

PART ONE
THE JANE

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The bronze nameplate outside the psychiatrist's office was discreet: Dr. Jacquelyn Picard.

"A woman?" she said, slightly upset with herself for being surprised, just like her literature students who sometimes backed out of her classroom to make sure they were in the right place, as if college-level teachers had to be men.

Edward opened the door with a slight bow.

"Is she any good?" Elisabeth whispered. The waiting room was small, just four chairs and a coffee table with two news magazines on it.

They sat down next to each other and, with a knowing look, Edward patted Elisabeth's knee. "Had to be," he said. "There were only four women in her class."

Dr. Picard peeked out of the other door in the room, and invited them into her office, which gave Elisabeth the feeling of being ushered into an interview room for the Miss Wisconsin pageant. First impressions were everything, and Dr. Picard's was mixed. Her blue seersucker straight skirt and boxy, collarless jacket over a white silk blouse were very modern in style and rather courageous for a professional woman, although her near lack of make-up seemed a concession to stereotypes of the woman doctor. Her brown hair was in a bouffant in front and curled under just above the shoulder, held in place with spray and probably done once a week at a local salon. The doctor's dab of cherry blush and touch of rosy lipstick gave her a very fuzzy image, not one pageant judges would remember as having its own personality. Elisabeth knew she could handle Dr. Picard.

After Edward's introductions, Dr. Picard settled herself comfortably in an oversized chair and pointed towards a couch, where Edward and Elisabeth shoved aside an array of rose-embroidered pillows and huddled together in the middle.

"What brings you here?" Dr. Picard asked.

Elisabeth studied the spare furnishings of the office—a bookcase with text books and a few *objets d'arte*, southwestern in motif, a bleached white cow skull, a lavender geode, a small brass clock. No personal photographs, no family portraits. How could this woman know anything about what it was like to be a mother? She looked to Edward.

He nodded to her as if she should answer the woman's question first, and she was immediately angry. This was his idea. He was the physician. He'd brought her here. He should at least own up to it.

She was fine.

"Elisabeth?" Dr. Picard asked. "Do you want to go first?"

"No," Elisabeth said, surprised how rude she sounded. "I'm okay. I really am."

Remembering her resolve to escape blame, she immediately flashed Dr. Picard one of her best smiles.

Dr. Picard turned to Edward. He rubbed Elisabeth's back, as if that would pry loose their story.

"You can take your time," Dr. Picard said to them. "Tell me whatever you're comfortable with."

Elisabeth's studied smile didn't waiver, and finally Edward said, "We've been married about two years. We met while I was in medical school, and Elisabeth taught literature at the junior college."

“At Franklin D. Roosevelt Community College,” Elisabeth said, correcting Edward’s answer, which she thought trivialized her accomplishment. Just because Dr. Picard had a medical degree like his didn’t make Picard superior to her. She told herself she could’ve been a doctor—she had the smarts for it—if she’d been encouraged. Her mother had objected to a girl pursuing such a manly career. Truthfully, she hadn’t had the interest.

“Do you have children?” Dr. Picard asked.

Reaching for Elisabeth’s hand, Edward said, “We have a girl, just over six months now. Elisabeth, do you want to tell Dr. Picard about Amanda?”

“Not really, dear,” she said to Edward, her teeth clamped together in a tight smile. “This was your idea, remember?”

Dr. Picard sat as still and calm as anyone Elisabeth had ever seen, her body conveying as much engagement as a stone. Not a twitch or change of position; no suggestion of frustration or annoyance that her patients weren’t cooperating. What a fraud. There wasn’t much reason to tell Dr. Picard about something she could do nothing about. How was this supposed to help Amanda?

Edward sighed. “The short story, Dr. Picard,” he said, glancing at Elisabeth, “is that our child is deformed.”

“An accident?” Dr. Picard asked, although Elisabeth thought she must’ve known better.

“Since birth,” Edward said. “She was born without legs.”

“I see,” Dr. Picard said. “That must be so very difficult for you both.”

