

ADVANCE ACCLAIM FOR

Sunrise ON THE *Battery*

“[Beth Webb Hart] knows South Carolina’s fabled lowcountry well and shares her knowledge with skill, wisdom, and beauty.”

—PAT CONROY, BEST-SELLING AUTHOR OF
THE PRINCE OF TIDES

“*Sunrise on the Battery* is a beautiful story of discovery and rebirth, of changing gears in mid-stride, and trusting in God’s guidance. On the surface, Jackson and Mary Lynn Scoville have it all: a great marriage, a fabulous historic Charleston house, and three terrific children. But in their quest to overcome their humble beginnings, Jackson and Mary Lynn have managed to squeeze God out of their seemingly perfect lives until a crisis of conscience turns their world upside down, illuminating the empty spaces once filled with the minutia of society’s demands. Ms. Hart describes in exacting detail the fine bones of her hometown, peopling it with characters you care about and want to root for, and who you will find yourself cheering for at the startling conclusion.”

—KAREN WHITE, *NEW YORK TIMES* BEST-SELLING
AUTHOR OF *THE BEACH TREES*

“Beth Webb Hart is fast becoming one of my favorite authors. *Sunrise on the Battery* is one of the best books I’ve read all year. Hart’s smooth prose prepares the reader for a surprising challenge while leaving them with hope and courage to change. Don’t leave this book on your TBR pile. Pick it up and read it.”

—RACHEL HAUCK, AUTHOR OF *DINING WITH JOY*

“A beautifully crafted story of the power of love and the joy of living in surrender. From the characters to the setting, Beth Webb Hart will draw you to Charleston with her winsome prose and a fabulously crafted tale that will be with you long after the last page is read.”

—JENNY B. JONES, AWARD-WINNING AUTHOR OF
SAVE THE DATE AND *THERE YOU’LL FIND ME*

“Do we always want what we pray for? *Sunrise on the Battery* takes a poignant look at the intersection of faith and family responsibility, of a life for show and a life that feeds the soul. Beth Webb Hart writes with a sense of Southern culture and the holy city of Charleston that is simply mesmerizing!”

—LISA WINGATE, NATIONAL BEST-SELLING AUTHOR
OF *LARKSPUR COVE* AND *DANDELION SUMMER*

“*Sunrise on the Battery* is a rich story that hit me where I live on many levels. Beth Webb Hart has tapped into the layers of a family with her portrayal of the unit as a whole while exploring each individual’s complex interior life. I especially enjoyed her portrayal of the lives of teens, and the challenges of raising them. Beth Webb is a talented author who has brought us another thought-provoking story.”

—MARYBETH WHALEN, AUTHOR OF *SHE
MAKES IT LOOK EASY* AND *THE MAILBOX*,
DIRECTOR OF SHE READS, THE FICTION
DIVISION OF PROVERBS 31 MINISTRIES

ACCLAIM FOR BETH WEBB HART’S PREVIOUS NOVELS

“Hart’s evocation of the ways of Charleston society – blueblood and redneck alike – is right on target, her evocation of the landscape here sure and certain.”

—BRET LOTT, AUTHOR OF *JEWEL*,
REGARDING *GRACE AT LOW TIDE*

“*Grace at Low Tide*, Hart’s first novel, is an aromatic bouillabaisse of Southern manners, island life and God’s redemptive love. Readers who love Oprah’s book picks will find this title in keeping with the best contemporary fiction.”

—LYNN WAALKES, *CBA MARKETPLACE*

“[Hart’s] charismatic cast of characters resonates long after the last page is turned.”

—*THE CHARLOTTE OBSERVER*, REGARDING
THE WEDDING MACHINE

“. . . an engrossing novel with weddings as the centerpiece . . . Hart’s writing is lovely, her characters endearing, and humor leavens the darker moments. Midlife women will find plenty to relate to, and the wedding plot line is an invitation to myriad details on food, decorations and points of Southern etiquette.”

—*PUBLISHERS WEEKLY*, REGARDING
THE WEDDING MACHINE

“*The Wedding Machine* is one of the most charming books I’ve read in a long, long time. The local belles of Jasper, South Carolina comprise the wedding guild, a group of unforgettable women who made me laugh, cry, and cheer—as all good weddings do.”

—CASSANDRA KING, BEST-SELLING
AUTHOR OF *THE SAME SWEET GIRLS*

“Beth Webb Hart writes a beautiful story with compassion and an unerring eye to detail as she peeks behind the white lace, the polished silver, and the artfully arranged flowers of traditional southern weddings to reveal the hidden flaws and secrets of four women friends. Reading it, you’ll feel like a member of the wedding.”

