

SOUTH CAPE MAY

“Bay, you ready to give me your two cents?” Wyn said.

“I’ve told you my opinion of marriage,” Bay said. “It doesn’t work anymore. It doesn’t work with equals because none are and it doesn’t work with a chief and an indian because people change.” “Besides, you should wait, it won’t hurt you to wait awhile,” Bay went on, “seven weeks is nowhere long enough to get to know each other.”

“We meet for breakfast or lunch most days,” Wyn said. “I’m sure Lara’s the one for me.”

“Can you honestly say you think she’s ready to make such a big decision when you haven’t even met her folks,” Bay said. “I’ll meet them after we’re engaged,” Wyn said. “Lara’s living on her own, she’ll make this decision on her own anyway.”

“It might work eventually,” Bay said, “but your jumping the gun now is more likely to scare her off.”

“Hell, Bay, I got the ring. I’m going to take my shot. It’s do or die for me tomorrow,” said Wyn.

OK, Wyn, no one can say you aren’t game, you always were,” said Bay. “Call me tomorrow and let me know if you’ll need a best man or a pallbearer.”

Lara woke up happy even though it was six a.m. on her day off. The temperature was in the low 30s but she couldn’t wait to start the day. She skipped breakfast to avoid waking up her roommate, Emily. She was glad that Emily was still sleeping otherwise Lara might tell

her the truth about this trip. Like some secret agent, Lara had told Emily and her parents, that she was taking the train to Cape May. A white lie, she reasoned, to save them worry. She was to meet Wyn at the Reading Terminal Market in Philadelphia at eight a.m. They didn't ask if she was traveling with anyone and Lara didn't tell. Last night Lara had decided what to wear and what to pack. Her choices were made easier by Wyn's relaxed attitude. He said he liked everything she wore and she really believed him. Lara had the urge to show up for a date with him some day in a completely goofy outfit just to hear what he would say. Probably, "You look great, Lara." She decided to wear her white cable knit sweater, calf length skirt, black knee socks, and her well worn oxfords. She always wore the golden locket and chain her mother had given her and her good luck rabbit brooch with this sweater. But for a white turtleneck shirt, this was the exact outfit she wore for her college yearbook photo less than a year ago. That seemed like ages ago now. She was also wearing her winter coat because it was likely to be colder or windy in Cape May. Lara also took her dispatch-style pocketbook so she wouldn't have to carry miscellaneous items in her pockets. Now that she had everything ready to go, she realized that she had squandered her time. She would have to hurry to make the 7:08 a.m. train to Philadelphia. It was a six block walk to the West Chester train station but there would be almost no traffic this morning and she wouldn't lose any time to traffic lights. Lara marched east along Miner Street toward the station. At Miner & Sharon Streets she looked for the white cat who greeted her every weekday morning as she walked for her train. He must have slept in because of the holiday. His loss. She next imagined how much fun she would have with Wyn

on the trip. He always made such remarkable comments about the buildings and people they saw. When she got to the station, she saw that the train cars were not open yet. She bought a newspaper and stood near the last car, the one she usually rode in on workdays. There were only half a dozen other passengers, none that she knew. Lara enjoyed the growing warmth of the rising sun and the twittering of a few stray birds. She saw a cat hiding behind a tree and watching the birds who landed. Lara wanted to interfere with nature by scaring the cat off with a small stone but she couldn't bring herself to make a spectacle, even such a small one. The conductor waved and the people began boarding the cars. Lara was the first board. She went to the third seat from the back and sat by the window. This was the seat she always took if she could. The high seats facing each other created a cozy nook. She was just settling herself for the ride when Ed Zwilling appeared by her nook.

“Hi, Lara, what a pleasant surprise to have you as a traveling companion,” he said, “Mind if I sit here?” Lara had gone to a pirate movie with Ed months ago and he peppered her with pleasantries and conversation every time they met, in hopes of having another date, Lara guessed. She would have none of it today. Ed was a nice guy but the world was big and she wanted to experience more of it. “Not at all, Ed, please make yourself comfortable here,” said Lara, “but I’m moving to the next car where I can think.” As she said this, she gathered up her bags and hurried to the next car without looking back. Lara knew her comment had a harshness about it, but she reasoned that a woman has the right to sit with and talk with whom she saw fit even if some man is flummoxed by it. The same seat in the next car was available and she

settled into her new nook with satisfaction. Cozy and insular now, Lara reflected about her relationship with Wyn and where it was headed.

She hoped they would have time for breakfast because she was famished. Wyn had said he would have his car, his uncle's car really, nearby. Maybe they would just get something to eat in the car on the way. Though Lara had not talked to Wyn about it yet, she hoped that he would let her drive some of the way once they were over the Delaware River Bridge. This would make her feel that they were on Route 66 adventure. Although the weather was clear and sunny in West Chester, Lara had read on the train platform that there was a big storm somewhere down South. The reason for her secretive itinerary was that she and Wyn planned to stay overnight at her Aunt's house in Cape May. No shenanigans were expected or encouraged. They agreed that they would sleep on separate floors of the big, old house, Lara on the first floor and Wyn on the second. Lara had not told Wyn about the ghost of the missing traveler reported to be an off-season novelty. His imagination was already too fertile. Lara's aunt had lived in the house at Chapman & Reid since before Lara was born. Lara had been babysitter to numerous kids, of family and friends when she was a teenager. She had been so happy to spend summers in South Cape May even as a babysitter of first and last resort. Finally, she was able to get a real job in town, working as at a craft and jewelry store. As Lara progressed to wage earner, her younger sister, Jo, took over the runny nose and spilled glue patrol. Sometimes Lara missed those days of late adolescent freedom. After high school, all her freedom seemed conditioned upon a myriad of responsibilities.

Lara was temporarily rooming with Emily, her college roommate, in a converted but not modernized, former livery stable on the western edge of West Chester. It had been in Emily's family forever. They had big plans to make it a great small home. Lara liked the name, Oakshaw Cottage, on Old Street. It was so Dickensian. Emily said, "It was haunted by the consequences of bad decisions not yet made." Lara preferred less complicated ghosts.

The well-articulated platonic tryst Lara planned was only possible because Lara's Aunt, Nancy Braneen, would be away at a nurses' convention in New York City. Lara and Nan had joked that they would be passing each other somewhere in central New Jersey, with Nan headed north and Lara headed south. Lara did have a bona fide reason for her trip to South Cape May which predated the addition of Wyn and his car. Because of the war in Korea, several of the young doctors in York had been called for military service and her father was helping to cover their patients' needs. Normally, Lara and her father went to South Cape May in October to close up their cottage, The Birdhouse, for the winter. It was always a nice trip for Lara. She felt it gave her special relationship with her father. She also learned the mundane skills important to protecting the cottage and grounds. When it became clear that her father would not be able to Cape May, Lara volunteered to go and close up the cottage without him. Because the Van Duara family only had one car, Lara knew she would have to take the train. That was fine with Lara. It would be a nice brake from her job at the bank. Thanksgiving was on the 23rd and her office would be closed until Monday the 27th.

Lara had graduated from Fredericksburg College in June with a degree in History.

She was working in the legal department of the Fidelity-Philadelphia Trust Bank getting acquainted with the fundamentals of corporate banking. Lara liked working at the bank. Its location at 123 South Broad Street gave her ready access to most of downtown. The building itself was very imposing, like something out of a movie. Her department was on the thirtieth floor. From one window or another she could see both rivers, the Billy Penn statue, and the long strip of South Broad Street all the way to the Navy Yard.

Lara had considered going to law school but three years would be a big bite out of her life. When the topic of careers came up at the dinner table on Thanksgiving, Lara was surprised to hear her younger siblings so sure as to what they were going to be. Jo and Bill wanted to be doctors like Dad and Jim wanted to be a lawyer like her, even though she was not all that sure herself. Mom and Dad had withheld comment, perhaps adding up tuition bills soberly.

Lara had worked out an arrangement with her boss to take thirty minute lunches four days a week so she could take a ninety minute lunch once a week. This allowed her to wander further afield in center city Philadelphia, to have a sit down lunch somewhere, always on payday, and then peek into the upscale women's shops. On the last Friday in September, Lara stopped at Leary's Book Store on 9th Street, below Market Street. Her mother was a self-taught watercolorist and Lara wanted to buy her a present. A book about her favorite creatures – butterflies – would be just the thing. There were thousands of varieties of

butterflies and their colors ran the spectrum. She hoped that Leary's would have some interesting books on the shelf so she wouldn't have to order something sight unseen. Someone had told her not to go to Leary's at midday because it was usually crowded. Really! Lara thought, I only have middays. There were only ten or so browsers on the first floor when Lara arrived. She asked an older man whom she took to be a salesman where the books for insects and butterflies were. He seemed nonplussed but a younger man directed her to follow him. Lara didn't see his face. She followed him up two stories and back to a small room. While they navigated the store, the man didn't speak to her but gave crisp hand signals. When they arrived at the little room, with books of all sizes everywhere but the ceiling, he turned and said to her, "scientific or artistic?" He was just a little taller than her with light brown short hair. He had a kind face with quite blue eyes and thin lips. Lara didn't respond to his question. She guessed he was maybe twenty-five or so. He wore no wedding ring. He held his hands out in front of him in a questioning gesture. "Perhaps it's a butterfly cookbook you are seeking?" Lara began to laugh, but bite her tongue instead and blushed as well. Recovering, Lara noticed his nametag and said, "Mr. Wyn, do you really have a butterfly cookbook?" "I'm Wyn Colebs and, no, I've never seen one." Lara realized that he was looking at her intently, not staring, but she felt his glance was piercing. "My mother paints watercolors so I need a book that would give her clear photos of various types of butterflies, close-ups showing structural details and colors," said Lara. Lara judged his face to be quite expressive. "May I call you Carol?," said

Wyn. "My name is Lara, not Carol," said Lara. "May I call you...Lara?" he said. Lara heard something in his intonation beyond what the words alone meant. Smiling at his ruse, Lara said "Yes, Lara Van Duara." "Thank you," he said. Without further ado, Wyn took a step toward Lara and removed a book from a shelf near her left shoulder. She noticed that he had an aftershave that smelled spicy. Lara also saw that Wyn had a noticeable scar on the left side of his neck just above the collar. "Please look at this book, Lara," said Wyn handing a large book to her. Though he passed it to her easily with one hand, Lara had to strain to hold it in her outstretched hands. Wyn placed a tubular book stand, like a music stand but with a flat top, in front of her. As he placed the book on the stand, their hands brushed. Lara stiffened as if he had stolen a kiss. Lara realized she was holding her breath and she exhaled slowly and intentionally. She stole a glance at Wyn and she saw he had a slight blush. Wyn explained the book's pluses and minuses. His descriptions and explanations were so smooth it was hard to believe he wasn't reading from cue cards. He said that this book would help Lara's mother for years to come. He also said he would like to see some of her mother's work. He told her the book was priced at \$30.00. Lara must have made a face at the price because Wyn smiled broadly and said, "That's probably as much as you make in a week. It's the right book, but the price isn't right for you today. You could buy it on layaway. Five Dollars a week and you could have it by Thanksgiving. Plus, I could see you in the store every Friday when you come to make a payment. I would like that. Maybe you could bring me a sandwich too, or we could go out."

