement at the airport in front of her mother, suddenly very aware that she had left Boston and her Professor.

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Mrs. B, who'd had to cultivate her elegance, studying her mother Simone's style very closely, simply did not understand how someone blessed with a long slim torso, ballerina legs, and such a graceful neck simply refused to acknowledge or take advantage of her good fortune. What a waste of a waist was all Mrs. B could think of as she examined her daughter's travelling attire. Ruthie looked so careless in the way she presented herself to the world – the untidiness of her adopted American lifestyle, the horrible hemp bag; that messy American-ness had become part of her look and it irritated Mrs. B. She didn't see herself as old fashioned, she'd had to accept the notion of being middle-aged, but what was wrong with wanting to present oneself in the best way possible. "Elegance," her mother Simone would say, "is the best defence." Mrs. B was well aware of how little elegance mattered to Charles, but she still strove for it and now she had to admit that for Ruthie, like her father, it didn't matter.

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Seeing Ruthie again and remembering all that she had been through in April took Mrs. B back to another sad time in her life, of another arrival coupled with a departure. It was when Mrs. B was a young girl of eight going on nine, when she was called Marie Elena Roumain. In those days she played a game with God. It came to be called the Ceiling Game. The game started soon after she moved into her Aunt Claire's three-bedroom bungalow, in an area where all the houses looked the same – a box with a grey galvanized roof, a low white front wall, neatly potted plants that

lined a short, narrow driveway that led to a narrower door into a small kitchen, just off the garage. Aunt Claire's small garden was no different from the others, except for the two swans and the white ceramic mother duck with four white ducklings that she had carefully placed just below the grotto that housed Mary, Joseph, baby Jesus, two oxen and three wise men. Marie Elena's mother, her Aunt Claire's one and only sister, Simone, used to say: "Clarita sweetie, I love you to death but I swear to God I think you may actually have the worst taste in the world." Then she would laugh, because from birth Simone had been given a powerful yet playful laugh; it gave her a free pass to speak her mind, saying exactly what she felt, when she felt it, seldom caring or even noticing who she slashed along the way. At the time, Marie Elena, the young Mrs. B, had not yet felt her mother's sting, but she had sensed that Aunt Claire avoided her sister as much as possible.

Her parents left the eight-year-old Marie Elena at Aunt Claire's house for two years. There were visits during those two years, and vacations when Elena would spend a month here with her father, Michael, or there with Simone. Sometimes Elena travelled to big cities like London or New York or other islands like Grenada, Jamaica, St Thomas or Barbuda; sometimes she spent weeks in a fancy hotel, and hours on planes being sent from the father to the mother, parcelled over from one air hostess to another. But after all those trips here, there and everywhere, Marie Elena would end up in the house on Hibiscus Drive with Auntie Claire.

Under her bed in an old shoe box where she was supposed to keep her white shoes for Sunday mass, Marie Elena put her mementos from her travels: postcards of couples lying on Grand Anse beach in Grenada; palm trees and sunsets in St Lucia; tiny shells from Martinique; a dime and a quarter snatched from a saucer; a pound note pressed in her palm by a stranger; a miniature Statue of Liberty, a tiny bright red double-decker bus, museum tickets, and the cap of the Coca Cola bottle from the day she shared a gigantic hot dog and two Cokes with her mother, sitting on a bench in Central Park. Marie Elena tried to collect memories as well, but these faded fast. So, from an early age, the future Mrs. B learned to hide what she treasured most.

There were times when Elena got very angry, berated her little self for what she should have remembered. In the days and months after her parents left her at Auntie Claire's, she often tried to recall the details of the morning they brought her to the house on Hibiscus Drive. Sometimes she saw her mother dressed up, laughing her strange, crazy, powerful laugh; sometimes she thought she saw her mother shed a tear; sometimes she saw her father in a dark suit trying his best not to look at her as he put down boxes of books, dolls and clothes in the tiny bedroom; sometimes she thought she saw her father smile. She thought she remembered her aunt standing like a thin, tall statue, barely breathing, holding her hand. When her parents drove away Elena remembered thinking that this would be the saddest part of her life, but she soon learned that life had many more days like this to offer.

In those days Marie Elena dreamed night and day of owning a city that was both island and metropolis, a big-city city like the ones she had visited with her parents. In these reveries she wasn't just owner of the city, keeper of the keys, lady at the gate, she, Elena, *was* the city. Powerful enough to change a building and become a building herself, she could also become a hurricane, a landslide, topple people from buildings with an earthquake, kill an entire village with a tidal wave. She drew a world filled with countries called ELENA on the pages of old copy books. There were ELENA cities with towering skyscrapers, ELENA villages with houses floating on rivers, ELENA oceans with fleets of ships – places drawn over sums and spelling tests. Sometimes she would glue old newspaper cuttings over the drawings, stick on beads or pieces of old cloth. Other times she would take leaves from the bougainvillea and flowers from the hibiscus and glue them into her world. Inspired by the *Alice in Wonderland* pop-up book her mother had given her, Elena tried to make her world like Alice's and for a while she was quite proud of what she had created. But even as God of her own world, with the power to build and destroy houses and families at will, her powers seemed to disappear when it came to her parents, so eventually Elena moved on to other things.

