Bobby Staley wiped his brow on his bare arm and prayed for a gust of wind that would carry him to heaven if only for a moment.

“Please God,” he murmured, “let loose Elisabeth Bumiller’s gown and I promise to get down on my knees every Sunday for the rest of my life. I know it’s a sin to ask for somethin’ like that, but that gown is half off her already and if you’d make this one miracle happen, I’d know that you surely are for real. Amen, sweet Jesus.”

Elisabeth was an Electric Park fountain girl with the most perfect creamy white breasts Bobby ever hoped to see. She was one of a dozen girls that posed each night on wooden pedestals under white lights as rainbow-hued jets of water shot in
the air, mist clinging to their gowns until the fabric became transparent, or so it seemed to his fevered seventeen-year-old brain. Her jet black hair peeked out from her bathing cap, framing piercing blue eyes he swore lingered on him as he hung on the wrought iron rail surrounding the circular fountain.

“She's lookin' at you,” Terry Martin said, elbowing Bobby in the ribs. “That prayer of yours must be workin’.”

Bobby jabbed him back, hissing under his breath. “Quit actin’ like some jackass never seen a pretty girl before.”

“Who you callin’ a jackass? I’m not the one askin’ Jesus to show me her titties!”

Bobby and Terry’s families lived together with three other families in a Kansas City mansion turned boarding house. Terry had apprenticed to his father as an electrician but neither could find any work. Both their fathers found little to do but drink.

Terry was two years older, three-inches taller and shaved every day. Lean, muscled and long, he had a natural swagger and easy smile Bobby hoped would rub off on him. He was Bobby’s guide through an uncertain world wracked by the Depression where their parents pinned all their hopes for the future on Roosevelt’s New Deal while Terry preached the gospel of find an angle and take it. Bobby envied his bold, grab-life-by-the-balls-and-squeeze way of doing things, never backing down and taking chances that would have made him shake, Terry telling him at least once a day to grow a pair.

They made the pilgrimage by streetcar to Electric Park every night, sneaking in to watch the girls in the fountain, joining the crowd of men that gathered around
it. Some of the men sported boaters and bowties, others wore jeans and t-shirts, all of them smelling of sweat, tobacco and beer and all of them joining in Bobby's prayer.

As soon as they slipped into the park, Terry clapped Bobby on the shoulder.

“Show starts in half an hour. Save me a place on the rail.”

“Where you goin’?”

“Have me a look around.”

Bobby didn't question him. Terry was always having a look around, his way of saying none of your business. Bobby never pushed. Terry was his only real friend and that meant not asking too many questions. He ducked and weaved his way to the rail, saving a space for Terry who showed up half an hour later sweating and out of breath, giving Bobby the big grin that always made him light up.

“Show time!” Terry said.

The fountain was terraced with a deep pool surrounded by a lower, shallow ring where an outer row of pedestals was mounted. At the beginning of each performance, the girls waded through the knee-deep water of the outer ring, using rungs carved into the sides of the pedestals to reach the top.

A single pedestal, reserved for Elizabeth, rose from the center of the deep pool, towering over the others. Bobby studied her smooth, graceful passage through the water and onto her perch twenty feet above where he stood, clearing his throat and rapping his knuckles on the rail to get her attention. She glanced his way, favoring him with a quick grin.

He blushed and turned toward Terry. “You see her lookin' at me!”
“You’re dreamin! You got a hole in your jeans and no money in your pocket. Just watch the show and quit prayin’ for miracles. Girl like that ain’t got no time for the likes of you. Shit, you got a better chance of gettin’ one of them young Jefferson House girls than you do her.”

The Jefferson House for Women was two-doors down from their boarding house. It was a home for unmarried pregnant women and orphan girls.

Bobby pointed to Elizabeth. “She’s a Jefferson House girl!”

Terry put his arm around Bobby’s shoulders. “Trust me, son, that is no girl. She’s all woman. And, long as we’re stuck in this shit hole town, we ain’t never gonna get the girl in the fountain ‘less we can give her what she wants. You wait, I’m gonna find a way out of here and when I do, I’m takin’ the girl in the fountain with me and I ain’t never comin’ back.”