Wow, thought Lara, I'm happy I stopped in here. "Should I put this book on layaway for you, Lara?" Wyn said. I like the way he says my name, not too sharp and with a slight roll on the 'r', like a burr, thought Lara. "Yes, please do," said Lara. "We'll see each other next Friday, midday. I can't leave the store at midday but we'll probably work something out, don't you think," said Wyn. "Call the store if you need to talk to me." Impulsively, Lara wrote down her bank phone number on one of the index cards she always carried. Wyn looked at it and said "No 'u' in Lara, is that why you seem calm and even-tempered?" Surprised, she simply said "One of my grandmothers was Russian." Lara had never felt she was missing a 'u' until Wyn pointed it out. Now she wondered if she had found a 'u'.

Bank at the bank, Lara asked her boss if she could take her lunch between 11:00 a.m. and 3:00 p.m. on Fridays. Mr. Stiles asked, "Do plan to get married during lunch?" As Lara began explaining, he smiled and said, "Enjoy Center City while you're young." Ever the efficient operative, Lara called Leary's Bookstore and asked to speak to Wyn. He was at lunch until three o'clock. Actually, Wyn wasn't eating lunch, he was standing at Broad and Walnut Streets admiring Lara's building and thinking about one of its occupants. Lara reached him on the phone before she left for the day. It was amazing how accurate and lifelike his voice sounded on the phone. She could envision him right in front of her. They agreed to have lunch next Friday at two o'clock. She specified Dutch because she didn't know how poor he was. That he didn't object meant he really was poor or that he thought she was a 'modern woman', which

she thought she was. Lara knew it was best to go slow but she wanted to see him immediately, not a week from now. Over a very restless weekend, Lara decided to visit him at his store on Monday to ask about the butterfly book, about any book, to have him explain the deposit policy, to listen to him explain anything.

Lara was amused when Wyn once inquired about why she frequently wore two or three rings. "I'm making up for lost time," replied Lara. "My mother wouldn't allow me to wear any rings until I earned my high school graduation ring." Wyn had sense enough not to ask Lara why her actual ring finger was always bare. I bet that you have no trouble dissuading unwanted interest from men even in the absence of an engagement or wedding ring," said Wyn. "You could win and lose that bet, Wyn," said Lara.

Lara ended her recollections and speculations because the West Chester train had arrived at Suburban Station. Lara walked along Filbert Street to the Reading Terminal Market. Lara felt her little suitcase getting heavier as she walked.

Lara saw Wyn hanging up a pay phone outside the Reading Terminal Market as she walked up to him. "Who were you talking to, Wyn," inquired Lara pleasantly. "My brother, Bay, up in New York City. I asked him what I should do if you get tough with me during our trip," said Wyn. "What did he say?" said Lara. "He said, 'With women, there's tough and there's sweet, either way you lose.'" "Sounds like a smart fellow," said Lara. "Lara, we've got to take a trip up there soon so you can meet Bay. He's a great guy. He's always been there for

me,” said Wyn. “He divorced last year but he’s not bitter, just gun shy,” said Wyn. “Are you trying to talk him into getting remarried?” said Lara. “No nothing like that,” said Wyn.

“Sure, I’d be happy to meet him, any time, the sooner the better,” said Lara.

“It’s inconvenient that all these railroads aren’t connected so people could walk shorter distances to change trains,” said Lara. Wyn was constantly amazed at how plain spoken Lara was. If she wanted something, she just asked for it. If she didn’t get it, watch out.

“Where’s your uncle’s car,” asked Lara. “He keeps it garaged near Broad & Erie Streets, but I went up last night and brought it down here,” said Wyn. “It’s parked on the east side of the Terminal Market, about three blocks from here.” “Can we stop at the Market for breakfast, I’m starving,” said Lara. “How about a loaf of bread and a bottle of wine,” said Wyn. Lara looked at Wyn as though he had suggested stale bread and water. “OK, OK, a short breakfast,” Wyn said as he steered Lara to the stall with the fastest cook and the least choices. “Sure,” said Wyn, “I know you’re happier if you’ve had a biscuit or two.” Once they were seated at the counter of the barebones little eatery, Lara ordered eggs, bacon, toast, and coffee and Wyn ordered rye toast and tea. “This is fun, isn’t it, being out in the world on our own,” said Lara. “Yes,” replied Wyn admiring her blue eyes. While they were waiting for their food, Wyn nonchalantly asked Lara to explain how she saw their relationship. Lara was glad she didn’t have a mouthful of food. She stared wide-eyed at Wyn. She saw a mischievous glint in his eyes and she realized that he had guessed at her thoughts during her ride in, guessed

accurately too. “Well, Miss Van Duara, I’m waiting,” said Wyn. Lara had given this matter miles of careful thought. She even noted the important points on an index card. Perhaps she should just hand the card to Wyn, that would take the smile off his face. Although Wyn loved facts, she doubted that he would like to see their relationship presented in such a succinct manner.

“Wyn, we haven’t known each other very long,” said Lara, “You know that I like you and I believe that you like me even more. I feel that we should leave it at that for now. What do you think?” Their food arrived and Wyn said he would speak his mind after they ate to avoid a food fight. Lara smiled and began eating heartily. As usual, Wyn took each bite and sip carefully, as any could be his last. Despite their truce, Lara was mildly irked that Wyn had left the “us” matter hanging because now he had the prerogative to reflect upon it all the while. When they finished their breakfast, Wyn paid the bill. Although it was less than Four Dollars, she observed that he paid in one dollar bills and exact change. He left a two dollar tip, literally, a two dollar bill. As they left Wyn said good bye to the cook and counterman and they both said goodbye to him, calling him by name. Lara decided against resuming their relationship talk, preferring to wait until Wyn picked up the thread. Lara asked where the ladies’ restroom was and Wyn walked her across the Market to an area she had not been in before. When they got to the restrooms, they found a chain link curtain blocking access. “It’s probably because of the holiday.” Said Wyn. His quick glance at Lara’s face told him that she was more interested in a solution than an explanation. “My rooms are only two blocks from here, let’s go there to use the bathroom before we start for Cape May,” said Wyn. They walked there in three minutes.

Unbeknownst to Wyn, Lara had walked by his building the second week after she met him.

Lara was curious by nature and deliberate by practice. She found Wyn's building to be a well-maintained brownstone on North Tenth Street, near Arch. Wyn's name was on the box, noted as Apt. 'W'-5th Floor. Lara wondered about the 'W' designation. It seemed like Wyn's wit at work. When they arrived at the building, Lara feigned surprise. Though nothing was said, Lara felt that, somehow, Wyn knew she had reconnoitered the neighborhood. Lara hoped the climb to the fifth floor would not be difficult because she was a strenuous daily walker. Nevertheless, she was breathing hard when she reached the top. Lara was really pleased to realize that Wyn lived on the fourth floor, that there was no fifth floor. Knowing Lara's unease on stairs, Wyn followed her up all the while peppering her with information about the building, stair construction, banisters, gravity, types of shoes, etc. etc. Oddly, Lara appreciated the diversion. Wyn slipped around Lara at the top of the steps and said, "Thanks for coming up, Lara." Lara smiled weakly. She quickly perched on a little wooden chair on the landing while Wyn opened the door. The landing was quite small, perhaps six foot by six foot, but there was an eight shelf bookcase crammed with books of all sizes and colors. Wyn saw her looking at it and said, "This is my intake department, many books never make it any farther than here." "Are these all yours?" asked Lara. "Yes, for the time being," said Wyn. "For the time being? What does that mean?" said Lara. "Until I die," said Wyn, "then they might be yours, depending upon how our relationship has matured." That Lara was taken aback was clear upon her face. "What would my rights be if we were still just dating?" said Lara. "My heart and my books are yours, Lara,

from this weekend to forever,” said Wyn. Spontaneously, Lara stood and hugged Wyn and he hugged her back tenderly. Wyn opened the door without a key and shepherded Lara inside. “Please let me use the bathroom before I look at all of our books,” said Lara. Wyn pointed to a round topped door off the kitchen and Lara walked through the living room and Wyn’s bedroom to get there. Once Lara closed the bathroom door, she saw that there was not lock, only a calligraphic sign reading “Trust”. That must be hilarious at parties, Lara thought. After a second’s reflection, Lara decided that there had probably been no parties at Apt ‘W’, 5th floor since Wyn moved in. Lara had noticed that Wyn was very friendly to almost everyone, but at the end of the day he was always alone. The bathroom was spotlessly clean, even the exterior window which had be stripped of old paint and restored to perfect working condition.

Although there was no lock on the bathroom door, Lara peeked into Wyn’s medicine cabinet. No pills, just toothpaste and a little sign reading – “Hi Lara”. Lara wasn’t tired yet of Wyn’s anticipation but she hoped it was not a big part of her future. However, Wyn did know her well. As Lara emerged from the bathroom, Wyn spoke to her from the living room, “Everything shipshape?” “Yes, thank you for introducing me to your medicine cabinet. I frequently have embarrassing silences when I first meet wall fixtures,” said Lara. “If you want people to come back, you’ve got to make them feel welcome when they’re here,” said Wyn. Although she heard his words, Lara was transfixed by Wyn’s bed in the middle of the room. With Wyn now standing beside her, Lara said, “What a remarkable bed.” “Yes,” said Wyn, “it took me days to select and stack the books.” Looking at the sixty some stacks of books each

about two feet high that comprised the bed, Lara said, “How can you sleep on books, it must break your back.” “No, not at all, I put a Japanese-style mattress on top of the books,” said Wyn, “it’s in the front room behind the couch while looked for some books I needed.” Without apparent effort, Wyn placed the mattress on the books. It looked a lot better, though still bumpy. As Lara stood with her back facing the edge of the bed, Wyn leaned close to her and, with his hands at her waist, placed her on the bed. Although Lara still had her long coat on, she felt this was a huge development in their relationship and very unsettling. Without coming any closer to his book bed, Wyn said, “Bundles of books and a beautiful woman! What more could a ask for.” Lara quickly clambered off the bed and smoothed her skirt and coat. Reading Lara’s ruffled expression, Wyn said, “I’m sorry. Did I scare you, Lara?” “No I was just surprised,” said Lara. As she walked away from the bed, Lara noted for future reference that the bed was very stable. Lara looked at the half dozen eight foot bookshelves in the living room, the three in the bedroom, and the single one in the kitchen. Most of the titles were beyond her but many others were simply disinteresting to her. “Why didn’t you make the kitchen table of books,” said Lara. “I did originally but I tired of eating meals with my legs splayed,” said Wyn. Lara suggested a table that looked like an “H” from above, with empty areas for legs. “That’s a great idea, Lara, if I make it will you come to dinner.” “Certainly, but first you must come to West Chester,” said Lara, Emily will be gone with her parents over Christmas to visit relatives in Norfolk, Connecticut. You could come then if you promise not to bounce me on any beds.” “That would be great, Lara, and I could take some photos of the old stone houses,” said Wyn.

