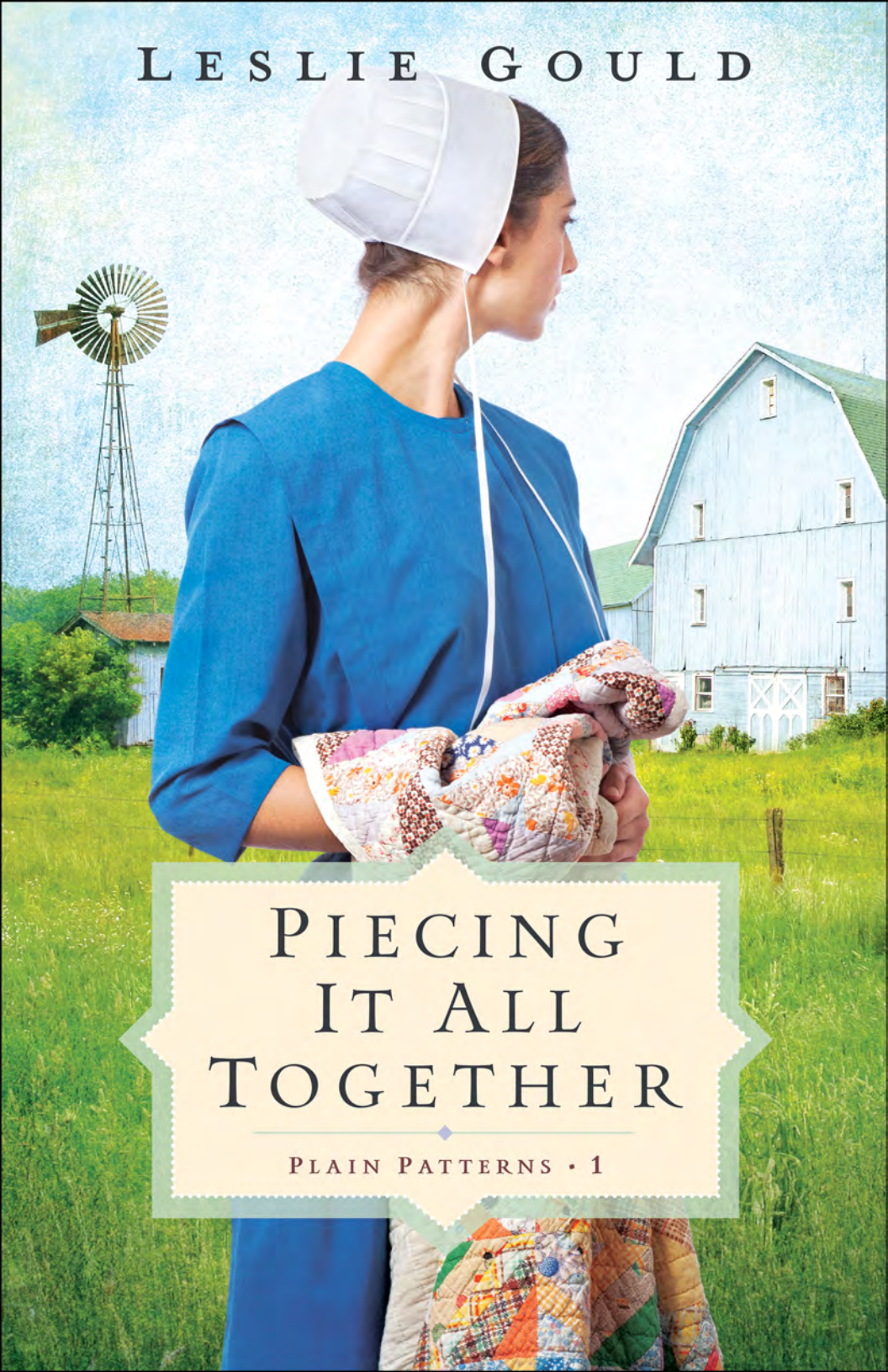


LESLIE GOULD

A woman in a blue dress and white bonnet stands in a green field, holding a colorful quilt. In the background, there is a blue barn and a windmill. The scene is set against a light blue sky.

PIECING
IT ALL
TOGETHER

PLAIN PATTERNS • 1



PIECING
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TOGETHER

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PLAIN PATTERNS • 1

LESLIE GOULD



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For Sallie Houston Fisher, my beloved aunt
who has kept our family stories alive
for generations still to come.

