

TheCalifornia Coven
Project

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

EXCERPT

DOUBLE, DOUBLE TOIL AND TROUBLE FIRE BURN AND CAULDRON BUBBLE . . .

As if on cue, the noise came again, much louder.

Melanie dropped to the floor and peered under a coffee table covered with scientific journals. “It’s an aquarium,” she announced loudly, “full of frogs!” Nearby lay a box containing dried insects and a book called *Your Pet Frog*.

“Carol—does your mom do experiments in here?”

Carol made a face. “Don’t be gross,” she complained. “Of course she doesn’t. If she did any at all, she’d do them down at the clinic, where they’ve got all that equipment. There’d be no reason to do them here in her bedroom . . .”

Chapter One

EXHAUSTED, Maggie lay in her bed listening to the soothing whisper of rain against the window.

Through the thin walls she could faintly hear her daughter chattering on the phone. She smiled, picturing Carol lying on the floor of her room, eyes roaming, body squirming, fueled by a fire that never seemed to cool except in the absolute surrender of sleep.

The rain quickened suddenly, and a dull flash of lightning lit the sky. One thousand one, one thousand two . . . She timed the interval without thinking. One thousand seventeen, one thousand eight— A quiet rumbled rolled into her room. Three and a half miles, she calculated, and smiled, realizing what she had done.

This is stupid, she thought. If I'm going to be awake, I might as well get up. Lord knows there's enough work to be done. I should at least read Beckie's proposal. I doubt that I'll get another chance before the meeting.

She decided to get up, then didn't; fatigue and depression overcame her once more.

Suddenly her mother's voice called out. "Maggie? . . ."

Maybe she was calling in her sleep—Ann had started doing that lately.

"Oh, please, Maggie."

Maggie rose quietly from her bed and took a deep breath.

The bedroom door sprung open. "Mom?" Carol stood in the doorway, confused and upset. "Grammar's calling. Can't you hear her?"

Maggie stood and kissed her on the forehead. "I'm going now, Carol, it's okay." She hesitated, then moved past Carol into the hall.

"Mommy?"

Maggie turned back to her daughter. She hadn't been called "Mommy" in a long time. "What, dear?"

"Can't you do anything?"

Maggie stroked her cheek gently. "I can keep loving her, that's all."

"Maggie?" Her mother's voice was very weak.

"Coming, Mother." She kissed Carol quickly, then hurried down the hall and entered her mother's room.

"Maggie, I can't find my pills, Please, could you find them for me? I hurt so much tonight."

She looked down at her mother's emaciated figure trying hard to remember her as she had been, before chemotherapy had claimed her hair and the cancer her body. Maggie paused a moment to regain her composure, then bent and kissed her mother. "Hello, Mother."

Ann looked up through her pain, confused. "Maggie, please—my pills . . ."

"You've already taken them, Mother." She said it almost as a whisper, fighting to treat Ann as her

mother and not just another patient. “You took them at ten.”

“No! I didn’t! You haven’t given them to me yet. Maggie please . . .”

She sat down beside her mother and took her hand in her own lap. “Mother, you did, you took them at ten. You must have slept and forgotten. . . .”

“But Maggie, the pain. I can’t take it. Can’t you give me anything? Something to help me sleep?” She looked pleadingly at her daughter. “I’d rather be dead than keep living with this pain. I don’t even know why they’re keeping me alive anymore.”

Tears in her eyes, Maggie relented. “All right, I’ll be — right back.” She squeezed her mother’s hand, placed it gently on the bed, and hurried from the room.

“Mommy? Is she okay?” Carol stood just outside the door.

Maggie hurried by her, “Yes. Wait a minute, I’ll be back.” In her room she opened her leather bag and searched carefully through it until she found what she wanted. When she emerged into the hall again, Carol was still there.

Carol looked at the syringe in her hand. “Mommy, you’re not going to? . . .”

Maggie looked surprised, then frowned. “No,” she answered, “just Demerol for the pain, and maybe for sleep.” She re-entered her mother’s room.

Her mother saw the syringe and sighed with relief. She turned away as Maggie injected the painkiller, then relaxed perceptibly “Thank you, darling. I don’t know what I’d do without you.” She sat quietly now, waiting for the drug to take effect. For a moment, she relaxed. “It’s either the pain or the drugs now, isn’t it? If only it was possible to get clear, even for a little while, just to put things in order. . . .” Her face seemed to freeze as the drug took effect, and she turned from her daughter, staring straight ahead, numb to the world.

Maggie sat a moment, then glanced at the clock on the bed table—a quarter to twelve. Leaning forward, she kissed her mother’s cheek and then, gathering up the Demerol and syringe, quietly left the room.

“She’ll be okay the rest of the night, Carol. Let’s go downstairs. We haven’t really talked about Gramma since she came home.”

Carol nodded and moved under her mother’s protective arm, Together, they walked down to the kitchen. Silence endured while Carol made tea and her mother half-heartedly straightened up the room. Finally, they sat across from each other at the table.

Maggie smiled sadly at her daughter, “I know it’s hard for you, having to watch Gramma die.”

“Mother!”

Maggie shook her head. “No, darling, you must accept that. Gramma is dying. She came home from the hospital because there’s nothing left that they can do for her.” She turned her head to look out the window at the falling rain.

Carol looked up from her tea, her dark, clear eyes piercing into Maggie’s. “Did she mean it before,

when she said that she'd rather die than have the pain?"

"I don't know," Maggie began. "When you're in that much pain, it's hard to think in terms of long periods of time—in terms of next year, or next month, or often even in terms of tomorrow. It's hard to think about anything except the pain that you're feeling right now, this minute, so you tend to think only in terms of what you would like best for this minute." She paused, aware of how unconvincing she sounded. "Carol, the truth is that I don't know. I just don't know."

"But is the pain just going to go on and on, and get worse and worse?"

"Carol, there'll be times when she's better and times when she's worse."

"But, in general, it's just going to keep getting worse, isn't it, Mom?"

Maggie nodded in agreement. "Yes, I expect it will."

Carol hesitated. "But, then, wouldn't she be better off dead?" She dropped her eyes to the table.

Maggie reached across to touch her daughter's cheek, bringing Carol's eyes back to her own. "I can't answer that any better than you can, Carol. I can't decide for Gramma."

Chapter Two

THE PHONE beside Maggie's bed woke her from a fitful sleep. Groggy, she looked at the clock. 8:15. Well, she thought, it could have been a lot worse. Swinging her feet off the bed, she picked up the phone. "Hi, Lisa, what's up?"

"Morning, Maggie. It's Sally Chandler—she's at home and seems to be doing well. Contractions are about ten minutes apart."

"Sounds good, but it's her second, so I suspect we better get over there right away." Maggie reached over for the bedside terminal and typed in Sally's name. Her records appeared on the screen. "Kathy Perez is their labor aide. Why don't you get in touch with her, and I'll call Sally back."

"Fine Sally's at 868-4476."

Maggie checked the screen. "I've already got it."

"Right."

"Okey-doke. I'll get back to you after talking to Sally."

"Good enough. 'Bye now."

"Good-bye" Maggie hung up the phone and quickly scanned the file—Sally was a week late, and there had been no complications to date. Lisa would be calling the hospital to notify them Sally was in labor, just in case, but it looked like the baby would be born at home. Maggie typed another request, and across the room the printer muttered softly to itself, then spit out a hard copy of Sally's file. Then she flagged the computer records so that new data entered at the clinic would automatically print out at her home.

Picking up the phone again, she dialed Sally's number. By now Maggie was totally awake. Sally answered halfway through the first ring. Maggie smiled—rarely did Sally's phone ring more than once.

Fifteen minutes later, Maggie was on the road, heading north out of Santa Cruz along the coastal highway. Sally lived in Davenport, almost twenty miles up the road. Maggie would rendezvous with Kathy and the ambulance there. If things went as expected, the labor aide would do most of the work, and the ambulance would sit, unused, in front of the house.

The air had cleared overnight, and she could see out to sea as far as the horizon, the morning sunlight bouncing back brilliantly from the crests of the windblown waves. Even the oil rigs on the horizon glistened. She hummed quietly as she drove, somehow calmed and reassured by the steady rhythm of the sea. Finally, she crossed the bridge on the edge of Davenport and slowed for the turn. Up the street, she saw an ambulance parked. Good for Kathy, Maggie thought. She beat me.

Inside, the atmosphere was tense, but almost festive. Sally's husband escorted her in. "She's in transition now, so it shouldn't be long," he said. In the bedroom, everything looked in order. The labor aide smiled, so Maggie turned to Sally.

Smiling, she asked, "How's it going?"

Instinctively, Sally grinned back. "The contractions are coming awfully fast now, it's not like when I had Darryl at all."

"That's because you're doing it this time." Sally's first child had been born in a hospital, and Sally had been heavily drugged.

"Well, just so that—" She stopped in midsentence as a contraction began. Her husband took her hand as she went into a pant-blow breathing pattern. Maggie watched her critically. She was holding together well. Unless she suddenly panicked, it should be an easy delivery.

Halfway through the next contraction Sally's face suddenly froze up. "Oh, God, I want to push—can I push now?"

Maggie hurried to her side. "Not this time, let me check after the contraction. If you're clear, you can start with the next one."

Sally nodded and returned to the pant-blowing. The air was charged with anticipation. "Okay!" Sally announced as the contraction came to an end, and Maggie gently checked the extent of Sally's dilation.

"You're clear!" she announced. "You can start pushing with the next contraction."

Kathy rested her hand on Sally's belly, monitoring the strength of the contractions, checking Sally's pushes. They were beginning a bit early. "Take an extra breath before you start pushing," she suggested.

Sally nodded, waiting for the next contraction to begin. Maggie monitored her progress as she pushed. "It's moving along," she announced. "We've got a half-dollar's worth of head showing."

Sally grunted with delight, then bore down harder.

For twenty minutes, the progress continued. "All right," Maggie warned, "it's crowning, so go easy on the next push." She waited for the contraction to start, her hand on Sally's belly. "Okay, push . . . harder,

harder . . . that's good . . . just a bit more . . .” Suddenly, the infant's head appeared. “Okay, relax, relax, wait for the next one.”

Kathy stood next to Maggie with a large mirror. “Here, take a look, you've got its head out.”

Sally stared at the reflection of her child's head in the mirror. Its eyes were open, and the tiny head slowly turned from side to side, as if taking in all of its new surroundings. Then, abruptly, Sally realized that the next contraction was beginning. One deep breath, let it out, a second, hold it and PUSH.

“Easy!” Maggie shouted. “Not too fast, it's coming really well, not too hard now . . .”

The shoulders moved past their last restraint, and then Sally could feel the child's torso slide out from within her.

“It's a girl!” Maggie announced triumphantly. “You've got yourselves a beautiful daughter!” Still attached by the umbilicus, the child was passed to her mother.

A half-hour later, Maggie was heading for her office at the Santa Cruz Birth Center Sally and child were fine, and the labor aide would stay with them through the morning and most of the afternoon. She was prepared to handle anything that might come up and had Maggie's confidence.

Chapter Three

THE MEDICAL practices Committee of the California Midwives Association met the next Friday evening in San Francisco. Maggie drove up to the city from Santa Cruz with her colleague and political cohort, Beckie McPhee. Ten years Maggie's junior, Beckie had been a member of the Santa Cruz Birth Center in the mid-'70s, when home deliveries were discouraged and delivery of a child by anyone other than an M.D. was a felony. Now, fifteen years later, she was practicing her skills legally. Unlike Maggie, who had been a registered nurse before midwifery was legalized, Beckie's only training was the one-year school all midwives attended.

The drive up Highway 1 along the coastline took well over an hour, but they noticed neither the scenery nor the time as they rehearsed their plans for the meeting one last time. Beckie drove a steady 100 kph, passing cars more casually than Maggie would have. The latest revised estimates promised at least two more years without the Bay Area subway, still not repaired since the mild quake of '84.

“I think that tonight, and in the meeting in two weeks, our best plan is just to stress the medical aspects of it,” Beckie said. “Obviously, the philosophical issue is the more important one, but we don't have enough votes to win that one. As it is, I think the vote's going to be real tight.”

“But the medical issue and the philosophical issue are the same one, Beckie. It's a question of trusting technology implicitly, even when the facts show the technology not only useless, but harmful.”

“Maggie, I agree with you. But we can't get those people to pass a resolution condemning technology. Their faith in it borders on the absolute.”

“I don't want them to condemn technology! I want them to pass a resolution saying that they don't just accept every new device that some company comes up with, unless it's been thoroughly tested and has been shown to be of value.”

“Oh, hell, Maggie, that's a wife-beating question.” Beckie swung into the left-hand lane and zipped

around a slower car. “To get them to pass a resolution like that you have to get them to admit that they do accept technology blindly, and they don’t think they do.”

Maggie frowned, looking out the window at the passing hills.

“In fact,” Beckie continued, “I wouldn’t even push the question of whether the fetal monitors were accepted blindly. And that’s what I’d really like to get you to agree on. It’s not going to help if you pull out your papers from back in the ’70s, showing that fetal monitors tripled the frequency of Caesarian deliveries without having any effect on the infant-mortality rate.”

Maggie tried to object.

“I know what you’re going to say,” Beckie interrupted. “And I agree. I think there was enough information back then to indicate that they shouldn’t have been used unless the delivery was at risk. And I know the frequency of monitor-caused abscesses in the child. But if you try to tell them that, what they’ll hear is your saying that they’ve been using techniques that were shown to be dangerous years ago, and I don’t think you can get them to agree with that. I do think, however, that if we present those studies together with those of Modrono, which came out just this last year, and argue that the early studies suggested a danger and these studies prove it—”

“That then we’ll be lying to them,” Maggie concluded. “It’s such a sleazy way to deal with people.”

Beckie nodded. “I agree. Maggie, it’s sleazy. It’s also known as politics, and I hate it as much as you do. But the thing to keep in mind is that it’s a political victory that we’re after now. Enough political victories, and we’ll have your philosophical victory. But I’m afraid that’s going to be a long time in the coming.”

Maggie’s frown continued. “Some of those women get me so mad—they’re as bad as the obstetricians were. They just can’t let a woman have her child. They have to get in there and do it for her.”

* * *

The meeting was at the home of Amy Belever, a classmate of Maggie at the San Francisco School of Midwifery. Amy lived in the old Haight-Ashbury section of the city, just a few blocks from Golden Gate Park. The neighborhood was a mix of recently renovated three-story flats and curvilinear plastihomes. Amy, who stood a mere five foot one, tended to win arguments by sheer force of will. Fortunately, she was solidly behind Beckie and Maggie.

“There is absolutely nothing wishy-washy about the motion,” she insisted. The meeting was running late over the issue. “The motion states, ‘The Medical Practices Committee proposes that the California Midwives Association recommend that its members refrain from the use of intrauterine fetal monitors, except in circumstances where the member believes that either the mother or child is at risk.’ The only part that could be the least bit unclear is the meaning of ‘at risk.’ Since the resolution doesn’t define it, the midwife would have to use her discretion in deciding whether mother or child were at risk. And if she can’t, for God’s sake, she could look up the indicators in any obstetrics text. Frankly, I don’t think there have been any rational objections presented to the proposal, and if there were, I’d like someone to repeat them for me!” Glaring from one face to another in the room, she thumped into her chair.

Maggie looked around the room silently. We’re arguing just like men—angrily, personally, even violently. Everyone knows that we’re arguing philosophy and not just about the fetal monitor. Beckie was wrong to think that it could be left out. Hesitantly, she raised her hand and was recognized by the chair.

“I think that there’s an issue here that we’ve all been thinking about but hiding in the background. Maybe it would be easier to talk about the fetal-monitor issue if somehow we could talk about the other one separately. So I’d like to suggest—I know it’s getting late—but I’d like to suggest that maybe we take some time here just to discuss our feelings about the use of technologies like the fetal monitor, and others too, like anesthesia and analgesia. Because . . . because I think that the general issue is what all the anger we’re seeing here is about.” She looked around and saw despair in Beckie’s face.

When Maggie turned back to the chair, she was confronted by Susan Glanvil, who stood with an almost terrifyingly smug smile on her face. She was one of the leaders of what Maggie had come to think of as “The Opposition.”

“Well! I must admit I’m surprised that one of you finally had the guts to come out and admit it!”

Maggie felt herself turning red under the unexpectedly violent attack. The woman suddenly turned sharply away from Maggie, dismissing her, and spoke in an almost inaudible voice.

“Because this truly is the issue before us.” She paused, for emphasis, and then continued. “I must confess that when midwifery was legalized, my fellow R.N.s and I had mixed feelings on the proposition. Not that I worried so much about the capability of those women who were obstetrical nurses and who would now become midwives, but rather I worried that women who had not had the opportunity to work with trained obstetricians, who had not worked in good obstetrical wards in hospitals, that those women might not have the training in some of the less common techniques involved in delivering children.” Her voice slowly grew louder. “But not once did I consider the possibility that those women, rather than frantically seeking to gain this necessary expertise, would renounce invaluable techniques, that they would renounce the gains of obstetrics during the last twenty years, that they would rather return to the devastatingly crude nostrums of the past, when midwives earned their bad reputations through their ignorance of medicine and their dabbling in witchcraft!

“But the sponsors of this motion want us to vote that midwifery return to the dismal state it occupied in the 1600s. I think we have no choice but to reject this proposal overwhelmingly.” By the end, her voice was soft again. She turned to Maggie briefly, her face a mixture of pity and hatred, then sat.

There was a shocked silence in the room. Before Maggie fully realized it, Beckie had risen to her feet and begun to speak.

“. . . doesn’t seem reasonable at this late hour. It is, however, two weeks until the general meeting, and I would like to suggest that we table this until next meeting, and that we finish with it then.”

Glanvil leaped back to her feet, ready to continue her attack, but was stopped by the chair.

“Beckie, you’re suggesting that we adjourn. If we do that, we will meet again in two weeks as scheduled, and this issue will still be on the floor when we come back. If you want to so move, you still have the floor. A motion to adjourn is not debatable.”

A wave of relief swept over Maggie. Thank God the chair, in addition to being on her side, knew what she was doing. Glanvil hadn’t had a chance.

In a calm, strong voice, Beckie said, “I so move.”

In another half-minute the meeting was over, much to the relief of most everyone except Susan Glanvil.

* * *

As they left Amy's house, Maggie and Beckie said nothing. The drive out of the city was slow as fog sometimes completely obscured the road. They headed inland to avoid it, following Highway 101 down the western edge of San Francisco Bay .

Finally, as they neared the airport turnoff, Maggie commented, "I guess I messed things up, bringing up the technology issue. I'm sorry."

Beckie shrugged a shoulder and drove on.

"You're mad at me," Maggie said, more as a statement than a question.

"Oh, hell, I don't know if I'm mad at you or not. I think I'm just so damn annoyed with Glanvil that you're getting some of it. But we're going to have to go over it all this week sometime and figure out how to play it from here. I think with a couple weeks' perspective, Glanvil is going to look rather hysterical to people." She drove on for a few minutes in silence. "Anyhow, now you know why I wanted us to stick just to the fetal-monitor question."

"I'm sorry, what did you say?" Maggie had missed the last statement.

Beckie laughed and looked at her watch. It was almost midnight, and they were still an hour from home. "It was nothing. Go back to sleep."

Maggie looked across at Beckie in surprise. "I wasn't sleeping." She paused a moment. "I was thinking about my mother."

"Oh." Beckie gave her a sympathetic smile. "How's she doing?"

Maggie shrugged. "Not well. The pain is almost to the point where she has to be kept heavily drugged to deal with it, and then she's so out of it that she can hardly keep track of where she is." There were tears in her eyes. "Carol's taking it pretty hard, too. She's never seen anyone dying before. She feels guilty, that we're not doing all we can for Mother."

Beckie nodded. "That's the hardest part, I think, facing up to the realization that there's nothing you can do."

"I think that's why I said what I did back at the meeting, about the whole issue of technology, because I suddenly realized very clearly how much of what we do in medical practice is for our consciences rather than for the patient's health and comfort."

Beckie nodded in agreement.

"But then," Maggie continued, "I feel the exact opposite, that the reason I'm not doing more for Mother is because I want to accept that she's dying and have it over with. Then I feel that Carol's right, I should be doing more."

Beckie shrugged. "But if the hospitals can't do any more, what could you hope to do, except make her more comfortable?"

“Oh, I don’t know,” Maggie admitted “but—well, you know we don’t usually hold the opinions of the medical establishment in such high regard. Doesn’t it seem that if we’re so sure that they’re doing a terrible job on childbirth that maybe they’re doing equally poorly in something like cancer treatment?”

“Except,” Beckie argued, “they tend to overtreat patients, rather than undertreat them. That’s certainly our objection regarding childbirth—that they treat a normal, healthy process as a terrible illness. I think that in regard to serious illnesses, like cancer, they do as well as anyone could.”

Maggie didn’t reply; her thoughts had wandered back to her mother and to her own youth.

“Mommy?”

“Yes, Maggie?”

“Tell me about all the Margarets again.”

“Okay, I’ll tell you, but then it’s straight to bed.”

“I promise.”

“Fine. Then you climb up on my lap, and I’ll tell you. There. Okay. A long time ago, before you or I were born, or my mommy, or even my grandma, there lived a woman whose name was Margaret.”

“Just like me?”

“Yes, her name was like yours, but, except for that, she was very different. Because, first of all, she was all grown up, and you’re just a child still, and she lived so long ago that they didn’t have cars, or electric lights.”

“Or books.”

“Well, not many books, And Margaret was like a doctor, and she went around to people who were sick and made them better, and to people who were going to have babies and helped them have the babies.”

“And she had her own baby too, didn’t she?”

“Yes, she did, except her baby was already a big girl, and sometimes she would help her mommy, who was Margaret—”

“What was her daughter’s name?”

“Now that I don’t know, but when she got bigger she had a daughter—”

“And she was called Margaret too, like her grandma.”

“That’s right, and—”

“And then there were more babies, and more babies, and whenever there was a baby and her grandma’s name was Margaret, then she was named Margaret, and then there was me, and I have a Grandma Margaret, and that’s why my name is Margaret, too.”

“Yes, that’s right, and that’s the end of the story, and it’s time for you to go to bed.”

“Mommy?”

“To bed now.”

“When I grow up, I’m going to fix sick people, too.”

“That would be very nice.”

“And if you ever get sick, I’ll take care of you, too.”

“I’d like that.”

“And I’d make you better, too. I promise.”

“That would make me very happy. And do you know what else would make me very happy?”

“What?”

“If you went to bed now with no more fuss.”

Beckie nursed the car up the hills between San Jose and Santa Cruz. Their speed was down to seventy, and the engine of the small car would occasionally protest with a harsh cough. Beckie peered anxiously into the rearview for any sign of smoke; the car was too important to her work for her to risk having it impounded for a pollution violation. Maggie stared out the window at the continuous wall of rock at the road’s edge, as they slowly spiraled along the hills.

She thought about that promise, made so many long years ago, and suddenly felt an overwhelming need to—she didn’t know what—to at least try to do something for her mother. She turned to Beckie, unsure of herself. “Beckie, do you believe in folk remedies?”

“Like what?” Beckie hadn’t been expecting the question; in fact, she had thought Maggie asleep.

Maggie’s confusion spread. “I don’t know. Like people used to use hundreds of years ago.”

“Oh, to an extent, I guess I do. I think medical practitioners, whether they were witch doctors in Africa, or doctors and midwives in England and the U.S., I think they all practiced a kind of empirical medicine, where they just kept mental records of what seemed to work and what didn’t.”

“You don’t think it was just—you know, silly quack things, like patent medicines?”

Beckie thought a minute, absentmindedly falling in line behind a slower car. “I don’t think they all worked all the time, and I suspect that some folk medicines had rather bad side effects, but I know that ergot, belladonna, and digitalis—drugs still used today—were used by witch healers even back in the 1600s, and they were used appropriately. And since 1980 the Chinese have decreased the incidence of angina by using herbal remedies the West refuses to try. In fact Chinese herbalists discovered ephedrine and used it to treat asthma successfully centuries ago.

“Oh, Maggie . . .” She said it sympathetically, realizing what Maggie must be thinking.

“No, listen, Beckie.” Maggie turned full around in her seat to face Beckie, pulling her feet up under her. “Why not? They used to cure warts and things like that all the time, and warts are—well, they’ve got characteristics in common with cancers, and the pharmaceutical houses would never mess with anything less than a pure substance. Look, it really makes sense!”

Beckie let out a long sigh, then, suddenly, pulled out and passed the car in front of her. “Maggie . . .” She didn’t know what to say.

“Well, why not try it?” Maggie demanded.

“Because the search will just cause you endless pain and grief, because in the end it won’t work. Even if there is a one-in-a-million chance, it’s still only one in a million, and you would just be punishing yourself to try something like that on your own mother.”

Maggie smiled gently and turned back to face forward. “In other words, because my peace of mind is more important than my mother’s life?”

She had decided.

Chapter Four

TUESDAY morning brought a cold rain to the Santa Cruz area, and as Maggie came down to breakfast the sky was dark and depressing. Carol sat sleepily in a chair while eggs fried on the stove. Her exhaustion brought a gentle smile to Maggie’s lips.

“How’re you doing, Carol? You look like you could use more sleep.”

“No. I’m okay.” She said it grudgingly, without looking up from the table.

The smile left Maggie’s face as she sat across from her daughter. She sat patiently, waiting for Carol to continue.

When she did look up, there was something in her face that Maggie could not identify. “Gramma was calling for you last night. Didn’t you hear her?”

“No, I didn’t . . . When was it?”

“Around two. I’m not sure exactly when, I was asleep too.” Then, “What difference does it make when?”

Maggie was puzzled. “I don’t know, I’m just confused about why I didn’t wake up, too. Did she just call out once, or—”

“First, just once, but then a couple of minutes later, again, and then—I don’t know how soon, I fell back asleep and then woke up again—then she called twice more.”

“Why didn’t you come get me then?” She still couldn’t identify what was strange in Carol’s manner.

Suddenly, Carol was close to tears. “Because I was afraid to get up!” she shouted without realizing it. “Because what if she was dying, what could you have done? Because even if she wasn’t dying what could you have done? Because”—she began to cry—“because I don’t want her staying here, crying out

to you, needing you, needing something that you can't give her, and taking from you and leaving you so exhausted and depressed, and I don't know what else. Mommy, everything's been so terrible around here since she came, I can't even bring my friends over here anymore . . ." She leapt from the chair and ran to the sink. Strong, warm arms encircled her, calming her with their touch.

"Carol, darling, I'm sorry," Maggie paused, not wanting to make what followed a qualifier of that sorrow "I didn't realize how much you were being hurt by it, too. I guess, I guess that I was so tied up in my own hurt that I couldn't see how you were hurting, too."

"I don't want her here!" It came out as a whisper, almost a hiss, partly a plea and partly a demand.

Maggie hugged her close. "Would you put her out?" she asked. "Send her back to a cancer ward, with her only comfort being that those around her were dying, too?"

Carol shook herself free of her mother's embrace and turned to face her. "But what were you doing for her? You're not even here most of the time, you just leave her by herself. In a hospital at least there would be nurses all the time if she needed them."

Maggie frowned at her. "You do know that it was Gramma who asked to come here?"

"But you said yourself that she wasn't thinking right now. She said that she would rather die than keep having the pain. Well, if you're just going to do whatever she says . . ." She stopped in midsentence, horrified by what she was about to say. Almost hysterical, she threw-herself into her mother's arms. "No, I didn't mean that, Mommy, I didn't!"

"I know, darling," she whispered. "I know you didn't."

"It hurts so much to see her so unhappy, so much in pain."

"I know. Death doesn't always come easily, but I can't let her go through it alone, in isolation, surrounded only by people who don't have the time, or the energy, or the concern to care about her. I guess you're still too young to have any feel for what death is like—but its important to know, to be reminded constantly that there are those who will remember you after you're dead, and who will cherish that memory always in their hearts. And she is my mother."

For a long time, neither of them spoke. Finally, Carol looked up to her mother's tear-streaked face. "I'm sorry, Mommy. I'm sorry." She wiped her face on her mothers shirt. "I just keep thinking that we should be doing something, and then realizing that we can't, and then I feel like—I feel just terrible!"

* * *

After Carol had left for school, Maggie worked silently around the house, spending some time with her mother, cleaning here and there, continuing the endless job of organizing her records and notes. But her conversation with Carol still echoed a challenge in her ears.

Finally, deciding she sat down at her console and summoned the Medocnet menu. Four minutes' Keyword play yielded twenty-seven English-language references, twelve Latin, four Hebrew, and thirteen Chinese—but no texts. Well, Latin, Hebrew, and Classical Chinese would have to wait. The English sources could all be studied at the University. She called theBirthCenter . "Hi, Beckie? This is Maggie. I'm going up toPalo Alto and the city today. If you have to get in touch with me, I'll have my beeper with me, but I don't think anything's likely to Come up."

“Okay, I’ll put a note on the board,” Beckie replied. “Going up to visit friends?”

“Yeah, and to do some work in the libraries.”

“Your computer down again?”

“Old stuff, but Medocnet has given me some good leads.” Anything that had been published since the turn of the century she could retrieve on her computer terminal. But putting books on disks was a slow process, and they had only reached 1900 last year.”

“Okay,” Beckie said, “If I don’t get in touch with you in between I’ll see you the night of the next meeting.” Beckie hung up.

Maggie was surprised and a bit irritated with herself for not telling Beckie the reason for her research. I’m afraid of her reaction, Maggie admitted to herself. I just don’t want to argue with her. She looked in on her mother a last time and headed out to the car.

It was eleven before she finally reached the main research library atStanfordUniversity . Working first through the card catalog, Maggie concentrated on references that led further and further into the past, until she had located material dating to the seventeenth century and earlier: books on faith healers, books on midwives, folk medicine; pamphlets, articles, and on and on. Card catalog numbers covering a sheet of paper, she waved her stack pass at an attendant and descended into the bowels of the library, where the legions of books stood a lonely vigil. At last, sitting on the tiled floor between two rows of bookshelves, Maggie read in the dim light of the lone twenty-watt fluorescent bulb overhead.

The books were very old, the bindings ornate, the pages brittle; some had been written a century before the American Revolution. As Maggie took notes and shuffled from one work to another, she became absorbed into another world. There was a reality to the books that seemed to transport her back to the 1600s, to the time when “physicks” used herbs and not complex chemical compounds produced in huge factories, and when faith seemed a necessary part of the healing process. And she found many descriptions of bizarre mixtures guaranteed to ease the travail of labor, cool a feverish body, help a broken bone to mend, or remove a wart. All these she diligently copied, noting where the various books’ physicks for the same ailment agreed, where they disagreed. Internal references led Maggie to other works. Finally, hunger distracted her and she spared a moment for a quick look at her watch. It read 5:30! She had been working more than six hours without even realizing that lunchtime had passed her by.

Looking over her notes, Maggie decided she had found what she came for. Exhausted but satisfied, she left the library.

The next morning she went about gathering the ingredients—a health-food store for fresh herbs, a drug store for salts and simple chemicals, a butcher shop for fat, and a pet shop for frogs. Back home, she cooked, she brewed, she steeped, working from a conglomeration of notes taken from her researches the day before.

Maggie found herself recalling Ann’s stories about their ancestor, fifteen generations earlier, who had been tried for witchcraft inMassachusetts when it was still a colony. Almost 350 years ago Margaret Jones had also practiced medicine as best she knew how, perhaps even using the same recipes, and Maggie realized she feared the same accusations that had been made against Margaret Jones.

There was, she realized, something absurd about the whole process. She was a trained professional,

generally considered conservative for her hesitance to use drugs newly developed by the pharmaceutical houses, yet she was about to experiment blindly with the uncontrolled pharmacopeia of untrained medical personnel three hundred years dead.

Well, if her experimentation was like her opposing over-treatment during childbirth, then she was probably right, she decided. But just then she was too exhausted to deal with self-scrutiny. She had confidence in her original decision to try folk medicine and her new recipe seemed as good a place as any to start. Judging by its frequent appearance and many variants, the recipe Maggie had found in the Stanford University Library probably represented the culmination of centuries of experience garnered by herbal doctors. She would try it. Later on, perhaps much later, she would sit down and try to figure out the logic that had driven her to it. Suddenly Maggie sat down to gather her thoughts, but was interrupted by the ringing of her mother's bell. Looking at the clock, she saw that it was 12:30. She hadn't even considered her mother's lunch yet. Annoyed with herself, she went to see what she wanted.

In her mother's room a sense of gloom pervaded, despite the fresh flowers and the sunlight streaming through the windows. It's basically an unused room, she realized. It looks too neat and orderly for a room where someone is active. And, of course, it wasn't. "Maggie, I'm starving. Do you have lunch for me?"

Ann seemed more alert than usual, as if the pain had receded temporarily. "I'm sorry, Mom. I've been so busy that I haven't noticed the time. I'll get it right away."

"Well, really, Maggie, I would appreciate it if you could get it for me. There's no way I can get it myself!" Her tone bordered on irritation.

Smiling to herself, Maggie allowed an expression of embarrassment to creep onto her face. "I'll get it right away, Mother." She was delighted by her mother's attitude. Maybe she would be entering a stronger period. Turning, Maggie headed for the kitchen.

And there was her . . . the word *potion* came into her mind, and it surprised her. What should she call it—medicine, drug, *potion*, brew? She smiled at the sudden significance that the decision took in her mind. And how the hell will I administer it? she wondered. From the formulas she was sure it would be unpalatable. She smiled—perhaps she should just serve it to her mother for lunch in a bowl with, maybe, a bottle of catsup to kill the taste?

The bell rang again. "I'm working on it, Mother," she called into the hall, but the ringing continued. Finally, half in irritation, she went to see what her mother wanted. But when she entered the room, she knew what was the matter. Ann's face had a bewildered look crossed with pain. "My pills," she whispered. "I need my pills!" The confusion brought on by the sudden onset of the pain was evident in her voice. There were tears in her eyes, and Maggie wasn't sure if they reflected the intensity of the pain or the shock produced by its sudden appearance. But, in fact, it didn't matter. She turned and crossed to the locked bureau where she kept her mother's medicines and quickly found the painkillers. With trembling hands, her mother took the pills and swallowed them dry.

"Would you like some water, Mother?"

Ann nodded weakly, struggling to sit up. Maggie helped her up and held the glass. With Ann while she drank. Finished, she sank back against the pillows, exhausted by the effort. "I was feeling so much better this morning," she whispered, her voice shaking. "Is it really worthwhile? Dragging it out like this?" But the question was rhetorical, and she sank farther into her bed and pillows, fighting the pain while she waited for the drugs to work. Maggie sat with her until the drugs took effect, then returned to the kitchen.

Maybe this would be the best time to give her the—brew, she thought. It would definitely be less objectionable when she was drugged up, and she would be unlikely to remember it tomorrow, so Maggie could give her several doses. A week, she decided, if it's going to do anything, I should see it in a week. Curious, she took a small spoonful and tasted the brew. She spat it out immediately. God, it was terrible! She thought for a moment and added a package of dried onion soup in the hope that it would cover some of the greasy taste. Finally, she added some grated cheese and christened it onion soup au rotten. Taking a bowl full, which contained what three sources agreed was "a portion," she headed back to her mother's room. By now Ann was so groggy she was only half aware of Maggie's presence.

"Lunch, Mother." Maggie put the bowl down by Ann's bed and maneuvered her into a sitting position. Ann mumbled unintelligibly and tried vainly to help Maggie get her up. Finally, leaning back against the pillows she allowed herself to be spoon-fed.

If the brew bothered Ann, she gave no indication of it. She ate it not with any relish, but, again, not with any objection. When the bowl was finished, Maggie sat quietly by her mother's side, reliving the six months since she had been told by Ann's doctors that her mother had cancer, that it was too late to do much about it, except to relieve the pain while waiting for the end. But the mere enormity of the emotion made its recapture impossible, and somehow in half a year the knowledge had lost much of its strength and now seemed to remain only as a sullen depression that could loom up over her at any moment.

Eventually Maggie realized her mother was asleep. She had no idea how long ago Ann had fallen asleep, but there remained no reason for her to be sitting around. Back in the kitchen, she looked at the big Farberware kettle that contained her brew. That's how I think of it, she realized, my brew. There was enough to last a week. She froze half, and put the rest in the refrigerator. Finally, she took the detergent bottle and sponge to wash what Carol had missed, as usual, of the breakfast dishes.

Over the next week, Maggie made sure that her mother got her daily bowl of brew. When Maggie was working, she would give it to Ann as dinner, otherwise at lunch. If Carol had noticed the strange addition to Ann's diet, she had not mentioned it, and Ann, who only once commented that she was getting tired of the same soup every day, didn't seem to find it particularly objectionable. But it was a hard week for Ann, and more often than not she was too heavily drugged to be aware of what she was eating.

Now and then, Ann would show signs of feeling better, and Maggie would find herself flooded with a mixture of hope and fear over her mother's condition. But by the end of the week, Maggie didn't feel that there were any grounds for hope.

"Grammar's getting worse, isn't she?" Carol brought it up the day after the week of treatment had ended.

"Yes, I guess she is." And only then did Maggie realize that her feeble attempt had failed. Tears welled up in her eyes unexpectedly, as all hope fled, leaving her again with the raw knowledge of Ann's imminent death. Maggie cried.

Chapter Five

IF MAGGIE had felt bad about the failure of her treatment of Ann, she had no time to feel it beyond the momentary breakdown in front of Carol. It had been hard to deal with, because she had not mentioned to Carol anything about the treatment, wanting neither to get her hopes up, nor to have to justify the treatment in the first place. In fact, the only one who had any knowledge about it was Beckie.

And it was with Beckie that she drove up to San Francisco to the Medical Practices Committee meeting.

She had wanted to talk about Ann and her treatment, remembering how Beckie had frowned at the idea when she had first proposed it two weeks earlier. But as seemed to be their policy, they spent the entire time discussing how to deal with their motion that was still before the committee.

They arrived at Amy's house early and helped her set up for the meeting. She was intermediate in age between Maggie and Beckie, and like Susan Glanvil, Amy's background was as an obstetrical nurse. She had received her training at Stanford University Hospital, one of the most prestigious and technologically advanced hospitals on the West Coast. Unlike Glanvil, she clearly sided with Maggie on the issue of the use—or overuse—of complex medical procedures during childbirth. “But Glanvil clearly has two things going for her that we don't, Amy commented while they arranged chairs in her living room. “First of all, she's taking the same attitude that most M.D.s have taken—the more technology the better. And really, it's not just the M.D.s, but basically the whole American ethic—that more is better. You'd think that the last fifteen years would have changed peoples minds, but really they haven't.”

“People are such asses!” Beckie interjected. “How they can keep believing that, in light of how close we are to running out of everything, is beyond my comprehension. And doctors! If their insistence on hospitalization and overmedication for every minor ailment hadn't led to the development of infections they can't clean up or cure, we wouldn't be out here delivering babies at home. With hospital superstaph infections the second greatest cause of infant mortality, you'd think that they'd realize there was something wrong with their philosophy, rather than attacking us for deviation from the line.” She was furious. “But as if the M.D.s weren't bad enough, half the midwives in the area agree with them.”

Maggie objected. “That's really not fair, Beckie. We were trained to believe that we knew nothing compared to M.D.s, and that we should always defer to them. When you get that pounded into you often enough it's bound to have some effect. You really can't be surprised when some of the others get confused and turn to the medical establishment for advice.”

“Oh, hell” Beckie retorted. “I mean Susan Glanvil doesn't surprise me. As far as I'm concerned she's prematurely senile, anyhow—but there are women who have received all of their training since the doctors agreed to give up on hospital deliveries, yet follow the lead of the A.M.A. anyhow. Amy, that's what drives me crazy!”

“Oh, come on now, Beckie.” They had gravitated into the kitchen while Amy prepared a few trays of simple snacks, “You know as well as I do that most of the people who disagree with you just plain disagree with you because they hold a different view, not because the A.M.A. told them to. You're just being silly.”

Their discussion was interrupted by the doorbell. From then until eight o'clock, members kept arriving, being unusually polite, Maggie noticed, under the strain of the issue at hand. In contrast to their normal casual intermingling, the women broke up into groups of three and four, talking quietly among themselves. Maggie could easily identify groups that supported her proposal and groups who opposed it, in addition to groups that, as far as she knew, were uncommitted. She could feel twinges in her stomach that bordered on cramps. She hated playing politics.

“I think we've got it made.” Beckie had come up quietly. “It seems to rest on that group Michelle's in. I can't figure if they're for or against us, but Kathy's among them, and when I talked to her last weeks she was definitely with us.” There was a mischievous look in her eyes.

“You actually like this part of it, don't you?” Maggie asked in honest astonishment.

Beckie looked equally confused. “Of course I do. Glanvil is such an ass, it'll be worth it to me just to see

her get voted down—if she even shows.” She looked around the room. “She isn’t here yet, is she?”

Maggie looked around halfheartedly. “No, I don’t think so.”

“Hell,” Beckie said, “I’m sure she’s planning some sort of grand entrance.” She had a look of disgust that Maggie thought might just contain a trace of jealousy.

“Beckie, you’re not doing this just because you hate Susan are you?”

“What?” Beckie seemed not to have heard. “Oh, of course not! I’m doing it for the same reason you are, to improve the quality of care that we’re giving. But that doesn’t mean that I don’t hate Glanvil and her whole reactionary attitude, or that I don’t get pleasure out of beating her in a fight. They’re different things, that’s all.”

A sudden hush spread over the room as the front door closed loudly. Turning, Maggie saw Susan Glanvil taking off her coat, accompanied by a middle-aged man who looked faintly familiar but clearly had no business at their meeting. She turned back to Beckie to see her smiling.

“Who? . . .”

But Beckie’s face was frozen in a beatific smile. “Somers,” she whispered to Maggie. “I can’t believe it! She brought Somers with her.” She turned to Maggie, victory on her face. “I can’t believe that she’d be so stupid! We’ve won hands down now.”

Maggie looked back at the pair walking across the room toward Amy. Beckie was right, it was Somers. “But he was the main opposition to the approval of midwives in the A.M.A.,” Maggie protested. “Why would Glanvil bring him with her?”

“It’s the carrot-and-the-stick approach to negotiations, and I’m sure that he’s the stick.” Beckie laughed, then shouted across the room, “Amy, it looks like we’re all here, should we get started?”

“What’s Somers doing here?” someone asked. “He’s not staying for the meeting, is he?”

Beckie turned to Maggie and whispered, “That came from the ‘undecided’ bloc, and I suspect that they’ve decided now.” She turned toward the woman who had asked the question. “Why don’t we all sit down and get started. I’m sure Susan has some good reason for bringing Dr. Somers—whether or not he stays can be put up as the first order of business.”

People began to sit down in the seats arranged earlier, and Amy, who was chairing the meeting, took her place up front. “Want to keep it moving,” Beckie whispered to Maggie. “Don’t give Glanvil time to figure out how badly she’s screwed up this time, or time to plan how to weasel out of it.”

Amy was already officially calling the meeting to order. “Before we discuss any of the items that have been assigned to the agenda, including the reading of the minutes of the last meeting, I would like to use the prerogative of the chair to propose that we decide whether Dr. Somers—who I’m sure is familiar to all of you—will be allowed to stay.”

“If I may?” Susan Glanvil was on her feet, trying to get the floor.

“It would seem, Susan, that it’s a little late to ask whether you may, since clearly you already have!” Amy was bordering on fury, but her comment brought chuckles from the audience.

“If I could have a minute, I could explain why he’s here, and I think that you all will appreciate my having brought him.” At first a bit unsure of herself in the face of the group’s animosity, she was slowly regaining her usual airs.

“What I was about to suggest,” Amy replied evenly, “is that I would accept a motion from the floor that Dr. Somers be allowed to stay for a preset length of time. Would you like to make such a motion?”

“Well,” Glanvil replied curtly, “if we have to be so formal about it—”

“Let’s just throw him out!” someone shouted from the back, and a small cheer went up in support of the idea.

“I think,” Amy continued, “that a degree of formality might be more satisfactory to all present. If there are no objections, I will accept such a motion.” She looked around the room a moment, carefully avoiding Glanvil, and then turned directly toward her. “Hearing no objections, I will accept your motion.”

Even Maggie had to admit a bit of pleasure at Glanvil’s discomfiture.

“Thank you,” Glanvil replied. “I would like to move that Dr. Somers be allowed to stay for about fifteen minutes, so that he can make a statement to this organization that I think you will all want to hear. I’ve—”

“A motion has been made,” Amy announced, cutting Glanvil off, “and before there can be any discussion of the motion, I need a second. Do I hear one?” Her request was met by a wall of silence. Amy looked around the room calmly.

“Listen,” Glanvil insisted, “couldn’t I just explain—”

“Not,” insisted Amy, “without a second.”

Casually, Beckie raised her hand, and waved to get Amy’s attention. “Amy, I’ll second the motion, if only to hear why Susan brought this gentleman.”

Amy looked surprised. “You are seconding it? Okay, then. The motion has been made, seconded, and is now open for discussion. Susan?”

“As I’m sure you all know, the main issue before us this evening is a proposal to recommend the banning of fetal monitors in almost all deliveries by midwives in this association.”

“Now wait a minute,” Maggie interrupted, but an icy stare from Glanvil stopped her in midsentence.

“Maggie, I do have the floor,” Glanvil declared. “I would hope you might exhibit at least enough courtesy to let me get more than one sentence out before interrupting. I’m sure you’ll get more than enough time to say what you think when it’s your turn.” She spoke with the condescension of a long-time schoolteacher berating her least favorite pupil.

Turning from Maggie, she continued. “Most of us here see this decision as a policy matter for the Midwives Association, of little relevance or interest to others. But, in fact, this is not so. You must all remember that we are permitted to practice our profession only because the state legislature has approved our doing so, and we retain the right to practice it only so long as such a statute is on the books. The original approval of the legislation legalizing midwifery was granted only after the A.M.A.

voted to support this bill, a decision that we all know was hotly and closely debated within the A.M.A.

“Clearly, anything which might jeopardize this sanctioning by the A.M.A. could also jeopardize the very legislation permitting us to practice. I doubt that this group would want to unknowingly support a policy change for the Midwives Association that might lead to the revocation of that right. It’s clear to me that this renunciation of medical technology is just the sort of issue that could lead to our losing the right to practice, but I thought you might be more forcefully convinced by an individual who has been active in the A.M.A.’s decision to support our right to practice.” She looked around the room, trying to judge the mood of the audience, then she unceremoniously sat down.”

“Beckie’s hand was waving in the air; a nod from Amy gave her the floor. Rising slowly from her chair, she shoved her hands deep into the pockets of her pants, turned to Glanvil, smiled, then turned back toward Amy. “Look,” she began in a calm voice, “I suspect everyone here knows what I personally think about Dr. Somers, and his ‘active’ role in the passage of the Midwifery Bill. But it seems to me that it would be faster, and less acrimonious if we just agree that Dr. Somers can have the floor for, oh, fifteen minutes to have his say, with the understanding that he will be leaving right afterward, Personally, I’m not particularly worried that what he says will unreasonably prejudice the impressionable minds of our membership.” She sat down to a scattering of chuckles and a few cheers.

The atmosphere lightened perceptibly, and no one else sought the floor. After calling for the vote, Amy announced, “The vote is near unanimous. Dr. Somers, you have the floor, for fifteen minutes.”

Somers rose formally and smiled. “Well, I hope I can keep my comments down to less than fifteen minutes, even if I am a doctor.” He was a portly man, in his mid-fifties, with a humorless face and large ears that stuck out prominently from his head. He gave the impression of an old country doctor, complete to three-piece suit and gold watch fob. His near-hysterical opposition to the Midwifery Bill had almost blocked its passage.

“Well, I’m sure that you are all aware that I was opposed to the Midwifery Resolution when it came before the A.M.A. five years ago, although I suspect that most of you are unaware of the reasons for my opposition. It certainly was not, as some have suggested, that I thought women were incapable of giving good medical care—why, we have hundreds of women in the California chapter of the A.M.A. itself, and I’m as happy to have them as anyone else is. Why, some of the best doctors I know are women.”

Unintentionally, a groan escaped from Maggie. Sinking down into her chair, she settled in for a tedious lecture.

For five minutes, Somers droned on about how he had really supported the concept of midwives, and was now one of the Association’s staunchest supporters. Even Glanvil seemed to understand that he was overdoing it. Everyone was calmly waiting for him to get to the big But.

“But, if you want to be treated like doctors, and have the privileges of doctors, then you must accept the responsibility to act like doctors. You must give your patients the best medical care possible, regardless of their means. You must keep abreast of advances in your field, and be prepared to change your style of practice as new and better methods appear. You must never allow yourselves to rest, confident that you know all there is to know, that you are as good as you can be, You must constantly strive to improve your methodology. You must . . .”

Beckie smiled contentedly. If there had been any question of whether Susan Glanvil could stop their proposal, the question was dead. No one, or at least nowhere near half, would be able to support her after Somers’s patronizing display. She almost felt disappointed. It took all the fun out of the fight.

“So in concluding, let me sound a tocsin of warning to you: if you insist on taking stances in opposition to those recognized as good medical practice, if you refuse to give your patients the advantages of medical technology that they have a birthright to, if you drag obstetrical care back into the sad image of the past, you will be stopped dead in your tracks by the true medical establishment, which has so generously given you the extraordinary right to practice medicine without a medical degree. Thank you.” With a half-smile, and a half-bow, he sat down once again. Next to him, Glanvil clapped politely, but she stopped when only two others joined her. She looked around nervously.

Amy turned to Somers. “The chair would like to thank Dr. Somers for his presentation.” Somers smiled sincerely, and Amy returned the smile. “We were worried that you would run overtime, but indeed, you finished with almost two minutes to spare.” She turned from Somers to the rest of the audience, and announced, “We’ll take a two-minute break while Dr. Somers leaves, and then promptly restart the meeting. It might be a long one, so let’s not waste any more time.” She rapped once with the gavel, then sat, staring oft into space, ignoring everyone else.

Maggie turned to Beckie. “That was unbelievable! Why did you want him to talk? If you hadn’t seconded the motion, we wouldn’t have had to listen to that garbage.”

“Yes you would have,” Beckie retorted. “You would have had to take it from Glanvil and her cronies, and it would have taken an hour or an hour and a half. Now there’s almost nothing they can say without alienating everyone even further. Because in fact, Somers did accurately present Glanvil’s position. She’s just not quite as stupid as Somers, and would have presented it more effectively camouflaged. They’re going to have to fall back on the specific merits of the fetal monitors now, and they know they don’t have a chance on those grounds. The evidence against them is just too overwhelming.” She stopped and thought a minute, and then added, “You know, I thought you had really blown it at the last meeting when you brought up the whole philosophical issue of overuse of medication and technology, but I was wrong. It gave Glanvil just enough rope to hang herself. I’m proud of you, it was a brilliant move.”

Maggie made an exasperated frown. “Cut it out. You know that has nothing to do with why I brought the issue up. And now it looks like you’re saying we won’t actually discuss it this week, either. I hope you’re wrong.”

But Beckie was right. What had looked like it might be a long, tempestuous argument dissolved in response to the annoyance over Somers’s presentation, and the obvious threat involved. After less than an hour’s debate the committee recommended by a 3-1 vote that the Midwives Association approve the restriction on the use of intrauterine fetal monitors.

By 10:30 Beckie and Maggie were on the road, heading back to Santa Cruz. Beckie was beaming with delight. “Well, that’s the halfway mark. If we can do it again at the general membership meeting next week, we’ll have it. I wonder if we can get Susan Glanvil to bring her friend back again.” She rubbed her hands together in anticipation of the battle. “Have to do some telephone work this week, see what’s the best tack for exploiting Somers’s statement. Too bad we didn’t know to record it. I’d love to type it up for the membership. It’d drive them crazy.” She chuckled.

Maggie tried to ignore the comment, paying attention to the road, and waiting patiently for the city traffic to thin out as they reached the interstate highway that coursed through the foothills, back toward Santa Cruz.

“Do you think we could invite Somers back ourselves?” Beckie asked.

“Cut it out,” Maggie complained.

Beckie looked surprised. “What’s the matter? I expected you to be delighted with what happened.”

Maggie stared out at the road, urging the car on a little faster, impatient to get out of the city. “I don’t like how we’re acting like men, arguing and fighting and intriguing among ourselves. You act as if the Midwives Association was a tennis tournament or something, and you’re out for trophies. And you’re acting like a bad sport, to boot. I find it hard to reconcile your claim that you’re acting out of political motivation with the way that you go on and on about Glanvil and Somers. It seems to me you’d be happy to switch sides if Glanvil did.”

“Oh, fuck! Sometimes I think you’re an old fuddy-duddy, Maggie.”

“Why? Because I think we should act like civilized people and work things out in a peaceful, supportive atmosphere? Because I don’t like to see midwives using violence against midwives to get their own way? Well, if that’s being a fuddy-duddy, thank you. I prefer it!”

“For crissake, Maggie, you know that’s not what I mean. It’s just that you don’t seem to realize that there are people in the Association, like Glanvil, who just aren’t nice people, and if you insist on being nice to them, they’re going to walk all over you.”

“I do know that, And I realize that we need to act as hard and as nasty as they do. That’s not the issue. The issue is that you seem to enjoy being hard and nasty.”

Beckie kicked angrily at the door of the car. “Oh, I don’t know if I like it or not. Partly it’s that I despise her so much, and this just allows me to vent my spleen a bit, and partly, I think I take delight in it because otherwise it would make me sick.”

Maggie nodded silently. “It’s such a waste to spend so much energy fighting, bargaining, and all, when we seem to ignore putting energy into being close to those we love.” She paused, but then continued. “Like Mom. I feel that I’ve been so tied up in other things that I’ve just ignored her lately, putting her off till later, when there really isn’t going to be a later.” Her voice had sunk to a whisper by the end.

Beckie sat silently, looking out the side window at the rapidly passing foothills. “How has she been this week?”

Maggie drove on without replying, unsure how much to say. Finally, relenting, she told Beckie everything. “And as far as I can tell, it didn’t do anything. I haven’t the foggiest notion what I was expecting, but it didn’t happen.” She glanced at Beckie “Am I going crazy, trying something like that?”

Beckie shook her head. “No. It hurts, being unable to help. Sometime you have to try.”

“But the idea. I mean, digging around for old folk remedies—that was sort of crazy, wasn’t it?” She gave a little laugh, not sure whether it was reasonable or not.

Beckie shrugged. “I don’t know. Maybe. I guess maybe it is kind of crazy trying to resurrect old wives’ tales that died out hundreds of years ago.”

Maggie smiled. Old wives’ tales—midwives. Both names left a bad taste. But midwives were back, the people who had come to the rescue when the hospitals had run rampant with their own queer diseases, infections that made hospitals unsafe for childbirth. Why, until five years ago, had they disappeared so

totally in the U.S. ? They had never really died out in Europe at all. And what was the connection between that and old wives tales? It didn't make total sense, but she realized that she felt reassured. Except, she now remembered, she had failed. Ann was dying as inexorably as ever, and for all her rightness and justifications, Maggie hadn't done any good. Had those cures ever been good for anything? If they had, why didn't they work now? It just didn't make any sense.

By the time they reached Santa Cruz, Maggie was totally exhausted. Not just physically—it was almost midnight, and she rarely stayed up that late—but emotionally as well. She didn't want to go home to Ann and Carol. The suffering was just too much burden. People were never made to live such solitary lives, she thought to herself. And the closeness to death made the isolation so much more painful.

She dropped Beckie off at her house without any further discussion. Unwillingly, but unavoidably, she drove home alone.