“There are some new restaurants on Market Street in West Chester that we could try though we better skip ‘Woolworths’, despite its college bar facade, unless we want trinkets for dinner,” said Lara.

“I don’t see any record collection. Isn’t that essential to the young man about town?” said Lara. “I don’t understand music very well, Lara,” said Wyn, “What’s your favorite recent hit?” “I really like ‘Mona Lisa’, said Lara. “What about you, Wyn?” “I’ll be truthful, I love ‘If I’d a known you were coming, I’d a baked a cake’,” said Wyn, “I bet you could play it on your violin if you really tried.” Lara smiled and shook her head.

“Are we ready to get on the road?” said Lara. “I’ll walk in front of you,” said Wyn, “please hold the banister, the steps are steep.” Noting the carvings, Lara said, “This staircase is beautiful, but scary.” The walk to the car took only a few minutes. The car was a 1948 DeSoto two door coupe, mint green with grey upholstery. It seemed to be in great condition. Wyn said, “My uncle loves this car. It’s the dog he never had.” Wyn put Lara’s suitcase on the back seat next to his and said, “They’ll be asleep in five minutes.” Lara laughed at Wyn’s remark. It reminded her of the pleasantly humorous comments her father was always making to her mother. Lara felt that she liked Wyn very much but she didn’t know how far it was to love. Maybe this weekend would show her. Once they were settled in the car and Wyn was pulling out onto the almost deserted streets, Lara broached the idea of her driving part of the way to Cape May. Wyn looked at Lara searchingly for a moment but he did not reply at once. When he did reply, Wyn used a tone Lara had not heard from him before. Although he stared straight ahead, Lara could

tell his full attention was not on the road. Wyn's tone was distant and almost cold. "Lara, you know this car isn't mine," he said. "It belongs to my Uncle Charlie. Besides, I've never seen you drive. I have full confidence in your mental abilities but driving is more an art." He continued, "But I trust that you would not get me into trouble with my uncle, so yes, you can drive. Our route gets less complicated once we get on Route #9 in New Jersey." Although Lara was a little miffed that Wyn had reservations, his courteous consideration of her request and his agreement satisfied her. "Thanks, Wyn," Lara said, "I'll be very careful."

As they drove across the Delaware River Bridge Wyn drew Lara's attention to the beauty of the sun sparkling upon the water and the stateliness of a large ship moving down river. The forest of bridge girders made it hard for Lara to see it the way that Wyn saw it but he always saw more poetry than steel or concrete. As they descended the New Jersey side of the bridge, Wyn said something about poetry of ships and the sea that Lara did not understand. At first she thought she didn't understand him because she had missed some of his words. But Wyn kept talking, about ships and the sea and Lara was sure she was hearing and understanding the words he was actually saying even though he was speaking much faster than he normally spoke. At their numerous breakfasts and lunches, Wyn routinely spoke about diverse topics at a quick pace. Lara took pride in being able to follow his conversations, given their quick tempo and wide range of topics. Wyn frequently thanked her for her attention, though in a self-deprecating way. But Wyn's present speech seemed substantially different. It was much faster, perhaps twice as fast as normal. More importantly, Lara couldn't follow it at all. It didn't seem to make any

sense. The words and intonation seemed to be normal, though very, very fast, but the content was chaotic and nonsensical. Also, it was much too loud. Wyn almost seemed to be shouting. Moreover, it didn't seem to be directed at her. It seemed that he was directly and intentionally talking to the windshield. Lara was unnerved by Wyn's behavior. Lara felt she no longer knew the person sitting beside her driving the car. Wyn didn't respond to any questions or comments Lara made. After a few minutes, when his speech didn't revert to normal, Lara began to get scared. Lara didn't see any change in Wyn's driving but she was concerned that he just couldn't be paying enough attention to driving when he was speaking at an almost hysterical pace. Wyn was now talking so fast that Lara could no longer distinguish specific words, everything sounded like unending syllables being spit out a machine gun speed. Lara also couldn't understand what topic Wyn was talking about because he kept jumping from one to another. It was frightening to be in a car being driven by someone talking faster than he was driving. Even though Lara had yelled very loud at Wyn to get him to stop speaking, he kept right on speed talking as if Lara wasn't even in the car. After this had continued for half an hour or so, Lara felt she was going crazy herself. Lara had been crying for a while when she realized that they were approaching the turn off for Route #9.

From her many trips to Cape May with her family, Lara remembered that there was a long traffic light where the switch was made from the Black Horse Pike to Route #9. Lara decided to jump out of Wyn's car at that traffic light if it was red for them then. Her wallet was in her pocketbook on the back seat with her suitcase and coat but she believed or hoped that

someone at the Circle Diner would lend her money to call her father. Instantly she regretted her lies to her father and mother about the trip. First things first, however, Lara knew she had to survive this car ride. Once she got away from Wyn, she'd call Aunt Nancy to help her. She might even convince Nancy not to tell her parents what had happened. No, damn it, Nan will be in New York City for her nurses' convention by the time that Lara would be able to call her. Regardless of what happened afterward, Lara knew she had to get out of this car before she was driven crazy herself by Wyn's behavior or killed by his driving. As the car approached the traffic light, Lara saw that it was green and she froze. She knew she could be seriously injured or killed jumping out of a car going fifty mph. At the last instant, the light turned to red and Wyn jammed on the brakes. Lara was astonished at Wyn's continued unimpaired driving. Lara jumped out before the car was completely stopped at the light. Her feet landed in a puddle of cold, dirty water but she was out of the car in one piece. Wyn didn't even look at her outside the car. In her relief Lara started crying again. She realized this must be a bus stop because there was a bench and a pole with a very faded metal sign next to it. Lara sat on the bench as Wyn drove away and she assessed her options. She looked toward the diner across the parking lot and realized that it was boarded up. A 'For Sale' sign was across the front doors. Without her coat, Lara was already shivering. It occurred to her that she might be able to talk to Nan before she left Cape May. She hurried to the telephone booth by the diner's front doors. There was no telephone in the booth. Lara hung on the booth door and wiped her eyes with her hand. She was tired of crying. Lara heard Wyn's voice behind her. She sprang into the booth

slamming the door behind her. Now she was terrified of the guy she had been thinking about marrying. But Wyn didn't approach the booth. Wyn looked at Lara through the dirty, cracked glass of the booth. Lara saw that he was crying. Not a lot, but some. She saw that he had brought her, suitcase, coat, and pocketbook. He put them on the ground near the booth and backed up ten or so feet. Lara was surprised and relieved. It now appeared that, although their relationship had to end, he didn't want to hurt her. Wyn was just a crazy guy, literally crazy, but harmless. Without knowing why this morning, Lara had brought enough money with her to go to Cape May and back to West Chester by train. If she calm herself, Lara could continue to Cape May on the train, close up the cottage, take some photos, and get back to West Chester with no further problems.

“Please let me drive you to the train station,” Wyn said. Lara said she would go with him to the train station only if she drove and he kept completely quiet. Wyn agreed readily. When they got to the station, they learned that the Cape May train had just left. The next one wasn't until three o'clock, p.m. It was now about ten o'clock, a.m. Lara resolved to continue to Cape May by train without Wyn and she asked him to leave. Wyn realized that the only way to convince Lara to go with him by car was to not say a word. Lara upended her suitcase and sat on it to wait for the next train. They were at an impasse. Wyn decided to wait in the car on the other side of the parking lot where he had a clear view of Lara. Lara took out a red book and began to read. Wyn wondered what book she was reading. He waited and hoped that Lara would change her mind. While he watched, a Dalmatian sniffed around her feet and then sat

down right next to her. Wyn became immersed in one of his science magazines and he stopped watching Lara. After an hour or so, Lara appeared at the driver's side window of Wyn's car. Wyn was startled by her tapping on the glass. Wyn was sitting on the passenger's side. She looked at him directly but he couldn't read her expression. Wyn held up several index cards to her in succession. "Hi Lara, you look great." "You can drive all the way to Cape May." "I won't say a word unless you ask me a question." "I won't stay in Cape May unless you want me to." "If you still want to go to Cape May alone on the train, I'll leave you alone now and forever." "Please give me your answer with a smile." Lara put her index finger to her lips and climbed into the driver's seat. When Wyn handed Lara the keys, their fingers touched and neither recoiled. Wyn put his seat back and pretended to nap. It was fortunate that there was very little traffic because upon exiting the parking lot, Lara drove the wrong way on the traffic circle. Wyn just glanced at Lara and gave her the thumb's up signal and he smiled. After they had driven two or three miles down Route #9, Lara pulled the car over and stopped.

Lara had convinced her father that she was able to make the trip and close up the cottage. She was determined to do it. After concluding that Wyn's behavior was not dangerous, Lara decided to continue to Cape May with Wyn's car. First, she turned the car off, then she held Wyn's left hand, looked him directly in the eyes, and said, "Your wild talking really scared me. So that we can make it to Cape May safely, I need your cooperation. I need to answer some questions, and those only briefly and calmly. Can you do that, Wyn?" "Yes, Lara," Wyn said. Lara started the car and off they went down Route #9, averaging about 45 mph. After five miles

or so, Lara said, “Wyn, have you ever been treated by a doctor for your talking problem?” “Yes,” said Wyn. “Briefly, what did he tell you?” said Lara. “He said only electroshock therapy could end it,” said Wyn. Lara was herself stunned. She knew from her father that electroshock therapy was dangerous and unreliable. “Did you have it?” said Lara. “No, I was afraid of being changed too much,” said Wyn. Lara was so unnerved by Wyn’s response, she involuntarily turned to look at his face. Without looking at her, Wyn said, “Lara, please keep your eyes on the road.”