One of these was a promising friendship with God and his family. In church she had heard that everyone had a friend in

Jesus, so Elena saw no reason why she and God, Jesus's father, couldn't be friends, and if Jesus was God and God was Jesus and the Father was the Son and the Holy Spirit, she really didn't see a problem, the more the merrier. At eight years old, Elena got along very well with the Trinity, especially when they played games like the Ceiling Game. The rules were quite simple. If Elena managed to touch the ceiling in the hallway three times in a row, God or Jesus would have to grant her three wishes since three seemed to be their favourite number. Her strategy was usually to run as fast as she could, often without shoes (which she thought would make her lighter) stretch her arms above her head, and launch herself into the air, hoping that the tips of her fingers would graze the ceiling.

The ceiling wasn't that high but she had yet to grow into the long, slender body she would inherit from Michael and Simone. She often succeeded in touching the ceiling twice in a row, but never quite made three times, at least this is what she remembered. Sometimes Aunt Claire would catch her at this game and in her quiet, gentle way would say that Elena should not run in the hallway since she could have a bad fall. Most of the time, Claire left Elena to her own devices. At that age, the young Mrs. B pretended to be as good as any other eight year old girl; she did her homework, made her bed, had good table manners, always said please, thank you, good morning and you're welcome, went to piano lessons, did not fidget during Sunday morning Mass and always sat like a young lady. There was little for Aunt Claire to complain about.

Apart from the short vacations with her father or her mother, Elena lived in the house on Hibiscus Drive. Two years passed before she left her aunt to live mainly with her mother and occasionally with her father. By then, she had already fallen out in a big way with God, Jesus and the whole entourage. They with all their supreme powers, apparently could not protect her from a witch at school called Veronica and her young *sorcière* assistant, Monica, from a music teacher and from another creature whom Elena always kept nameless since he was nothing less than the devil on earth. With no God listening to her and monsters everywhere, her cities fell apart, and her powers began to fade like the old curtains in her Aunt Claire's drawing room. Great expectations

began to drip, drip, drip like the leaking tap at the back of her Aunt Claire's house and she blamed everyone, but mostly her old friend God for all the leakage.

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Aunt Claire was tall and thin, with the same macadamia-coloured skin as her sister. She was not glamorous, not as startlingly beautiful as Simone. If you ignored her slightly slanted, ink-coloured eyes, or the wideness of her smile, you might even think her pleasantly plain. It was true that she did not have the best taste when it came to what she wore or the furniture in her home; everything was functional, practical, neat and clean. She had lived alone for some years before her niece arrived, so perhaps she did not realize (or perhaps no longer cared) how plain she looked and how unadorned and simple her life had become. Everything had a place and there was a place for everything. She had folded and stacked her past carefully, leaving just a few spaces to slot in the future; her days were measured by ritual and routine: her morning ablutions, her prayers, her daily walk, her voluntary work at the church, her teaching and always her reading in the evening. It was this routine that made her sister Simone say that Elena would be a gift, a blessing to "poor, lonely Claire", that her existence would suddenly have purpose and meaning. Simone was tempted to think "old maid", but she resisted; Claire at thirty-three was only two years her senior.

Truth be told, Claire did not want to take care of Elena. She had no desire to raise a child – those painful feelings had long passed. But she was never as powerful as Simone, even though she was the elder; and though she thought she had shown outward signs of protest, Simone pretended not to notice. Simone drew her older sister in with all her charms, hypnotizing her with her sorrows, dangling the precious spirits of their dead parents and even speaking for them. "Wouldn't they have wanted their granddaughter to have a peaceful place during these stormy times," and then promising that Elena would only be there for a couple of months, not the two years that she had probably intended all along. It was not that Claire was weak with everyone; she had stood up to seemingly greater forces than her sister, but for reasons that she did not understand, Simone had managed to

manipulate her ever since she could speak. Simone knew this and knew that Claire knew she knew this. The rules of the game had never changed.

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During the day Claire was known simply as "Miss" to her third standard class at the Princess Margaret Primary School, conveniently located within walking distance from 623 Hibiscus Drive, where she had moved two years before Elena's arrival. Claire had tried her best to find complete contentment in her teaching, trying to live for those little brown, third-standard faces that looked to their "Miss" for all the answers, but she had to admit that it was not enough and at times tremendously tedious. She would have preferred to spend her day in the room she called her library. A librarian was what she had dreamed of becoming – she had never wanted to be a teacher, but without the necessary qualifications she had been forced to settle for the job of "Miss". As a librarian there would be fewer questions, definitely less noise and no more Miss. There would be no need to make small talk with the other teachers; she imagined all librarians sought the same solitude. She could barely control her ecstasy when she imagined herself surrounded by shelves and shelves of books; there was something she found on the second floor of the Port of Spain Public Library that she could not find even in church. But there was also the guilt that she felt at the thought of reading her favourite poems with Mary, Jesus and all the saints looking over her shoulder, and she had never missed Sunday Mass even though there were days when the early morning rain made her feel like lying in bed with Baudelaire. To others, Claire's love of reading did not seem to go beyond the obvious – a romantic to the core, it allowed her to escape to another world, to be transported from an ordinary life to something better. It gave her the simple pleasure of being lost, of never noticing time passing because, more than anything, Claire wanted time to pass. She believed all the clichés about wounds being healed by the balm of time. Sometimes, though, Claire read in a way that others were less likely to deduce; sometimes what she felt could only be described as a *frisson*: discovering new words or following the patterns that the sentences made, seeing beauty in simplicity, complexity in