Chapter Six

MAGGIE awoke a minute ahead of her alarm clock, and quickly turned it off, then lay back on the pillow. Smiling, she realized she had just lost a bet, and owed Lisa a lunch. She had been sure that Ellsie Gordon's child would come in the middle of the night, and had bet Lisa that the phone would ring before her alarm clock. Actually, she thought, finagling in her mind, the alarm hadn't gone off this morning, so technically . . . She laughed to herself, and sat up. The morning haze was already burning away, so it would in all probability be a beautiful, clear day. For the end of January, that wasn't bad at all. Slowly, almost luxuriously, Maggie laced her fingers together, and stretched her arms out in front of her, palms away, until she could feel it all the way to her head. Then, yawning, she swung around and dropped her feet to the floor, just as the phone rang.

Even after three years, excitement coursed through her body as she realized that another child was on its way. Before the day was out there would be another person whom she had helped bring into the world. She answered the phone on the second ring.

"Hi Lisa, is Ellsie on her way?"

"Yep. The contractions don't seem so close, but they're getting nervous, and wanted to know if you or Kathy could come by."

Maggie grimaced. "Damn! I was afraid that might happen. They live near Ellsie's mother, and she's big on 'Childbirth is a terrible experience.' Do they have any specific complaints?"

"Not seriously. Ellsie said that some of the contractions were hard right from the start, but it wasn't clear if she meant that they were too painful, or that she was afraid that she was getting close to transition. I tried to ask her, but she just sort of said, 'Both.' It looks like plain old fear."

Maggie laughed. "Old for us, Lisa, but not for them." She paused a minute, calculating. "I'm pretty sure that it's Kathy's turn to take early call. Why don't you phone her, okay?"

"Will do. And I suspect that you can take it easy, because I doubt that they'll be close for several hours yet. I'll have Kathy get over there with the ambulance, and she'll call when it's time."

"Yep. Except, make sure that it's Kathy's turn."

"Okay. I'll talk to you later."

“Bye.” Maggie hung up and lay back on the bed, her feet still hanging over the side.

The excitement had drained from her body. God, I hope she doesn't have a hard time, she thought. It was such a delicate line, between maintaining control and losing it. But the difference in the experiences was tremendous. She frowned, remembering the last woman who had become too scared. It had definitely not been a pleasant experience for any of them.

What was it, she wondered, that made the difference in the end? Was it how painful the labor actually was? She doubted that. Too often a woman could be spotted months ahead of time as likely to have trouble with the delivery. But no one had ever really studied it, she was confident, or she would have seen the results. And then she smiled, realizing that it was not the sort of question that the medical profession was traditionally interested in. Besides, it dealt too much with emotions, a subject that obstetrics had classically neglected. Women were just weak and emotional. What more could you want to know about it? Laughing at the idea, she finally roused herself and headed for the shower, making a mental note to check whether anyone was actually doing such a study. She lingered on in the shower, letting the warm needles prick her back, then roll sensuously down to her feet. She gently rocked back and forth, making the needles move up and down. It was hard to remember that a generation ago even this sensuality was tinged by the fear of sexuality. Sex had been evil, and childbirth unbearably painful. Our mothers had been deserted, abandoned by both the medical profession and by religion, to lead schizophrenic lives where their bodies were not to be enjoyed, but censured. No wonder they couldn't deal with childbirth! They had no control at all over how their bodies acted or felt. They could only censure them.

Turning off the hot water, Maggie stood in the freezing shower and slowly counted to ten. Jumping out, she toweled herself dry. Are those still the reasons women have trouble with childbirth? she wondered. The medical profession had dealt with the problem in its characteristic manner, provided symptomatic relief. But in the process they had taken the woman out of the childbirth. It all sounded like an aspirin commercial to her. Instead of helping people deal with their medical problems, doctors always tried to do it by themselves, and the results were often marginal. Childbirth, she was sure, was just one such example.

Dressed now, she headed for the kitchen, peeking into Ann's room to make sure that she was still asleep. Death, she thought, grimly. That was another example of where the medical profession had taken control, so that now people routinely died in sterile hospital wards, often without even family nearby. She was glad that Ann was home with her and Carol, in her old room. Perhaps she would die a week or a month earlier for lack of the sophisticated equipment that would be available up in Palo Alto or San Francisco, but Maggie felt that the extra time wouldn't have been any better for Ann. Ann could never rest comfortably in a hospital. Maggie doubted that anyone really could since superstaph.

“Hi, Mom.” Carol was eating busily at the table, the radio buzzing incoherently in the background.

“You're up early,” Maggie commented.

Carol made a face. “I've got a biology exam first period, and I want to go over some of the stuff.”

Maggie smiled. “Meaning you went over to Susan's last night instead of studying as you should have. I thought you said you didn't have any homework?”

“I didn't! For Pete's sake, I can't even study a little extra without getting complaints.”

Maggie laughed and hugged Carol from behind. “Lecture over. Let me state that in reality I’m totally satisfied with your study habits, and their results, to wit, your rapid acquisition of knowledge, and good grades. So there. Now, how are you today?”

Carol put an arm around her mother without getting up, and squeezed affectionately. “Well, to be honest, a little worried about this test. I went to Susan’s last night, and I probably should have stayed home and studied.”

Maggie shrugged. “As ye sin, so shall ye weep.” Dodging a punch from Carol, she went to the stove. “Nothing for me?”

“Uh uh. When I heard your phone ring I figured you’d be running off without any breakfast. I’m sorry.”

“No problem. I’ll just scramble up a few eggs.”

“What was the phone call, Mom?”

“Oh. That was about Ellsie Gordon. Lisa thinks she’s running a little scared, so Kathy’s going to head right over to see what she can do. Hopefully she can talk her down. The Gordons seemed to be doing okay in the classes, and I had hoped that they would sail right through the delivery without any need for medication. Right now, I’m not so confident.”

Carol looked up from her biology book. “You know, they say here that humans are the only species where childbirth is painful; that in other species it never is. Do you think that’s so?”

Maggie shrugged. “I don’t know. I’m sure they never asked a dog if it hurt.”

“But it says that they never make any noise. So they can’t be in a lot of pain.”

“No, not necessarily. In the wild, giving birth is the most dangerous time in the life of an animal, because they’re so totally helpless. It would be really important that they not make any noises that would give their location away to any predators. You’ll notice that the young don’t make any noise, either.”

“But a lot of times, don’t women make a whole lot of noise? And don’t their babies cry?”

Maggie thought a minute. “I’m really not sure, I mean, what’s natural and what’s not. If you go into it expecting to make lots of noise, I suspect that more than likely you will. But I’ve been to lots of births where the women are really quite quiet. By the way, did you know that cats use the Lamaze method for bearing their young?”

“Mother!”

“No, it’s true. They use pant-breathing while they’re delivering, just as we have women do nowadays. I would assume that it’s for the same reason. They’ve shown that pant-breathing causes the release of endorphins in the brain, chemicals which act like morphine to kill the pain but don’t get out into the rest of the body, so the fetus isn’t affected.”

“But that would mean that the cats do feel pain during labor.”

Maggie thought a minute. “I guess so. Better write a letter to the biology-book publishers.”

“But they never get so scared, like women, do they?”

“No I doubt it. But I really don’t know enough anthropology to be able to say whether or not the way women react in our society today is a product of the society. All I know is that it’s a lot better for everyone if the woman can get through calmly and without medication.”

Carol looked up from her book. “But are you really sure? I mean, in the end, doesn’t it all come out the same, whether the mother is knocked out right at the start, or does it all unmedicated?”

Maggie looked at Carol, surprised.

“Oh, I know,” Carol admitted. “But don’t you think that you’re actually overreacting a bit? Is there really any good reason to think that it’s that much better?”

Maggie answered slowly. “Well, first of all, there are all kinds of studies that show that anesthesia is bad for the child, no matter how it’s administered. But there are also studies that show that the less traumatic the delivery is to the mother, the easier the establishment of infant-mother relationship. And there are many other little studies that show that this little, picky detail is better in an unmedicated birth than in a medicated birth, while I don’t know of anything that suggests that a good medicated birth has any advantages over a good unmedicated one.

“But there’s another whole aspect of it, sort of a philosophical one, that I don’t quite know how to phrase.” She paused to think. “Evolution has given people biological mechanisms to deal with most medical situations. In the end, all physicians do is shift the balance in favor of an individual. Rarely can physicians really cure a disease. You cure it, doctors’ drugs just make it easier. If you didn’t have an immune system to attack infections, all the antibiotics in the world couldn’t keep you alive very long. And doctors can set broken bones, but that’s just to help keep them in place while your body patches them back together.

“I think that the more doctors can leave you on your own, the better your own systems can work. I think that women are designed to bear children, and do it well. But I think the quality of that delivery depends on the avoidance of too much interference. Granted, sometimes there are going to be problems, and I think it’s important to have medical facilities available. But I think that the whole mind set of the woman, her emotional state, is important to the process, and that when the medical profession ignores that element, or removes it by anesthetizing the mother, it hinders the delivery in all sorts of ways.”

She felt unsatisfied with her explanation. “Look, I’m making this all complicated. All I’m saying is that doctors should be working with their patients, and not on their patients. That’s all. And that it threatens the whole process when doctors try to take the healing process, or the delivery process, out of the hands of the patients.”

Carol looked lost. “Oh.” She looked down at her book. “Well, if I’m going to study this stuff, this is the last chance I get.” She turned back to the book, and started leafing through the pages. Then, looking back up, she asked, “That’s what you’ve been fighting about, isn’t it?”

It was Maggie’s turn to look lost. “What do you mean?”

“At the Midwives Association. All the fights about using fetal monitors, and all the things that Glanvil woman was saying—that’s just a fight about who gets to deliver the baby, the mother or the doctor.” Then, unsure of Maggie’s reaction, she backpedaled. “I guess it’s more complicated than that.”

“No!” Maggie exclaimed. “You’re absolutely right. That’s exactly what we were fighting about. I didn’t realize you were paying such close attention to our arguments.”

Carol looked proud and embarrassed at once. “Well, now I really do have to study,” she muttered, and turned back to her book.

Transferring her eggs to a plate, Maggie moved to the table and sat down across from Carol. For a minute, she just stared silently at her daughter, thinking over their conversation. It really seemed to her that medicine had, somewhere in the last few hundred years, shifted from a team effort, where doctor and patient worked together, almost to an adversary relationship, where the patient and doctor were as likely as not to work at cross-purposes. I wonder, she thought, whether sometimes that even blocks totally the ability of the two to work a cure.

Carol looked up from her book. “You know you hate eggs when they get cold,” she reminded Maggie.

Nodding, she turned her attention to her breakfast. Damn, she thought, they’re cold.

* * *

It was almost midnight when Maggie returned home, exhausted. Carol was reading in the living room.

“Hi, darling, how was the exam?”

Carol crossed the room to give Maggie a hug. “Hi. It was stupid. I think I did all right, but there was a stupid fill-in-the-blank section where she wanted to know all sorts of stupid picayune stuff, and a whole bunch of it I didn’t have any idea about.”

“Doesn’t sound so great.”

Carol shrugged. “It was only twenty percent of the test, and I knew at least half of them. But they were stupid things, like list four poisonous snakes that live in the U.S. ”

Maggie looked surprised. “You couldn’t think of them? I mean, even without taking a course you should at least know about rattlers, and water moccasins, and—”

“No, Mom, not common names. You had to know their Latin names, like *Crotalus*, that’s the name for rattlesnakes.”

“Oh.” Maggie made a face. “You mean taxonomy. Well, if it makes you feel any better, I couldn’t ever remember that stuff, either.”

“Well, she always grades on a curve, so I don’t think I’ll have any trouble.”

Maggie sat down in a rocking chair, and picked up a paper. “How was Gramma this evening?”

“Pretty good. She didn’t take any pain pills during the afternoon, and finally took one around seven. I think she was hoping to wait until you got home. After that she was pretty dopey.”

“I wish I had been able to get home earlier. We get so little time together when she’s feeling well.”

“Well, I don’t know that I’d say she was feeling well. But better than usual, I guess.” After a moment

she turned to Maggie, and asked, “Mom, is the reason that you want Gramma to be at home instead of at the hospital because you think she’s more likely to recover?”

“No—what makes you ask that?”

“Well, I was just thinking about what you said this morning, about how sometimes, maybe, people can’t get well as fast, or at all, unless they sort of get to help, and I was thinking that maybe you thought she’d have a better chance to, well, fight along with the medicine and all, if she was at home.” Carol looked down at the floor. “I guess it was a dumb idea, but I just thought that maybe . . .” She looked up at Maggie, tears gleaming in the corners of her eyes.

Maggie got up and walked over to her daughter. Sitting down on the arm of her chair, she gave Carol a hug. “I don’t know, darling, that wasn’t in my mind when I brought her home. I just felt that, well, she’d rather be here at the end than in a hospital.”

Carol’s eyes were pleading. “But don’t you think that maybe, if she could help, like you said, that then maybe the medicines would work better?”

“No—not really. You see, those drugs were all evolved through elaborate tests, and clinical studies done in hospitals, so if anything, they’re probably optimized for your standard hospital setting.”

They sat quietly for a few minutes, lost in their private thoughts. Finally, Maggie got up and looked at her watch.

It was almost one. “Hey, it’s one, and I’m going to bed. You probably should, too.”

Carol put down her book. “I know. Besides, it’s a dumb book.” Getting up out of the chair, she gave Maggie a kiss and headed down to her room.

Maggie spent the next few minutes straightening up the kitchen, more out of nervous exhaustion than any real need, and then headed gratefully for her own room. It had been a hard day, and poor Ellsie Gordon had fought herself the whole way through the labor and delivery. In the end it had been a heavily medicated delivery, and Maggie had been forced to resort to forceps. At least she could look forward to a night of uninterrupted sleep.

* * *

She was wandering lost in the halls of a huge hospital, searching frantically for her mother. The halls were immense, resembling more a long ballroom than normal hospital corridors. On both sides, doors of heavy carved wood were set one beside another in ornate frames. Above each door was a plaque on which was drawn some ancient rune. She was looking for B416.

Down the hall, a door opened, and a short, disfigured man came out. She immediately took him for a doctor. But as they closed the distance between them, she realized that, in fact, he was Death. As they passed, he smiled, and pointed back to the room he had just left. Hurrying on, she stopped outside the open door. Over the frame the number B416 was etched into a bronze plate.

Hesitating, she peered into the room. It looked like a typical hospital room. At a card table, Ann and Carol were sitting, quietly playing dominos. “It’s so boring,” Ann was explaining to Carol, “to try to get better. They won’t let you do a single thing to help. Boredom’s bad enough with these modern medicines, but the old ones don’t even have a chance unless I get to help.”

Carol nodded sympathetically. “Well, that’s Mother for you. Always telling everyone what to do. Why, she’s even trying to force all the midwives to do things her way. But I tell you what,” leaning closer to Ann, she whispered in a just audible voice, “you tell her to get off my back about my homework, and I’ll talk to her about letting you help.”

Ann smiled and then shook hands with Carol. “It’s a deal.”

Suddenly, Maggie realized that she was not alone in the doorway. Turning, she saw the disfigured doctor laughing to himself. “Too late,” he smiled, and drew a large chalk X on the door. Laughing again, he headed back into the hall. Terrified, Maggie turned back to the table, but it, Ann, and Carol, were gone. In their place was a large wicker basket full of flowers.

* * *

Maggie sat up suddenly, the nightmare still with her. The house was dark, and her alarm read three o’clock. Still bearing the face of the disfigured doctor in her mind, she shook herself, and turned on the light. The dream had an unpleasantly real air about it. Maggie got up and walked out into the hall. She could hear light snoring from Ann’s room, and she quietly opened the door to peek in.

The finger of light from Maggie’s room crossed the foot of Ann’s bed, casting only the dimmest ray to her face. For an instant, she feared that Ann was dead, but in the next moment she heard another breath sigh out. The dream returned suddenly, but this time Maggie felt that there was something in it that she was not supposed to forget. She stopped and frowned, trying to recall the details of the dream, but as she did, it drifted from her memory.

She closed the door, went back to her room, turned off the light, and got in bed. Most of her apprehension had disappeared with the details of the dream. I wonder what it was I was supposed to remember, she thought, and, searching for it, fell quickly back to sleep.

* * *

But in the morning, the dream was still bothering Maggie. She could remember the vague outlines of it, the rooms, the faces, the emotions, but not the dialogue, except for the comment, “Too late.” She was convinced that there was something important for her to remember. Creeping senility, she decided, worrying about my dreams like this. Throwing off the idea, she began her day.

As she headed for the clinic, the sky was overcast and dreary, promising a day of intermittent drizzle. She met Kathy in the parking lot, and as they walked into the clinic they bashed over the events surrounding Ellsie Gordon’s delivery. “I think that by the time I arrived, it was already too late,” Kathy explained. “In fact, I suspect that we lost the battle a month ago.”

Maggie nodded in agreement. “But do you think there’s anything we can do once women like Ellsie go into labor, and it becomes clear that they are terrified of giving birth? Some way to break them out of it at that point?”

“I don’t know,” Kathy replied, “I think it’s more than just a frame of mind. The whole purpose of the Lamaze process is not just to make a woman feel more calm while in labor, but to relax her body physically. Lamaze is not just a psychological process, it’s a complicated psychophysical interplay, and if it’s not working properly, then I don’t think the birth process works properly. To be honest, I don’t think the woman has a chance of delivering easily unless she gives her body a chance to help.”

The phrase rang in Maggie's mind, and for a minute she even forgot that she was with Kathy. It was from her dream. Somehow, mysteriously, the entire dream flashed back before her again, and this time she was hearing their conversation clearly.

Ann was complaining to Carol: "Boredom's bad enough with these modern medicines, but the old ones don't even have a chance unless I get to help."

"That's it!" Maggie said suddenly.

"That's what?" Kathy asked.

Maggie suddenly became aware of where she was. "Oh, something I was trying to remember." Without further explanation, she ran ahead to her office. "Write it down," she told herself. At her desk, she typed the snippet of dialogue into the computer terminal. "Boredom's bad enough with these modern medicines, but the old ones don't even have a chance unless I get to help." And then, in capital letters, she wrote "TELL MOM." Then, she added. "MAKE HER HELP." She just looked at the paper for a minute, and then wrote "RITUAL" and underlined it twice. She read it all over again, convincing herself that it would make sense even if the dream were forgotten completely. Then, just to be sure, she wrote, "Ancient cures evolved to work as applied, and that wasn't in, a sterile hospital under rigid hospital procedures" Rereading what she had just typed, she was finally satisfied. She typed in a routine to be played back to her first thing next morning, then leaned back in her chair and closed her eyes. A tremble ran through her body, half exhaustion and half elation. She forced herself to breathe slowly, demanded that her body relax, and tried to blank her mind.

She would think that she was totally relaxed, and then realize that a corner of her mind was replaying the dream again. She tried again, and found a corner rehearsing what to say to Ann. She tried again, and found herself rearranging her schedule so that she could go out to buy the ingredients for her brew. She tried again, and found herself faced with Ann's renewed hope, and her own fears of failure.

Kathy stuck her head into Maggie's office. "You okay?"

Maggie smiled and nodded. "Yep. Just great." Getting up from her desk, she said, "Let's get going. We've got a busy day ahead of us."

Chapter Seven

"MOM?" Maggie looked intently into Ann's face, waiting for her to awaken. Crossing to the windows, she opened the curtains to let in the morning light. Carol had just left for school, and Maggie was determined to begin right away. Coming back to the chair, she sat at the head of Ann's bed. Ann seemed sound asleep. "Mom? Mom, it's morning. Wake up."

Ann opened her eyes. She wore the slightly bewildered expression that indicated the pain was bad. "Why are you waking me?"

Maggie took a breath, and steeled herself for what she needed to do. "I've got some new medicine for you, Mom, and I want to start using it right away." She tried to look encouraging.

Ann turned and looked at the window. "So what? My sleep is the only nice part of my day. There's nothing your medicine can do that would be better than a little extra sleep." She turned back to Maggie. "Why did you wake me up?"

“Mom, this medicine is different. I think . . .” She paused, just a fraction of a second, understanding the importance of sounding convincing, but also realizing the odds. “. . . that this might really work, might really be able to help you, to cure the cancer.”

Ann looked confused. “What . . . what do you mean?”

“It’s a new medicine—one they haven’t used before—and I think it really can work.”

The confusion remained in Ann’s face. “You mean cure it?”

Maggie nodded excitedly. “Yes, Mom, I mean cure it. Really make you better.”

Ann tried to raise herself to a sitting position, finally accepting Maggie’s help. “This damn pain,” she complained, “it makes it so hard to understand you. . . . Tell me again, Maggie,” she said, her eyes becoming just a bit unfocused, “what are you talking about?”

Again, and yet again, Maggie patiently explained the situation to Ann—a new drug, never used extensively, but with great hope, a hope that Maggie believed in, and that it was important for Ann to believe in, too. Slowly, Maggie could see the realization building in Ann.

“Stop.” Ann looked pleadingly up to Maggie, “Please, stop.” She turned and looked out the window. “I can’t continue hoping against hope and failing every time.” She paused. “Margaret, I know . . . I know that I’m dying. It’s not an easy thing for me to know and come to any sort of terms with, but I feel that I have. Please don’t start me hoping again, because if you do, then all that sorting out is lost, and I have to start all over again. And it hurts, Maggie. It hurts more than anything else I’ve ever had to do. I’ll be happy to take the medicine. I’ve gotten to the point where I can’t tell one from the next. But don’t make me start to hope again. I just can’t take it.”

Maggie sat quietly for a moment, wondering whether her experiment was fair to Ann. Did she actually believe in the potion she was going to give Ann? Why should she have faith in it? Suddenly, she was unsure.

“Maggie?”

“It’s okay, Mom, I was just thinking.” She had no time to decide. “You see, it’s important for you to believe in it. No one knows why, but it’s true. Somehow believing in it helps the process, helps the medicine to work.”

Ann looked at Maggie quizzically, but then seemed to accept her statement. “Hmmp! So they won’t let me be a helpless little old lady anymore?” She paused. “Looks a lot like that disgusting onion soup.” She paused again. “Okay,” Ann said, “let’s do it, Margaret, you and me together.” She reached for the spoon.

* * *

Maggie stayed home that Friday morning, and she and Ann talked about many things, only occasionally returning to the subject of the treatment. She had taken the medicine, but if it had any effect, it was not noticeable, and the pain remained.

Saturday, the treatment continued, and Maggie spent most of the day with Ann, encouraging her as best

she could. But the pain was worse than usual, and Ann refused any painkillers. The result was hard on Maggie. Never before had she realized the strength of the woman whom she had taken for granted all her life. Sunday was the same, and doubts crowded Maggie's thoughts.

On Monday Ann's condition was better, and on Tuesday, a little better still. But not that much, and not any better than it had been from time to time in the past. Ann and Maggie had trouble talking about the treatment because, strangely, now that they were starting to believe it, they began to fear its failure.

But on Wednesday the pain had definitely lessened, more, Ann insisted, than any time that she could remember since she left the hospital, Thursday, the improvement continued, and Ann wanted to get up and walk around. That evening, Maggie relented, and walked Ann to the bathroom, a luxury the old woman had not enjoyed in months. But she was still weak, and the short walk left her exhausted. Yet she insisted that it had not been accompanied by pain. They talked late that night, almost in a whisper, lest they break their luck.

Friday morning made one week. " 'Morning, Mom." Maggie stuck her head into Ann's room. "How you feeling?"

Ann smiled up at Maggie. "Frustrated, I'm pleased to say." She looked disapprovingly at the shape of her body underneath the coven. "I'm so weak from never doing anything, that I'm absolutely helpless, even though I feel fine." She raised her hands and looked at them. "At least I'm getting some strength back in these. This weekend you'll have to get me yarn so I can at least do some knitting."

"Promise," Margaret agreed. She sat down and held Ann's thin hands. "Recovery's going to be slow, you know. You've lost a lot of weight, and it's going to take time to get you back into good shape."

Ann turned her hands over to look at the backs. "I'm not so young anymore. I know. But if the cancer's gone, I'm not too old to recover. . . . Maggie?"

"Yes?"

"Do you think it is gone?"

Maggie paused. "I guess I don't know."

"Why haven't the doctors wanted to see me?"

"What do you mean?"

Ann looked irritated. "I mean, if they're trying this new drug out on me, and if it seems to be working, I'd think they'd have me back in the hospital for tests, and Lord knows what else. But you haven't even mentioned them. So what's going on?"

Maggie didn't know what to say. "Why, I don't know, Mom. Maybe they're testing it on a lot of people, and can't see them all right away. . . ."

Ann slapped the palms of her hands hard on the bed beside her, interrupting Maggie. "Margaret, I'm your mother, not your daughter! You've been lying ineffectively for forty years now, and I find it rather irritating. So would you please be so kind as to tell your sick, old mother what in the name of God is going on?" She sank back into her pillows, exhausted by her outrage. But her eyes remained fixed tightly on Maggie's.

Maggie hesitated, unsure how to respond. Lying was useless, but she was terrified that if she lost Ann's faith, she might lose the cure. Finally, she raised her eyes back to Ann's. In a calm, soft voice, she said, "The reason the doctors aren't showing any interest in you is because they don't know anything about it. I didn't get the medicine from them." She felt no guilt, no embarrassment, at her admission.

Ann's eyes narrowed. "A quack cure? You're telling me that you gave me something like that Laetrile that created a scandal twenty years ago? You bought me some quack cure and it worked?" Her eyes were wide now. "Is that what you're telling me?"

Maggie smiled. "No, Mom, I didn't buy it for you. I made it myself!" She almost bounced with delight. Quietly she poured out the whole story from her first ideas, to her realization that the patient was important to the process. As she finished, she could read the delight in her mother's expression.

Ann nodded her head slowly. "Well, I'll be." She looked at her daughter in amazement. "I can hardly believe it. Margaret. Margaret named after that Margaret so long ago. You've earned that name."

Chapter Eight

THAT afternoon, Maggie drove to Palo Alto, to see Bill Krueger, Ann's physician at Stanford Hospital. Before Ann became his patient, Bill and Maggie had known each other slightly in a professional context, and had come to respect one another's abilities.

"Hi, Maggie, good to see you again." He walked from behind his desk to shake her hand warmly, and sat down with her in a pair of Breuer chairs set alongside his desk. In his late forties. Bill's slight tendency to heaviness was emphasized by his height of five foot six. His face radiated gentleness, part of a carefully cultivated bedside manner.

Maggie sat comfortably in her chair, trying to reflect Krueger's relaxed mood. "It's nice to see you, too, Bill. How go things?"

He smiled. "Oh, about average, which means I have twice as much to do as I'd like." His face turned more serious, "How's Ann?"

Maggie paused, still unsure about how much to say. "Better." She nodded her head in agreement with her comment, and then continued. "In fact, remarkably so. Her pain is pretty much gone—she's stopped taking any analgesics—and she's put on a bit of weight in the last week, just a couple of pounds. I walk her to the bathroom sometimes, but she's still so weak . . ." She stopped, suddenly realizing how strange it must sound.

Krueger sat silently in his chair, but the casual appearance was gone; curiosity and confusion were evident in his face. But he said nothing.

Finally, Maggie looked down at her lap, confused. She could bear Krueger breathe as he waited for her to continue. Finally, looking up, almost shyly, she said, "I think she's recovering." She forced herself to keep her eyes on Krueger. "And I'd like to bring her up here early next week for you to examine her."

Krueger nodded quietly. "How will you get her here?"

"I could use a clinic ambulance. We have backup units and extra gas coupons, so it wouldn't really create a problem. I'll leave some of the gear at the clinic." Her voice was stronger, more self-assured.

Krueger nodded again, obviously still thinking about something else. "Wouldn't it be easier on her to have someone down there look at her? It's a two-hour drive and another two back."

"An hour and a half," Maggie interrupted. "And they're not equipped to run a scan down there."

"You want me to run an X-ray scan?" He was openly surprised now.

Maggie nodded. "I think the tumors are gone."

"You know that's not very likely. Even if the pain is gone, even if she's gained a little weight, almost certainly that's just a lull in the progression of the disease." He stopped for a moment, confused. "I'm sorry, Maggie, I've been acting like you were just another medical person, not the daughter of a patient. I said that rather harshly."

"No, that's fine. I know how the disease normally progresses, and I know how unlikely what I'm saying sounds. That's another reason why I want to bring her here. Most any other doctor would wave me off as a hysterical relative. I guess I'm asking you both personally, as a favor, and medically, as a colleague, to trust my judgment enough to run the X-ray scans. If you're right, it certainly won't make any serious difference in Mom's case."

Krueger nodded again. "That all sounds reasonable. But why do you think she's better?"

"Because . . . because of a reason that I'd prefer not to discuss now."

Krueger sighed, and leaned back in his chair. "Curenin?"

Maggie shook her head hard. "No, not Curenin, not Laetrile, no magic proven remedies from doctors or ads in the newspaper. No one has sold me any cancer cure."

Krueger shrugged. "Okay. I don't know why you want it, but if Ann agrees, I'll give her a limited scan to see if the major tumors have changed." He paused, then asked, "Have you discussed this with her?"

Maggie nodded. "Yes, and she agrees that a scan would be the best thing."

Krueger turned to a small computer terminal on his desk. "Let me check when we can have it done." Looking up at Maggie, he asked, "Tuesday at one?"

Maggie nodded agreement, and Krueger struck a key on the terminal. "Well, it's set. Tuesday at one."

Smiling, Maggie got up to leave. Krueger stood too, and walked her to the door. "Maggie, please don't be too optimistic until we see some positive results."

Maggie nodded. "I won't." She left the office. Outside, she found a telephone booth, and called the clinic to see if there was any reason to hurry back to Santa Cruz. Lisa answered the phone.

"No," she said, "everything's under control here, so there's no rush, but I think that Beckie was looking for you earlier. Did she get in touch with you?"

"No," Maggie answered, "she didn't— Oh, damn! I know what it is. Is she there?"

“Just a see, I’ll check.” There was a silence while Maggie waited. A minute later Beckie answered the phone.

“Hi Maggie, how are you?”

“I was doing great, until I realized that the Midwives Association meeting was tonight.”

“Does that mean you can’t make it?”

“No—oh, hell, I don’t know. I only just now realized it when Lisa said you were looking for me. I’ll call home and get back to you.”

“Where are you now?”

“Up in Palo Alto .”

“Well, then you wouldn’t be going home before the meeting, would you?”

Maggie thought a second. “No, that would be silly. If I’m going to go, I’ll probably go up to San Francisco now, and spend the rest of the afternoon there.”

“Well, look,” Beckie said, “I was calling about a ride, and obviously that’s not going to work, but I was counting on your being there for the big fight tonight. You’re my right-hand woman, you know.”

Maggie laughed. “Well, I’ll try my best, okay?”

“Good enough. I’ll look for you there.”

Maggie hung up and called home. With Ann doing so much better, she felt no qualms about leaving her with Carol. She wondered whether Carol was aware of the change in Ann’s condition.

But in their conversation, Carol agreed to stay at home that evening and watch Ann, and no mention was made of her condition.

* * *

The night’s meeting of the entire Midwives Association of the San Francisco Bay Area was held in a large lecture hall at the University of California’s Medical Center in San Francisco . Maggie arrived early, and chatted idly with several of the women about the fetal-monitor resolution, and the rumors of a big fight in the works. But no one seemed to have any facts.

Finally, Maggie got some details from Amy. “It appears that Susan Glanvil has been working overtime to try to correct her errors of two weeks ago. She and a small group of her cronies have been on the phone every evening, as far as I can tell, and have been in touch with most of the members of the Association who aren’t solidly in our camp. I found this out only last night, when I got a call from Emily Watson, saying that she had just spent half an hour on the phone with Glanvil. After that, I called some people I knew, and it seems Glanvil’s crowd is going to enter a substitute motion, stating that fetal monitors must be used during all deliveries, unless some kind of overriding medical reason indicates that it would be unusually dangerous. The impression I got was that at first it was just a parliamentary trick to tie up the discussion and get our motion sent back to committee, and possibly even a different committee. But now, apparently, Glanvil thinks she might actually have enough votes to get her motion through. She’s been

pushing the issue of reprisals from the A.M.A. pretty hard, and she seems to have a lot of people scared. My impression is that we've got a really big fight ahead of us."

Maggie was shocked. "But would Glanvil actually want to require the monitors? I've never heard anyone take that position. Why would she want to do that?"

"Well, actually, in the late '70s and early '80s, a lot of hospitals did make it a general policy, allegedly to stave off malpractice suits, and lots of doctors used them routinely. Besides, Glanvil would be delighted to make them mandatory, just to irritate us. She's into politics heavily, you know, and she sees us as a real threat to her power. I think nothing would please her more than to have a rule passed that we couldn't accept, so that we would either leave or get kicked out of the Association." She waved at someone across the room. "That's Beckie, I want to find out what she's heard."

They worked their way to the far corner of the hall, where Beckie had just arrived. She was discussing the news with some of the other members.

". . . on parliamentary grounds," Beckie was saying. "The bill originally was referred to the Medical Practices Committee, as the only reasonable place for such a bill to start. I think we should argue that the substitute motion must be sent to that committee before it can come out on the floor."

"But that's just the point," someone else argued. "Glanvil will accept the idea of them both being sent back to committee. That's what she wants."

"Both?" Beckie asked. "Why both? One bill came out of committee, and the other didn't. Let the one that did come to the floor for discussion and a vote, and let the other go to committee."

"But that would make the Glanvil motion moot. I don't think we can get away with it."

Maggie turned around and looked at the slowly filling room. She hated politicking. She hated talk of "getting away with it," and "sneaking it by," "tricking someone into looking like a fool," and all of that depressingly irrelevant garbage. And she hated the way Beckie rose to it, and blossomed, as if the maneuvering were her one true love. Turning back to the group, Beckie caught her eye.

"I told you we were only halfway home. Do you have any feel for how it'll go?"

Maggie frowned. "How the hell should I know? All I know is that Glanvil is dead wrong, and it's crazy for her even to be suggesting such a stupid move."

Beckie smiled delightedly, and crossed over to give Maggie a hug. "Ah," she said, "my favorite little anarchist!"

Maggie pulled away in irritation. "(A) I'm two inches taller than you; (B) I'm ten years older than you; and (C) I'm not an anarchist. But neither am I a politician. Strange as it might seem in this group, I'm a midwife, and that's what I like being!"

Beckie frowned. "Well, if you don't get a little political quick, you might not be a midwife for long! Glanvil is serious about this thing, and she'd be delighted to get all of us drummed out of the Association."

"But being in the Association isn't the same as being licensed. So even getting kicked out wouldn't make any difference, Beckie."

“Except that we aren’t in here as solidly as we’d like to think. Maggie, you’ve forgotten Somers’s threat that the A.M.A. would take action against us if we passed this resolution.”

“Come on, Beckie, we agreed two weeks ago that they wouldn’t have the nerve.”

“But that was if the whole organization approved it,” Beckie countered. “I agree that they’re not willing to take on the whole California Midwives Association, but if a group of us is kicked out for refusal to follow what the C.M.A. officially calls ‘good medical practice,’ then I think the A.M.A. would swarm down on us as a bunch of radical troublemakers. Plus,” she continued, “with no group of our own, we’d lack the means of fighting such an attack.”

“Well,” Maggie said, “then we’d just have to form our own group, split off from them, rather than get kicked out. But I still don’t think that they’d try to revoke our licenses.”

Beckie looked at her, startled, “That’s it! A splinter group. We can at least use that as an out if we get trounced in the vote.” She hugged Maggie. “I take back everything I said. Underneath that calm exterior lurks a scheming politician.”

From the front of the room the sound of a gavel reached back to them. “Come on,” Beckie said, taking Maggie’s arm. “Let’s sit down. There’ll be a break before the big vote, and we can try to organize some sort of orderly retreat if it becomes necessary. Not,” she added, “that I’ve given up the fight yet.”

The meeting started slowly, for there was a lot of old business to be dealt with. It was 9:30 before the report of the Medical Practices Committee was presented. Amy, who was chairperson of the committee, presented the report, and ended by officially entering the motion. “By a vote of fourteen to five, the committee approved a resolution that the C.M.A. recommend that its members refrain from the use of intrauterine fetal monitors, except in circumstances where it is the opinion of the member that either the mother or the child is at risk. Therefore, I would like now to introduce such a resolution.”

The motion was entered and seconded, then opened for discussion. Apparently by prearrangement, the chair called immediately on Susan Glanvil, “Madam Chairman,” she began, “it is my belief and, I am sure, that of a vast number of the midwives present, that the motion is an abomination. Not only is it an attempt to impose a specific political ideology on the midwives of this Association, but it requires this membership to reject one of the most valuable advances in obstetrical practice in the last fifty years. Rather than the senseless rejection of this practice, it would seem more reasonable, more forward-looking, for this Association to embrace this practice. Rather than accept the nihilism of this small group of agitators we should stand behind the advances of the medical profession. For these reasons I would like to introduce a substitute motion, which states that ‘The California Midwives Association recommends to its members that they make use of intrauterine fetal monitors except in circumstances where specific medical reasons indicate that such use would be dangerous to the mother or child,’ and I so move.” With a flourish, she sat down.

The chair nodded to Glanvil and turned to the audience. “I will accept a second to the motion—”

“Objection!” Beckie was on her feet. “Point of order, Madam Chair.”

With some irritation, the chair recognized Beckie.

“Madam Chair,” she began, “I have two objections. First, this motion is not a substitute motion, but a separate motion, which may be brought up after, and only after, the motion currently on the floor has

been passed on. Secondly, this motion should not be allowed to enter directly onto the floor, but should first be referred to the Medical Practices Committee of the Association. If Ms. Glanvil, who is a member of that committee, has chosen to have this motion entered as an official minority report of that committee, it would then be appropriate for it to enter onto the floor directly after the current motion. But Ms. Glanvil did not so choose, and I therefore ask the chair to rule that this motion be referred to the Medical Practices Committee for consideration.”

Maggie was dazed. She hardly understood a word of what Beckie had said. Her mind drifted as the meeting went into a technical, parliamentary argument. The California Midwives Association will turn into another A.M.A., she thought to herself, if Beckie and Glanvil keep fighting.

Suddenly she realized that the fight was an important one; she remembered that Ann, who seemed to be recovering, had been treated with a recipe lost for three hundred years because modern medicine had no place for it.

Maggie turned to Beckie, but she was whispering to the person on her other side.

Maggie’s mind drifted to Ann again and Tuesday’s X-ray scans. She was terrified that the remission would turn out to be a fantasy, that the tumors would show clearly. She realized now that this fear had prevented her seriously considering the implications of a cure. Although a cure obviously had been her goal, Maggie had never seriously thought much beyond Ann’s case. And she hadn’t told anyone about it yet, not even Beckie. She turned to Beckie, suddenly excited. But as she did, a general commotion rose in the hall.

“Dammit!” Beckie muttered, getting to her feet.

“What?” Maggie asked. Everyone seemed to be getting up and talking to people around them. “What happened?” she insisted. “I wasn’t paying attention.”

“Well, you better start paying attention,” Beckie growled. “Didn’t you even vote?”

Maggie shook her head. “What happened?”

“Jesus Christ! You’re unbelievable,” Beckie exclaimed. She started pushing Maggie out toward the aisle. “Glanvil’s motion has been ruled a legitimate substitute motion, and been seconded. After this break we’ll be arguing her motion, not ours, and if hers passes, that’s it for us. Fetal monitors for all.”

Maggie stopped before reaching the aisle and turned to Beckie. “Do you think it might pass?”

Beckie shoved her forward again. “If you had been awake, you would have known that about two-thirds of the votes said that it should be allowed as a substitute motion, and that’s a hell of a lot of votes. Come on, we’ve got to find Amy and talk about your splinter group.”

“Mine?” Maggie asked. “What splinter group?”

“Come on! We don’t have that much time.”

Ten minutes of frantic conversations followed, none of which Maggie paid much attention to. She found herself dragged back and forth across the hall as Beckie cornered one woman after another to drum up support for a walkout. Why can’t they all just leave us alone, Maggie wondered, unsure just who “they” and “us” were.

Finally, the gavel pounded again. Beckie looked incredibly defiant as she charged back to her place, for once leaving Maggie to follow along at her own pace. The debate began just as she reached her seat and continued interminably.

Eventually the chairperson recognized Glanvil for a final summation. The hall was silent as she rose to her feet. Slowly, dramatically, she turned a full circle, so that she could see the entire hall. "Madam Chairman, members of the California Midwives Association: we have reached the most critical point in our short history tonight. The practice of midwifery, until just recently illegal throughout this nation, has reached a point from which it must now decide either to move forward or move backward, to embrace the advances in obstetrics and midwifery that science has produced or to turn our backs on them and reject them, just because, if you will, they are new and scientific. I fear," and here her voice began to rise, "that whether we know it or not, whether we want to or not, we must, by the very nature of our decision, also decide tonight whether we are to build midwifery into a more legitimate and respectable profession, or if we are to destroy it, destroy its legitimacy and respectability, and even, I fear, its legality.

"We all know the fight that we had to receive legal status, we all know the opposition that the established medical profession raised to our certification, and we all know that this opposition and resentment has not disappeared following our legalization. That opposition would not hesitate to destroy our legal standing at the first opportunity. If we now choose to take a formal position in opposition to a standard obstetrical practice, one accepted by the vast majority of obstetricians, then not only are we giving them grounds for renewing their attack on us, but, in fact, we are challenging them to do so. And this is not a challenge that they will pass up. I promise you.

"In fact, we have done even worse than this. By having the Medical Practices Committee pass favorably on this motion, by having this motion come before this body at this meeting, we have already initiated this renewed attack. Even if we were to defeat the Medical Practices Committee's motion, they might still attack our credentials. And this is why we must approve the substitute motion. Only by firmly stating that we accept, and believe in the use of the fetal monitor, can we prevent our own demise as midwives,

"I have not talked here about the value of the fetal monitor, or the lives saved, about the added information gained from this wondrous machine. Others have discussed this over the last hour. And those reasons should be more than sufficient to gain your support for the substitute motion. But I wanted to bring up the matter of our continued professional existence before the vote, because I want you all to be aware that your vote might determine whether, six months from now, you will still be midwives." Finished, she sat immediately.

Beckie leaped to her feet. "Madam Chair?"

The chair turned to her. "I'm afraid those were the concluding remarks, and the floor is no longer open to debate."

"But Madam Chair," Beckie persisted. "Ms. Glanvil has brought up an entirely new argument in her concluding remarks, and I feel it is only fair that a reply be permitted."

The chairperson frowned, and then shrugged. "Oh, go ahead. But you have three minutes. If you run over, I'll cut you off. And after she finishes," the chair said, facing the rest of the audience, "absolutely no one else is going to speak." She nodded to Beckie.

Beckie turned around to face the bulk of the membership and then back toward the chair, trying to marshal her thoughts. "Look," she finally began, "I don't have anything fancy to say, but what Glanvil just

said is nonsense. It's preposterous to think that at this time there is any way that the A.M.A. or any other group can stop us from practicing midwifery. Who else is going to do it? Doctors certainly aren't going to take the time required to deliver children at home. They could never make their hundred thousand a year that way. And if they started delivering them in hospitals again, they'd lose their shirts in malpractice suits, and they know it. As it is, it's only in cases of great risk to the mother or child that they'll agree to let us bring a mother into the hospital.

"But there's another point, If we buckle under to the demands—in this case the alleged demands—of the A.M.A., and give up our freedom to have our own independent opinions on the best way to conduct our business as midwives, we will end up repeating all of the horrendous errors of the medical profession. When male doctors first began to wrench the practice of childbirth away from midwives, they brought with them the diseases and infections of the hospitals, and the rates of fetal and maternal deaths skyrocketed. That was hundreds of years ago, but now they have repeated that history, and once again their practice of childbirth brings with it such a tragic price that they have conceded that practice back to us, the midwives. It will do women and children no good if we become little doctoresses, mimicking the procedures and policies of the A.M.A. It is only by maintaining our independence that we can properly serve the women of this state.

"So Susan Glanvil wants us all to use the fetal monitor, so that we can be like little doctoresses. And what has been the effect of this usage in the past? You all know the answer to that. The use of fetal monitors has led to a tripling of the rate of Caesarian sections with no perceptible benefit—with no reduction in the infant mortality rate! More surgery for the obstetricians in the hospitals, and, since the rise of the superstrains of bacteria, more fetal and maternal infections. It has been suggested that if we vote to avoid the willy-nilly use of the fetal monitor we will be turning the clock back hundreds of years. But I say to you that if we vote to mimic the behavior of the A.M.A., we will bring upon our patients the disease and death that we have always strived to prevent." She stopped, and looked around the audience, unsure what more to say. Unable to come up with anything, she finished with, "I cannot urge you strongly enough to vote against this despicable resolution."

"And that finishes all debate," the chair announced, rising from her seat. "The secretary will now read the motion on the floor."

The secretary read the motion.

"Very well," said the chair, "you have heard the motion. All in favor, signify by raising your right hands . . ." In just a few moments votes aye and nay had been counted.

"The result of the balloting," announced the chair, "Is two hundred and fourteen votes in favor of the motion, one hundred and eighty-seven against. The motion is approved."

As applause broke out from the audience, someone in the front shouted, "No!" Heads turned as Amy leaped up onto her chair. "This decision is a farce!" she shouted. "You have let fear replace reason, and you have allowed that fear to harm your abilities to act as responsible midwives!" Her face was red with anger. "Well, I for one cannot, and will not stand by you while you destroy all that we have struggled for!" So saying, she jumped down from her chair, pushed her way through to the aisle, and stomped from the hall.

Beckie was on her feet, pulling Maggie up by the arm. "Come on, that's our cue." She shoved Maggie toward the aisle.

Looking around, Maggie realized that an impressive number of others were doing the same, close to a

third by the looks of it.

“It’s working,” Beckie said with delight. “We’ve pulled enough to form that splinter group of yours, Maggie. You’ve saved the day!”

Chapter Nine

THE next half-hour was a total mystery to her. In all, 135 women had walked out of the meeting, and, to Maggie, it seemed to be a victory celebration despite their loss. Finally, Beckie stood on an overturned wastepaper basket and called for quiet. Thirty seconds passed before the lobby grew calm. “Listen, everyone,” she shouted, “there’s a lot of work to do, and some of it needs to be done quickly, so we’re going to meet Monday evening at 7:30. That’s in just three days. Call either the Santa Cruz clinic or the Haight-Ashbury clinic on Monday, and they’ll tell you where it’s going to be. So congratulations, everybody, and think up a good name for us before you come on Monday.” Cheers rose from the group and Beckie waved as she climbed down.

Beckie came up to Maggie. “Can I catch a ride back to Santa Cruz with you? Peggy’s decided to stay in the city tonight.”

Maggie shrugged, but then smiled. “Sure, happy to have you. Besides, I’ve got something I’d like to talk to you about.”

“Fine. I’d just like fifteen minutes to tie up some loose ends.” With that, she disappeared back into the crowd.

Over an hour passed before they even got out the Medical Center door, and Beckie was running on a mile a minute about their new group, which she started calling the Natural Midwives Association. “Someone suggested calling it the California Midwives Society, but then we’re just copying the C.M.A., and the point is that we’re not just another C.M.A., we’re different.”

Maggie smiled. “Actually,” she said, “so far we’re just a figment of your imagination.”

They had just gotten into the car, and Beckie turned around full in her seat to look at Maggie. “Do you really believe that?” she asked. “Or are you just being nasty?”

Maggie shrugged. “Maybe. I’m not sure. I certainly didn’t get off on all the parliamentary finagling, and I think it’s a real shame that we can’t even agree enough to stay in the same organization. I get the impression that you’re just as glad that the split came.”

Beckie thought a moment. “You’re right, and you’re wrong. I am glad that the split came, because it had to come. But I’m not glad that it had to come. It’s the same as the civil rights movement, or the antiwar movement back during the Vietnam days, or the women’s movement. I’m glad that those movements appeared and built the strong opposition to the status quo that they did, because things were wrong and needed change. But that doesn’t mean that I ever wanted women and blacks to be oppressed, or blacks and Vietnamese killed or nuclear power plants blown up.” She paused a minute. “I guess what I’m trying to say is that lots of times people or groups of people, or corporations or nations set up situations where others are unfairly hurt, whether it be subtle discrimination or out-and-out rape, plunder, and murder. And most of the time the rest of us, and even those being oppressed, just sit around and say, oh, isn’t that a pity, it really shouldn’t be like that, and do nothing about it. So, yes, I am, pleased, even delighted, when someone finally stands up and says ‘Enough!’ And that’s what we did tonight.”

Maggie smiled. "You're calling me a liberal."

"You may be a feisty radical, but you don't know your literature. Back in the '60s we studied that stuff."

"What are you talking about?" Beckie demanded.

"'Combat Liberalism,' by Mao. Bet you never read it."

"Read it?" Beckie asked incredulously. "I've never even heard of it!"

Maggie laughed. "'Liberalism manifests itself in various ways. Although the person concerned is clearly known to be in the wrong yet because he is an old acquaintance, a fellow townsman, a school friend, a bosom companion, a loved one, an old colleague or a former subordinate, one does not argue with him on the basis of principle but lets things slide in order to maintain peace and friendship. Or one touches lightly upon the matter without finding a thorough solution, so as to maintain harmony all around. As a result, harm is done to the organization as well as to the individual concerned, This is the first type of liberalism.' There's more to it, but that's the most relevant section. I memorized the whole thing back in '67, and it's served me well."

Beckie looked awestruck. "That's beautiful! It's like poetry. Did Mao really write that?"

"Yep. Around 1935, as I recollect."

"I've never read anything by him; I thought it was all political rhetoric." She thought a minute, then added, "You're right, though, that is exactly what I was saying. So you agree with me?"

"I don't know. I'm still not sure. I just have this feeling. . . . Look, let me quote some more. 'To engage in struggles and disputes against incorrect views, not for the sake of solidarity, progress or improving the work, but for personal attacks, letting off steam, venting personal grievances or seeking revenge. This is another type of liberalism.' And I guess that's what I'm worrying about I sensed personal grievances and revenge-seeking in your tone. So I guess I'm not sure which way you're moving, just what's motivating you in all this."

Beckie thought a moment. "Fair enough. I can see how you might not know which were my real reasons just by looking at my actions in there, but I guess I'm hurt that you don't know me well enough to know that I wouldn't do it for those reasons. You certainly don't have much faith in me!"

Maggie didn't know what to say. "I'm sorry," she offered.

They drove silently down the coast; each lost in her own thoughts. The sky was unusually clear for the start of February, and the moon shone brightly on the ocean as they headed south along the water.

They were halfway to Santa Cruz before Beckie commented, "You haven't told me what you had to say tonight."

Maggie shook her head. "Not now. Another time."

"I'm sorry I got so angry at you, Maggie. I know you were just trying to be honest with me. I shouldn't have blown up at you. I'm really sorry."

"Well, now we're both sorry." Maggie drove on in Silence, all the joy and excitement drained from her

body. There was no energy left to argue. Well, she thought, here we are, being liberal with each other. And she quoted to herself, "To be aware of one's own mistakes yet make no attempt to rectify them, this is the eleventh type."

Chapter Ten

THE next morning, Maggie slept late. She awoke with a start, fearing that something was dreadfully wrong. The clock showed ten o'clock. She hadn't slept that late since . . . Suddenly she knew what was wrong.

Leaping from her bed, she hurried down the hall to Ann's room. There hadn't been a sound from her all morning. For months, she had lived in dread of that morning. Reaching Ann's room, she nearly collided with Carol, who was silently backing out.

"Shh!" Carol whispered. "You'll wake her up." She pulled the door shut and motioned for Maggie to follow her. Together, they headed toward the kitchen.

"Is she all right, Carol?"

"Yes, yes. She's just sleeping!" Carol closed the kitchen door. "Now," she asked, in a normal tone of voice, "what was all that about?" Not waiting for an answer, she opened the refrigerator. "We're out of milk." Closing the door, she added, "In fact, we seem to be out of most everything. Have you gone shopping lately?"

Maggie sat down at the table. "No, I haven't. I guess I've been spending a lot of time with Ann lately, and not getting around to much else. I guess I can get out this afternoon. Or," she pointed out, "you could go get some stuff yourself."

Carol pouted. "But I can't take the car. How could I get anything?"

"What's wrong with your bike? You've got those fancy Kirtland paniers, you might as well use them for once."

"But you said you could go this afternoon."

Maggie sighed. "And I will. But you know, you're fifteen years old, and you don't have a lot of responsibilities around the house."

"What do you mean? I've got lots of responsibilities."

"Not now," Maggie insisted. "I can't take an argument now. We can talk about it another time, okay?"

"Okay. But I do have responsibilities."

"Not now!" Maggie turned and looked at the closed kitchen door. "How did Ann seem last night?"

"Actually, she seemed really good. She was a bit irritable, but almost like she wasn't sick, and wanted to do other things. She made me walk her to the bathroom before bed, even though I argued. She said you've been doing that too. Have you?"

Maggie nodded. "Since Wednesday, I think."

“Is she getting better?” Carol asked.

Maggie turned to look at Carol. “Why do you ask?”

Carol shrugged. “Well, she’s getting up now, and she hasn’t since she came back from the hospital. Her grouchiness reminds me of how she used to be, before she got sick, and—well, when I went in there this morning, she was just sleeping there, so normally, it reminded me of when I was just a little kid, how I used to go in before she woke up and just watch her sleep.” She stopped, confused. “Isn’t she?”

Maggie let out a deep breath, “I don’t know if she is. I mean, in some ways, yes, she obviously is. She’s feeling a lot better, and the pain is largely gone, and it looks, like she’s starting to sleep a lot better at night, but I don’t, know if there’s been any real progress, in terms of the cancer disappearing.” She paused a second, and then added, “We’ll know more on Tuesday.”

“Why Tuesday?”

“Because I’m taking her up to Stanford Tuesday for some tests.”

“How come? I thought she was done with all her tests.”

Maggie shook her head. “Because we think, Ann and I think, that maybe she is getting better.”

“Really? You mean cured?”

“I mean maybe better,” Maggie cautioned. “And we’re just going for tests. Until we get the results, we won’t even know that she isn’t getting worse.” She reached across the table and took Carol’s hand. “Don’t get your hopes up yet. I don’t think the odds are very good.”

“But you must think she’s getting better,” Carol insisted. “Otherwise you wouldn’t take her all the way up to Stanford. You do think she’s getting better, don’t you?”

Maggie could see how much Carol wanted to believe that Ann’s recovery was possible. “Darling, to be honest with you, I don’t know whether I believe it or not. I don’t want to get my hopes up too high without the test results, and I don’t think you should, either.” She had tears in her eyes, and got up and turned toward the sink. She could hear Carol walk up behind her. Turning, she put her arms around Carol. “I just don’t want you to get hurt if it turns out that were wrong,” she whispered.

Chapter Eleven

OVER the weekend, Ann’s condition remained stable. The pain became something of the past, and her strength increased. Sunday evening, she came out to the kitchen to join Carol and Maggie for dinner. On Monday, Maggie returned to work, finding it hard to concentrate on anything except Ann and Tuesday’s tests. But walking into the clinic was like walking into a hurricane.

Everywhere, people were arguing in loud voices, and Beckie stood in a corner talking on the phone, gesturing wildly with her free hand. Maggie cornered Kathy Perez. “What in God’s name is going on?” she demanded.

Kathy turned to see who it was. “Maggie, we’ve been attacked!”

“What?”

“The A.M.A. They Issued a statement this morning condemning midwives who refuse to use fetal monitors.”

Maggie looked at her watch. It wasn't even nine o'clock. “But when did this happen?”

“A couple of hours ago,” Kathy said “They released the statement from their New York office about three hours ago, at nine their time. The computer was set to go ding-a-ling if a news story came over that's about midwives. Lisa found the release on the console when she came in. It seems they're going to start an accreditation fight with us.”

“But that's crazy,” Maggie said. “No one's refusing to use fetal monitors. All that we said was that we wouldn't use them as a routine procedure. Lots of obstetricians have the same policy.”