“Whoa, did you see that?” said Lara as she swerved the car abruptly to avoid hitting a big, white bird on the road. Wyn instantly looked out the back window and said, “It’s still standing in the road, unmoved, I think its watching us. I don’t like birds that much. I especially don’t like gooney birds like that one, Why do they walk so much, they have wings, why don’t they fly everywhere?” “I like seeing little birds walking and running on the beach,” said Lara. “They look like little pedestrians or commuters.” “Why don’t you like gooney birds, Wyn?” said Lara. Wyn replied, “On Saipan I was using a latrine with other marines when a gooney bird wandered in and started flapping its wings stirring up dust. As soon as I finished, I grabbed a stick and chased the bird which had an injured wing. Two seconds after I left, the latrine was destroyed by a shell.” “Gee,” said Lara, “That should make you like them, its appearance was good luck for you, you didn’t get killed.” “But my buddies got killed and I owed one of them forty dollars that now could never be repaid,” said Wyn. Lara took a sidelong look at Wyn to see if he was kidding. His straight ahead stare said he wasn’t.

As the miles wore on Lara recalled Mr. Duran, a neighbor in York and one of her father's patients. His wife brought him in to see her father because of his extremely high level of his activity, including endless talking on all types of topics at all hours of the day and night. Lara remembered that Mr. Duran's behavior also included substantial periods of time when he just stood or sat staring at nothing for no reason. Mr. Duran was eventually killed trying to cross a railyard in the middle of the night. This memory of Mr. Duran came to Lara just as she realized that Wyn had not said a word in the last five miles and that he was still on page one of his book. He wasn't sleeping though, just staring straight ahead. Without any plan, Lara said, "Wyn, please talk slowly, and tell me a little of what it was like when you were a soldier during the war." "Lara, I was a marine. My brother Bay joined the Marines right out of high school in 1943. I was two years behind him in school but I skipped out of my senior year as soon as I turned seventeen. Our Uncle Charlie had been a Marine in WWI and he had told us all about it. I was in the invasion of Saipan. It was really tough. I was pinned in the surf with lots of dead Marines, my friends, for over an hour. Steady Jap fire, crashing surf, and dead men floating and bobbing around me. I had to spend as much time under water as I could to avoid getting killed. I was amazed at the little fish swimming so close to the beach on such a bad day. I wondered what kind they were. Finally, some naval guns silenced the Japs and I could get on the beach. Most of the Marines who had urged me get up on the beach were dead or dying. If you die in the surf, your body doesn't rest; if you die on the beach, your journey's done. I joined up with a handful of survivors from my company and we started inland by fits and starts. The Marines

took the island in eighteen days. I killed two Japs that I know of, though I threw as many grenades as I could get my hands on so there might have been more.” Lara said, “Wyn, I’m so sorry you had to go through that hell. I think you’re a hero.” “No, the guys who went up the beach without naval gunfire were the heroes, said Wyn. “Do you think the battles caused your talking problem?” asked Lara. “No, they only caused my fear of being in the surf again,” said Wyn. “My talking problem is in my family blood. I had an uncle and a grandfather who had it.” “I hope the restaurant has 7UP,” said Wyn. Lara knew that it was Wyn’s favorite drink and that he downed two or three bottles at a time.

After a few minutes, Lara asked, “Were you ever a lifeguard, you look very strong?” Wyn looked at Lara incredulously and said, “A lifeguard? I’m terrified of the water – pool, lake, ocean – I wouldn’t go in even at gunpoint.” “Would you go in to rescue me or kid,” said Lara. “I don’t know,” said Wyn, “why would you go in there anyway?” Lara pulled her eyes from the road again to search Wyn’s face for a jocular crinkle but saw none. Lara created a rule of thumb to interpret or understand Wyn’s bizarre answers and comments: if they were in the car, she should take it all as his genuine opinion; if they were at lunch somewhere or just walking, everything was meant as a joke or setup for a joke. If it got that far, Lara had to be certain that Wyn proposed in a car. It occurred to Lara that this was a rough form of lie detector device. “You give a girl a lot to think about, Wyn,” said Lara. “You’re welcome,” said Wyn.

They were only about four miles from Cape May. Given all the excitement they had made good time. It was only three o’clock. It was overcast but not raining. “Are you hungry?”

said Lara. “Yes, I’m starving,” said Wyn. “Let’s stop at Willard’s to eat,” said Lara, “they have great submarine sandwiches. I was a waitress there one summer.” “Can we fill the gas tank first, Lara, I’m afraid the gas stations will close early,” said Wyn. “That’s a good idea because this still a holiday weekend,” said Lara. “Let’s go to Captain Butch’s Gas Station, it’s on Sunset Blvd. at Broad.” Moments later, Lara was watching Wyn shoot hoops with the other attendant. She was amazed how someone who could banter and mix so casually with other men, make the grade in the Marines, be alert to the weather, could be as crazy as he sometimes seemed. Lara realized that she would need to have a long relationship with Wyn to give her time to understand him fully though his lunching habit would add ten pounds a year to her figure if she were not careful. “OK, Lara, the gas tank’s full, let’s eat,” said Wyn. Wyn seemed surprised as Lara slid behind the wheel again but, smiling, Wyn said, “Prettiest chauffeur in Cape May.” Lara drove to Willard’s after several problems with one way streets. As they went in, it was beginning to rain in earnest. Lara’s fears about Wyn’s problem resurfaced when she saw him eat and and eat. In total, he had three hamburgers, his and her fries, three bottles of 7UP, and two bowls of rice pudding. It was like a scene from that old Irish song ‘Johnny Mcalldoo’. Wyn’s speech remained calm and moderate, however. He read items to her from the local newspaper which he found in the restaurant, including the movie section and tomorrow’s weather – clear and cold. Lara actually appreciated hearing about the movies because it would be a pleasant thing to do on Saturday night. They had not gone to a movie together. It might be nice to sit in the dark handing hands. At least Wyn would be quiet. The movie playing was ‘Harriet Craig’; it starred Joan Crawford and Lara wanted to see it. Lara filed away for future

consideration Wyn's dinner at Willard's. At their breakfasts and lunches in Philadelphia, he always ate sparingly. It was now about five o'clock and it was raining furiously as they left the restaurant. Wyn brought the car to the restaurant door so Lara didn't get soaked in a mad dash. He knew she didn't like to run especially on wet ground. Once they were settled in the car and safe from the amazingly heavy rain, Wyn said, "Lara, I can't live without you. I'll do anything to keep you in my life but I'll deathly afraid that I'm just a passing fancy to you." "Not to worry, Wyn," Lara said and she squeezed his left hand reassuringly.

Lara thought that they should 'check in' at Aunt Nancy's house now. Lara's Aunt Nancy was sister-in-law to Lara's mother. Nan had no children of her own so she doted upon her nieces and nephews. Nan was the youngest of her generation and had always been very good to Lara. However, Wyn was anxious to see the cottage over in South Cape May while there was still light so Lara drove to the railroad tracks at 10th & Mt. Vernon Avenues, the edge of South Cape May. Lara's father had told her never to take a car down to the cottage because the ground was sand and a car could sink to its axle quickly. It was only a short two block walk to the cottage from the tracks. Once they got to the 'Birdhouse' cottage, Wyn walked around it twice, counterclockwise, admiring it profusely. Lara sensed that Wyn's speech was about to become wild again so she interrupted him loudly, saying "Let's go inside!"

It surprised her that Wyn went up the steps three at a time. Lara was always careful going up and down stairs, wet or dry. Once when Wyn and Lara were walking along Walnut Street in Philadelphia, he remarked upon her gait and asked if she had a problem walking as a

child. Lara brusquely denied any problem and they walked on without further comment.

Despite her answer, Lara flashed on her painful memories of special shoes and mean doctors. she also remembered Tommy Pierce, whom she had liked a lot in fifth grade, called her knockkneed. She never spoke to him or his family again. The rain seemed as if it were being poured from a sky wide bucket not falling as drops when they ducked inside the cottage. “This one solid little house,” said Wyn, “I counted sixteen pilings.” The floor area was thirty by forty and there were sleeping lofts at each end of the 9/12 roof. Before they left the cottage, they checked the storage room beneath to inventory what would be needed to do the maintenance Lara’s father had specified. Wyn was surprised to see quite a few tools plus wire, rope, and cable. As they left the property it was raining hard and the sand by the sidewalks was turning into miniature gullies. Lara almost tripped over a metal signpost that had been bent almost parallel to the ground. Wyn pulled her back just in time, saying, “Looks like a car or truck ran right over this sign.” The sign read ‘No Swimming – Rough Water’. Lara and Wyn were soaking wet by the time they got back to the car. Wyn said, “The newspaper said it would be sunny tomorrow. Could they have been more wrong?” For no clear reason, Lara recalled her grandfather’s warning that no one should stay at the cottage during a hurricane. Lara didn’t mention this to Wyn because this is just a thunderstorm. Without meaning to, Wyn had gotten into the driver’s seat and Lara had become the passenger. “Now you’re going to see some real driving,” said Wyn. At Lara’s frightened look Wyn said, “Just kidding, Lara, just kidding.”

With much hilarity they traded seats without leaving the car.

By the time they got to Aunt Nancy's neighborhood, it was teeming rain. Lara tried to take some photographs of the Victorian dormers but, between the rain and the fading light, she knew it was a waste of time and film. Aunt Nancy's Victorian house was well lit when Lara stopped the car near it. Lara was surprised to see lights on in the house and her stomach sank. Nan was on her front porch talking to someone. If Wyn's crazy talking had been a disaster, this was a catastrophe. Their weekend was over before it started. "Is something wrong, Lara?" said Wyn. "Yes, I'm going to drive right by the house. Aunt Nancy is still here. She's supposed to be in New York City at a nurses' convention. I don't know what went wrong. You can't come to her house with me. Nan is smart. She'll guess what my plan was. I couldn't take the embarrassment even if she didn't tell my mother." "Lara, please don't be upset. We'll figure a way to salvage this weekend," said Wyn.

"If you stay in the cottage tonight and I stay at Nan's house, we can meet tomorrow morning in town. Then I could tell her you're a friend from college and could you stay here to save money, or something," said Lara. "That's great, Lara, you think fast," said Wyn. "I'll drive to the railroad station," said Lara. "The train was due in at six o'clock. I'll tell her I waited for the rain to stop," said Lara. "You're already soaking wet. Please let me drop you off closer to Nan's house," said Wyn. "OK," said Lara, "I guess I don't need to get drowned to convince her." Lara stopped the car about half a block from Nan's house. As Lara was about to leave the car, suitcase and all, Wyn hugged her, kissed her tenderly, and stroked her hair gently. Lara was completely surprised but quickly cooperative. Their first real romantic kiss

made up for a lot of worry about Wyn. Maybe it was a prudent Fate that would put them together under Nancy's roof, with her still there. As she was getting out of the car into the driving, howling rain, Lara said, "Be careful where you park the car. It's our ride home."