“We’re fine,” Elisabeth said, and drilled her eyes into the doctor’s.

“People usually don’t come to see me because everything’s fine, Mrs. Drury,” Dr. Picard said, turning her head ever so slightly towards Edward.

“It’s not my idea to be here,” Elisabeth said, lowering her voice to its lowest, most angry pitch.

“It was my idea,” Edward said, sounding exasperated. He pulled the cuffs of his shirtsleeves up, exposing his pale wrists, thin and delicate. One of the first things Elisabeth had ever noticed about Edward, back when she was in graduate school was how patrician his slender hands were—perfect. Elisabeth sat back on the couch, her arms crossed.

He put his hand on top of hers. “Amanda has phocomelia,” Edward said. “Otherwise presents as a normal infant in every phase of development. My wife suffers major depression.”

Who wouldn’t be depressed, Elisabeth thought. Since when did a person have to see a psychiatrist just because they felt sad? It was entirely normal, given the circumstances.

Edward continued, “Not eating well, not sleeping, not engaging in social and other relationships.”

Eating well? She needed to lose her baby weight, didn’t she? Did he want her to gorge herself, continue eating for two until she was the size of a house? Hadn’t he always said how sexy he found her Miss Racine figure?

“It’s been a bit of a strain on our relationship as husband and wife.”

How dare he! If he’d wanted to have sex, he should’ve said so, made a move, not go whining to a psychiatrist and making her out to be a cold and unappealing bitch. How embarrassing. To be discussing one’s sex life with another person.

“That’s quite a lot to deal with,” Dr. Picard said when Edward finished.

Elisabeth stood up in a sudden burst of energy.

“I think we’re wasting your time, Doctor,” she said. “Come, Edward.”

He didn’t budge.

“Sit down, Elisabeth.” His voice was stern, and her stomach muscles tightened. She felt like a child sitting in the principal’s office with her parents. They had no right to gang up on her.

“You must have a lot of feelings about this situation,” Dr. Picard said. “Do you feel somehow responsible for your baby’s deformity?”

The question stung. “No!” she said emphatically. “Of course not!” She sighed heavily, as if Dr. Picard were incredibly stupid to have suggested such a thing.

“As a doctor, you know these things happen,” Dr. Picard said to Edward, “but sometimes the mother feels guilty, as if it’s her fault.”

“It’s not my fault,” she blurted. “It was Jodie’s idea. Jodie’s.”

Edward turned to her. “Jodie? What idea? What does Jodie have to do with it?”

Elisabeth hung her head, shaking uncontrollably. “All I wanted was a good night’s sleep,” she said.

Edward’s voice was quiet, disbelieving. “What do you mean, honey?”

Elisabeth had been so nauseous she could hardly drive herself to her morning class at FDR junior college, even though it was only ten miles away from her home in the affluent near-western suburbs of Chicago. One of just two women faculty, she felt lucky to have the job, having dropped out of graduate school after her first year, when she met Edward. She was afraid now that if she passed out in front of her class, the dean would yank pregnant women from the lecture hall--the way they did in grade school and high school--or worse, not hire married women at all.

Before she’d gotten pregnant, when her friends had complained about morning sickness, she’d thought they were exaggerating. Many didn’t work and so didn’t have financial resources

of their own; part of her had suspected that they were playing their husbands for ameliorating gifts. Now, kneeling on the cold salmon tiles of her master bathroom floor, she hung her head over the commode and regretted every such misogynist thought. Edward had left for his office an hour ago and was already seeing patients. She spit and drew her terrycloth robe around her.

In the kitchen she steeped a cup of tea and searched in the refrigerator, shoving aside three huge jars of pickles--jokes from friends to congratulate her on her news. She couldn't stand pickles.

Oranges, apples, cheddar cheese, milk, eggs. Her stomach flipped.

