

A lush forest scene with sunlight streaming through tall trees and a river in the background. The image is a vertical composition. In the foreground, several tall, slender tree trunks stand prominently, their bark appearing dark and textured. Sunlight filters through the dense canopy of green leaves and branches, creating a soft, ethereal glow. In the lower right, a river flows with white water rapids, its surface shimmering with light. The overall atmosphere is serene and natural.

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ENTRANCED

an outtake

*(publisher-deleted prologue from *Sufficient Grace*)*

All the fairy tales really happened, you know,
All the fairy tales are true.
All except our own

— Fred Chappell

Eddie's father had foreseen this day. Planned on it for years. Hoped his son would have freedom he himself had let slip away.

"Do it now," his daddy said, standing in Eddie's dirt driveway at 6:00 a.m. His daddy pressed the truck key into the center of Eddie's callused palm. "Do it now, while you can."

The '63 Dodge Adventurer, sea foam green and white with chrome trim, was a birthday gift. His father had bought it new four years before. With the transfer of the key and title, the truck became Eddie's only major possession—unless you counted a deluxe leather tool belt, an ample assortment of carpentry tools, and a coveted Black Hawk socket set.

"Call Boyd's Custom Auto and order a shell for it," his daddy said as he ran his hand along the waxed front fender on the driver's side. "Tell him I'll pay. Then find a good mattress to go in the back."

Twenty-five minutes later Eddie sat in his birthday present under the pump lights at the Texaco. An eight-track tape deck hung low over the hump in the floorboard and the Temptations sang *I Wish It Would Rain*. At 6:30 sharp Bobby Hamby cut the station's inside lights on and flipped the sign to read OPEN. By 6:45 there was a Rand McNally road map in the Dodge's glove compartment. A thick red Magic Marker line already bled a trail across the map from Virginia to

California, then turned back toward Arizona and the Grand Canyon, traversed the Bitterroot Mountains into Montana, dipped and waved randomly back to Maine, from where it connected dots down the eastern seaboard until it cupped the tip of Florida from Key Biscayne to Key West like a bloody hook.

Eddie was born with a mind for structure and mechanism and a heart for the art they sometimes spawned. He could see geometry and physics at work in any situation, any environment, the same way some folks could spot a good horse from a distance or know good soil when it ran through their fingers. He saw the rest of his life as a series of blueprints, the first being this map. The red line was his immediate plan, and the map left room for artistic interpretation. With a mattress and a new set of tires and a few remodeling jobs to put more traveling money in his savings account, Eddie would follow that thick red line across America and back. He would work building houses and fixing cars along the way. He drove toward the bridge and imagined the sun setting fire to the red-brown hues of the Grand Canyon and the deep blue swells of the Pacific Ocean. A slide show of picture postcards carouselled through his mind as he pulled up to the black and white striped barricade that marked the dead end of South Readyville Road. He made a mental note that a hard brake caused the steering wheel to pull to the right.

The iron bridge had been condemned for a year or more. Eddie used to cross the bridge in his mother's Galaxy 500 back when he was sixteen, seventeen, eighteen. "We're crossing the bridge tonight," he and his friends would say, like the generation before. That meant taking some sweet thing through the iron matrix and over the bumpy wooden slats to the overlook—his hands on the wheel in recommended ten and two positions until he safely parked his mother's car, turned off the engine, and killed the headlights.

After the bridge was condemned, Eddie made his ritual rides up South Readyville Road alone. Oftentimes he scaled the barricade, trespassed the two hundred and fifty feet to the center of the iron webbing and meditated on the Smith River as it opened up at the bend to the west and then

where it closed out again at the bend to the east. Eddie felt a coming loss. Maybe it was the scar the new bridge would make across the vista up river, the day ahead when nothing would look the same again in any direction.

But today, on his twenty-first birthday Eddie chose not to walk out to the center of the bridge. Instead he reached in the back of the truck and palmed a tin can of whole-kernel corn in one hand and pressed down on a strand of barbed wire along the roadside with the other. He slid through the fence near the barricade and quickly pulled his rod and reel and tackle under the bottom strand of wire. All this in a fluid motion he had perfected over time. Eddie swished through the timothy and alfalfa to another fence line and repeated his graceful piercing and passing. Paper-like bugs fluttered from the dry grass and made a dusty halo that followed him to the tree line. Once out of the field, the path was worn down to a hard gash of glossy red clay. His curling shock of tow hair lifted from his shoulders as he descended rapidly, his boots tapping quickly down the steep to the mossy levels below. Cool river air encircled him, and he continued on the path he had worn bare over ten years of running and sliding to his best kept secret, a fishing hole guaranteed to spit forth some of the prettiest trout to be had in Duncan County. Eddie was the only one to fish that spot, the only one he knew about, until May 1, 1967—the day he parked his birthday Dodge at the end of the road.