Bobby listened to his friend, having heard him make the same complaint and the same boast since they were old enough to get a hard on. It’s what they talked about when they’d had all they could take of living under one roof with five families, listening to their mothers cry because there wasn’t enough food on the table and watching their fathers die a piece at a time because there wasn’t enough work. He agreed with Terry. He just didn’t think it was possible to get out clean.

“Yeah, well be sure and send me a postcard.”

The fountain was the most popular attraction in the twenty-eight acre amusement park. Men would rather watch the girls on the pedestals than ride the rollercoaster or watch Alligator Joe hypnotize reptiles by rubbing their bellies or soar two hundred feet above the park in Captain Honeywell’s hot air balloon. When
the fountain's streams reached their apex, showering the girls with a million liquid crystals, there was little short of a cataclysm that could turn their heads.

An explosion in the Bug House did just that. A transformer short-circuited; cutting off the current to the fun house's spinning floors, shifting walls and blinking lights, two hundred people groping for a way out of the acrid smoke and rippling flames, tricked and turned around by false doors and mind bending mirrors.

Escaping parents snatched their screaming children by their collars, men and women tripping and trampling one another in a mad dash as the flames leapt to the adjacent American Derby merry-go-round, swallowing painted horses as riders bolted to safety. Electric Park was on fire.

The crowd bunched fifteen deep around the fountain pivoted like a school of fish as the fire swept through the merry-go-round, and began devouring in succession the dry wood in the California Fruit Store, the Dragon tunnel, the Grey Hound scenic railway, the Fairy Swing and the rolling tubs of the Whip, advancing from the southwest on a collision course with the fountain. Men broke ranks, hooting and hollering, some cupping their hands to their mouths, shouting for wives and kids, others making for the exits and still others racing toward the flames to lend a hand.

The electrical fault spread to the city's power grid, the town going dark. The fire reached for the heavens, the only light for dozens of city blocks.

"Mother Mary! It's hell on earth!" Terry shouted.

Bobby watched his friend sprint toward the stampede, holding his ground, the lure of the flames no match for his passion and prayer.
Elisabeth Bumiller, alone among the fountain girls, didn’t panic. While the others screeched and flailed their way out of the fountain and ran, she remained on her pedestal, basking in the fire’s glow. For Bobby, she was a goddess, rising above mere mortals, her gown sliding further off her shoulders as her eyes blazed and her bosom heaved.

Bobby stayed until they were alone, unable to take his eyes off of her. He threw one leg over the rail, intent on rescuing her when she smiled at him again, loosened the straps of her gown, letting it fall to her feet, revealing a white swimsuit, winked and dove into the deep pool, barely making a ripple. Stunned, he lost his grip and fell into the shallow water. Scrambling to his feet, he splashed around the fountain but she was gone.

**

Vivian Chase crossed the Missouri River from the north on the Hannibal Bridge, a .38 caliber Smith & Wesson revolver in her purse and a carpetbag stuffed with twenty thousand dollars tucked beneath the front seat of her Plymouth Deluxe PE convertible coupe. The top was down, warm summer air swirling around her face.

Flames from the Electric Park fire were visible throughout the city, devil tongues painted red, orange and pink, chasing the darkness, making real the images of Hell the Reverend Artemis Johnson had promised sinners at the revival meeting where she’d been saved the night before.

Men had spoken in tongues and women had swooned with rapture in a hot crowded tent on the courthouse square in Liberty, Missouri, twenty-five miles north
of Kansas City. The spirit of the Lord entered her without warning, flinging her to the sawdust covered floor in agony for her sins, Reverend Johnson scooping her into his arms, letting her wail like a newborn.

“Surrender to Christ, girl, and repent,” he urged her and she cried some more.

She couldn’t remember the last time someone had called her a girl or held her with such encompassing, protective warmth, craving the Reverend’s voice and touch, missing her lost years and the daughter she’d given up to save her from her mother’s mistakes.

