

Everything in the house looked fine. Nothing was out of place. Nothing except the way her mother's head tilted, like something was wrong with her neck.

Dinah thought she'd been helpless yesterday. That yesterday had been the punchline.

She touched her mother's face. No response. She grabbed her hand, trying to feel a pulse.

Anything to say this wasn't her whole world, gone.

Her mother's knuckles were scuffed, the skin on her hands creased from working in the garden, kneading dough, stitching up rips, chopping wood. Her hands looked a little like raisins, dried by the sun but with everything good still inside them.

The creak of the screen door had her turning around, pulling her knife out of the sheath.

Gates stood just inside the doorway. "Your mother got very upset."

His voice should have no power over her. She shouldn't freeze like he was her god and what he said next would determine her whole life.

"She hit her head when she fell."

Dinah touched her mother's face again. Her skin was cooling, but maybe that didn't mean anything. Her mother had to be alive. Dinah was just wrong. Because her fingers were turning numb and she couldn't feel anything correctly.

Her mother's eyes stared across the room. Maybe she'd blink. Dinah brushed the soft skin by her mother's eyelashes. Her eyelids felt stiff.

Gates shrugged, his thin lips moving into a flat line. "She was very emotional. Tried to make me leave when I told her I'd be foreclosing. It was a terrible accident."

Dinah's mind had left her body, gone somewhere safe, maybe just followed her mom to wherever she was now.

Gates was talking through thick clouds. He sounded miles away from where she sat on the braided rug of her living room floor.

She could feel the knife in her palm. She twisted the handle of her knife around and around in her hand. The blade flashed sunlight from the window. *Stand up. He's lying. Stand up. She didn't fall.*

His cigarette ashed onto the floor.

Dinah stood up. "Everyone is going to leave. All you're going to have is three empty counties of deserted forest."

He flicked his cigarette into the sink. "As long as people are desperate, there will be people who won't leave, and people who will come here to work for me. I'm creating jobs."

Dinah flung her knife at him. But he was already moving toward her, and the blade buried itself in the doorframe where his chest had been.

He grabbed her braid, tilted her head up until she met his bloodshot eyes.

"You're right," she said. "We won't all leave."

His other hand gripped her jaw, and she couldn't have spoken then even if she'd wanted to. Looking into his eyes made her feel like she was leaving her own body. Rising out of his grip and out of the house until she could crush him inside it.

Something creaked. Then the metallic *pop-chink-thunk* of a shell hitting the chamber.

Warren stood in the doorway, looking down the sights of his rifle. His voice shook, but his hands were steady on the gun. "Get out of our house."

Warren, no.

Gates tightened his grip on her jaw, fingers pressing on her lips until they cut into her teeth.

"You put that gun down, or I'll break your sister's neck right here."

Warren's shoulder steadied, went still. Dinah saw it. He squeezed the trigger. The bang was so loud in the small house. Gates ducked, and the shot hit the wall to his right. Dinah twisted her head and sank her teeth into Gates's hand.

He screamed and jerked back, but she kept digging her teeth in until they pierced flesh. He shoved her away. Her head snapped back. She bolted to her feet, reaching Warren in three steps.

Together, they moved away from the door, over to the table. Blood had spurted into her mouth. His blood, his iron and salt. She spit onto the floor.

Gates stepped toward Warren. "You really think you're going to kill me, kid?"

Warren kept his aim steady. "I've killed all kinds of things. Get out."

Gates went still. He watched them for a moment and tilted his head to the side. Then he walked out of the house and climbed into the truck. The bang of a truck door sounded, and a moment later the engine rumbled. The truck jerked as it turned onto the blacktop. Rubber screamed as the truck accelerated.

Warren lowered his gun. His pale gray eyes strayed to their mother's body.

Dinah had to do something. Even though her body was a husk. All her insides must have fallen out or blown away like smoke.

Dinah reached out and carefully took the gun from him.

"We have to call a doctor," he said.

Dinah shook her head.

"They have an ambulance in St. George. They'll take her to the hospital."

Dinah shook her head again. She wanted to scream, shake her mother's body just to see her move.