Soda crackers. She remembered soda crackers as being her own mother's remedy for upset stomachs when she'd been a child. Her mother hadn't lived to see Elisabeth married or pregnant, sparing Elisabeth more years of being hounded about when she would give up her academic ambitions and do both. When Elisabeth was twenty-five, there'd been a winter car accident, and her mother had been taken instantly. Her mother had never been without an opinion or a piece of advice, requested or not, and they'd often disagreed, but at the moment she missed not having her mother to call.

The phone rang. It was early and she didn't need to be at school for an hour and a half. Jodie's voice greeted her.

"I'm sick," she admitted. She found an unopened package of crackers in the cabinet and tore into it.

"I'm tired," Jodie laughed, "and it's only nine! Welcome to motherhood. So, what have you tried?"

Elisabeth's mouth felt as if she'd been chewing chalk. "It's pretty bad."

"I know it must be if you're admitting it," Jodie said, and Elisabeth puffed slightly. She'd always considered herself just a tad superior—stronger, more independent, better-educated—than her stay-at-home friends. She didn't take to her bed over menstrual cramps, didn't complain or weep or fuss the way some of her friends did. She'd even thought she had a higher threshold of pain.

"I've got something," Jodie said. "I'll be right over."

"I don't need," she started, but Jodie'd already hung up. How many times had she heard Edward on the phone, explaining to a patient why they didn't need an antibiotic, a sleeping pill, or a painkiller?

"Sometimes, Mrs. Smith," he'd say, "a mug of warm milk will work just as well." After a pause, "Let's see if the heating pad helps, and if you don't get some relief, call me back tomorrow and we can talk about your options."

"Can't you just give her something so she'll stop calling here?" Elisabeth would ask, and he'd repeat his belief that most of the time it was better to wait and let the body heal itself rather than risk the unknown side effects of modern pharmaceutical cures. He was so anti-drugs, she wondered why he'd gone to medical school in the first place.

"You're strong," he'd said about her morning woes, and she felt his pride swell in her. "You can do this." She hadn't even bothered to ask him for a pill.

Jodie arrived in Elisabeth's kitchen with John Michael on her hip. Forgetting for the moment her nausea, Elisabeth reached out to hold him on her lap. He was heavier than she'd expected. He smelled like carrots.

"What a big boy," she said.

"He's a work-out," Jodie said.

"I can't wait!" Elisabeth said. "Assuming I live through this." Her stomach roiled, and she handed John Michael back.

Jodie took him with one arm and stretched out the other, handing Elisabeth a business-size envelope with a handful of black-and-white capsules in it. "My cousin in Europe got these when she was pregnant, and sent me her left-overs when I was pregnant with him," she said, shifting John Michael to her shoulder.

Elisabeth sucked in a breath. "Edward doesn't like drugs," she said.

"Edward's not pregnant," Jodie said. "If men got pregnant, they would've solved this morning sickness thing years ago. My cousin swears this works. She only took a couple."

"Did you take it?" Elisabeth asked.

"By the time I got it, I didn't need it anymore," Jodie said. "But I would've. You remember how sick I was."

"Really?" She didn't remember, exactly. She thought she'd listened sympathetically, but now she realized she'd not really heard her friend, had never witnessed it, and probably had misjudged her, just like the others.

"How do you feel now?"

"Not as bad as when I called, but still urpy." She felt a tingling in her mouth and an uneasiness in her stomach. "How many do you take?"

"Just one, I think," Jodie said, her face scrunching in a question.

"It's so sweet of you," Elisabeth said, not wanting to hurt Jodie's feelings by declining her gift. She put the envelope on the kitchen table. "It'll help to have back up, if I need it."

"There's no reason to be a martyr," Jodie said. "Believe me, the whole birth and motherhood thing is tough enough without taking all the help you can get."

Elisabeth stuffed a soda cracker in her mouth and let the crumbs spill playfully down her chin. "We'll see. With any luck, only a few more weeks of this."