He was right about her fate. She’d earned it, coming to Kansas City to make good her repentance, not surprised to find Satan’s gate in her path. Reverend Johnson had armed her with faith but hers was fresh, fragile and untested, no match for the devil. She reached inside her purse, taking more comfort from her gun.

“Is that furnace for me, Old Man?” she said, lifting her eyes to the heavens, shaking her head when God didn’t answer, wrapping her fingers around her gun. “Or, maybe not.”

Her coupe glided to a stop in front of the Jefferson House for Women. She lit a cigarette and leaned back against her seat, inhaling until her lungs burned, letting the smoke leak through her nostrils, trying to make sense of a life that had brought her to this place at this moment.

“You sure are a pretty one,” George Chase had told her when he stopped at her parents’ farm in Greene County to ask for directions one day all those years ago. He had a thick shock of red hair and broad shoulders and hazel eyes that made her heart skip a beat.
“How pretty?” she asked, staring straight at him without a trace of shame.

She’d developed early, getting used to the way men and boys looked at her curves, taking care to brush her dark brown hair a hundred strokes every night, her mother calling her a natural born heart breaker.

“Pretty enough,” he said, flashing a grin that lit her up inside and out.

He was twenty-two and she was sixteen when they were married. She was seventeen when she began driving getaway for him and eighteen when their daughter, Lilly, was born. Three years later, George was killed in a fight over six diamond rings he’d stolen and given to Vivian, his killer another woman who claimed he’d promised the rings to her. Robbing folks was no life for a child but it was all Vivian knew so she dropped Lilly off at Jefferson House, sneaking visits whenever the police tired of looking for her.

Lately she’d taken up with Pighead Hardeman, a thick-necked man, sharp-edged and quick with the back of his hand. She squirmed in her seat, the latest bruises he’d given her working a dull ache in her right side. Pighead would come after her when he found out she’d run off with the money they’d stolen in a string of drug store robberies in Nebraska, Iowa and Missouri, money that was in the carpetbag, money that would insure Lilly’s future and her peace. She had a day, maybe two, on him and more ground to cover, last night’s revival meeting costing her time she didn’t have. At thirty-four, she was all in and all done.

**

Bobby Staley framed his mouth with his hands and yelled until he was hoarse.

“Terry! Terry Martin! Goddammit, Terry! Where the hell are you?”
His shouts were lost in the din. If he couldn’t hear himself against the roaring fire and the clamoring mob, there was no chance Terry could hear him but he yelled again, darting through the crowd, jumping up and down for a better look. There was no sign of his friend. It was as if Terry had been swept out to sea, Bobby feeling just as lost.

An anonymous shoulder knocked him to the ground and someone else tripped over him as he tried to get up, a knee to the head leaving him woozy as they both sprawled in the dirt. He made it to his feet, wet from his spill in the fountain, now muddy and gasping for air, panic squeezing his lungs like the time he nearly drowned in a quarry pool and would have if Terry hadn’t dived deep and pulled him free from rocks where he’d caught his foot. Carried along by the crowd, he fought his way out of the current, tumbling through the door of the locker house where people changed before using the swimming pool, slipping on the damp, stone floor, skidding to a stop ass down and feet up.

“Well, look at you,” Elisabeth Bumiller said, laughing, one hand over her mouth.

Bobby flushed, feeling the heat in his face, more because she was standing over him wearing nothing but her panties, her arm hiding her breasts, than that he was on his butt looking like he’d just wrestled a pig and lost. Paralyzed and speechless, he watched in mute, wide-eyed amazement as she turned her back to him and slipped into a dress.

“C’mon now,” she said. “On your feet and zip me up before that fire makes toast out of both of us.”
When she dove into the fountain and disappeared he thought he’d lost her. Now she’d materialized at his feet as close to naked as he dared to hope, securing the promise he had made to God from that day until his last. He placed one trembling hand on her waist, pinching her zipper between two fingers of his other hand, drawing a quick breath as his rough knuckles brushed against her soft skin, tracing a path from the shallow base of her spine to the fine downy hair on the back of her neck.