—MARY ALICE MONROE, BEST-SELLING
AUTHOR OF *SWIMMING LESSONS*, REGARDING
THE WEDDING MACHINE

“A lovely, gifted writer.”

—*PUBLISHERS WEEKLY*, REGARDING
GRACE AT LOW TIDE

“With [*Love, Charleston*] Beth Webb Hart moves up in the ranks of the accomplished southern writers. She is one of the youngest members of this southern literary coalition but she is also one of the most talented. Based on the progress shown with her first four books there is no stopping her now.”

—*HUFFINGTON POST*

“*Love, Charleston* doesn’t fail to deliver the drama as this tale of three cousins unfolds . . . As Hart illuminates the difference between outward appearances and reality, the end result is a heartwarming story of love and friendship.”

—*CHARLESTON MAGAZINE*

“Like a Charleston garden in a Southern storm, *Love, Charleston* exposes the tangled, tenuous roots of Family in ebb and flow of Faith and Love. Hart’s new novel is lush and gripping—you won’t want to put it down.”

—NICOLE SEITZ, AUTHOR OF
THE INHERITANCE OF BEAUTY

“If you love Charleston, you will *Love, Charleston*. Beth Webb Hart writes with flair and insight about fascinating people and beautiful places.”

—ROBERT WHITLOW, BEST-SELLING
AUTHOR OF THE TIDES OF TRUTH SERIES

Sunrise
ON THE
Battery

BOOKS BY
BETH WEBB HART

Grace at Low Tide

Adelaide Piper

The Wedding Machine

Love, Charleston

BETH WEBB HART

Sunrise
ON THE
Battery



THOMAS NELSON
Since 1798

NASHVILLE DALLAS MEXICO CITY RIO DE JANEIRO

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For Frances and Edward

So don't sit around on your hands! No more dragging your feet! Clear the path for the long-distance runners so no one will trip and fall, so no one will step in the hole and sprain an ankle. Help each other out. And run for it!

HEBREWS

Chapter 1

MARY LYNN SCOVILLE

December 24, 2009

It was the morning before Christmas, and Mary Lynn was preparing for her sunrise jog around the tip of the Charleston Peninsula. She stretched her thighs and calves in the gray light of her piazza, then bounded out of her South Battery home, traveling west toward the coast guard station like she did every morning as part of her effort to “finally get back in shape” since her fortieth birthday, six short months ago.

By the time she reached Tradd Street, the gray had turned to a soft, creamy light, and she hung a left and rounded the corner onto Murray Boulevard where she traced the west tip of the peninsula as buoys bobbed in the churning water of the harbor and pelicans—beak first, wings pulled tight against their large prehistoric bodies—dove for breakfast in a thrilling kind of free fall.

At her husband Jackson’s strong suggestion, she stayed clear of the darkened cars parked along the edge of the waterway leading up to White Point Gardens. Unseemly characters gathered along the water’s edge at night and often fell asleep there, not to mention the handful of homeless folks who made their berths on park benches. There had been a murder in one of the

cars last year as well as a rape, but the light was too high in the sky for any of that now. As her friend from her bluegrass days, Scottie Truluck, boldly proclaimed the day after someone broke into her house and took off with her laptop and her sterling silver tea set, you couldn't let fear get in the way of your city life.

Mary Lynn hit her stride, as usual, at the High Battery as a lone sailboat with little blinking white Christmas lights encircling its mast pushed through the choppy water. She felt her heart rate rising and she became conscious of her breathing, so she attempted to take her mind off of her workout and the pounding of the pavement on her knees by going through her to-do list for the day as she passed the Carolina Yacht Club where Jackson had been offered a membership after his second time through the application process. Hot dog! An invitation to join this exclusive, tight-knit club was a kind of proof that they had been officially accepted by Charleston society. Not an easy feat in this historic southern city that, after two brutal wars and a depression that stretched on for half a century, had good reason to be wary of outsiders. Of course, they both knew they had Mark Waters—an older friend with hometown ties—to thank for this and many of the doors that had been opened to them.

Still, Mark didn't run the entire city (especially not the old-Charleston set) no matter how deep his pockets, and the yacht club membership meant that they had finally passed some sort of insider's test after their move to the city ten years ago. And that, along with the invitation Mary Lynn received last year to join the Charlestowne Garden Club and another to serve as chairman of the board of the old and prestigious Peninsula Day School, made her feel like this truly was their home. Their real home. She smiled even as she panted. She and Jackson,

two country bumpkins from Meggett, South Carolina, were somehow making their way into Charleston society. Who'd have ever thunk it?