"Yes, Miss Lara," said Wyn. Then he said, "I miss you already, I'll always miss you, Lara."

Because of the storm, Lara didn't hear Wyn's parting words to her.

Even though Lara had left the car half a block from Aunt Nancy's house, Lara didn't have a dry inch on her body when she trudged up Nan's porch steps. Nan opened the door at the first knock and hugged Lara as firmly as Wyn had just done. "Oh, Lara, I'm so happy you got here safe and sound, though soaked," said Nan. "I'm so happy to see you too, but I thought you were going to New York," said Lara. "I've been to lots of conventions. I skipped it so a younger nurse could go," said Nan. "We'll have so much fun this weekend. Tell your father I was the one who distracted you from your chores at the "Birdhouse". You'll have to come down again next weekend to get the work done. Let's get these soaking wet clothes off of you right now. You'll feel great after a long, hot shower. I'll make a fire and we can compare your exciting life to my boring life." "Thanks so much for having me, it makes everything easier," said Lara. "I thought we might go the movies tomorrow night. 'Harriet Craig' is playing and I would like to compare it with the 1936 version," said Nan. Lara froze partially. "Sure, whatever you'd like to do," said Lara. "Where's 'Bandie'?" said Lara. "Oh, you know cats, here today, gone today. Probably hunting mice or what not. I'm sure she'll turn up tomorrow," said Nan. "Lara, you remember where the towels are. I'll wait until you're relaxed before I start flushing

toilets, ha, ha,” said Nan.

Lara was five minutes into a relaxing shower when the lights went off. At first she thought Nan was playing a trick on her as she had when Lara was a kid. But no, Nan knocked on the bathroom door and said, “Lara, this storm is worse than I thought. The Civil Defense teams have been called out, including me. I have to go to the hospital. Get dressed warmly, there may be an evacuation, but I doubt it. But, if so, don’t take anything but your pocketbook.” Lara wanted to save her clean clothes for the movie on Saturday night. By the time she dried off and got redressed in her damp clothes, Nan was gone. Lara wondered if this was a hurricane. Lara was sure Nan would have called it by name if it was. She wished the ‘Birdhouse’ had a year round telephone so she could talk to Wyn. After ‘disaster’ and catastrophe’, Lara didn’t know what to call this trip. As she walked downstairs, Lara heard the rain hitting the front door like a firehose. Water was being driven under the front door and through the front window sills. Impulsively, Lara opened the front door to see how much water was on the porch. The wind driven rain saturated Lara instantly and she staggered backwards several feet into the living room before she even tried to close the door. Lara really had to put her shoulder to the door to get it closed. While she was trying to close it, Lara saw that Chapman Avenue was flooded above the curb. Lara tried to call the police to ask what she should do. Fifteen minutes ago evacuation seemed unnecessary, now she felt it would be prudent. Nan’s phone was dead. Lara knew the house had withstood floods before. She could get some food and retreat to the second floor. But she didn’t like being alone and she had seen a movie which showed people in a flood being

bothered by snakes and rats. She thought of trying to go to Wyn in South Cape May but decided it was safer to stay put until the police came. Lara took the curtains down from the two front windows and put candles in each to show that someone was still here. Although the 'Birdhouse' was much closer to the Bay, Lara was not too worried about Wyn because it was much sturdier built, was higher, and because Wyn seemed to have a strong survival instinct which the Marines had only enhanced.

To calm her nerves, Lara lit more candles and sat down to read. She picked up the new book which Wyn had given her for her birthday – Kon-Tiki. Three pages into it and Lara was sure it was not the book to read during a flood. Moments later someone pounded on the front door. Then opened it. Lara's sense of vulnerability paralyzed her. "You Lara?" said a short but thick policeman. "Yes," Lara said. "Get your coat, you're be evacuated right now, no pets," he said in a booming voice. He was wearing a yellow slicker and big rubber boots. As he stood in the doorway, the wind and rain soaked the front half of the living room. When she hurried through the doorway, he slammed the door firmly. Oddly, Lara recalled the playful white cat me met almost every morning. She hoped someone would rescue it if it were ever in danger. She was relieved that her pets were safe in York. The policeman helped Lara into the back of a big military truck. "What about the people in South Cape May?" asked Lara. "Those houses are closed for the season. My men went through there at five o'clock, it was deserted," said the policeman. Lara chose not to say anything about Wyn because she felt he could handle anything and because most of the people in the truck was Aunt Nancy's neighbors. The street

had at least a foot of water in it which she stepped into with her right foot. As Lara climbed into the back of the truck, she saw that there were half a dozen people in it already including two children. Lara thought that if she ever tried to write a novel about anything, the looks on the faces of those people would be mentioned. One older woman was holding a birdcage. After she got settled next to a middle-aged man, Lara said, "Is this a hurricane?" "No, this storm has water but not enough wind to be a hurricane. There'll be flooding from the full moon tide and the heavy rain, but probably not much wind damage. Best to be safe, however." Lara breathed a sigh of relief about Wyn being at the 'Birdhouse'. "Where is the evacuation center?" asked Lara generally of her fellow travelers. "We're headed to St. Mary's by the Sea out on Lehigh Avenue in Cape May Point," said one of the women. "Thanks. How long until we get there, do you think?" said Lara. "Half an hour or so," said the woman. Instantly, Lara was counting on seeing Wyn at St. Mary's, and soon. Her worry would not abate until she could hug him. In all the excitement, Lara had forgotten his tender kiss and encouragement. She was at the very back of the truck and she could see the weather and debris vividly. The water on the road now seemed to be a foot and a half deep and all manner of debris was floating in it. The water wasn't just standing still, it appeared to be flowing briskly across the road. It seemed to be flowing toward the bayside. Lara saw a dog sloshing through the water. Lara asked the man next to her whether they should tell the driver about the dog. He said, "Dogs are good swimmers, he'll be alright. Just try to relax, We'll be at St. Mary's soon."

When the truck stopped at St. Mary's, the rain was an absolute deluge. A coast

guardsman helped her out by lifting her at the waist. During the ride from Chapman Street she was astonished at the amount of water she saw. Flood water was everywhere, from knee high to waist high. Lara reassured herself when she realized that Wyn was tall enough to survive this mess by just standing tall. St. Mary's by the Sea was right at the point where the Ocean and the Bay converged. It sat high on a rocky hillock so it was not flooded. Inside the building Lara processed through an intake line. An elderly lady asked if all of her family was accounted for, whether she was injured, and questions like that. The lady knew Nan and Lara had actually babysat of the lady's grandson. Lara chose not to mention Wyn to anyone. Someone gave her a blanket and directed her to a cot. Lara sat for a while on the cot trying to focus her attention. She could not believe the chaos since she and Wyn had crossed into New Jersey. She heard some people by the coffee table talking about the storm. "Is this a hurricane?" Lara asked of the group. An older man said, "I don't think that it is. Hurricanes are mostly very strong winds driving water. This wind doesn't seem strong enough to be a hurricane." Another person said. "I haven't heard this storm called by any name, usually the weather bureau gives them a name so they can be told apart. Lara went to the open back door of the building and stood staring into the wet, cold night.

St. Mary's pastor met Lara when he went to close the back door to shut out the wind. Lara was trembling from the weather and her worry about Wyn. "Can I help you?" he said. Lara was startled by his voice and presence. She stumbled of the threshold out into the rain. As she turned to face him, Lara's tears became indistinguishable from the raindrops hitting

her face. The light bulb over the doorway showed her eyes puffy from crying. The pastor offered Lara his hand and she stepped back inside. An old saying came to his mind, "A woman's beauty is not truly known until she weeps." "Please tell me your name," said the pastor. "I'm Lara Van Duara. I was visiting my aunt, Nancy Braneen on Chapman Street in Cape May." "What is it that worries you so about this storm, Lara?" said the pastor. "I'm afraid that it's a hurricane," said Lara. "Well, I've been at this parish for twenty years and I have never experienced a storm with such unrelenting rain," he said. "Even Noah would have been nervous. But hurricanes originate and travel in particular ways, Lara. This storm started in the lower Appalachian Mountains not the Atlantic Ocean. I'm sure it will blow itself out by morning." A friend of mine, a man, is staying down in South Cape May in my family's cottage on 10th Avenue," said Lara. "My grandfather had that cottage built by a shipbuilder. He said it could withstand anything but a direct hit by a hurricane," said Lara. "But this isn't even a hurricane, so he's safe there, right Father?" The pastor stared at Lara for a moment and then said, "Lara, please stay here, have some tea or coffee, I'll talk to the Civil Defense people." Lara had read his mind on his face. Wyn was in serious danger at the cottage and she had to warn him as soon as possible.

The pastor knew from CD Director Dreyman that storm at the naval air station was the worst that anyone there had ever seen except in the South Pacific during war. Already even inches of rain had fallen and a barracks had collapsed because of extensive erosion. An old branch of Salt Marsh Creek had revived, had become a raging torrent, was coursing through

South Cape May, and was washing most of the town into Delaware Bay. The full moon had increased the tides dramatically and the rain runoff made the whole community impassable. South Cape May had extensive losses since its creation in the 1880s but this unnamed storm might be the knockout blow. The pastor told the CD staff about Lara's friend. Mr. Dreyman said, "We can't do anything right now because we're trying to move the refugees at the high school to higher ground upcounty. The Ocean and the Bay are lapping at the only access road for all those people. We'll send a search team down there at first light." When the pastor got back to the door, Lara was gone. A quick search indicated that she was not in the shelter. The ground outside the back door showed small recent footprints in the mud. The prints headed toward the South Cape May road.