that beauty, perfection in all its forms and shapes – page after page. Claire loved it all – no, it was more than love – it was pure adoration. There was another gratifying aspect to her reading; it was the only advantage, although slight, that she had over Simone, who had never been much of a reader.

As a child, Claire, like her father (another great reader, and the one who taught her, more than any teacher, how to read), read all the time, though her family was not sure that it was the best thing for someone as homely looking as Claire to fill her mind with false hopes and the Cinderella expectations that these books might give. Her old aunts feared that Claire would further lessen her chances of finding a good husband if her vocabulary continued to expand at such a quick pace. No man wanted a wife who seemed more intelligent than he. The old aunts lived in a perpetual state of anxiety about poor Claire's future. It didn't help when two Fathers of the parish came to the house one afternoon to have tea with the Roumain family that Claire was seen holding a Koran, (taken from her father's library). Needless to say, the priests noticed, mentioned it to the old aunts, who in turn encouraged Claire's father to be a little more vigilant about his daughter's choice of reading material.

Indeed, the old aunts strongly urged Claire's parents to censor her selection of books. Until then, Claire had been allowed to browse the shelves and select at will novels, poetry, plays, books on horticulture, agriculture, bird-watching, fishing and the history of the British Empire. Her parents had already removed unsuitable texts like the *Kama Sutra*, the Marquis de Sade and the banned poems of Baudelaire. After the Koran incident and the old aunts' insidious nagging, a battle for righteousness, though not the war, was won. For a while it was salvation over education.

As a young girl, Claire also read to hide behind a book, shying away from questions, requests and social gatherings. Unlike Simone, who shone like a jewel in a crowd, Claire wanted to disappear. In those days Claire's books were her only shields, though she learned that they could not protect her from the disappointment of a missed party because her family did not know the parents of the little girl or boy she liked, and they

certainly could not protect her from the pain that an aunt or an uncle inflicted so casually with a cruel word or careless remark.

In her study, Claire arranged her books the way she wished she could have arranged her past life – carefully, thoughtfully, even with kindness, making sure that those with similar ideas, religious beliefs or experiences were grouped together; some kind of correspondence had to take place on her shelves. So instead of putting *Madame Bovary* with all the other 19th century French novels she had collected during her year in Paris, she thought that Emma should be next to Anna Karenina. With so much pain to share, the two women could comfort each other. Verlaine and Rimbaud, having endured such violent quarrels, could never be next to each other, so she put Rimbaud next to Ronsard, and Verlaine next to Watteau, a painter he admired. Baudelaire stayed away from Hugo and was placed next to another great, Shakespeare. Even if the two men were from different times Claire felt that they shared dark loves and battles of the soul.

But there was more; while reading shielded her from the outside, familiarity with her books guided her into other places. What Claire loved most was that she knew what to expect, she knew the plots by heart; there were no surprises. Claire could drop in and out, just like Alice in Wonderland; she could assume different roles at different parts of different books; she could become the heroine in one chapter or a less important character in another. It was ridiculous how many times she had reread *Madame Bovary*; just holding that book could take her into the back of the carriage with Leon or into the woods with Rodolphe. She knew what the kiss did to Emma. Claire could almost feel it, and once she actually held the page close to her lips that were parted ever so slightly, just the way she imagined Emma's had been with Rodolphe that afternoon. Claire knew Emma better than any other character because in her own life she had met her own Leon and several Rodolphes.

What no-one knew about Claire's reading was that the more times she read a book, the more emboldened she was to take liberties with the writer's decisions; sometimes she would scribble passages in her notebook that changed the plots or parts of the story. She would have allowed Emma to be consoled by a kind

priest, not the uncaring one in the book, but a new, charming character, who when Emma went into the church that day seeking guidance or some sort of solace, would seduce Emma back into the church with his intelligence, heightened sensibility and overpowering good looks.

Claire knew that the family was not happy that she lived alone, but it was the only way she could survive the brutalities committed against her so early on. She knew this aloneness made her seem a little odd, and even she wondered if living in these fantasies was a sign of some abnormality, but was she hurting anyone? And did anyone really care what she did with her time? So she enjoyed her invisibility more and more and kept these imaginings to herself. Everyone had secrets, even Simone.

So imagine Elena's surprise the day she walked into Aunt Claire's study for the first time. The small room was filled with books on every wall save one where there was a sofa, a lamp and two votives on a side table. The room had a strange smell; a mixture of hot chocolate, vetiver, vanilla and something else. It was a male smell.