“Well, I'm sure that's the line we'll take in defending ourselves, but there's no question but we're on the defensive.” She looked at the clock on the wall. It read exactly nine o'clock. “Look, I can't talk to you right now, I said I'd try to get in touch with the women we signed up at the meeting last Friday, to make sure they know about what happened, and can come to the meeting tonight. I heard Beckie say she wanted a statement for the group to endorse tonight. Talk to you later.” Kathy headed back to her desk, glanced at a sheet of paper, and picked up the phone.

Maggie stood there, dumbfounded. Finally, she headed down the hall toward her office. All the others were empty. This place has gone crazy, she thought to herself. She turned and walked back toward the main office. As she reached the vacant reception desk, a woman in her late twenties entered through the front door. “Hi, Fran,” Maggie said. “Here to see Beckie?”

The woman, close to eight months pregnant, nodded. “I have a nine o'clock with her. I guess I'm a few minutes late.”

“Oh, that's all right. You go to her office; I'll tell her you're here.” Maggie then stormed into the main office, and shouted above the general din. “If anyone cares, there are people around here who still think this is a birth center. Beckie, if you're interested, a patient is waiting in your office.” Voices dropped, people checked their watches, and slowly filed out of the room. Finally, Maggie headed down to her office, too, She had no appointments until half-past, and had planned to spend the time reading medical journals. But she found herself too frazzled to concentrate. Frustrated, she canceled the request, and the journal disappeared from the screen. She leaned back in her chair, trying to relax. It had to come, she told herself. We became midwives because we couldn't stand the medical profession's turning obstetrics into a medical procedure with no room for the mother in it. We came here for political reasons, and I shouldn't get mad at Beckie when the politics finally become obvious. She rocked gently in her chair. We wanted to revolutionize childbirth practices, and we naively thought we could just quietly go about our ways. She smiled, remembering Ho Chi Minh's poem “Revolution Is Not a Cocktail Party.” They had a fight ahead of themselves, and it was as important as all the health care that they gave their patients, because the fight would determine the direction of obstetrics for the next decade. She remembered quoting Mao to Beckie, and smiled. They're a new crop of revolutionaries, she thought, unschooled and untested.

* * *

At noon, Beckie visited Maggie's office. “Free for lunch?”

“Sure,” Maggie agreed. She replaced a file disk in its jacket, checked her afternoon schedule, and slid back her chair. “I’m only free till one, so we’ll have to move fast.” Slipping on a coat, she followed Beckie out the door. They walked in silence awhile, before Maggie finally said, “I guess it’s just as well that the crunch came now. We’re probably about as ready for it as we ever could be.”

Beckie’s eyebrows rose, “Is that a change in position?” she asked.

Maggie smiled. “Maybe. You know us oldies, it takes awhile to get us going, but once we’re started, we’ve got lots of staying power.”

Beckie laughed. “So tell me, what do you really think?”

“I think you were right on Friday. It is an important fight. It’s going to affect the whole field of obstetrics.”

Beckie nodded. “Obstetrics isn’t the only area of medicine where people are tired of being treated like specimens. I think that’s part of the reason that the A.M.A. responded so violently. They’ve kept pretty firm control over things and they don’t want anyone else getting a finger in the pie.” They had reached the restaurant, and turned in. It was several minutes before they resumed their conversation.

“You know,” Maggie said, “If we look at this as a major political struggle to change the medical profession, rather than a struggle to retain our accreditation, then we probably shouldn’t be thinking in terms of fighting it on our own. There’re lots of groups involved in fights over medical and health-care issues and we should probably contact them, too.”

Beckie nodded. “You’re probably right, although there isn’t any ‘we’ yet. As you pointed out on Friday, so far this group is just a figment, of my imagination.”

Maggie disagreed. “That’s all changed. The group now has a real existence based solely on the A.M.A.’s attack, I know it’s a negative definition, but you wait. References will be made to ‘that group of women who walked out at the C.M.A. meeting in February.’ Which, of course, is why you instinctively realized the need to organize quickly—its important to set up a positive identity to work from, to have the public define you in a positive way, not just as ‘the people the A.M.A. is opposing,’ or ‘the group that disagrees with the AMA.’ It’s also the reason that you saw the importance of the group’s name.”

Beckie turned to her in amazement. “You sound like an old pro at this.”

Maggie laughed. “When you were in knee socks, my dear, I was trashing college campuses. But I’m older now, and short-term changes seem less worth fighting for.”

“But we’re not talking about short-term changes,” Beckie insisted.

“And I’m not refusing to join in the fray, either.”

They ate quickly, the lunch hour all too short, and finally headed back toward the clinic. “Do you want me to drive tonight?” Beckie asked.

Maggie frowned. “You probably should plan on it; I’m not sure I’ll be able to make it.”

“What? I thought—”

“No, I do want to come tonight, it’s not that. It’s just that—well, Ann’s going to have a hard evening tonight, and I feel an obligation to spend it with her.”

“Is she . . . is it getting real rough?”

“Oh, no, it’s nothing like that.” Maggie paused a moment. “It’s just that she’s going up to Stanford for some tests tomorrow, and she’s going to be all worried about them, tonight.”

Beckie nodded, sympathetically. “What are the tests for?”

Again, Maggie paused before answering. She badly wanted to tell Beckie the whole story, but it was already a few minutes before one. “Just routine tests, to see how things are going.”

Beckie sensed Maggie’s unwillingness to talk, but let it drop. “Well, I’ll hope for the best.” As they entered the building, Beckie asked, “Okay if I stop by tomorrow evening? I’ll want to talk over the meeting with you.”

Maggie thought a second. “Call first, okay? it’ll depend in part on how Ann’s feeling—the tests and all.”

Beckie smiled. “Sure. I’ll call you then.” She turned, and headed toward her office.

* * *

Maggie was just finishing her last patient’s chart when Beckie stormed into her office. “That does it!” Beckie exploded, “we have to win this fight!” Maggie looked up from the chart.

“I just got this call from Flatters, up at Stanford,” Beckie explained. “Doreen Cohen lost her kid.”

“I’m sorry,” Maggie said. “When did it happen?”

“Yesterday. She was in her seventh month, but just barely. Flatters said it was born dead.”

“Any idea what brought it on?” Maggie asked.

“Oh yeah, quite clear. Drugs.”

“Drugs?” Maggie looked surprised. “Doreen didn’t strike me as the type—”

“Prescription drugs.” Beckie sank into the chair across from Maggie. “She’s been seeing Flatters regularly since she became pregnant, apparently at the insistence of her mother.” Flatters was one of the few obstetricians in the area who still felt that an uncomplicated pregnancy should still be monitored by an M.D. Flatters just told me today! Doreen had been going every two weeks without mentioning a word to me. Anyhow, Flatters’ office is in the new hospital complex, and apparently Doreen picked up hospital strep during one of her visits. She came down with a strep throat, and the culture showed it was a super-strep. Flatters tried half a dozen antibiotics on her, but nothing would touch it. Eventually, he called in the complex’s Infectious Disease Monitor, but by then it was obvious that Doreen should be hospitalized. She picked up another infection in the hospital, and they ended up trying a series of experimental antibiotics, and apparently one of them, aside from its shred of antibiotic activity, is lethal to fetuses.

“Do they at least know which one?” Maggie asked.

Beckie shrugged. “Maggie, they’re in such a panic over the superstrains, they’re running out new antibiotics as fast as they can tailor them. Flatters said preliminary results suggest that not one but three of them might cause fetal deaths in animals. But the FDA has cut the testing requirements down so far that the drugs are on the market two to three years before the companies finish their tests. With no effective treatments for some of the strains, the doctors are in so much trouble that they’re not particularly worried about side effects.” She shook her head, and then suddenly pounded her fist on Maggie’s desk.

“It’s the same issue, too. Those damn doctors have been so concerned with doing everything themselves, with curing every disease that comes along without letting the patient help with proper rest, and diet, that they’ve thrown every antibiotic they have against every infection they see for almost fifty years. So now the bacteria are all drug-resistant, and the hospitals are grinding to a standstill. But they still won’t admit that maybe they’ve been wrong to approach the problem in such a heroic, combative style.

“Maggie, the medical profession’s acquiescence to the practice of midwifery is the proof of their failure. Hospital infections are so common nowadays, and so deadly, that it’s not safe to be in a hospital anymore.” She shook her head again. “And the medical establishment won’t admit one word of it. All they say is, ‘It’s a good thing for the American public that the drug companies have been able to come up with these new antibiotics so fast, because now that the old ones are useless, you really have to count on science to keep you alive. If it wasn’t for the progress of science and medicine, you people would be in big trouble.’ The arrogance! If it wasn’t for their bumbling, we’d never be in this predicament now.”

Maggie smiled consolingly. “It isn’t just politics we’re fighting about, is it? We’re fighting for our lives, and the lives of our patients, and our friends.” They sat silently a moment, and then Maggie shook her head. “It’s so terrible when a woman loses a child, it happens so suddenly, so unexpectedly.”

Beckie looked up and took a deep breath, “That’s another thing that has me upset. Flatters didn’t mention it, but when I called Doreen, just before coming in here, she said that she had told Flatters a week ago that she was getting bad cramps when she took some of the medications.”

“And he didn’t change the medication?”

“Oh, well, you know. He said it was probably just normal Braxton-Hicks contractions, and she was just getting all excited about them with no cause. So he told the Infectious Disease Monitor not to worry about it.”

Maggie slammed her open hand down on the desk. “I can’t believe they still do that! I can’t believe that they’re still so stupid about that.”

“Flatters?” Beckie asked. “He’s not stupid. He wouldn’t be at Stanford if he was. No, Flatters is just one of those wonderful doctors who thinks that women have lots of emotions and no brains. You know, men have diseases and women have spells. It’s all in our heads.”

Maggie sighed. “I know, I know. It’s just that sometimes I refuse to believe how sexist so many doctors are. We stopped their discouraging women from breast-feeding and prescribing drugs that made it impossible to breast-feed. We beat them back on forceps deliveries, and general anesthesia, We beat them back on induced labor. All of that since the early ’70’s.”

Beckie nodded. “I remember that the rate of Caesarian sections had topped fifty per cent in a lot of hospitals in the mid-’80s. I knew doctors who told women that they were being selfish if they wanted to

deliver vaginally, it threatened the health of the child! And they used the same line in opposing home births, until their own hospitals became so deadly even they had to admit it wasn't safe. Beating them doesn't seem to convince them were right, and a lot of them out there would still just as soon yank the baby out as sit around the extra half-hour and wait for the woman to do it."

"And now Doreen has lost her child," Maggie said, "and we're out there fighting again, fighting for the right of women to participate in their own labors and deliveries, without any more interference than necessary."

Beckie smiled. "And we'll win again."

Chapter Twelve

THE next morning, Maggie spent a couple of hours appropriating the ambulance and unloading oxygen and other gear that might be needed at the clinic, and then drove back home. She bathed and fed Ann and got her dressed for the trip. With the help of a wheelchair, she took Ann out to the ambulance over her objections that she was strong enough to walk. By eleven, they were headed for Stanford.

As they wound their way through the hills, they talked about Carol, and Maggie when she was a girl, and Ann reminisced about being a teenager. It was a pleasant time, and they were able to forget briefly where they were going and why. Occasionally, a car would abruptly pull over ahead, reacting to the sudden appearance of an ambulance behind it.

They made good time through the hills, and headed north, up the interstate to Palo Alto. They arrived at the hospital at 12:35.

With help from an emergency-room orderly, Maggie transferred Ann to a rolling bed, and wheeled her to the X-ray section. Bill Krueger, notified by the emergency-room staff, was waiting for them at X-ray. "Hi, Ann." He walked over and stood beside her, putting a hand on her arm. "Maggie says you're feeling a lot better."

Ann grunted. "Except she won't let me get up and around like I want to. No respect for parents anymore." She was always grouchy with Krueger. "Well, what's holding things up? Let's get this over with."

Krueger smiled. "It'll be another fifteen minutes, I'm afraid, before we can get you in. Maggie said the pain isn't as bad as before?"

Ann scowled. "Small talk. Won't make the time go any faster. No pain at all anymore. Convincing Maggie to let me walk to the bathroom, or out to the kitchen for food, those are the biggest pains I've got now." She stopped and smiled sheepishly. "Well, that must have killed a minute. Fourteen to go."

Krueger smiled again. "Right you are. Fourteen and counting." He turned to Maggie. "Maggie, if I could see you in the office a minute?"

Maggie nodded. "We'll be back in a few minutes, Mom. Okay?"

Ann's face turned sullen. "Didn't mean to scare you all away, Doc."

"You didn't, Ann, I'm as tough as you are. It's just the forms have to be signed before we can run the scan on you. We'll just be a minute."

Maggie followed Krueger into his office. Sure enough, the forms were on his desk, and after glancing over them cursorily she signed them. Krueger checked the forms briefly, then turned to Maggie. "How has she been over the weekend?"

"Better. She's put on another pound, and insists on walking to the kitchen for one meal a day. She's regaining her strength, I think. You saw how improved her attitude is."

Krueger laughed. "You're right there. It's been a long time since she's been her old, obnoxious self. You still think that she might be in remission?"

"I still think she's cured."

"Can you tell me why?"

"No." She held her gaze on his eyes, refusing to back off. "Can we put this discussion off till after the scan? It won't matter if her condition's unchanged."

He started to object, then said "Fair enough. Let's check on how they're doing."

Back in the waiting room, Maggie went to Ann's side. She could see Ann was tense. And so was she. They hadn't talked about it since leaving Santa Cruz, but soon they'd know whether their hoping was in vain. Maggie noticed a tiny tear in the corner of Ann's eye, and squeezed her hand hard. Her eyes were wet, too. Krueger returned and stood on the opposite side of the cart. "They'll take her now."

An orderly came up and stood at the foot of the dolly. He waited patiently while Maggie kissed Ann and whispered a word of good luck to her. Then, as Maggie released her hand he silently pushed Ann through the double doors into the X-ray room.

Krueger turned to Maggie. "Well, she'll be in there for the better part of a half-hour, so, unless you have something you want to talk about? . . ."

Maggie shook her head no.

"Then I'll be back in about half an hour. They'll call me when she's ready to come out." With a smile, he turned and departed.

Maggie looked around the waiting room. People sat singly and in pairs, silently staring ahead or reading last month's *Time* or *Doctor's World*. Noticing a free seat, she went over and sat down. Depression settled over her, which was confusing because she was confident about the tests. Fear she could have understood, but profound sadness was unexpected.

She picked up a magazine, and then dropped it in her lap, unopened. It was loneliness that she saw. Aloneness. Everyone in the room was experiencing emotional trauma. An X-ray was to show how badly you were hurt. It could never be a calm, unimportant event. Yet these people sat with calm, blank expressions on their faces. A sign on the wall read THANK YOU FOR NOT SMOKING, and Maggie could imagine another one next to it: THANK YOU FOR HIDING YOUR EMOTIONS. That was another part of modern medical practice—illness without emotion. All those doctors incapable of dealing with the deep anguish and sorrow of their patients, solving the problem by denying their patients the right to have or to express emotions. And so the feelings all lay locked inside emotionless exteriors. To fight off her depression, she lifted the magazine from her lap, and read the news of last Christmas.

She read how the firemen of Syracuse had collected and fixed toys for poor children, she read how suicides were up and divorces down for the holiday season, and the Dow Jones averages were stable in light trading. When she looked up, Krueger stood before her.

“The technician said they were on the last set,” he told her, “so Ann should be out in just a minute or two. It’ll be five minutes then, before the results are sent up.” He paused a moment, and then continued. “You want to come with me to look at the results, or wait here with Ann?”

She considered, then shook her head. “No. Mom’s going to need me here more. I’ll wait with her.”

Krueger nodded. “Okay. Then I think I’ll head back there now, so I can get them as soon as they’re up. Maggie, you know that I’d like to see a clean scan as much as you would, but—well, you should be ready for the news that there’s been no substantial change.”

Maggie smiled. “We’re both trying to keep that in mind.”

He nodded again and left.

As Krueger had promised, Ann re-emerged within a minute and she came through the doors, Maggie bent over and gave her a big hug. “Dr. Krueger was here just a minute ago. He said that it’d take about five minutes for the results to come up. So he went to wait for them. I guess we’ll know then.”

“Excuse me, ma’am, if you’ll let me get her over to the staging area, I can leave the two of you together. You’re blocking the doorway.” Without waiting for a reply, the orderly gave the cart a shove, and quickly walked Ann’s dolly over to a recession in the wall.

A staging area, Maggie thought. They’re even using military terminology. Shaking the thought from her head, she turned to Ann. “How was it?” she asked.

Ann grimaced. “Push, push, hurry, hurry. It’s an expensive machine, you know, and they can’t have any dilly-dallying.” She tried to sound irritated, but her voice trembled.

Maggie stood there, holding Ann’s hand, and they said nothing more to each other.

Finally, Krueger left the X-ray office. He smiled noncommittally, then dropped his glance to the floor. Though his expression had been meaningless, Maggie was sure the results were not what he had expected. He reached the dolly, and touched Ann’s arm.

“Well,” he began, “I must admit that the results look good.” Under Maggie’s hands she could feel Ann relax. “But now I want to send you back in for a thorough set of scans, Ann, so that we can see just how good things really are.”

“Bill,” Maggie pleaded, “what did you see?”

He paused a second, composing his response. “The scans that I ran were just to check and see if the main tumors were still present, I saw none. But I must emphasize that the scans were not of the highest possible resolution because I felt it wouldn’t be needed. So now we have to take some more, before I can really say anything definite.”

Maggie laughed. “Bill Krueger! You just ran straight X rays, didn’t you? You didn’t think you’d see any

change because you didn't believe a word I said to you."

Krueger frowned. "You're right about the X rays, and half right about my believing you. You said you thought Ann was cured, and I knew that you believed that. But I was sure that you were mistaken."

"And now?"

"And now we all have to wait for the results of this next set of scans."

"The first set of scans."

Krueger nodded, slightly irritated. "The first set."

"Maggie?" Ann looked up at her, not understanding the conversation.

"It looks good, Mom. Dr. Krueger couldn't find any sign of the tumors, but he wants some more X rays just to be sure." A big smile swept her face.

Ann's expression gave no indication of her feelings. Turning to Krueger, she said, "Well, let's get on with the tests."

As she spoke the door to the scan room opened, and someone was wheeled out. "Okay," Krueger said, "it's our turn. I'll wheel you in myself." Moving to the head of the dolly, he pushed Ann toward the door, then stopped and turned to Maggie. "I should be out in a minute, and I'd like to talk with you?"

Maggie nodded, returned to her seat, and picked up her magazine. The economy, she read, was starting that long-expected turn for the better, maybe.

It was almost ten minutes before Krueger returned from the scanner room. He was visibly shaken. Maggie rose and crossed quickly to him. Krueger nodded to her. "Let's talk." Without waiting for an answer, he turned and strode off toward his office. They were inside, the door closed, before he said any more.

"Maggie, I waited for the results of the first high-res series so that I could see the composite for the abdominal region where Ann's main and largest tumors were. There is absolutely nothing left in the area. It'll take forty-five minutes for them to complete the scans over her entire body, but three large and four or five small tumors should show in the scan I've got here, and they are all gone." He passed the scan to Ann. "Normally, I would say nothing until I saw the results of the other scans, but I'm convinced. There's been a remission here, the likes of which I've read about in texts but never seen myself—I don't know anyone who's ever seen one like it if we just talk about the abdominal region that the scan you're holding covers, the likelihood of a remission like that is, at best, one in ten thousand—or one in a hundred thousand, I don't know. For some reason you felt convinced that it was happening, so I'm not going to call it a 'spontaneous' remission. I think Ann received some treatment that caused the remission." He stopped for just a second, and then finally asked, "Did she?"

Maggie stared him straight in the eye. "Yes."

"Are you going to tell me what it was?"

She shook her head. "No."

“But Maggie!”

“Wait, Bill,” she insisted. “First, I have to see what happens with the rest of the scans. Then I have to deal with Ann. Look,” she continued, “I’ll tell you this much, and I don’t know if it’ll make you feel better or worse. I gave Ann some medicine that I concocted myself. There were reasons which I felt made it worth trying, and they’ve obviously proved right. But the situation’s complicated, and I have to think it through before I can talk to anyone else about it.”

“But Maggie,” Krueger insisted, “every day, hundreds of people . . .”

“I know!” she said, raising her voice for the first time. “Dammit, Bill, I know as well as you do how many die every day from cancer, and how much suffering is going on because of it. Do you take me for an idiot?”

He made no response.

“Look, you’re just going to have to trust me. When I’m ready to give out details, I promise that you’ll be first. In fact, everything I’ve told you is confidential information about your patient, and you damn well better not go talking to anyone else about it.” Her face was red with anger.

“Maggie, I’m stunned. I just don’t know what to say.”

“Then say nothing. We haven’t even seen the rest of the scans yet.”

Krueger opened his mouth to say something, thought better of it, and closed it. “Okay,” he finally replied. “Let’s settle the question of Ann first.”

Relieved, Maggie smiled. “Thanks. I’ll wait outside.” Rising from her chair, she quickly left the office.

In the waiting room, she was momentarily shocked to find the same people, wearing the same expressions, sitting in the same chairs. Her entire universe had turned upside down since she last looked around the room, but to the people waiting here, it had been an insignificant bit of time. Sitting down in the same chair as before, Maggie picked up the magazine. Her hands were shaking.

In anger, she threw the magazine down again and folded her hands tightly in her lap. For a moment, a few people looked up, surprised by the sudden noise, but then they politely turned away.

Damn them, she thought. Damn this whole, ugly, emotionless place. I can’t believe that I’m just sitting here, looked in my own little head, with a cure for cancer, for God’s sake, a cure for cancer! Suddenly, she bounded to her feet, hurried downstairs to the pay phone, and dialed the collect-code for the clinic.

“Lisa, it’s Maggie. Is Beckie there? I need to talk to her.”

“Hold the line; I’ll buzz her.”

She heard a hum and then, after about fifteen seconds, a click. “Hi Maggie? What’s up?”

“Oh, Beckie, thank God you’re there. I don’t know what I would have done if you weren’t.”

“Is something the matter?”

Maggie let out a nervous laugh. “No, something’s great, and I need a place to blow off some steam. I think Ann’s going to be better.”

“What?”

“You heard me. I think Ann’s going to be better. I think her cancer’s gone. I’m up at Stanford. Remember, I said we were coming here for tests? Well, she’s getting total body scans, and so far it looks like it’s all gone.”

“The cancer?”

“Yes! The cancer! Krueger’s finished the scans of the abdominal cavity, and at least a half-dozen tumors, including the main ones, have disappeared. And Beckie, I cured her!”

“What?” Beckie shouted. “You cured her?”

Maggie began laughing uncontrollably. “Yes,” she finally choked out, “I cured her. And Beckie, I haven’t talked to anyone about it, and Krueger’s pressuring me for information, and I just needed to tell someone who I could feel good with. Beckie, look, I’m a little crazy right now. But please, can you come over at eight tonight? I’ll give Ann some sedatives, because she’ll need them for sure tonight, and then we can sneak off somewhere to talk.”

“Why sure. Should I come for dinner? We could talk then, too?”

Maggie hesitated. “No. I haven’t told Carol anything about this, yet, and I want to tell her when we’re alone. So let’s wait until eight.” She glanced at her watch. “Look, I have to get back upstairs, because Ann should be coming out soon. See you at eight?”

“Guaranteed a hundred percent.”

Hanging up the phone, Maggie hurried back to the waiting room. When she got back upstairs, Ann was already out, sitting up with the back of the bed cranked up, an orderly next to her.

“Oh, Mom, I’m sorry I wasn’t here when you came out.”

“We’ve just been out a couple of minutes,” the orderly offered.

“Well, thank you for staying with her until I got back,” Maggie said. “I can take her from here.” As the orderly left, she turned to Ann. “How are you feeling?” she asked.

“Scared,” she admitted, “Afraid that it’ll all turn out to have been a mistake. Oh, Margaret, I just want to sit down and weep!”

Maggie gave her a big hug. “Go right ahead, Mom There’s nothing wrong with that.”

But Ann pulled away. “No. I have to wait for the results of these scans before I can do anything. How long should it be?”

Maggie shook her head. “I really don’t know. Dr. Krueger is really upset about all this, and I wouldn’t tell him about your treatment. So he might want to study them in detail before saying anything.”

Ann frowned. "Do you have my glasses?"

"They're in my bag."

"Well, give me them, and one of those stupid magazines, and then let's just wait for the doctor."

Twenty minutes passed before Krueger appeared. "Ann," he began, "I can find no evidence of any cancer in your body from these scans. I'll want to look them over much more carefully, and have other doctors here look at them, too."

"I'm tempted to say that you are out of danger, but I won't say that because I don't know why the cancer has gone." He glanced at Maggie, then turned back to Ann. "I do know that treatment developed by your daughter seems to have caused the regression of the cancer. That's such an unexpected event. That I do not know whether to expect its return in a month, or to expect never to see it again. But for now I can find no evidence of cancer in your body. At a later date I'll want to take biopsies to see how things look, but until then, go home, rest, and regain your strength. In a couple of weeks, I'd like someone down in the Santa Cruz area to give you a good going over." He turned to Maggie. "I'd really like to talk to you some before you leave."

"I'm sorry. Bill. I'd really like to. But I can't yet, and I'm afraid you'll have to respect my feelings."

Frowning, he shrugged his shoulders. "Okay, I guess I don't have much say in it. But do remember the others?"

"I will. I'm quite sure of that." She turned to Ann "Okay, Mom, let's get you dressed and out of here."

A half-hour later they were heading for home.

Chapter Thirteen

"MOM?" Carol stuck her head quietly into Ann's room and whispered to Maggie. "Beckie Mcphee's here."

"Shhh." Maggie rose from her chair and tiptoed out the door, then closed it. "Grandma just fell asleep, so we should be quiet for a while." They walked to the kitchen. Before Beckie could say anything, Maggie greeted her. "Hi, Beckie, how are you?"

Beckie stalled in the middle of a joyous greeting. "Pretty good, and you?" she asked, tentatively.

Maggie smiled. "Great, all of Ann's tests were as we hoped they would be. But I do want to hear about the meeting last night." She turned to Carol. "We should be back around twelve. Well have a beeper with us, so if you need to reach me, just call the clinic."

"Is it okay if I have Melanie over?" Carol asked.

"Sure, just don't get so loud that you wake Ann." Kissing Carol good-bye, she left with Beckie. They walked the two short blocks to the Catalyst, a coffeehouse frequented mostly by students from the Santa Cruz branch of the University of California. Located in what was once a luxurious oceanside hotel, the decor was outrageously ornate, with a fountain in the center of one room. Somehow, it fit reasonably well with the dart board, and the small crowded tables where people were playing chess or bridge or talking quietly. They finally found a table off in a corner.

“So,” Beckie said excitedly, “tell me about Ann.”

Maggie smiled. “Don’t you want to talk about what happened at the meeting last night?”

“Maggie! Of course I want to talk to you about last night, but first I have to know everything about Ann. How is she?”

Maggie sat forward in her chair, excited beyond control. “Beckie, I think she’s cured, and so does Krueger. He ran a complete series of computer-averaged scans, and couldn’t find a single tumor. He was totally freaked out, because last week I went in and pressured him into doing them, even though he was sure that there wasn’t a chance of any significant improvement. Krueger concluded that I had tried something on her. I think he’s scared that I used Lactrile or Curenin. But he really believes that whatever I did, it worked a cure. He wants in on it.”

“But he said that he thinks the cancer is gone?” Beckie demanded.

Maggie nodded. “He didn’t take any biopsies but he’s convinced she’s cured. And if she isn’t, it’s been reduced so far that she’s not in anywhere near as much danger as before. So maybe she’ll need another treatment every year or two. It doesn’t matter. For all practical purposes, she’s cured!” She leaned back in her chair triumphantly. Her cheeks were a bright red from the excitement.

Beckie was speechless a rare condition for her. For a moment she just stared at Maggie with her mouth half open. Finally, she asked, “But Maggie, what did you do? I mean, what kind of medicine did you give her?”

Maggie smiled proudly. “First, you have to swear to absolute secrecy, and I really mean absolute, because this is just too big a thing to let get out.”

She nodded.

“No, Beckie, I want you to think about it, and then say it.”

Beckie paused. “Okay,” she said finally. “I solemnly agree not to divulge anything that you say after this point in our conversation to anyone, without your clear permission.”

Maggie solemnly nodded her head in acceptance, but then her face broke into a silly grin. “It was a brew of frog and sweet oil, egg yolk, burnt allo—”

“Maggie! Not that old cure you found at Stanford? I thought you tried it, and it didn’t work.”

Maggie smiled. “I only tried half of it before. I only tried the medicine.”

Beckie looked confused. “I don’t understand—was there more in that book than that recipe? What do you mean?”

“Oh, you know, the incantations, charms, magic drawings on her bedroom door . . .”

“Stop it! Why won’t you be serious with me?”

“Because I’m so happy! Beckie, don’t you understand? I’ve found a cure for cancer!” She almost

bounced up in her chair as she said it.

Beckie did bounce to her feet. Leaping around the table, she pulled Maggie up, gave her a big hug, and whirled her around.

Maggie grabbed Beckie's chair and pulled it around the table so that it was right next to hers, and then pushed her into it.

"You know," she said, "I haven't proved that it worked, or anything yet, but if it was the medicine that cured Mom, we've done what medical science couldn't do. I just can't comprehend the magnitude of the event. It's just too much! All I believe so far is that Mom really is better. And even that's hard to believe."

"Oh, Maggie!" Beckie said, her voice soft but intense. "I'm so happy for you, and proud of you, too!"

"But Beckie, I never would have figured it out without you. I would have given up after the first try. We did it together!"

Surprised, Beckie pulled away a bit, and looked at her. "Maggie," she pleaded, "what do you mean? What did you figure out?"

Her eyes danced with delight as she repeated, "Incantations, charms, magic drawings on the door! Beckie, we're all so blinded by pharmaceutical-house science that we forget the source of magic's true strength. Why do you think witch doctors, midwives, and primitive doctors all over the world used magical trappings?"

"Well." Beckie began uncertainly, "probably to give some sort of authority, power, to their treatment—"

"No!" Maggie shouted. Leaning forward, her face only inches from Beckie's, she whispered, "Because they worked!" Throwing her head up, almost defiantly, she leaned back in her chair. "You taught me that," she announced.

Beckie responded slowly, unsurely. "You're saying that magic works?"

"Nope. Try again."

"But you're saying that the incantation and charms, and all that did work, in curing diseases?"

"Closer," Maggie replied. "Those things together with—"

"With the medicine!" Beckie said.

"Right." Maggie smiled. "The medicine works with them, but not without them. I know that, because I tried it both ways."

"But did you actually use those things on Ann?—incantations, charms, drawing on her bedroom door?"

"And what did you have to do with it?" Maggie suggested.

"Yes, and what did I have to do with it?"

Maggie laughed. “Oh, I’m sorry, Beckie. Will you let me do it this way? Making you guess? I really want to, because I want you to see it the way I did, as a flash.”

Beckie laughed, too. “Maggie, you’re wonderful! Of course you can, if you want.”

“Okay. Look, when you teach someone how to do natural childbirth, what do you teach them?”

Beckie accepted her role. “To relax, to understand what is happening in their bodies, and what’s going to be happening.”

“And what sort of specific procedures do you teach them?”

“Relaxation breathing,” Beckie replied. “Breathing patterns that make it possible for the woman to relax her muscles, and deal with the pain of the contractions.”

“And does that breathing pattern cause the body to relax?”

“No, not really, it just makes it easier for the woman to relax.”

“And does that stop the pain?”

“No. It breaks the pain-fear-tension cycle, so that the pain doesn’t build up any stronger.”

“So if all you did was teach them the breathing exercises?”

“It probably wouldn’t work.”

Maggie paused a moment, then leaned forward, “Why not?”

Beckie considered the question. “Because—because the woman has to have enough strength and self-confidence in addition to block the buildup of fear.”

Maggie smiled. “And what is the scientific, biochemical, physiological basis for the pain-fear-tension cycle?”

Beckie thought a minute. “I don’t know. I don’t think anyone really knows. It has to do with adrenaline release, and all that, in part, but really, we don’t know.”

“So, if the basis for it isn’t scientific—”

A huge smile broke out on Beckie’s face. “Then it’s magic!”

All the fantastic, electrical excitement in Maggie’s face vanished, replaced with an impossibly contradictory calmness. She took a deep breath, exhaled slowly, and said, “I taught Ann to trust the medicine, and to trust the ability of her body to work with that medicine to cure the cancer. I gave her strength and self-confidence. You can call it magic if you want.”

Beckie was astonished by the near-radiance of Maggie’s face. She seemed almost to glow with delight and pride. She started to say something when Maggie stopped her.

“And Beckie, it was you who taught me that progress could be sought not only from new and better

instrumentation, medication, and technology, but that it could also be sought from within the patient.

“You know, up until right now, I hadn’t been sure why I refused to tell Krueger about what I did. I knew vaguely that it had to do with a fear that he wouldn’t believe me; now I do understand it. My cure, my potion and charms, are totally at odds with the whole approach of modern medicine. They aren’t scientific.” She paused “And now, you do have to tell me about what happened at the meeting last night, because, you see, if we can’t convince the medical profession of the validity of how we want to carry out our midwifery we won’t be able to convince them of the validity of my cancer cure, either.”

* * *

For several hours, Beckie replayed the first meeting of what had come to be called the Natural Midwives Association. They then discussed strategy, edited the draft of a statement that Beckie had written that morning and time and time again came back to the miracle of Ann’s cure. By midnight, they were exhausted.

“So we have two battles ahead of us,” Beckie summarized. “How to get the Natural Midwives Association recognized, and how to get Maggie’s Magic Cancer Cure recognized.”

Maggie smiled. “Maggie’s Magic Cancer Cure,” she repeated. “M2C2. Sounds like a robot I used to know.” Beckie groaned. “But really, it’s not two fights, it’s just one—getting the medical establishment to accept the fact that they don’t have a monopoly on approaches to taking care of people.”

“Well,” Beckie argued, “they may have the same eventual goal in mind, but tactically, they’re really different fights, and I suspect that there won’t be much interaction between the two.”

Maggie nodded in frustrated agreement. “But isn’t there some way that we could tie them together?” she asked.

Beckie shrugged. “I don’t see how.”

“Well, look,” Maggie suggested, “we really haven’t talked at all about dealing with our cancer cure. I mean, I don’t even know how we’re going to be able to convince anyone that we really have a cure.”

“Why not?” Beckie asked. “You seem to have Krueger convinced. And you did cure your mom. So where’s the problem?”

Maggie smiled. “The problem is three problems, really. Problem number one: no one’s going to buy a three-hundred-year-old cure for cancer that uses frogs and spices; number two: we haven’t any evidence that I actually cured Mom, as opposed to her just spontaneously recovering from cancer after I gave her the so-called cure. I would like more evidence before I try to convince the medical profession. Number three: if I give them my cure, they’ll go and test it on rats, mice, and people stashed away in hospital death wards, and when they do that, it won’t work. That’s the way I tried it with Mom the first time, and it didn’t do anything as far as I could tell. It’ll take some pretty strong evidence before they’re willing to test the medicine the way it has to be done. In fact, maybe I shouldn’t even call it a medicine. Maybe potion is more appropriate, because . . .” She stopped, confused by her inability to say what she was thinking. “I guess I’m more tired than! Thought.”

But now Beckie was alert again. “But are you saying that you want to test the potion on more people before you tell anyone about it?”

Maggie nodded.

Beckie continued excitedly, “Then maybe there is a way we can tie the two together—what say that we let a few of the women from the N.M.A. in on your secret. Maybe a half-dozen or so of us could do it.”

“The point being?” Maggie asked.

“The point being that I think the A.M.A.’s anti-N.M.A. campaign is going to be slow in building. If we can get enough evidence for the cancer cure before the crunch comes, then we could have the N.M.A. announce your discovery—”

“Wait a minute,” Maggie interrupted. “You gave me your solemn promise that you wouldn’t tell anyone about this. That includes other midwives, too.”

“Well, I’m not going to go and tell them unless you’re in agreement, Maggie.”

“No of course not,” she admitted. “I don’t know where that came from. I guess I just don’t have enough confidence myself, and I’d hate to involve anyone else if it turns out to be a bust.”

Beckie shrugged. “It wouldn’t be such a terrible thing if a few more people spent some time on it and it turned out not to work,” she suggested.

Maggie smiled. “It depends on your point of view, I’m afraid. Because I suspect that the A.M.A. would look on it as practicing medicine without a license, a rather nasty criminal offense.”

Beckie looked surprised. “I never thought of that. Would it hold?”

“That’s irrelevant, Beckie. If they decide to push it, it’ll take all your time for two or three years to get off, and you’ll be in debt to some lawyer for the rest of your life. You’ll remember we went through all that in the late ’70s, when they busted the clinic for the same thing.

“The point is,” Maggie continued, “that the issue we want to fight on is not whether I am in fact practicing medicine without a license. The issue is whether I’ve found a cure for cancer, and whether the medical profession can accept the fact that the patient is an important part of that cure.”

“So where does that leave us?” Beckie asked.

“Well, for one thing, it leaves us not wanting to involve the Midwives Association at all, at least until we’re sure we’ve got a cure, and then taking it very slow. If the A.M.A. is coming down on us because they feel that we’re cutting in on their province with our midwifery, imagine how intense they’ll get if we begin curing sickness!”

“Do you think we should hold off on the cancer cure for a while?”

Maggie frowned. “No, let’s just keep it separate from the N.M.A. for now. I guess what we should do is quietly look for another cancer patient to try it on. it’ll be tricky.”

Beckie shrugged. “There’re enough of them, God knows. We shouldn’t have too much trouble coming up with one.”

“No, that’s not what I mean,” Maggie said. “I mean I’m not sure just what the cure really is, what it is

that Mom had to do, for example, to make that medicine work. So when we find a new patient, what is it we want to do?" She frowned again. "We know so damn little about this thing! I mean, assuming the treatment really did cure Mom, did her attitude, her involvement, really make the difference? Did I just make the medicine up differently the second time? Does it just take two treatment periods to work? These are all things that we have to sort out before we start getting public attention, and I don't know how long I can keep Krueger off my back."

"Do you think he'll be a problem?" Beckie asked.

Maggie nodded her head vigorously. "Of course. Wouldn't you be? I never should have admitted I had anything to do with it. Then he would have let it slide as just one more spontaneous remission."

"That's it, Maggie! Convince him It was a spontaneous remission!" Beckie's mouth broke into a wide grin. "Tell him you drove up and down the coast of California , and lit a candle in Ann's name at all of the old missions, and that's what you think caused her cure."

Maggie was shocked. "I don't know what he'd say, but he'd think I'd gone off the deep end." She thought it over, laughed, then, putting an arm around Beckie, gave her a half-hug. "You're right," she announced. "He'll drop it so fast, it'll be hard to see. The only thing ill regret is the change in his opinion of me."

"It's just as well," Beckie replied. "That way, he's less likely to stumble onto what we're really doing. And besides," she added, "when we finally announce the cure, you won't have to worry about his opinion anymore." Smiling, she returned Maggie's hug.

"Well, I'll talk to him within the week. That should solve that problem."

"So we look for another patient?"

Maggie nodded. "And keep working on the Midwives thing."

Beckie looked at her watch. "Well, it's after midnight, and you told Carol you'd be home."

Chapter Fourteen

"THERE it is again!"

Carol and Melanie sat on Maggie's bed. It was almost eleven, and they were using Maggie's room because it was farthest from Ann's. They sat calmly for two or three minutes, until they heard the sound again. "It came from over there," Melanie insisted, pointing toward a door in the corner. "Is it a closet?"

Carol shook her head. "It's my mom's study," she whispered. Silently, they both moved toward the door.

Melanie tried the doorknob, but it was locked. They both listened. The sound came again. "It is!" Melanie whispered. "it's coming from in there. Is there any way to get in?"

"Of course there is," Carol replied. "She keeps a spare key in the back of one of her drawers." Crossing the room to a large bureau, she pulled out the middle drawer. With a flourish, she pulled out the key. "Ta-da!" She quickly unlocked the study door, then returned to the dresser. "Don't open it!" she whispered to Melanie. "I want to see, too."

“Well, hurry up, then.”

Putting the key back in the drawer, and closing it carefully, Carol turned and hurried back to the door. “I’ll catch hell if Mom finds me in here, so I want to be ready to split fast if she comes in.”

Opening the door, they both peered in. Melanie felt around for the light switch on the dark wall.

“No!” Carol whispered, pulling Melanie’s hand back. “Mom could see that from halfway down the block. Go on in.” Giving her a little shove, Carol followed close behind Melanie, and closed the door behind her.

Melanie pushed back against Carol. “I can’t see a thing!” she complained.

“Well wait a minute, will you? Your eyes will adapt.” Squirring, Melanie continued to push back, trying to get behind Carol, who steadfastly kept her back against the door. “But what if that thing’s loose in here?” Melanie squealed.

As if on cue, the noise came again, much louder.

“Aiee!” Both screamed simultaneously. Suddenly, the light went on. Turning, Carol saw Melanie’s hand on the switch. She was white as a sheet. They looked around the room quickly, reassuring themselves that no large beasts were loose.

In the light everything seemed more reasonable. “Dummy,” Carol complained. “Whadja go getting all scared about?”

“Me? You’re the one who screamed.”

“Well you did, too.”

“Yeah, but only after you did,” Carol stood her ground. “Besides, why’d you turn the light on. I told you not to.”

Melanie stuck out her lip. “So turn it off, wise guy.” She moved her hand off the switch, and offered it to Carol. “And you’ll be able to see more if you don’t keep your back flat against the wall.”

“Well, we might as well take a quick look around, as long as the light’s on already.” Moving past Melanie, she cautiously started a search of the room. After a minute the noise came again, from right near Melanie’s feet. Dropping to the ground, she peered under a low coffee table covered with journals and found: “An aquarium!”

“What?” Carol asked, coming over.

“Its an aquarium, full of frogs!” Melanie tugged it from under the table. Indeed, as she did, a series of grunts and croaks emanated from within. “That’s where our mysterious noises come from.”

Carol peered inside. There were at least twenty of them, mostly piled on top of one another in one corner of the container. A few sat lazily in the inch-deep water that covered the bottom of the aquarium. Looking under the table, Carol pulled out a small box “Frog food,” she announced. There was also a pamphlet in the box. ““Your Pet Frog,”” she read aloud, and turned it so Melanie could see.

Melanie looked at Carol eyes wide open, the question obvious, but unspoken.

“Come on,” Carol said, jumping to her feet. “Let’s put this stuff back. I still don’t want to get caught in here.”

Melanie pushed the aquarium back under the table. “Me neither.” They turned off the light and scurried from the room. Carol checked to make sure the door locked behind her.

“Why don’t we go to your room?” Melanie suggested. Agreeing, Carol quickly straightened Maggie’s bed and followed Melanie out of the room. She took one last look at the study door before turning off the light.

In Carol’s room, recovering from their escapade, they sat a minute in silence. Finally, Melanie’s curiosity got the best of her. “Carol, what are they for?”

Carol shrugged her shoulders. “I don’t know.”

“Does she do experiments in there?” she asked. “Does she cut them up and use them in some kind of science stuff?”

Carol made a face. “Don’t be gross. Of course she doesn’t. If she did any experiments at all, she’d do them down at the clinic, where they’ve got all that equipment.”

Melanie was not convinced. “Maybe it’s secret stuff, that no one else is supposed to know about.”

“God, you sure can be dumb.”

“Well, then what are they for, smartie?”

Carol frowned. “I told you, I don’t know—I’m not supposed to go into her study, and I’m not supposed to know where the spare key is, either. How am I going to explain how I found the frogs, huh?”

“You could just tell her about hearing the noise. You wouldn’t have to tell her we went into the office.”

Carol frowned, but didn’t reply.

Melanie sensed that conversation had reached its end. “Your mom at a meeting?”

“Huh? Oh, no. She went out with one of the women she works with. There seems to be some kind of trouble brewing about their delivering babies.”

“They in trouble for something?” Melanie asked,

Carol shrugged “Nah, I don’t think so. I think it’s just the doctors want all the business to themselves.”

“But I thought there weren’t enough doctors to start with.”

Carol shook her head. “Honestly, Melanie, sometimes you are beyond belief.”

“Does this mean your mom might lose her job?” Melanie asked.

“No,” she answered slowly. “I don’t think so. She didn’t seem to be particularly worried about the situation, anyhow. I think it’s like when Flynn calls us into his office to scream about something we’ve done. You just have to take shit from the guy for a while, and then, at the worst, you have to look embarrassed, and say you’re sorry.” She made her best sincere-repentance face and the two of them rolled on the bed, laughing. Suddenly Carol stopped and hopped off the bed. Going over to the front window, she pulled the curtain aside and looked out. “Aha!” she said. “Old eagle ears strikes again. That was my mom’s friend’s car starting up. They’re back home.”

* * *

“Hi, Mom.” Carol smiled at her, but didn’t get up from the table. “I’ve got water on the stove if you want something.”

“No thanks, Carol, I think I’m going straight to bed.” She smiled the eternal smile of a mother. Turning to Melanie, she said hello.

“Hi, Maggie. Did you have a pleasant evening?”

Maggie stopped at the door to the hall. “Quite pleasant, and I hope you did, too?”

Melanie smiled. “Oh, we had a great time.” She paused just an instant “Say, do you have toads outside, around your house?”

Maggie thought a second and then shook her head. “No, not that I’m aware of.”

“Oh” Melanie replied innocently. “Because Carol and I were talking to each other in your room—so we wouldn’t disturb your mother—and we thought we heard some toads or something. You know, little croaking sounds.”

Maggie stared at her. There was a bit too much innocence in her style. She threw a quick glance at Carol and saw her staring angrily at Melanie. What to say? “Well, a lot of the houses around here do have them, so I wouldn’t be surprised if we did, too. But I think they’re pretty innocuous. In fact, don’t they eat tons of insects?”

“Huh?” Melanie’s mind was obviously elsewhere. “Oh yeah, I guess they do.” She paused a second.

“Well, good night you two,” Maggie yawned. “I’m going to bed.” Turning to Carol, she added, “And don’t you stay up too late. There’s school tomorrow.”

“I know!” Carol complained.

“Good.” Maggie turned and headed for her bedroom. Once in it, she turned on the light and closed the door. She checked the door to her study. Locked. She had been afraid that she might have left it unlocked. There was no need to get Carol all involved in her doings if she didn’t have to. She had enough problems without that. She lay down without taking off her clothes, planning to undress “in just a minute.”

Chapter Fifteen

ON Wednesday Carol arrived home from school at three. Ann’s door was closed. Carol quickly

wandered through the house to make sure Maggie was still at work, then went straight for her mother's room. She quickly retrieved the key from the dresser drawer, opened the study door, and returned the key. Nervously, she slipped into Maggie's study.

Checking under the coffee table, she convinced herself that what she had seen the night before was real. For a minute, she just sat on the floor, staring at them in idle curiosity. But then she was back on her feet. Slowly, she looked around the room. She was convinced the explanation was somewhere nearby.

Settling on the obvious, she went to Maggie's desk, which was piled high with disks. Only the area before the terminal was clear. Off to one side lay a small data book, similar to the one Carol used in her chemistry class. Except this one had a black cover, with a rich, red binding. In the red square on the cover, her mother had written "A.K.S.," her grandmother's initials. Carol opened the book and looked at the first page. It was dated January 10, exactly one month earlier. She started reading, at first not making any sense out of the entries. But on the third page she found the transcription Maggie had made of her composite cure. Carol read on.

It took Carol twenty minutes to read through Maggie's copious notes, which ended with Monday's entry. There was no entry for Tuesday. She sat there silently, trying to digest what she had read. It was all too confusing.

She looked at the clock on Maggie's desk. Four already? She went out into the bedroom and checked the alarm clock. Four o'clock. Where had the hour gone? She stood a minute, uncertain as to what to do, then hurried back to the study, sat down, and reread the book.

It was 4:30 when Carol finally returned to her own room. She lay down on her bed, her breath coming fast, her heart beating as if it wanted to burst, and her mind locked in terror. Her mother was trying to become a witch! She fought to maintain a grip on herself, and tried to analyze the notes. It was clearly two books in one. The first reminded her of Ms. Canton, who tried to get them to keep their chemistry notebooks neat, with careful, critical observations of what they saw, complete, concise notes on what they had done. But the other part was just weird. It seemed to be her mom just talking to herself about witch's brews, incantations and charms, and earning her name—whatever that meant. It was this part that worried and confused Carol. It sounded like one of those dumb horror stories about the witch who had lived in a secret cave for five hundred years before gaining the strength to recapture the souls of her pre-seclusion enemies. She couldn't remember the name of the book, but she did remember the cover, and that the witch had not looked as scary as she would have expected.

Her mind jerked back. Who cared about the cover of that book? What had her mother done? If she had found a cure for cancer, why wasn't she telling anyone? Why is she even hiding it from me, Carol asked herself. And what would she tell Melanie? God, she had really been dumb to tell her that she was going to look around this afternoon. Now she didn't know how to handle the situation.

Unexpectedly, a loud, sharp slam resounded through the house and Carol leaped off her bed.

"Hello! Carol? Are you home?"

Carol nodded dumbly, and tried to answer. No sound came out.

"Carol?"

Fighting for control she walked into the hall, not knowing what to expect. She could hear her mother bustling around in the kitchen, and for an instant she couldn't picture what she looked like. In terror, she

walked toward the kitchen.

Maggie was puttering aimlessly around the room, trying to calm down. It had been a hard day. It had started badly, with her showing up a half-hour late for her first appointment then Krueger called her at 10:30, pressing for information on her treatment. She had begged off, saying she was with a patient and would call back, and then didn't. The pace for her day had been set. She couldn't take much more.

"Mom?"

Maggie jumped. Turning, she saw Carol, standing nervously by the door. The girl's eyes were red, as if she had just been crying. "Darling, what's the matter?" She walked over to Carol, to comfort her. But as she reached out for her, Carol pulled back. There was terror in her expression. "Carol! What is it?" She had never seen her look like this before.

"Mom?" Carol asked again.

"Carol?" she offered, not moving forward.

Suddenly, a shiver shook Carol's body, and crying, she hurried into the protection of her mother's arms. "I was afraid," she stuttered. "I—I thought it wasn't you."

Maggie hugged her tight against herself. "Carol, darling, what do you mean?"

"I snuck into your study. I took the key from your dresser and I read the book that you have in there about Gramma. I thought that you were trying to be a witch, and that you weren't really my mom, and I got all scared and, and—" She paused to wipe tears from her eyes. "And then I remembered your great, great—whatever—grandmother, Margaret Jones, and how she was a witch—"

"Carol!"

"Well, lots of people thought she was, you told me that, and they even tried her as a witch!"

"But Carol, there're no such things as witches, you know that. I don't understand—"

"Well, neither do I, and I got all confused, and what did you do to Gramma?"

Guilt overcame Maggie. "Oh, darling, I'm sorry. I should have told you long ago." She hugged her gently. "I just didn't want to talk to you about it until I was sure that it worked." She held Carol out at arms' length. "But now you need to know, and I need someone else to tell it to."

So Maggie told her story again. Carol listened wide-eyed, fascinated and scared by the story. By the end, she was satisfied. "But Carol," Maggie cautioned, "you must promise not to tell a word of this to anyone. Not even—no, especially not—to Melanie. When I'm ready, I'll tell the whole world. But if it gets out before I'm ready, I won't be allowed to continue, and get the information I need to prove it."

Carol nodded, looking more grown up than usual. "I promise; Mom, not a word to anyone. I'll keep it a secret."

Maggie smiled. "And one more promise, to help you keep the first one. Promise that you'll try to not even think about it when you're around Melanie. Otherwise, it'll eventually just bubble out of you, when you're not expecting it to. To make up for that, you and I can talk about it a lot. I'd like to do that, and I

think you would, too. Okay?"

Carol frowned. "I said I wouldn't tell anyone. You don't have to treat me like a kid, and give me little tricks to help me. I'm fifteen."

Maggie smiled. "And you already know all there is to know. Okay, I'm not going to make you promise that. But that's what I do now. At work today, it was the only way I could keep from telling everyone. You do it however you want. But make sure you don't slip up."

Chapter Sixteen

AS she lazed in bed Sunday morning, Maggie smiled, remembering Krueger's response to her religious revelations, and how they had led to Ann's cure. She had built up to such a fever pitch that Krueger had literally squirmed in his chair. Being religious in the late twentieth century was akin to being a leper in earlier times.

Krueger isn't such a bad type, she reminded herself. He had been a competent and gentle doctor when dealing with Ann, and Maggie appreciated that. But somehow, despite his supportive attitude and friendly nature, something in him was very much aloof, domineering, unreachable.

And when she told him that an act of God had saved Ann's life, he pulled back, as if from an inappropriate contact with a person of a lower caste, someone he'd been tricked into treating as an equal. Well, he wouldn't be asking her any more questions about what she had done.

She wondered if Beckie was doing as well in her fight with the A.M.A. On Thursday she had read the Los Angeles Times account of the formation of the Natural Midwives Association, and, at least in the San Francisco Chronicle, a fairly objective report of the dispute with the California Midwives Association. But she hadn't been in touch with the issue beyond that, and had not talked with Beckie since Tuesday night.

With a sudden burst of energy she sat up, swung her feet over the edge, and rose to her feet. She began to dress.

A few minutes later the phone rang—not the clinic hot-line, but the house phone. Let Carol get it, she decided, and went on dressing. After another ring it stopped. There was a knock at her bedroom door. "Come on in."

Carol's head appeared. "Beckie's on the phone, Mom."

"Okay, thanks." Maggie went back to her bed and lifted the receiver. She noticed that Carol had left the door open. "Hello?" She carried the phone across the room to shut the door.

"Hi, Maggie, it's Beckie."

"Hi, Beckie. How are you?"

"Oh, busy, mostly." She paused. "I've been hunting for you."

"Hunting?"

"Yep." There was challenge in the way she said it. "You were looking for something, remember?"

Maggie frowned in confusion. “What?”

“Another patient.” For a moment, neither spoke. Finally Beckie continued. “She’s home with her family, and losing ground slowly. From what I could gather she’s in slightly better shape than Ann was when you started treating her.” She stopped again, waiting for a response from Maggie, but none came. “I told her we’d come by this afternoon.”

“What!?” Maggie almost shouted it into the phone. “What do you mean? What did you say to her?”

“Why, just that we maybe had some medication that we could try on her, and—”

“We?” Maggie shouted. “We have some medication? She knows who we are? Beckie, do you have any idea what risk we’re running doing these tests? We could end up in jail for a good long time, you know.” She sputtered for a moment, not knowing what to say. “Tell her you were mistaken, that there aren’t any tests. We can’t just run out and treat people willy-nilly.”

There was a long pause before Beckie finally replied. “Well, I’m glad that I went out and found someone for you. It’s clear that you never would have done it on your own.”

“Beckie, we can’t do it this way. I mean it.”

“Oh, don’t be silly. We can’t do it what way? Honestly, you really don’t have much faith in me. You’re acting as if I ran a full-page ad in the Examiner, or something.”

“Well, from the way you described it . . .”

“Oh, Maggie, I’m sorry. That’s just my silly way of explaining to you. I thought you’d be delighted, so I just sort of blurted it out.”

“So now can you tell me what actually is going on?” Maggie asked irritably.

Beckie paused before responding. “I was at Amy Belever’s yesterday, working on our strategy for the N.M.A. fight, and she asked how your mom was, didn’t know what to say, so I muttered something about her seeming to be a lot better. Well, it turns out that her aunt, who I guess she’s been pretty close to most of her life, is also dying from cancer, and is now at home, with her husband.” She stopped, and took a deep breath. “So I decided, and I guess I should have talked to you first, but I just decided that if we can’t trust Amy, who can we? So I told her, and she was all excited about the possibility, and, well, I agreed to go and talk to her aunt.”

“And?”