But that wasn't even the primary goal for Jackson, who was the sharpest, most focused man Mary Lynn had ever known. The real goal for him (and he had written it down and asked her to put it in her jewelry box in an envelope marked "family mission statement") was to give their three girls the life he and Mary Lynn never had. This meant a top-rate education, exposure and immersion in the fine arts, and frequent opportunities to see the big wide world beyond the Carolina lowcountry or the United States for that matter.

"Not just education, baby—*cultivation*," he would say as they lay side by side in their four-poster antique bed purchased on King Street for a pretty penny, Jackson resting some classic novel he should have read in high school on his chest. Then Mary Lynn would look up from the *Post and Courier* or *Southern Living* or lately, the little black leather Bible Scottie had given her after the birthday luncheon meltdown, and smile.

Every time Mary Lynn and Jackson discussed their children, she had an image of her husband tilling the soil of their daughters' minds and dropping down the little seeds like he did every spring growing up on his daddy's farm. "Just like the tomaters, darlin'," he'd say in his exaggerated country accent. "Only now it is little intellects that will one day be big as cantaloupes!"

A pretty lofty mission. But a worthy one, Mary Lynn supposed. Though sometimes she grew nervous that he rode the girls too hard with their school work and over scheduled them with extracurricular activities—strings lessons, writing workshops, ballet, and foreign language. They sure didn't have much

time to lollygag or linger or strike out on an adventure as she had as a child roaming the corn fields on her uncle's farm, climbing trees, building forts, or spending the night in a sleeping bag beneath a blanket of stars. Despite her mama's missteps and mean old Mrs. Gustafson, who made sure the whole town knew every little detail about them, Mary Lynn had a sanctuary on her uncle's farm. Much of her childhood she was ignorantly blissful of all the trouble and the gossip that surrounded her family as she played hide-and-seek in the corn husks with her mama, running fast through the papery leaves that gently slapped her face. Then crouching down as she heard the sweet voice of her only parent call, "Ready or not, here I come!"

But Mary Lynn had to acknowledge the fruit of Jackson's labors. Thanks to his staying after them, the girls were well on their way to mastering a stringed instrument and they could carry on a conversation (and for their oldest, read a novel) in French and Spanish. Imagine!

Who would have guessed the upward turn their lives would take after Jackson's daddy's death revealed the little real estate gems up and down the South Carolina coast he had inherited from a great uncle? The timing was right and Jackson had been shrewd. He turned to Mark Waters, who showed him just how to go about it. This was in the early '90s, well before the economic downturn, and Jackson sold each piece of property for five and even ten times what his great uncle had paid for it. Then he bought more land, bought several low-end housing projects Mark introduced him to, invested in some of Mark's big commercial and condo development ventures, and did the same year-in and year-out for more than a decade as the market soared.

"Boy, you picked wisely," Mama had said the first time she came to

visit them at their new home on South Battery. She narrowed her eyes and looked up at Mary Lynn. "Course I thought Mark was going to gnash his teeth when he got a gander at the skinny farm boy you had fallen for."

"Mama, Mark was married by that point."

"Not that nuptials ever meant much to the Waters clan." She winked, then shook her head. Mary Lynn guessed her mama was thinking of her own engagement to Mark's father, who had proposed after she ran his office for years. They never did make it to the altar. "But you saw something in Jackson no one else took the time to see, smart girl." Then she walked carefully over to the portrait of some eighteenth-century British gentleman that their decorator had insisted they purchase for the foyer, rubbed the corner of its gilded frame, and shook her head in disbelief before turning back. "You saw the man in the boy, didn't you?"

Mary Lynn had smiled. Then she walked over and kissed her mama's made-up cheek. It felt cool like putty.

"I was just lucky, Mama." And that was the truth. Jackson was the only boy in town she ever dated, though Mark Waters had told her more than once he'd wait for her to grow up. Of course, she wasn't surprised that he didn't.

Her mama had nodded her head as she walked into the foyer and rested her hand on the grand staircase's large pineapple finial. Then she gazed up the three flights of intricately trimmed hardwood stairs, clucked her tongue, and said, "Everybody gets lucky sometimes, I reckon."