“You forget how to talk?” she asked.

“Um, no m’am,” he answered, clearing his throat.

“What happened to that fella you was with?”

He shivered, thrilled again that she’d noticed them and stricken with guilt that he was here with her instead of out searching for Terry.

“He ran off when the fire started.”

“But you didn’t.” She turned and faced him, close enough that he could taste her breath. Mint or clove, he couldn’t tell which. He was surprised to be looking down at her. She’d always seemed so tall on that pedestal. “You chose me over your friend. Why?”

His speech deserted him. His arms hung at his sides, useless shanks of meat, his fingers dangling and dead. She searched his face with impossibly blue eyes that were at once cold and hot.

“I don’t know.”

She caressed his cheek. “I think you do.”

He swallowed hard. “You do?”
“Mmmm,” she murmured, her palm soft against his skin. “Yes, I do.” She took his hand. “C’mon. Let’s go find your friend.”

**

Jefferson House was dark when Vivian knocked on the front door. She stood on the porch that ran the length of the house, the colors in the stained glass windows invisible until a lantern lit them from the inside, a swaying yellow glow making the red, blue and green images float in midair.

“Who’s there?”

Vivian recognized Martha Moore’s voice. She ran Jefferson House, never turning away anyone in need. She was white-haired and big-bodied, easy with a laugh and firm with a switch when need be.

“It’s me, Vivian.”

Martha Moore hadn’t asked for an explanation when Vivian brought Lilly to Jefferson House. She had her hands full providing a future for her girls and let others worry about their past. God would pass judgment on them, she was certain. In the meantime, she welcomed Vivian’s visits because Lilly loved and missed her mother and because Vivian always gave her enough money to pay for Lilly’s care and to buy things for the other girls. Martha thanked her, blessed her and didn’t ask questions.

She opened the door, set the lantern down and the two women embraced.

“How’s Lilly?”
They sat on a porch bench, the lantern casting a halo around them until Vivian turned it off. Martha didn’t object, understanding that Vivian wanted her visits kept quiet.

“Doing fine,” Martha said, sighing. “She’s more woman than girl now. Almost sixteen. Pretty and high spirited, like her mother. And itching to get out from under me.”

Vivian let out a breath, the worry she’d carried in her back and neck all the way from Iowa easing a bit.

“What happened to the lights? The whole town’s gone dark.”

“Power went out a couple of hours ago. Must have something to do with that.”

Martha pointed to the fire in the sky.

“Has anyone come around asking about me or Lilly?”

It was the same question every time she came to see her daughter only this time Martha’s answer was different.

“Earlier tonight, a man sat in a car down the street watching the house but he never come to the door. He left just before you got here.” Vivian stiffened, hugging her chest. “Don’t mean he was looking for you. Could’ve been anyone. Lord knows most of my girls come from trouble. How’re you doing?”

Vivian smiled. “I ain’t sure. Only thing I know is that I got to find another road than the one I been on. If I stay here, things will catch up to Lilly and I can’t let that happen.”

Martha nodded. “She’s sleeping, or supposed to be. I’ll fetch her.”
Vivian sat on the bench, peering into the surrounding darkness, imagining the man who'd been watching the house, wondering if he was a thug or a policeman who'd gotten a tip, maybe even a bribe from Pighead, who wouldn't hesitate to buy a cop if it meant getting his money back and beating a hard lesson into her.

Vivian’s hand went to her throat, clasping the gold chain and the cameo that hung from it around her neck. Tens of thousands of dollars had run through her hands with nothing to show for it. The necklace was the only thing of value she owned and it had been a gift from her mother on her sixteenth birthday, a week before she ran off with George Chase. What, she wondered, would she give her daughter before she ran off again?

“Momma?”

Lilly rushed to the bench and threw her arms around Vivian, mother and child hanging on to one another.

“Hey, baby girl. You doin’ all right?”

Vivian stroked Lilly's hair, kissing her cheek. Lilly let loose and stood, smoothing her nightshirt, wiping away tears.

“I’m full growed, momma. It’s time I was with you.”