“And so I went over with Amy, and just talked with her awhile, and then suggested that I knew someone who might be running tests on a possible cure, but that it was hard work, and the patient had to work hard too—and she said she wanted to try it. I said that I wasn’t sure the tests were still going on, but promised that I’d let Amy know. That’s where we left it.”

“Except for Amy.”

“Yeah. I guess I did more or less tell Amy that we’d be willing to try it on her aunt.”

“You told her it was me?”

“Yeah.”

“Beckie, how could you? I don’t understand you!”

“Because I wanted to do something nice for you!” she blurted out. “Because I wanted to do something that would make you happy.” She stopped. “I’m sorry,” she continued in a softer voice. “I guess I’ve screwed things up.”

There was a long silence. Finally Maggie decided. “What time?” she asked.

“What?”

“What time did you say we’d come by?”

“Do you mean it?”

“Beckie, I’m just now realizing that despite the way you say things, I can’t think of anything you’ve done in connection with the clinic or the Midwives Association that in the end I haven’t come to agree with. For once I think I should trust you.” She paused. “I want to trust you, to say thank you for what you’ve done. Because I never would have gotten off my ass and done it for myself.” She paused again, and then continued in a more businesslike manner. “I don’t have any of my potion made up, and there’s no way I can make some for this afternoon. What did you say about us coming by?”

“Just that we might come and talk with her today, nothing more. In fact I said that even if we could treat her, most likely we couldn’t start until some time next week.”

Maggie thought a minute. “We could probably start tomorrow. Where does she live?”

“In Palo Alto. But it’ll still be better than an hour each way I thought that if I came along for the first couple of days, later we could alternate, go every other time.”

Maggie laughed. “You’re determined to be a part of this, aren’t you?”

“Well, no,” Beckie stammered, “I just thought that—well, I mean you told me about it, and it looked like you could use some help—”

“Oh Beckie, I’m sorry. I was just being nasty. I want you to do it with me. I’ve felt so alone on it so far. So tell me when you said we’d come by this afternoon.”

“It’s not firm. I said that around three would be most likely. But if that’s not convenient—”

“No, that’s fine. I don’t have a thing planned for this afternoon, so three’s as good as any other time.”

“You sure?”

“Positive. What say I pick you up a little after 1:30?”

“That’d be fine.”

“Great. I’ll see you then. And Beckie, thanks for calling.”

* * *

It was ten of three when Maggie swung the car into a wide, flagged driveway. For a moment she just sat and stared. Located near the Interstate, the house sat on at least an acre and a half of prime land, probably worth five hundred thousand in itself. And the house was—the word “elegant” came to Maggie’s mind, followed by the word “money.”

She turned to Beckie. “You didn’t tell me that they had a place like this.”

“She’s dying, Maggie. That’s the only thing about her that matters, I think. Her money isn’t worth much to her dead.” But then a smile crept across her face. “Of course, she might be a useful ally if we can save her. Actually, I hadn’t any idea where she lived when I told Amy I’d come and see her. My motives were really not so callous.”

Maggie laughed. “I think I’ve grown to understand that, Beckie.” She opened her door to get out. “Is that Amy’s car, too?”

“She said she’d meet us here, so I assume it is. In fact, that’s her, now.”

Coming down the steps from the front door was Amy.

Maggie was startled to see her in this new context. As a midwife she lived a modest middle-class existence, and Maggie had always assumed that her background was the same. But as she descended from the porch, she looked as if she was used to the wealth and comfort of her aunt’s home. Maggie suddenly realized that she knew little about Amy.

“Maggie, I’m so glad you could come.” Amy came down to the car to meet them. “Beckie told me a bit about what you did with your mom, and—well. I guess there are a lot of people who would like to try it. My own mother died when I was thirteen, and Aunt Judy has been like a mother to me ever since.”

Maggie walked up the sidewalk with Amy and Beckie. “Did Beckie tell you that I’ve only tried it once, and that I’m not sure that it even works?”

Amy nodded.

“And does your aunt know?”

Amy shook her head. “I haven’t told her anything, because, for one thing, I didn’t know very much, and for another, I don’t have the heart to disappoint her any more than I feel I have to.” She paused, afraid that Maggie was going to demand that her aunt be told.

“Good.” Maggie stopped and turned toward Amy. “Walk back to the car with me,” she said. As they walked Maggie explained. “She must be given every reason to believe that the cure will work. I think she has to believe in it, and fight for it, and bring her whole mind and body into the struggle, or else—I don’t know why, but it doesn’t work.” Back at the car, she stopped and turned toward Amy. “Does it scare you, to hear my saying that?”

Amy’s face was clouded with indecision. “It—it gives me pause, yes. I don’t think it scares me, but it confuses me, and I feel as if you don’t want to explain yourself to me, and that is a bit scary.”

Maggie nodded. “You’re right, I’m being very defensive about this. I will say that some sort of active involvement—sometimes I think of it as spiritual participation—is necessary for the cure to work. There’s a logic that led me to suspect the necessity, but not to believe it. What led me to belief was hard fact; my mom didn’t get better when I slipped her the medicine without her knowing that it was new and experimental, but she did when I told her what I was doing, and demanded her involvement in the process. Granted, it’s not the best-controlled experiment of all times, but for the time being, when I try to reproduce it I want to do it exactly the same way each time.”

Amy smiled. “A bit mysterious, but, all in all, it sounds rather reasonable. Someday you’ll tell me the logic?”

Maggie returned her smile. “If it turns out to be right, I promise.”

“It’s a deal.”

“Let’s go see your aunt then,” Maggie suggested.

* * *

“Judy, I know the doctors told you they couldn’t do anything more for you. So, do you think that doctors are the only ones who know anything about medicine? Do you think that when I’m out there, delivering babies, I don’t know what I’m doing?”

“Amy, dear,” her aunt said, “I’m not strong enough to argue with you. I just don’t see how a couple of nurses can know more about curing cancer than the best doctors available do.”

Maggie sat silently, waiting for the appropriate moment to speak up, but it never seemed to come. Finally, Beckie joined in. “Mrs. Belever, do you understand that we have cured several other cancer patients? That we have never failed to cure one?”

The woman looked up, somewhat surprised. “Amy said there was only one.”

“Only one that we can talk freely about. The others, like you, can’t be talked about, because strictly speaking it’s illegal for us to treat you, even if we save your life. And in fact, you will be sworn to secrecy before we begin treatment on you, as the others were. But we can save your life.”

“You seem rather sure of yourself.”

“I’m trained in medicine, and science. I can judge when a treatment is effective, and when it isn’t. This one is.”

“But when I spoke with you yesterday, you seemed to indicate that your friend here was in charge.” She pointed toward Maggie.

Beckie laughed pleasantly. “But I do all the talking? Well, Maggie invented the treatment, tested it, and perfected it. Only after she felt sure it worked did she tell me about it and allow me to help. We talkers aren’t always the ones who do the real work.”

Amy’s aunt laughed weakly. “Well, that certainly is the truth.” She paused, then leaned back into her pillows, her expression serious again. “It works?” she asked, addressing the question to the ceiling.

“It works,” Maggie said.

“Then let’s begin the damn treatment. The pain is so bad.”

* * *

The next morning, Beckie and Maggie drove to Palo Alto early in the morning, reaching Amy’s aunt’s house by eight. They spent a half-hour trying to build Judy Belever’s confidence in the treatment, then administered it. While Beckie drove back to Santa Cruz, Maggie quickly fell asleep in the passenger seat.

When she awoke, they were already at the clinic. “I’ve never seen you sleep like that,” Beckie commented. “Feeling better?”

Maggie stretched as best she could in the cramped space of the Volkswagen, “I’m not sure yet. I hate sleeping in the middle of the day.”

“Well, it’s only 9:45, it’s not really the middle of the day yet.”

“Picky, picky. If you’d been up till three, you’d be sleepy, too.”

“How come so late?” Beckie asked.

Maggie frowned. “Well, I went down to the drug store last night, to get the cancer cure, but they were fresh out, so I had to make it up myself. Takes a little time, you know.”

Beckie was surprised, “You had to prepare a new batch last night?”

“Every night,” Maggie explained. When the first tests with Mom failed, I thought maybe the problem was with freshness, so every day I went into my study and made it after dinner. But now that Carol’s aware of the project, I wanted to wait until she was asleep. I don’t want her getting all upset about this needlessly.”

“You mean, the freshness might be the reason that it worked the second time and not the first, and not because of your mom’s involvement in the process?”

Maggie shrugged. “I told you last Tuesday that I wasn’t sure why it worked the second time. As I said, the brew might just take two weeks to work.”

“So why are we going through all this rigmarole with Amy’s aunt?”

“Because I want to convince myself that I do have a cure. Later on I can worry about what is and what isn’t required for it to work.”

Beckie smiled. “Well, you’re clearly a cleverer scientist than I am. I just would have tried fresh medicine by itself.”

“Soon enough—before we’re done—I promise well have the parameters all sorted out.” Looking at her watch, Maggie reached for the door. “But it’s five of, and I have a ten o’clock.” They headed into the clinic.

* * *

That night, Maggie opened a file on Amy's aunt. Then, when she was sure that Carol was asleep, she prepared another batch of medicine. Beckie had offered to go to Palo Alto alone the next day, but Maggie still feared that some minor quirk in her treatment, something she did but Beckie wouldn't, might affect the success of the treatment. So they had agreed that Maggie would go alone on Tuesday and they'd both go on Wednesday. Most likely, they'd maintain that rotation until the end of the treatment, it was three o'clock, again, when she got to bed.

Chapter Seventeen

SUSAN Glanvil arrived at Dr. Somers's office at noon. She identified herself to his receptionist, then sat down, just a bit nervously. Almost fifteen minutes passed before the receptionist called her back to the desk. "Dr. Somers will be about another ten minutes, but will be able to join you then." She gave Glanvil a bored smile and returned to her work, neither waiting for, nor interested in, a response.

At 12:30, Somers appeared, cheerful but aloof. Walking up to Glanvil, he extended both hands. "Susan, how nice of you to come by." He took her hands in his, and gave them a gentle squeeze. "Please come in." After seeing her to a chair, he circled behind his immaculate walnut desk and sat down. "Susan," he began, "I want to tell you how pleased I am that you have finally managed to remove from your organization those so-called midwives whose attitudes were so repugnant." His look invited a comment, but his whole manner indicated none was needed.

After a moment's hesitation, he continued. "I had been worried that your association with this group could lead to serious problems for you and your legitimate colleagues, but that risk has now significantly diminished. I do feel more consequential action will shortly be taken against this N.M.A.—the nutty midwives association, or whatever they call themselves." He paused here to laugh. "You Look a bit confused. Perhaps you're wondering what type of action I'm referring to?"

Glanvil nodded slightly.

"Well, I think we will most likely go to the state, and ask that their credentials be revoked for their refusal to employ reasonable care in their medical practice. We might also request local hospitals to remove their privileges." He paused a minute, as if wondering whether he had failed to mention something.

"As you can see, Susan, we are not taking this turn of events lightly. I feel, and a goodly number of my colleagues agree, that we are experiencing a subtle but direct attack on the medical establishment, one which, if allowed to continue, could undermine the entire medical profession in this country."

Glanvil opened her mouth, as if to disagree.

"Now, Susan, I don't want to argue with you over whether such a threat exists, for that's not why I asked you to come by. I and many of the more influential doctors in the A.M.A. have decided that there is such a threat. I asked you to come here mainly to inform you of our opinion and of our decision to cut this cancerous growth from the medical body." He paused, and as he did, his strident manner softened.

"Now as you know, Susan, when a doctor decides that he's dealing with a malignant growth, it is most important that he remove all the cancerous tissue. To do so, he must always remove a certain amount of healthy tissue; one can never tell whether a few cancerous cells have wandered into the peripheral tissue.

“Of course, when one is dealing with tissue, one doesn’t feel sympathy for the healthy tissue so excised. But in a situation such as we now face with the N.M.A., I would be saddened if all the midwives in your organization were to be stripped of their credentials, solely to insure that the entire contingent of . . . disruptive midwives is removed.

“Yes, Susan, I believe there is some reason to worry. I fear that some of the other doctors involved in this project might be unwilling to take my word for your dedication. . . .” For a moment, he seemed lost in thought, as if he were unsure of what to say next, or had actually forgotten. Finally, nodding his head to himself, he continued. “Susan, I feel that it is really important for you, and the other midwives who have remained loyal, within the Midwives Association, to take a public stand and condemn the N.M.A. I think that is the only way that you can guarantee your own survival in the fight ahead.”

Somers rose from behind his desk. “Well, we’re both busy people, Susan, and I don’t want to keep you any longer.” He extended a hand to help Glanvil up. Walking with her to the door, he added, “I wanted to talk to you personally, so I could emphasize how important I think it is for your group to take a strong stand on this issue. Because, if it doesn’t, I’m afraid I can’t promise you that it will come out of this any better than the N.M.A. is going to.” Standing in the doorway with her, he smiled broadly. “Well, thank you again for coming.”

Closing his door, he returned to his desk and smiled. She’ll go along with it, he decided. She’s too scared to realize that no one but the midwives can assist at home deliveries—or would be willing to. Too dangerous. More important, there’s no profit in it.

Chapter Eighteen

ON Wednesday Carol cooked dinner. Maggie had her worried. Since Monday, she had seemed listless and sleepy. And today she had disappeared before Carol got up. Again. Clearly, something was amiss.

On the other hand, Ann was recovering more rapidly than Carol could cope with. She sat in the kitchen chattering while Carol cooked, and at the dinner table, Carol was stunned by the normalcy of the scene, the three of them sitting around, eating joking.

After dinner, Maggie retired to her room while Carol cleaned up. Ann remained in the kitchen with her, a little run-down from all the time up and about, but happy to be out of her room. The air there, she insisted, was perpetually stale despite open windows and doors.

The dishes done and the kitchen cleaned, Carol finally helped Ann back to bed. Returning to the kitchen, she passed Maggie’s room. She could bear Maggie’s voice and, since the door was not quite shut, Carol stopped to listen.

“Maybe you aren’t so upset by the possibility,” Maggie said, “but I’m trying to support a family. Beckie, you know, since Steve died, I’ve been totally on my own in raising Carol, and now I have not just her, but Ann too. I can’t afford to go to jail, arid, dammit, I have no interest in going to jail.”

Moving even closer to the door, Carol could hear only half the conversation; the telephone volume was set on low or Maggie was using the receiver.

“But you’ve come up with two more cancer patients, and you ask me not to worry about how you found them. . . . Beckie, this is going beyond the point of trust—you’re making decisions that could turn my life upside down and you’re not even asking me about them.

“I’m just not going to let you get away with it anymore. You’ve found me three patients to treat, and fine, I appreciate it—but no more! You bring them to me without our having discussed it ahead of time, and I’ll refuse to help. And I mean that. When am I going to be able to treat these two? . . . Beckie, I’m still working at the clinic; I can’t just spend all day seeing cancer patients. . . . We talked about that before, with Amy’s aunt, it’s too early for you to go by yourself—first we have to be sure the treatment’s working at all.”

There was a long pause during which Carol heard nothing.

“All right. All right. All right! Friday morning I’ll go to Amy’s aunt with you, and then you’ll go up to the city to talk with the two new patients; I’ll head back here. The first treatment will be scheduled for Saturday, and if there’s clear improvement in Amy’s aunt, then you’ll go up to the city by yourself. . . . Fine,” Maggie said unenthusiastically. “It’s really too much for me to do myself. Now I’ll be preparing triple batches, and that’s going to take longer. I don’t know how much longer I can go to bed at three in the morning, and get up at seven. Now I’m going to be doing it all next week, too.” Her voice clearly indicated Maggie was not happy with the prospect.

Maggie shifted her position slightly and Carol could make out a muffled squawking. Her mother was using the telephone amplifier.

“Come on,” Maggie complained. “One variable at a time, huh? We can have you give the medication, but if you’re making it up and it doesn’t work, we don’t know whether to blame your presentation or your preparation—or something else entirely. If these two pull through and Amy’s aunt, then we can consider your helping in the preparation. . . . Look, this is silly. I want to nap before Carol goes to bed, so I can get some rest before I make the medicine. Let’s get off the phone now, and when we meet on Saturday, I can talk to you about the things we need to work out, okay? . . . ’Bye.”

* * *

Carol quietly backed away from the door, and tiptoed to her room. She stood there a minute, trying to understand what she had just heard. So that was why Maggie was so tired—she was waiting until Carol was asleep to make up more medication. Suddenly, she had an idea. Walking down to Maggie’s room, she knocked on the door.

“Come in,” Maggie answered.

The lights were off when Carol entered. “I just wanted to tell you I’m going to bed,” she announced. “I’m totally wiped out, and I’m going to fall asleep one way or another in the next ten minutes.”

Carol saw a smile of relief cross Maggie’s face. “Okay,” she replied, “I’ll see you in the morning.”

Closing the door, Carol returned to her room, and got ready for bed. Then she tried to piece together what she knew. Obviously, her mom was testing the cancer cure on more people, and Beckie was helping her. It had never occurred to Carol that Maggie would do that, but there was no question about it. But what was the meaning of her comments about going to jail? It almost sounded as if Beckie wanted to, but Mom didn’t. What were they planning to do that would get them into that kind of trouble? I have to talk to her, she decided. Find out what Beckie’s trying to get her into. Beckie was like that, always wanting to do crazy things. Maybe just telling Mom that I know about it, she thought. Maybe that’ll stop her. I could even threaten to tell on her.

She lay in the dark, imagining her mother in prison. How long would she be gone? Sometimes they send

people off for only a few days, or weeks, but sometimes they're gone for twenty years, or longer. When she tried to imagine herself thirty-five years old, her mother sixty, the two of them driving home from the prison, she began to cry.

Chapter Nineteen

SATURDAY, Maggie and Beckie didn't leave Santa Cruz until almost eleven, but Maggie was exhausted nevertheless. Thank God Carol had been going to bed early the last few nights. Maggie never would have made it to the weekend if she'd had to stay up until three every night. If things went well at Amy's aunt, Beckie would drive the VW up to San Francisco to see the two new patients, while Maggie returned to Santa Cruz by bus. If, Maggie reminded herself.

As if in response to her thought, Beckie asked. "So what do you think? It seemed to me yesterday that she was definitely better. How about you?"

Maggie nodded slowly. "Yes, she definitely seemed to be better. But I'm not sure that she is better. There's a big difference between the two, you know, especially when everyone wants there to be an improvement. It's not exactly a double-blind experiment."

Beckie flashed a questioning look at Maggie, and then turned her attention back to the road. "I'm tempted not to ask you this question, because you'll think I'm a fool, but what the hell—what is a double-blind experiment?"

Maggie laughed. "It's the dreamchild of the clinical researcher. In a lot of types of experiments that involve people, it's hard to determine what is caused by the test system you're using, and what's due totally to the expectations of the patients. It's called the placebo effect. It turns out that if you give patients with colds, or various types of pain, like arthritis, some pills and tell them that they're a new wonder cure, about half of them will show significant improvement, even if all that you gave them was sugar pills. So to make sure that the improvement is due to the drug you're testing, you don't tell the patients whether they're receiving the test drug or the placebo, the sugar pill. The point is to try to determine if those that got the test drug showed more improvement than those that received the placebo. That's called a blind experiment.

"Why don't you just give everyone sugar pills?"

"What?"

"Well, you said that it made half of the patients better. I mean, maybe when a patient in labor needs something for their pain, we should just give them sugar pills."

"But it's not a real effect," Maggie explained.

"What do you mean?"

"Well," Maggie tried to explain, "it would work no matter what you gave them, so it isn't really the pill that's making them feel better."

"Yeah, but it's making them feel better, isn't it?"

"Well, not really," Maggie said uncertainly.

“Huh?”

“Well, it makes them think that they’re better, but it doesn’t really change anything.”

“But,” Beckie argued, “in labor you don’t care if anything really gets better, because everything’s just fine. You just want it to feel better, and that’s what it does. And besides, how do you know that it doesn’t really make them better, just to think that they’re better. I mean, isn’t that what you’re saying about your magic potion? That it only works if the patient expects it to?”

Maggie was confused. “There’s a mistake in there somewhere, I’m just not sure where it is.”

“Boy,” Beckie said, “it’s a good thing you’ve got me working with you on this project. I think you know too much scientific technique for your own good.”

“You’ve just been getting more sleep than me,” Maggie complained. “I’m sleeping the rest of the way. Tell me when we’re there.”

Forty minutes later, Beckie pulled off the Interstate and turned into Palo Alto. “Hey, Maggie, wake up.”

Maggie opened her eyes and looked around, disoriented. “Where are we?”

“We just pulled off 290. We should be there in about five minutes. I thought you might want that much time to wake up.”

Maggie yawned and stretched. “Thanks. I’ll need it.”

A few minutes later they pulled into the drive, and as they turned off the engine, Amy came running from the house. Concerned, Maggie quickly leaped from the car. But as Amy came up to her, she threw her arms around Maggie and hugged her.

“She’s asleep!” Amy exclaimed. “I keep checking every ten minutes, because it’s so strange, but she’s sound asleep! Could it be working this fast?” It all came out in a rush and Amy’s excitement made Maggie smile.

“Right on schedule,” she announced. “Beckie, we’re a success.”

Beckie, who had been slower getting out of the car, came around to join them. “What’s this all about?” she demanded.

“The patient is sleeping soundly, after a pleasant evening,” Maggie proclaimed, mimicking the voice of a pompous doctor. “The cure is effective.” Then, suddenly, her own excitement broke through and she gave out a loud whoop.

“Quiet!” Amy insisted. “She’s sleeping, remember?”

Maggie smiled apologetically. But an instant later, she was hugging Beckie in delight. “It works!” she whispered as loudly as humanly possible. “It really works!”

Maggie suddenly became aware of Amy, standing off to the side, alone. Stopping herself, and turning from Beckie, she said, “It’s just—well, so exciting to me,” she sputtered. “I guess I’m not acting very professional.”

Amy's smile spread into a huge grin. "Maggie, I've been dancing around this house for the last two hours, Please don't apologize. In fact"—She grabbed the two women by the hands and started to lead them back to the house—"I took the liberty of setting out a bottle of champagne and three glasses while I waited for you." All three headed up the walk to the drive. "Just remember that Auntie's sleeping."

"A toast!" Beckie announced, as the three of them lifted their glasses from the table. "To Maggie's Magic Cancer Cure!" They drank to their joys.

* * *

Two hours later, Amy's aunt awakened to a complete absence of pain, a miraculous change from her condition of just a week earlier, and excitedly took her medicine, or, as Beckie still insisted on calling it, her potion. Beckie then drove Maggie to the terminal to get the bus for Santa Cruz before hurrying to the city, to start the two new patients.

Maggie rode the bus in a dream. She was so excited that her mind refused to concentrate long enough to complete a thought. She considered how all their lives had been changed so drastically, and she remembered how it had been with Ann's improvement, She tried to imagine all the hundreds of thousands of families around the world waiting for someone to die of cancer, someone who could now be cured. And she thought, most immodestly, about the fame, and the glory, and the riches that soon would be hers. And she thought, most seriously, about the N.M.A., and how her cure could be used to guarantee not only its success but also an even greater opening of the medical profession to create a larger nurse-practitioner program, to remove more power from the hands of doctors and to spread it around to all the trained people who could, but were forbidden to, practice the healing arts.

But the situation had so many ramifications that she could not bring it down to the level of reality. She thought of going to the state legislature and saying, "I've got a cure for cancer, but if you cut off the N.M.A., I'm going to burn it." But that was just a fantasy, she knew. It all seemed like a fantasy, though some of it obviously wasn't. In the end, it really didn't make any sense, and the dreamlike feeling lasted all the way back to Santa Cruz .

* * *

When she finally got back home, the world seemed to become a little more real. Ann was sitting in the kitchen, sipping hot chocolate. "Hi, Mom, how're you doing?"

Ann smiled. "I'm getting bored, again, Margaret. I'm still too weak to be up as much as I want to. And Carol," she nodded toward the hall, "disappeared into your study after you left this morning, and I haven't seen hide nor hair of her since, if television hadn't run so far downhill these last few years, I'd even be willing to watch it. A hundred channels worldwide to choose from, and every one a loser!" She dropped her hands to the table. "But even talking exhausts me. It's so irritating!"

"Carol's in my study?"

"Oh, yes, indeed. Said she had to get some of your stuff into better order." She looked at Maggie curiously. "I took it that you had agreed to this."

"Noo, not as far as I know." She headed down the hall.

The desk in Maggie's study sat beneath a window facing the street, opposite the bedroom door, so

Carol heard and saw nothing as Maggie quietly entered the room. Maggie was startled to see Carol sitting at her desk, her notes spread out, working busily. She paused suddenly, realizing how much her daughter had grown. She's an adult, Maggie told herself. A real, live, full-grown adult. "Carol?"

Carol jumped in her seat, turning to face her mother as she did so. With difficulty, she regained her composure, then replied. "Hi, Mom. How's Mrs. Belever doing?"

Maggie smiled. "I gather you've been reading my notes? That's a bit much, isn't it?"

Carol fought to keep as adult a look on her face as she could. "Now look, Mom, somebody has to keep your records, because you're just too busy to do a good job. Since I already know what you're doing and I do have the time, I figured I might as well do it."

Maggie stared at her in amazement. "Just what is wrong with my records?"

A very officious look came onto Carol's face. "Well, I mean, they're just fine, if you're trying to write a novel or something—"

"What?"

"Well," Carol persisted. "This is the Computer Age. I shouldn't have to read through thirty pages to find out that Mrs. Belever showed a little improvement yesterday." She moved to one side to show Maggie the table she had prepared on the CRT. "See, I've got all the information here." She indicated the columns on a sheet of hard copy as she went along. "Here I give a summary of the patients' condition before the treatment—for Mrs. Belever, you never even noted where the cancer started or how long she's had it. And then, here, I've entered when, they began treatment, and then over here I gave a day-by-day scoring of how much better or worse they seem to be."

"But that's nowhere near enough information, Carol. You need to know how she's being treated, if the procedure's different, who gave the treatment— Look, you didn't even mention that I tried Gramma once without her knowing about it, or that it didn't work that time."

Carol looked hurt. "But it didn't work. What's there to say about it?"

Maggie laughed. "Oh, darling, I'm sorry. I don't mean to criticize you. Really, I'm delighted, and proud, of what you're doing. But you aren't a research scientist quite yet, and should accept the fact that you have a lot to learn."

"I thought I was doing pretty good," Carol pouted.

Maggie hugged her. "Darling, you did a lot better than I did, so I'm in no position to complain. I'm impressed with how well you've done on your own, and I'd love it if you kept on with it."

She pulled up a chair and sat next to Carol. "So, now that we're colleagues, let's talk about how best to keep these records."

Chapter Twenty

AFTER a pleasant weekend, the rains returned on Monday, and the weather forecast suggested that they might linger for a week or more. But even the weather couldn't get Maggie down. She drove slowly down Highway 9, wending her way from Palo Alto through the foothills to Santa Cruz, after her last visit

to Amy's aunt. Mrs. Belever's recovery looked as good as Ann's. They had spent some time that morning discussing the need to get a CAT scan for Amy's aunt, and how best to go about it. The only reasonable place was Stanford, since it was only a five-minute drive and her doctor's office was there.

Unfortunately, Mrs. Belever's doctor was an associate of Krueger, and he knew that Amy was a midwife. If the two physicians should discuss the Belever remission, it would come out that two spontaneous-remission cases, amazing for any hospital over a couple of weeks, had both been brought in by midwives. Krueger's suspicions would return. Finally, Amy had decided that she would ask around and see if she could find someone willing to run the scans with no questions asked. It would probably take a few days for her to feel that out.

Details, details, Maggie thought, smiling to herself. It's worked again. I'm certain. There was that clinical part of her which added, "But I won't know for sure until I get that scan done," though the rest of her rode homeward in a blissful calm. Everything was going to work out. The rain grew heavier, and she slowed the car as traffic began to back up. Wonderful California, she thought, bumper to bumper all the way across the hills. But she drove on, contentedly. In her life, all seemed clear and bright.

She didn't reach Santa Cruz until noon, so she decided to go home for lunch before going to the clinic. While she heated up leftover soup, she called the clinic to see if she'd had any calls.

"Maggie," Lisa answered, "where've you been? We've been trying to find you and Beckie all morning. Is she with you?"

"Why, no, she's not with me. Why? What's going on?"

Lisa groaned. "Everything's going on. Do you know how we can reach her?"

Maggie didn't answer. Beckie was probably still in the city, with the two new patients. But Maggie had no idea what excuse Beckie had used for her being out in the morning. "Not if she hasn't come in to the clinic," she finally replied. "Did you try her at home?"

"Oh, Lord! Did we try her at home? We've called every place we could think of. We can't find her anywhere."

"Lisa, what is this all about?"

There was a pause before she answered. "Well, to put it in a nutshell, Susan Glanvil has gotten the California Midwives Association to approve her preparing a statement supporting the A.M.A.'s attack on us, and calling for the revocation of our licenses on the grounds that we 'refuse to employ necessary medical techniques, required for the safe delivery of the child.' That last part was a quote."

"How could they do that?" Maggie asked in dismay.

"That's not all," Lisa continued. "I think that'll take months to sort out, because it's a legal thing. But they've also called on area hospitals to revoke our hospital privileges, and then we couldn't bring in our patients in an emergency. That's what everyone's worried about right now, because some hospital administrator could get scared and just push us right out into the streets."

"We won't stand for that!" Maggie sputtered.

"Well, then, get over here, and if you can think of any way to get in touch with Beckie, do so, because

she's the one running the N.M.A., and nobody's willing to do anything without talking it over with her first."

"Will do," Maggie replied. "See you soon." Hanging up the phone, she hurried to her study for the numbers of the two women in San Francisco. While paging through her notes, she swore at herself for being so disorganized. But finally, she found the numbers. Beckie had left the first well over an hour earlier. That left the second. "No. I'm Sorry," the voice replied. "She left about ten minutes ago."

"Did she happen to mention where she was going?"

"No, I'm really sorry. She got a phone call about fifteen minutes ago, and left just a few minutes after that."

"She got a phone call?" Maggie asked, confused. Who would know to call her there? "Did she happen to say who it was?"

"No, she didn't."

Maggie thought fast. "Listen, I'm calling because something important has come up, and it needs Beckie's immediate attention. I'm just trying to figure if that call might have been about the same thing."

"Well," the voice offered reluctantly, "she did seem rather upset over the call."

"She did? Oh, great. Then that was probably it. Look, if she should happen to get in touch with you today, would you please tell her to call the clinic immediately, that it's important?"

"Why, yes, I'll do that."

"Thanks." She was off the phone and running.

"Maggie?" Ann's voice betrayed some irritation.

She hurried into Ann's room. "Hi, Mom, how are you?"

"I'm fine! But I'd certainly like to know what all this running and shouting is all about."

Maggie forced a smile onto her face. "Well, you'll just have to wait until this evening to find out, because we've got a problem at the clinic, and I have to run down there and see about it."

Ann frowned. "I just don't understand people nowadays," she complained. "No one has time for anyone else." A look of resignation came over her face. "All right, then," she muttered. "Go on. You've got to, I suppose."

Maggie bent over and gave her a quick kiss. "Thanks a lot, Mom." Turning, she ran out of the house.

She had expected the clinic to be a disaster area, but it looked perfectly normal. Only Lisa and a couple of patients were in the reception area.

"There you are!" Lisa beckoned Maggie over to her desk, then continued in a soft voice, "Amy called from San Francisco. She's managed to contact Beckie, and I guess they're on the way to the N.M.A. office. So there's not much for us to do right now. Amy said she'd call us as soon as they decide

anything, or when there's something that we can do."

Maggie frowned. "Maybe we should start calling hospitals, and putting pressure on them to ignore this whole thing."

"We've already thought of that," Lisa whispered, "but Amy said to wait and see what they decide up in San Francisco, so we can coordinate our efforts."

Maggie shrugged. There didn't seem to have been all that much need for her to rush right over. She could have finished her lunch— "Oh damn!" Maggie muttered. "Can I use the phone a sec?" Lisa turned it around for Maggie to use, and she quickly punched in her home number. After a few rings, Ann answered. "Mom, this is Maggie. I left some soup on the stove. Could you turn it off for me, and put it back in the refrigerator?"

Ann grumped. "I was wondering if you'd ever remember that. It boiled over a couple of minutes ago. I'm still trying to clean up the stove. Honestly," she continued, "I would think that being forty years old and having a fifteen-year-old daughter would have put some sense into you, but obviously not."

Maggie sighed. "All right, Mother, I don't need a lecture. I'm sorry it happened. Just leave it, and I'll clean it when I get home. You shouldn't be doing dishes."

"Well, I didn't have much choice, with the whole thing boiling over."

It was five minutes before Maggie was off the phone. "Sony," she said to Lisa. "I wasn't expecting all of that."

Lisa laughed. "No problem."

Maggie looked at her watch. "Well, I've got patients coming, so I better mosey on down to my office. Be sure to let me know if you hear any more."

"Sure. You and everyone else. Promise."

* * *

It was 3:25 before Lisa buzzed her. "Maggie, I thought I'd tell you before your 3:30 that Beckie wants you to call her."

Maggie looked at her clock. "Where is she?" Lisa gave her the number, and Maggie quickly dialed.

"Oh, Maggie, I'm glad you called," Beckie answered the phone.

"How are things going, Beckie? Everyone's waiting for the word."

"We're getting there," Beckie promised. "If and when Glanvil launches her attack, we'll start a big phone-in to the hospitals tomorrow, not just from us, but we'll try to get all of our patients, including former patients, to call up and demand that we be allowed to continue our practices. We figure we can probably drum up a few thousand calls."

"That's probably more than the hospitals can handle," Maggie suggested.

“Great. Then they won’t know how many more might have been trying to call. Anyhow, I think that should keep the hospitals from making any fast decisions on the issue. Some of our patients or ex-patients must have political clout, too.”

“I’m sure you’re right. So you want me to start calling around, lining up people to call tomorrow?”

“No.”

“What?”

There was a pause. “Are you alone?”

“Yes,” Maggie replied slowly.

“I want you to stop working at the clinic, and to start working on the cancer cure full-time.”

“What?”

“You heard me. Maggie, it’s crazy for you to be doing midwifery when you’ve got a cure for cancer. You should be testing that out as fast as you can, so that you can release it as soon as possible. Every day you delay means more people die of cancer. Other midwives could take over your load, but no one can replace you in your cancer work.”

“But Beckie, these women aren’t just a ‘load.’ They’re people who have put a lot of trust in me, people who expect me to be present when they deliver, I can’t just walk out on them—”

“Maggie! You’re being ridiculous. How would they feel if they knew that a few thousand people were going to die needlessly of cancer, because you thought they needed you so much?” Beckie pushed on. “Maggie, the problem is that you still don’t believe what’s happened. You don’t believe that you’ve found a cure for cancer.”

Maggie said nothing.

“Maggie?”

“Beckie, I need time to think.”

There was a pause before Bectie replied. “Maggie, you know how big a difference it could make in this accreditations fight if—”

“I know!” Maggie snapped, “Do you think I’m an idiot?”

“Of course not, but—”

“Listen. I said I’d think about testing the cancer cure full-time. What more do you want? I’m not going to say that I’ll go and hold a press conference on it before I’m sure of what I’m talking about—and I’m sorry, two cases is nothing to talk about.”

“How many is?” Beckie demanded.

Maggie paused. “Twenty-five. Twenty-five well-documented cases. And that means first sorting out

what's important and what's not. But not before that."

"Okay." Beckie sounded sullen. "I trust your judgment on this. But it is our livelihoods they're planning to take away."

"Mine, too," Maggie pointed out. She looked at her watch. "Beckie, I can't talk any more right now, I'm late for my next patient as is."

"Okay, but do think about it."

"I will, I will!" Maggie slammed the receiver down in anger.

* * *

Melanie leaned across the library table, her voice whisper-quiet. "I bet it has something to do with those frogs."

Startled, Carol looked nervously around her. "Shut up about that, will you? If you start blabbing all around, everyone'll know!"

Melanie leaned even farther forward. "But you haven't found out anything, have you?"

"Well, no. Not really."

Melanie seemed satisfied. "Well, I bet they have something to do with it."

"What are you talking about?"

"I bet that they're doing something with the you-know-whats, using them on their patients or something, and they were found out by the regular doctors, and that's why they're in trouble all of a sudden."

"Honestly, Melanie, sometimes I just can't believe how flaky you can be! If you had half a brain, you'd know how dumb an idea that is. Just what do you mean, 'using them on their patients'? You think my mom's making them eat frogs or something? Sometimes I think you come up with nuttier ideas than anyone else ever has."

Self-satisfaction was apparent on Melanie's face. "What makes you think it was my idea in the first place?"

Suddenly the playful nature of the banter was gone. "What do you mean?"

Worry streaked across Melanie's face. She looked away. "Nothin'. Just that other people sometimes have wacky ideas, too, and you shouldn't say that I'm so much worse than all the other kids here."

"Melanie Scott, that's a load of bull, and you know it. What did you start to say?"

"I told you, nothing." She had retreated back across the table, and was slouched down in her chair.

It was Carol's turn to lean heavily on the table. "Melanie, I mean it. You're going to tell me what you started to say, or else."

“Or else what?” Melanie sneered, angry at the threat.

“Or else you can go find another table to study at.”

“I like it here,” Melanie retorted. “If you don’t like the company, you can go sit somewhere else yourself.”

Carol looked around, her eyes stopping at a table here and there. Then, deciding, she slid her chair back and started to rise. “Well, I think that’s Tommy at that console—all by himself! I just remembered a really funny story that he’d love to hear.”

Melanie practically leaped across the table to grab Carol’s wrist. “Don’t you dare tell him what I said about him!”

Carol’s face was the picture of innocence. “Tell him what? Oh, hey! I hadn’t even thought of that story. Do you think he’d be interested in it?”

“Carol, I swear I’ll never speak to you again if you tell him.”

“You’d rather I sat here with you?”

Melanie nodded.

“Then tell me.”

Melanie looked trapped. “Promise not to tell anyone?”

Carol nodded.

“I mean really, Carol. You can’t ever tell anyone, because Jenny Swore me to secrecy.”

“Jenny, huh? It figures.”

“Carol, please!”

She frowned. “All right, already, I won’t go telling anyone else.”

“Promise?”

“Promise.”

Melanie sat back, relieved, but still unsure how to proceed. “Well, she heard the report on the news this morning, about how they might close down the clinic here, and about the midwives’ refusal to be careful, or something, and she told me her dad said that the midwives nowadays were no better than they were back in the Dark Ages, and how they used to practice witchcraft back then. So Jenny said, maybe that’s why they’re in trouble now, because they’re trying witchcraft again. You know, a lot of women up in San Francisco say that they’re witches, even now. And then I remembered all those weird frogs hidden in your mom’s study, and I figured, maybe Jenny’s dad was right. But if you tell Jenny I told you, she’ll never speak to me again, and she and Tommy are good friends—”

“All right! I told you I promise. So stop worrying.” Carol was furious. “I could wring that idiot’s neck!”

“Carol, you promised!”

“Well, let me tell you. It just so happens that I do know what Mom’s doing with those frogs, and there isn’t a chance that I’d ever tell you, ’cause you’d tell it all over the school. And when you find out what they’re for, you and the rest of the world will be coming around just begging to be my friends, and you’ll just fall all over yourself apologizing for your stupid ideas. And when I just laugh in your face, you can thank Jenny for giving you the idea!” Furious, she pushed her chair back from the table and stomped out past an amused librarian.

Chapter Twenty-One

The next week flew by in a fog. Between her job, maintaining records with Carol, and preparing medication for Beckie’s two patients in San Francisco Maggie had little time to think about what was happening.

But it had been a good week, as Maggie saw it, a week of growth. There were clearly two alternating phases to her life, one of growth, where she would reach out and establish new contacts, new ideas, new friends, and another of consolidation, when she would stop to embrace the newness and bring it within herself, turning it into familiar ideas or old friends. Too much time spent on consolidation led to stagnation, and a need to get out and about. But too much growth led to an anarchy of the mind, where everything seemed to become disconnected, and her mind frazzled.

Lying quietly in her bed, eyes still shut against the morning light, Maggie was now definitely frazzled. Emotionally, she still didn’t believe the reality of half the things she was doing—she didn’t believe that Ann was better; that she had a cure for cancer; that she boiled up a few frogs every night for her medicine. She couldn’t call the preparation a potion, despite Beckie’s love of the word, because the name made the reality even more difficult to comprehend. Maggie didn’t even believe the change that had occurred in Carol, her sudden assumption of mature authority. Maggie didn’t believe that she was seriously considering leaving her job to do cancer treatments full-time—and that, of course, because she didn’t really believe that they were working—and she didn’t believe that she might be out of a job any day now regardless of what she did.

She squeezed her eyelids shut even tighter. She could sense a hint of hysteria in her thoughts, and her stomach had become a knot. She tried to relax, practicing the same techniques she had taught hundreds of others, starting at her feet and working her way up, relaxing her muscles one at a time. The concentration and sense of purpose relaxed her as much as anything else. At last, with a clear sensation of ambivalence, she opened her eyes. The room looks the same as always, she thought, expecting that fact to help ground her in sanity. But somehow it seemed to have the opposite effect, hiding her from the fact that nothing was the same as it had been.

She swung her feet over the edge of the bed and stood. Grabbing a bathrobe in case Carol already had some friend over, Maggie headed for the bathroom. One foot in front of the other, she thought to herself. It always gets you where you’re going.

“Hi, Mom, how ya doin’?” Carol smiled around a mouthful of toothpaste.

Maggie smiled despite herself. “I’ll survive,” she replied, grabbing her own toothbrush.

“Beckie came by about an hour ago,” Carol said, “and I gave her the potions for today. She said that the two in San Francisco seemed to be getting better, but she wasn’t sure yet. I guess today should tell on

them, huh?"

Maggie shrugged. Carol changed the subject. "How are things going at the clinic?"

"You're full of serious questions today, aren't you?"

"What's wrong with asking you how the clinic's going?" Carol demanded.

"Nothing's wrong with asking. It's just different from your usual Saturday morning conversation."

"Like what?"

Maggie rinsed her mouth out and spat elegantly into the sink. "Oh, like where you went last night, and what kind of a time you had, and I haven't heard any of the gossip from Melanie for almost a week I bet, or who's not seeing whom anymore, and who's seeing whom again, and—well, all the things in your life."

Carol looked outraged. "Are you saying that I'm not interested in you? That I only want to talk about myself?"

"Now don't go getting all in a huff. But, in fact, usually we do talk about you more than me. I don't mean that negatively. I enjoy hearing about what you're thinking and doing."

"Well, did it ever enter your mind that maybe I'd be interested in what you're doing and thinking, too? The reason that we never talk about you is because you're never willing to."

Maggie took a step back, surprised.

"You know, you still treat me like I'm a six-year-old or something. You like to hear about what I'm thinking, but you always have that smile on your face when I tell you, like 'Oh, isn't she so cute.' Well, I'm tired of being treated like a kid. Because I'm not one."

Maggie was confused by the attack, unsure how to respond. "You want to be treated more like an adult?"

"Mom, I'm fifteen years old! I am an adult."

"An adult could have just said yes for an answer," Maggie countered. "Carol, I actually have been trying lately to accept the fact that you are grown up, that you are an adult. But you have to realize that it means changing the way I've been acting for fifteen years, and that just can't come overnight."

Carol seemed only partially satisfied. "Will you make me a partner in the cancer business?" she asked.

"But you already are! You're keeping the records—"

"But I don't get any say in the decisions that are being made. Really, I'm just a secretary, What's the difference—being treated like a child or being treated like a secretary?"

A laugh escaped Maggie. "Well, your politics are pretty grown up, I have to admit that." Still smiling, she agreed. "Okay, I'll give you a role in the decision-making. But only on the condition that you recognize and acknowledge that you're still learning, that there will be times when I'm the only one capable of making a decision because I know more about scientific techniques."

Carol extended her hand to Maggie. “It’s a deal,” she agreed, and they shook on it.

Chapter Twenty-Two

At lunch Maggie got the call from Beckie. “It works!” Beckie shouted, almost deafening her. “Maggie, it works!”

“Beckie, what happened?”

“They’re both improving! They slept without medication for the first time in months, they both slept late this morning, and then both woke up without pain. Maggie, it works! It really works!”

Maggie was pacing with excitement “Where are you now?”

“I drove to N.M.A. headquarters; I wanted to be able to shout and jump around when I told you. Maggie, I’m so excited!”

By now Carol was trying to hear, too. “What’s going on?” she demanded.

Maggie tried to calm down. “Beckie, please, could you just be seeing what you want to see? Are you sure they’re better?”

“Me? I’m positive! I gave you the objective results. But the minute I walked in I could tell. It was just like going to Amy’s aunt’s house, when Amy came running out. They’re sure of the improvement, too!”

Maggie jumped for joy, then threw an arm around Carol, and repeated Beckie’s message.

Carol gave her mother a huge hug. “Mom, that makes four! It must be real! You’ve done it!”

Maggie didn’t know where to turn. “Listen,” she finally said, “this is a crazy way to talk about it. Beckie, can you come over here? So we can all talk about it together?”

“Who’s we all?” Beckie asked.

“Oh, just you, me, and Carol. Do you think you can?”

“I don’t know—there’s so much work to do here at the N.M.A.—oh, hell, of course I can. I’ll get there as fast as I can.”

* * *

It was three o’clock before Beckie arrived. Maggie and Carol were working away in Maggie’s study. “Well,” Beckie asked, “What do you think?”

“I’ve been pounding on Mom to try more patients, and do more variations, and basically, she’s still chicken.”

“Carol!”

Carol turned to Maggie. “Well, it’s true, Mom. You’re still afraid it’s all a mistake somehow.” She

turned to Beckie, and added in a knowing way, “You know these older folks, it’s hard for them to get used to changes.”

“Well,” Beckie put in, “I hate to get into a family squabble, but I suspect you’re right, Carol. Still, you should be able to discuss it in a more constructive way, don’t you think?”

Carol looked a bit chagrined. “Honestly, Beckie, you’re as bad as Mom. I’m trying to be constructive and convince Mom that she’s not doing anybody any favors by going superslow on new patients. I mean, we blocked out about thirty patients worth of tests that we need to do, but taking everything one step at a time doesn’t make any sense at all.”

“Well, I don’t want to just listen to you two argue.” Beckie insisted, “so why doesn’t one of you start by telling me about the tests.”

Maggie spread a sheaf of papers across her desk. “Here’s what we know so far: in the last three of our four cases, the recovery has followed the same time course. Ann was the only discrepancy; she received the medicine for a week without any effect, before I gave her the second treatment.

“Now there are two differences between the first and second trials with Ann. The first time I gave it to her I didn’t tell her about it or try to get her confidence up. That’s what I think made the difference. But the second difference is that the first time I made one big batch and froze it, thawing some each day. In Ann’s second treatment, and in the treatments that the other three people were given, the medicine was prepared fresh each day.

“So we have to sort out which of these two factors made the difference. Beckie, when Carol and I talked about it, we decided to test each factor independently, first trying a couple of patients with frozen medicine, but doing the normal confidence-building and all that, and then trying a couple of patients without telling them about the medicine, but preparing it fresh daily. In theory, one method should work, and the other not. If the theory holds, then we should be on the road to sorting all of this stuff out.”

Beckie nodded. “Well, that seems reasonable, but at most that accounts for a half-dozen patients or so. How are you going to run thirty?”

“The rest are simple things,” Carol jumped in ahead of Maggie. “We’re just going to see how often you have to give it, like whether one dose is enough but it takes a week to work, or whether two doses a day would be even better, or things like whether the dose is ten times bigger than it needs to be. Mom also wants to try leaving parts of the medicine out to see if it’s all important or not, but I like it the way it is, all sort of spooky.”

“Well, then,” Maggie said, “you can start preparing the medicine. Personally, I hate dropping those frogs into boiling water, and I’ll be really embarrassed if it turns out that they’re not necessary.”

Beckie smiled. “Maggie, did the recipe say they had to be alive when you drop them into boiling water?”

“Well, no, it didn’t say anything about how to do it.”

“Do you know why you chose that method?”

Maggie thought a moment. “No, not really.”

“Because you’re thinking of it as a witch’s brew!” Beckie laughed in delight. “Somewhere in your

subconscious, you have this image of a boiling cauldron, and a witch dropping live toads and frogs, newts and snakes into it. You insist on calling it the ‘medicine’ but really you’re still thinking of it as a witch’s brew.”

Maggie smiled sheepishly. “Much as I hate to say it, I suspect that you’re right, Beckie. But nothing gets changed without controls, and I’m afraid that goes for frog-killing, too. So we’ll just put that onto the list of experiments to try, and worry about it when we get to it.”

Beckie seemed satisfied. “Carol,” she asked, “what was your complaint, then? Everything seems to be going ahead reasonably.”

Carol frowned. “Except that we don’t have any patients at the moment. She hesitated a moment, then added, “And I know why Mom’s afraid to recruit them, too.” She could feel Maggie’s eyes on her, but she spoke to Beckie, not looking at Maggie. “It’s because she really is a witch!”

“Carol!”

Carol turned to face Maggie’s astonishment. “It’s true!” she insisted. “I looked it up in the dictionary, and it said a witch is someone who other people think is a witch. That’s what people thought about your grandma Margaret Jones, so she really was a witch, and you’re afraid that people will think the same about you, and then you’ll be a real witch, too.” She turned to Beckie. “And she’s even named after old Margaret Jones. That’s why her name is Maggie.”

Beckie looked from one to the other of them, her mouth agape. “What are you two talking about?” she demanded.

“Oh, it’s just a silly old family story,” Maggie sputtered.

“Then how come you told me I have to name my first daughter Margaret, huh?” She turned to Beckie, “Her gamma’s name was Margaret, and my grandma, Ann, named her Margaret, and now I’m supposed to name my daughter Margaret. Every second generation, we name the first daughter Margaret, and we’ve been doing it for over 300 years. Mom says we’re the only matriarchy in the whole country. Right, Mom?” She turned and smiled at Maggie.

Maggie managed a strained smile. “Right, Carol.”

“Now wait a minute! Someone’s going to have to explain this to me before we go any further. Who was this Margaret Jones?”

Carol leapt in before Maggie had a chance, “A doctor! She was the first woman ever to be a doctor in Massachusetts, back in the 1650s, even before the Revolutionary War. And all the men doctors didn’t like her because she was a woman, and she used all sorts of herbal cures that really worked, instead of all the crazy stuff that the doctors were doing. Back then, you know, the doctors would bleed you—with leeches—if you were sick. That’s how George Washington died. He got a bad case of laryngitis, and the doctors bled him so much, he was actually bled to death! Anyhow, Margaret Jones didn’t do that stuff, and the other doctors couldn’t say ‘Well what does she know, she’s not a doctor,’ because she was a doctor, so they trumped up charges that she was a witch, and they put her on trial. The whole story is told in the diary of the guy who was governor of the colony, and she’s the first woman ever to be tried as a witch in the colony, too. Pretty neat, huh?”

Maggie laughed. “That’s the most outrageous presentation of a sacred tradition I’ve ever

heard—accurate, but outrageous.”

“It’s true?” Beckie asked.

Maggie nodded. “I have to admit it. Every word of it is true. That is, about who Margaret Jones was. Not about my being afraid of being called a witch. That’s nonsense.”

“Well, then why are you afraid to go out and get a dozen cancer patients to try it out?” Carol demanded.

“You just can’t do it that way,” Maggie insisted. “First of all, for a lot of these, we don’t even know which way we want to do it yet—with the fresh preps of medicine, or with the building up of confidence in the patients. We definitely have to sort that out. And besides, no one’s thought about dealing with twenty patients. Even if I work at it full-time, I doubt that I could treat twenty in a single day—and I’m not working on it full-time.”

“What?” Beckie looked surprised. “Maggie, after these results—I thought for sure you’d work full-time on it. What are you waiting for?”

“As a matter of fact, I’m waiting for two things. I’m waiting for my patients at the clinic to deliver, and I’m waiting for a salary to appear by magic, so that I can feed my family.”

“And in the meantime,” Beckie asked, “how fast do you think we can take patients?”

Maggie shrugged. “I figure between us we should be able to do two or three a week.”

“See what I mean? She just refuses to go any faster. Mom, I think you’re just chicken.”

“You want to work to support us?” Maggie snorted back.

“Yes.” Carol turned defiantly to her mother. “If that’s what it takes to get you to work harder on this.”

Maggie looked surprised. “Well, I tell you what. The very first thing we need to do is run the tests to see if we need it fresh, and to see if we need to prep the patients psychologically. Why don’t we say that we’ll run two of each, as fast as we can find them.”

“Which,” Beckie pointed out, “brings up the question of how we’re going to recruit patients. It’s going to be hard getting patients without bringing more people into our little club. I mean, we know, and Amy knows, and of course the four women we’ve treated know. We could ask them to find us more patients, but I’m not sure that’s any better than telling people whom we trust more.”

“Like more midwives?” Maggie asked.

“Sure. Why not some women from the N.M.A.? We must know a couple of dozen we could trust to keep it quiet.”

Maggie frowned. “You’re playing games with me, Beckie.”

Beckie looked surprised.

“You’re trying to connect the cancer cure with the N.M.A., so you can use it as a strategic weapon in the fight with the A.M.A. And don’t look surprised, either.”

“But I’m not playing games with you. I know that I’m trying to do that, and I told you I wanted to do that. I’m not keeping any secrets from you. What do you suggest, we ask Susan Glanvil?”

“Listen,” Maggie said, “I don’t want to get all upset over this. Basically I think your idea is a good one, so why don’t you draw up a list of who you think would be good, and we’ll go over it.” She turned to Carol. “What do you think?”

She seemed a bit stunned by the arguing. “Okay, I guess. I don’t see how it’s all that important who helps us find the patients, as long as they can keep it a secret.”

Maggie smiled. “I agree.”

Chapter Twenty-Three

It was a gray Monday morning. But Maggie’s excitement was almost unbearable. She headed for the clinic, her attention focused entirely on the cancer cure, and she found herself seriously contemplating leaving her job there. The thought scared her. Forty, she thought, was no age to start a new profession.

The morning passed smoothly, and by lunchtime she was back into the swing of things. She loved her job, both the prenatal work and the actual helping with the birth. She felt she could never trade it for another. But her enjoyment was shattered when Beckie came running into her office.

“Maggie, they’ve struck—the A.M.A.! And the California Midwives Association has joined them!”

Maggie’s mouth dropped open. “The C.M.A. has joined them? In what?”

“In calling for the legislature to strip us of our right to practice midwifery. Maggie, they issued a joint statement calling for our licenses to be revoked, and then Somers issued a separate statement—I don’t have the story straight for sure, I think he made a separate A.M.A. proposal, but it might have been just his personal stand. Anyhow, Somers called upon hospitals to immediately review our privileges, and urged them to suspend our rights to bring emergency cases into hospitals until the legislature decides.”

Maggie was on her feet. “That’s ridiculous! What are we going to do?”

“Well, for one thing, I’m taking a month’s leave of absence, effective whenever I get my patients shifted. Someone has to take this seriously enough to work on it full-time, and I seem to be the only candidate.” She looked squarely at Maggie. “We can’t run away from the world out there, Maggie. We have to deal with it, and sometimes that means changing our own plans. If I recommend your taking a leave to work on the cancer cure, then I can take a leave, too. Maybe Carol was right. Maybe it’s easier when you’re younger.”

“Good for you, Beckie. Now I have to decide, too. I’ll let you know what I’ve decided by tomorrow morning.” As she said it Maggie realized that she, too, was going to take a leave.