Now if Jackson stuck with Mark and played it right, he might not have to work for the rest of his life, and he and Mary Lynn would leave a pretty penny to their girls someday. With financial

security and intellects as big as cantaloupes, what more could their daughters need?

But back to the to-do list. Mary Lynn still had a few presents to wrap, and she needed to polish the silver serving pieces for the “show and tell” tea party they had hosted every Christmas afternoon for the last eight years. Jackson, who had taken up the cello a few years ago, was trying to get their three daughters to perform a movement from a Haydn string quartet (Opus 20, no. 4 in D major, second movement to be exact), and he had played the slow and somber piece on the CD player so many times over the last month that Mary Lynn found that she was waking up from her sleep with the notes resounding in her head.

She'd never really known of Haydn; she never knew a lick about classical music until they moved to Charleston and started going to the symphony and the Spoleto Festival events. Eventually they became supporters of the symphony and the College of Charleston's music department, and now she found she could recognize a few pieces by ear, though in all honesty, she always daydreamed when she went to a concert. Sometimes it would be over, the audience would be standing for their ovation, and she'd be lost in thought about shelling butter beans on the back porch with Aunt Josey or sitting by Uncle Dale in the rocking chairs as he tuned his mandolin before they started in on “Man of Constant Sorrow” or “O Brother, Where Art Thou?” with him singing low and Mary Lynn singing the dissonant high lonesome sound while she twirled and twirled around. Uncle Dale said she had a voice that was pure sugar and more moves than a croker sack full of eels. And once when Mark Waters and his daddy, Cecil, were over, Cecil teared up over the singing and the twirling and then insisted on underwriting voice and guitar lessons from a famous

country music writer who had settled in Charleston. Mary Lynn and her mother drove the fifty minutes into town for the next seven years until she graduated with two offers: one from her guitar instructor to join his newly formed bluegrass band as the lead singer, and an academic scholarship to USC-Beaufort. Since she was smart enough even then to know that an eighteen-year-old girl didn't need to be traveling in a band, and since Jackson had proposed on bended knee, she did what felt right to her heart: she chose the scholarship and married her sweetheart.

But on those mornings when she dropped the kids off at school and had to run a few errands, she turned back to the radio station she grew up listening to, an old blend of rock 'n' roll and country and bluegrass, and tapped along to Elvis Presley or Johnny Cash or the Stanley Brothers as she drove through the historic streets with her windows rolled up as if she were in her own secret time capsule, transporting herself back to when she was thirteen, dancing and twirling with her mama to "Return to Sender" on the screened porch as Aunt Josey and Uncle Dale clapped and laughed.

Catherine and Lilla, Mary Lynn's oldest girls, both played violin, and Casey, the baby by five years, played the viola. Their family quartet sounded all right, except for the cello, which made an occasional alley cat screech when Jackson came at it a little off angle. She imagined they'd be practicing all day to get it right for tomorrow's performance.

The sun was beginning to warm Mary Lynn's back when she turned from East Bay Street onto Broad where she planned to sprint all-out to Meeting Street, then stop and walk briskly home the rest of the way, her hands raised and clasped behind her head, her heart pounding, then slowing moment by moment

as the brisk air chilled her sweaty body to the bone. What a way to wake up! She loved it. And she had shed twelve of the fifteen pounds she had been trying to get rid of since her big birthday.

But this morning, just after she bounded at full speed across Church Street and back onto the uneven sidewalk of Broad Street, the front tip of her left running shoe caught for a split second in a crooked old grate so that when she slammed her right foot down and lunged at a sharp angle to keep herself from somersaulting, she heard a tear just below the back of her knee and a pain blasted through her calf as though she had been shot at close range.

“Agh!” she screamed, falling hard on her side and grasping the back of her right leg.

She knew what had happened, and she wasn’t sure if it was her knowledge or the pain that was causing the intense wave of nausea. She spit and attempted to will her stomach to settle down as her aching muscle throbbed.

The injury, she was sure, was tennis leg, a rupture of the calf muscle on the inside of the leg. She had suffered the same kind of tear in the same place two other times before. Once when Scottie had taken her to a Joni Mitchell concert in Atlanta and she had danced a little too hard to “California,” and just two years ago, when she was standing on the top of her living room sofa, hanging a new set of silk drapes hours before hosting a Parents Guild luncheon.

Mary Lynn put her forehead on her knee and ground her teeth. The stones from the old sidewalk were cool beneath her legs, and a chill worked its way up her spine. At best, she would spend the next ten days on crutches icing down her leg every few hours. And then another six weeks in physical therapy. Or

worse, she would have to undergo surgery—something Dr. Powell had warned her about after her last rupture. “Surgery means no bearing weight for four months,” he had said, looking over his tortoise shell bifocals at her. “So be cautious, Mary Lynn.”