She was, in truth, looking forward to motherhood, and even thought that with her superior education, it couldn't possibly be as difficult as Jodie, and even her own mother, made it out to be. You put your children first, organized your time, made lists, cooked ahead, kept careful track of your budget. You made certain "sacrifices" because you loved your children. Jodie hadn't bought a new dress in two years, but said she had nowhere to go, anyway.

Elisabeth's own mother hadn't found such deprivations necessary; Elisabeth couldn't remember a single time when her mother had skipped as much as a beauty parlor appointment for her. She'd been late to Elisabeth's fourth grade piano recital because of a mix-up at the hair salon. But she'd been front and center at her pageants, and had even bought her a dress for the Miss Racine preliminary competition that was worthy of Miss America herself. It was a turquoise, full-skirted tulle and taffeta gown with an elaborate strapless bodice covered in gold and silver beads and sequins and mother-of-pearl leaves which formed vines that flowed around the bodice and down the right side of the skirt. Her mother had been so proud of that dress, that when Miss Waukesha County became Miss Wisconsin in a flouncy pink chiffon, Elisabeth's mother called it hideous long before she remembered to comment on Elisabeth being only second runner-up. The dress had hung in her closet for years, reminding her of her failure to live up to its promise, and then she'd finally put it in a box in the attic, with the fleeting thought that someday her daughter would be delighted to find it and play dress-up.

Her mother had always rejoiced more in her victories and suffered more in her losses than Elisabeth herself, who, at the time, thought that her mother loved her and believed her capable of great things. "They'll think we didn't practice enough," she would say, although

Elisabeth had understood, that only *she* could practice and or perform, while her mother stood by, helpless. So she'd worked hard, hoping her success would prove the love between them. "You are my only daughter," her mother would say. "Make me proud." Her mother rarely said so out loud, and Elisabeth had had to take her affirmation from the fact her mother, a terrible snob, would tell people—randomly, it seemed to Elisabeth—that her daughter was a graduate of "Smith College in Northampton, Massachusetts," as if "Smith" itself would be mundane, if not located in the superior-sounding "-hampton."

After Jodie left, Elisabeth slipped the envelope under her laciest underwear in her bureau drawer. For the next three mornings, she hugged the toilet bowl, put cold washcloths on her forehead, sucked on crackers. Little stayed down, and she felt dizzy. Several times she went to her drawer, fingered the envelope, selected a pill. Once she even took one to the bathroom, where she filled a glass of water and saw herself in the mirror as the pill lay on her tongue. She'd heard Edward's voice, "All drugs have side-effects, Mrs. Smith," and spat it out.

Later that week the dean and someone from the faculty evaluation committee were scheduled to visit her "Intro to American Literature" class. She'd been feeling confident about this, her first review, had even envisioned wowing them, being promoted from assistant to associate professor on the spot. But how could she impress them with a rebellious stomach churning in pain? They'd find her tentative, weak, feminine. They'd think she--representing to them all women professors--couldn't command a classroom. She couldn't afford to take that risk. If the pills in her lingerie drawer would save her, would strike a blow at the stereotypes the male faculty held, well then, why shouldn't she take one? One couldn't hurt. She wouldn't have to tell Edward. He wasn't the person with a job on the line and he wasn't the one vomiting his brains out.

Gingerly, but hopefully, on the following morning, she swallowed the pill. The results were not immediate, but as the morning wore on, she felt better, although she almost always felt a good deal better by late morning. She woke up early on Friday and took another. By the time she got to her ten o'clock class, she was feeling fine. She introduced the dean and the chairman of the English Department to the class, and then did her best to ignore them. It reminded her of the Miss Wisconsin pageant, when the contestants were constantly under the watchful eyes of chaperones and judges and told to "be themselves" and to "act natural." "Act" was the operative word then, and she employed it now. She breezed through the fifty-minute hour, and afterwards Professor Milton of the math department, a member of the committee, stopped to talk to her.

"Nice," he said. "Perhaps I could take you to dinner sometime?"

She took a step back, startled. "Thank you," she said. "They're a good group." In truth, she didn't think much of her students' academic abilities. "Saturday?" the professor pressed.