When Eddie jumped the last few feet of the steep, he landed to a surprise. A young woman about his age wearing jeans, a white T-shirt, and red Keds squatted ten feet away in front of a hut made from bent saplings. Her camp was on level ground just above the river's high-water mark. She had a fire going. An iron skillet rested in it. She busily scaled one of her three sleek rainbow trout with the back of a spoon. Her copper hair was twirled into a rope and knotted to stay out of her face. She looked up at Eddie and smiled. It was a smile Eddie fell into like one falls into deep water, and it turned out he stayed lost beneath the surface for years.

The girl first said he was an angel drifting down, alighting on the ground before her. Not a chubby cherub, but a powerful broad-shouldered messenger or warrior, an archangel.

"Who are you?" he said.

"Let's not do that yet," she answered. "You want some fish for breakfast? I've got three one-pounders. I can't begin to eat all this by myself." She seemed intent on her work, unruffled by his intrusion, comfortable on the riverbank with only a hot pan to protect her.

That first day the girl fed him trout and corn cakes she fried in the skillet.

"Where'd you learn to do this?" Eddie asked and licked his fingers clean.

"From someone I knew when I was a kid," she said. "All I know that's of any use, I learned from her."

"And this hut?" Eddie asked, nodding toward the huddle of young trees behind them.

"I call it a butterbean tent."

"Why butterbean?" Eddie laughed at the sound of it and fell back on his elbows full and sleepy.

"It just came to me. The words were just there in my head."

"What if it rains?"

"I'm prepared," she said, and she showed Eddie the plastic tarp under the two blankets just inside the hut door.

The girl told him how she had carefully bent the young trees toward each other and woven their spindly branches together. Young dogwood, oak, red maple, and ash were secured in a dome by morning glory vines and wiry saw briars. Her hands bore the intricate scars of her work.

She had shaped a level dirt bed in the center of the small hood of trees and covered it with moss. It was a comfortable bed, and there was no explanation as to why mosquitoes and other blood-hungry insects kept their distance from her, didn't eat away at her paradise.

She spread an olive drab army blanket across the moss the first night and smoothed her hands along its edges. Later she pulled the second blanket up over them and Eddie fell into a deep sleep.

Eddie didn't know she watched him breathe, saw his lips pop slightly as he exhaled, decided she could live with his plain face, his pale eyes. He didn't feel her finger his yellow-white hair as it curved down onto his shoulder, twirled a piece around her finger. He didn't feel her touch the three pale hairs at the center of his breastbone. He didn't know that he had first appeared heroic to her, but in sleep she thought he looked fragile.

The second day she baked bass in mud and made biscuits over the fire. That night, when they made love under the rustling roof of the butterbean tent, the girl felt the stars watching them from far above the higher canopy. The river made its gentle gurgle and rush. The girl drew Eddie to her and closed her eyes. At that moment, she forgot her history, let each broken piece of her life slide from her as Eddie moved over her body. The husband of ten days slid to the water's edge. The baby drawn from her body too early rippled in its little bloody stream to the river. All of the memories that weighted the girl down eased off her one by one as Eddie brushed against her on the mossy bed. He asked her soft questions in the moonlit night, some that she answered there and some that she saved for answering later, when paradise faded.

During the day they fished and walked the riverbank looking for arrowheads and fossils and picked cress where small tributaries pushed through to the larger faster current. Each night more of the hard and hurtful thoughts she cradled in her heart made their way to the water. With each thrust

Eddie made in earnest, the girl prayed for a new baby, one to replace the child taken from her before its birth. She could feel Eddie—not his body, but the man he would be. She knew he would not let go of her as long as she asked him to hold fast.

On the third day the girl steamed the fish in leaves and fed Eddie by hand, each fleshy mouthful passed to him in an effort at love. Eddie looked around at the world he had dropped into. Like Alice down the rabbit hole, what was once so familiar had become extraordinary. As the girl fed him, a squirrel scampered across a limb and dove from one tree to the next. Eddie instinctively looked to the trees to trace the sound. When he turned away, the girl's smile momentarily faded. By the time he looked back at her, the smile had returned. He missed that moment of revelation, the premonition of the future held in a brief instant, the shadows of her losses hiding behind the light of her beautiful face. He didn't think about the shell for his Dodge or the road map tucked in his glove compartment, the one with the red marker line running from state to state in a big circle and hook. He only thought of her, of the hut she made, the fish she caught and cooked, the way her hair came unknotted in his hands in the dark.

On the fourth day it rained, a slow soaking rain. The lovers cuddled beneath the leafy hut.

"My name is Evelyn Grace Price," she said so quietly he barely heard her.

"Edgar Albert Hollaman," he said.

With that exchange of vows done, they listened to the raindrops splash and sally downstream, heard them rush and eddy and press on further from them and further and further from the fairy-like world she had made.

Eddie's truck remained at the end of South Readyville Road for four days. No one came looking for him because Eddie lived alone in an old house a few miles from the bridge. He was a carpenter, and carpenters seldom showed up when they said. They were always adjusting their own schedules to suit themselves without bothering to tell others about it. Eddie hadn't been a carpenter long enough for anyone to know his occupation wouldn't affect his punctuality. The people of Readyville assumed he had taken up a hammer and a saw and now a carpenter's ways. So no one came looking for Eddie. No one even knew he was lost.