The street was quiet on this early Thursday morning. No one was around to gawk or help her up, and she started to weep—more from the frustration, from the time she would lose in the days and weeks to come, and from the stupid grate that no one in the city had bothered to right in maybe one hundred years than from the pain that seemed to compound itself with every new beat of her heart.

She put her clammy palms on the sidewalk and rotated her body over to her left side toward the entry way of the Spencer Art Gallery, and then she slowly felt her way up the side of the stone building until she was upright. She would have to walk on her tippy toes until she flagged someone down or found an open store where she could use the phone to call Jackson.

Mary Lynn swung her head back and forth in an effort to shake off the stars she was seeing. She walked a good block, carefully, on the balls of her feet to the corner of Meeting and Broad singing “Walk a Mile in My Shoes” by Elvis just to keep herself going. When she rounded the corner where St. Michael’s Episcopal Church stood, she spotted Roy Summerall, the rector, chatting animatedly to a familiar-looking man who leaned against a parked taxi cab, steam rising from his coffee mug.

She recognized the man as soon as he glanced in her direction. It was Craig MacPherson, Alyssa’s father. (Alyssa was one of Catherine’s best friends.) He had lost his job as a real estate appraiser during the recent economic crisis, and he was forced to pull Alyssa

out of the Peninsula Day School, the private school Mary Lynn's daughters attended. Now she could see that the rumor she heard was true. He was driving a cab to make ends meet.

Then just as she relaxed the balls of her feet after her favorite line in the chorus—"Yeah, before you abuse, criticize and accuse . . ."—in her relief over finding some folks she knew could help her, the pain shot through her leg, worse than before, and she leaned forward and vomited all over the base of the large white church column closest to Broad Street.

The men must have heard her retching. By the time she looked back up again, wincing and straining to get upright and back on her tip toes, they were by her side, gently placing her arms around their shoulders.

"You all right, Mary Lynn?" Reverend Summerall asked. She had been attending his church with Scottie every now and then, and she had met him once briefly at a Downtown Neighborhood Association gathering awhile back, but she was sort of surprised that he remembered her name.

She pulled her arm back around, wiped her mouth with the back of her fleece jacket, then placed it on his shoulder again. "Tennis leg." She shook her head in disbelief. "I tore a muscle in my calf. It's happened to me before."

The men made a quick plan to carry her to the cab.

"On three," Craig MacPherson said, and after he called out the numbers, she felt them lift her up and carefully scurry her down the sidewalk before setting her gently in the backseat of Craig's taxi.

"Let's get you home," Craig said.

"Wait." Roy put his hand on her shoulder and uttered a quick prayer. She couldn't make out the words, but that didn't

matter. She had no problem with prayers. In fact, she was starting to like them. She'd been going with Scottie to a women's prayer group at the church every Wednesday afternoon for almost two years now, and she had become downright used to listening to folks pray out loud for one another's needs, though she'd never had the nerve to join in.

"Thank you." She looked up and swiveled her head back and forth to meet both sets of sympathetic eyes. "I'll be okay." And then to Roy, "Sorry to leave a mess on your portico."

The priest smiled. "Don't worry about that. Just take care of yourself. I'll check in on you later."

Mary Lynn nodded, and Craig gently closed the cab door and walked around to the driver's side. She was surprised by how clean the car was. It smelled like soap and maybe gardenias? Some sort of flower, anyway. And when she looked up to see Craig's picture and license displayed on the visor, she noticed a drawing that Alyssa must have made for him. It was of the steeple of St. Michael's with the sun shining through the second tier balcony. The one with the handsome arches. Then she saw the girl's name inscribed in the far right corner.

Sitting down felt much better, and Mary Lynn was astonished by how much the pain receded when she took weight off of her leg. She needed to get ice on her calf as soon as she got home, and she would have to elevate her leg (up higher than her heart as she recalled) to stop the ache. That was how she would spend the whole afternoon—her leg in a pillow with a rope tied to the ceiling beam. That and calling all of the guests to cancel tomorrow's tea.

But she felt so much better at this moment. Whew. Sitting down in the back of the clean cab with the bright sunlight

shooting through the windows, she felt relief. As if, for a moment anyway, it had never happened.