CHAPTER TWO
HOME SWEET HOME

Mrs. B had spent a lot of time, energy and money refurbishing the guest room for Ruthie's arrival. She wanted Ruthie to have more space, more privacy and the guest room downstairs had a private bathroom. She knew that Ruthie didn't like their new home in a gated community, the San Pedro Villas. In fact neither Mrs. B nor Charles had really become used to it; there were too many neighbours, too much gossip. They had never wanted to leave their five-acre home in the valley. Mrs. B still missed the white egrets on the lawn in the morning, the parrots flying home to the bamboo trees in the evening and their mini estate of oranges, grapefruits, avocados, mangoes and lime trees. In their last years in the valley, Mrs. B and her longtime gardener, Sammy, had grown a healthy kitchen garden of basil, thyme, rosemary and mint just off the kitchen porch. Only the herb garden had been transplanted, but now clay pots held the plants and the roots were no longer in the earth.

Their house in the valley had a verandah built to imitate the old colonial style; it wrapped around most of the ground floor and allowed an easy flow onto the soft Bermuda grass. Before Charles and Mrs. B built the house she had wanted to buy one of the older colonial estate homes, like the ones her family owned when she was a child, but Charles said this was impractical since restoring the homes she liked would have cost as much as constructing a new one. But she had managed, with Charles and their architect, to build a home with all the nostalgic details of her childhood: high wooden ceilings, tall doors, and wooden latticework along the edges of the roof.

During her first few months in San Pedro she had enjoyed the company of her neighbours – many of whom they knew from high school days – and the ability to see her close friends, who all lived nearby. But after a while she began to miss the things she had taken for granted in her old home; here in San Pedro the constant need to meet, greet and give daily updates on anything and everything began to irritate. A face seemed to appear the moment she stepped out of her townhouse door, or out of her car, or even when she sought some peace in her small backyard garden. In San Pedro, the custom of phoning before a visit seemed unnecessary especially since the neighbour lived only minutes away; walking in to someone's front door and simply calling out "Hello" was the norm. After four years Mrs. B had grown tired of the place; she longed for the simple pleasure of walking to the edge of her old property and sitting on her favourite bench under the sprawling samaan tree just above the path that led down to the river.

Originally San Pedro seemed the best option: good location in the west, excellent neighbourhood, mall and grocery minutes away, with a view of the sea. Each unit had three bedrooms, three bathrooms and a powder room, a living area to the back that opened onto a small but thoughtfully landscaped garden with neat beds of ginger lilies, alamandas, and exotic ground cover. There were some tall, carefully pruned ficus and a few weeping willows at the edge of the compound. Separating side A from side B of the compound were nine royal palms that gave it an air of grandeur. It was the palms that had drawn Mrs. B and Charles to San Pedro.

But she couldn't help making comparisons with the valley. On mornings in San Pedro, young twenty-something housewives left their babies with housekeepers who arrived in droves at the crack of dawn as their young employers went to work or the gym in their shiny new cars. In the afternoons Mrs. B would see the mothers once again, walking their little cherubs in fancy carriages around the compound. The fathers would come home in the evening, suited and tired. The sight of the young families affected Mrs. B with envy, nostalgia and an indescribable numbness. Besides the young couples, there were many like Mrs. B and Charles, a group of forty-somethings to fifty-somethings who

had left much larger properties partly for the convenience but primarily for the security. San Pedro boasted the best guarded gated community in the west; whether this was true or not, it didn't hurt that the family of one of the young Lebanese couples living there owned the security firm that guarded the compound. At night, guards patrolled with pit bulls; they were without them during the day, but always carried concealed weapons. Curled barbed wire atop the compound walls bordering the main street mostly deterred bandits from jumping over, though the previous Carnival season, two crackheads, or *pipers*, hazarded a jump, only to be welcomed by pit bulls, guns, batons and cricket bats.

At first, Mrs. B and Charles resisted the temptation to spend their early evenings discussing the crime situation with their neighbours. They thought they had left fear behind in the valley, along with the surplus goods donated to Goodwill, the Red Cross and Salvation Army, or given to the local valley poor, but even in the guarded compound the wives spoke about robberies, rapes, murders and kidnappings all the time, and Mrs. B and Charles soon discovered that fear was not something you left behind or gave away, like an old pair of shoes.

Still, in spite of the nostalgia she felt, Mrs. B had to admit that her valley, like everything else on the island, had changed. In recent years those who had made Coco Valley their home had built towering walls that locked them in, making sure that the villagers who walked past had no chance of seeing anything inside their palaces. But with each robbery that took place in the valley, each kidnapping, each shooting, Mrs. B and Charles felt the enemy was getting too close. At night every pop became a gunshot. Then there was the body dumped in the canal by the main road that snaked through the valley, bloating in the sun like a dead dog. Life in Coco Valley had ceased to exist in the way they wanted to remember it. There was no one to call on to protect and serve them. "Not one jackass," Charles would say in his diatribes against the corrupt police force and even more corrupt politicians – many of whom, as he claimed, enjoyed the profits of a healthy drug trade. It was better for witnesses to pretend to know nothing, because witnesses were shot all the time, even on the steps of the Hall of Justice.