Later that afternoon Beckie returned to Maggie’s office to announce that a meeting of the N.M.A. was set for Wednesday night in Palo Alto. “We should have a press release ready, and, hopefully, a plan of action for heading off the A.M.A.-C.M.A. attack. I’ll bet that there’s a lot of ambivalence in the C.M.A. I checked with some relatively sympathetic members in the C.M.A., and apparently the decision was made by the newly elected leadership, and never brought before the general membership, so they might have hung themselves with their quick attack, but I don’t know. Anyhow, I’ve switched all of my

patients, and tomorrow I go on leave.” She fished into her pocket and pulled out a sheet of paper. “By the way, here’s a list of midwives I think we can bring into the cancer-cure program.” She handed a sheet of paper to Maggie. “Just check those you feel are acceptable, and I’ll get in touch with them.”

Maggie looked over the list slowly. “Okay,” she replied. “I’ll do that sometime this afternoon, or else this evening.”

“Great. And don’t forget the meeting Wednesday night.”

* * *

It was evening before Maggie found time to review the list. She knew almost all of the women on it somewhat, and half of them well. Several omissions surprised Maggie. For once Beckie wasn’t just running as far ahead of her as she possibly could. She had been very careful in her selections. The thought sent a wave of relief through her. If I can only depend on Beckie, she thought, I’ll feel a lot better about the whole project. But I’m going to have to get better at this, she told herself. If I’m doing it full-time now, it’s going to be my baby.

Chapter Twenty-Four

By Wednesday evening, Maggie hardly recognized herself. She had approved Beckie’s entire list, and between them they had spoken with fifteen of the candidates by phone. All were excited about the project and had agreed to work on it. In addition, Maggie had requested a leave of absence from the clinic, implying, somewhat incorrectly, that she too would be working on the N.M.A. So, by Wednesday, she was unemployed. She and Beckie had spent the afternoon plotting courses of action. They had decided that those working on the cancer project would gather after the N.M.A. meeting in Palo Alto. They planned to approach the five women they hadn’t yet reached before the N.M.A. Session.

In Palo Alto, the N.M.A. got off to a good start with even more members than had signed up after the walkout. Maggie quickly buttonholed the five women she hadn’t talked to yet, and all wanted to become involved in the cancer-cure project. Spirits were high, and a sense of determined defiance washed through the hall. Maggie was stunned by Beckie’s capabilities as a chairperson—within two hours a modified version of her press release had been accepted, a phone-in to hospitals and to legislators planned, and coordinating committees for each phase set up.

When the meeting broke up, Maggie and the cancer-project people congregated at the rear of the hall. As they agreed to meet at Pat Mercer’s house, just a couple of miles away, several other women approached Maggie. One she recognized vaguely from some midwifery meeting or another, but the other was a totally new face. It was the unfamiliar one who spoke to her. “Hi, Maggie. Great meeting, wasn’t it?”

Maggie smiled back, embarrassed about not recognizing the woman. “It was the best meeting I’ve been to in years. Everyone seems so excited.”

The woman nodded in agreement. Then, indicating her friend, she added, “Eleanor and I would really like to do something more active, and we were wondering whether we could come along if some of you are going to be planning more stuff.” She indicated the small group waiting to leave for Pat Mercer’s house.

Maggie was confused. “Well, this doesn’t have to do with the N.M.A., really. We’ve all known each

other a long time, and we just get together for some small talk now and then.” She started to back away, to join the others, when Eleanor stepped forward.

“Could we come and meet some of the women, Maggie? It would be nice just to sit and talk. All this politics isn’t very relaxing.”

Maggie was flustered. “Well, let me ask,” she replied weakly, and turning, went looking for Beckie.

“Absolutely not!” Beckie snorted, looking in the direction of the two hopeful participants. “You can’t just grab people at random for this, Maggie.”

“But what do I say to them?” she pleaded. “I said no once, and they almost begged me.”

Beckie frowned. “I’ll talk to them.” She walked over and spoke with them for a couple of minutes, while everyone else waited. The duo seemed to be giving Beckie an argument. Finally Beckie returned. “Why don’t you all get started? I’ll be a couple of minutes longer, but there’s no reason for you all to hang around for me.” She turned to Maggie. “Could you wait for me, Maggie?”

“Sure.”

Beckie pulled some keys from her handbag. “Pull the car around front, and wait for me there, okay?”

Maggie shrugged. “I could, but I don’t mind waiting here.”

“No, I’ll explain while we’re driving, but I want you to wait out front in the car.”

Maggie shrugged again, and turned to go. She found the car in the parking lot, and pulled it around in front of the school. About three minutes later, Beckie trotted from the building. “Move over, quick.” She hurried Maggie out of the driver’s seat and jumped in. They pulled away with a roar.

“What’s the big rush?”

Beckie glanced into the rearview mirror. “I think they’re going to follow us.” She stopped at Alma , and waited impatiently while the light checked traffic, then gave them a green. “Yep, there they are.” She hit the gas and turned left.

Maggie looked behind them. “You turned the wrong way.”

“I know.” Beckie turned right at the first corner, and started winding through back streets. After a few minutes she stopped by the curb and turned off the lights and the engine. “Well allow them a few minutes to give up.”

“What’s going on?”

Beckie looked surprised. “Haven’t you figured it out? They’re plants. I don’t know who sent them over tonight, but they’re obviously out to get information on the N.M.A. They must have decided that we were a steering committee or something. I think they’re nervy enough to just walk into Pat’s if they knew where it was.”

Maggie was stunned. “But who? . . .”

Beckie smiled. “Well, Somers and the A.M.A. for one, Glanvil and the C.M.A. for another, and maybe even the police or FBI for a third.”

“But why?”

“Why for which one?”

Maggie shrugged. “Well, the A.M.A. and the C.M.A. make sense, but the others? . . .”

“Well, the police might see us as a protest group now—we’re certainly fighting the establishment. And they still try pretty hard to keep tabs on any group that they think even has a small chance of causing trouble.” She pulled up in front of a row of parked cars. “Well, here we are. Welcome to the cancer-cure club.”

Inside, everyone was waiting for Maggie and Beckie. “It’s our baby,” Beckie whispered, then went to sit with the rest of the women, leaving Maggie alone at the front of the room.

A little embarrassed, Maggie smiled at the group. “Hi. I guess you all want to know the details.”

Maggie spent an hour explaining to the group exactly what had been accomplished so far in testing the medicine, and where she felt the project should go from there. There were a lot of questions for a while and some time was spent answering them, but in the end, everyone was excited about establishing an underground group to perform the necessary tests.

As the discussion wore down, Amy Belever called out, “Maggie, what are we going to call ourselves? We need a name, you know.”

Maggie shrugged. “I haven’t even thought about it,” She looked out at the group. “Any suggestions?”

“How about ‘The Cancer Cure Club,’” Beckie suggested.

“No good,” Maggie said. “We need a code name, so that if it’s overheard, it won’t give away the project immediately.”

“How about the Witches’ Coven?” Amy suggested.

“No,” Pat called out. “Just the California Coven.”

A cheer of support went up from the crowd. “Come on,” Maggie said. “I think we should be more serious about this.”

“Actually,” Beckie pointed out, “it’s not such a bad name. I wouldn’t be surprised if the people who first worked out the cure were considered witches. I think it’s time we gave witches a better name.” The others cheered again.

“Listen,” Maggie insisted, “if we call it that it’s going to sound like we’re a bunch of cultists who call on the Devil and sacrifice babies.”

“I don’t agree with you, Maggie. I’d feel pretty dumb if we called ourselves the Junior Medical Association of America.”

Finally, Amy suggested a solution. “Why don’t we not settle on a name for now. Maybe we can use the California Coven as a code name for the project, but not consider it a name for the group. We can come up with that later on, when we have time.” She turned to Maggie. “Is that okay with you?”

Beckie leaned over and whispered to Maggie, “If you don’t agree, I’ll suggest we call it The Margaret Jones Fan Club.”

“Sure,” Maggie said, ignoring Beckie. “The code name is California Coven.”

Finally, the meeting got down to the specifics of planning. Again, Maggie reviewed their plans for further tests. “Eventually,” she pointed out, “we’ll have to test it against different types of cancer, at different stages of development, and in different age groups; all that stuff.”

“But isn’t the critical issue how much we have to do before we can go public?” Pat asked. “Because, once we can get the medical establishment to accept the cure as effective, they can run tests on tens of thousands of patients within a few months.”

“True, but we should run for several months on our own, to accumulate as big a log of success as possible. There’s no way that the A.M.A. and the drug industry are going to like our discovery.”

“In fact,” Amy said, “you should think about filing for a patent on your cure, because if you don’t some drug company is going to steal it out from under you.”

Maggie shook her head. “That’s not what we should be worrying about now. Now we need to discuss the simple issues, how we’re going to recruit patients, whether we should screen them for the ability to keep a secret, who’s going to administer the medicines, and all that stuff.”

In short order they sorted out most of the questions. It was agreed that all would search for possible patients, but not tell them about the project. Maggie would take six Coven members, one by one, with her while she treated the new patients, to show them how she implemented the psychological aspects of the cure. After they had observed her for a week, Maggie would watch them each treat a patient. With luck, six more people would soon be able to administer the treatment. At the same time, Maggie would teach another two women to prepare the medicine.

“Which leaves the question of screening the patients for Secrecy.”

“Could I make a suggestion, Maggie?” The question came from Lynn Yonida, an older woman, in whom both Maggie and Beckie had the utmost confidence. “What if we practice a little deception, and tell the patients that they have to receive boosters every month for six months? If we explain that the continued treatment is contingent upon our not being discovered, that should give them the necessary incentive to keep quiet.” Everyone agreed.

“That brings us to security,” Maggie said. “Everyone here must maintain the tightest secrecy around this project. I can’t overemphasize how bad it would be for us if we’re discovered prematurely. At the least, we’re practicing medicine without a license and dispensing unapproved medications. It will be disastrous if the D.A. comes after us too soon. So everyone must agree not to tell anyone—and I really mean anyone—about what we’re doing.”

“What about new members?” Amy asked. “Do we want to try to enlarge the group? I can think of a couple of women who weren’t invited who would be fantastic to have in the group.”

Beckie answered. “Amy, I’ve thought of a few, too, and I suspect that our lists of additions overlap. But I don’t think we should expand for a while. Every step toward new people risks our secrecy, and I agree with Maggie—that’s of the utmost importance. I suggest that we reopen this discussion only when we must have more members.”

Maggie looked around the group. Everyone seemed to agree. “Is there anything we’ve missed?” No one made any suggestions. “Do call me when you hear of possible candidates for treatment, and I’ll be in touch with those of you who are going to be working more directly with me. Why don’t we plan on getting together again in two weeks.” Maggie adjourned the meeting, and everyone headed home.

* * *

It was almost one AM, when Beckie dropped Maggie off. Maggie was surprised to see the light on in her study. Sure enough, Carol was at work. “How was the meeting?” she asked.

Without thinking, Maggie started to discuss the Coven. “Hey, wait a minute,” Carol interrupted. “I thought this was a meeting of the Natural Midwives Association. What’s all this about a group working on the cancer treatment?”

Maggie quickly explained about the formation of the California Coven. “Well, how come I wasn’t invited?” Carol demanded.

“Oh, I hadn’t thought of it. Would you have wanted to come?”

“Mom! We decided that I was going to work with you. And it was going to be just the three of us, you, me, and Beckie. Now you went and invited another twenty women to join, and didn’t even tell me. That’s not fair!” Her voice ended up halfway between an angry complaint and a whine.

“I guess I just never thought about it that way. This group is made up of some of the midwives from the N.M.A.—”

“And you’re throwing me out!?” Now she was angry.

“Darling, I didn’t say anything like that.” She stopped and thought for a moment, “There’s certainly no reason why you can’t continue to keep the records, I suppose . . .” She drifted off uncertainly.

“What do you mean, you suppose?”

“Well, I’m not sure. I mean, the others are risking a lot by being involved in this project, and I guess I’m not sure it would be fair to force another person on them without their at least discussing it first.”

“It certainly didn’t bother you to take in twenty more without talking to me about it.” She stopped to sniff back her tears. “You’re still treating me like a kid. Well, you can just keep your stupid secrets to yourself!” Turning swiftly, she fled from the room.

Chapter Twenty-Five

The following week brought chaos to Maggie’s life. As if the California Coven Project wasn’t enough to keep her going time-and-a-half, the struggles of the N.M.A. refused to calm down. On Monday San Francisco City Hospital temporarily suspended the hospital privileges of midwives not associated with the C.M.A. Tuesday’s response was a massive phone-in and the start of legal proceedings aimed at

obtaining at least a temporary injunction by week's end. So Maggie spent a half-day calling women whose children she had delivered to encourage them to contact the San Francisco hospital.

In addition, six cancer patients had been located over the weekend by Coven members, and Maggie was struggling to manage a schedule that would allow her to take one apprentice to each patient. Both the timing and geography presented what at first seemed to be insurmountable obstacles. The solution was a ten-hour day for Maggie, who ate her lunch in the car while driving to appointments. So Monday night she prepared a huge batch of her medicine.

Without further discussion of their fight, Carol began the records for the new patients on Monday night, and arbitrarily divided the patients into two groups of three: those would get the fresh and those who would get the frozen medicine. Maggie was also lining up more patients to test the feasibility of doing without the psychological pep talks. If the frozen medicine worked, then she could just drop off a week's worth of medicine with three or four patients, and they could take it themselves, without getting the pep talks.

By Thursday, things had just begun to calm down. San Francisco City Hospital had agreed to reconsider its stand, and the N.M.A. had a show-cause hearing scheduled in the district court for Friday afternoon. The two Coven women who were to learn to prepare the medicine had agreed to obtain the frogs and the other ingredients starting immediately, and that had taken some pressure off Maggie. In addition, they were into the third day of treatments for the six new patients, and a routine was starting to develop.

* * *

"Hi, Mom, dinner will be ready in about half an hour." Carol gave her a quick kiss as she came into the house, and then returned to cutting tomatoes for a salad. "How'd things go today?"

"Pretty well, but I'm absolutely exhausted. I'd love to be able to just eat dinner and go to bed."

"Why don't you?"

Maggie sank into a chair. "I've got about a thousand things to do. I have to log in today's results. That shouldn't take too long. Then I have to call Beckie to see how things are looking for tomorrow's court appearance. Then I have to check my phone recorder, to see if any new patients have been found. . . . After that, I can relax until eight, when a couple of the women from the Coven are going to come over to watch me prepare the medicine. When all of that's done, if I can get them to leave without socializing, I can get to bed."

Carol placed the salad on the table. "Do they know about me?"

"How do you mean?"

"Do they know that I'm working with them on this project?"

"Well, you're working with me on it, not really with them," Maggie pointed out.

"No way!" Carol objected. "Who's going to keep the records on the patients who get medicine made by these women? And who's going to keep the records on the patients of the other six women you're training?"

"Well," Maggie answered slowly, "I guess I had thought that everyone would keep their own records. It

would be sort of hard for them to take their records to you every night, don't you think?"

"But there's no reason I couldn't go and get them once a week," Carol countered.

"But what's the use? You'll just be keeping duplicate files."

"Mom! You just don't want me to do it!"

"Oh, that's not true!"

"It is, too," Carol insisted. "Because someone has to keep combined records. How else are you going to know how many successes you have, and how will you know if someone's not doing as well as the others, and who's going to keep track of the batches of medicine and which patients get which batches, and stuff like that?"

"Well," Maggie admitted, "I guess I thought that I'd do it."

"But that's my job—you're taking my job away from me."

"Carol, you've always kept my records, and that'll still be your job."

"I'm not your secretary!" she shouted. "I'm a member of the Coven, and I'm one of the first three members, at that. You're not going to throw me out, or hide me from the other members because you're ashamed of me!"

"What, in the name of the good Lord, is going on out here?" Ann stood in the kitchen doorway. "My word, I could hear you two all the way down in my room with the door closed and the radio on." She turned to Carol, and added, "And young lady, it would not hurt you in the least to show a little respect for your mother."

Carol's glare didn't soften. "And it wouldn't hurt her to show me some respect, either." She stomped off to her room.

"What was all that about?"

Maggie sat down at the table. "Carol wants to be a part of the Coven, that's all."

"And you said? . . ."

"I said I wasn't sure yet, Or at least, that's what I said last time. This time the fight was rather oblique, and it probably sounded like I didn't want her in it."

"Do you?"

"I do. I'm delighted to have her working with me. But the Coven is really a midwives' association, and she's so young—"

"Did you ask them?"

"Ask who what?"

“Did you ask the women in the Coven how they felt about it?”

“I haven’t had a chance. We’ve only met once so far.”

“What does Beckie think about all this?”

“I haven’t talked to her about it, either.”

“Hmmpf.” She turned and started to leave, Then, turning back a moment, she added, “You two are both acting like children,” then headed back to her room.

* * *

Carol didn’t come to the dinner table, insisting she wasn’t hungry. After the meal Maggie headed for her study. It was getting late, and she wanted to be ready when the two new “pharmacists” showed up. Ann had announced that she was going to talk to Carol. Maggie hoped she wouldn’t make things any worse than they were already.

Her two new “pharmacists” showed up at eight o’clock, sharp. Of the two, Maggie knew Amy Belever well. The other, Carla Partlow, worked with Amy in the San Francisco clinic, but had never been very active in the C.M.A. “Let me show you my study,” Maggie said, leading them down the hall. “That’s where I’ve been keeping most of the records of my work, and also where I’ve been keeping the supplies for the medicine.” She led them into her bedroom, and through to the study, where she stopped suddenly, “Carol! What are you doing here?”

She was sitting at Maggie’s desk, file disks spread all around her. “Oh, hi,” she replied innocently. “I was just bringing our records up to date. I didn’t get a chance earlier to enter today’s data.” She turned to the other two. “I guess we haven’t met. I’m Carol, Maggie’s daughter, and I’m the official keeper of the data. I started working with Mom on it around the time of the C.M.A. split.” She rose to her feet as she spoke, and shook hands with the two women as they introduced themselves. Turning back to Maggie, Carol said, “If you want to use the study, I can come back later. I’m almost done.”

“Oh, don’t bother,” Amy injected. “Your mom was just showing us around. You don’t actually prepare it here, do you, Maggie?”

Maggie was still recovering. “What? No. I do it in the kitchen.”

“Can I help carry anything?” Carla offered.

In another minute the three of them had left the study, and Carol went back to her files. But when the footsteps recoded into inaudibility, she stealthily crept out to the hall door, and looked out. No one was in sight. In an instant she was across to Ann’s room. Crossing to her bed, she gave Ann a big kiss. “It worked just like you said it would, Gramma. You’re a genius!”

Chapter Twenty-Six

IT was after eleven when Amy and Carla left, and Carol was already asleep. Friday morning Maggie was out of the house before Carol was even up. Maggie had been impressed and irritated by Carol’s move. She had carried it off with such style that Amy and Carla expressed surprise when Maggie admitted that she was unsure as to whether Carol should really participate.

“After all,” Amy had said with a smile, “we are a coven, and witches always train their daughters.” Maggie hadn’t argued.

By midday she was starting to feel exhausted. That it was Friday didn’t help, because the treatments had to run for seven days straight. But her first apprentice of the afternoon brought her a message to call Beckie immediately. A bit apprehensively, she called the N.M.S. office in San Francisco .

“Victory number one!” Beckie announced. “City Hospital just withdrew its ban on us. Apparently City’s lawyers told them they didn’t have a chance, that they’d have to go through full hearings before they could reach a decision. So at the least, we’ve gained several weeks of breathing room.”

“That’s great,” Maggie said.

“How are your patients going this round?” Beckie asked.

Maggie shrugged into the phone. “This is only the fourth day, so medically I can’t say anything yet. But the apprentices are really good, and that’s a relief. Aside from that, I’m running a bit ragged at the edges from going nonstop, and I’m really counting on their taking over the treatments after next week.”

“Well, you have to expect to run a bit ragged at the start. It gets easier with time.”

“It’d better.” She looked at her watch. “Hey, I’m supposed to be thirty miles from here in forty-five minutes, and I haven’t seen this patient yet. I’ll have to talk with you later.”

“Great, You know about the Coven meeting next Wednesday, right?”

Maggie smiled. “Yes, I know about it, and I know how much you like that name, too.”

“Maggie, I don’t know what’s the matter with you. It’s like there was something wrong with being a witch. You should read your history more carefully. Really, they were all government agents in disguise, and they never deserved the bad reputation they got.”

Maggie groaned. “Good-bye, Beckie.”

* * *

By the time Maggie completed her rounds on Sunday, she was excited again. The medicine was working. Most exciting was that the three patients receiving daily doses from the frozen batch were all getting better. Two of the controls were also. Which meant that her new pharmacists were working well. Most likely, the last of the six would show signs on Monday. In fact, of the six, the one who hadn’t shown any improvement was the only true control, the only patient who received fresh medicine daily, always prepared by Maggie. The other two controls had been receiving fresh doses made by Amy and Carla since Friday. Everything was going better than could be expected, or even hoped for.

On the following Monday the six patients received their last doses of the medicine, although they were told that there would be monthly boosters. Still, only five had recovered. The sixth showed no signs of improvement. It was their first setback, and Maggie was in an ambivalent mood when the second meeting of the California Coven met Wednesday evening.

The meeting was at Beckie’s house, in Santa Cruz , and Maggie decided to hike the short mile. At eight o’clock, people were still drifting in, but it was already clear that the sense of the evening was going to be

one of victory. She refused to discuss her results before the meeting was underway, insisting that she didn't want to repeat herself. Despite this, word circulated rapidly, and the living room was buzzing with excitement.

Suddenly, the crowd seemed to quiet. Maggie looked up from her conversation and saw Carol at the door. Spotting her mother, Carol waved casually and then turned and walked over to Amy, who was talking with Carla and a small group of midwives. A minute later, the incident had been forgotten—but not by Maggie. She quickly crossed the room. “What do you think you're doing, Carol?” she muttered quietly. Only Carol could hear.

“Hi, Mom,” Carol answered cheerily. “I figured I'd better come, in case there were any questions about the records. And besides, I wanted to meet more of the women in the Coven since we're all working together.” She smiled at Maggie.

One of the women turned to Maggie. “You never told us your daughter was involved. Amy tells us she's been a real help.”

Maggie grudgingly agreed. “Especially at the start, before the Coven was set up. Back then, Carol was the only one who knew besides me.” She put an arm around Carol, and gave her a squeeze. “But I came over here just now to give her hell for crashing the meeting. I'm not sure it's appropriate for her to be a member of the Coven—”

“Oh Maggie, sometimes you're such an old fogey,” Amy complained. “if it'll make you feel better, I'll bring it up as an agenda item, and we can make it formal. Okay?”

“Well, I don't want to sound pushy, but—”

“But you won't even have to say a word. I'll handle it myself. If people object, which I'm sure they won't, then well just have to hear them out.”

Maggie looked embarrassed. “Look, if you bring it up, then it's your problem, so I'm just not going to worry about it, okay?”

Amy smiled. “It's a deal.”

* * *

It was eleven before the meeting broke up. There was a festive air to the room, as people prepared to leave. An unavoidable fever of success had infected the group, and the news of one patient's failure to recover had not dampened their excitement in the least. As Beckie pointed out, they could live with a ninety-percent success rate instead of a hundred. Even Maggie had been lifted out of her normally worrisome state, and had begun to have faith in her cure. And she was delighted by the warmth with which the Coven had accepted Carol. Beckie had even snuck out to the kitchen, tied a bow around her broom, and presented it to Carol after the vote.

Mother and daughter left Beckie's together, the broom handle sticking out a meter behind Carol's bike. Pedaling beneath the clear night sky, Maggie could imagine only clear sailing ahead for the Coven.

Chapter Twenty-Seven

THE next week, Maggie slept. Her two pharmacists made up a week's potion for six patients, and the

six apprentices handled the six new cases they had recruited for that week. Maggie still visited each case with them and spent considerable time talking to the apprentices about procedure and showing them how to format daily reports that Carol could incorporate into the records. But the schedule was working well, and they were getting through the six patients by three o'clock, and Maggie was routinely finishing by six. When Friday rolled around, Maggie was feeling better than she had in a month. She would have been feeling perfect, except two of the six hadn't responded to the treatment. Instead, she was worried.

Friday evening, she sat in her study, poring over her records, thankful for Carol's organization, searching out any clue to why these two had failed. We're moving too fast, she told herself. All three failures have come since other people started to help me. Is that the problem? She stared at her pencil, tried to stand it on its point, and finally let it fall onto her notes. Sixteen patients, seven types of cancer had been treated. People in differing stages of terminal cancer had been treated. Some were in their seventies and one was in her thirties. What factor had caused three to fail? She shook her head in despair. Eventually, exhausted, she turned off her light, and stared out the window. The dim, post-Crunch streetlights left broad dark areas between cones of illumination. She stared at the darkness, made all the darker by the brightness so nearby. I should go back, she decided, back to doing them all myself. If it means spending a year, then it means spending a year, that's all. Her face contracted into a frown. In fact, why am I keeping the treatment to myself? It'd make a lot more sense to turn it over to some university or medical school that could test it out properly. Test it out on a thousand mice in a month. And then she laughed, remembering. How do you convince a thousand mice that they're going to be cured? How do you get them to participate in their cure?

* * *

The next morning, Carol came in to do the records and found the study a mess. She had been up early, and eaten breakfast before Maggie had risen. Now Maggie was in the kitchen. Normally the record disks from the day before were neatly piled for Carol to go through, often with notes from Maggie or the apprentices. But this morning she couldn't even find yesterday's data sheets. Irritated, she walked heavily out to the kitchen. She would not be a maid for her mother. "Mom, you're going to have to leave your data sheets somewhere where I can find them if you want me to keyboard the data for you."

Maggie didn't look up from her coffee. "So don't do them."

"What?" Carol demanded. "It's my job, and I'm going to do it!"

Maggie turned and frowned at Carol. "Then do it. I don't care."

Carol started to object.

"Carol, listen, I know you're a big, important member of the group now, and I'm all impressed with you, just as I should be, and I think it's fine that you're all impressed, too. But I've got a headache and I'm not going to have you shouting at me. If I can't do it to you, I'll be damned if I'll sit here and let you do it to me." She turned back to her coffee. "Now go away, and give me a little peace and quiet."

Annoyed, Carol left the kitchen, suppressing an urge to slam the door behind her. Ann called to her as she walked past her room. Pouting, Carol dropped into the rocker in her grandmothers room. "Sounded like a fast one from back here," Ann commented.

Carol kicked at the floor. "Oh, she's just in one of her bad moods, that's all." Ann waited patiently for Carol to continue. "Oh, she left her data sheets somewhere under a big mess and I couldn't find them this morning, so I went out and complained to her about it."

“And she said—”

“And she said she had a headache.” Carol looked down at the floor. “I mean, she didn’t even say she was sorry.”

“Sorry that she had a headache?”

“No, sorry that she had left things so messy.”

Ann let out a most unfeminine snort. “Honestly, Carol, sometimes I can’t decide which of you has more of the child in you. She’s your mother, not the Virgin Mary. She makes mistakes. She forgets to do things. She even gets tired sometimes, and just doesn’t do something because she’d rather not.” She wagged a finger at Carol. “You are not fully grown up until you acknowledge that your mother is entitled to make as many mistakes as you are. Remember that, it’s a sure test of your maturity.”

“You’re telling me that she makes mistakes? She makes more mistakes than I, and boy, do I know it!”

Ann smiled. “Well, good for you. But recognizing that she does isn’t a sign of maturity, it’s a sign of adolescence. Maturity is recognizing that she’s entitled to those mistakes. The first is realizing that she’s not God, and the second is realizing that she is human. ‘Ya ain’t there yet,’ as they say in your culture.”

Carol frowned. “Well, you’ll never catch her admitting that she makes mistakes.”

“Ask her sometime.” Ann returned to the newspaper that she had been reading, and glanced at it briefly. “Well,” she muttered, “I just wanted to say good morning. I know you have some records or something that you want to get back to, so don’t just sit there being polite.” Without waiting for a response, Ann turned her full attention to the paper.

Carol walked to the study and stared at the mess. It wasn’t really so bad. Just sort of spread out. Maggie must have been going through the notes last night, looking for something. Whatever it was, it doesn’t look like she found it. Wonder what it was. Shrugging her shoulders, she began returning things to their rightful places. Within two minutes everything was in order, and she had Fridays data sheets. Curious, she skimmed through them.

Two more failures! No wonder Maggie was in a bad mood. Two failures! Carol broke out in goose bumps. Maybe it doesn’t work. Which ones were they? She entered them into the records first. Thomas O’Connell in Santa Cruz, lung cancer, Oates cell, a particularly deadly type, but one they had cured twice already; John Cafferty in San Francisco, bladder cancer, the first one that they’d treated. Hmmph. Both men. Figures.

Both men? Carol checked her records. She was right. The other failure, the one last week, was Peter Oberdorf. She ran through the list of all of their patients to date.

Leaping up from the desk, she dashed into the hall, and shouted at the top of her lungs, “Mom, I’ve got it!”

* * *

They mulled it over all afternoon and into the evening. But came up with only two explanations: the men were less trusting, and weren’t doing whatever it was that the patient had to do, or they were trusting, but

their body chemistry was different enough from women's that the medicine just couldn't carry out its half of the cure. Neither one was a very useful explanation, but it was all they had.

They decided to tell no one, since if the apprentices knew that the treatment might not work on men, they might not be as persuasive with them, and that in turn could cause it to fail. So on Sunday each of the six unknowing apprentices accepted two new patients.

Maggie was left with little to do. "It's ridiculous," she complained to Beckie at lunch on Monday. "I feel as if I should go back to work at the clinic or something—I mean, I have absolutely nothing to do. Amy and Carla each made up a half-dozen batches of potion, which is all the apprentices need since it can be frozen, the apprentices are going out by themselves, and Carol's keeping the records. All I do is fret."

Beckie smiled. "Why I thought you'd love being an administrator. You get to sit at your desk all day, talk to people on the phone, plan things. Why, that means you're rising in this society. Power, Maggie, you've got power!"

"It's not funny, Beckie. I feel more like a secretary than an administrator. I should be with the patients, not stuck behind some desk."

"And just what do you think I do all day?"

Maggie was flustered. "But you're organizing. You're setting up a union, fighting off the A.M.A. and the hospitals, worrying over the N.M.A.'s accreditation and a thousand other things."

"I spend my whole day sitting behind a desk, talking on the phone, just like you, while other women are going out there and doing the real work that I'm organizing about. Maggie, take my word for it—from over here you're in one of the most enviable positions imaginable."

"And speaking of losing accreditation! Maggie, have you seriously dealt with what's going to happen when your potion finally hits the papers?"

Maggie looked surprised, then shrugged. "Well, I figure there'll be rumors all over, and reporters wanting to do stories about it and all that. It'll be a nuisance in a pleasant sort of a way."

"You mean fame and fortune?" Beckie asked.

Maggie just shrugged again. "Well, I don't know that it'll be all that much. . . ."

"Jesus Christ, Maggie, you are really, and truly, beyond belief! Fame and fortune? How about arrest and prosecution? Maggie, wake up, will you? There's a war going on right now, with the A.M.A. and the medical establishment on one side, and us midwives on the other. You want them to welcome your discovery with open arms and call you their savior?"

"Listen, my naive old friend, you had best put your mind to the question before much longer, because the more people we treat the more likely a leak is going to appear, and when it does, you had best run for cover."

"But," Maggie said, "what could I do? I mean, I am practicing medicine without a license—I guess that's true—but what can I do now to prepare for it?"

Beckie shook her head. "For a start, you can worry about more than practicing without a license. For

example, that first guy who you gave it to, and it didn't work, what's his name?"

"Peter Oberdorf."

"Right, that's the one. What's his status now?"

"I don't know," Maggie answered. "I haven't seen him in the last week. But he was pretty bad. Unless the potion caused some retardation of his cancer, I doubt that he has much more than a month to live."

"Well, have you considered the possibility that if he dies you might be charged with murder?"

Maggie was stunned. "That's absurd!"

"Says you. But the A.M.A. says that the defendant gave an illegal concoction to this individual, Peter whatever, almost guaranteeing him a cure, and six weeks later he was dead. Not only that, but given the number of men you're treating this week, there are going to be more such deaths. With evidence of a half-dozen men who died within two months of your treatment, what are they going to conclude?"

"Beckie, for God's sake, they're terminal cancer patients. Of course they're going to die!"

Beckie just stared at her. "Well, Maggie, I promise that if I'm the judge you'll get off scot-free, because I know that you're innocent. But there aren't many people like me who are judges nowadays. So if I were you, I'd think about the problem."

Chapter Twenty-Eight

THE last week of March was not an easy one for Maggie. Beckie's warning had struck deep, and the old fears, which had somehow been pushed aside with the conviction that the potion worked, returned full force. And now she also felt responsible for the others who were involved in the project. Even Carol might be liable to prosecution. And the situation with the N.M.A. wasn't going any easier. Through the prodding of the A.M.A. and City Hospital, the state legislative committee on accreditations had scheduled the N.M.A. license-revocation hearings for the first Monday in April. Beckie was working day and night with her staff and their lawyers preparing their case.

And Maggie had little to do but worry about everything. By the end of the week the prognosis for the latest dozen patients was obvious: eight women cured, four men unchanged. The potion was not working on men. And, as if to prove Beckie right, one of the two men who had shown no response to the treatment the previous week died.

With seven men uncured—all the men they had treated—Maggie saw no reason to test more. Unfortunately, there was a hitch. Since all the women in the Coven Were recruiting patients for them, more men had been recruited during the week and Maggie wasn't sure how to handle them. Finally, Maggie called an emergency meeting of the women who had been working most closely with her, Carol, the two "pharmacists," and her six apprentices. They met at Maggie's Saturday afternoon, after the latest dozen patients were given their last treatments.

"Well," Maggie began, "there's good news and there's bad news, and I'm not totally sure which is which. Look, it's real simple. You probably all know that we had four more failures in this batch of twelve, making a total of seven failures out of twenty-eight patients. What you probably haven't pieced together—and actually it was Carol, and not me, who finally figured it out—is that the seven failures constitute all of the men we've treated so far. We have a hundred-percent cure rate with women, and

zero percent with men.”

Everyone started talking at once. Finally Maggie shouted them down. “Please! In a minute, I’ll have finished everything I wanted to say and someone else can talk.” She waited while they quieted. “First of all, we’ve only two explanations. The first is that we’re just not convincing the men, so whatever that mystical step is that can only happen if the patient is ‘helping,’ well, they just aren’t helping. The second is a variation on that, the men are convinced, but something about their body chemistry makes it impossible for the potion to work on men.” She shrugged her shoulders. “It’s not a pair of brilliant insights, I admit.

“But the other thing I wanted to say is that we have to decide whether we should stop treating men for the time being. Oh, and there’s another thing. Beckie has suggested, and I agree, that we need to discuss the possibility of legal action being taken against us, for what we’re doing.” She paused a second. “I guess that’s all I have to say.” She leaned back in her chair, trying to look relaxed.

Amy Belever was the first to speak. “I want to say a few things about your last point, Maggie. First of all, unpleasant as the thought is, I really think we shouldn’t assume that we don’t have an informer among us. I don’t think we do, but I think that’s a dangerous assumption to go on. And even if no one is now, no one can say for sure how each of us would react if threatened with prison,” Amy paused for a moment, then continued, “First of all, I think Maggie and Carol should make plans to go underground if it’s their only way of avoiding arrest. They have all the data, and they could continue the tests somewhere else. We shouldn’t get hung up in a long trial and let the testing come to a complete halt. In fact, in a crunch, the completion of our tests might make a big difference to the outcome of the trial.” Before she could continue, others started to interrupt. “Let me finish!” Amy insisted. “I’ve just got two short points left. One, the rest of us might also consider going underground separately since we all have the information necessary to carry out the cure. And two, I think that it’s important that we not tell each other our plans. If you’re thinking of contacting someone about going underground, keep it to yourself. That’s all.”

But, of course, that wasn’t all, and the meeting didn’t break up until after midnight. The Coven decided not to treat any more men for the time being. Maggie agreed to keep the names of the six men recruited in the last week, so that if and when it became appropriate, she could contact them about treatments.

Carol helped Maggie clean up before bed. “Do you really think we’ll have to go into hiding?”

Maggie smiled. “No. I don’t think it’ll come to that, and if it does, it’ll just be for practicing without a license—and the success rate of our treatment will be too impressive for any jury to convict us.”

“But shouldn’t we make some plans, just in case?”

She gave Carol a hug. “Not tonight, anyhow. Let’s go to bed.”

Chapter Twenty-Nine

MAGGIE drove to San Francisco for the opening of the accreditation hearings. The legislative committee had agreed to hold their hearings in San Francisco, since that was the center of N.M.A. activities. On her arrival, she was shocked to find Beckie in a very fashionable—but proper—dress.

“Bought it just for the hearings,” Beckie confided as they sat in the visitors’ gallery. “When the legislature investigates you, you call them all sirs, whether they’re men or women.” She removed a pair of kid gloves, then opened her attaché case and withdrew a sheaf of papers. “Maggie, didn’t you bring anything to take notes with?” Maggie shook her head. “Honestly, Maggie! You should be taking this more

seriously.”

Maggie smiled. “You forget, I’m not even a practicing midwife. This is your bag, Beckie.” Their sniping was interrupted by a gavel calling the hearings to order.

The morning session passed without excitement. The mandate of the committee was read, the chair introduced the members of the committee, and a brief history of the legalization of midwifery in California was read by some doctor from the A.M.A. The split between the California Midwives Association and the N.M.A. was described only in those terms, as a split, and at that point the hearings recessed until after lunch.

For lunch they were joined by Liz Jason, the N.M.A.’s lawyer. “Can you get any sense of how it’ll go?” Maggie asked after they had ordered.

“It isn’t going at all, yet,” Liz replied. “They haven’t even started jockeying for position. I know that McCardle opposed the legalization of midwives. He appears to be a crony of your friend Dr. Somers. Aside from him, though, I don’t think there’re any members who are fanatically on one side or the other. I suspect that’s in our favor, since it’s a pretty drastic act to revoke licenses for a whole group of professionals. But I don’t know what the A.M.A. has cooked up, and I don’t know just how big a fight McCardle is planning to dish out. To a large extent, I suspect it’ll depend on popular reaction to the hearings, so they’ll probably be just fishing around for the first few days, without anyone taking clear positions. But so far, like I said, they haven’t even started to do that.”

“Will Beckie have to testify?” Maggie asked.

“At some point. She’s been asked to be available, which means that she’ll probably be called as a witness by the committee. But even if she isn’t, we’ve formally asked to speak during the open testimony, and they’ve told us that we’d get time then. Of course, how much time can depend on how things are going.”

They stopped talking as the food was served. Finally Maggie said, “Liz, I know this is a silly question, but is there really any logical reason to revoke our licenses? I mean, we haven’t done anything that’s improper.”

“That depends on whose version of improper you’re going by. In McCardle’s eyes you acted improperly when you first tried to deliver babies. He would have stopped you then. In the eyes of the A.M.A., you acted improperly when you rejected their standard operating procedures, and claimed to know better than they how to deliver a baby. In the end the question boils down to how badly you misused the privileges that licensing implies.”

“But that assumes we’ve acted badly,” Beckie pointed out. “First they have to prove that, and that’s going to be next to impossible.”

“Still,” Liz replied, “this isn’t a court hearing, this is a legislative hearing. They could revoke our licenses just because they don’t like the way we look, then we’d have to go to court, and that’s slow and expensive. So, our job here is to try to keep them honest.” She looked at her watch. “In fact, we had best get back so we can do exactly that.”

* * *

The afternoon dragged on uninterestingly until the hearings were recessed. But the next morning, things

picked up, as Beckie was called to testify.

She was brilliant. She answered each question carefully, politely, and honestly. At one point McCardle asked her, “Do you think that your group knows how to deliver babies better than obstetricians?”

“No,” she replied, “I think we know how to deliver babies differently than physicians. I think their classroom and clinical experiences lead them to favor one approach to childbirth, and our experiences lead us to favor a different approach. I openly admit that in many, many cases I believe that our methods are more appropriate, and I would not hesitate to tell any obstetrician that I thought so. But I would not presume to force my approach on obstetricians, any more than they should presume to force their approach on us.”

Maggie hadn't known that Beckie could be so polite. It had certainly never shown before. But McCardle pushed on. “So you don't think you have anything to learn from regular, ordinary physicians.”

“That isn't so,” Beckie said. “Most everything I have learned in the field has been taught to me by physicians, and, indeed, most of the scientific studies which have led me and my colleagues to our current attitudes toward childbirth were carried out at medical schools and by physicians. As does anyone who practices a profession, I have also learned considerably from my daily experiences, but still, when I need to I always fall back on what I have been taught, and most of that constitutes information and practice I have learned from, I believe your phrase was ‘regular, ordinary physicians.’”

McCardle was getting nowhere, and some of the committee members were beginning to show their boredom. Finally, McCardle seemed satisfied that Beckie would make no embarrassing admission, so he dropped the line of questioning. He looked down at his notes a minute, nodded his head to himself, and looked back up at Beckie. “What do you know about curing cancer?”

Beckie looked around nervously. “What?” she asked, almost in a whisper.

“Come now, it's a simple enough question. I asked you what you know about how to cure cancer.”

“Well,” she responded unsurely, “we had a unit on it in school, but that was several years ago, and I haven't kept up on the literature.”

“You haven't, say, been treating cancer patients on the side?”

“Senator McCardle?” It was the chairperson. “I can understand the confusion of the witness. Perhaps you could give us all some idea of where you're heading with this line of questioning?”

McCardle was irritated by the interruption. “Where I'm heading? I'm afraid, Mr. Chairman, that I'm not absolutely sure yet. I do know,” he said, his voice beginning to rise, “that there are women, who purport to be midwives, who are visiting cancer patients. They claim to have a cure for cancer. I also know that two of their patients died within weeks of receiving this so-called treatment. I was wondering—since the so-called Natural Midwives Association rejects standard, medically accepted procedures involved in the safe and healthy delivery of newborns, and since they feel that they can safely practice whatever form of pseudomedicine they deem appropriate—I was wondering whether perhaps they are the same midwives who feel that they can improve on the billion-dollar effort of the legitimate medical establishment to cure cancer.”

Liz was on her feet. “This is outrageous, and slanderous!” she exclaimed.

“You have neither the floor nor a right to the floor,” retorted the chairperson. But by then members of the committee had also begun to sputter in outrage.

Liz whispered furiously to Beckie. “Don’t answer any more questions on the subject. Tell them that McCardle’s statement implies legal wrongdoing, and that you insist on consulting with counsel before responding.” But Beckie hardly heard a word of it. Although Liz knew nothing about the Coven, apparently McCardle did. Beckie frantically repressed the urge to turn to Maggie for support. Jesus God, she thought, how much does the bastard know? And how does he know? If there’s a plant in the group, we’re sunk.

The chairperson was pounding for order, and both the committee and audience were finally quieting down. McCardle, his face red with anger, pounded on the table in front of him with his fists. “Mr. Chairman, I ask this witness again whether she knows anything about this—this abomination! Because, Mr. Chairman, this is exactly where we can expect these so-called midwives to head if we allow them their practices. If we decide that these unschooled, uneducated women can ignore the dictates of proper medical practice, if we decide that they be permitted to place themselves above the true medical profession, above those men who have graduated medical school and who do research to better medical procedures, then you can only expect that this decision will so bloat their egos that they will quickly attempt to supplant medical doctors in all their functions!” McCardle turned and glared at Beckie, his hands shaking with rage. Lifting one hand and pointing at Beckie, he shouted, “They would gladly lead us back to the superstitious ways of their predecessors, the witches and midwives of the Dark Ages!” Exhausted, he sank back into his chair, wiping his wet brow with a shaky handkerchief.

The room was silent for many seconds, until Patricia White, the only woman on the committee, turned to Beckie and said, “I must apologize for my colleague, he appears to have an uncontrollable fear of women.” A ripple of laughter spread through the hall, and lightened the atmosphere immeasurably. For a moment, Beckie thought the whole issue might just blow by without further ado. But her hopes were dashed a moment later, as White continued, “Senator McCardle, you’ve made a rather shocking accusation. It sounds as if you consider Ms. McPhee guilty of manslaughter, or even murder, in the deaths of two cancer patients. Although I can see absolutely no connection between this charge and the purpose of these hearings, I am reluctant to allow this charge to slide by. I am reminded all too strongly here of another senator, from long ago, who used his position on a committee to claim to have lists of wrongdoers and wrongdoings, which he used to pull this entire nation into infamy, so you will forgive me if I pursue this a bit further.” She stared into McCardle’s angry face. “Senator, have you turned your information over to the Attorney General’s office for further action?”

McCardle frowned. “Senator White, you seem to feel that it would be more politic to investigate me than these midwives. I take it that you’re not as seriously concerned about our wandering off the main purpose of our investigation if you can pick the direction.” He glared at Beckie, who was sitting quietly in her chair. Perhaps we should focus more directly on her, and her practices.”

But White wouldn’t back off. “Senator, perhaps you didn’t understand that I was asking a question of you. Have you turned your information on these two alleged deaths over to the Attorney General’s office?”

McCardle continued to stare at Beckie. “I have not done so yet. Now may we return to investigation?”

“No! I’d like to know when you plan to turn this information over to the Attorney General’s office.”

McCardle turned and stared angrily at White. “I’ll turn it over when I’m good and ready. My staff is investigating this matter; when we feel we have sufficient information, we will most certainly go to the Attorney General. Does that satisfy you?”

White shook her head. “No, Senator. It does not. I don’t believe that you should be doing the work of the Attorney General’s office. Nor do I believe that you have any right to withhold information of possible crimes from the Attorney General for so much as a single day. You have stated here that you believe that this woman, Rebecca McPhee, might be involved in two felony deaths and that you feel she might, in the future, become involved in more, and yet you don’t feel that this information has to be turned over to the Attorney General. I am shocked by such an attitude—unless, of course, you actually have no evidence of any substance.”

A thin smile spread across McCardle’s face. “Very well, Senator, would you be satisfied if I promised to get the information to the Attorney General by the end of the week?”

“That would be fine,” she replied.

“Then I so promise. Now, Senator, may we return to our questioning of the witness?”

But the exchange had drained most of the energy from everyone involved, and within a half-hour, the hearings were adjourned until Friday.

Chapter Chapter Thirty

IT was three before Beckie and Maggie broke free from reporters, lawyers, and well-wishers. They talked quietly while they searched for a coffee shop.

“Beckie, what are we going to do? it’s as if he has access to our files. How could he know about the Coven?”

Beckie looked around nervously. “I don’t know. I’ve been wondering if someone in the Coven is a plant, but I know every one, and I can’t believe that any of them would be a fink.” She thought for a minute. “In fact, it doesn’t make sense that way at all.” She looked around again, still concerned about other ears. “Look, if he had a plant, then he’d have information about everything—he’d even know we were curing some people. I mean, if all the information comes out now it would still be a plus for us, and if he had a plant, he’d know that.”

“On the other hand,” Maggie pointed out, “if he could get twenty percent of the N.M.A. indicted for manslaughter, conspiracy, practicing medicine without a license, or whatnot, that certainly would go a long way toward discrediting the group.” She stopped, and turned to Beckie. “And that also assumes that he believes everything that his stool pigeon tells him. He might very well just reject anything about the successes.”

They started walking again. “That does make sense,” Beckie agreed. “On the other hand, he might not have an informer at all, in which case we have to think about where he did get his information. We do depend on our patients and their families to maintain silence about our treatment. What if the families of the two patients who died felt guilty and asked their doctors if our treatment could have contributed to the deaths? It’d be easy to see how that might get around until McCardle finally heard of it.”

“Of course!” Maggie said. “Look, he can’t have an informer. Something confused me at the time—he said that the cancer cure was given by women who ‘purported to be’ midwives. There’d be no reason to hedge if he had an informer, because he’d be certain that they were midwives. So his information must come from outside the group, in fact, from someone who doesn’t know that the group even exists. Beckie, I think we’re clear for a while. I think we still have some time to maneuver.”

Beckie thought silently for a while. "I think you're right, Maggie. Thank God! But we've got some pretty fancy footwork to do for a while, and I think it'd be best if you and I weren't seen together at the hearings, since any investigation is likely to start with me."

* * *

Melanie found Carol as they headed to the lunch hall. "Hey, Carol, have you heard the news yet?"

"What news?"

"Big trouble," Melanie whispered. "Better sit where we can be alone." Without another word she pushed Carol over to a corner table away from where they and their friends usually ate. She looked around suspiciously. Then in a conspiratorial voice she whispered, "I think they've found out about your mom."

A wave of fear washed over Carol. "What do you mean?" she demanded.

Melanie looked around again, and then hunched closer to Carol. "I just heard it on the news. They were talking about the midwives trial up in the City, and some senator said the midwives were trying to cure cancer patients and that a couple had died from the treatment."

"That's not true!" Carol exclaimed.

Melanie peered at her through squinted eyes. "Sssh! Now just what isn't true?"

Carol caught herself just in time. "Oh, the whole thing isn't true, that's all."

"What do you mean, 'the whole thing isn't true?'—I heard it on the radio with my own ears."

"Well, what does it have to do with Mom, anyhow?"

Melanie looked at Carol suspiciously. "What do you think it has to do with your mom?"

Carol tried to look nonchalant. "Oh, you mean just because she's a midwife, she'll sort of be connected to it or something?"

Melanie looked irritated. "The frogs, you dummy. The experiments. You know what I'm talking about." She looked around again, just to be sure. "I just want you to know that I'll keep your secret. No one will find out from me."

Carol tried to laugh. "You mean you think my mom actually has something to do with those guys who died? I bet they just died of cancer, anyhow."

"Well, listen, you don't have to go and get defensive about it. Like I said, I'm not going to squeal."

"Squeal? You mean start rumors! And I swear, Melanie, if you start any rumors that my mom had something to do with those guys, I'll tear your eyes out. And I mean it," she added furiously.

"Look, don't get mad at me about it I'm just trying to help, that's all."

“That’s all, my eye. You’re just trying to tease me.” She got up and started to walk away. “And I meant it about your eyes!” Turning, she stalked out of the lunch hall.

She ran all the way down to the corner drugstore where there was a phone booth. Punching in her number as quickly as she could, she waked impatiently while the phone rang. Finally, Ann answered.

“Gramma, is Mom there? I need to talk to her.”

“No, she’s not, Carol, she’s still inSan Francisco , at the hearings. Is there something I could help you with?”

“No, I need to tell her something.” She paused a moment to think. “Is there any way that I could reach her there?”

“I doubt it very much. If you tell me, I’ll tell Maggie if she calls again.”

“Did she call once, already? What about?”

“Well, I don’t really know,” Ann said. “She was very mysterious, just told me not to talk to reporters or strangers if they called or came by.” She stopped, remembering the conversation. “She told me she would explain it all this evening.”

Carol sighed in relief. “Well, listen, if she calls again, just tell her I know about it, and that I’ll be careful.” Without waiting for a reply, she hung up and charged back to school. She never should have left Melanie alone in the lunch hall, she realized. It would be smartest to stick close to her until they got a chance to have a serious talk.

Chapter Thirty-One

MAGGIE finally arrived home at five, exhausted, only to find a frantic Carol. “What are we going to do, Mom? Should we go away somewhere, so they can’t find us?”

“Carol, stop it! I don’t have the energy to deal with you when you’re hyper. Just calm down. You want to be treated like an adult? Try acting like one!”

“Maggie.” Ann said, “don’t take it out on poor Carol.”

Maggie turned on her. “Mom, I don’t want that from you either right now.” She looked from one to the other in irritation. Finally, she threw her arms up in frustration. “Forget it. I’m going to my room, and I don’t want to be disturbed. You two can talk about it to your hearts’ content.”

Once in her room, she just stood awhile in frustration and fear, then dropped down onto her bed, feeling the tension in her body, the knotted muscles. Struggling to soothe herself, breathing deeply, concentrating on the muscles, one at a time, relaxing them, neck, shoulders, arms, down the length of her body, a fragile calm was gradually established over her whole body.

She lay there, thinking about nothing except the calmness of her body, for a full half-hour. Only then did she consider her plight, mentally listing the things to be done; talk to Beckie and map out the next few days, talk with the Coven, and Carol too. Finally she walked into her study and drew up her detailed list. When she finished. she punched Beckie’s number.

The phone rang several times before Beckie answered. “Don’t say anything until I explain,” Beckie said before Maggie even got in a hello. “I’m afraid my phone is tapped, so try to tell me who you are in an unobvious way, and I’ll get back to you.”

Maggie was confused. “Uh, Beckie, this is, I mean, you know who this is. I’m at home.”

“Call you back in five to ten minutes.” She hung up.

Maggie stared at the phone. She had been counting on Beckie to calm her, and instead she was shaking.

Several minutes later, the phone rang. Maggie leaped at it. “Beckie, are you all right? What’s going on?”

“I’m just fine, as far as I can tell.” Her voice wasn’t convincing. “But my damn phone’s been acting strange since I got home, and I’m afraid the D.A. or someone might have decided to check out McCardle’s bombshell.”

“But don’t you think this will make them suspicious, your running out to a pay phone?”

Beckie laughed. “Not as much as if you had blurted out that you were scared, going underground, and taking the records with you. For all they know, I’m expecting a phone call from someone about an ounce of dope. They expect you to get paranoid like that.”

“Just a second, Beckie.” Carol, who had joined Maggie after the call had come, was tugging at her sleeve. “What do you want?”

“Mom, what’s going on? Is Beckie okay? What’s happening?”

Maggie turned back to the phone. “Beckie, Carol’s here Give me a minute to explain to her what’s going on.”

“Well, I’ve only got three minutes, so let me give you the number here, and you call me back.”

It was five minutes before Maggie called back. Carol was slipping into hysteria and Maggie had to talk her down. Finally, Maggie called back, with Carol on the extension.

“Maggie, I’ve been talking to some of the women in the N.M.A.” Beckie said, “and we feel that we have to reply to McCardle’s accusation. I’ve got a rough draft of it here.” There was a pause, while she fumbled for the paper. “The Natural Midwives Association of California categorically rejects the claim of State Senator Steven McCardle that it is in any way participating in the testing of any alleged anticancer drugs, and deplores this attack, which implies that the Association is guilty of manslaughter or even murder. Such attacks are seen by this Association as a futile attempt to create public opposition to the Association, its members, and their practices.” She paused. “This next part is iffy; we haven’t decided whether we were going to put it in. The N.M.A., along with all Californians, desperately desires a cure for cancer, and would support any and all reasonable attempts to find such a cure. Any drug suspected of having therapeutic value as an anticancer agent should, we feel, be screened to test this possibility. If, as Senator McCardle claims, such testing is taking place outside of the normal medical research institutions, we feel that the blame for such un-supervised testing lies as much with the medical establishment—which casually and unscientifically rejects all medical claims which do not originate from within its own establishment—as it does with the testers of the drug.” She paused again. “It’s not too well worded yet, but that’s the idea. We were going to maybe insert something about how the medical establishment wouldn’t accept acupuncture or chiropractic even though millions of people had successfully been treated

by them. What do you think?"

"I think it sounds great!" Carol chimed in. "And I really like that last part."

"I don't know," Maggie admitted. "I mean, that last section isn't going to help the N.M.A. Any."

"Well that's what we're arguing about at this end. I want to make sure it expresses the Coven's point of view, that it sounds good to you."

"Well, it certainly sounds fine to me," Maggie said. "In fact, it might be successful in negating McCardle's hysteria over the deaths."

Beckie agreed, then added. "Listen, about the Coven—it's got to go further underground. Have you given it any thought?"

"Not really."

"Well, listen. I think it's important that you get set up so that if, for example, there's a leak, it doesn't catch everyone. I was thinking that all of the women you've trained should each train another woman, and that no one should be told who that other woman is. That way, the new members will be able to keep going even if all of the original Coven members get rounded up. I think it's also worthwhile that everyone pick a safe house, where someone would be willing to hide them. And all the Coven members should learn how to make the potion, so that they're not all dependent on each other. And the network should keep growing, you know, with the new people training other people in secret."

"Look, Beckie, do you really think all this is necessary?"

