

about it and learn what they had done with themselves over the years and visit with some of the other girls. Maybe even some of the boys. Show them the sprinklings of gray she was getting. See if they'd had any early winter sky settling down on them too. Laugh with them about too little sleep and too much thinking that made you forget things. They were all older, but they could still paint themselves in Luna powder if they wanted, could still walk out through the quiet streets and stand luminous under the stars. She told Lester to look after things, that she would be gone for a few days, maybe even a week. The distant months she had spent in Ottawa danced before her eyes as she drove first east then north up past Lafayette, Monticello, and Rensselaer. She'd recently had new tires put on her truck, and if the old engine complained a little about the unaccustomed speed Zorrie was encouraging it to achieve, the tires hummed and sang as the towns and fields blurred by.

**It began** raining near Demotte, and she discovered she needed new wipers. When she found herself in Valparaiso instead of Merrillville, she knew she had gotten turned around. She got gas, fresh wipers, and directions at a filling station, but either the directions were bad or she hadn't listened closely enough because pretty soon she was at Woodville, then Porter, and instead of passing signs for Chicago, she was seeing signs for Lake Michigan and the Indiana Dunes. She went as far as the road would take her and ended up in a parking lot nestled against high hills of sand. She got out and walked up a trail. The sand made it feel like she was walking through molasses. It even stuck a little to her shoes as if it were as syrupy as it felt. The rain had stopped and left a thick mist behind.

She thought she might as well go as far as Lake Michigan before she got herself steered back in the right direction.

The dunes stretched all around, as far as the mist would let her see. Little wind-harassed trees grew here and there, and the dunes were covered with long grass and did not look like the pictures she had seen in *Life* magazine of their great cousins in the Sahara Desert. Gulls called overhead. There was no one else around. The sand never stopped moving. She bent over and dragged a finger through it. In places it was damp and in others dry. She took up a pinch between her fingers and saw that not only were the grains different colors, they were also different sizes. Some of the bigger grains were rose-colored, a few appeared almost violet, and she wished she had better light and a magnifying glass. She tossed what she was holding into the air. The sand rode out and then down in a wind-feathered arc that pleased her so much she did it again. Standing there, she realized she could smell the lake, had been smelling it for some time. The smell seemed strange and bottomless and gave her a pang in her stomach she couldn't put a name to. She had heard Lake Michigan was very beautiful. Bessie and Gus had taken Harold camping on its shores once. She started to move again, hoping soon to hit water, sand crunching and pillowing underfoot. She felt sure she was getting close when it started to hail. All she could think to do, besides bury herself in the dunes, was head back to the truck. The sound of the small white pellets striking the sand was wonderfully muted, and if they hadn't started to hurt as they hit against her, she might have stopped to more carefully listen.

Once safe inside the cab of her truck, she thought that since it wasn't even midday yet, she would wait it out and take

another try at reaching the lake, but when the hail turned into more rain she put the key in the ignition. The engine started slowly, sounded tired when it did catch, and it coughed twice as she was pulling out of the lot. One of her sweet new tires took a nail before she had a chance to turn west out of Porter. Though she got the tire changed without trouble, she ended up soaked and chilled and wondering what to do next. The simple yellow town dress with a worn lace collar she had tossed in her bag to put on in Ottawa when she was with her old friends wasn't the kind of thing you could wear out on Michigan Avenue, she thought, much less into Marshall Field's. The pang made itself felt again in her stomach. It was for the deep water she had smelled but hadn't glimpsed, she now understood. She didn't get anything like the same feeling when she thought of Janie's L, though she believed she might if she actually took a ride on it. I'll give it a try another day, she thought, though she wasn't sure whether she meant Chicago or the lake. An image of her aunt, making her hold out her hand so it could be struck with a spatula because she'd said she hoped it would be sunny the next day, floated up before her. It had not been sunny the next day. "Hope'll lead you straight into the bushes. Look where hope led me," her aunt had said. The hills of sand had been beautiful, so that was something. There was always something. Even when there wasn't. In her mind's eye she saw again the feathery shape the grains had made as they flew from her fingers, then tried to imagine the shape Harold's smoking plane might have made as it fell through the distant Dutch skies. Condensation had formed on the inside of the truck's windshield, and she traced an arc that was either the sand or Harold or both. The L would roar without wavering over and over again through

the air, she thought, and traced a great loop. But what shape would she make? She traced small ripples, then larger waves, then a spiral, then a well that was all sides and no bottom—like the one where Virgil’s words had gone or the place where Noah’s Opal now lived—but this made her shiver, so she rubbed it out. “Don’t do that, Zorrie Underwood,” she said aloud to herself. She suddenly felt very tired. She ran a hand through all she had drawn, and then put the truck into drive again.

THE FOLLOWING EVENING Ruby called Zorrie up and asked if she was done traipsing around the countryside. A few minutes later she knocked on the door and handed Zorrie a box containing a purple blanket and a jet-black puppy curled up and snoring so lightly that Zorrie thought maybe she was imagining it.

“Johnsons had a litter they were getting rid of, so I had Noah run over there and get you one,” Ruby said.

Zorrie looked at the box, then at Ruby.

“You need company,” Ruby said.

“I never had a dog.”

“Now you do.”

“We always had cats around.”

“Cats are different.”

“How?”

“Just different. There’s nothing spooky about a dog.”

“Well,” said Zorrie.

“It needs a name,” Ruby said.

Zorrie put a hand into the box and brushed her finger against a stomach the size of a large russet potato and tight as