As they turned off of Meeting Street onto South Battery, she could see her historic white clapboard home in the distance, particularly grand in its Christmas décor—fresh garland around the doorway and piazza rail, two magnolia-leaf wreaths with large gold bows on each piazza door, and even a little red berry wreath around the head of the statue in the center of the fountain in the side garden. That had been Casey's idea, and it added a little whimsy to the decorations, Mary Lynn thought. To her it made the house wink to the passersby as if to say, *There are children who live here! It's not a just a photo from Architectural Digest. See?* Every time Mary Lynn saw it, she grinned.

As Craig went around to help her out of the car, she turned to face him and still did not feel the pain. He took out his cell phone. "Should I call Jackson to meet us down here?"

"No," she said. "He's probably on his morning walk and I'm sure the girls are still asleep." She reached out her hand. "If you help me out, I can make it in on the balls of my feet."

Like Mary Lynn, Jackson had a morning ritual—walking their black Labrador, Mac, up King Street to Caviar & Bananas, munching on a scone and an espresso, reading the *New York Times*, preparing for a meeting with Mark or mapping out the day, the week, or the month—depending on how exuberant he was—and walking briskly home. Sometimes she ran into him a block from their house on her way home from her morning run. He usually brought something back to her—a muffin or a strawberry dipped in chocolate, which she discreetly gave to Anarosa, the housekeeper, to take home to her little boys. And now that the girls were out of school for the holiday, he brought

something for them as well. Casey always enjoyed her treat, but the older girls were watching their weight and they, too, gave their treat to Anarosa.

When Craig leaned forward, she put her arm around his shoulder and let him hoist her up on her tippy toes. Then she took a step forward on the balls of her feet, still leaning on him, and she didn't feel any pain. She took another step. Nothing. Her calf felt normal. She almost put her heels down, but she was afraid to.

When a horn from a driver stuck behind the recycling truck blasted just yards ahead, she was so startled, she leaned back and was forced to put her heel on the sidewalk.

The pain behind the back of her knee was not there.

She looked up at Craig. Her eyebrows furrowed. She rubbed the back of her leg. No tenderness. Nothing. What in the world?

"Hurt bad?" he said. He shook his head in an effort to commiserate. Then he stepped back and leaned forward with his hands on his knees to give her a little space. Maybe he thought she might get sick again.

She looked up at him. Had she dreamed the whole thing? No. She had heard her muscle rip. She had felt the shot of pain. It had happened to her two other times in her life, and she knew precisely what it was.

She decided not to answer Craig. It was just so strange. After a few seconds he lifted out his hand and she leaned into it expecting the pain to kick in, but it didn't. Once she was on the piazza, she thanked him and he headed back to his cab. Then she unlocked the door, walked in the house with her heels firmly planted on the hardwood floor.

Was she fine?

She shook her right leg out. She walked. She did a few lunges, then jumped up and down several times, which caused Mac to bark and run into the foyer where he stopped, stared, and tilted his head as if he were as confused as she was.

Had Reverend Summerall's prayer been answered?

"How was your run?" Jackson handed her a chocolate croissant in a waxy little bag. He was back sooner than she expected.

How many calories in a chocolate croissant? Way too many for a gal beating back a middle-age paunch in the midst of the holiday season. And how was her run? Well, she wanted to tell him the whole story, but something held her back. He had made it clear since she started going to church with Scottie that he had no interest in religion. He wasn't going to stop her. It didn't bother him that she went. He just didn't want her to expect him to follow along with all of that. He had a mission, after all, and he was focused.

He cocked his head. "Your jog all right, baby?"

She looked into his bright green eyes. They blinked slowly. It was the first time they had made eye contact today.

"Amazing," she finally said. She smiled and lovingly squeezed his shoulder. Then she gently accepted the little waxy bag and headed to the pantry where Anarosa kept her purse.

Chapter 2

CATHERINE

It was eight a.m. and Catherine's mind was still racing. Her hands were clammy and her head felt as though it weighed seventy-five pounds in and of itself. It was the morning before Christmas and the three Tylenol PM pills she had taken around two a.m. had not done much for her this time. Her sleep was fitful, and by the time her parents were up a few hours later, their firm steps causing the floorboards of the antique Charleston house to creak, she couldn't manage to drift off at all.

Now she could hear her sister, Lilla, snoring lightly from the bedroom across the hall. Lilla was younger by a year but she seemed, in some way that was hard to pin down, older to Catherine. Just last night Lilla had taken the Dickens novels they were both supposed to read for their post-Christmas trip to England, as well as Catherine's SAT vocabulary flash cards, and shoved them under the bed. "We're on break. Give it a rest."