"Maggie, I hate to say it, but I think the Coven is going to be busted right up the middle." Beckie had never sounded so weary. "All McCardle has to do is turn the names of the two dead men over to the Attorney General. He'll interview the families, and for sure he'll force them to cooperate. Then he'll go through the midwives photoregistry or have the families examine the photos. Then he'll bust the midwives who treated the men. And soon, they've got us all rounded up." She sounded defeated. "And once they get to me, I'm afraid the whole N.M.A. is going to come down around my ears."

"We could all go hide."

"But that doesn't really do any good, Carol," Beckie said. "First of all, that'll be taken as an admission of guilt, and second of all, treating people while you're underground would be ten times harder, but I suspect it's going to be a lot harder getting patients starting right now."

"In that case," Maggie pointed out, "maybe we should think in terms of decreasing the Coven's size."

"No," Beckie insisted. "The only chance we have of coming out on top is to have so many cures, that we can convince a court that we're doing right by our patients. Even if the Coven only treats a woman every month, there's an image of growth and strength that we project to the public."

A moment of silence followed before she continued. "Maggie, listen, I can't stay on the phone, I'm too worried about the connection between me and the Coven. I've decided that it'd be best if we didn't have any contact until some of this stuff blows over."

"How long do you mean?"

“I don’t know. I’m thinking a month, at least.”

“But Beckie!” Panic was plain in her voice.

“Maggie, they’re going to be looking for the Coven, even though they don’t know that it exists for sure, and that search is going to start with me. The longer I can keep them off your trail, the better for the Coven. And for God’s sake, don’t panic. Maggie, in Coven affairs all I do is agree with whatever you say. You don’t need me. Besides, you’ve got Carol with you, and you should realize she’s a much stronger and more intelligent member of the Coven than you’ve been willing to admit.

“Look, if you do what you think is best, you’ll be as close to the right solution as you need be. When things have calmed down, or when the link between us has been blown open in public, I’ll call you back. It won’t be all that long. Good-bye.”

Maggie listened silently as first Beckie and then Carol hung up. As Maggie hung up her own phone, Carol rushed into the study, “Mom, we can do it. I know we can. Because, you do have a cure for cancer! In the end, we just can’t lose. We can’t!”

Chapter Thirty-Two

THE next day, the N.M.A. press release appeared. It cheered Maggie up some, but at the same time, seemed a last, surreptitious message of support from Beckie, so she felt the loss even more.

She was confused by her emotions; surprised by the extent of her depression over losing access to her closest friend. But she didn’t have much time to think about it. She had called a meeting of the Coven for noon, and the members were, for the most part, either scared or confused, though one or two seemed excited by what lay ahead. It was going to be a hard meeting.

Carol had spent most of the morning getting the records into shape. The master disk files, which she had transferred from the members’ handwritten records, had been stacked in piles on Maggie’s desk and on a table under the window, and Carol was organizing them and placing them in cardboard boxes. She had muttered something unintelligible when Maggie asked what she was doing. Finally, apparently finished, Carol had returned to her room.

Maggie glanced at the clock on her wall. A quarter of twelve. She left her room, and walked to Carol’s, where she found her daughter sitting on a large, overflowing suitcase, struggling to close the catches. With a final bounce, she snapped the last one shut. Looking up, she saw Maggie and jumped. Oh, hi, Mom.”

“What in the world are you doing?”

“Just closing up this suitcase.”

“I know that, but what’s in it?”

She looked down at her feet. “Just some stuff. That’s all.”

“What are you doing?”

“I’m packing a suitcase!” Carol shouted.

“But why?”

“So I can get out of here fast. And you should pack one, too. Why do you think I’ve been organizing our records for the last three hours?”

“So we can take them, too?” Maggie asked incredulously.

“No. So we can get them out of here today.” She still stared into Maggie’s eyes, but it was clearly an effort. “Otherwise, if they do bust us, the records get taken as evidence, and then we don’t have our data anymore—and that’s the only proof we have of what we’ve done. They always take everything as evidence. We’d probably never see the stuff again.”

Maggie looked at the suitcase, then at Carol. Smiling, she shook her head. “All right,” she said. “After the meeting, we pack me a suitcase, and find us a place to stash it.”

The meeting concluded by three, and Maggie was exhausted. Everyone agreed with Beckie’s suggestions: the six apprentices would train to prepare the potion; the pharmacists would be apprenticed; new apprentices would be sought. The only new suggestion concerned communicating with Carol and Maggie for data recording and collating. Ten women had started treatment just Monday, and more were to begin the following week. But for the future, it was agreed that each member was to find her own patients, and drastically reduce communications between Coven members.

The members left on a cheerful note. Twenty-one successes had been logged, with possibly ten more in the works, and the midwives knew that they possessed a cure for cancer. As the meeting broke up, Amy quoted the witches of Macbeth, “When shall we three meet again?”

Maggie sat on her bedroom floor, packing, while Carol watched from the bed. “There’s an unreal quality about this,” Maggie commented. “It’s like when I packed a suitcase for the hospital when you were born, having no idea when I’d use it. But at least then I was sure that I’d need it sooner or later.”

“I felt like I was running away from home,” Carol said, “because I didn’t have any idea where I was planning to go or how long I was going to stay or anything like that. It’s scary and exciting at the same time.”

Maggie stared at her suitcase. “I don’t even know what I’m packing for. A weekend? A month? A lifetime?” She knelt on the suitcase to force it shut. “I feel like I’m packing to emigrate to the Moon.”

“Would they really lock us up in jail, Mom? I mean in those horrifying places that you read about all the time, where people keep dying because they won’t let them see a doctor, and stuff like that?”

Maggie sat beside her. “Well, if they even arrest us, I suspect that we’d be out on bail the same day. I think it would be a celebrity arrest, with enough press coverage to prevent any serious problems. Like everywhere else, it’s mostly the poor and minorities who get the worst treatment in the prisons.” She reached an arm around Carol, and pulled her closer. “But that doesn’t mean that the prospect isn’t scary for me, too. They do have almost total power over you when you’re in jail, even if they don’t always exercise it, and it’s not something we would find easy to deal with.”

Carol sat silently under Maggie’s protective arm. Then, after a minute, she sat up straight and said, “Well, we should decide where to move our suitcases and records to, just in case.”

Somewhat reluctantly, Maggie withdrew her arm. Turning sideways, she asked, “Have any ideas?”

“What about Amy?”

“No good. They’d be too likely to be watching her by the time they get around to busting us. It needs to be someone not connected with the N.M.A.”

“But who else can we trust, Mom? They’re the only ones who are one-hundred-percent trustworthy.”

“But that’s exactly why we can’t use them, Carol—the police would know them, it has to be someone who isn’t so obvious. I know! Judy Feldman, in Palo Alto. We hardly ever see her anymore, but I trust her. And she’s moved since we were last there. So her neighbors won’t even know that she knows us. I bet she’d be willing to hide us for a while.” Maggie stood and walked into her study, returning a moment later with her phone book. “I’m sure I have her new number—yes, here it is.” She picked up the phone and slipped in the card with Judy’s number on it.

Suddenly, Carol grabbed the phone and pushed down the button, disconnecting the call. “Shouldn’t we use a pay phone?”

Maggie frowned. “I don’t see why we’d have to worry about our phone.”

“But everyone saw you at the hearings with Beckie. You even went out with her afterward. And maybe they traced her call even though it was from a pay phone.”

With a sigh, Maggie gave in. “You win. Let’s get some change.”

A half-hour later they were on the road to Palo Alto. Judy had agreed to stash their belongings and offered to discuss their staying at her house. So with their records and two suitcases, they drove aimlessly about Santa Cruz, then headed to Palo Alto.

After some time, Carol asked, “Do you think someone might be following us?” She kept peering through the rear window.

“I doubt it. I’ve been watching closely. I once read an FBI agent’s statement that a tail can be good or invisible, but not both. I don’t think anyone’s back there.”

It was late when Maggie finally pulled in at the modest house Judy shared with her two daughters. Number 207 stood at the end of a cul-de-sac in a standard California subdivision. As the car rolled into Judy’s driveway, she came out to meet them. “Everything okay?” she asked, somewhat apprehensively. Maggie nodded affirmatively, and Judy relaxed visibly. She reached for one of the suitcases in the back seat. “Let me help you with these.”

While Carol carried the second suitcase into the house, Maggie opened the trunk. It was filled with cartons of papers, all the reports and records of their cancer treatments. She began to ferry them in.

It was evening before they reached home. Judy had enthusiastically offered them the use of her home if they had to hide, and promised to relocate the files elsewhere, just in case they could be traced to Palo Alto. Maggie warned Judy of the dangers of harboring desperate fugitives, but she just laughed. “Listen, it’s a chance to visit with you—you’d be unable to leave because they’re looking for you, and I’d get to see you for more than our usual two-hour quiche.”

The rest of the week was hard on Maggie and Carol. Nothing happened on Wednesday or Thursday.

Friday, the hearings continued in San Francisco, but Maggie didn't attend. Late Friday evening, Any Belever dropped by, with the treatment reports for Wednesday through Friday.

"Looks real good, Maggie. I haven't gone through the actual reports, but I talked to people as they brought them in, and it sounds like we're making progress on all ten."

Maggie smiled. "Have you heard anything about the hearings in the City?"

"Carla called the N.M.A. office late this afternoon. Nothing exciting had happened except for McCardle's announcement that he had turned over his information to the Attorney General. He said he was confident that indictments would follow."

Maggie stopped smiling. "How did she feel about it? I mean, how do you feel?"

Amy laughed. "Really, you mean how should you feel about it. To be honest, everyone seems to be unsure of themselves. At the rate McCardle's going, the entire question of N.M.A. licensing is going to be tied to this—as he put it—'quack cure for cancer pushed by a bunch of power-hungry atavistic midwives.' No one's particularly happy about the prospect of spending time in jail, but no one thinks there's a chance in a million of a conviction coming out of this. At the least, we can withhold the cure until all our members are out of jail—that was Sue Tiemann's idea—and probably get a commutation of the sentence even after a conviction."

"Amy, that depends on how many cures we have before we all get arrested, and whether we've got enough to convince the public that the treatment works."

Carol, silent till then, suddenly interrupted. "Mom, look, we've got twenty-one already, and if only nine out of these ten work, we'll have thirty. That's thirty cancer patients that the medical profession had already given up on. Doesn't that prove it?"

Maggie turned to Carol. "In a rational, scientific debate, yes, that would probably prove it. But there's no guarantee that's what's going to happen. For all I know, the prosecutor will find some grounds on which to make all our evidence inadmissible. He might argue that the mere admission that we treated these cancer patients amounts to a guilty plea, and that whether we cured them or not is irrelevant if the charge is practicing medicine without a license. If you remember the trial in the mid-'70s, when they tried to bust all the midwives for practicing without a license, there was no question of infant mortality or women dying or being injured during childbirth. The only charge was of doing something that was reserved for doctors. They can hit us with the same charge, and it's a felony."

Carol stomped her foot. "But it's so dumb! I mean, they just can't go and punish us because we found a cure for cancer!"

"That's the hope," Amy said. "That's the hope."

Chapter Thirty-Three

By Monday morning Maggie and Carol agreed that the ten current patients were recovered. That gave them thirty-one cures, and, of course, the same seven failures. Despite McCardle's statements and the publicity, the Coven had recruited a record fifteen patients and they would be started immediately. Unfortunately, Maggie didn't know who was to treat them. She cursed the need for secrecy. She didn't even know if her apprentices were training other women or not. She hoped the individual apprentices were recording data properly and noting who was treating whom.

At noon, Sue Tiemann stopped by. “Good news and bad news. The bad news is that another of the men we treated has died. That makes three. I saw it in the obituaries, and take it as a bad sign that the family didn’t call and let us know.”

“Did they know one of us directly?” Maggie asked apprehensively.

“No, it was through an intermediary, and I think she’s solid. But if the family had notified her, she would have called us immediately.”

Maggie frowned. “If word of another death reaches McCardle, he’s going to raise another stink.”

“Well, the good news,” Sue said, “is that I have a good friend who lives a block behind you, on Summer Street. She’s trustworthy and is willing to give two unnamed people a ride out of town if they ever need it.” She handed Maggie a slip of paper. “Here’s her name, address, and phone number. You should probably memorize them and then burn the paper. Or eat it.” She giggled, then shrugged, looking a bit uncomfortable.

Maggie smiled. “I appreciate the help—but I hope we’ll never have to use your friend.”

Sue left after a strained lunch. Ann was visiting Maggie’s brother in Chicago, and would be gone for a couple of weeks, so Maggie was alone in the house. It had been a long time since the house had been empty. Feeling suddenly vulnerable, Maggie went into her study. She turned her chair around, so she could sit at the table under the window, rather than at her desk. Taking down reference books, she started planning further tests. But her nerves refused to calm, and every time a car or bike passed down the street she started, and then watched the vehicle pass out of sight.

By two, she had begun to get the experiments organized. It felt rather silly. Her eyes left the sheet to follow a large dark blue Ford down the street. It slowed as it got closer. She could see the driver peering out at house numbers. Finally it pulled in front of her house and stopped!

Maggie leaped from her chair. A plainclothes cop? She looked around frantically. She wasn’t at all ready. She had left the slip of paper with Sue’s friend’s name in the kitchen. Grabbing the protocols, she ran to the kitchen. Where was the paper? She spent precious seconds searching, before she found it by the sink. Memorizing the address, she shoved it into the disposal just as a knock came at the kitchen door. She froze.

The knock came again, and reluctantly, she turned to the door. Bill Krueger waved a cheery hello from outside the glass door. Her knees almost buckled as she opened the door. She invited Bill in and sat with him at the table, unsure her legs would continue to hold her.

Krueger looked at her somewhat nervously. “Are you okay, Maggie?”

Maggie smiled. “I’m fine. What brings you down here, Bill?”

He shrugged casually. “Oh, I was just visiting a friend in the area, and thought I’d stop by and see how Ann’s doing. I haven’t heard from either of you since her remission.”

“Just taking a Monday afternoon off to go visit friends? Business must be slacking off.”

Krueger looked nervous. “Well, actually, it was a patient I was seeing—one I don’t want to move

unnecessarily.”

Maggie smiled. “Good for you. It’s about time doctors got back to making house calls, although an hour’s commute each way is rather exceptional,” There was just the edge of sarcasm in her voice. “Well, I’m sure you’re in a hurry to get back, so I won’t just gab. Mom’s totally cured, as far as I can tell, but I’m not a doctor. She’s in Chicago visiting my brother, and isn’t due back for a couple of weeks. It’d probably be a good idea to run another scan on her when she gets back, so we can have some hard data on how she’s doing, but aside from that, patient seems recovered.” She smiled again, as if the conversation were at an end. She rose to her feet.

Krueger smiled, but made no move to get up. “I’ve been following the N.M.A.’s credentials fight. I really think it’s disgusting the way this whole challenge has come up.”

Maggie remained standing. “Well, write a letter to your representatives on MedCenter stationery, and tell them that. We could use some help from M.D.s. We’re not getting much.”

He looked interested. “I’ll do that. And maybe I can even get a petition up around the hospital. I think you have more support than you know about.” He paused a minute. “That McCardle is amazing, bringing in that slur about cancer patients.” He looked up at Maggie, uncomfortable with the angle.

She turned away, and crossed to the sink, and shoved her hand down the disposal. “You have to expect stuff like that.” She had one finger on the paper with the name and phone number, but couldn’t quite reach it. “But I’ve got a lot to do today.” There. She had it. Slowly she pulled it out. “If you arrange for a scan of Mom in about three weeks, maybe we could talk more then.” She turned back to Krueger, who was on his feet now.

“Maggie, you win. I’m no good at playing games, and I apologize for even trying.”

She had moved to the door. “Oh, that’s okay. I appreciate your stopping by. It’s just that I am loaded down with work today, and can’t talk.”

“Maggie, please. I want to help. Honestly I do. I haven’t told anyone where I am this afternoon.”

She opened the door. “Well, I appreciate it, Bill.” She smiled an honest smile and shrugged. “Problem is, there’s no way to know who’s honest and who isn’t. Thanks for coming by.”

Krueger didn’t move. “Maggie, you can know who’s being honest by who has information and whom they give it to.”

Maggie looked confused.

“Oh hell, Maggie, I’m no fool. You and your mom think you cured her of cancer. McCardle claims that some midwives are claiming to have cured cancer. You are a midwife. . . .” He paused. “And I’ll be straight with you. I can track down every one of your patients if I want to. At the moment I have a list of eighteen women with terminal cancer who have had total spontaneous remissions in the last month or two. All of them since your mom got better. I’ve gone around very quietly. I don’t think anyone has an idea of what’s up. No one else has spotted the huge number of remissions lately, although they’re bound to before much longer. But I’ve seen the records of several of those remissions, and if there’s one consistent thread, it’s that none of the patients are as surprised as they should be. It’s as if they already knew that they were better.” Maggie didn’t respond. “Maggie, if I were trying to get you, I wouldn’t have to play this game. I could turn the names over to the D.A., and he’d have you in a minute. I don’t

know if there's fifty of you, or if you're working alone. But I wouldn't tell you I knew if I wanted to track others down."

"Are you threatening to go to the D.A. if I throw you out now?"

"No. And if the D.A. approaches me, I'll claim doctor patient privilege and they won't get a word from me. I meant it when I said I'd like to help." Neither of them made a move. Krueger sighed. "If you ask me again, I'll leave, but I wish you'd let me help."

She almost relented. She wanted so much to sit down with a cancer specialist, and tell him all they had accomplished. But it was the urgency of that desire that held her back. "Bill, I appreciate your offer, but I'm afraid to make that decision too fast. So let me think on it. If you would just not spread what you know, that would be helping us—me—a lot."

Krueger frowned. "Well, I'm sorry I can't convince you, Maggie. But keep me in mind—for anything you might need, not just medical advice."

"Thanks, Bill." She shook his hand, and he left. She was still leaning against the door when she heard him drive away.

* * *

"Hi, Carol, how ya doing?" Melanie found her at her locker after school.

"Usual. Honestly, Mrs. Kaderin drives me bats with her dippy 'Boys and girls, I've got a great idea' voice. She's a real basket case if you ask me."

"Yeah—Say, did you hear the news?"

Carol tensed. "What news?"

"Another one died." Carol looked confused. "That guy at the hearings, he said that another one of the people treated by those women died. Didn't your mom tell you?"

"No," Carol admitted. "But why should she know?"

"Well, I mean, you said that she thought she knew some of the people at the hearings, So I thought maybe they told her." She was clearly fishing for an explanation.

"Any other reasons?" Carol asked pointedly.

"Well, there is your grandmother." she said tentatively.

"What about my grandmother?"

"Well, don't get mad about it. Everyone in the school knows about it. I mean, you never tried to hide it or anything."

"Hide what?" Carol's voice rose almost to a scream.

"That your grandmother suddenly recovered from her cancer. I mean, how dumb do you think people

are? Your mother's a midwife, and your grandmother suddenly gets cured of cancer. You think people can't put two and two together?"

"And just what do they get when they put two and two together?"

Melanie took a step backward. "Well, what they say—and I've never said it once to anyone—is that your mom is one of those women who are treating cancer patients, because that's how your grandmother got better."

"Who says that?"

"Oh, I can't even remember. But it's not just one or two people who asked me. Lots have."

"And why do they ask you?"

"Come on, Carol, everyone knows that we're good friends."

"Well, I wouldn't count on it if I were you." Turning, Carol stomped off.

She ran all the way home.

Maggie was sitting in the kitchen, still recovering from Krueger's visit, when she heard Carol running up the driveway. It was amazing how much energy that child had, she thought. But the minute Carol entered the room Maggie knew something was wrong.

"Mom, Melanie says that it's all over school. Everyone knows!"

Her heart leaped into her throat. "Everyone knows what?"

"That you cured Gramma." She stopped for a breath. "And she says that McCardle announced at the hearings today that another man died from the potion."

"I know about the death, but what's this about people knowing about Gramma?"

Carol tried to calm down enough to talk coherently, and then dropped into a chair. She related her conversation with Melanie word for word. "I don't want to get arrested. Do you think we should go to Judy's?"

Maggie frowned. "I don't know. The situation's getting tighter, but I just don't think it's time yet—I think we're just jumpy. I almost bolted this afternoon." She told Carol about Krueger's visit. "But it isn't clear to me that the police are learning anything new. It's just that we're learning what other people know. We mustn't confuse the two. I think in a few more days we'll be in a better position to tell."

Chapter Thirty-Four

ON Tuesday, McCardle announced a fourth "victim," again without anyone in the Coven having heard about it first, and Amy told Maggie that one of the apprentices, she wouldn't say which, had apparently gone underground.

Wednesday morning, Maggie was awakened by an excited Carol. "Mom, look at this!" Carol shoved a newspaper into Maggie's hands as she tried to come fully awake.

“Where? What am I supposed to read?”

Carol pointed to an article by a columnist. It was in the San Francisco Chronicle, and the headline was **THEY REALLY CAN CURE CANCER!** Maggie read it quickly. “Over the last week,” it began, there has been much reportage of State Senator Steven McCardle’s claim that midwives have been secretly treating cancer patients, three of whom have subsequently died. During that week I have been contacted by, and have met with, two women who claim that their cancer has been cured by this same group of women. I have spoken with both of their doctors, and the men admit that their patients, both of whom had terminal cancer, had experienced ‘spontaneous remissions,’ sudden and unexplainable cures. Both women claim that the improvements followed immediately after their participation in a week-long series of treatments offered at no cost by a secret organization.” The article continued, describing, surprisingly well, the course of the treatment and the women’s responses. In conclusion, the columnist called upon the Coven to come out into the open. “If, as these two women claim, you do have a cure for cancer, there is no need to hide it. We call upon you to come forward, and share your secret with Mankind.” Maggie folded the paper.

“Isn’t it great?” Carol asked. “Do you think maybe we can just go public now?”

Maggie frowned. “I don’t know.” She pointed at the paper. “He doesn’t have to worry about going to prison on a felony rap. I don’t think I’m ready to confess quite yet.”

“Well, you should tell him that.”

“Tell who what?”

“Him!” Carol pointed at the paper. “Call him up, and tell him why you aren’t willing to come out yet. Maybe he could get them to promise not to prosecute. At the least, he could publish what you say, so everyone will know.”

“A press release!” Maggie thought a moment. “I’d have to check with everyone, to see how they felt about it, but I think you’re right. I think this is the time to admit that we exist.” Throwing off her covers, she leaped out of bed.

Maggie spent the rest of the morning writing the statement, and most of the afternoon in a phone booth talking to other members of the Coven. Everyone seemed excited by the idea. The only thing that bothered Maggie was that she didn’t dare call Beckie, and really wanted her thoughts. She trusted Beckie’s political sensibility a lot more than her own. And it bothered her that all the members felt they should identify themselves as the California Coven. Amy had summarized that feeling when she said, “Maggie, if you’re going to demand that they accept us for what we are, then let them accept us as the Coven. The name’ll creep out sooner or later, so make them accept it from the start. Make them acknowledge their fears and deal with them.”

Late Thursday afternoon Maggie called the columnist, and got his secretary. “Who may I say is calling?” she asked, ever so politely.

“I’m one of the women who have the cancer cure. I have a statement for him.”

“One moment please, I’ll see if he’s in.” She put Maggie on hold.

A few seconds later a man’s voice answered. “Hello?”

“Hello, Mr. Crane? I represent—”

“Yes, yes, I know,” he said, cutting her off. “You’ll forgive my rudeness, but you’re the fifth caller today with an official statement from the Women Who Can Cure Cancer. Is there any way you could possibly convince me that you actually are one of them—for example, could you tell me the names of the two women I wrote about in the column?”

“I—I don’t know which ones they were.”

“Well, you could give me the whole list, and I could see if they were on it.”

“No,” Maggie said. “That would violate patient-doctor ethics. I couldn’t do that without their agreeing. She thought a minute. “Look, you could open the phone book and pick four names out at random, and then add one of the women who called you, and if you read me the list, I could tell you which one it was.”

Crane thought a moment. “Okay. That sounds fair. Hold on.”

Maggie stood on one foot, waiting anxiously, though confident that she could recognize any of the names. Crane finally came back on the line. “Very good. I’ve got the list now.”

Suddenly a woman’s voice came on the phone. “Three dollars for another three minutes please.”

“What?” Maggie asked.

“Hello?”

“Your three minutes are up. It will be three dollars for three additional minutes.”

“Operator?” It was Crane asking. “Can you reverse the charges to me?”

“Yes.”

“Please do then” The operator signed off. “Are you calling from a pay phone?”

“Yes,” Maggie admitted. “I—I don’t trust my phone anymore.”

“Of course. Well, let me read you the list.” He read off five names to Maggie.

“Could you read them again, more slowly?” she asked. She hadn’t recognized any of the names. More slowly Crane reread the list. “But,” Maggie sputtered, “we haven’t treated any of those. Are you sure that you have the right name?”

“No, that’s fine,” Crane replied. “Neither name was on the list. Now I’ll make up a real list.” After a minute, he picked up the receiver again. “Okay. I’ve got a list of ten names here, and I’ve put one of the two women’s names in it. Why don’t you listen to the whole list, and then tell me which one is the right name.” He started down the list. Number five was Fran Powell.

“That’s it!” Maggie shouted excitedly. “Look, I treated her myself. Every day for seven days. I know she’s the right one.”

“Well, let me read the rest of the list anyway,” Crane insisted, and quickly read through the rest of it.

“What!” Maggie blurted.

“Excuse me?” Crane asked.

Maggie was furious. “That last one, Ann Stone. Did she call you, too?”

“I thought you said Fran Powell was the one you treated,” Crane objected.

“Oh, for God’s sake, I can imagine Fran calling you, but I can’t imagine that Ann did. That’s really outrageous. Did she see you last Friday?”

“Yes, as a matter of fact she did. How did you know?” Crane asked.

Maggie didn’t answer. She had taken her mother to the airport early Friday morning for her 9:30 flight to Chicago, and Ann had insisted that Maggie not stay with her until boarding time. Obviously she had then ducked out and driven to San Francisco before catching a later flight.

“I can’t explain without divulging my own identity, and I don’t want to do that,” she explained.

“Why not?” Crane asked.

“Because after yesterday’s article, your phone is probably tapped, too.”

Crane laughed. “Yes, I suppose you might be right. Well, now that I believe you, why did you call?”

“I have a statement to read, and I would appreciate it if you would run it in your column.”

“Why not just send it to all the papers?”

“Well, I don’t know. Maybe I wasn’t sure they’d believe me, or maybe because I thought you might be more sympathetic.”

“Do you mind if I tape it? So I can get it word for word?”

“No, that’s fine with me.”

“Great. Here it goes. Testing, testing. Okay, go ahead.”

Maggie took a deep breath. “Okay, this is it.” She propped the sheet of paper up in front of her and began to read. “I am making this statement on behalf of the California Coven, and with the approval of that group. The California Coven is a group of professional women employed in health-allied fields. We have in our possession the formula for a potion which is capable of curing cancer. As of this date, we have successfully cured thirty-one individuals who were diagnosed as having terminal cancers of twelve different varieties. All twelve classes have been cured by our potion. Within a well-defined subset of the patients we have treated, the cure has to date proven one-hundred-percent effective, and we have every reason to believe that at least half those now suffering from cancer can be cured quickly and completely by this method. Although we have not had time to perform thorough long-term follow-up studies, the completeness of the reversals witnessed so far makes this potion undoubtedly the most effective

anticancer treatment currently available.

“Because we are not physicians, and because we do not have millions of dollars in federal or drug-company grants for extensive animal tests, we have been forced to test in secret. We deeply regret the necessity of this procedure. We would like nothing more than to bring our potion out in the open, and test it under optimal research conditions. Unfortunately, because of certain unorthodox aspects of the treatment, we cannot trust testing done in the hands of others. At the moment, we cannot discuss this in any detail.

“The California Coven is, however, willing to make the following offer to society: All members of the organization will make their identities known and join with physicians in clinical testing of our potion if, and only if, two conditions are met. First, the testing will be according to protocols designed by members of the Coven, and all aspects of the testing will be under the direct control of Coven members. Second, the Attorney General will agree not to prosecute any member of the Coven for prior actions which may constitute the practicing of medicine without a license. The members of the California Coven will make themselves known within twenty-four hours of the acceptance of these terms by appropriate persons.”

Friday morning the statement ran on the front page of the Chronicle, word for word.

Chapter Thirty-Five

AFTER reading the article in the Chronicle and calling Maggie’s attention to six typographical errors, Carol went off to school. Things might all sort themselves out yet, she thought. I wonder if Melanie will tell me about the story, or if she’s only interested in bad news.

The morning passed swiftly. Twice friends, people she had not thought knew about her connection to the Coven, mentioned they had seen the article. Melanie had been right about that much. At lunch Carol couldn’t find Melanie. Several of her lunch gang had read the column, and she was a silent celebrity, steadfastly denying any connection with the Coven, though there was just a little smile on her face. Before they headed back for classes Melanie finally rushed in. “Where’ve you been?” Carol asked.

“Shut up!” Melanie whispered, grabbing Carol by the arm. “Come on.” Carol followed without an argument. Melanie’s face was absolutely white. She dragged Carol all the way across the lunch room, looking nervously around all the way. Finally, she pulled her into the women’s bathroom, and leaned against the wall, exhausted. Through a dense cloud of pungent smoke, a dozen other students hardly noticed their presence.

“What is the matter?” Carol whispered.

Melanie was more upset than Carol had ever seen her. “Carol, you have to run away, they’re going to get you.”

Carol felt her stomach knot up. “For God’s sake, Melanie, will you make sense for once? Who’s going to get me?”

Melanie looked around nervously. “I don’t know,” she whispered. “I was in geometry when someone came in with a note, and the teacher sent me off to the main office. Then one of the secretaries took me into Peterson’s office, When she went out there was me, Peterson, and this other guy. Peterson tells me this guy wants to talk to me, and I should answer his questions, and that nothing I say will have any effect on me and school, and that in fact, if I answer the questions, he’d put a good word into my college record.”

“Who was the guy?”

“I don’t know! I mean, he must have been a cop. He started out asking how I was doing in school, if I had friends in school, stuff like that. Then he asks me who my best friends are, and I listed you, and a half-dozen others. Well. All of a sudden he seems more interested, and asks me a couple of silly questions about Patty, and then starts asking about you.”

“What did you tell him?”

“Just silly things, about how we eat lunch together, and sometimes we go on double dates, and dumb stuff like that.”

“That’s all?”

“Lemme finish. After a little diddly stuff like that, he asks me, real casual like, if I ever go over and visit at your house. So I said, sure, sometimes I did, and then he asks me if I know your family, your mom and dad.”

“My dad?”

“Yeah. So I told him how your dad got killed in the car accident years ago—I mean, everyone knows that, Carol.”

“Go on!”

“So he just says oh, and then asks if your grandmother lives there, too.” She looked rather uncertain about how to continue. “Well, I told him, I mean, he must have known that already if he asked me. It’s no secret!”

Carol repressed an urge to scream at her. “Would you please just tell me what happened, already?”

“Oh, Carol! He started asking about how your grandmother was, and hadn’t she been sick, and was she better now, and how did I think it happened that she got so Much better so fast!”

“Well, what did you tell him?”

“Nothing, honest. I refused I said I didn’t want to talk about it anymore, that he should talk to you, or your grandmother. But Carol, he obviously knows all about it!”

Carol looked at her watch. “Look, I gotta tell Mom. Cover for me in history if you can. I’ll be back as fast as can.” Without waiting for an answer she turned and ran from the washroom.

* * *

At home, she told Maggie everything she had leaned. It was too much even for Maggie. “Listen, you head back to school. I’ll pick you up in front at the end of the day. We might as well spend the weekend in Palo Alto. I think it’s getting right down there to the wire.”

They were both startled by the door opening. “Beckie ran in. “Beckie! What are you doing here? I thought we’d agreed—”

But Beckie was in a frenzy. “Shut up, and hurry. I was just driving down Water Street, and there’s a cop car sitting around the corner at the end of your block. So I drove around the block, and there’s one sitting at the other end, too. They’re watching the block with binoculars. You have to get out fast. Grab what you need, and hurry out to my car.”

Maggie looked around frantically. “Carol, get the new records. Stick them in my attaché case. It’s on the floor next to my desk.” Carol ran off without a word. “Beckie—we won’t go with you. If they’re watching the block, they’ll see us getting in.”

“But what’ll you do?”

“We’ve got a contact and a way out, We’ll be okay.” Carol ran in with a briefcase.

“I’ve got it all.” Her breath was ragged with fear.

“Great. Beckie, stay here as long as you can. If they come to the door, try to stall them. All we need is five minutes, and we’ll be away.”

She gave Beckie a quick hug. “Love you Beckie, hold on for us.” Grabbing Carol’s hand, she pulled her through the house and into the garage and through the door to the back yard. “Over the fence,” she ordered, pushing Carol in front of her. Carol grabbed a branch from the apple tree to help her over the palisade fence. At the top, Maggie passed her the briefcase, and Carol disappeared. Frantically, Maggie pulled and pushed her way up into the tree until she was high enough to reach over the fence. Irrelevantly, she prayed that neighbors weren’t watching her clumsy performance. Finally, she was perched on top of the fence.

“Hurry up and jump down!” Carol whispered.

“Get out of my way!” With a final commitment, she dropped to the ground. She grabbed Carol’s hand. No one at the Zamoks’ had noted their sudden appearance. “Now calm down, and try to look reasonable.” They circled the pseudo adobe ranch house and reached the sidewalk without comment or notice, then headed toward the address Sue had given her. As they walked along the sidewalk, Maggie repressed an urge to break and run. She kept her eyes straight ahead, expecting a squad car to cut off their path any second.

After what seemed like an eternity, they reached 13169 Summer. Hurrying now, they turned up the drive and almost ran to the side door, pounding on it as soon as they arrived.

A woman in her mid-thirties opened the door. She had short, blond hair which outlined a slightly heavy, round face. For a moment she seemed startled by their presence, but then said, “You’re Maggie?”

Maggie nodded, breathless.

The woman looked suspiciously at Carol.

“My daughter, Carol,” Maggie stuttered. “Please, they’ve got our block cut off. Can you get us out of town?”

The woman looked around herself, into the house.

Maggie could hear a television blaring away in the other room, but saw no one else. Deciding, the woman turned back to Maggie. Lie down on the floor of the back seat in my car. I'll get a blanket to throw over you."

She turned and hurried off into the house. Obediently, Maggie and Carol got into the car—a nearly extinct breed, a full-size American station wagon—and the two of them managed to crouch behind the front seat. A minute later, the woman re-emerged with a blanket. Carefully, she threw it over them, and Maggie could feel a few other things being tossed atop the blanket. "I'll be back in a minute," the woman whispered, and disappeared again. Carol groped in the dark until she found Maggie's hand.

They heard the house door close again, and footsteps returning to the car. The door on the right opened, and they could hear the woman putting some large package on the front seat. She spent some time arranging it, then closed the door, and circled to the driver's side. The motor started.

They hadn't gone a block before a loud scream broke the silence. Carol and Maggie huddled closer to the floor before realizing it was a baby's scream, coming from the front seat. "Well, look who woke up!" The woman reached across to her child in the seat beside her, rocking the car seat gently. "I thought you might sleep for another hour." In another minute they had gotten several blocks away. "Where are we heading?" the woman asked.

"Palo Alto?" Maggie wasn't sure how far the stranger was willing to go for them. "We have a place we can stay there. But if that's too far—" She started to get up, out from under the blanket.

"Stay down!" The woman reached out and pushed Maggie back. "I've passed two patrol cars already, and they're all looking around. I'll take you to Palo Alto. Just stay down. I have a suspicion I'm in trouble too if we get caught."

Chapter Thirty-Six

Beckie watched Maggie and Carol climb over the fence, then returned to the kitchen. Apprehensively, she filled the tea kettle and put it on the stove. She had no idea where Maggie was going, and now couldn't make contact with her even if she needed to. A car drove slowly down the block, and the two men in it stared intently at the house. Beckie diligently scrubbed at a pot, watching the car from the corner of her eye. It stopped two doors down, and two gray-suited men got out. They walked to the rear of the car, and leaned against the trunk. Here it comes, Beckie thought. Just slow them down as much as you can. One of the men turned up the driveway of the house two doors down, and the other walked past Beckie without looking in, and then turned up the driveway of the next house. Thank God Maggie and Carol had already left. The back of the house was being watched now.

Everything seemed to be moving in slow motion. Beckie jumped at the sound of a siren, and then realized it was the kettle. Slowly, reflexively, she began to make the tea. What was taking so long? She glanced at the clock. Only a few minutes since Maggie left. As she put the tea back on the shelf a squad car pulled up in front of the house and four men in uniform got out. At last! She went to the table and sat with her tea. She tried to drink, but her hand nearly emptied the cup in her lap. She put her hands in her lap, folded them together, tried to take a deep breath. There was a knock at the front door.

As slowly as she could make her body move, she stood and walked to the door. Two uniformed policemen stood in the doorway. She could see the other two at the car. One held a walkie-talkie.

"Margaret Stone?"

“W-what do you want?”

“That’s not her,” the second cop said. He flashed something on a clipboard to the first cop.

“No, I’m not,” Beckie said carefully. “Can I help you?”

“We’re looking for Margaret Stone.” He tried to push into the hall.

Beckie braced herself in between the partially opened door and the wall of the foyer, blocking his way. “I haven’t said you can come in,” she said, pushing back. “You have to have a search warrant.”

The one cop tried to shoulder his way past her. Smiling, he said, “Come on, miss, we’ve got the house surrounded, there’s no reason to try to drag it out. We’ve got warrants coming out our ears.” He flashed the clipboard at her. There was a picture of Maggie, and underneath it some legal-looking documents.

Beckie shoved back. She was stronger than she looked, and he stumbled back a step.

“Hang on, Bob,” the second one said. “They don’t want this one botched up on technicalities. Show the lady the warrant.”

Frowning, the cop unclipped a sheet from the clipboard and handed it to Beckie. It was a warrant. “Okay?” he asked.

Beckie stood her ground. “How should I know? You haven’t even given me a minute to read it.” She turned her attention to the document, watching out of the corner of her eye for any sudden lunges.

But they waited patiently while she read through the first page. Finished, she turned over to the back side. “Aw, come on, lady, it’s a warrant already, okay?”

“Doesn’t it have to be signed by a judge?” she asked innocently.

He grabbed it out of her hands and pointed to the bottom. “Right there. Judge Franklin Pinter. That’s his real signature, I promise you?”

Beckie took it back and looked at the signature. “I haven’t gotten down there yet.” She continued to read the back side.

He threw up his hands in disgust. Turning to the street, he shouted, “She’s reading the warrant, word for word. You got the back covered?” The man on the street talked into his walkie-talkie, then listened to a reply. Then he shouted to the men at the door, and made a grabbing motion. Instantly one of the men grabbed Beckie and the other pushed past rushing into the house. The two on the street came running up the sidewalk.

“Fred says they’ve got records in there that they might try to destroy. Get in there and see if Bob needs help.” Beckie was turned over to the second pair of cops as the first rushed in to join “Bob.” “And who might you be? the new cop asked her.”

Beckie smiled sweetly, hoping that she wasn’t shaking visibly. “I want to talk to my lawyer,” she answered, and her voice cracked on “lawyer.”

Instead, the cop grabbed her gently by the arm and pushed her into the house. “Let’s all sit down and

talk.”

She led him into the living room, and offered him a seat. Then she sat down on the couch. Just try to delay them, she thought. She glanced at the clock. Nine minutes since Maggie and Carol disappeared over the fence.

One of the cops started to strike up a friendly conversation. “You know, just because you happened to be visiting when they get arrested, that doesn’t have to say anything about you. Are you a neighbor of theirs?” Beckie started to reply when one of the other cops rushed into the living room. “I don’t think they’re here anymore!”

“What?” He shouted the message into the walkie-talkie. “Have you checked closets and everything?”

“Quickly, but I thought I’d better tell you before we started going over it again. And there’s a file cabinet in the study that’s open and empty, the terminal’s been wiped. Not a disk I can find.” Another squad car pulled up. This one had a spinning blue light. Four more men—three uniforms—ran in. Without a word they fanned out into the house.

“Take her out to the car.” The suit-wearing newcomer was obviously in charge. That must be Fred, Beckie thought.

“Fred!” she said aloud, staring at him.

“What?” The one taking her out stopped.

She nodded toward the detective. “I was just saying hello to Fred. Don’t you remember me?” She flashed a smile at him, then turned back to the other and said, “His memory isn’t what it used to be.”

The detective stared at her hard, obviously confused by his lack of recognition. “Bob” ran back into the living non. “No one else in the house, unless they’ve got secret passages built into it. Not in the yard or the garage, either.”

“That can’t be. They were both seen in the house just twenty minutes ago.”

One of the uniforms pointed at Beckie. “She passed our stakeout ten minutes ago. She must have tipped them off. We were already at the end of the block in position. If they were expecting it—”

The detective turned to Beckie, anger in his voice. “Okay. You’ve got exactly ten seconds to start talking or we’re arresting you as an accessory after the fact, and for blocking a police investigation. If you don’t start talking, it could cost you the next ten years of your life.”

Beckie shrank back in fear. He looked like he might actually lash out at her physically. “I want to talk to my lawyer.”

“Take her out to the car!” he bellowed. He grabbed his walkie-talkie and started shouting. “They’re not here. Issue an all-points.”

Beckie found herself locked in the rear of a police car. A crowd was slowly building up on the sidewalk, curious to see what was happening. As the front door opened, she shouted at the top of her lungs, “Someone please call theBirthCenter . TheSanta CruzBirthCenter . Tell them what happened.”

The lead cop whirled angrily. "One more word out of you and I'll see that you get special attention when we get to the station!" But Beckie noticed someone in the crowd turn and run toward a neighboring house.

Please, thought Beckie, let her be going to call the Center.

Chapter Thirty-Seven

IT seemed to Maggie and Carol that they had been lying on the floor of the car for hours. Maggie's left leg had cramped, and pains shot up and down her back. "Where are we?" she shouted out finally. "I can't take it down here much longer."

"We'll be on the Bayshore Freeway in about two minutes. I think it'd be safe to get up then" They rode in silence for a few minutes. The baby had fallen back asleep, much to everyone's relief. The car banked into a long curve, and then began to accelerate. "You can get up now."

Slowly they untangled themselves and sat on the back seat.

"Boy, that sure was uncomfortable," Carol muttered. She had taken it much better than Maggie.

Maggie looked around to get her bearings. "You want to keep going north until you get to the Oregon Expressway. It's either the first or second Palo Alto exit."

"I haven't seen any police since we got out of Santa Cruz, but when we got on Highway 9 they were sitting on both sides of the road checking cars as they went by, I didn't realize they were police until we passed them. If you'd been up then, I think they would have gotten us."

"We'll get down again when you get off," Carol suggested. Maggie moaned. "Come on, Mom, it's better than going to jail."

Ten minutes later they were back under the blanket. Maggie called out directions as best she could without actually seeing where they were. One of her legs was totally numb and the other was tingling painfully when they finally pulled into the cul-de-sac where Judy Feldman lived. Maggie popped up to indicate the drive, and Carol appeared a moment later.

"Let's go on in, Mom."

"Wait a minute. My feet are asleep." Maggie began to rub them impatiently.

"I'll go see if she's home," Carol suggested. Maggie started to object, but Carol was out of the car. She rang the front doorbell and waited nervously. Could the police have traced them here? Were they waiting for them? Judy opened the door and quickly let her in.

"Where's Maggie? Is everything all right?" She looked out at the carport, but couldn't see the people in the car. "Who's out there?"

Exhausted, Carol dropped into a chair. "Mom and a friend who drove us over here. We had to run real quick; the cops were at our door. We just barely got out."

Judy came over to Carol, taking one last look out at the car. "Well, why are they just sitting out there?"

Carol began to giggle uncontrollably. “Because her legs fell asleep.”

Judy rushed out to the car. “Maggie, are you okay?”

Maggie nodded, and opened the back door. “My legs were asleep, and I didn’t want your neighbors to see me get halfway to your door and then fall over. It would attract attention.” She reached for her attaché case and hobbled from the car. “But I’m all right now.” She turned around to the car again. “You know, Ellen, there’s no way I can thank you enough—”

The woman smiled. “Maggie, you keep at your work, and I’ll consider us even.” She looked around, a bit apprehensively. “Is there anything more you want from me? Any messages to deliver, or anything?”

Maggie shook her head. “No, in fact, if anyone asks you—and I mean anyone—tell them we never connected, that if I got out of town, I did it without your help.” She backed away from the car. “Have a safe ride home.”

The car backed slowly out of the carport, and stopped on the street. They exchanged one last wave, and the car pulled off.

Judy put her arm around Maggie and turned her toward the house. “Let’s get you in and out of sight. I don’t know if you’re going to make the news, but there’s no reason to let anyone see you if we can avoid it.”

“I’ve put your suitcases in the back bedroom—it’s mostly a guest room now that Claire’s off to college. It’s just got a double bed in it, but we can get a cot from somewhere if you want.” She led them into the room.

It was clearly a teenager’s room, and reminded Maggie of Carol’s. “Well, why don’t I give you some time to unpack and settle in. When you have, come on out, and I’ll make tea or coffee and we’ll talk.”

* * *

They turned on the TV at 6:30 to catch the news, and there was Beckie being led into the police station by two detectives. Her head was up, and she was smiling. A lightly accented male voice was intoning the voiceover. “The District Attorney’s office said that their investigation had focused on a Margaret Stone, who appeared to be the ringleader of the group. Detective Thomas Ardway stated that his information suggested that her request for a leave from her normal occupation as a midwife was granted by the Santa Cruz Midwives’ Collective on the understanding that she would be working full time on the alleged cancer cure. How many individuals are connected with the ring is unclear, although Ardway said it was a significant number, most, if not all, of whom were practicing midwives. Rebecca McPhee, the woman shown in our footage here, was arrested at the Stone woman’s home on charges of interfering with a police investigation, and as an accessory after the fact. Detective Ardway said that they had not yet decided whether charges of practicing medicine without a license or manslaughter would be pressed. These, presumably, were the charges prepared against the Stone woman, and the hesitancy of the District Attorney’s office to press identical charges against McPhee would suggest that their case against her is not nearly as clear.”

“That’s right. Jaime. What makes the case all the more confusing is the fact that McPhee is also the head of the Natural Midwives Association of California, a group of midwives who broke from the main California Midwives Association over the use of fetal monitors during routine deliveries. The monitor, which has become more and more popular over the last dozen years, gives the midwife or doctor

important information that could help them spot danger signs during labor, and, in extreme cases, could lead to the saving of either the mother's or child's life. The Natural Midwives Association, or N.M.A., which McPhee heads, opposes the use of the monitors, apparently because it is an 'unnatural process.' It is this refusal which has prompted the A.M.A. to demand that their licenses to practice midwifery be revoked, and has led to the legislative hearings on the N.M.A."

Carol was on her feet. "It's lies, all of it. They're just lying about the whole thing!" She turned to Maggie, her face red with fury. "How can they do that? 'An unnatural process'! It blinds kids, why don't they talk about that? Why don't they talk about the five- to ten-fold increase in Caesarians when the monitor is used?"

Maggie reached out and pulled Carol over to her side. "You're going to have to get used to it, darling. The world isn't always fair." She turned to Judy. "Maybe I wasn't so paranoid after all."

The rest of the story wasn't any better. Photos of Maggie and Carol were displayed, and viewers were requested to forward any information that would help police locate the suspects. "We have to figure out what to do about Beckie," Maggie said. "We can't just leave her at their mercy."

"Well," Judy said, "she's not exactly without support. She does have legal help, and I suspect the N.M.A. is going to be working tooth and nail to get her out and acquitted. Besides, there isn't much you could do to help."

"I could offer to trade myself for her."

"Maggie, she'd kill you if you did that, and you know it. She knew what she was doing when she sent you out the back. You told me how much you miss Beckie's advice. Well, now you've got it. You've got to go out there and cure cancer patients."

* * *

Amy pulled into the Herberts' driveway with trembling hands. After the news coverage last night, she wasn't the least bit confident that they hadn't turned her in. She took a deep breath, opened the car door, and got out. It was a pleasant suburban home, set in a peaceful section of Santa Clara, the last place one would imagine a police stakeout, but she still couldn't shake the fear from her mind.

Suddenly the front door of the house flew open and a burly man of forty charged out. "Thank God!" he exclaimed. "We were afraid that you wouldn't come back!" Jerry Herbert was Fran's husband and, at this point, nurse, for Fran was dying of cancer.

Amy tried to smile, the adrenaline still shaking her body. "You're not the only one who was scared, let me tell you. Trying to get into the driveway, I was shaking so hard, I almost hit that tree of yours." They looked at each other a moment.

"Thank you," Herbert muttered.

"No," Amy said, "thankyou."

Chapter Thirty-Eight

Liz Jason sat behind her table in the hearing room and listened as the testimony droned on. She could hardly keep her mind on what was being said as her thoughts continually returned to Beckie McPhee.

They actually were treating cancer patients, and Beckie insisted they were curing the female patients with a hundred-percent success rate! She jerked her attention back to the hearings again. Good old Senator McCardle was still trying to drag an official apology out of Pat White.

“Senator White, you don’t feel you implied in your statement last week, that I was making this whole thing up?”

White, looking peeved or bored by turns, seemed unable to decide which emotion should have control. “Senator, if that’s how you took my statement, I’m sorry that you did so. Because it means that you failed to understand what I was in fact trying to say, which is that no one should be allowed to allege wrongdoing from his or her position in the legislature without turning all of the evidence as to his wrongdoing over to the Attorney General’s office. It would seem that if an apology is owed it’s you who owes to this entire state, for having refused to turn the information over—”

“I DidNotRefuse To Turn It Over, I Merely Had Not Yet—”

“Then for not yet turning this information over—”

“Senators, please!” The chairperson was pounding his gavel. “I will not tolerate such behavior in these chambers!” White and McCardle fell silent, and then McCardle made as if to reply. “Not a word!” The gavel descended again. The chair looked from one to the other, “This discussion is out of order! We shall now return to discussion of the issue before us, to wit, the status of the licenses of members of the Natural Midwives Association.”

“Mr. Chairman,” McCardle suggested politely, “certainly the arrest of Miss McPhee and the flight of Mrs. Stone are relevant to this deliberation. Miss McPhee is—”

“Senator,” the chair insisted, “it is your demands for an apology that I am ruling out of order. You may talk all you want about the arrest and alleged flight of members of the Natural Midwives Association.”

An aide brought a note to McCardle and shoved it in front of him. McCardle read it quickly and rose to his feet. “Mr. Chairman!” There was something in his tone that held everyone’s attention. “Mr. Chairman, I have just received a note informing me that a fourth victim of these—these witches has been found. He was treated by them just two weeks ago, and now is dead!”

The hall broke into an uproar, and reporters ran for telephones while the chair pounded for order. Getting nowhere, he finally recessed the hearings until after lunch.

At the beginning of the afternoon session, Pat White called for a ten-day recess, “to allow the hysteria surrounding this issue to subside.” Over McCardle’s vehement objections, the committee voted in favor of the recess, and the chair scheduled the next set of hearings for a week from that coming Thursday.

* * *

The isolation was more than Maggie had planned on. She sat in Judy’s spare bedroom, the shades pulled down, reading the Chronicle. Carol had been in the shower more than a half-hour, and showed no signs of surfacing.

Scattered throughout the first section of the paper were articles about the Coven, about the N.M.A., sidebars with biographies of Beckie and herself. There were articles on the state of the art in treating cancer, and histories of the Laetrile fiasco.

The paper's position was negative. It rejected the Coven's claim to a cancer cure, pointing to hundreds of other alleged cures that had popped up in the preceding decade. In contrast, the editors seemed eager to accept McCardle's charges, and reported his statements as if they were fact. All in all, the situation wasn't very encouraging. In the whole paper only Cranes column seemed sympathetic. Suddenly, the shower turned off in the bathroom.

Maggie felt useless. There didn't seem to be anything she could do from seclusion, and there wasn't really anyone she could talk to. Admittedly, there was Carol, who knew as much as she did, and there was Judy, who was wonderfully supportive, but neither were people that Maggie could lean on for help in deciding what to do.

She got off the bed and began to pace the small room. What was she going to do? She hadn't gone into hiding just to hide. Clearly, her task was to do whatever she could to help Beckie in her trial. But what did she need? Maggie found herself wishing that Beckie would somehow get word to her, impossible as she knew that was.

"Hi, Mom." Carol walked into the room, toweling her hair dry, water dripping all over the floor.

Maggie stopped her pacing. "Well, how are you today?"

Carol grinned at her. "Ready to get back to work. We've been sitting around here for five days now, and it's about time."

Maggie frowned. "Any suggestions?"

"Well. I thought we were supposed to treat more women, and maybe try to figure out why the potion doesn't work on men."

Maggie nodded. "That certainly was the idea."

"Well, what's the matter with it?" Carol demanded.

Maggie put an arm around her. "Nothing, darling, except that at the moment we don't have any patients to treat, we don't have any potion to treat them with, and I don't have the foggiest notion of what to do about the men. So we seem to be at a standstill."

"You mean you don't think there's anything we can do?" Carol asked.

Maggie tried to smile. "No. I just mean that we're going to have to think about it awhile, until we figure out just what we should be doing."

"Well, then we have to start thinking right now!" So saying, Carol picked up a sheet of paper and a pen and sat down at the little desk by the shaded window. "We can start by making a list."

* * *

The afternoon paper contained a statement from the Coven. Maggie and Carol read it the instant Judy brought them the paper.

"It's a pretty good statement," Judy told them as they started to read it.

“Shh!” Carol whispered. “Let us read it.”

It read as follows:

The California Coven expresses its unreserved support for Rebecca McPhee and Margaret Stone in their struggle against the oppression of the medical establishment. Once again this country finds itself in the midst of a witch-hunt, where facts and reason are replaced with fantasies and fear. These fantasies and fears are being perpetrated on the people of California by the medical establishment, which is showing its true colors by fighting against good medical care in order to increase its own power and wealth.

The California Coven states categorically that it has in its possession a treatment for cancer that can cure over fifty percent of all cases of cancer, and can cure cancer completely within ten days of the start of treatment. Since the start of this project three months ago, we have cured over forty-five cases of cancer, with only ten failures. Although we acknowledge the fact that four of the individuals among our ten failures have subsequently died, we deny categorically that the treatment which we gave these individuals in any way caused or hastened their death. All fifty-five of our patients were terminal cancer patients. Those whom we fail to cure will die. That is the nature of their disease.

We believe at this time that we can distinguish between those cases which we are capable of curing, and those which we cannot. Therefore, we are prepared to make the following challenge to those who would have us arrested, and our cure discredited: If a list of one hundred cancer patients who are believed to have terminal cancer, but are expected to live for at least six additional weeks, is presented to us, the California Coven is prepared to (1) suspend its secret treatment of cancer patients, (2) select thirty to fifty individuals from the list of one hundred, and (3) treat that subgroup within the following four weeks. We insist that if permitted to treat these individuals as we deem appropriate, by the end of the four-week period at least ninety percent of those we have treated will have undergone so-called spontaneous remissions and will show no residual signs of their cancer. If we fail in this test, we will acknowledge the failure of our treatment, and cease and desist from all further testing.

We know as a fact, however, that we can and will succeed. But we will participate in this test only if we are assured that all charges against Beckie McPhee will be dropped, and that no further charges will be brought against her or any other person in any way connected with the California Coven if we succeed in proving the efficacy of our cancer cure. We would, of course, also demand immunity for those members of the organization who participate in the test.

The people of the world have a right to see all alleged cures for cancer rigorously and scientifically tested. We demand that that right be extended to our cure, and we demand the right to prove to the world its effectiveness. We call on scientists, physicians, and lay people alike to join us in this demand.