The nightshirt couldn’t hide her daughter’s shape and the darkness couldn’t dull the excitement in her eyes. Vivian knew what that was about. Lilly wasn’t just glad to see her mother. Her daughter was feeling the call to bust out and take on the world same as she had the day George Chase drove into her parents’ yard. Looking at Lilly was like looking in a mirror only the image Vivian saw was of her past. She
was sure when Lilly looked at her, her daughter saw a future of glamour, love and adventure and not the hard road her mother had traveled.

“You are full growed. I’ll give you that. Sit with me, child.” Vivian put her hand on Lilly’s knee, Lilly covering it with her hand. “I brought you to Miss Moore cause I couldn’t take care of you like she could. Seeing how pretty you turned out, I know I done the right thing. I was about your age when I left home and it was the mistake of my life except for havin’ you. Believe me, Lilly, when I tell you not to make the same mistakes I made. Stay here with Miss Moore. I’ll be back when I can.”

“Miss Moore makes me go to school all week and go to church on Sunday. I’m so full of readin’ and writin and Jesus, I think I’m gonna explode. I want to be with you. How will I know what to do if you don’t teach me?”

“All I can tell you is not to do what I done.”

Lilly leaned against the bench, arms crossed, pushing her lower lip out. “Like what?”

Vivian looked away, turning her eyes to the heavens, giving God another chance. The moon had risen, smoke and fire turning it pink.

“Look it there,” Vivian said, pointing to the sky. “The moon is pink. One day, some man is gonna come along and tell you how pretty you are and you’re gonna believe it cause it’s true and you and him are gonna want to do somethin’ about it. That’s the way it is with men and women. But that feelin’ ain’t gonna last any longer than that pink moon. The fire’s gonna go out and that man will turn cold as a pale moon. He’ll take every bit of you and leave you on the side of the road like a cornshuck.”
A car pulled up in front of Jefferson House, headlights sprayed all over them as it stopped alongside Vivian’s coupe. Pighead Hardeman stepped out, leaned over the open driver’s door, aiming a gun at them.

“Goddamn you, Vivian Chase! You no good, thieving, whoring, bitch! Where’s my money?”

**

Bobby clung to Elizabeth’s hand as they ran out of the locker, stopping in their tracks when they saw what lay in front of them. Lofty tongues of flame shot skyward, wood popping with fiery starbursts, like an artillery battery. Heavy black smoke rolled overhead, a doomsday cloud, as hot, cinder-filled fog choked and scorched their lungs.

The social contract was the first casualty of the fire, primitive instincts turning the park into a cauldron where survival and conquest were the only imperatives. Boys and men carried off whatever they could grab, the strong turning on the weak. A mother, bent over and shielding her child, wailed, afraid to move. A trio of teenage girls held hands as they ran past, searching for an exit. Behind them, a man cradling his daughter, staggered through the smoke, his face blackened.

Sirens reverberated as a phalanx of police waded into the crowd, wielding their clubs in a vain effort to corral the rioters. Outnumbered and outmatched, they locked arms and retreated, waiting for reinforcements.

Across the way, firemen drove their trucks into the middle of the conflagration and unspooled their hoses, turning heavy sprays on the nearest blaze. The fire sucked up the water, spit it back as boiling steam and raged on.
“Sweet Jesus!” Bobby said.

“I think he’s sitting this one out,” Elizabeth said. “Let’s go!”

She was nimble and fearless, dodging the flames, taking him deeper into the park. He kept pace, wondering how she knew where she was going and how they would possibly find Terry. They rounded a corner, stopping at a windowless, one-story stone building; it’s heavy oaken door wide open and smoldering.

“In here!” Elizabeth commanded.

It was dark and smoky inside but Bobby could make out a dim light on the far side of the room they’d entered.

“Terry!” Elizabeth said. “Is that you?”

She’d surprised Bobby again, somehow knowing Terry’s name though he’d never told her. He hadn’t even told her his name.

“Over here, babe!” Terry answered. “Talk about luck, huh? The power goes out but, lucky for us, the bean counters had a flashlight.”