She realized that perhaps he hadn't meant her teaching was "nice" at all, and she felt her stomach roil in anger. "Thank you," she said firmly. "I'm flattered. But married."

"Oh," he said. "Can't blame a guy for asking."

She brought her hand to her waist and twirled her wedding ring, thinking he should at least have checked out her hand before making such a move. She smiled weakly, indeed blaming him for seeing her not as a professional colleague but as someone to date. She was glad she'd taken the pill. If he were to give her a bad review, she'd know it was only in retaliation for her rejection. She hadn't been sick. She'd done her best.

In fact, she felt so much better that she took the pills the next day and the next. Her symptoms subsided, letting her sleep through the night and sail through her remaining lectures. With her old energy but new "nesting" instincts she decorated their house for their first married

Christmas. She bought a half-dozen women's magazines and calloused her finger tips pushing a needle through popcorn and cranberries. Fretting over drops of glue that squished out from under forms of stars and candy canes, she attached sequins to felt stockings and macaroni to paper plates. She sprayed the pasta gold for wreaths and painted powdered sugar-and-milk icing on cookies shaped like snowflakes. It felt good to feel good again.

"You're awfully chipper this morning," Edward said in appreciation a week before Christmas. "Feeling better?"

"Much," she said.

"I knew you'd outgrow it," he said, and she momentarily froze. She couldn't tell him the morning sickness had brought her to her knees, that she hadn't been able to gut it out. She was grateful the pill had settled her stomach, and thought maybe Edward should have more respect for how drugs could help women feel better during pregnancy. From what she'd heard from her friends, there wasn't a man alive who could survive childbirth. Perhaps, she thought, it was just that suffering that created such a bond between mother and child. It was one thing to be connected physically, invisibly, the baby totally dependent on you; it would be an altogether different thing to expel the child to the world, giving up part of yourself, making it separate, but always irrevocably connected.

"Someone should find a cure," she said.

"Nature's pretty good at taking care of itself," Edward said.

"Yes, of course," she said with a hint of sarcasm. "Then there's always the delivery to look forward to," she laughed, and put a bowl of oatmeal in front of him.

"I'll be with you," he said.

"In the hall!" she teased. "What good will that do me?"

"I'm a doc," he said. "They'll let me scrub in."

He poured some milk on his cereal and she glanced away. She didn't like the look or the texture of mushy food--it was hard to believe that soon she'd be encouraging her baby to swallow the stuff. "I hear it's terrible," she said. "Why would you want to?"

She was surprised when he rested his spoon on the edge of the bowl and looked at her, tears filling his eyes. "Because it's our baby," he said. "I want him to know his daddy right away."

"Him?" she asked.

"Or her," he corrected himself. "Ours."

"But do you really want a boy?" she asked. She assumed he did.

"Don't you really want a girl?" he asked her in response.

They reached for each other's hand at the same time. "Just so it's healthy," they said in unison, mocking the truism.

"So, what's the plan?" he asked, his tone now serious.

"For the day?" she asked. Classes were over and she only had a few papers left to grade.

"I mean, you won't be teaching after he--she--comes, will you?"

"No, of course not," Elisabeth said, although as she said it she realized she'd not thought it through. Most women didn't work, especially when they had young children, and she'd assumed Edward wouldn't want her to.

"Why do you ask?"

"Just checking. A couple of the nurses at the hospital have been talking about it."

"I might work, eventually," she said, "but I think being a mother is pretty much a full time job. Look at Jodie. I don't think she has a minute to herself, let alone time for a career."

He nodded in agreement, finished his cereal and kissed her on the forehead, leaving her to sit a few more moments at the kitchen table, imagining herself with her baby in her arms, singing her lullabies, reading to her from glittery pop-up books, dressing her for Easter in sticky-out petticoats and flowered bonnets. She deliberately ignored the traces of mushy oatmeal congealing on Edward's breakfast bowl.