Chapter Thirty-Nine

THE response of the A.M.A. was swift and brutal. Calling members of the “so-called California Coven” a group of “charlatans attempting to gain fame and fortune through the suffering of others,” it called for the swift roundup and prosecution of all members of the Coven. The A.M.A. took the occasion of its statement to announce the death of a fifth man treated by the Coven, and added, “if, as some have suggested, these deaths are other than natural, we might now be seeing just the beginning of one of the most massive instances of unnecessary deaths in American history.”

Carol threw the newspaper article on the floor. “I don’t understand why they have to get so uptight

about the whole thing! Why can't they just let us test it in the open, and then they'll be able to tell whether it works or not?" She was honestly confused.

"Because they've gone to medical school, and they've been taught that anyone who hasn't been is at best an idiot, and at worst a murderer. I think if there's any profession that tries to convince its members that they are truly godlike, it is the medical profession."

"But you said Grandma's doctor believed your cure, and offered to help."

Maggie shrugged. "So Bill Krueger isn't like the others—and sure, lots of doctors aren't. For all I know, a majority of them are decent although my instinct tells me that they're not. Maybe it's just that the A.M.A. elects the worst as their officers. All I know is that from my experience, everything the A.M.A. is doing fits right in place."

Carol changed the subject. "Have you decided what you think we should do now?"

Maggie dropped into a chair. "No, I haven't. It doesn't make sense for me to line up patients and treat them from here. I'm not even letting myself be seen by Judy's neighbors, let alone wandering around looking for cancer patients. Besides, if the other women in the Coven are still giving treatments, I wouldn't be adding much, and if they're not, it won't be enough to make a difference. So I don't know what I should be doing."

"So let's do something else," Carol insisted. "There must be something we can do."

"I know. The question is what?"

"Well, what about the men?" Carol asked. "Can't we work on why it doesn't work with men?"

Maggie frowned. "I haven't the foggiest notion of where to start on it, Carol. We know that it works differently on men or, rather, that it works on women and doesn't work on men. So there must be a difference between men and women. But which of the thousands of differences is responsible? Carol, I really think it's a hopeless problem given our resources."

"Mom, you've done this much. You can do the rest, too!"

Maggie smiled and gave Carol a hug. "But it's such a big problem, I really don't see how—"

"Just start!" Carol interrupted. "That's what you always tell me when I'm stuck on my homework. Start anywhere."

"What do you recommend?"

"Well," Carol said unsurely, "we could start by talking about the sorts of things that could cause it not to work with men."

Maggie relented. "Look, we know two things about the potion that are strange: it only works on women; the women have to be in a particular psychological state or it doesn't even work for them. What this means is that the potion, in and of itself, is not a cure for cancer. It only becomes a cure under certain circumstances."

"So?" Carol said. "We've known that for months."

“But what does it mean? It means that the potion has to be modified in some way before it becomes active, or it’s only effective if some second process, controlled by the patient’s psychological state, is also functioning. There are actually lots of examples of the first type. Vitamin D is a classic. What people have always taken as Vitamin D is, in fact, a very weak analog of the real, biologically active vitamin. What happens is that your body takes the form of Vitamin D that’s in the pills, and converts it to the active form. What’s unusual about our potion, if it works by this model, is that not everyone’s blood contains the factors that are required to convert the inactive ingredient into the active, cancer-killing agent. What we could say is that neither men nor women normally have this converting ability, and we can get women so that they do have the converting ability, but we don’t know how to get men to do it.

“Well, if that’s the case, then blood from the women we treat is able to convert an inactive ingredient in our potion into an active one. So we should be able to add the blood of women whom we’re treating to the potion, and get the conversion to occur in a test tube. If that happens, then we should be able to take the treated potion and give it to anyone and it should work.”

“So we can try that on men!” Carol added. “And it should work, too.”

“Maybe,” Maggie answered. “There are a lot of ifs in the project.”

“Like what?”

“Well, like we have to assume that the trick is a modification, and not a totally separate but important process which goes on in parallel. Like the modification has to be made by something that’s released into the blood, and not, say, in the cancer cells themselves. And the ingredient in the blood has to maintain its activity long enough for us to get the blood out of the treated women and use it to treat the potion. But since all we can add is maybe one part blood to one part potion, while in the body we combine one part potion with maybe fifty parts of blood, we have to hope that the converting agent in the blood is present in a huge excess. Finally, we have to hope that after it’s converted, it can still be taken up by the stomach, and not be degraded in the process. And I’m sure that there’re a dozen more that I just haven’t thought of—but that’s certainly enough for a start. No, we can try it, but we have to remember that it’s iffy. Real iffy.”

“But now you make it sound like it really isn’t worth trying. it doesn’t sound like there’s a chance of it working.”

Maggie smiled. “But what you said before is true, Carol. If we don’t try, we’ll never find out.”

“Well, when can we try it?”

Maggie was startled by the question. “Well, I don’t know. We don’t have any potion, and we don’t have any patients, men or Women.”

“But the rest of the Coven probably does. Couldn’t they try it? We could just tell them what to do.”

Maggie thought a minute. “Well, I don’t like the idea, but I can’t think of a better one.” She stopped and thought about it. “We’d have to call someone and hope the call couldn’t be traced.”

“I could borrow Judy’s car and drive down to San Jose to call,” Carol suggested. “Then even if they trace the calls, they won’t get anything.”

* * *

They decided that Carol would drive in on Friday night, when San Jose would be full of footloose teenagers looking for something to do. Most likely, the police would have other things on their minds.

Chapter Forty

En route to San Jose, the darkness of the highway offered Carol the security of invisibility but still seemed to harbor a hidden threat that left her nervous. It took the better part of an hour to reach the center of town, and Carol cruised around the unfamiliar streets until she caught sight of chain-dancing high schoolers waiting to catch the midnight show of Disco Hamlet.

She drove several blocks farther, and then parked. Making sure she knew exactly where the car was, Carol headed back toward the noise and the lights, and bought a ticket to a movie theater without a line. Then, popcorn in hand, she headed for the lobby pay phone.

From her pocket she fished a handful of quarters that Judy had gotten for them. In her back pocket she had Maggie's checkbook. The phone numbers of three Coven members were written down in it, disguised as the amounts of checks written. \$3.54 and \$17.29 gave her Sue Tiemann's phone number, 354-1729. She dialed it and waited expectantly. What if they were all having a meeting? Then she wouldn't be able to reach any of them.

"Two eighty-five for the first three minutes." The voice took her completely by surprise, and she let out a yelp.

"H-how much?" The phone had already started to ring at the other end.

"Two dollars and eighty-five cents, please."

As Carol started feeding in quarters, the phone was answered at the other end. "Hello?"

"Sue?" Carol called out in excitement. "Is it you?"

"Ma'am, thirty-five cents more, please."

Carol quickly stuffed two more quarters in. "Sue, are you there?"

"This is Sue," the voice replied, "To whom am I speaking?"

"It's me!" Carol shouted, and then, almost in a whisper, "Carol."

"Oh!" The phone was silent for a second. "Are you calling long distance?"

"Well, sort of," Carol answered.

"Why don't you give me the number where you are, and I'll call back, if you think that's okay."

Carol thought a moment. If Sue called back, then the phone company would have a record of where the call was made to, but otherwise, there was always the risk of the operator listening in, and that was worse. "No, it's a good idea. Let me give you the number."

A minute later they were reconnected. “Uh, what can I do for you, Carol?”

“We want some tests done on men,” Carol blurted out, “and decided we’d just have to hope that your phone isn’t tapped.”

“Um, maybe I should call you back from a different phone. . . .”

“Sue, wait,” Carol shouted. “Honest, we’ve thought it all through it won’t make any difference whether you go to another phone or not. Please, let me just tell you what we want done.” Sue relented. “Okay, do you have a pencil? Write this down. Then, if you decide that you want to do it differently, that’s your decision, but we want you to think very carefully before you change it, because we put a lot of time into working out this method. Anyhow, if in the end you decide it would be better changed, go ahead and do it, but keep really accurate records of exactly what you do, okay?”

“Fine.”

“Okay, here it is.” Carol read her the protocols as she Maggie, and Judy had finally worked them out. Three men, all receiving potion that had been incubated for six hours in an equal volume of blood from women who were currently taking the cure. The men would be psyched up just as the women were, and treated exactly the same, except for the one difference in the preparation of the potion, which the men would not be told of. Blood would be taken only from women who volunteered it, understanding that the donation would in no way help their condition.

She finished the call just as the movie let out, and the lobby was suddenly packed. As Carol walked from the booth, she noticed two men pushing their ways toward it. While she hurried toward the exit, she saw them open the door to the booth and start talking to the woman who had begun to dial. Slowing down her pace, she tried to melt into the crowd as it left the theater. A police car sat in front. Without looking back, she headed down the street, praying that she was invisible in the crowd.

She was afraid to look back, and terrified that she was being followed. Suddenly, she realized that the crowd was virtually gone, and that she was walking along with a group of no more than ten other people. When they turned off Willow Street, she did, too.

Unable to take the suspense, she finally looked behind her. The Street was empty. She stumbled, and almost fell, then regained her composure, turned and continued down the street. “I don’t even know where I am,” she muttered to herself. Everything looked vaguely familiar yet totally strange. She walked another half-block, unsure how to proceed, then suddenly came upon her car.

It took her a minute to realize what had happened, and then as quickly as she could, she unlocked the door and got in. The door shot and locked, and tears stinging her eyes. Carol realized that part of her had been hoping the police would find her and put an end to her fear.

Restraining an impulse to start up the car and drive off, she climbed over into the back seat and pulled an old blanket over herself. “They can only find you if they know exactly where you are, or if you’re moving,” Maggie had said. “They’re going to expect you to be running, so the best thing is to stay put.” Two hours, Maggie had said. Two hours and they’ll figure you’ve gotten away. Carol looked at her watch. It was 9:45. She would die of fright before midnight.

* * *

She sat up suddenly, confused as to where she was, and pulled the blanket off her head. Then she

remembered. She had fallen asleep. It was just after one.

She drove off in a trance, half from fatigue, half from terror. Every few seconds she checked her speedometer, her rearview mirror, her watch. Everything was going fine. Once, when the engine sputtered pulling onto the expressway, she searched frantically for the gas gauge, only to find the tank still over half full. Although she would never describe it that way, the drive back to Palo Alto was uneventful.

Chapter Forty-One

“This court is now in session. All rise.”

Beckie rose to her feet, as did her attorney, Linda Coles, while the judge entered the courtroom and took his seat. The chamber was packed with members of the N.M.A., the press, and others whom Beckie could not place. The judge serenely examined the audience, and then the prosecution and defense tables. Finally, looking up to the audience, he said, “Before starting, I would like to make clear to the members of the gallery that this is a court of law, and not a place of public amusement or a political rally. No making of noise, or any other displays, will be tolerated. I have instructed the sergeant-at-arms to remove any spectators who persist in such behaviors. I presume that such action will not be necessary.”

A quiet murmur began in the gallery, but quickly died down. Beckie was struck by the effect of the judge’s robes on his appearance. When she looked objectively at his face, he seemed a rather plain man, clearly in his fifties, with a soft, slightly pudgy, and cheerful face. But when considered with the robes, his features took on an almost Olympian grace and wisdom, and she found herself thinking of the word merciful instead of cheerful.

He turned and looked directly at her. “The case before us is the State of California versus Rebecca Louise McPhee.” Pulling herself up straight in the chair, Beckie returned his look, trying as best she could to hide the fear within her.

“Rebecca McPhee, you are charged with practicing medicine without a license, and in so doing, endangering the lives of others. How do you plead?”

Beckie rose to her feet. “Not guilty, Your Honor.” She sat back down.

The next hour reminded her of a confusing and boring political meeting. In fact, she understood very little of what was going on. Her lawyer had asked for a dismissal of the charges based on lack of evidence, while the prosecuting attorney, in his early thirties, had asked for a restraining order prohibiting Beckie and all members of the Coven from treating cancer patients. Both motions were denied, for reasons that Beckie didn’t follow. Finally, bail was set, and met, and Beckie was free to leave. Opening arguments were scheduled for Wednesday.

* * *

Meanwhile, Sue Tiemann and Amy Belever were huddled over the kitchen table at the Palo Alto home of Amy’s aunt. Amy was confused. “But why should the blood from female patients do anything?”

“Because that’s what makes the potion effective, Amy. When the women are psyched up for the cure, they release something into their blood that makes something in the potion more effective, and then that something kills the cancer cells.”

Amy frowned. “But how can they know that? There’re so many other possible explanations.”

“Maybe they’ve found out something that we haven’t,” Sue suggested. “Who knows what they’ve been doing since they went underground.”

“Even so, Sue, it’s only been ten days. And the fact that they want us to try it out means that they haven’t been able even to get set up enough to start their own treatments. So how could they have gotten any new information?”

Sue thought a minute. “Maybe they’ve been in touch with other members of the Coven. Carol didn’t say anything about our being the only people she was contacting. Maybe one of the other women had a breakthrough.”

“Dammit,” Amy said. “It’s so frustrating having to work so secretly. How can we get anywhere if we don’t even know what other women in the Coven are doing?” She read their new instructions once more.

* * *

Maggie sat nervously in the waiting room, reading an old Timemagazine. She felt silly wearing Judy’s clothes, huge wire-rimmed sunglasses, and a blond wig. She was sure that anyone looking at her would realize she was a disguised fugitive, but in fact, no one paid the least attention to her.

As always, the office was behind schedule, and it was a full forty-five minutes before Maggie was taken in to see the doctor. She sat down in the offered chair, across the desk from him, and waited for the nurse to close the door behind her. He looked across at her with a friendly smile. “Well, Mrs. Landon, what can I do for you?”

Unable to restrain herself, Maggie began to giggle. The doctor started to look uncomfortable, which just made her laugh even harder. Finally, she pulled off the glasses and wig, and said, “Hi, Bill, you promised you’d help me if I asked, remember?”

Krueger stared at her. Suddenly he rose from his seat, crossed to the large picture windows on the side of his office, and closed the curtains. Returning to his desk, he buzzed his receptionist. “Betty, I don’t want to be disturbed for anything less than a real emergency until I’m done with this patient, okay?” He disconnected without waiting for a reply. Finally, he returned his attention to Maggie. “Maggie, I was sure you’d be far away from the Bay Area by now.”

Maggie smiled. “Well, here I am, alive and in the flesh.” Her smile broadened. “I don’t think I’ve ever seen you at a loss for words before, Bill.”

“Maggie, you’ve had me at a loss ever since Ann came out of those scans without a tumor in her body.” He paused before continuing. “Hell, I’m still at a loss for words. But tell me what you’ve been doing. Do you really—I mean, you were lying to me when you told me how you cured Ann, weren’t you?”

Maggie laughed again. “Yes, I lied to you, and yes, we have a cure for cancer, and yes, I do want to tell you all about it—but this isn’t the time or place, since you have other patients to see and it’ll take hours to explain it all to you. I came here instead of calling because they surely figured out that you were Mom’s doctor and they may be tapping your phone.”

Krueger thought a minute. “Are you free this evening?” Maggie nodded. “Good. I’ll get a room at the Holiday Inn on El Camino. Do you know where it is?” She nodded again. “Okay. Call me there at six, and I’ll give you a room number. You can come right up then, and we can talk.”

Maggie frowned. “Won’t it all look rather suspicious?” she asked.

Krueger smiled. “Yes, but I’m sure they’ll suspect something quite different.” He looked at his watch and thought a second. “I’d love to have you give me just a hint about how you do it.”

Maggie shook her head. “You’ll have to wait till six.” She reached out her hand, and Krueger rose and shook it. “Thanks, Bill.”

He shook his head. “No, Maggie, it’s I who should thank you. I don’t think there’s a cancer researcher in the country who wouldn’t give his eye teeth to be there tonight. It’s an honor to have been asked.”

Maggie put on her glasses and her wig again. “Do I really look reasonable in all this?”

Krueger nodded. “Yes, Mrs. Landon, you looked just the way I had expected you to.” Then, winking, he added, “See you at six?”

Maggie turned and left the office.

It only took her ten minutes to drive to Judy’s house and tell Carol the good news. Carol was equally excited. As they talked about it, Carol seemed to become confused. Finally, she said, “I’m coming, too, aren’t I?”

Maggie seemed surprised, and started to answer. Then she stopped. “Yes,” she finally said. “You get to come, too.”

* * *

Maggie and Carol arrived at the hotel, and in another two minutes they were safely in Krueger’s room. Maggie introduced him to Carol. “Despite my own doubts, Carol has probably done more to organize our work than anyone else in the Coven.” She stopped, embarrassed by the name.

Krueger recognized her feeling. “How did you come to choose that name? You must have been aware that it wouldn’t help your case much.”

“Well, actually,” Maggie explained, “it started as a joke—”

“No it didn’t!” Carol insisted. She turned to Maggie. “You used to be so proud of your great, great grandmother, Margaret Jones; you used to tell me how we had to match her standards, to vindicate her life. But now you just want to forget about her.” Maggie frowned. “She’s a direct descendant,” Carol explained, “of a real witch!”

“Carol!” Maggie objected.

But Carol continued. “It’s true. She was tried as a witch in Boston, in the 1650s. There’s even a description of the trial in the diary of the guy who was governor of Massachusetts back then. Mom is even named after her!” She looked at Maggie with a smile of satisfaction. “But that’s not all. Wait until you hear how we cure these women!” She giggled nervously. “Tell him, Mom. Tell him how we do it.” With a look of elfin delight, she sat down to await Krueger’s reaction.

For the next hour and a half Maggie explained the whole story to Krueger, who listened intently, asked

only an occasional question, and took copious notes.

When they were done, Krueger just stared at his notes for several minutes, finally looking up only after Carol began to squirm anxiously in her chair. Turning to Maggie, he said, "Would you swear that all of what you've told me is true? That you haven't improved on the statistics even a little bit to make them more clear-cut?"

Maggie nodded her head. "Bill, every one of the women we've treated has shown a complete disappearance of the pain they were experiencing. I'm not talking about a diminution of pain, but a disappearance. Five have had subsequent X-ray or CAT scans that showed their tumors to be gone. Admittedly, there hasn't been any time to follow up, but what you saw with my mom seems to be the rule. As far as anyone can tell, the cancer is gone."

"But why have you done it all secretly? And why have you gone into hiding over it? That sounds crazy to me. You should be giving news conferences, and demanding millions of dollars in federal grants to test your medicine, or potion, or whatever you want to call it."

"That's easy for you to say," Maggie replied. "Why didn't you follow up on my cure of Ann then?"

"But you said it was some crazy religious cure. You didn't tell me that—"

"That I had swiped some witch's recipe from a book two hundred years old, a recipe that calls for boiled frogs and a bunch of herbs and wouldn't work if you fried it because you have to make the patient really believe it'll work—or it won't." Maggie looked at him defiantly, "Now that we have thirty-five or forty cures, maybe you'll look at it more seriously."

Krueger started to answer and then paused. Finally, he shrugged his shoulders. "Okay. It doesn't matter at this point, anyway. I like to think that I would always be open to scientific evidence, but things do tend to look more obvious in hindsight. So, looking forward I'm left with two questions. First, what are your plans for helping Beckie McPhee, and, second, where do I fit into your plans?"

Chapter Forty-Two

Liz Jason leaned over and whispered to Beckie, "This guy's pro-A.M.A., a real smoothie from Orange County."

James Craddock thanked the chair and turned to give Liz and Beckie a polite smile. He was in his early forties and looked both interested and alert. His sights were known to be set higher than the state legislature. "Gentlemen, it would seem to me that in deciding the question of the licensing of midwives associated with the Natural Midwives Association, several points must be borne in mind. Foremost amongst these is that we are not attempting merely to decide whether being a member of this group is grounds for revocation of one's license. We are not engaged here in a denial of the right of these women to join any organization of their choosing, under any name, for whatever reason they may choose. Rather, the issue is whether they have violated the conditions which were accepted by them when they were licensed. If their behavior has been consonant with that prescribed by the legislation which governs their licensing, then I believe we have no reason to revoke their licenses. If, on the other hand, they have been acting in a manner that is contrary to the standards established by the enabling legislation, then, and only then are we entitled, and even required, to revoke their licenses. I believe this last to be the case, and I believe that it is our obligation to revoke their licenses."

Beckie frowned, Craddock's methodology was certainly different from McCardle's ranting. Liz was

right. Craddock was a real smoothie.

Craddock continued for half an hour, slowly focusing on the N.M.A. and its stand on the fetal monitor. “The Natural Midwives Association,” he concluded, “was founded out of a rejection of the requirements set forth in the legislation governing the licensing of midwives. That legislation requires all midwives to carry out their practice, and I quote now, ‘in a safe and conscientious manner, in accord with such standard practices as have been established by the medical community.’ The Natural Midwives Association was founded on a refusal to follow one such practice—accepted by the medical profession as necessary for the safety of mother and child—and its members made clear from the start that they would refuse to accept the policies of the medical profession as governing their actions. By this rejection they have forced upon us the responsibility of revoking their licenses.

“The licensing of medical personnel is a most serious obligation of the government. We will have done ourselves and our state a great disservice if we do not revoke the licenses of these women who not only refuse to perform their duties in the safe and conscientious manner required by law, but go even further and reject that very obligation.” He turned and looked directly at Beckie, neither anger nor bitterness in his expression or his voice. “I urge all members of this committee to vote for revocation.”

Scattered applause rose from the audience. Beckie looked around, curious to identify her opponents, but failed to recognize any. Strange, she thought, they look just like normal, reasonable people, and yet they obviously feel strongly about the issue, and are out to deprive me of my livelihood. It unnerved her.

“We’ve done it,” Liz whispered. “He said almost exactly what we predicted he would.” Liz and Beckie had met the night before with Senator Pat White, the only woman on the committee, and a strong supporter of the N.M.A. The meeting had been requested by White, who wanted help in planning her strategy against McCardle and Craddock. She asked the chair for the floor.

“I would like to thank Senator Craddock for the rational form of his position.” She turned and looked at McCardle. “Perhaps in such a framework we can discuss this issue with something of the propriety that I feel sure the citizens of this state expect of us.” McCardle returned her glare, but said nothing. White turned back to Craddock. “Senator, I agree with you that the issue here is whether or not the members of the Natural Midwives Association have met the conditions set forth in the legislation regarding their licensing. But I totally disagree with your conclusion that they have not met these requirements. In point of fact, I am certain that they have—and I quote the original legislation—that they have acted ‘in a safe and conscientious manner, in accord with such standard practices as have been established by the medical community.’ Our disagreement, it would seem, revolves around the interpretation of three key phrases in that sentence. They are the phrases ‘safe and conscientious,’ ‘standard practice,’ and ‘medical community.’ Senator, I think you will agree that the choice of the phrase ‘medical community’ instead of ‘A.M.A.’ was appropriate? The use of the word community implies that we are not talking about an organization of men with M.D.s, and especially not the ruling board of that organization. The ‘medical community’ includes doctors, nurses, midwives, nurse practitioners, paramedics—in short, all those people who are engaged in the maintenance of the health of the people of this state. Now, when we talk about the ‘standard practices’ established by this medical community, we are not talking about those established by the A.M.A., but those established by the entire medical community. Clearly no such standard practice has been established. The fact that the A.M.A., the California Midwives Association, and the Natural Midwives Association all endorsed policies on the use of the fetal monitor within the last three months, not to mention the fact that they do not agree on their position, indicates that no established medical standard exists on this issue.

“The decision to license midwives carries with it an implicit assumption that they are being granted a certain amount of independence to decide how their practice should be performed. The position of the

N.M.A. on fetal monitors is a reasonable difference among medical personnel. Many M.D.s, in fact, also disapprove of its routine use.

“The actual issue before us is not the relatively small issue of the licensing of the N.M.A. members. No, the issue before us is whether the State of California is going to give to the executive committee of the A.M.A. the power to decide who can practice medicine in this state, and exactly how they are to practice it. Senator Craddock, I am especially surprised that you would be willing to take this terrible step toward the establishment of what could easily become a policy of encouraging medical witch-hunts engendered by the desires of some for dictatorial control over all medical practice.” She sat. Beckie didn’t have to look around to know who was applauding.

Suddenly McCardle was on his feet, shaking his fist at White, then turning and pointing at Beckie. “And you think it’s just fine,” he shouted at White, to let women like that—out on bail for killing her patients—practice medicine? You think that constitutes safe and conscientious behavior?” His face was red and he trembled with rage.

Quietly, White stared at McCardle. Then, in a loud, dear voice she replied, “The behavior of Ms. McPhee appears to be the subject of a court hearing, and I would feel it inappropriate to draw any conclusions of guilt before the final verdict is reached in that case. On the other hand. Senator, your totally unconscionable behavior is obvious to everyone present.”

* * *

Bill Krueger worked in his office late into the night, while Carol, half asleep, sat in the chair by his side. He was poring over the records of the Coven. Occasionally, he would ask a question and then note the answer in the margin of the appropriate page. They had been at it for over six hours without a break. Despite the hour, Krueger was wide awake. The data were incontrovertible. The material would have to have been faked from beginning to end to be wrong. And Maggie and her daughter couldn’t have done it. It would have taken a real pro. Which implied that the data were not false, which in turn meant that they really did have a cancer cure, in fact, a foolproof cancer cure.

But it only worked on women. His mind whirled with questions, experiments, clinical tests. He held in his hands the medical story of the century, the solution to a question that billions of dollars had failed to answer. It occurred to Krueger that there would be Nobel Prizes to spare coming out of this. He smiled at the thought. His mind was cutting a piece of the cake for himself.

Finally, he turned to Carol. “You know, you really don’t need me. I doubt that there’s a physician in the country who would try to stand in your way.”

“But what if they don’t believe it?”

“Is it true?”

“Of course it is.”

“These patients?” He pointed at the piles of file folders on his desk. “They’re real people? They can be found? They’d be willing to testify under oath about what happened to them?”

Carol nodded emphatically.

“Then they’ll have no choice but to believe you.”

“But what about Beckie and the rest? They can still be arrested and all, can’t they?”

Krueger shook his head. “There isn’t a jury in this country that would convict any of you if it was convinced that your cure worked.”

“And you think we could convince them?”

“I know you could.”

Carol hesitated a moment and then asked, “Would you be willing to testify?”

Krueger nodded slowly. “Give me a week. Let me get the feel of your data. I’ll also make up some of the potion, and, perhaps, start some separations, analyze it. Not because I think I might get somewhere in a week, or even a month, but so I can say that I’m in the process of doing it. I think that’d lend the treatment an air of respectability.” Carol looked away, apparently less than totally satisfied with his answer. “What’s the matter?”

Carol frowned and looked back at him. “You all treat science like it was a religion, and unless the priests say a few holy words over something, it’s unacceptable. You asked my mom why we called it the Coven, remember? Well, it wasn’t a joke at all. Maybe it made Mom feel better to think of it that way, but that’s because she goes to your church of science. But the rest of us, we called it the Coven because it wasn’t men’s science that discovered this cure, it was women’s healing, and they’re as different as night and day!” Her voice rose almost to a shout as she finished talking, and then, embarrassed, she fell silent.

They sat quietly for over a minute, without looking at each other, before Krueger finally turned to face Carol.

“I don’t know that what you said has any meaning, but if it does, then science has lost its way, and you’ll have to show us the way back to truth.” Picking up another file, he began reading.

Chapter Forty-Three

BECKIE’S trial resumed on Monday. As his first witness, the District Attorney had called Joanne Oberdorf, the widow of the first man that Beckie had treated. He had died just ten days after the end of the treatments. Beckie was amazed at the change in the woman. The hope and tension that Beckie had seen in her every day of the treatment was gone. She seemed ten years older, resigned to a pointless life. At times she seemed almost reluctant to testify, but at others she clearly saw herself avenging her husband’s death.

The D.A. asked Mrs. Oberdorf to describe the daily treatment. Referring to Beckie, the woman explained, “She insisted that Peter be worked up almost to a frenzy of belief before she would give him the medicine. She insisted that it was necessary, even though it always left Peter exhausted so.”

“And did this ‘frenzied pitch’ seem to make any difference?”

The woman shrugged. “it just made him more tired.” She paused a moment, reflecting. “He did feel a little better, I think—it gave him a little hope that he hadn’t had before.”

“It wasn’t justified, that hope, was it?”

“Objection!” Linda Coles, Beckie’s defense lawyer, was on her feet. The judge nodded in agreement, and the D.A. changed his tack.

“What was the medicine like? Was it a clear, colorless liquid, or what? And how much did she give each day? A teaspoon?”

The woman grimaced. “Oh, it was a strange thing. It was cloudy, and brownish, and smelled rather unpleasantly spicy. Some days Peter had trouble drinking it all down. He said it tasted like onions and liver.”

“How much did he have to take?” he asked again.

“A glass.”

“A whole glass? A big glass, a little glass?”

The woman seemed unsure. “I guess it was about a six-ounce glass, maybe a bit more. It was less than eight ounces.

The D.A. turned and looked first at Beckie and then at the jury. “So it was about six ounces a day of a cloudy, brownish, unpleasant-smelling brew, that tasted like onions and liver. Is that correct?”

The woman nodded.

“Yes or no?”

“Yes,” the woman said. “But if it could have helped—”

“Thank you, Mrs. Oberdorf,” the D.A. interrupted. “Thank you.”

* * *

Maggie and Carol read the reports in the evening paper. To everyone’s surprise, the prosecution had rested its case after just one day of hearings. The prosecution had shown that Beckie administered medicine to the patient, that no doctor had been involved in the original interview, nor could any legitimate prescription be produced. The prosecution had dwelled on the fact that Beckie did not conduct a physical examination of the patient, nor had she asked to see the patient’s medical records. It had called the patient’s doctor, who testified that he did not expect the patient to die so quickly—although under cross-examination he had admitted that in such cases unexpected deaths were quite common. But the doctor had been adamant that no medical person would ever prescribe a medicine for a disease without a preliminary examination of the patient, noting that such careless practices recalled the days of charlatans and witch doctors.

The final witness had been a medical historian who reviewed the history of charlatans and witch doctors, who concluded that, though some might have believed in the efficacy of their treatments, none had made any significant contribution to medicine. Cross-examination of this final witness had been put off until Tuesday.

“We’ve got to tell them that Dr. Krueger will testify,” Carol said. “They should get to talk to him right away.”

Maggie agreed. "And they should have a copy of our records. I don't know what Beckie's planning to do about calling some of the successful patients as witnesses, but she should have the records in any case." Maggie thought a moment. "Let's have Bill Xerox the records, and then get them notarized or something. He could take them to Beckie's lawyer, and explain what's going on at our end." She began to pace up and down the room. "I just wish we knew better what was going on with the treatment of the men. It would make such a big difference if it worked." She stopped and turned to Carol. "Look, I'm going to walk down to the shopping center and call Bill at work, see if I can't sort this all out. It's silly for us to just talk about it, when we should be doing it."

"Can I come, too?" Carol asked.

Maggie frowned. "No, let me do this alone. There's no real reason to have two of us go." Carol began to protest. "Carol, you can't be in on everything!"

"Okay, Mom. But hurry back and tell me what happened?"

"Promise," Maggie said.

* * *

She was back fifteen minutes later. "Everything's set. Bill said he'd Xerox all the records over the next couple of days, He wants to do it himself because he's afraid someone else might look at what it was and call the police. Anyhow, by the weekend he said he'd drive to San Francisco and talk with Beckie's lawyer."

"Did he say anything about his trying to find out what was in the potion?" Carol asked.

"He's just today ordered all the ingredients. He says they should arrive by Wednesday, and then he can start looking into it. For the next couple of days, I guess we just sit and wait."

Carol looked around the room where she had spent most of the last two and a half weeks. "Something big had better come up before too long." she said.

Chapter Forty-Four

WEDNESDAY evening, Krueger called. "We've got a problem, Maggie. I was visited today by the police. They want to know what I plan to do with the frogs."

"With the frogs?"

"Yeah. It was a plainclothes cop, and he seemed bored and apologetic, but explained that he had orders to follow up every order for a dozen or more live frogs in the Bay Area."

"Did he say what for?"

"Not exactly, but I pumped him as much as seemed safe. He was irritated, and complained that he had had no idea how many scientists up and down the Bay used just dozens and dozens of frogs in their research. When I asked him why he was checking he said that they were just trying to trace some people who were using frogs in a criminal activity. Somehow the D.A.'s figured out that the Coven is using them in the potion."

Maggie frowned. "I don't know how."

"Did any of the patients know what was in the potion?—Remember McCardle has obviously talked with the wives of those men whom you've treated and who've then died. If they knew . . ."

"No, Bill. None of the patients was to have any idea what was in the potion. That was specifically agreed to by all the apprentices before the tests were begun." Maggie stopped to think. "Bill, I really can't think of any—Oh shit! The pictures!" Maggie said. "In the papers, and on the TV, too. They had pictures of me all over the place. All that they'd need is for someone at a pet shop to remember me, and recognize the pictures."

"Of course, Maggie! They could have put it together in an instant, and if they called the police, then that would be the obvious way to trace Coven members."

"Which means that they might be tracking down any Coven member who buys frogs!" Maggie added.

"You're right. They could probably do a roundup of Coven members anytime they wanted." He paused a second. "I guess the most important thing right now is for me to get up to San Francisco and talk with Beckie's lawyer."

Maggie agreed. "How soon do you think you could do it?"

He stopped to calculate. "I can get a key to do the Xeroxing after work tomorrow, and then go to San Francisco on Friday." He looked at his calendar. "That's the sixth. I don't think there's any reason to go up before the evening—they'll all be in court anyhow, and I probably wouldn't be able to get to see her lawyer before dinnertime. And it'd be a lot better for me if I didn't have to cancel my Friday appointments. What about you, Maggie. Is there anything you could do on such short notice?"

She thought for a moment. "Get in touch with Amy, I guess, warn her about being tracked down by the police. At the same time I could find out whether she's been able to do anything about the men." Frowning, she added, "But it's such a long shot. What a hell of a way to do research!"

* * *

Sue Tiemann drove through the heavy rain, the wipers fighting to keep the windshield clear enough to see through. It was a classic last attack of the rainy season that had a strength and fury that implied it knew of its imminent defeat by the warm, dry, spring months ahead. Between her anxiety over the results of their tests and the concentration needed to drive in the rain, Sue was worn out. Since last Sunday she and Amy had each been seeing four patients a day, two women and two men. That in itself was enough to be exhausting. Daily she visited her two women patients, treating them normally but also drawing 50 cc of blood from each. Then she would divide the 100 cc of blood between two cups of the potion, and let it sit for a couple of hours over lunch.

Blood of a virgin. She remembered stories about witches' brews that called for the blood of a virgin. More than anything else that had terrified her of witches. But now? Boiled frogs treated with the blood of true believers—that was the formula she was using to cure cancer. Why was it so repulsive even to think of? She laughed, remembering how one of her teachers had once described oxytocin, the pituitary hormone even now given occasionally to induce or intensify labor contractions as "squeezed from the brains of a thousand freshly slaughtered cows." A bit jaundiced, but an accurate description.

Driving on toward the first of her two male patients that afternoon, the two doses of potion rocked

gently on the seat alongside her. Slowly, she relaxed. It was the fifth day of the treatment, and she had noted clear signs of progress in the two women she treated earlier that morning—the pain was diminished in one and almost nonexistent in the other. The wonder and delight of the cure had given way to routine by now, but the relief and thanks of the women still reached into the center of her being and shook her.

The notoriety of Beckie's trial had not scared off prospective patients. Just the opposite, in fact—recent patients seemed to have more faith in the cure, yet with talk of people's dying from the treatment, they were clearly more nervous than earlier patients had been. As yet, no one in the press had noticed that the dead had all been men. Sue couldn't help but feel that the public would believe the sort of sinister plot that McCardle was always muttering about if they became aware of that one correlation, and that could disrupt the cooperation that was so vital for the cure.

As she turned onto the street where her first male patient lived her stomach knotted with tension. She realized that she thought of him as Male Patient # 1, not as Robert Maxwell. Was it fear of failure that led her to create this distance, this dehumanization of her male patients?

Robert Maxwell was thirty-three and had already lost one lung to cancer. The disease had spread to other parts of his body. He had at most six months more to live—unless her potion was successful.

As she walked up the drive, she prepared herself to exude confidence, for the reassuring role of conqueror of cancer. She had to maintain a credible appearance of confidence—not the obviously phony confidence of doctors and nurses in a terminal cancer ward who blithely told disbelieving patients they were sure to recover, but an earnest, believable confidence that would be duplicated in the patient. By now it was a professional role, and she prepared herself without a second thought.

Robert's wife answered the door. Sue noted the anxiety in her appearance instantly. Something had changed.

Sue fought to maintain her normal attitude. "Hi, Marsha. How are you?"

The woman was flustered by Sue's normalcy. "Fine," she finally answered. "Come and see Bob." She turned and hurried down the hall without waiting for a reply.

Fighting her panic, Sue walked quietly down the hall, hesitating only briefly before the bedroom door.

Across the room, the thin, frail body of Robert Maxwell lay propped up on pillows. When he saw her, a weak smile played across his face. His voice was almost a whisper as he said, "The pain's gone."

That night Amy Belever joined Sue in an excited celebration. "Four men. Four for four?" Amy squealed. "It's almost too much to believe!"

"Now, Amy—I can't swear about my second one."

"Oh, for God's sake, Sue. 'Slight improvement,' 'vast improvement'—I don't care! This here is a celebration, not a scientific meeting. The blood activates the potion so that it can cure men. It works!"

Sue gave her a hug, almost jumping with her excitement. "Oh, there's no way that—"

Their discussion was interrupted by the phone ringing. As Amy went to answer it, Sue called after her. "Don't sit on the phone for an hour. We've got some serious celebrating to do!"

Leaving Sue by the fireplace, Amy crossed into the kitchen and answered the phone.

“Hi, is this Amy?”

“Yes. Who’s this?”

“Amy, it’s Maggie. I want you . . .”

“Maggie!” Amy shouted. She turned and called to Sue. “Maggie’s on the phone!” and then turning back to the phone, continued, “Maggie guess what . . .”

“Wait!” Maggie interrupted. “Shut up a minute. I don’t trust your phone so I want you to go call from a pay phone.”

“But Maggie,” Amy insisted.

“No! Amy, I’m sure your phone is tapped. I want you to call me back. Will you do that—from a pay phone?”

“Sure, it’s just that—”

“Amy, please! Explain to me when you call back, can’t you?”

“I guess.”

“Okay, great. Listen, go to a drugstore and get a roll of quarters. Then find the number of a pay phone that you can use, and come back home. I’ll call you at home in fifteen minutes. Got that?”

“Okay, ’bye now. Talk to you in fifteen.” Maggie hung up.

Amy explained the situation to Sue as they drove to the shopping center to get the change. “Why does she want us to get her the telephone-booth number if we were going to call her?” Sue asked.

Amy just shrugged. “At this point I’m just doing what she says to do. She sounded pretty upset.”

The phone was ringing when they returned home, and Amy ran in to get it.”

“All set?” Maggie asked.

“I guess,” Amy answered.

“You’ve got the change and the phone-booth number?”

“Okay give me the number.” Amy read it to her.

“Okay,” Maggie continued. “You hurry back there, and I’ll call you in three minutes.”

They rushed back to the phone booth, and waited for the call. It came right on time. “Hi,” Maggie said. “Now I’ll give you the number to call me at. I didn’t want police listening to your phone to know where I was.” She read them her number. “Now drive across town and call me from another phone booth. Talk to you soon.”

Finally they were connected again, and able to talk. “I’m sorry for all the mystery,” Maggie explained, “but the police have figured out that were using frogs. and they’re tracing all orders for live frogs. So if you’ve been making up potion, they know who you are.” Maggie paused for breath. “If they know you’re with the Coven and tap your phone, I didn’t want them to be able to trace down where I’m staying. Now, what’s new at your end?”

“Oh, Maggie! It works, Maggie! Sue and I have been trying the potion, activating it the way you said, and we’ve each been treating two male patients, and today was the fifth day and three of them are a whole lot better. Even the fourth looks better, we’re just not positive about him. But it works, it really does!”

Maggie was ecstatic. Finally she calmed down. “Listen, Amy. We shouldn’t stay on this phone like this. I tell you what. I’ll call you again on Sunday, say at five P.M., where you are now.” Amy read her the number. “Great By then you should have finished the treatment, and we can figure out what to do next.” She paused a moment. “Christ, Amy, I’m so excited I’m running in six directions at the same time. Listen, you two take care of yourselves, and I’ll talk to you again Sunday, okay?”

“Okay. And Maggie, you take care of yourself, too. ’Bye.”

Chapter Forty-Five

The Senate hearing room was full Friday morning as the hearings on the N.M.A. continued. As Beckie was tied up at her trial, Sue Tiemann represented the N.M.A. But Maggie’s revelations about the possibility of the D.A.’s having identified her as a Coven member had diminished whatever appeal the appearance would normally have had for her. Liz Jason was looking frazzled. “Everything rides on Beckie’s trial now, Sue. If she’s convicted, the N.M.A. will lose its accreditation. If she’s acquitted, we’re home free. Everyone here is just biding their time and hedging their bets.”

Sue was scheduled to testify on behalf of the N.M.A. that morning, and she did so with a certain amount of trepidation, but following Liz’s advice avoided McCardle’s glare the entire time. She spoke of the hearings as a fight for the freedom to practice one’s profession without undue interference, she spoke of the A.M.A.’s control of the medical profession, of the economic gain that resulted from that power and control, and of the A.M.A.’s resorting to witch-hunts and hysteria to try to maintain its power over the medical profession. Finally, she spoke of women’s medicine.

“I’m sure that to some of you the term ‘women’s medicine’ will be a new one, so let me explain what I mean by it. Throughout the history of this country two approaches and philosophies of medical practice have coevolved. As early as the 1600s this distinction existed, dividing medical practitioners into physicians, on the one hand, and midwives, lay healers, herbalists, and the like, on the other. The one was dominated by men, the other by women. Since men held the power in that era, both by law and by custom, their medicine became dominant, again by law and by custom. That form of medicine practiced by women became known, at best, as ‘old wives’ tales,’ and, at worst, as witchcraft. Now, more than three hundred and fifty years later, we are still fighting that battle, and the form of the fight remains the same. The descendants of the physicians, now canonized in medical schools and by the A.M.A., insist that they and they alone are capable of setting standards for the practice of medicine, while we, the descendants of the midwives, lay healers, and herbalists, merely ask to continue our practice.

“But what is women’s medicine? It is a medical practice which preaches that the least is the best—that the purpose of a medical practitioner is to help the body heal itself and therefore the least interference with the normal activities of the body is preferable. This does not mean that we oppose appendectomies

in severe cases of appendicitis or that we oppose Caesarian sections when the life of the mother or child is in danger. But it does mean that we consider these to be serious acts, not to be carried out frivolously. It means that we do not support the use of Caesarian delivery to get the doctor onto the golf course in time for eighteen holes before dinner. And these are not frivolous accusations. Before the reinstatement of midwifery and home deliveries, almost fifty percent of all children born in this country were delivered by Caesarian section, an outrageous figure in itself, a horrible increase over the already large figure of thirty percent that was reached in many hospitals by the late '70s.

“Women’s medicine says that physician and patient must work together, must work in harmony and trust, in their mutual fight against illness, as opposed to the all-too-prevalent attitude that the doctor cures the patient that the patient, as the embodiment of illness, is indeed the enemy of the doctor. We believe that women’s medicine is more appropriate, that the extent of medical, and especially surgical, intervention in what are basically simple and adequate processes, such as childbirth, is more harmful. But we are not asking this committee to make such a judgment. We are not asking this committee to give us the power to decide who can engage in medical practice or how they may practice medicine. We ask only that this committee acknowledge that—as in law and politics so also in medicine—people who are honorable and intelligent may disagree on what is best, but this disagreement is honest and should not be used as a lever to ban one group or another from practicing. That is all that we request. Thank you.” She sat down quickly to hide the shakiness she felt in her hands and legs, and waited for the questions.

* * *

Across town Beckie’s trial was also in progress. Linda Coles, her attorney, had just finished questioning her fourth witness of the morning. They had called, so far that day, two women who had been cured by Coven members, and both their doctors. The women related how they had been contacted by Beckie and treated. Their doctors confirmed that both had had terminal cancer with no reasonable expectancy of survival, yet both had undergone spontaneous remission after Beckie’s treatment.

The D.A. spent more than an hour prodding at their stories, looking for a hole, but found nothing. The physicians agreed that they had no objective evidence that Beckie’s treatments had helped the patients, but both indicated that spontaneous remissions happened on their own at a rate of around one every few thousand patients. They also pointed out that it was very unlikely that Beckie would treat two patients who would undergo spontaneous remission within a week of treatment. Finally the D.A. finished his cross-examination, and the judge recessed the trial for lunch.

Linda and Beckie walked to Linda’s office for lunch. “Are you ready to testify this afternoon, Beckie?” Linda asked around a mouthful of roast beef on rye.

Beckie shrugged. “As ready as ever. It’s the same old problem, though, they’re going to ask me for data that Maggie has, and I’m just not going to have it.”

“We’ve been over that, and you know what to say, right?”

“Yep.”

That afternoon, her testimony went as planned, with Linda asking questions and Beckie supplying well-rehearsed answers. When Linda was finished, the questioning was turned over to the D.A.

“You are Rebecca McPhee?”

“Yes.”

“You are a member of a group which calls itself the California Coven?”

“Yes.”

“And you treat cancer patients, giving them an alleged medication which you claim will cure them of their cancer?”

“Yes.”

The DA. began to pace the front of the courtroom. “Now, this morning we heard testimony from two women who stated that they were treated by you, and that afterward their cancer disappeared. To the best of your knowledge, were the statements of these women accurate and truthful?”

“Yes.”

“And you believe that this alleged medication which you gave them was the cause of the disappearance of their cancer?”

“Yes.”

He stopped and turned toward her. “How many cancer patients have you treated all together?”

“Eight.” She answered without having to think.

“And how many have you cured?”

“Six.”

“And the other two?”

“One was Peter Oberdorf. His wife testified earlier in the trial, he died of cancer about two weeks after my treatment failed. The second person still has cancer, and I assume his prognosis is the same as it was before I began the treatments.”

“So it doesn’t work on everyone, your cure?”

“No.”

“Do you know why that is?”

“No.”

“Maybe something different about the way you treat some of them?”

“No, they’re all treated identically.”

The D.A. began pacing again. “Miss McPhee, can you give any explanation for why your treatments work?”

“No, but doctors didn’t—”

“Thank you,” the D.A. interrupted, “but please just answer the questions? So you don’t know how it works, or why it works on some people and not on others. Tell me, why do you work the patients into a frenzy before—”

“Objection!” Linda was on her feet. The judge agreed. “Well, whatever you call it, this getting the patient excited beforehand, why do you do that?”

Beckie hesitated. “Because it’s a necessary part of the cure.”

“How do you know that?”

“Because it doesn’t work without it.”

“How do you know that?”

“Well, we tested some women with the hype, that’s what we call it, and some without, and it only worked when we gave the hype.”

The D.A. walked over and stared at her, a smile on his face. “Some ‘women,’ you said.”

Beckie looked confused. “What?”

“Could the stenographer read back her last statement?” the D.A. asked.

The stenographer reached over his notes and read, “Well, we tested some women with the hype, that’s what we call it, and some without—”

“Thank you,” the D.A. said. “Were the tests done just on women?”

Beckie looked uncomfortable. “I meant to say people, not women.”

“Oh, I see. But were the tests done just on women? That’s a question.”

“Well, now I’m not sure.”

“Might it have been true?”

“I guess,” Beckie began.

“Because maybe there was a reason to test it just on women?”

“Well . . .”

The D.A.’s voice rose almost to a shout, “Because, perhaps, all the men you treated were killed by the treatment?”

“Objection!” Linda shouted.

“Excuse me.” The D.A.’s voice had returned to its normal, almost soothing, tone. “Let me ask the question more simply. Rebecca McPhee, how many of the men you and other members of the Coven

have treated, how many of them have died since then?"

"I'm not sure," Beckie answered.

"Well, Senator McCardle has reported four, and we had the wife of a fifth testify here, so at least five, you would say?"

"Yes, I guess."

"And how many men have you cured?" The question was spoken almost in a whisper.

Beckie's voice faltered as she answered, "None."

"Not even one?" he asked.

She took a deep breath. "No."

"And so you lied when you said you didn't know why it didn't work on some people. You knew that it didn't work on men, didn't you?"

"No! I mean, yes, I knew it didn't work on men, but no, I don't know why it doesn't."

"And I suppose you don't know why the men died after your treatment?"

"No!"

"I ask you again, Miss McPhee, was there any difference in the medication—the so-called medication—between what you gave to the men and what you gave to the women?"

"No!"

"But the women lived, and the men died?"

"Not all the men have died, and they have terminal cancer! Don't you understand?"

The DA. turned to the judge. "No more questions, Your Honor."

* * *

Bill Krueger sat nervously in the waiting room, his briefcase by his side. He had reached Linda Coles's office at four, and was told that the trial would probably run until five. If Linda returned to the office before heading home he could see her then. Otherwise, he could leave a message, and she would probably get in touch with him Saturday. He rejected the thought of not making contact tonight, and had quietly looked up her home address in the phone book while waiting. It was ten after five, and the receptionist was in the process of closing up the office when the door opened.

Krueger leaped to his feet. "Are you Linda Coles?" The woman nodded. Krueger closed in on her and said, "My name is Bill Krueger. I'm with Stanford Medical School—I'm a cancer specialist." He looked nervously at the receptionist. "Could I talk to you in private for a minute?"

Linda looked at him. Friend or foe, she wondered, and then, relenting, said, "All right, Mr. Krueger,

come on in. But I have only a minute.”

Krueger followed her into her office, struggling to maintain his composure. Linda dropped her attaché case on the floor next to her desk, and sank into her chair. She looked up and saw a distraught man, clutching an old leather briefcase. Had he said he was a doctor? She couldn't remember, but thought not. A crackpot? She managed a weak smile and said, “Now, Mr. Krueger, what can I do for you?”

For a moment, Krueger stood dumbly. Two nights without sleep suddenly combined with his anxiety over seeing her and left him utterly confused. “It's about the Rebecca McPhee case,” he finally answered.

Linda leaned back in her chair. He's a nut, she thought. Five-fifteen on a Friday evening, and I get a nut. But, ever the professional, she smiled encouragingly. “Yes, you wanted to tell me something about the case? You said you were a cancer specialist, is that your profession or hobby?”

“A what?” Krueger came out of his daze and laughed. “I'm sorry, I've been running on adrenaline too long.” He reached for a chair and pulled it over to where he was standing. Sitting down, he continued, “I'm a professor of oncology—that's tumors—atStanfordMedicalSchool, and a friend of Maggie Stone.” He smiled as she started. “I have the originals of all the Coven's records downstairs in my car, and I'm prepared to testify that the Coven can definitely cure cancer—at least in some cases.” He hesitated over the qualification.

“You mean the sex thing, or something else?” she asked quickly.

Krueger nodded. “Yes, the ‘sex thing.’ It only works on Women.”

Linda was on her feet, pacing back and forth. “But what would you testify? You've seen the records, but you haven't seen the patients. What could you say?”

“A lot. First of all, I have seen one of the patients, Maggie's mother.” He noted the look of surprise in Linda's face. “That's right. Maggie tried the potion on her mother first, while I was her doctor. So on that one case I can testify as the patient's doctor. But half of the women they've treated have been through the cancer group at Stanford, and I've seen the records for at least a dozen women who I've since verified were treated by Coven members. So on over a dozen cases I can testify that the Coven records agree with the medical records at Stanford.” He paused a moment before continuing, “And I'm ready to testify that, based on the Coven records, and the cures that I have been able to verify independently, there is no question but that the Coven's treatment cures cancer in women.”

Linda stopped her pacing and turned to him. “Does it cure all cancer in women?”

Krueger shook his head. “I can't answer that. There're more than a hundred distinct types of cancer, and probably close to a thousand variants have been reported. I'd need a carefully selected sample of ten thousand women to answer that question. But the Coven is running a miraculous hundred-percent cure rate on the women they've treated.” He stopped and thought a second, then pulled a calculator from his pocket. After punching in a series of numbers he looked up again. “I'd be willing to say that the cure is almost certainly ninety-percent effective, and probably at least ninety-eight percent. Of course, that's short-term cure, it'll be twenty years before we can say anything about the permanence of the cure.” He shrugged his shoulders. “But I'd say at this point that this is the best treatment available for women with cancer, and that as fast as the Coven can train people as—oh, whatever they want to call themselves—as fast as they can train people, all women with cancer should be treated.”

“You’d give that recommendation in court?”

Krueger laughed. “I’m prepared to say it at a scientific meeting!”

Linda sat down again, delighted. With a smile, she shook her head. “You can’t imagine how happy I am to see you.” At a sudden thought, she asked, “What about the men? Do you know what’s going on there?”

Krueger shook his head. “No idea. Only that it doesn’t seem to help men.”

“Does it harm them?”

He stopped and thought. “Now I really don’t know. I never thought about that. You see, the Coven didn’t do any real follow-up work on the men who weren’t cured.” He frowned. “I guess the testimony of the doctors of the two men who died wasn’t very conclusive, is that right?”

Linda nodded. “They had cancer and they died. Maybe they died earlier than they would have and maybe they didn’t. As far as I can tell there isn’t any information to suggest one or the other.”

“So I guess that’s at a standstill, it might be worth pointing out at some point that it could still be helping at a slow rate that the Coven’s statistical methods just haven’t been able to detect. But, if pressed, I’d have to say the treatment doesn’t seem to do anything at all to men, and I haven’t the foggiest notion why not.”

Chapter Forty-Six

SATURDAY afternoon, Sue Tiemann drove away cheerfully from the home of Male Patient # 1. He was better, no doubt about it. She and Amy had started treating the four men the previous Sunday and this would be their last visit. Four for four! The patients had all shown the clear signs of progress that Amy and Sue had learned to expect from women patients. Maggie’s idea had done the trick, and now the Coven could boast a hundred-percent cure rate, she could hardly wait for Sunday’s phone call from Maggie.

Turning off the Bayshore Freeway, she started winding through the streets of Redwood City toward the home of Male Patient # 2. Sue had been tempted to ask them if they would testify at Beckie’s trial now that curing men had become an open issue, but she and Amy had decided that the treatments should be finished before either was asked. Otherwise, the request might appear an implied threat. She parked her car, picked up her bottle of potion, and headed for a run-down bungalow set back a bit from the road. Patient # 2’s wife answered the door as soon as she knocked.

There was an edge of nervousness in her that Sue had not expected. The seventh day usually saw patient and family euphoric as the reality of the cure began to penetrate. But this woman seemed almost terrified. Nevertheless, she showed Sue in and smiled.

“How’s Gary today?” Sue asked.

“Oh, Sue, he’s doing so much better, I’m almost believing that your cure has worked for him!”

Sue smiled. “Well, that’s what it’s supposed to do.”

The woman looked totally confused. “If it’s true, Sue, we’ll owe you so much—” She trailed off, and

then added, "Remember that, Sue, please." Turning she led Sue into the bedroom where her husband lay. "He's so much better, I almost feel that he doesn't need the treatment today. Do you think maybe we could just as well skip it?"

"I'm afraid not," Sue answered from behind. "I know it tastes foul, but the treatment calls for seven days, and even if he is a lot better already, we need to do the full seven days."

The woman shrugged without answering. Sue turned to the man and was surprised to see the same scared look in his face. "How you feeling, Gary?" She cursed herself silently for letting her own confusion leak into the question.

"A thousand times better, Sue," he answered. "It's like Jenny said, we owe you so much and—well, we just want you to remember that." He looked away. "Well, let's do it."

Slowly, Sue started talking him up, encouraging him, reassuring him, building up a visible sense of confidence in the cure and in his ability to work with the potion to cure himself. For ten minutes they went through the ritual as they had every day that week, as Sue had done a hundred times before. Except it wasn't working. Tension and fear were evident in his expression, disappearing only briefly now and then.