When they first moved into Coco Valley things were different. There were more trees, more bush, more shades of green; there were fewer houses, more cocoa plantations, fewer cars, more villagers on bikes; it was less town and more country, and that was what Mrs. B and Charles had loved. Although they were not born in the valley, they felt that the almost two decades they spent there earned them the right to feel that they belonged. Ruthie had grown up in the valley; she knew no other home.

When the horrors began, Mrs. B and Charles pretended not to notice. They were not unique to Coco Valley; evil things were taking place all over the island. Like many of their friends, Mrs. B and Charles went about their daily routines trying hard not to think about the way things were falling apart. They busied themselves with shopping at the malls, doing their groceries on a Saturday morning, movies on a Sunday evening, dinners with friends, lunches, brunches – avoiding restaurants that had been held up by bandits; they had self-imposed curfews and travelled in numbers at night, never going into the city after dark, or never going into the city at all. When they got into their cars, day or night, they locked their doors, kept their windows up, air conditioners on; looked closely as their electric gates opened and closed behind them; let their dogs out at night and hired security to patrol their neighbourhood. That was the way they survived, skimming the surface of a deep red sea, never looking down to see what was below.

But then there was the incident with Mary, their neighbour in the valley. She lived with her handsome husband and her ten-year-old twin boys. The day began like any other: husband off to work, twins off to school, housekeeper housekeeping, gardener gardening. They arrived quietly, through the back gate that led to the river (they never found out who left it unlocked). The men knew the Rottweilers were tied up, and they found Mary where she spent every sunny morning in the valley, in her garden weeding, cleaning up a bed next to the tall African tulip. That was where they ripped her apart. Worse than raging pit bulls, they bit, tore, straddled, paddled, and broke Mary like a dry twig in her own garden. They ate the lunch the housekeeper had cooked for the family (she said she was kicked around before they locked her

in the powder room at the bottom of the stairs, but compared to Miss Mary, she knew she had been spared). Before they left, they shat on the kitchen floor and used their excrement to write FOCK YOU across the white kitchen walls, and then they packed the laptops, the Wiis, the Xbox, the cell phones and the shoebox with Mary's jewellery and five thousand US into Mary's Mercedes and drove off into the bright valley light. The gardener, who had hidden in the shed outside, swore they had guns, swore that they threatened to kill him if he said anything to the police. Mary's husband Joey and their two young sons had to clean up the entire mess, not just the house but Mary herself, who never again felt clean.

After this, Mrs. B and Charles realized they had to leave.

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Mrs. B was busy preparing the guest room for Ruthie. The idea that pleased her most was the motif of shells; she had chosen a shell-pattern curtain fabric at the ever popular "Jeanelle's" and gathered several conch shells that she had found with Charles on their last holiday in Tobago and put them on the book shelf. But it didn't end there; she asked her seamstress, Jeanelle's daughter Taneeka, to make a bedspread using the same fabric, and then to add a few cushions as well. Charles was sure that Ruthie would hate the shells, and painting the room pinkish-orange to match the curtains made him cringe; the whole idea was very un-Ruthie. But when it came to Ruthie, Charles always felt that his wife tried too hard, though he seldom contradicted her on things that mattered to her; he seldom contradicted her at all. During the two weeks before Ruthie's arrival, Charles would peep into the room to observe the progress. There, Mr. Kenny, housepainter-handyman, originally from a Hindu village in Coco Valley, with his son Ricky, was dusting, hanging curtains and painting. The room's colour looked like a perpetual sunset. Ruthie would loath it, but when Mr. Kenny asked, "How you like it, Mr. Charles?" he could only reply, "Looking good, man. I like the colour." Mr. Kenny looked pleased. "Yeah, it nice."

Charles saw how much Ruthie's breakdown had affected his wife; she acted as though she was somehow responsible for it. He knew that she wanted him to share in this responsibility, but when she came back from Boston, acting as though she had

attended a funeral, he refused to walk around the house as if in mourning – though he could see how this was angering his wife. He had never demanded too much from his daughter. He missed her when she left for university, though they had never been very close and seldom shared their feelings with each other. Ruthie was not a talker and neither was he; they were both comfortable with silence. She had made few demands as a young girl and he was grateful for that because he would not have known how to respond. His father and grandfather belonged to that generation of Caribbean men who knew what they were supposed to do; there were areas they inhabited comfortably and others they quickly vacated. Now more was expected of a husband and a father and Charles just didn't know where and when he was supposed to be what. So even if he wanted to stroke Ruthie's hair or kiss her without the formality of a goodnight, goodbye or a good-morning, he simply couldn't; and if, as TV fathers did, he felt he should ask her about her day, the words would not come out. Yet he felt that he could read Ruthie better than his wife. She seemed to miss the details – the subtle shift in tone, the quick grimace, the way Ruthie opened her large eyes even wider when she was unhappy, and the pain she felt when her mother made her the focus of attention. At the parent-teacher conferences when Ruthie was at primary school, the school would say that Ruthie was a bright student, never giving any trouble in class, but they didn't think she was happy. She never seemed to want to play with the other children, and at break time she would sit quietly or simply stare at some fixed point. It hurt Charles to hear this, but it seemed not to bother his wife, because Ruthie, throughout primary and secondary school, was always in the top three of her class.