On Christmas Eve, they sat together on the love seat in front of their first Christmas tree to exchange gifts. She made him go first, and he carefully slit open the tape and folded the wrapping paper on the small box she'd given him.

"Very classy," he said, examining the cordovan leather wallet she'd picked out for him at Brooks Brothers. "I guess I'm not a student anymore." He took his rather beat up imitation leather billfold from his back pocket and started transferring his driver's license and some bills to the new one. She cleared her throat, and he made an exaggerated show of continuing his business with his gift.

"Ahem," she said again. The corners of his lips twitched playfully, and she thought how still young and handsome he looked, despite the stress of caring for all those sick people he saw every day. It must be so reassuring to them, she thought, her see his full head of brown curly hair, brushed to the side like that Senator Kennedy from Massachusetts. Edward had a less rugged good looks: an aquiline nose, a high smooth forehead, trim eyebrows. "Ahem."

"Oh, yes. You. Yes, I did get you something. I just don't remember where I hid it."

She punched him good-naturedly and he pointed to her home-made felt stockings sitting on the hearth, one with the "h" falling off so that it seemed to say "Elisabet." In the toe she found a small powder blue box with a white satin ribbon from one of the best jewelry stores in

the city. She'd wanted a gold charm bracelet, and he'd bought one with a Christmas tree charm, a tennis racket, a book and a round engraved disk, "To Lis Love Ed Xmas 1959."

"Beautiful," she said. He kissed her on the lips, and then reached under her sweater to kiss her stomach. She bent over and kissed the back of his neck, and after a few moments, he lifted her from the couch and they dashed to the bedroom.

Six months later, he gave her another gold disk, with the script "Amanda," and the date, July 14, 1960. She put that one in her lingerie drawer.

Her friends had said it would be bad, but she hadn't expected it to be that bad. At first, in the morning, after Edward had gone to work, she felt a cramp in her abdomen and wasn't sure whether she was in labor or not. She called Jodie, who sounded concerned, but opined that if she had to ask, she might just be having indigestion. At noon, the cramping coming every twenty minutes or so, she called Edward, who said she needn't go to the hospital yet, but he'd cancel his afternoon and be right home. He said she should pack a bag, as if forgetting that her duffel for the hospital had been packed for weeks. Jodie had hosted a small shower, and in addition to baby blankets and mobiles and such, they'd given her a pink satin bed jacket and a matching but impractical lacey negligee.

Edward came home a few hours later--hardly immediately, she thought, except in doctor-time--and brought with him a bouquet of yellow and white daisies and a box of chocolates. He made her some tea, but she couldn't eat or drink. Her contractions came closer together, and lasted longer, and when Edward encouraged her to breathe, in the same calming tone he would use for his own patients, she snapped back that he should mind his own damn breath. Eyebrows raised and lips upturned, he repeated himself in a slightly friendlier tone. When the contractions

started coming seven or eight minutes apart, Edward said they should go to the hospital. She'd read that they should go when her contractions were five minutes apart, or even less, but Edward seemed flustered, and she hoped that if she went to the hospital now, her delivery doctor would take charge of her, and he might give her something for her pain more effective than Edward's instructions to breathe.

Her own doctor, Dr. Cohen, thought she was doing fine. She could stay, but he would come back after dinner. He, too, was reluctant to give her anything that would interfere with the natural process, and Edward continued to stroke her hand, cool her brow with a wet washcloth, and coach her breathing. Every so often he ate one of the chocolates he'd bought for her, and she had to look away.

The timbre of his voice, usually so soothing, irritated her, and made her want to scream even louder. She'd not thought of herself as a screamer, but as the evening wore on and the pain grew deeper and more urgent, she gave into it. Even Edward, swathed in his green surgical gown and facemask, began to sweat, as if he were the one in distress.

She panted, she pushed. She shuddered in pain and pushed some more. Finally, finally, finally, the last push. She heard a little cry, but it was greeted by silence. In awe to the moment, she supposed. She closed her eyes, spent, and took a deep breath, gathering her energy. She reached out her arms for her baby, who she could hear but couldn't see, but Edward squeezed her hand.