"I should've shot to kill him instead of threaten him. We could have taken her to the hospital in his truck."

"Warren, listen, honey." Dinah crouched down and set the gun aside. "You need to get some stuff together, okay? Get all your warm clothes. The potatoes, the cheese, all the meat. Fill the water jug, too."

His eyes finally met hers. "Why?"

A wet streak burned down her face and she wiped it away. "He's coming back, okay? Did you see how fast he drove off? He's coming back for us, and he'll have his bodyguard and other people with him. We have to be gone by then. Hurry, Warren. Go, go, okay?" She had to push him a little before he ran into his room.

Dinah picked up the quilt from the couch and draped it over her mother's body. She should do more than that. How could a quilt be all she could give her mother?

His blood was still in her mouth. She spit into the sink and rinsed, but the taste of iron wouldn't fade.

Warren's dresser drawers banged. If he was making noise, he was okay.

But he wouldn't be for long if she couldn't snap out of this. She ran to the kitchen, dug food out of the refrigerator. Hurried from room to room, piling things on the table.

Gates could be on his way back by now. She didn't know where he was going, who he'd be calling, how far away they'd be.

A tarp, a rope, the matches. Soap. The gun. Ammunition. Kara's money.

She couldn't even tell Kara or other neighbors. Because he'd go there to look for her and Warren first. If the neighbors knew anything, it would be trouble.

Tears still burned down her face. Hot and falling, no matter how many times she wiped them away.

Her knives. They didn't have a compass. No room for her guitar. She couldn't take her tablet or the school would be able to track her. She pried up the creaking floorboard in her room, shoved her tablet and her charger into the gap underneath it. Pounded the nail back in and to the side enough that it caught new wood and held.

They were taking too long.

Warren carried an armload of things to the kitchen and heaped them on the table. He ran out again and returned, carrying the backpacks—the heavy-duty waterproof ones their father had used for hunting trips.

“Warren.” Words stuck in her throat and the sick feeling spread. She couldn’t tell him he had to say good-bye.

He looked at the quilt-covered body, and his hands clenched on the straps of the bags.

She could not freeze like this.

Dinah took the backpacks from her brother and strapped the folded blankets to the bottoms.

Warren glanced at the pile of things on the table. “You haven’t packed anything.”

Dinah looked up. Right. She needed her own clothing. “I’ll hurry.” She ran to the bedroom and grabbed socks, underwear, a tight shirt, a loose shirt, a sweater. Jeans. Softer, warmer pants. Hair ties. Antiseptic cream, toilet paper, tampons. Matches, the sewing kit. She paused by the kitchen sink. She bent and pulled out the plastic bag with the deed to the farm.

“Dinah?” Warren touched her hand. “I’ll pack the bags. You said we have to hurry.”

Warren was a natural organizer. She would have just crammed everything into a bag, but he’d put the things they wouldn’t need right away at the bottom, roll the clothing tightly, and tuck tiny items into crannies.

Dinah knelt by her mother, pulled the quilt back and touched her cheek. She’d told her she’d figure it out. Just last night, she’d promised that.

Rasping sounds. Warren dragged the backpacks across the living room. His own face was wet now, too. He wiped his red eyes on his sleeve.

Dinah reached for his hand and he gripped hers. They stood there, staring at the yellow quilt covering their mother, and all Dinah could do was hold on to Warren’s hand.

An engine growled on the highway. Two engines. Fear leaped into her throat. The rumble didn't slow; the cars barely braked for the turn onto the dirt. Dust surged up in a cloud. Seconds. They had only seconds.

Dinah sprinted for the bags and shrugged hers up on her shoulders, then held up Warren's for him. It was smaller, but not much.

They ran down the back steps and across the yard. The cars didn't stop on the driveway, tearing over the grass toward the trees.

The woods were only a dozen yards away. Dinah seized Warren's hand as they ran. Their feet pounded and sticks cracked under their shoes. They reached the edge of the trees. Voices yelled for them to stop. A shot fractured the air and a pine to their left shuddered. Then an elm and another pine.

The woods were sparse enough here for them to be seen. Dinah gripped Warren's hand both to keep him from falling and to keep them together.