★

Although, even after two years of therapy, Mrs. B could only describe her feelings towards her mother as ambiguous, she had to admit that she admired Simone's air of quiet superiority. Charles saw no value in this. Sophistication and snobbery equalled hypocrisy in his mind. He liked people who were "down to earth"; he didn't like fakes or show-offs and he had never cared much for his mother-in-law; the feeling was mutual.

But during his courtship, Charles's rough, unpolished, earthy

persona was exactly what the future Mrs. B found most enticing; in her young mind, he represented a revolution, something far away from what the family expected. She didn't want a lawyer or a doctor. But that was before time began to play tricks – shortening the good years, stretching the bad, making five good years feel like a week, and five bad, a lifetime.

They met when she was twenty, he twenty-two; by her twenty-first birthday she was married; by twenty-two Ruthie was in her arms. In the early days Charles courted, romanced, did all that was expected, but with each passing year there seemed less to talk about and by the time Ruthie went away, there was little left to share. Nothing she said or did brought a smile to his face; she tried to ignore the fact that Charles only seemed to laugh when he talked to his cricket buddies, his best friend Chow, or his brother on the phone, and that he was always happier when he came back from his Sunday morning walks around the Queen's Park Savannah with his old high-school cronies. His mood had clouded again by the time he had finished Sunday lunch, even his favourite of roasted lamb, macaroni pie, callaloo, stewed red beans with pumpkin, tomato, cucumber and lettuce salad with a vinaigrette dressing, followed by coconut ice-cream. There were times when, with the hope of a compliment from Charles, Mrs. B prepared dishes that they had eaten on their vacations in Milan, in Paris, or Madrid – dishes that Charles had eaten with such gusto in those foreign cities. At home, Charles seldom showed the same pleasure; he had said more than once that "something was missing". Mrs. B wasn't sure whether she had stopped telling Charles about her life before she realized that he had stopped telling her about his.

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The day she left Boston for Trinidad, Ruthie dressed for what would be the last time in the small rent-controlled apartment in Cambridge. She had spent so much time sipping warm *café au laits* on crisp Cambridge afternoons in Harvard Square, watching the old men play chess while she waited for her Professor to finish his last lecture. When he appeared it always surprised her that this was her lover – this quintessential professor with his dark brown hair, blue eyes, tall, lanky body in loose Levis, tee shirt and his professor uniform of a rumpled corduroy jacket. Together they

would walk casually to the apartment ten minutes away from the Square.

She knew she had spent too many afternoons in the last year in this apartment with her Professor; making love too many times on the dusty sofas, the Persian carpets, and the creaky four poster in the master bedroom. In the last month she had actually moved into the apartment, morning to night, lying to her parents, telling them it was shared with someone from her class. They believed her when she said that since the bathroom episode, she simply could not go back to face Alice and the others. This was not a complete lie. Those American friends, who had come to visit her when she was in the clinic bearing gifts and Hallmark greetings, saying how much they missed her, that it was not the same without her, were all liars. In the two years since Ruthie hooked up with her Professor, she had seldom slept in her dorm room and tried her best to distance herself from the other students; she never said much beyond the necessary civilities, fearing their suspicions and discovery of her secret life. It would have been impossible to see her Professor in the dorm; they knew who he was, not so much for his course on Pound and Eliot, but more for his gorgeous looks.

So when the Professor's friend and colleague in the Art History Department asked him to take care of his apartment by emptying the mail box, paying the bills, and watering the plants for a semester while he was in Florence, her Professor couldn't believe his luck. Her Professor swore, more than once, on his mother's grave, that this colleague did not know about the affair but Ruthie never believed him and even took some pleasure in the fact that someone knew; it made the whole affair seem real. But she knew she couldn't trust her Professor; she had heard him lie to his wife and daughter on the phone in his steady, calm unwavering tone while she strolled around the apartment in her skimpy panties and nothing else. She had heard him talk to a colleague while he fondled her nipples; he used the same tone in his lectures, the same one that had seduced her; he had said that his wife no longer cared about their marriage; that Ruthie was his first student-professor affair; that their love for each other was something extraordinary; that the heart has a mind of its own and

that what they felt could not be ignored. Words came to him so cheaply. Sometimes it had bothered her.

The Art Historian's apartment added a new dimension to their trysts; they could play house, no more dirty-sexy hook-ups in posh hotels, or tacky motel rooms with huge mirrors, or bare-boned conference accommodation on some university campus. Since she met the Professor, Ruthie could feel the emptiness she'd felt ever since she was a little girl being replaced by a heady passion. And although Ruthie had mastered, at a very early age, the skill of detaching herself from people, places and things, the Professor found a way very slowly, and very gently, to guide her into places she'd refused to go to before she met him.