Earlier, after Wyn had dropped Lara near her aunt's home, he drove back to the tracks in South Cape May to park the car and walk down to the "Birdhouse". He passed a police tow truck headed back toward Cape May's downtown. The electricity, the street lights went out all at once along his route. Although the moon was full, the cloud cover and heavy rain cut his visibility greatly. Wyn tried to park his car just where 10th Avenue passed over the railroad tracks but he misjudged the exact arrangement of the railroad embankment. Somehow he parked his uncle's car parallel to the tracks but with driver's side wheels inside the bayside rail and the passenger's side wheels outside that rail. There was a foot or more of running water, maybe it was the tide, in the area and debris had caused him to jump the rail accidentally. Wyn got out to assess the situation more carefully. The driver's side tires were supported by the ties

but the passenger's side tires were sinking into the sand every time the wheels spun or the tide flowed. Ruining his uncle's car was not an option to Wyn. He walked down the tracks a bit and located a heavily built metal signal support about twenty feet away from the car. Wyn figured he could winch the car onto the ties or tracks and free the passenger's side wheels. Wyn had seen rope and some cable in the storage room under the 'Birdhouse'. He also remembered a sturdy flashlight on a shelf just inside the storage room door. It was only two and a half blocks to the cottage but he had to tread carefully to avoid tripping or getting knock over by the rising water and the debris floating in it. By the time Wyn reached the cottage, the water was waist deep and was definitely ebbing and flowing like a tide. He knew that he wasn't a good swimmer and that his clothes were heavy and wet. He'd be pulled under instantly if he lost his footing. As he neared the cottage, without warning, something solid hit him hard in the lower back. He couldn't see what hit him because of the roiling waters. Wyn stayed on his feet but he couldn't walk without real pain. The coldness of the waters was numbing his legs, too. Slowly and painfully he climbed the stairs to the cottage. When he got to the top, Wyn sat down on the step to ease the throbbing pain. When the full moon shined through the clouds, Wyn saw the extent of the flood damage. This afternoon there had been seven or eight small cottages within a block of the 'Birdhouse'. Now there were only two. One had been turned sideways on its foundation and the other had collapsed in place. The others were simply gone. Although Wyn didn't believe that the numerous and massive pilings under the 'Birdhouse' could be washed away, he suspected that it was listing little toward Delaware Bay. Lara had told Wyn that her

grandfather had a shipbuilder construct the 'Birdhouse' as strongly as possible to protect his family. But, tonight, it seemed to Wyn that the sea would not be denied. This realization energized him to get the rope and cable and get back to his uncle's car. His back didn't feel any better and his legs stung intensely when he stepped back into the cold tide. Wyn thought if he could get the car out of the sand, he would get Lara and they would head for home immediately. Wyn wished that he were with her right now in some little restaurant in Philadelphia or West Chester. As he trudged toward the tracks, Wyn saw amazing amounts of debris being banged about by the water. Under foot, a vast tangle of debris caught at his trousers and shoes at every step. He thought he saw a dead dog was by him but it dipped under the surface before he could even focus upon it. Wyn had slung the cable over his shoulder and he was carrying the yellow rope in his left hand. Wyn was using his right foot to tap along the curb as he headed up 10th Avenue toward the tracks. He had only gotten about half a block when he thought he heard a high-pitched sound off to his left. The rain and the wind were as fierce as he had ever experienced so he wasn't sure he had actually heard anything. Wyn turned in the direction where he sensed that the sound had come from and he adjusted his eyes to what snipers called the thousand yard stare, and he waited. In a few seconds he again heard the sound. At the same instant the clouds parted momentarily and the full moon revealed a small person tangled in a bush about thirty feet to his left. Fortunately, the wind also abated and Wyn yelled, hoarsely, to the person, "Hang on, I'll bring a rope over to you." Wyn didn't know if the person heard him or not or even if he was alive but he certainly intended to find out.

About seven o'clock, Lara couldn't tolerate doing nothing any longer while she knew what danger Wyn faced because of her. Years ago she and her sister Jo had biked from South Cape May to St. Mary's to crash a dance. It was silly but important to them then. Lara estimated it was five or six miles by road. She knew it was not safe to cross fields tonight because of the rain and flooding. She hoped she could make it in two hours. If the rain stopped and the clouds blew away, the moonlight would help her find Wyn. Lara left St. Mary's by the back door and made a beeline for the down county road. It was pitch black and the road was ankle deep in broken branches and slippery leaves. Low spots in the road were covered with moving water. Lara could only walk in the made by the trucks to make any progress at all. The ruts also helped keep her on the road in the dark, mostly. Once she veered off the road and she ended up in a water-filled ditch. She didn't realize she had cut her hands until the intermittent moonlight revealed she was covered with her own blood, not just ditch water. Lara was badly shaken when some kind of animal snarled and lunged at her from the dark for no apparent reason. It didn't bite her but she jumped off the road into some deep mud and her right shoe was pulled off. It was so dark she couldn't find the shoe. Though she believed that she could continue without it, twenty paces on the splinter-filled rut road stopped her. Lara sat down, exhausted, in the rut beside a mile marker which indicated that she had walked less than a mile. Lara couldn't get up. She was still in the rut thirty minutes later when an overloaded jeep almost hit her. The guardsmen were angry until they saw how pathetic she looked. Two quickly hopped out of the jeep so Lara could be taken aboard. The sergeant peppered Lara with

questions until he concluded she was incoherent or in shock. Since the jeep's destination was St. Mary's, Lara's effort to help Wyn accomplished nothing. By eight thirty, when Lara arrived back at St. Mary's, her Aunt Nancy had come over from the hospital after hearing that Lara was missing. Lara was put on a cot in a corner and Nancy cleaned her up and bandaged her hands and foot. After hearing Lara's story, including about Wyn, Nancy said, "Lara, smart girls make mistakes too and not just fenderbenders and burnt dinners. I have to be honest with you, it is really bad down in South Cape May tonight. They may not find Wyn tonight or ever but he is very lucky to have a friend or girlfriend who would go out in this terrible and dangerous weather to help him. All things being equal though, I'd put my money on the Marine. Get some sleep now, I'll come and tell you as soon as I hear anything about Wyn." In moments, Lara was not so much asleep as out cold.

Wyn knew from his afternoon visit that 10th Avenue by the 'Birdhouse' was probably twenty feet wide. If he inched across the flooded street slowly, he could count his steps to be sure he didn't go too far if the other curb was washed away. Wyn made it to the farther curb safely though it was physically exhausting leaning against the ebb and flow of the tide. He remembered from some shipboard lecture that even one foot of flowing water could knock a man off his feet. Wyn was in water up to his waist. Earlier, an oar had banged against him and he had grabbed it. He was using it as a crutch or brace on his Bay side as he worked toward the person on the bush. Wyn had heard nothing more from the other person but he was determined to push on. Only slowly did it dawn on Wyn that he was in surf. Though certainly not placid,

the tidal water in his immediate vicinity seemed less churned up. But on this side of the street, Wyn could see that the water ahead of him was tumultuous. Wyn had the rope and the cable but he didn't know what he could tie them to and secure the person stuck in the bush. As he stepped over the curb, his foot hit something solid. By ducking under the water and feeling the object direct, Wyn realized it was the bent 'No Swimming – Rough Water' sign Lara had tripped over. He hoped the cable was heavy enough to stay put if he put it down carefully under the water. Wyn had to duck under the water three or four times to tie the rope to the bent pole. He used a running knot to tie the rope. Afterwards he was so drained he almost collapsed.

Now closer to the bush, Wyn could see that the person was a boy or teenager. before he set out for the boy, Wyn tied the rope around his waist in case the water was too much for him. Wyn's first step into the visibly roiled water told him what the problem was. This very wild flow was not tidal. It was some kind of stream flowing in to Bay. And flowing very strongly. Wyn used the oar in his left hand and arm to work against the current. As he plodded ahead, he played out the coiled yellow rope slowly to keep tension between his body and the submerged sign pole. He also realized that the stream water tasted like fresh water. The stream seemed to be about four or five feet deep. Wyn was using the oar like a big crutch against being swept into the Bay. He had the blade of the oar fast by his left arm with the handle grip poking into the bottom of the stream. With three wide jumpy steps Wyn was across the rough water. Though it was slippery and mushy, he made the stream's far slope in one more step. Wyn saw the boy clearly now about ten feet farther on. As he closed the distance, Wyn saw how unstable

the kid's raft or door was. The bush could be uprooted at any moment. Wyn realized that the boy was dazed. He wouldn't be able to hold onto the rope to cross the rough water and Wyn didn't think he had the strength to carry him. While Wyn was tying the rope to the doorknob, the oar slipped away and was lost into the Bay. Wyn tied the extra ten feet of rope around the boy's waist using a quick release knot.

Wyn told Pete, the boy on the door, it was not safe for both of them to come back across the rough water using the yellow rope because it might dislodge the door from the bush or tree. Wyn told Pete the rope secured him for the time being. Using the rope to steady his progress, Wyn re-crossed the rough water toward the bent sign to get the cable. As Wyn bent over to retrieve the cable, a heavy piece of broken furniture propelled by the rough water stream hit the right side of his head very hard. Stunned, Wyn took in a deep swallow of water. Wyn lost his grip on the yellow rope. Dazed, at the edge of the rough water, Wyn tried to move in Pete's direction. Wyn's next step dropped him back into the surging rough water stream in the gully worn by the revived branch of Salt Marsh Creek. Wyn was washed out into Delaware Bay in seconds.

One o'clock, a.m., on Saturday was a dividing line. The rain became less severe. It was possible to walk across St. Mary's parking lot without becoming drenched. All the people whom the civil defense knew needed to be evacuated, were. The National Guard arrived with plenty of specialists and supplies, including two-way radios. A baby girl was born. The bars were ordered closed until noon on Monday. Not a single fire was reported. Two small boats

were flooded at their moorings. There were incredible volumes of flood water, both fresh and salt, all over the county with most roads impassable to all but the largest trucks. The two main evacuation shelters would remain open until noon on Tuesday.

After assuring herself that Lara was safe and sound, Nancy went back to the hospital to fill in shifts. She spoke to the pastor about Lara. Nancy said, "It wouldn't serve any purpose to wake her up for bad news. If Wyn shows up, let him give her the good news." Nancy assured him she'd be back before the search teams returned from South Cape May. Director Dreymann had arranged to send a search team there at six, a.m. Although only fifteen people were missing in the entire county, it was hoped that most would turn up safe somewhere.

Lara woke up before six on Saturday. She hobbled to the CD tent to join the searchers. Mr. Dreymann said to her, "Miss Van Duara, you can't go. Look at yourself. You can barely walk or carry a tool. Besides, you are only looking for one person. If you find him dead or you don't find him at all, you will become a burden to the team. We'll have answers by noon. I will personally tell you about your boyfriend as soon as anything is learned. We all have radios." "You can help us though. See that woman sitting on the cot with the two little children," said Dreymann. "Her husband and older daughter are also missing. Could you sit with her and distract the children for awhile. She's near the end of her rope. Don't tell her about Wyn." "OK, thanks, I will," said Lara.