“Terry?” Bobby asked as his friend emerged from the smoke carrying a canvass bag over his shoulder.

“Bobby?” He turned to Elizabeth. “What the hell, Betts?”

Elizabeth took Terry’s arm. “It’s okay, honey. He showed up in the locker house while I was changing. Even got a little show,” she said, winking at Bobby.

“And you brought him? Here?”

“He was worried about you. Besides, you and him are buddies, ain’t you? What’s the harm?”

“What’s going on, Terry?” Bobby asked. “Where are we?”
“We’re in the park’s business office, where they keep the money that they collected today. Me and Betts, we’re gettin’ out. Just like I told you.”

“How? What’s in that bag?”

Terry grinned. “Enough money to make it happen. I’m guessin’ at least three grand, maybe more.”

Recognition dawned slowly but when it did, Bobby shook his head like he’d taken a punch.

“You did this? You started the fire so you could rob the park?”

“Short-circuited a transformer in the Bug House. Been figuring out how to do it all summer. Goddamn thing blew up just like I thought it would.”

“But the fire?”

Terry shrugged. “Can’t plan on everything that happens. Just got to go with it. We figured the bean counters would have to get out and they’d leave the cash lying around waiting for us to take it. And that’s what happened. Didn’t figure on the fire being so bad, though. Can’t do nothin’ about that now.” He turned to Betts. “You ready?”

She threw her arms around him and kissed his soot-stained face. “I was born ready!”

“All right, then,” Terry said. He pulled away from Elizabeth and put his hand on Bobby’s shoulder. “I won’t be seein’ you for awhile. Might be I’ll never see you again. I’m countin’ on you not tellin’ no one about this. I’d take you with us, but you ain’t cut out for the life me and Betts got ahead of us. So you best get on home. You grow a pair, you come lookin’ for us. We’ll have us a time. I promise you that.”
Bobby took the streetcar home, walking the last six blocks. He turned onto his street as a car passed him, burning rubber in the turn, jolting to a stop in the middle of the block next to a Plymouth convertible coupe, headlights flooding Jefferson House. A man jumped out of the car and cursed at someone on the porch.

“Goddamn you, Vivian Chase! You no good, thieving, whoring, bitch! Where’s my money?”

Vivian turned to her daughter. “Go in the house.”

Miss Moore swung the door open, grabbed Lilly and pulled her inside. Vivian reached in her purse for her Smith & Wesson and stepped off the porch.

Bobby hid behind a thick oak in the front yard of his house, afraid his father would hear the commotion, find him in the yard and order him inside before he could watch what was about to happen. A woman walked down the steps from Jefferson House, the headlights making her a silhouette.

“You wait right there, Pighead. I got something for you,” she said.

Bobby bit his lip when she raised her right hand and leveled a revolver at the man she called Pighead, bursts of flame erupting from the short barrel. The man screamed and flinched, returning fire before ducking into his car, jamming the gears in reverse, spinning around and racing off in a drunken zigzag. The woman staggered to the coupe, slumping to her knees, one hand on the door handle.

Bobby ran to the woman. Blood oozed from a wound in her side. Her color was gone and her breathing was faint. He heard a shout from Jefferson House and
looked up to see Miss Moore flying down the steps, a girl trailing her, wearing nothing but a nightshirt. He knew Miss Moore to say hello and had seen the girl around but never talked to her, heeding his father's demand that he stay away from the Jefferson House girls, calling them trash.

“Oh, dear God,” Miss Moore said, cradling the woman. “Dear, sweet Jesus.”

“Lilly,” the woman said, her voice faint.

“I’m here, momma,” the girl said, kneeling next to her mother.

Miss Moore gripped Bobby’s arm. “She’s hurt bad, Bobby. You’ve got to get her to the hospital.”

“Me?”

“There’s no one else. I can’t leave the girls and no one can know that she was here or who she is. You’ll have to leave her with the doctors and get out of there before anyone asks you questions. Now help me get her in her car.”