By the end of the first year of the affair, the Professor's wife seemed suspicious of her husband's renewed interest in presenting conference papers at this stage of his academic career. Her persistent interrogations, her insistence on knowing all the travel arrangements – studying his itinerary and conference details – began to take its toll and he was forced to cut back on these presentations. Then, just as things were beginning to look a little shaky, the opportunity to baby-sit the apartment presented itself. The Professor adopted a policy of transparency, telling his wife every detail about the apartment, especially since she went across the river to Cambridge at least twice a week to her favourite bookstore in Harvard Square. She even walked past the apartment a couple of times just to make sure that he was not there. Though she couldn't see inside, because the curtains were always drawn, there seemed to be no sign of her husband or his car, so she had to conclude that perhaps she could believe what he had said. There was also the fact that the Art History professor was gay. He was discreet but not closeted, and perhaps the Professor's wife thought that the flat was immune from heterosexual affairs having been infused with its owner's gayness – or perhaps she had decided that discovery was sometimes worse than doubt.

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If ever she was going to make an effort to look her best, Ruthie knew this should be the time – except she lacked the energy and will to get beyond the debilitating fatigue that made it difficult to even think about an outfit for the plane, more so one that would

meet her mother's approval. Apart from the clear gloss she spread on her lips and the black eyeliner, she wore no other make-up on her faded skin, normally much browner when she was at home. She put her unwashed oily hair into a loose bun, knowing that once she stepped out of the plane into the humid island air, her hair would be a mess anyway. She slipped into a pair of her favourite Old Navy jeans; this last month she had lost even more weight (perhaps her mother would appreciate this – "never too rich or too thin") but when she looked in the mirror she saw a gaunt, drawn, unattractive face. The only things left out of the big black suitcase were a white tank top, a black cardigan and a pair of old black ballerina flats. Two suitcases and a knapsack with her laptop and her hemp bag were all she had. Everything else had been sent home; the Professor and Eddy had helped her with this. She had packed up four years in a few days: books, linens, tokens she had collected over the years in Boston or on her brief trips to Europe. She had come to Boston alone and was leaving alone.

It was an early flight from Logan to JFK, where Ruthie would connect to Miami, then Barbados and finally home. She was supposed to have left her keys to the Cambridge apartment on the coffee table in the living room but she hadn't; her Professor had left two days earlier for a conveniently timed vacation with his wife and daughter in London. Their last afternoon together in the apartment had been a disaster. They drove to Walden Pond; he spoke about Thoreau and a recent annotated edition; she had heard this little lecture before. When they got back to the apartment after dinner at their favourite Indian restaurant in Kenmore Square, she broke her promise to herself and had sex with him, the hungry kind that you have when you think it may be the last time. As soon as he left she felt sick, nauseous and broken. When she was in the clinic earlier that April, after his quick, nervous visit she swore on her father's life that she would never see him again, but her Professor was stronger than any drug she had ever tried, though she knew she was not his first student, even before he confessed. Before she left the apartment she decided, uncharacteristically, to keep the keys as a token, not expecting to ever return but simply to have some proof of it all.

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"There he is. Let's hope he doesn't drive past us." Mrs. B waved to her husband who was luckily able to draw up just in front of where they were standing. Charles had not seen his daughter since January; he found he could barely look at her. He got out and moved towards her, kissing both cheeks and felt her hair brushing against his face. She looked thin, tired but still so pretty, always his little girl. He could see that she was anxious and that worried him; but they were all nervous about this return.

The moment Ruthie saw her father and the familiar unhappiness on his face, the sadness came back and it took her by surprise. She had managed to fill herself with anger and anxiety on the plane, fuelled by thoughts of the Professor's abandonment and the inevitable disapproval and disappointment she would have to face from her mother and the family. But sadness and longing – she was unprepared for this and it left her weak.

Little was said on the drive home. Ruthie did notice the new car and told her father how comfortable it was. Her mother only reported on what she thought was necessary – news about friends Ruthie no longer cared about and the possibility of a job at *The Guardian* or *The Express* as soon as she felt up to it, but obviously there was no rush. The rest was just ramblings about the escalating crime, the corruption, the President; it allowed Ruthie to tune in and out as she had always done with her mother. How easily these tricks came back to her, feigning attention to the details piled upon details. Her father usually tried to protect her from the plans her mother made to show her off, but Ruthie soon realized that unlike previous returns where her mother would have planned a million little lunches, brunches and dinners, nothing was being said about anything like this. Rest was what her mother said she needed; it was clear to Ruthie that her mother didn't think she was ready to be presented to friends or family.