Lara remembered or guessed that Bay's book store in New York City opened at eight-thirty, a.m., on Saturdays. Lara reached Bay at eight-fifteen, a.m. "Bay, this Lara Van

Duara, Wyn's friend. You probably heard about the disaster in Cape May last night. Wyn is missing. He was sleeping at my family's cottage in South Cape May and the whole area was severely flooded," said Lara. "I thought he was staying at your aunt's house in Cape May," said Bay. Lara was shocked to learn that Bay knew about Wyn and her and where they were supposed to be sleeping. "It's a complicated story, Bay; my aunt didn't go to New York," said Lara. There's a search team down in South Cape May right now and I'm desperate to hear that he's OK. I'm really, really sorry to give you this news by telephone or at all. I'll call you as soon as I get more information. Can you give me your home telephone number?" said Lara. "Oh Lara, Wyn is a real survivor, if anyone could make it through, it would be him. Damn, I haven't seen Wyn in weeks, but I spoke to him yesterday morning. Did he give you anything?" said Bay. Lara chose not to tell Bay about their crazy ride to Cape May. "No, nothing unusual, just breakfast yesterday," said Lara. "Lara, I just looked at a train schedule. I can be in Cape May by three o'clock, p.m. today. Where will you be then?" said Bay. "I'll be at St. Mary's by the Sea, it's where evacuees are being lodged right now. Thanks for coming down, Bay," said Lara. "Sure, Lara, keep your hope alive. Everybody needs to hope to keep going," said Bay. "See you then, bye," said Lara.

Lara had overheard some civil defense people talking about identification of bodies. She said a prayer that Bay got to Cape May before anything like that was needed for Wyn.

Except for the 'Birdhouse', which was knocked off its pilings and was lying on its side on the beach, all the other houses between Arlington Avenue and Delaware Bay were gone,

just gone. The searchers had found Pete Geist dazed but alive by the railroad tracks at 10th Avenue. They wrapped him in a blanket and brought him back to St. Mary's. Some thought he was the missing friend of Miss Lara. The searchers also found a yellow rope tied to a bent safety sign ("Rough Water – No Swimming") near the remaining pilings of the 'Birdhouse'. There was a new runout of a non-tidal watercourse, the old branch of Salt Marsh Creek, now running parallel to 10th Avenue and emptying into the Bay. It was at least eight feet across and five feet deep. The water from the Bay was washing into it, eroding the sides and filling it in. Without a constant influx from the higher lands, it would be a shallow gully in a few days and a swale in a week. Last night, it could have easily drowned anyone who fell into it or tried to cross it. After listening to the searchers' summary, Lara told the CD Director that, "Her father had expressed great concern when the Navy cleared thirty or so acres of timberland in the Salt Marsh Creek watershed during the war for the naval air station. He believed the removal would cause erosion into the creek bed that wended down to South Cape May, that it would eventually cause a resurgence of the old creek, now 10th Avenue."

As Aunt Nancy had promised, she was back at St. Mary's when the search team returned from South Cape May. Lara was up and about in donated clothes. She was standing by her cot listening to an older woman. "Hi, Lara, I'm happy to see you up," said Nan. "I've always thought most of time spent in bed is wasted but you really needed to sleep last night." Nancy had already learned from civil defense that only one person was found alive in South Cape May, a thirteen year old named Pete Geist. Three bodies were recovered but Wyn was not

among those. “Lara, this boy says he saw Wyn last night,” said Nancy. Lara instantly interrupted, “I need to speak to him, where is he.” “Lara, the boy is suffering from exposure and his hands are very badly cut up from hanging onto a tree all night,” said Nancy. “You mustn’t scare him. You can hear what he has to say but you must remain calm.” said Nancy. We can hear his story right now,” said Nancy. “Yes, yes, where is he?” said Lara. Nancy motioned to a man and boy standing a short distance away and they approached Lara and Nancy.

Lara sat on her cot and Pete Geist sat next to her about a foot away. “Pete, we’d appreciate it a lot if you would tell us what happened last night on 10th Avenue in South Cape May,” said Nancy. “OK,” said Pete. “Before he starts, please, let me explain how we found him this morning,” said Dr. Geist, the boy’s grandfather. “We got to South Cape May at about six-thirty, a.m., this morning. We found Pete sitting on the ground where 10th Avenue passes over the railroad track next to the wreck of a car. This is about two blocks east of 10th & Mt. Vernon. He was semi-conscious and very exhausted and cut up from holding onto a tree and, later, a rope. Pete had lost most of his clothes so we wrapped him in a blanket, gave him some water, and put him on a stretcher. I thought his condition would prevent him from explaining what happened out there but he has a good memory,” said Dr. Geist.

“OK, Pete, are you able to tell Miss Duara what happened out there?” Pete said, “Yeah, my dog ‘Echo’, broke free when my family was trying to get into the Army truck to evacuate to the high school. I chased him down 10th Avenue and across the tracks to the edge of the Bay, which was a high tide, a higher tide than I ever saw before. When I got to him, Echo

was standing on a door that was floating just off the beach. I waded into the water and tried to wrestle him off a door. I had lost the leash while chasing him. Somehow, I ended up holding on to the floating door while Echo ran away down the beach. Suddenly, the door was pulled out thirty foot or so with the ebb. Already the water under me was way over my head. I was holding on to the doorknob and lying flat on the door like a raft. I hoped that the waves would push me back to shallow water so I could get to the beach. My soaked clothes made it impossible for me to swim against the currents.” Lara interrupted sharply, “What about Wyn, was Wyn there?” Both Nancy and Dr. Geist told her to be quiet or the boy might freeze up. Lara put up her hands in a conciliatory gesture and sat back down on the cot. Pete continued, “The surf was very rough to my left, toward the big house on pilings. I guessed about half a football field to that house and I felt I couldn’t swim that far. The tide carried the door back and forth numerous times but eventually the door crashed into a tree or bush and I grabbed the branches and held on as tightly as I could. I worked around the branches to keep the bush between me and the Bay. I felt if I lost my grip on the bush, I would be swept out into the Bay and drown. I was freezing cold and my hands were so numb that my numerous cuts stopped bleeding.” Dr. Geist said, “The tide was pretty much back to normal when we arrived in South Cape May but the entire area was covered with broken furniture, pieces of houses, and everything else you can imagine.” Pete went on, “I yelled for help sometimes but the wind and rain were so loud I couldn’t even hear my own voice. Once, though, I heard a man’s voice. It sounded close. I don’t know what he said but I yelled back as loud as I could several times until I was almost capsized by a wave. I couldn’t see him at

first, but a little later I saw him thrashing through the really rough waters about ten yards from me and the bush. He was coming from the direction of the piling house. He wasn't big but he had a yellow rope looped around his right arm. He was using a blue oar with his left arm to brace himself against the rough water flowing down from the beach into the Bay. He had a light colored coat and short, dark hair. When He got near the door, I grabbed his hand and pulled him right up to it. In the confusion the oar slipped loose and was swept away. He asked my name and said his was Will. He immediately tied the yellow rope to the door knob, even though it was loose. He tied it so there was about ten feet of rope left over. He looped this around my waist several times. He said the door could break loose from the tree at any time. If that happens, he said, hang onto the door until the knob breaks off, then climb along the rope until you get where you can touch bottom with both feet. He said, when you can touch push yourself with all you have to get clear of the water and high up by the tracks. He showed me how to get the rope off my waist with one tug. He said he'd once won a bet with his brother using the knot around my waist. D. Geist interrupted, "Pete, do you want to take a break from this, to go for a walk?" "Just a Coke, please," said Pete. "What happened next?" asked Lara. "Will told me he had to go back across the rough water to get a piece of cable. He wanted to go up the beach and tie it to the fireplug and walk it back down to where I was. He asked what kind of fish was on my coat. I said a shark. He said he hoped that was the only shark we saw tonight. He worked his way back across the tide water and the rough water toward the piling house. I couldn't see him very well as he got farther away, but I saw him stop a bit short of the piling house and duck his heads

under water looking for the cable. Once I saw him dunk and not come right back up. I didn't see him after that. Maybe, a half hour later, the rough water stream got closer to the tree and it caused the door to break free. The door and I were pulled into the middle of the stream until the rope played out. Then the stream pushed my door into the tidal water just down from the piling house and close to the wake caused by the water flooding around the pilings. Ass will had said, I pulled myself along the rope toward the beach even my hands hurt almost unbearably. After I got even with the steps of the piling house, I could feel the bottom with both feet. Will said staying in the surf would kill me, that I had to get up onto the beach to survive. I pushed on. Once I got to the sand and debris, I crawled until I got to the tracks. That's all I remember. Next thing, Gramps was hugging me. Will said I'd really have a story to tell about this adventure. Did you rescue Will yet?" Lara turned away and moaned.

The Seashore Lines train arrived at Cold Springs station at two fifteen, p.m., on Saturday. It couldn't go any farther because of train dame and high water. This left Bay five miles or so from the St. Mary's by the Sea evacuation center. Bay hailed a taxi. The taxi had to take a roundabout route to St. Mary's because of the closed bridges and washed out roads. Bay arrived at three, p.m. and spoke to some national guard soldiers about traveling directly to South Cape May. They told him he couldn't go there without a pass from CD director Dreymann and they directed Bay to his office. Bay stood in the doorway to the CD office in St. Mary's common room. He filled the doorway almost completely. "I'm Baylor Colebs, my brother is Wyn Colebs. He's missing over in South Cape May, I've only got three hours of

daylight to search for him. I appreciate that your people have searched for him but Wyn and I were Marines. If he's still on land, dead or alive, I can find him. Bay was well over six feet tall and of a powerful build. His face was similar to Wyn's in shape and coloring but there was a hardness to his eyes that couldn't be ignored. "I'm sorry that we haven't found your brother," said Mr. Dreymann. "I need to go there at once to satisfy myself that Wyn isn't being left behind," said Bay. The CD Director already realized that Bay was going over to South Cape May, one way or the other, to search for Wyn. "Bay, where'd you serve?" asked the CD Director. "2nd Marines at Tawara and Tinian, Wyn was with the 1st Marines at Saipan and Peleilu." Mr. Dreymann told Bay he had been with the Marines at Belleau Wood in 1918. "I'll go with you. I haven't been over there myself since last night. Do you have searching experience?" "Yeah, during the invasions and landings. I searched for Japanese soldiers who hid themselves as snipers. The searches didn't have a humanitarian purpose but the experience is similar," said Bay. "Sure, extra eyes are always useful. I'll meet you by your jeep in twenty minutes. I have to talk to Wyn's girlfriend, Lara."