Lilla had nodded to the window above the second-floor piazza in Catherine's room. It was the one Lilla crawled out of every now and then before shimmying down the roof and onto one piazza after the next and then out to the sidewalk to meet a group of neighborhood friends late at night. "Go out with us tonight." She licked her thin red lips. "Departure time is one a.m."

Catherine had rolled her eyes. They both knew she couldn't stomach sneaking out of the house. She'd tried it once and had a miserable time, always wondering what would happen if their little sister, Casey, or one of their parents made their way up to the third floor to look in on them.

A misstep like that and she'd never get back on the cross country or the track team. And she might never get another good night's sleep. Without those two goals to strive for, she couldn't imagine mustering the strength to raise her SAT score another two hundred points as her father insisted she do.

Now Catherine shook her head slightly at Lilla sprawled out on top of her bed in her jeans and fleece jacket, sleeping soundly with her cell phone still in her hand and the second book in the Twilight series open to the last chapter. It was her third time reading it through. Her late-night trip had been canceled at the last minute after one of the other girl's parents seemed suspicious, but she didn't even bother changing into her pajamas. She was a fast talker and could surely convince Mama that she had just fallen asleep in her clothes if pressed on the matter.

The Scoville house rule was to leave the cell phones on the charger downstairs every night at nine, but somehow Lilla managed to sneak hers up every now and then. Her friends texted one another all night, and Lilla seemed to have no problem waking up, texting back, then falling right back into a deep sleep.

Lilla had scored a 2090 on the SAT last summer, so their father wasn't breathing down her neck. Catherine's highest score was an 1810, putting her in the 81st percentile. The consequence?

An indefinite leave from the cross country and track teams (despite the coaches' pleadings) and impromptu SAT questions any time of day or night from her father, who was constantly studying his own practice test booklet. At their quartet practice yesterday, he had taped a question on her music stand:

Hoping to _____ the dispute, negotiators proposed a compromise that they felt would be _____ to both labor and management. (A.) enforce . . . useful (B.) end . . . divisive (C.) overcome . . . unattractive (D.) extend . . . satisfactory (E.) resolve . . . acceptable.

At dinner last night, another was taped to her napkin ring:

If p is an odd integer, which of the following is an even integer? (A.) $p - 2$ (B.) p^2 (C.) $p^2 - 2$ (D.) $(p - 2)^2$ (E.) $p^2 - p$

She tried to hold in the sighs, she tried not to roll her eyes, but when she couldn't help herself he would lean forward and say, "Do you want to go to an above-average college?"

You know I really don't care, Dad. What I'd settle for is a chance to run again and get a decent night's sleep. But she bit her lips to keep her thoughts from coming out.

Now Catherine walked back into her bedroom. It was illuminated by the morning light that poured in both the windows facing west. By all appearances her room looked like one belonging to a very happy girl. There were the framed pictures above her bed of Catherine and her sisters on Sullivan's Island laughing barefoot in the dunes, their white sundresses billowing out. There were strips taped to her vanity mirror of fun park

photos of her and Alyssa, her best friend, making funny faces. There was even the corsage from her good-looking neighbor, Tres King, pinned to her bulletin board. He had invited her to the homecoming dance, only to consume too much vodka from his hidden flask before passing out in the boys' bathroom. The track coach's son, Bryan Christiansen, had driven her home. Thankfully her parents never found out.

One of her bookshelves had been set aside for her cross country and track certificates, trophies, and number tags. Last year Peninsula Day had won the cross country conference and was second runner up in the state championship. Both times she had scored number two on the girls' team behind Martha Marion, who was a senior and had the longest, strongest legs Catherine had ever seen. Her coach, Ms. Christiansen, told Catherine she ran the five kilometer like a gazelle and predicted she'd get a number one spot this year. With Martha gone, the team had needed Catherine and Bryan, one heck of a finisher, to bring home the state trophy last fall. But they didn't have Catherine and they didn't win state. Now Bryan seemed to scowl at her every time she passed him in the hall. And once last October when her mother and father were strolling around campus with the Head of School and the representatives of the architectural firm to go over the plans for the expansion, she saw him set his jaw and turn the other way so as to avoid the sight of them.

Now Catherine's hand tremored slightly as she pulled the study books and flash cards out from under her bed. She opened the case to the *R* section and started flipping through: *regale*, *regurgitate*, *rehash*, *repel*, *repentant*, *retroactive*, *revive*, *revoke* as she heard the light, quick footsteps of her baby sister, Casey, bounding up the stairs.