"You're so very tired, sweetheart. The nurses will clean her up and bring her to you later." She saw him exchange glances with her physician.

"No, now," she pleaded, and then his words sunk in. "A girl?"

"A beautiful girl," Edward said.

"Let me see her," she whispered, hoarse.

Edward took the infant from the nurse and held her at an angle so Elisabeth could see her face, squished and red.

"Oh!" Elisabeth cried. "Beautiful!"

Edward handed the baby back to the nurse who took her off, while another fiddled with Elisabeth's IV hanging on a pole behind her and before she could insist her eyes drooped and her words were thick.

She woke just before dawn, realized with a start where she was and buzzed furiously for the nurse. Just then Edward strolled in, a bundle in his arms. Fuzzy brown hair, a round baby face.

"Say good morning to mamma," Edward cooed. Gingerly, he sat on the edge of Elisabeth's bed and she sat up, intent on holding her child.

"She's beautiful, he said, "and very healthy." He put the baby in her arms and put his hand on her shoulder. He seemed to her also tired, but she was fixed on her baby's face, peaceful and pink.

"Oh my," Elisabeth sighed. "She's so little." She touched the baby's nose, up-turned and perfect, and counted her tiny fingers. "I love you, Amanda," she whispered. She gazed silently into her daughter's eyes. It was amazing. This life had grown in her womb for nine months, and here she was, her own person, her own life. All the trite phrases about miracles were true. "Let me see your toes," she said, and started to pull away the baby's blanket.

Edward put his hand over Elisabeth's, stopping her. "It's very rare, honey, and it's not life-threatening." He sucked in a deep breath and paused, but not long enough for her to

comprehend that he wanted to tell her something. He took the baby from her, his tone turned clinical. "Her legs were not completely formed."

She stared at him, not sure, his words a blur. Gently, he pulled the blanket away, revealing two red stumps, each not even the length of her hand. No toes. No chubby knees. Stubs, like flippers.

"Nooooo," she cried. "No. No. No."

She stared, horrified, her chest heaving. She gasped for air, as if at the end of a race. She fell back, twisting away from Edward and biting into the pillow to stop the panting. Her vision tunneled and she couldn't feel the bed under her. She pounded her fists against the bed, and the fluid bag rattled on its tree. Her body shook, and her abdomen burned.

"Elisabeth," Edward called, then commanded, "Elisabeth!" She heard him as if he was far far away and she was at the bottom of a deep canyon collapsing around her.

"Sweetheart," Edward started, his voice cracking.

"Not ours," she said. "A mistake." She grunted, and Edward took the baby from her.

"Honey," Edward said. "I know... "

"You don't know. Anything." She groaned. "My baby... "

Edward blew out a long breath and sucked one in. "She's healthy," he began, snuggling the blanket around the baby's stumps.

"No," she said.

"Remember, we said, 'as long as she's healthy.'"

"She's not."

"She is. Heart, lungs, everything's fine. She'll be fine. We'll love her just as she is."

"I can't," she cried.

"Yes, you can," he said, his voice scratchy. "We can." He touched the baby's cheek. "No," she choked. "No."

"You're the best woman I know," he said. "No," she said, tears flooding the pillow. "You have to. We're all she has."

His voice was distant. It sounded like a sentence, a constant punishment, a torture.

How could Edward not see the injustice of it? Her baby. Condemned. What kind of life could the child possibly have? A life of pity. Stares. Rude questions. "What happened to your legs?"

"Please, honey, trust me." He sounded as if he were about to cry. He shuffled around to the other side of the bed, Amanda in his arms, but she turned back the other way. He rocked the baby in his arms. "It's gonna be okay, " he said.

How could it be okay? How was their baby to survive in a world that would be repelled by the very sight of her?

"Please, Elisabeth. It's gonna be okay."
Chapter Continues....