Bay found Lara on the other side of the grounds in an arbor staring out to sea. She was wearing a white sweater and ill-fitting men's trousers. Her figure was more than girlish but athletic looking. Her shoulder length chestnut hair was a bit unkempt and both her hands were bandaged. As he approached her from the back, Bay said "Hi Lara." Instantly, she spun around calling Wyn's name. When she didn't see Wyn, she sagged noticeably. "I'm Bay, Wyn's brother, we spoke on the telephone this morning," said Bay as he grasped her left arm to

steady her. "I'm here to search for Wyn. I'm going over to South Cape May in a few minutes with Mr. Dreymann." "Please wait for me, I want to go too, I must get my coat," said Lara.

"No, Lara, Dreymann and I can move quicker without you. Besides, its not safe over there because of the decaying fish, animals, and birds. You can accomplished more by staying here and helping with recovery efforts," said Bay. "I'm afraid if you do find Wyn or if you don't find him. I'm so sorry that this happened. I can hardly believe that it happened. It's my fault," said Lara. Bay was glad Lara was looking in the distance, that she hadn't seen the pain in his face.

Although Bay had thought about being dead, he hadn't felt it until he her the certainty in Lara's voice. "Wyn wouldn't even have been in South Cape May or our cottage but for me," said Lara. "Don't look at it that way, Lara. You know that Wyn would never do anything he didn't want to do. He was there because he chose to be near you. As for the search, either way we're both strong enough to live with the result," said Bay. Bay walked Lara around to the front of the building to make sure she went inside. Though she used a crutch to spare her right foot, Bay didn't have time to asked about it. As they walked, Lara mentioned Pete Geist and his amazing survival last night in South Cape May. Inside the building Bay got two coffees and some juice for Lara. Bay didn't think it was too useful for Lara to be too alert right now. She looked exhausted. Once she was on a cot, she was asleep quickly. Though Lara's dreams were dark, wet, cold, and guilt-ridden, her body needed sleep nevertheless.

During the roundabout ride to South Cape May Mr. Dreymann asked Bay about himself and about Wyn. Bay said, "I only got a few scratches during the war, but Wyn was

badly injured on Peleilu in hand to hand with a Japanese officer. Wyn killed him but he was slashed and stabbed. I'm studying law in New York and I work for the Governor's redistricting commission and at the Strand Bookstore. Wyn sold and collected books at Leary's Bookstore in Philadelphia. How about you?" said Bay. "Oh, I was a general practice lawyer and now I'm a judge," said the CD Director. "What do you think of this Korea thing, Bay?" "I'm still a reserve officer. I hope I finish my law studies before I'm called up," said Bay.

As they neared the railroad tracks which were the unofficial boundary of South Cape May, two soldiers motioned for them to stop. Bay and Fred Dreyman left the jeep near the soldiers and proceeded on foot because the incredible amount of debris from the tracks to the Bay. Bay saw his uncle's car up the tracks a bit. Luckily he had brought the spare keys. They picked their way down 10th Avenue toward Delaware Bay. Except for the broken roadbed, the entire area consisted of trash, broken pieces of houses, seaweed, and dead fish half-buried in the sand. There was no actual dirt left at all, just sand. While they were there, it was still low tide. Even so, the waters of the Bay reached almost to the intersection of 10th and Mt. Vernon Avenues, easily two blocks closer to the railroad tracks than Friday morning. When an ordinary high tide occurred, it was likely that the water would reach the tracks. No buildings were left. What had been Lara's Birdhouse cottage was off its pilings and on its side toward the Bay. It looked as if it would crumble completely in even a small storm. There was a wide gully next to the 10th Avenue roadbed just across from the remaining pilings which had supported cottage. "I think that this gully was caused by the new branch of Salt Marsh Creek," said Fred. "The sides

of the gully have been smoothed over by the tide and it's collapsing in upon itself. Likely, it will be gone in few days." Fred was on the far side of the gully well to the right of Lara's pilings.

"This must have been about where the boy held onto the tree," said Fred. Fred had told most of Pete Geist's story to Bay on the way over in jeep. Bay found the bent sign pole across from Lara's cottage. The yellow rope was still tied to it with a Wyn's running knot. The rope extended down into the water and was partially buried in the sand. With some effort and by following it into the water, Bay pulled the entire rope up on top the wet sand by Lara's cottage. Just as Pete had reported, there was another similar knot still attached to the detached doorknob, then about ten feet of unknotted rope. This must have been attached to Pete by Wyn. There was no evidence of which knot Wyn had used to secure Pete. "Well, what do you think?" said Fred when he saw Bay handling the end of the yellow rope. "I don't remember any rope bet with Wyn, but he was always challenging me to bets when we were kids. In any case it looks as like Pete won the bet a second time," said Bay. The marines divided South Cape May in half at 10th Avenue and searched for Wyn or anyone else, dead or alive, for several hours. They found no one. Bay untied the yellow rope from the bent sign post, coiled it, and put it in the jeep. "I'll talk to Lara about Wyn," said Bay. He inspected his uncle's car and the jack and some driftwood to spring it from the railroad tracks. Bay drove it back to St. Mary's and parked it out of sight behind some trees.

Bay and the Director returned to St. Mary's at about six p.m. Bay found Lara helping in the food service line. From a distance he saw her talking in an animated way to the

people passing through the line. As they stood in the doorway, Bay said to Mr. Dreymann, “Even though I’m broken-hearted at Wyn’s death, his bravery makes his loss meaningful. I’m not all sure that Lara will see it that way. I hope she can remember Wyn as someone she met but who was borne away by the tides of chance as most acquaintances ultimately are. One almost never learns the fate of fellow passengers on buses, trains, or planes. Or the other guests at a friend’s wedding. Or staff or customers in restaurants, theaters, or bookstores. I find it more efficient to speculate upon the fate of us all rather than that of unnumbered souls we encounter as we pass on our way.” “Bay, Lara either loved Wyn or thought she could. She’s entitled to be devastated by his death and absence from he life. Don’t deny her genuine grief. She’ll likely never forget Wyn though she’ll meet another man and get on with her life. That’s how life goes,” said Judge Dreymann. “We’ll have a dozen fisherman on the water tomorrow looking for bodies. I’ll contact you if we find Wyn or when we stop looking.”

Bay motioned Lara to meet him outside. “You didn’t find him, did you?” Lara said before Bay could say anything. Then, Lara said, “This isn’t fair at all. Wyn was a great guy. He should still be alive and here with me. He was wrong to save that kid. Why didn’t he save himself. I sent him there. If I had been there, he’d saved me and I wouldn’t let him go back for anybody. What I am I going to do, I can’t stop thinking about him. I’ll do anything to keep him in my life. What can I do Bay, what can I do?” “Lara, you can remember Wyn as he was. Take that memory, put it in a special part of your heart, and then go out and live your life fully,” said Bay. He walked Lara around to the ocean side of St. Mary’s by the Sea. There were

benches there and they sat down. While Lara quietly sobbed, Bay recalled the last time he had been with Wyn and how the only thing he would talk about was Lara. Bay mourned the losses, each for the other. Bay knew why Wyn loved this woman. You wanted to do things for her and with her just to see her smile.

On Sunday morning Bay offered to drive Lara to Suburban Station in Philadelphia. Before they set out at noon, Aunt Nancy came by and hugged Lara mightily and assured her that what had happened would be their secret. Lara slept most of the way to Philadelphia. When they spoke it was in somber tones and non-specifically. Bay waited with Lara on the train platform for the 5:41 to West Chester. Just before she boarded, Bay gave her the butterfly book he had found in the backseat. As Lara's train pulled out, Bay watched it go and wondered if it was proper for him to even hope to see Lara again. Her sniffles echoed through the car empty except for her. Lara's habitual nook gave her no comfort.

Epiolgue

Lara and Bay only went back to Cape May once, for the memorial ceremony for the fifteen people lost in the 1950 storm. They used Bay's car but Lara drove most of the way. During the ride down, Bay told Lara stories of he and Wyn growing up. On the ride back, Lara told Bay about her lunches and architectural walks with Wyn. By the time that Lara started at Bay's law school, he had graduated. They only saw each other occasionally and they dated other people. But when they did see each other, they always liked spending time together. Over

time their conversations drifted to their own lives. After Bay finished his clerkship, they saw each other a lot more. One day while they were having lunch, Bay proposed and gave Lara a beautiful ring. Lara accepted without hesitation.

They eventually built a summer house on a bluff in Nantucket well back from the ocean and they went there as much as they could. They had three kids, Ward, Yara, and Nancy. During one summer party at “Bluff House”, a friend who had known Wyn asked if they realized that their kids’ initials spelled his name, W*Y*N. Lara and Bay laughed out loud because all three children were chatterboxes and only Wyn’s stream of facts and stories could ever have kept them quiet.

In November, 2006 Lara’s nephew Charlie invited her to accompany him on a trip to Cape May. Charlie worked for an environmental conservancy group and he needed some soil samples from near the bird sanctuary which had replaced South Cape May. Lara remained in Charlie’s car while he collected the samples. Lara had thought that she wanted to see South Cape May again but, ultimately, she did not. Lara had wanted to get some sense of what had been there that day in 1950 when Wyn and she had been as close as they ever were to be. After they were settled on the ferry to Delaware, Charlie went to them some hot chocolate. As she stood at the rail and looked at the choppy water of Delaware Bay, Lara saw a large, black and white bird standing on the water and drifting toward the ferry. As it came closer she realized that it was standing on a piece of bright blue driftwood. Lara felt the bird was looking directly at her. Just twenty feet from the ferry, the bird spread its

large wings and flew over the ferry toward the ocean. Although the blue board was just at the water's surface, Lara was certain that it had lettering on it, lettering which spelt "D H O U S E". Before she could reach her camera or call it to anyone's attention, the board was sucked under the ferry. It didn't re-surface. When Charlie returned, Lara told him about the blue board. She asked him if it was possible that it was the same sign her uncle had carved, painted, and hung over the door to their "Bird House" in the 1940s. Charlie said that his sampling had to do with sedimentary heavy metals being stirred up in Delaware Bay by commercial dredging. The sign could have been buried since the cottage was destroyed in 1950 and dislodged by the dredging. An elderly birdwatcher whom Lara met while in line for the ferry also saw the large bird standing on the plank. His bird book identified it as a black-browed albatross. He said that when he was in the South Pacific with the Navy during WWII, they had called them gooney birds but that they were not supposed to be this far north. He also said that he had read of one that returned to the wrong rookery in Scotland for many years in a lonely attempt to breed. As he spoke, Lara realized that it was the same day of the week and same day of the month as November 24, 1950. Lara knew there was probably a name or word for that relationship or phenomenon, but she didn't know it. That was the kind of information only Wyn would have had.

Though Lara knew that Wyn thought that our collective future would be but eternal darkness and cold, she chose to believe that his was sunny and cozy among spirits who liked their information sprinkled with wit.

Ed Thompson © 2006