Suddenly the girl was on the threshold of her door. She was growing up too, Catherine realized, as she gave her a good hard look for the first time in a long while. Casey had just turned ten and her Christmas pajamas from last year with the candy cane print were already well above her knobby ankles.

“Hey,” Casey said. She walked over to Catherine and sat down beside her on the bed.

Catherine stroked the little girl’s long dark hair. “What’s up?”

The girl rubbed her bright blue eyes. “I think Dad wants us to practice soon. I heard him going over today’s schedule with Mama.”

Just then her mother alighted at the door. “Morning, loves,” she said. She had a glint in her eye that made Catherine feel suddenly at ease. She grinned at them before glancing at her wrist watch. “Dad wants you all ready to practice the quartet in an hour. Why don’t you come on down and get some breakfast?”

Catherine nodded.

“Yes, ma’am,” Casey said. Then, “Who is going to wake up Lilla?”

They all looked at one another. “Why don’t you, Case?” Mama said. They all knew what a bear Lilla could be in the morning, but like everyone in the family, she had a soft spot for Casey. It must be nice to be the baby.

Casey bit her lip and patted her index finger on the side of her full cheek. “Well, since it’s Christmas Eve and since Santa Claus is watching . . .” She turned back to Catherine. “You know I’m back to believing in him, don’t you?”

Catherine chuckled. “Yeah, I heard that.”

Casey had asked Lilla the truth about Kris Kringle last year

and without hesitating she spilled the beans, and she let her know where their parents often stored the gifts, in the closet beneath the stairs in the carriage house. It took Casey about a day to let it sink in. She refused to check out the booty in the carriage house when Lilla invited her and moped around until evening looking like a balloon someone had popped with a pin just for sport. Then she perked up all of a sudden at dinner the following night and proclaimed, "I'm just going to pretend I never had that conversation with Lilla."

"Good," they all said, even Lilla. They much preferred the perky Casey to the one with all of the sighing and frowning.

Now Casey stood up and headed toward Lilla's room. "Wish me luck," she said without looking back.

"Good luck," their mama said.

As Casey walked across the hall, Mama looked at Catherine and narrowed her eyes. "You look tired, Cat. You feeling okay?"

The fingers on Catherine's left hand were trembling a little and she tucked them behind her back. She nodded.

Her mama looked around at the study books and the index cards and the Dickens novel.

"Why don't you take a break? It's Christmas. I think your dad will stop drilling you at least for the week until we're home from England."

She inhaled deeply. The next SAT test was the first Saturday in March. Could she afford to take a week off?

Her mama reached out and rubbed her shoulder. "Come on, honey." She shook her slightly until her tense arms seemed to give way. "Relax."

"Will you ask Dad to let up?"

Her mama nodded and then looked toward the window as if

she were preparing just what she would say. Catherine knew by now that her mother didn't have full sway with her father, but if she came on strong enough there was a fifty percent chance she could convince him. Her mother nodded and looked her in the eye. She touched her chin. "I'll have a talk with him this morning."

Catherine mustered a smile as her mama leaned forward and kissed her forehead. "You won't always have this test hanging over your head."

Catherine made her hand into a fist to stop the tremors. Mama had a way of leavening the heaviest of situations.

She almost wished she could tell her everything. The tremors in the hand. The trouble sleeping, the nightmares. How her stomach had been winding itself tight like a spring ever since she received the test scores in late August. Or how when she went on that college tour trip to the northeast with her class in October, her roommate, Reeves, had given her some dex and for the first time in a long time she had felt light and free like she did when she was running. How even now there was a little orange Adderall pill Tres King had given her in the bottom of her jewelry box, and she was thinking of taking it tomorrow to help her get through the quartet and the tea and the rest of *A Tale of Two Cities* before their trip.

But it was Christmas Eve. Her mother had a lot to do today to get ready for tomorrow's festivities, and then the day after that they were all heading to England. It would pass. It would all pass sooner or later.

"I know, Mama." She mustered a smile. Her mama smiled back and squeezed her daughter's trembling hand before she corrected her posture, gently slapped her knees, and said, "Oh,

don't forget to give me your passport tomorrow, sweetheart. I want to keep them all together in my carry-on bag.”

Then her mother stood and headed to the door before calling over her shoulder, “Now come on down and eat something.”

Catherine rubbed her left hand with her right. “Yes, ma’am.”