Finally Sue stopped. "What is it, Gary? Something's bothering you so badly that you can't concentrate. Tell me what it is?"

Startled he looked at his wife and then back to Sue. "I'm Sorry," he said, "I've just been distracted. Lets just keep going. I'm sure I can click into it." He offered her a strained smile.

Five minutes later Sue was satisfied with their progress, and poured out the potion. He took it and drank it down quickly, Returning the glass to his night table, he looked up at her from his bed and said, "Thank you, thank you so much and . . ." He stopped and looked past Sue toward the bedroom door. Turning back to Sue, he added, "And I'm sorry." His eyes sank to his lap and he leaned back in his bed, exhausted.

"Susan Tiemann?"

She whirled to find the source of the voice.

"You're under arrest for practicing medicine without a license, conspiracy to practice medicine without a license, and dispensing unapproved drugs for human consumption."

The policeman's hand rested on the butt of his pistol.

* * *

"The woman, Susan Tiemann of San Francisco, is now the second midwife to be arrested in conjunction with the dispensing of an alleged cancer cure. Tiemann was arrested for the treatment of Gary Painter of Redwood City. The arrest comes just one day after the other woman arrested on similar charges, Rebecca McPhee, acknowledged in court that the treatment was not effective on men. A bail hearing is scheduled for Monday. In other news—"

Maggie turned off the TV with a violent stab. "God, They'll crucify her!" She stamped angrily into the kitchen. "They'll say she was treating men even though she knew it didn't work, and then they'll speculate about whether we're killing the men, and . . ." She sputtered to a halt.

Carol followed Maggie into the kitchen. “But she could just tell them that she was trying a modified potion that we thought might be more effective with men.”

“And then they’ll ask her what that modification was,” Maggie replied, “and they’d love to hear that. They’d have a field day!”

“But Beckie never told them what the potion was, why would Sue have to give any details?”

“Because— Oh. I don’t know. It’s just that this messes everything up—Beckie’s trial, the tests with the men—I just don’t know where we are anymore.”

Carol stopped and thought. “But when did they start treating the men?” Maggie looked at her uncertainly. “I mean, wasn’t today supposed to be the last treatment? If they haven’t grabbed Amy, and they certainly didn’t say anything about it on the news, then she might very well have the results.”

“That’s right! When did they say they started?” Maggie stopped to calculate. “We talked to them Thursday night and they were already getting results, so that must have been day five, which makes Friday six and today seven! Then they did finish the tests!”

“And we can get the information from Amy!” Carol was jumping with excitement. She looked at her watch. “Let’s go out and call her now. She’ll still be up!”

Maggie laughed. “Just rush right out and call her? No more caution?”

“Oh, jeez, Mom. All we everdois be cautious. I’m about ready to turn myself in rather than keep sitting in this dumb house! Dr. Krueger’s gone to San Francisco to testify, Beckie and Sue have been arrested. Beckie’s back out and Sue probably will be on Monday.”

“Well, if we’re going to turn ourselves in, we can turn ourselves in. But I’ll be damned if I’m going to go and get caught just by being sloppy.”

“All right, already,” Carol agreed, “but can’t we call her all supercautious then? You know, ten telephone booths and forty quarters? Because if they really do have four cures, and especially if that guy Sue was treating is cured, then we’ve got real important information that we should at least get to Beckie’s lawyer somehow.”

“You mean you don’t want to turn yourself in?” Maggie teased.

“I don’t know,” Carol responded seriously. “Maybe we should.”

Maggie laughed again. “Well, I’ll make you a deal. We can call Amy up carefully, and then afterward we can talk about what to do next. How’s that?”

Carol smiled. “It’s a deal,”

* * *

It was half an hour before they had chased Amy around to two different phone booths and satisfied themselves that everything was safe. “Did you hear about Sue?” Amy asked.

“That’s why we’re calling,” Maggie said. “We heard on the news tonight and wanted to know—well, first of all, what’s happened with her patients.”

“They’re better! All four of the men, the two I treated and the two Sue treated. They’re all better.”

“Including the one whom Sue was arrested for treating?” Maggie insisted.

“Yes! Maggie, they’re all better. It works!”

“What is it?” Carol demanded. She was crowded into the phone booth with Maggie, but couldn’t hear.

“They’re all better,” Maggie told her. “Amy says that all four, including the one where Sue got arrested, seem to be cured. She says it works on men!”

“Yippee!” Carol jumped up and down in the tight confines of the phone booth and gave Maggie a hug. “Hooray!” she shouted at the receiver.

Chapter Forty-Seven

MONDAY morning the courthouse was packed. People hoping for seats in the gallery had begun to arrive as early as six o’clock, a full hour earlier than on any previous day of the trial, and by the time the courthouse opened at 7:30, the line extended around the corner onto Palmer Street, which meant that already the line was longer than could be accommodated in the hall. Linda and Beckie drove by the line shortly before eight on their way to pick up Krueger at the BART station.

“Looks like they’re expecting an exciting day,” Beckie commented.

Linda nodded. “They’ll get it, too. Krueger’s testimony will smash the D.A.’s entire case.”

“Except for the question of the men.”

Linda shrugged. “That’s something we’ve known about all along. It sits out there like a sore thumb. But I think that with enough medical jargon Krueger can end up making it sound reasonable, and hammer home the efficacy of the cure on women. Everybody’s expecting a circus centered around Sue’s arrest, and the issue of whether we’re killing the men. That’s what brought out the big crowd today. But Krueger’s testimony should throw them.” She smiled across at Beckie. “It’s just like the cavalry, riding up just in time—I don’t know where we’d be today without his testimony.”

“Well, there he is,” Beckie said, pointing to a man standing by the curb in front of the station. “At least he’s here on time.”

Twice as many reporters packed the courtroom than on previous days, reinforcing Linda’s belief that everyone was expecting a sensational event, with the horror of a group of men-killers hovering about the edges of the debate. She scanned the gallery. Mostly women, she noted, but that was generally the case. “Have you looked over the gallery?” she asked Beckie. Beckie shook her head.

“I never do. They unnerve me, even when I recognize supporters—then I feel like I have to live up to their expectations in addition to just trying to save my neck.”

“You try to live up to their expectations whether they’re there or not,” Linda said. Beckie looked at her quizzically. “We could have plea-bargained from the very start,” Linda pointed out.

“Oh, hell. And perjure myself by saying that the cure doesn’t really work, so they can just slap my hand? That’s no choice and you know it.”

Linda backed off. “I know.”

Their conversation was interrupted by the entry of the judge, and for the next five minutes they paraded through court ritual, Finally Linda took the floor. “Your Honor, the defense calls Dr. William Krueger.”

“William Krueger.”

Krueger entered from the witness room carrying his briefcase, and after being sworn in he took his place in the box.

For the next several minutes, Linda established Krueger’s credentials in great detail—his undergraduate training, medical school, residency in cancer therapy, professorship in oncology atStanfordMedicalSchool . He was the perfect “expert witness,” with a long string of publications, membership in innumerable scientific associations, and the like.

“Do you know the defendant, Rebecca McPhee?” Linda finally asked him.

“I know of her, but, to my knowledge, I’ve never met her face to face.”

“Have you ever, to your knowledge, communicated with her in any way?”

“No, I have not.”

“Thank you.” She began pacing back and forth before the witness box. “Ms. McPhee has been charged here with illegally treating cancer patients and she has in fact testified under oath that she treated several cancer patients with an unidentified medication. Do you have any opinions as to the efficacy of that treatment?”

“Objection!” The D.A. was on his feet in an instant and Linda suppressed a smile. “Your Honor,” the D.A. explained, “although Dr. Krueger may be an expert on cancer therapy, any opinion he might have about this alleged medication must be based on hearsay evidence and as such is inadmissible.”

Linda staged a frown. “I withdraw the question,” she said, and the D.A., satisfied, returned to his seat.

“Dr. Krueger,” Linda continued, “as a cancer researcher, is the evaluation of possible cancer therapies a part of your work?”

“It is the entirety of my work. My job is to devise procedures for curing cancer, and then test them.”

“Do you ever evaluate the efficacies of cancer cures devised by individuals other than yourself?”

“Yes, I do. I spend a vast amount of my time reading the results of other researchers’ experiments, and evaluating their experiments and, hence, their ideas about how cancer works or how it can be cured.”

“I see.” Linda stopped for a moment as if thinking. “Can you describe for the members of this jury the procedure by which you would evaluate a potential cure reported by a researcher?”

“Well, in simple terms, I would first examine their claim as to the treatment’s effect. This would involve looking at how they chose the subjects for their experiments, how they define their control group, and the actual difference that they saw between the two. For example, someone might claim that a particular treatment could cure five percent of all people with lung cancer. First I would ask whether they looked at enough people to be sure that the five percent difference wasn’t just a coincidence. For example, if twenty people died in the control group, and nineteen in the experimental group, that would be a five-percent difference, but most likely that would just be due to chance rather than the efficacy of the treatment. But if two thousand died in the control group and nineteen hundred in the treated group, then I would be convinced that the difference was real.”

“Is this approach that you take a standard one?” Linda asked, interrupting Krueger.

“Oh, yes! We teach it to our students—everyone does it.” He seemed somewhat confused by the question.

“Is this method, then, the standard, accepted, scientific approach to the analysis of such experiments?”

“Yes, it is.”

“Thank you,” she said, and smiling, turned toward the D.A. With her eyes on the D.A. she continued, “Now, Doctor, perhaps I can rephrase the question which the District Attorney objected to previously: Have you read through and analyzed the results of the experiments of the California Coven, including those of the defendant Rebecca McPhee, and have you been able to scientifically evaluate the efficacy of their tests?”

“I have,” Krueger replied, but a roar from the gallery drowned out his reply. The judge gavelled for silence, then turned to Krueger and asked him to repeat his response.

“I have,” he repeated. Again the judge pounded for order.

“Your Honor!” The District Attorney was on his feet. “Until such time as these alleged records are introduced as evidence both those records and any testimony based on those records remain hearsay evidence and inadmissible in this court!”

While the D.A. protested, Linda returned to her table and picked up a cardboard file box. “Your Honor,” she said when the D.A. had finished, “I am prepared to enter those records as evidence in this trial. This box,” she lifted it onto the judge’s bench, “and the four similar boxes which sit under the defense table represent the original records of the California Coven Project a research program undertaken by the California Coven. They contain the detailed reports of the daily treatments of seventy-two cancer patients, and the results of those treatments.” She carried the remaining boxes to the judge’s bench, and then crossing to the District Attorney’s table, deposited a single large box. “This is a photostatic copy of those records.” She returned to Krueger. “Dr. Krueger, based on your scientific analysis of these records, what have you concluded about the efficacy of the treatment provided by members of the California Coven?”

The hall was silent. Krueger took a deep breath and then answered in a slow, measured voice. “Based on the records presented to me by Carol and Margaret Stone, there is no question in my mind but that the treatment which they have been testing is the greatest advance in the treatment of cancer, ever.” Pandemonium broke out, as reporters raced one another for the few telephones located in the lobby of the courthouse. Linda noticed people in the gallery hugging each other. It seemed at least some of them were not hostile.

Finally, the gavel returned her attention to the judge. “One more outbreak like this, and I will order the sergeant-at-arms to clear the gallery!” He turned to Linda. “You may proceed, Counsel.”

“Thank you. Your Honor.” Linda turned her attention to Krueger, who was fidgeting nervously in the witness box. This clearly wasn’t his style. “Dr. Krueger, could you tell us just how effective the treatment is?”

Again, he paused before answering. “I can’t tell you exactly how effective it is. That will require not seventy-two tests, but thousands, if not tens of thousands of tests. But I can give you an idea of its effectiveness. Among the women who were tested, every single one was cured of her symptoms of cancer. Based on the sample, I would expect than no fewer than ninety percent of women with cancer can be at least temporarily cured by the Coven’s treatment. Whether the malignancies will return after six months or a year, or ten years, I can’t say; the Coven has not had time to perform follow-up studies. But at this point, their treatment is without a doubt the best available for women with cancer, and I personally would recommend to all my women patients that they subject themselves to this treatment as soon as possible.”

Linda nodded and turned toward the judge. “No more questions at this time, Your Honor.”

The judge nodded back and turned to the D.A. “Mr. Georges, I realize that this information is as new to you as it is to me. Are you prepared to begin your cross-examination?”

Linda crossed her fingers and silently prayed. Would he take the gambit and start now, riding on the crest of Sue’s arrest over the weekend? Or would he put it off until he could read all the documents—but lose the chance to exploit Sue’s arrest?

Georges paused, running the same calculations through his own mind, and then answered. “Your Honor, I will, of course, need time to study these documents carefully, but I would like to ask some questions of the witness now.” The judge assented.

“Dr. Krueger,” Georges began, “you commented that, based on these records, at least ninety percent of all women suffering from cancer could expect some measure of relief from this treatment—is that correct?”

“Yes, it is.”

“Doctor, tell me, how effective is it for men?”

A ripple of excitement ran through the hall but instantly halted. Krueger paused again, and then replied, “Based on the results presented in their records—and only eight of the seventy-two individuals treated were men—the treatment has no apparent beneficial effects on men.”

“Might it, Doctor, have some deleterious effects on men? Might it actually kill the men?”

Linda began to object, but then stopped. It could do more harm than good. She just hoped that Krueger was ready for the question.

“Based on the data presented in these reports, I can find no evidence that the treatment has any effect whatsoever on men.”

“Do the reports state that at least five of the men treated by this procedure, including two treated by the defendant Rebecca McPhee, died within a short time after being treated?”

“No.”

“Does that omission surprise you, Doctor?”

Krueger shook his head. “No. In a perfect study it would have been there. The Coven’s record-keeping is far less than ideal, but they had nowhere near the personnel that would be required to do the study properly. Given the limitations that they worked under, it isn’t surprising at all that they didn’t follow up their failures.”

Georges was set back by the reasonableness of Krueger’s defense. The man would be harder to shake than he had thought.

“But you would agree that the way the reports were prepared could have, either intentionally or unintentionally, hidden the fact that the treatment was lethal to men.”

“That is correct—”

Georges cut him off before he could continue. “And Doctor, do you have any sense of when they first realized that the treatment was of no value to men?”

“Yes.” Krueger opened up a folder and scanned through it, “It was around the end of February.”

“Almost two months ago,” Georges said.

“Yes, a month and a half to two months ago. Something like that.”

“And yet they continued to treat men?”

“Only a few,” Krueger replied. “I don’t think they were sure as early as the end of February. I understand they tested several shortly thereafter, to firm up their data, but then they stopped.”

“Except that just this last weekend, on April 8th, well after they, if I may quote you, had ‘firmed up their data.’ they were still using this treatment on men, a treatment that they knew didn’t work!”

“Objection!” Linda was on her feet, “There has been a charge made by local police to that effect, but that is by no means substantiated, and certainly has not been decided by a court!”

Turning to the judge, Georges persisted, “But we do have a sworn affidavit from a police officer who saw her administer the ‘potion’—that’s what Miss Tiemann called it, a ‘potion’—to the man, and we have the sworn testimony of both the man who was treated and his wife!”

“That is hearsay evidence until presented to this court in person,” Linda countered, “and is not admissible!”

The whispering in the gallery rose in volume and threatened to overwhelm the argument before the bench. Suddenly a woman had pushed past a guard and was storming toward the front of the gallery. In a moment she had been grabbed by a guard, but not before she had reached the gallery rail and shouted for all to hear, “That’s not important, none of that is. What’s important is that the man Sue was arrested

for treating, and three other men treated last week, have been cured!” She swung defiantly toward the District Attorney. “We can cure women and men now! We can cure everyone who has cancer!”

Krueger stared, openmouthed, at the young woman who now held the attention of the entire court. It was Carol.

Chapter Forty-Eight

“HOLD that woman, there’s a warrant out for her!” In seconds policemen were rushing down the aisle to where the guard held Carol. Photographers were swarming about, trying for the ideal picture, and the judge was fuming, pounding his gavel to no avail. In the mêlée, Beckie could hear someone shouting, but all she could make out was “. . . without a license . . . conspiracy to . . . flight to avoid . . .”

Suddenly, Beckie spotted Maggie walking quietly toward the police and Carol. She elbowed her way into the center of the struggling knot, then disappeared from Beckie’s view. She turned to Linda, who was craning her neck to see better. “Maggie’s there, too. She just joined Carol. We have to talk to them!”

“Maggie?” Linda asked. “Where? I didn’t see her.”

“She just walked into the circle of police. I can’t see her now, but she’s right in the middle of it.”

Linda finally turned to her. “You’re right. We do have to talk to them.” She turned and walked up to the bench. “Your Honor, I request a recess until after lunch.” The D.A. nodded in helpless agreement, and the gavel descended again.

“Court recessed until 1:30!”

Beckie had leaped from her seat before the words were out of the judge’s mouth, and turned impatiently toward Linda. “Come on, we don’t have much time!” They pushed their way through the crowd out into the lobby where Carol and Maggie had been taken. There was no sign of either them or the officers who had removed them. While Beckie searched frantically, Linda quietly walked to the information booth, tucked away in a corner of the lobby.

“’Morning, Tommy.” She smiled at the spry man in his sixties sitting behind the desk. “Busy morning?”

Tommy returned her smile. “Morning, Linda. It sure is. We haven’t had this many people lined up for the gallery since that double homicide last July. But it’s a real polite crowd today, not so much ruffraff.”

“Did you see them whisk two women out awhile ago?”

He nodded slowly. “Yep. Saw them all go bustling down to Booking.” He tilted his head. “It was funny,” he added, “kind of backward, with the officers all jumpy and the ladies smiling and real calm-looking.”

Linda started back to Beckie and waved a good-bye to the man. “Times are changing, Tommy,” she called back.

“Not if I can help it, Miss Coles!”

By now Beckie was standing helplessly in the middle of the lobby. “Come on,” Linda said, grabbing her by the arm, “they’ve been taken down to Booking. We should be able to catch them there if we hurry.”

Linda led her down one hall after another, and then down into the basement. Farther down the hall Beckie could see a crowd outside of a closed door.

“Damn!” Linda muttered. She stopped and turned to Beckie. “Keep your mouth shut, and pretend you’re my assistant, okay?” Beckie nodded uncertainly as Linda plunged into the crowd. They seemed mostly to be reporters, Beckie noted, standing around like scavengers waiting for scraps to be thrown from behind the closed door. Beckie stopped abruptly as Linda halted before the door. A guard was blocking her way. “Sorry, Miss Coles, Mr. Georges says no one allowed in.”

“Hi, Don. I’m Maggie Stone’s lawyer—it’s okay.” She moved as if to go on in, but the guard didn’t move.

“Just a minute, Miss Coles, I’ll have to check.” He opened the door and slid through quickly as the crowd pushed forward for a look. An instant later the door was closed again.

“Now we keep our fingers crossed. If he has to check with Georges . . .”

The door opened a foot and the guard appeared. “Come on in, Miss Coles, it seems to be okay.” Linda slid through the opening, dragging Beckie behind her. The guard opened his mouth as if to complain, but Linda casually injected, “Don, have you met Beckie before?” She moved to let Beckie stand beside her. “We’ve been working together for the last few months.” He closed his mouth again, unsure, and Linda pushed farther into the room. “Ah! there they are!” Linda spotted Maggie and Carol being fingerprinted off in the corner.

She turned to Don and smiled. “Thanks a lots Don. And do keep those reporters out. Tell them my clients have no comments for the press.” She turned to Beckie “Now let’s go talk with our clients!”

Carol spotted them as they crossed the room. “Beckie!” A look of delight spread quickly across her face. Maggie, in the middle of being fingerprinted, turned quickly, waited for the officer to finish, then pulled free. Beckie gave her a big hug.

A detective, wearing a quiet sports coat, looked at Beckie. “You’re not her lawyer. You’re the McPhee Woman.”

“I’m her lawyer,” Linda interrupted. “I’m Linda Coles, and Ms. McPhee is functioning as an assistant to me in this case.” But the detective continued to frown.

“Is this woman your lawyer?” he asked Maggie.

She nodded. “Yes, she is. Definitely. And that other woman is working with her.”

The detective shook his head. “Okay, okay. I can tell when I’m being outflanked.” He looked at his watch. “You can have ten minutes now, and then we’re going to finish the booking without any interruptions!” He turned and walked heavily from the room.

Maggie looked uncertainly at Linda, and Linda smiled and nodded. “It’s okay now. The next ten minutes are ours.” Maggie and Beckie threw their arms around each other. A moment later, Carol joined in, and they all began talking at once, it was several minutes before they remembered Linda’s presence.

“You’re Linda Coles?” Maggie asked, wiping tears from her eyes. Linda nodded. “Well, I just don’t know how to thank you for getting Beckie in here.” She turned back to Beckie “We’ve been reading

about you, and watching all the news shows every night, and we've missed you so much!" She gave her another hug.

"And there we were, almost afraid to come out of the house where we were staying," Carol joined in, "and not able to talk with anyone we knew, and we didn't get to see any of our friends the whole time, and there we were sitting and hiding while you're out there, I mean, right out there in front of the whole city, and the whole world, standing up for the Coven, and we felt so helpless and useless!" She stopped, confused, and everyone else laughed happily.

"But now you're both here," Beckie said, "and all three of us are going to go out there for the Coven—but what were you saying in court?" She turned to Carol. "Does it really work on men now?" Maggie and Carol smiled.

"But how? Why didn't it work before? What did you do differently?"

Maggie and Carol smiled at each other. "Well," Maggie began slowly, and then turned toward the door. The detective had just returned. Maggie turned to Linda. "Look, we have so much to talk about—"

"I know," Linda interrupted. "But we'd best let them finish now. It shouldn't take more than fifteen minutes to half an hour, depending on how much they drag their feet, but we'll all get to talk again afterward. For the time being, I recommend that you just cooperate with them—but tell them nothing about what you've done since you left Santa Cruz, and nothing at all that relates to the Coven, or people in it. I doubt that they'll hassle you too much anyhow." She spoke quickly as the detective came over.

"Okay," he said. "Let's get this show on the road." He turned to Linda. "You two can wait over there, on the benches. And I don't want any more interruptions!"

"Fine," Linda replied calmly. "We expect to have immediate access to them after you're done booking them."

"You can talk to them in their cell in half an hour!" He turned away from her, and picked up a sign from the desk. "Okay, you first," he said to Maggie. "Put this around your neck, and stand up against that wall." Maggie hung the number board around her neck and walked over to the wall. Turning around, she faced back into the room. A moment later a camera flashed. "Now a profile!" he ordered.

* * *

Twenty minutes later, they were together again, this time in a small holding cell, with steel benches welded to the walls on both sides of the room and a foul-smelling toilet standing uncovered at the rear. Light came from an unshielded bulb glaring in the hall outside the cell.

"Well," Linda said, "let's start by dealing with some specifics. First of all, a bail hearing has been set for three o'clock, and I think that we can probably get you released on personal recognizance since you did turn yourselves in. If not, I can't imagine your bail being set any higher than Beckie's, and that was five thousand." Maggie blanched. "But you don't have to put it all up," Linda explained. "People have already offered to put up bail for any Coven members arrested. But, there's a lot that Beckie and I don't know, and that we need for the hearings." She stopped a moment. "Is it all right if I just ask you a few questions?"

Maggie nodded. "Go ahead."

“Mom,” Carol asked uncertainly, “shouldn’t we tell them about the women?”

“What women?” Beckie asked,

“In the gallery,” Carol explained. “Many of the women we’ve cured, and two of the men. We called them on Sunday and asked them to come for support. They’re all prepared to testify if you want them to. I guess there must be thirty of them, all together.”

“In the gallery?” Linda asked in amazement. Carol nodded. “Why, that’s amazing! Do you have a list of their names?”

“No,” Maggie answered. “We were afraid that if we got arrested they’d confiscate the list and use it against us.”

“Can you remember any of their names?” They could. Linda pulled a sheet of paper from her briefcase. “Well, start listing them!” Five minutes later they had eighteen names. “That’ll do just fine,” Linda said. “More than we can deal with today, actually, and we can get the rest of the names afterward.” She returned the sheet to her briefcase. “Now let’s get back to my questions.”

Linda looked at a list she had at the top of a pad of paper. “Tell us about the men,” she said. “All the details that you can, about what you, Carol, shouted down to us earlier. Why do you say it works?”

Maggie took a deep breath and then began. “Well, we were going stir-crazy where we were staying, and decided that there was no use in being in hiding unless we were going to carry on our work, and the only useful thing we felt that we could do was try to think about the question of why it didn’t work on men. So we tried to think up possible explanations of why it didn’t and then modifications of the procedure that would take care of those problems. Well, we came up with a potentially useful modification, and called some of the Coven people and had them try it. That’s how Sue got caught. She was testing the modification.”

“And the man she treated is better?” Beckie asked.

“Totally, I mean, as much as any are.” Maggie paused to decide just what to say. “Look, Sue treated two men with terminal cancer, chosen by the same criteria as the women we’ve treated, and another Coven member treated two more. When I talked to them on Saturday, all four patients had shown the same improvements we’ve seen in women. Until then, we’d never seen any improvement in the men we’ve treated. I can only assume that the procedure we developed really does the trick.”

“But what did you do?” Beckie asked. “What was it that we weren’t doing right?”

“Well, I’m not really sure exactly what the problem was. I mean it seems some biochemical difference makes the unmodified procedure work with women but not men. I don’t have any idea why the original method doesn’t work with men.” Maggie seemed hesitant to say more.

“But what’s the change?” Beckie demanded. “What’s the difference between how you treat the men and the women?”

“Well.” Maggie looked down toward her feet.

“We’re not telling!” Carol blurted out.

“What?!” Beckie shouted. “Maggie, what does she mean you’re not telling?”

“Look, Beckie. It was your idea that we should form cells, keep our results to ourselves, and not have everyone in the Coven know everything that’s going on.” She looked up at Beckie. “I think you were right. And until we get the legal proceedings sorted out, the fewer people who know any important information the better for us all. Carol and I have decided that we won’t tell other Coven members how to cure men until our trials are settled satisfactorily.”

“But me? You’re not even going to tell me?”

Maggie smiled just a bit. “I’m afraid not, Beckie, not even you.”

Chapter Forty-Nine

“THIS court is now in session!” The judge rapped with his gavel and all sat.

Linda approached the bench. “Your Honor, with the permission of the District Attorney, I would like the cross-examination of Dr. Krueger temporarily suspended so that we might receive testimony from Ms. Margaret Stone. As you know, it is the contention of the District Attorney that Ms. Stone is in fact the founder and head of the so-called California Coven, and, as such, is guilty of practicing medicine without a license, conspiracy to do so, and illegal flight; however we feel that testimony from her at this time would be of the utmost relevance to this trial.”

The judge turned to the DA. “Mr. Georges, are you in concurrence with this request?”

“I am, Your Honor.”

“Very well. Is Ms. Stone present in the court?”

“She’s in the witness room now, Your Honor,” Linda replied.

“Then call Margaret Stone to the stand.”

Maggie was escorted from the witness room by a policewoman. Since bond had not yet been set, she was still in custody. As she sat in the box she scanned the galley. Beckie turned, too, for the first time. She was surprised to find the faces of several women she had treated over the past two months. All eyes were on Maggie, however, and no one returned her smiles.

“Could you tell the court your name?” Linda had begun her questioning, and Beckie turned to listen.

“Margaret Stone.”

“Your occupation?”

“Midwife.”

“And your place of employment?”

“The Santa Cruz Birth Clinic.”

“Ms. Stone, do you currently work at the Clinic?”

“Well, no. I’m on a leave of absence.”

“How long have you been on leave?”

“About three months.”

“And what have you been doing during that time?”

Maggie took a deep breath. “I’ve been working for the California Coven.”

“Can you tell me what you did in that capacity?”

“Yes.” She paused, and then continued, “I coordinated and participated in the curing of cancer in terminally ill cancer patients.”

“So you and the other members of this organization administered cancer treatments to patients, is that correct?”

“Yes, it is.”

“Ms. Stone, were you in any way involved in the founding of this organization?”

“Yes. I guess you could say that I founded it.”

“How so?”

“Well, I’m the one who originally formulated the potion, the medication that cures the cancer, and I asked some other women to work with me in testing it. It’s from this group that the Coven was founded.”

“Could you tell me how many women with cancer you personally have treated?”

“Fourteen.”

“And of these, how many are, to the best of your knowledge, cured now?”

“Thirteen.”

“And all thirteen had been terminally ill with cancer?”

“Yes, they were.”

“Can you tell me what ‘terminally ill’ means?”

“It means that the patient is going to die from the illness.”

“And yet these thirteen did not?”

“No. They were cured.”

“But how can this be if they were terminally ill?”

Maggie paused for a second, honestly confused. “Well, when you say that someone is terminally ill, that means that you expect them, based on all your previous experience, to die from the illness.”

“And who defined these women as terminally ill?”

“Their doctors.”

“Doctors? These were men and women with M.D. degrees?”

“Why, yes. Most of them with specialties in oncology— in cancer treatment.”

“And they expected these women to die?”

“Yes.”

“Doesn’t that seem unreasonable, since you were able to cure them?”

“Well, no. The M.D.s didn’t know about my—our—cure. Before I discovered the treatment there was no cure for these people. They would all have died.”

“So, you would say that you saved their lives?”

“Yes, I would say that. I did.”

“I see.” Linda walked back to her bench and picked up a copy of that morning’s San Francisco Chronicle.

“The treatment which you used on these women, does it work on men?”

“No, it doesn’t.”

“Why not?”

Maggie paused. “I don’t know for certain, but I think it’s a result of a difference between the biochemistries of men and women. Just what difference, I don’t know.”

“I see.” Linda paused and looked at the paper. “Do you know Susan Tiemann?”

“Yes, I do.”

“Is she a member of the California Coven?”

“Yes, she is.”

“Ms. Stone, are you aware that Susan Tiemann was arrested yesterday on charges of treating a male cancer patient?”

“Yes, I am.”

“Didn’t she know that the medication which you had devised does not work on men?”

“But that’s not what she used. Sue used a modified potion, one that we hoped would work on men!”

“A modified potion?”

“Yes, it was, it was treated differently, in a way that we hoped would make it work for men.”

“So Ms. Tiemann was testing a newly formulated medication on this man?”

“Yes, she was”

“And how many men have been treated with this modified potion?”

“Four.”

“And do you know the results of these tests?”

“Yes, it works.”

“How do you know?”

“Because all four patients have shown marked improvement. The pain, which in some cases had continued without relief for as much as a year, has in all four cases disappeared completely, and done so exactly along the timetable that we have seen when we treat women.”

“Then you’re positive that it works on men also?”

Maggie hesitated. “Well, no, not positive. We haven’t tested it on enough men. Four cases is just not enough to be positive.”

“Well why haven’t you tested it on more men?”

“Because we keep getting arrested.” A spurt of laughter sounded from the gallery.

“Thank you, Ms. Stone.” Linda turned to the judge. “No more questions, Your Honor.” Turning to the D.A. she added, “Your witness.”

Georges approached the witness stand slowly, looking down at his pad of notes as he did so. “Mrs. Stone, where have you been for the last month?”

“In hiding,” Maggie replied.

“Where?”

“In Palo Alto .”

“Why?”

“Because I didn’t think they would look for me there.”

“No,” he said, “why were you in hiding?”

“Oh. To avoid arrest.”

“Arrest for what?”

“For curing people of cancer.” Maggie said defiantly. Another ripple of laughter rolled through the gallery.

“Were those the charges?” Georges asked sarcastically.

“No. The charges were ‘practicing medicine without a license.’”

“And were you practicing medicine without a license?”

“That seems to be a moot point, but I do not believe that I was doing anything wrong.”

“But you were treating cancer patients, critically ill people, giving them a medication, what you have referred to as a potion, which is not recognized by the medical establishment as having any medicinal value, and you were doing this while not having a degree as a medical doctor. Is that correct?”

“Pretty much so.”

“Not totally so?” Georges pushed.

“No.”

“What part isn’t correct?”

“The medical establishment hasn’t taken a stand one way or another on the value of my potion, and the only individual with a medical doctors degree who has commented on the potion is Dr. Krueger, who has testified that it is a very valuable medicine indeed.”

“But it is not a generally recognized treatment, it has not been approved by the F.D.A. for general use, or even for testing, and there have been no scientific papers published on its efficacy—isn’t this all true?”

“Yes, it is.”

“Mrs. Stone, don’t you find it ironic that with the government spending billions of dollars on cancer research, with many of this nation’s finest scientists devoting their whole lives to finding a cure for cancer—don’t you find it at least ironic that you should discover a cure for cancer in your spare time at home?”

Maggie smiled for the first time since taking the stand. “Yes, Mr. Georges, I find it very ironic.”

Georges began to pace in front of the witness box. He was far from delighted with the way the questioning was going. Stopping again in front of the box, he asked, “How did you discover this cure, could you tell us that?”

“Well, yes.” Maggie sat up a bit straighter. It was the first question that Georges asked her that she had anticipated. “My mother, Ann Stone, has had cancer for several years, and more recently had begun to fail badly and was near death. Out of a sense of frustration at being unable to help her, I decided to

explore the vast range of unorthodox cancer cures to decide if any showed evidence of being worthwhile. But I couldn't find one that seemed to be anything more than a quack cure." She paused. "You see, I don't think that medical researchers have a corner on wisdom, and I don't think that their approach to finding cures is the only one. I do believe that it is a good approach, and often an effective approach. But I felt that others could also be of use."

"Nowadays we have a strong prejudice against folk remedies and old wives' tales, but those treatments and theories were evolved in much the same way as modern scientists go about their work. The practitioners would find something that seemed to have an effect on an illness and then they would test it on large numbers of people. The disadvantage was their poor statistical methods—they didn't use control groups and things like that. But their advantage was time. While researchers today try to test a new drug in just a few months or years, folk medicines were tested, sometimes, over many generations. That way, you see, they could make up for their bad statistical methods.

"But all the new, unorthodox treatments for cancer had the worst of both worlds, bad statistics and only a handful of cases, and personally, I didn't believe half their data. In fact, I suspect that many of them were out-and-out frauds."

Georges interrupted her. "But that doesn't tell us how you came up with your cure, Mrs. Stone."

"Well, I was just getting to that," Maggie replied indignantly. "What happened is, I said to myself, 'Well, what about all those old folk remedies. Did they ever work or not?' You see, I couldn't imagine that all the medicines of the 1500s and 1600s were totally without effect, or they wouldn't have survived. So I researched old books, looking for approaches to diseases like cancer, and it was in a number of these that I stumbled across what was said to be a cure for cancer." She stopped suddenly. "So that's how I came up with it."

Georges smiled and turned toward the jury. "So you found your cure for cancer in a two-hundred-year-old book?"

"I don't remember when the book was written, but the original recipe—that's what it was called—was much older than that, over three hundred years old."

"So you found a three- or four-hundred-year-old cure for cancer." He smiled again. "You thought it just might work?"

"Yes," Maggie said, "I thought it just—" He had taken the words out of her mouth, but she finished them anyway. "That it just might work."

"And this is the potion that you claimed just a minute ago cured thirteen terminally ill cancer patients?" He didn't have to fake his incredulity this time. "You really thought that a four-hundred-year-old folk remedy could cure a disease that they didn't even know existed back then?"

"But the book said it was for cancer!"

Georges turned to the jury, and then back to Maggie. "This is amazing, absolutely amazing!"

"And your 'preparation of the patient,' working the patient into a frenzy before you give him, or her, the 'potion'—this was described hundreds of years ago, also?"

Maggie hesitated before answering. "No."

“No?” Georges asked. “This most amazing part of your procedure, this outrageous demand that the patient be near hysterical before you are willing to give him the medication, this part of the procedure is of your own design?”

“Yes,” Maggie answered slowly, “you see—”

“No, Mrs. Stone, I must admit I don’t see. I can see why faith healers, who wander from coast to coast taking the money of the poor, the credulous, the aged, and the infirm—I can see why they demand a highly emotional setting for their treatments. I understand how they use manufactured hysteria to cover up their own inabilities. But I can’t understand how you, a woman who claims to have had medical training, who claims she can cure cancer in thirteen out of fourteen cases, I don’t understand why you would need to do this.”

“It’s complicated.”

“I’m sure it must be, Mrs. Stone. But perhaps we can work our way through it. Shall we try?” Georges began to pace in front of the stand. “For example, Mrs. Stone, have you always employed this procedure? When you first tried this potion of yours on your own mother, for instance, did you drive her into an emotional frenzy?”

“It’s not really a frenzy,” Maggie tried to explain.

“I don’t care what you call it!” Georges shouted. Then he dropped his voice to a near-whisper. “Mrs. Stone, did you use this emotional aspect of the treatment on your mother?”

“Yes,” Maggie answered. “Well, no, I mean—”

“Maybe you don’t remember, Mrs. Stone?” Georges offered sarcastically.

“No.” Maggie tried to pull herself together. “I’ll explain. The first time I treated Mom, I gave her the potion without first psyching her up—that’s what we call it—but it didn’t work. Nothing happened from the treatment that I could see at all. So, after giving the matter some thought, I decided that maybe ‘psyching up’ would help, that maybe that was necessary for the potion to work.”

Georges nodded his head sympathetically. “I think that maybe I understand now. Perhaps. Mrs. Stone, in your worry and anxiety over your mother’s condition, you tried, as so many others have, to find some unorthodox treatment for her illness, in the frantic hope that it might help. This much you’ve said yourself. But because of your training in science and medicine you couldn’t just fly to any quack cure; you knew that they had been tested and that they didn’t work, so you tried finding an old, lost cure. Again, so much you have said yourself. It was almost a search for a fountain of youth.

“And then you found this potion, this recipe, in a moldy old book, and your hopes were fired up, and you cally derived cure that could cure your mother. So you copied ‘the recipe’ and you took it home and you tried it and it failed. Yes, all this you’ve admitted yourself in your testimony.

“But now we have the final key, the point that until now I haven’t understood. For, you gave your mother the medication and it failed—that must have been so painful for you, Mrs. Stone. You must have built up your hopes, your beliefs, until you truly believed that this musty old recipe would work. And then it failed.” He shook his head and turned toward the jury. “And when her treatment failed, she turned to mysticism, to religion, trying frantically to salvage some hope from despair. Perhaps we would do the

same. She retained the medication, her faith in science, but the crux of her treatment now became faith. It became a potion, not a medication, and she formed a group and called it a Coven, a group of witches.”

“But it worked!” Maggie interrupted, her voice shaky and quiet. “It worked!”

Georges nodded his head. “Or so you felt.” He picked up a file folder from his table. “I have here Dr. Krueger’s file on your mother, Ann Stone. It says, and I quote, ‘Mrs. Stone, your mother, appears, based on these tests, to have gone through a spontaneous remission of the classical type.’ Interestingly, there are some further notes here, that aren’t quite so clear. Perhaps you could help me, Mrs. Stone. It says, ‘daughter feels she cured mother.’ Did you tell him that at the time, Mrs. Stone?”

“No,” Maggie said. “My mother sort of let it slip out we were both so excited when the X-ray results came back. . . .”

“So,” Georges interrupted, “Dr. Krueger got some inkling that you thought you had done something that cured her, is that right?”

“Yes it is.”

“Now, Mrs. Stone, that line I read you, the one about the daughter thinking she had cured her mother, there’s a black line drawn through that sentence crossing that sentence out, and below is written, and I quote, ‘Foolish religious mysticism, exclamation mark, exclamation mark. Can you tell us, Mrs. Stone, why he might have written this?’”

“Oh!” Maggie let out a nervous laugh. “You see, I didn’t want him to know about the cure.” She pointed to Beckie, who was sitting next to Linda Coles at the defense table. “Beckie and I decided that until we had run more tests, we didn’t want to let anyone in the medical profession know. So I made up a story to tell him, to throw him off the track, and so that’s why he wrote that down.”

“And just what was that silly story. Mrs. Stone.”

“That I had gone up and down the coast and prayed for my mother at all of the old missions. I think I said I lit candles to each of the saints, or something outrageous like that.” She smiled.

Georges smiled too. “Did you?”

“What?” Maggie was confused by the question.

“Did you go up and down the coast, lighting candles at all the old missions, hoping that this would help your mother?”

“No! I told you, it was just a silly story that I made up, to throw Dr. Krueger off my trail.”

“And you thought that he would find that less believable than what you have said you did do? You thought that if you told him that you grabbed the recipe for a magic potion of the 1500s, combined it with religious mysticism, and gave it to your mother, that then he would have known that you really did have a cure for cancer? Is that why you made up that ‘silly little story’?”

“It’s not religious mysticism,” Maggie insisted, still a bit confused.

“Then what is it, Mrs. Stone?”

“It’s—well, it’s complicated.”

Georges turned and looked over the gallery. Then he looked at his watch. “Very well, Mrs. Stone, we have the rest of the afternoon. In your own words, at your own speed, tell me, tell the jury, if it isn’t religious mysticism, what is it?”

* * *

Maggie took a deep breath, then exhaled slowly. “It’s complicated,” she repeated, “because there are so many different threads that are pulled together into it. I—I don’t know where to start.” She paused, and for once Georges said nothing. “A while ago you asked me ‘wasn’t it ironic’ that I had come up with a cure for cancer when so many others had failed.” She paused again.

“You see, if I was going to come up with a cure, and so many others had tried, with so much more knowledge and expertise then it could only be because they were going about it all the wrong way. The cure would have to be some simple thing that for one reason or another they weren’t able to see.

“And that’s why I researched old cures. The women who practiced folk medicine weren’t fools. Today everyone believes they were merely superstitious. But those are vicious lies spread to enhance the power and reputation of modern doctors, and used back then by men when they were first trying to usurp the role of healer from women. And to prove that they were better than women at healing, early doctors vilified the ways of those women, said that the women’s ways couldn’t possibly work, and when they did work, used the cures as evidence that the women were witches! All this is fact that I’m telling you, it’s accepted in history books. I’m not making it up, or reinterpreting what others have said. This is true!

“But I went a step further, I said to myself that whenever one culture conquers another—and that is in essence what happened—that they denigrate the culture of the conquered, they label it primitive or sacrilegious or Communist, or whatever the opposite of their own culture is seen as. And when the more powerful culture does that it rejects the good as well as the evil in the conquered culture. Consequently, it can no longer learn from the wisdom of the conquered.

“Well, that is exactly what happened when men began taking over the medical profession in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. They rejected and denied the wisdom and knowledge of women healers. So at first that is what I thought might be the key, the simple thing that all of those doctors and scientists would be blind to, that they would overlook—the wisdom of the old women healers—and that is why I looked for an old folk remedy.”

She paused a moment before continuing. “There’s another reason why I find my current situation ‘ironic’.” She looked nervously at Beckie, but continued. “Over the last several weeks, while Beckie—Ms. McPhee—has been on trial here, a lot of sensational rubbish was published in some of the papers about our calling ourselves a coven, suggesting that we’re all witches just a minute ago, you used that word, ‘witches,’ too.” She glanced at Beckie again, uncertainly. “You see, that’s what male doctors did in the 1600s to attack women who practiced the healing arts. And the real irony is that one of my ancestors, a woman physician named Margaret Jones, was—because of her medical successes—tried as a witch in this country, in the mid-1600s. So here I am, 350 years later, being charged for all practical purposes with the same crime—the crime of opposing the male medical establishment. But you see, Mr. Georges, there never were any witches, were there?”

“That’s all very interesting, Mrs. Stone, but it doesn’t really get at my question, does it? Perhaps this explains why you tried a treatment from four hundred years ago, but the cure you found didn’t work? And

then you came up with this—what I call near-hysteria—that you say makes the difference, and that has nothing to do with the old cures, has it? Because that’s what I asked you about, to explain why you used this emotional pitch as part of your treatment.”

Maggie shook her head vehemently. “I know, I know. But the subject is complicated, I told you that.”

“But could you perhaps speak just a bit more directly to—”

“I know!” Maggie insisted. “I’m explaining it. Because, as you said, it didn’t work, and I had to ask myself why not, and that’s when I thought of the emotional aspect.” She looked to see if Georges was going to interrupt.

“Go ahead then. Try to confine yourself to that aspect, please.”

“I am.” She paused to gather her thoughts, “I had to ask myself why the medicine hadn’t worked, and I had to ask myself again whether any folk remedies worked or was it all a fraud, and I answered myself, ‘No, they weren’t frauds, because they would have died out over the generations if they were.’ So I asked myself what I was doing differently. Why had the recipe worked in the past? What was it that I wasn’t seeing—like the scientists and the doctors—what was the subtle difference that even I was overlooking?” She hesitated before continuing. “And the answer I came up with was faith.” She turned to face Georges. “You see, you can look at faith from two different perspectives. You can look on it as a mystical religious belief that is supposed to bring down the hand of God or something like that, or you can look on it as a psychological state of mind.

“Forget for a minute what the faith is in, whether it’s in a God or in one’s luck or one’s cleverness or strength or whatever. Look at the essence of faith, and you will find that there are certain features that all these different kinds of faith have in common. There’s a unifying mental state and physical state. Clinically, you see increased sympathetic-nervous-system activity, similar to the fight-or-flight reflex. But you see other things, too.” She paused to collect her thoughts.

“Do you know what the placebo effect is?” she asked Georges.

“No,” he replied, a little uncertainly.

“It was a scientific anomaly for a long time, a phenomenon discovered by doctors and scientists for which they had no explanation. Most simply stated, if you give patients with intractable pain—pain with a clear physiological basis—if you give such patients pills containing nothing but sugar and tell the patients that the pills contain a powerful new painkiller, about half of the patients taking the sugar pills will report marked reduction in the amount of pain that they are experiencing. Well, for a long time scientists gave their standard explanation for things they didn’t understand, that said it was all in the patients’ heads—the pill obviously couldn’t cause a reduction in the amount of pain.

“And the researchers would have left it there if pain wasn’t such a terrible problem. Because finally they had to say, ‘It doesn’t matter if it’s just in the patient’s head, because that’s all that pain is anyhow, something in your head and if giving them sugar pills and convincing them that the pills will work means that the patients will actually experience less pain, well, that’s all any painkiller is supposed to do.’

“For years this phenomenon lay at rest in psychology texts, a curious quirk of some human minds. It wasn’t discussed in physiology texts or in pharmacology tests because it didn’t fit in with what they knew of how the body works. Or at least not until their knowledge of the body improved.

“It was in the late ’70s that researchers discovered a chemical in the brain, which they named endorphin, meaning a morphinelike compound endogenous to the body, which was as potent a painkiller as morphine itself, and whose release into the body was controlled by the mind. And when they went back and tested those people who reported diminished pain when given sugar pills, scientists discovered that they were releasing endorphins into their body.” She paused again to reinforce what she had said. “When the patients thought they had been given a painkiller that could cure their pain, when they just thought this, when they had faith in this their minds and their bodies took that faith, and through the mysterious workings of the brain translated that into a signal to cause the physical release into their own bodies of, possibly, the most potent painkiller ever found. This is scientific fact, accepted by doctors and scientists and the A.M.A. and the National Academy of Science.

“And I realized, Mr. Georges, that this element of a cure, which you describe so scornfully, is the one element of those ancient cures that everyone, including myself, had dismissed as absurd. It must be a terribly deep-seated fear in us, Mr. Georges, that even now, years after scientists have conclusively proven that in at least one case faith can cure, that even now we refuse to see it.

“You painted such a pathetic picture of me, Mr. Georges, sinking into hopelessness and then reaching out to mysticism, but in fact, you couldn’t have been further from the truth. What I did was the opposite of that, Mr. Georges, and infinitely harder to do. I came to an understanding that what I was about to try was not mysticism but science, that what I was doing was not being done out of a sense of hopelessness, driving me into religious fervor, but rather that I was rejecting the religious superstition of this scientific age that labels certain concepts heresy, and that I was opening myself to a possible truth which, as all truths eventually do, would transcend the superstitions of our age.

“But all this only led me to have the confidence to contemplate a heretical hypothesis. It was merely an idea to test, and it was only after I did test the hypothesis and found that it was correct, that I told others of it, and decided to carry out further tests. You know the rest, Mr. Georges. That is why we are here. Except I’m afraid, Mr. Georges, that your own acceptance of the superstitions of our age prevents you from understanding the simple results of those experiments. We can cure cancer.”

Maggie sank back into her chair. She felt calm, at peace with herself in the absolute silence of the courtroom. It was several seconds before Georges was able to respond, and when he did his voice lacked the confidence that it had shown earlier. “Mrs. Stone, it is clear that you do believe in your cure, that you believe that it can cure cancer, but I must ask you, where is your proof? This is a court of law, Mrs. Stone, and although we are very much interested in people’s opinions—that is why I asked you to explain your use of this psychological treatment—we must, in the end, rely on facts, not opinions. So I must ask you, where is your proof that the treatment cures cancer?”

Maggie sat a moment. Then, slowly, she rose from her chair and raised her right arm, pointing to the gallery. “There,” she said in a loud, firm voice, “there is my proof!”

Every eye in the jury turned to follow her finger. A woman in her sixties, with short white hair and deep creases in her face, rose to her feet in the gallery. “I am her proof, I am her living proof.” And as she stood, first one and then another and another rose to their feet until fully thirty people were standing, all bearing on their faces the signs of their long, painful struggles with cancer.

In a voice so soft that it was barely audible, Maggie said, “Yes, these are my proof!”

Chapter Fifty

THERE was a party that evening at Maggie’s, Beckie was present, and Sue Tiemann, the two lawyers,

Linda Coles and Liz Jason, Ann and Carol. It was the first Maggie had seen of Ann since going into hiding, and she was ecstatic at the improvement in her mother's condition. Ann hadn't looked so healthy in years.

The group had just finished watching the evening news when Linda opened a bottle of champagne. "To the Coven." Glasses clinked. "I think we've won it today," she said. "Between Bill Krueger's testimony and yours, Maggie, even a conviction is bound to bring no sentence. The news media have gone wild. I think you may even have convinced old Georges." She laughed aloud. "I've never seen him so totally at a loss for words. I think he was convinced you were going to make a fool of yourself, and instead you turned the trial around."

And so it seemed she had. The next day, Georges continued his cross-examination of Krueger, but he couldn't find a single hole in the doctor's support for the medical validity of Maggie's cure. By the end of the day, Linda had begun calling witness after witness who had been treated by the Coven and been cured. After the second of these Georges even stopped cross-examining.

Liz Jason was waiting for them when they came out of court. "Things are jumping. Pat White has a meeting of the Senate Committee set for tomorrow morning, and she's going to push for a vote against repeal of the licenses of N.M.A. Members."

Maggie and Beckie turned to each other, each about to speak. "No, wait," Beckie said. "I have to be in court tomorrow, but you don't, Maggie. Go with Liz. Go to the hearings."

"But I couldn't desert you like that, Beckie!"

"But you can't desert the rest of the N.M.A., either. It's obvious that your testimony yesterday convinced White that she can push the vote through. So it's you who should be there, visible, at the hearings tomorrow."

"But—"

"She's right," Liz said. "It's obviously your decision. Maggie, but your presence could make the difference between passage and rejection."

Maggie looked around for support. "How can I leave Beckie?"

"You're not leaving me. You're going to those hearing, for me. Come on, Maggie. tomorrow isn't going to be a hard day for me at the trial. If anything, I feel Sorry that you'll miss the fun."

"Which is not to say," Liz pointed out, "that these bearings might not turn out to be a lot of fun themselves."

"All right," Maggie relented. "I'll go. But we damn well better win!"

Linda gave her a big smile. "I think we're going to win on all fronts."

* * *

The next day was almost anticlimactic. Senator McCardle, correctly sensing the mood in the state, didn't even show up for the hearings. Pat White recommended that the resolution to revoke the licenses of N.M.A. members be killed in committee. There seemed no opposition at all. Just before the vote, White

spoke. "I think that what we are saying, as we vote to kill this resolution, is that there is still room in California for differences of opinion, that we are not going to force one viewpoint, one attitude on all people. Killing this bill does not give the members of the Natural Midwives Association carte blanche to act however they please. But it does say that where honest, competent medical opinions disagree, we are not about to decide these medical issues on a political level. We have not, since the start of these hearings, heard any testimony that the members of the N.M.A. are not properly carrying out their primary duty to provide good, safe medical assistance to women giving birth. So long as this remains the case, these midwives should be confident that their practices shall not be meddled in by the state.

The vote was unanimous, with only McCardle absent.

* * *

The rest of Wednesday, and Thursday, were a blur to Maggie. The entire N.M.A. had turned out in San Francisco for a celebration Wednesday evening. As much as anything else, it seemed a premature celebration of the final decision of the court case. While Beckie and Carol basked in their popularity, Maggie couldn't help feeling a little uncomfortable about the whole affair. After a month in hiding, groups of people were more than she could cope with.

Friday morning the case went to the jury, but deliberations took only an hour. As the jury filed back into the room Beckie sat tensely by Linda's side.

"Have you reached a decision?" the judge asked.

"We have," the foreman replied.

"What is your verdict?"

"We find the defendant, Rebecca McPhee, innocent of all charges."

Cheers rose up from the gallery as Beckie and Linda threw their arms around each other in joy and relief.

The judge pounded his gavel, demanding silence. "The jury so ruling, I wish only to say that I believe that justice has been done." He turned to Linda. "Ms. Coles, I understand that you are counsel for Susan Tiemann and Margaret Stone as well, is that correct?"

Linda rose to her feet. "It is, Your Honor."

The judge smiled at her. "I will entertain motions next Monday that charges against them be dropped. in the meantime, court is adjourned." He brought his gavel down one last time, turned, and left the courtroom.

As a cheer broke out from the gallery, Maggie and Beckie found themselves surrounded by well-wishers and members of the press. But within a minute Maggie had managed to sneak out of the circle, and found Carol and Ann.

They stood outside the circle, watching the fury of activity. "Well," Ann finally said. "What do you think?"

Maggie smiled and wiped a tear from her cheek. "Too many things, all at once. We've won, both the

N.M.A. and the Coven, and life looks clearer ahead than it has for a long, long time. And Carol's grown up. I know that now." She hugged Carol, who was vainly trying to hold back her tears. "She doesn't seem so small, or young, or helpless anymore."

And I think that we don't have to pass the name Margaret on any longer. I think that finally Margaret Jones. can rest in peace."

AFTERWORD

The History of New England from 1630 to 1649, by John Winthrop, First Governour of the Colony of the Massachusetts Bay ,” relates the following.

June 4, 1648. At this court one Margaret Jones of Charlestown was indicted and found guilty of witchcraft, and hanged for it. The evidence against her was, 1. that she was found to have such a malignant touch, as many persons. (men, women, and children) whom she stroked or touched with any affection or displeasure, or, etc., were taken with deafness, or vomiting, or other violent pains or sickness, 2. she practising physic, and her medicines being such things as (by her own confession) were harmless, as aniseed, liquors, etc., yet had extraordinary violent effects, 3. she would use to tell such as would not make use of her physic, that they would never be healed, and accordingly their diseases and hurts continued, with relapse against the ordinary course, and beyond the apprehension of all physicians and surgeons, 4. some things which she foretold came to pass accordingly; other things she could tell of (as secret speeches, etc.) which she, had no ordinary means to come to the knowledge of, 5. she had (upon search) an apparent teat in her secret parts as fresh as if it had newly sucked, and after it had been scanned, upon a forced search, that was withered, and another began on the opposite side, 6. in the prison, in the clear day-light, there was seen in her arms, she sitting on the floor, and her clothes up, etc., a little child, which ran from her into another room, and the officer following it, it was vanished. The like child was seen in two other places to which she had relation; and one maid that saw it, felt sick upon it, and was cured by the said Margaret, who used means to be employed to that end. Her behavior at her trial was very intemperate, lying notoriously, and railing upon the jury and witnesses, etc. and in the like distemper she died. The same day and hour she was executed, there was a very great tempest at Connecticut , which blew down many trees, etc.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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