They passed the turn-off that would have taken them to their old home in the valley. Ruthie suddenly thought of her dogs, how she and her father would take them for walks in the trails leading to the hills behind the house. On Saturdays, Ruthie would help her father bathe them, and then tie them in a sunny spot to dry. They had enrolled the two German shepherds, Thena and Pollo, in training classes, and even entered them in a couple of dog shows. Ruthie

had watched her father and their gardener bury both dogs in the backyard near to one of the poui trees; the dogs had died of old age within months of each other. There had always been at least five dogs on the property at any given time. Left to Ruthie there would have been ten but her mother didn't like dogs and only tolerated them because of the security they provided and because, as she acknowledged, Ruthie and Charles were "dog people".

Her father drove through the imposing electric gates of San Pedro, waving to the security guards, and parked his vehicle next to her mother's. Her parents carried her bags in for her as if she was an invalid. Every year her mother had tried to make it look more and more like a reduced version of their valley home; there were all their paintings, their vases, their photographs, the inherited antiques and their rugs. As she entered Ruthie thought about the poem her Professor had recited to her early in the courtship. She had even tried to memorize it; it went something like, "The time will come when, with elation, you will greet yourself arriving at your own door, in your own mirror, and each will smile at the other's welcome." There was more but that was all she could remember.

But Ruthie did not know how to greet this self arriving at her door; she had changed so much in the last few years that she no longer recognized the person in the antique mirror from the old valley house. She had no idea how to welcome this new self or to introduce it to the old one, and the promise of elation was not something she expected as she walked into this home. Home. Already she could feel it; all the things she wanted to leave behind were still waiting right there for her.

Ruthie did not like the refurbished guest room; she preferred it the way it was before, when they first moved in, bare and white. She would have preferred her room upstairs, the one her mother said was hers. And yet the minute her mother opened the door and her father put her suitcases on the new sisal mat, she thanked her parents, especially her mother, for everything they had done and for the room.

"It's lovely, Mummy, thank you," Ruthie said.

"And your father was worried that you wouldn't like it." Mrs. B turned and gave Charles a self-satisfied glance.

"We'll let you get organized and I'll make a little something for you to eat." Mrs. B rested her hand awkwardly on her daughter's arm.

Ruthie didn't unpack right away; instead she lay on her bed and stared at the ceiling. The bright colours really didn't help, they seemed to magnify how uncomfortable she felt, but perhaps this was the best place for her, the most appropriate room to occupy, for she *was* a guest in this house, as she felt like a guest in her own body. What she had failed to do in Boston flashed through her mind as quickly as her Professor reappeared. "There will be no more of that," he had said at the clinic the night after her mother left, "No more of that."

She lay on the bedspread of shells waiting for her mother to call her; the ritual of return from the airport demanded that she have a chicken salad sandwich on wholewheat bread with grapefruit juice or a glass of white wine – now that she was "no longer a child." Chicken salad had been her favourite when she was a little girl and her mother always had their Grenadian housekeeper of a million years, Miss Milly, make it the first meal Ruthie had when she came home. So, at eleven o'clock at night, Ruthie found herself sitting at the long, oiled teak table eating a sandwich that she could barely keep down. Her father ate in his usual mechanical manner, staring at nothing in particular; her mother sipped her glass of chilled white wine and tried not to look at Charles while he ate. Only in the last few years had Mrs. B admitted to herself how much his bovine chewing irritated her.

"Tomorrow you should just rest," Mrs. B said, "unless you want to go to the pool."

"Anything is fine, but maybe I'll just take it easy," Ruthie said. "I am a little tired."

"You must be, after such a hard semester." The moment Mrs. B said this she regretted it. But Ruthie said nothing, neither did Charles.

Although the compound had a pool, Ruthie preferred not to swim within view of her San Pedro neighbours. She missed the privacy of their life in the valley, their private pool, their lawns at the back and front of the house, their view of the hills surrounding them, protecting them. When her parents moved into this

gated community, she decided to take up membership at a nearby hotel, which gave her access to its pool, tennis courts and, more importantly, time away from this communal living. Ruthie understood her parents' need to be safe; the country was in a mess with a few monsters terrorizing many, making their victims live behind burglar bars like prisoners while they roamed free. Some of the families she knew had been through nightmares of kidnappings, rapes and even murder; a friend's uncle had been stabbed fifteen times by a sixteen year old boy trying to rob the store; another boy who she knew from primary school had been kidnapped – although he told the newspapers that the kidnappers treated him well, serving him Chinese food and nut cakes for the week until his father paid the ransom of one million US dollars. The stories went on without end. The place, Ruthie thought, had grown as ugly as she felt.

Before she went to bed her father poked his head through the door.

"Goodnight, my beauty. Happy to have you back home," he said.

"Yes, so am I, I mean happy to be back home. Thanks for everything, Daddy." Ruthie got off the bed where she had been sitting and kissed him goodnight on his cheek; it was damp but smooth with the scent of his woodsy aftershave. He had obviously shaved before coming to meet her at the airport.

Her mother called from upstairs, "Sleep well, my darling," but she didn't come down.

"Goodnight, Mum, thanks for everything."

Return complete, mission accomplished, but Ruthie did not sleep well. She tried to read, got up for a drink of water, turned off the bedside lamp yet again, but still she felt uncomfortable, hot then cold, but mostly she felt terribly alone.