They eased Vivian onto the front passenger seat and Bobby got behind the wheel. He had no trouble working the Plymouth’s clutch and gearshift. As he was about to pull away, Lilly grabbed the side of the car, tears streaming down her face.

“Please,” she said. “Save her.”

Moonlight shone in her eyes, dancing across her face. She stood straight, her shoulders square, her pain and beauty so raw and clear to Bobby that he fell in love for the second time that night. She let loose of the car and wrapped her arms around her middle, as Miss Moore laid a protective arm across her shoulders. Bobby glanced at his passenger. Her chin lay on her chest and her face was slack.

“If she can be saved, I'll do it,” Bobby said.
Fifteen minutes later, he wheeled the coupe to a stop outside the emergency room entrance to General Hospital off of Twenty-Second and Holmes and was about to open his door when Vivian murmured.

“Wait,” she said.

“Can’t wait, m’am. You’re hurt too bad.”

“Necklace. Give my necklace to Lilly.”

“Yes, m’am,” Bobby said, lifting her chin until her head lay back against the seat, hoping no one was watching or he’d surely be accused of murder and stealing.

He pocketed the necklace and tore into the emergency room.

“There’s a woman in a car outside! She’s been shot!”

Two nurses and a doctor rushed out the door, picked Vivian up and carried her inside, disappearing behind swinging double doors. Though Miss Moore had told him to leave as soon as possible, he couldn’t without knowing what happened. It didn’t take long before one of the nurses came out, shoulders slumped, taking her time because time didn’t matter and called the morgue. Bobby ducked out before they thought to ask him any questions.

He drove away, pulling over on a side street a mile away, his mind churning. Terry was gone and he’d never felt so alone. He couldn’t believe what Terry and Elizabeth had done, setting fire to Electric Park so they could steal the day’s receipts and start a new life. It was awful, terrible and thrilling all at the same time. Awful for the people at the park, terrible for all the destruction, but he had to hand it to Terry. He’d done what he always said he’d do.
He thought about what Terry had said, how he couldn’t take him with them because he wasn’t cut out for that kind of life. Maybe he wasn’t. Maybe he was doomed to a life on the unemployment line, a thought that made him feel even worse until he heard a voice inside his head calling bullshit on him.

He took Vivian’s necklace from his pocket, absently tossing it in the air, his eyes lost in a distant space, the necklace falling to the floor of the car on his third toss. He reached down, feeling for the necklace and found Vivian’s carpetbag. He hoisted the heavy bag onto his lap, opened it and whistled.

“Holy Mother!”

He counted the money twice to be sure he had the count right, his hands trembling. He closed the bag and put it back under his seat, holding Vivian’s necklace up to the moonlight. He studied the cameo, deciding with sudden clarity what he would do. Terry Martin wouldn’t tell him to grow a pair ever again. No one would.

Electric power had been restored when he pulled up in front of Jefferson House. Lilly Chase was sitting by herself on the front porch. She’d changed out of her nightshirt into a pair of jeans and a t-shirt. Bobby parked the car at the curb, considering his next move when Lilly rose from the porch bench and walked slowly toward him. His stomach did flips, knowing he’d be the one to tell her that her mother was dead. The next thing he knew, she was standing at the driver’s door, her eyes full, her lip quivering.

“She didn’t make it, did she?”
Bobby shook his head. “I’m sorry. She wanted you to have this.” He handed her the necklace.

She slipped it on, running her fingers along the chain and the cameo.

“That’s my momma’s car.”

“I don’t reckon she’s gonna have much use for it now.”

She wiped her eyes. “You figurin’ on keepin’ it?”

Bobby looked deep into her eyes and saw something he hadn’t seen in anyone else. His future.

“Maybe. Depends on a couple of things.”

“What?”

“Well, first thing is if you don’t mind me keepin’ it and the second thing is if you get in so we can get out of here.”

She smiled, splitting her face ear to ear, fresh tears spilling down her cheeks.

“I don’t mind,” she said, opening the door and sliding alongside him.

Bobby fired up the engine and pulled away, pointing to the sky.

“I’ll be damned! Look at that will you? The moon is pink.”