*Religion that God our Father accepts as pure
and faultless is this: to look after orphans
and widows in their distress and to keep
oneself from being polluted by the world.*

James 1:27 NIV

PROLOGUE

Jane Berger

December 23, 2016

Nappanee, Indiana

The clock in the quilt shop chimed six times as Jane Berger's hands rested on her manual typewriter. She still had bolts of fabric and books of patterns to put away, plus a tray of coffee cups to wash.

Outside, the snow fell as if God were sifting sugar over the Indiana landscape. She needed to get home and start a fire in her wood stove, but first she had to finish her monthly column for the *Nappanee News*.

She glanced at her notes on the origins of the town. The first settlers to the region were the Miami Nation, but they were forced out by the Iroquois in the 1700s. Soon after, the Potawatomi Nation settled in the area. By the time the first of the Amish and Mennonites arrived in the early 1840s, the Potawatomi had been gone for a few years, sent to Kansas on the "Trail of Death."

Jane shivered. She didn't want to touch on that particular story, not now. What happened to the Native Americans was so shameful that she found it heartbreaking to even think about, although she vividly remembered stories from her childhood that examined the topic in depth. Someday she would need to pass down the story about a particular Potawatomi woman to just the right person.

But she wouldn't think about that now. She'd concentrate on the story for Arleta, a woman who came to Jane's quilting circle from time to time.

Arleta had moved back to the area a year ago after marrying a local bachelor. The woman had been a widow and had two children in their teens, who'd grown up in nearby Newbury Township. Arleta's previous years spent in the Nappanee area hadn't been happy ones, and although she was trying to stay faithful, she feared the same unhappiness now, for herself and her children.

"The past is never dead" was something Jane had heard from time to time. *Jah*, the past was always with us. She firmly believed that. But she also believed that nothing ever stayed the same. Sometimes life changed for the better. Sometimes for the worse.

The town of Nappanee wasn't platted and named until December 1874, when the railroad arrived. By then, Jane's ancestors had been farming on their land, where she currently sat, for over thirty years. She was a fifth-generation descendant of those original Amish settlers.

The word *Indiana* meant "land of the Indians" and the word *Napanee* seemed to be a Native American word too, although the meaning wasn't clear. The spelling was later changed to *Nappanee*.

She'd attended an English elementary school as a child,

and she remembered learning that Nappanee was the only city name in the United States with four letters of the alphabet that were all repeated twice. She'd always loved saying the word—*Nappanee*—because of the way it rolled off her tongue.

Jane continued writing, explaining how the land Nappanee now sat on had once been a marsh. She wrote that when the railroad came through, a group of people had a vision for a town, and they built it, structure by structure. The townspeople had cared about education, industry, and shipping crops to a wider market. Good had come, for all of them, from change.

She prayed for the same sort of change to come to Arleta's life. She prayed that the women in the quilting circle would be a blessing to Arleta and her family too.

Jane prayed extra hard, knowing the woman was married to Vernon Wenger. He was a harsh man with a quick temper. She prayed for Arleta's teenaged children too. Both were on their *Rumschpringe*. Running around was a tricky predicament with Vernon as a stepfather.

Jane left her prayers with God and cleared her mind from her present-day thoughts. Then she continued to write as quickly as she could, the keys clicking, one after the other, creating words, sentences, and paragraphs. Sometimes Jane wrote about a place, such as the town of Nappanee. Other times she wrote about a person—a pioneer or another resident of the area from a different time who had made a difference in the community. There was nothing Jane enjoyed more than writing, than piecing the past together. Although quilting was a close second.

Once again, Jane became so caught up in the past that it was as if she was living there. She waited at Locke Station, thankful her family could now ship out their onions, potatoes, and mint to a larger market. She stepped onto the platform and looked down the new train tracks, anticipating all the changes

the railroad would bring. Change might not be a typical topic for an Amish woman, but Jane ended the column with that image of change coming to Nappanee anyway.

The clock struck the half hour, and she rolled the second sheet of paper out of the typewriter, stacked the two together, and then slipped them into a manila envelope. She addressed it from memory, put on the correct number of stamps, and left it on the desk as she took off her reading glasses and let them dangle from the string around her neck. Then, she put away the bolts of fabric—mostly solid colors. Maroon and sapphire blue. Black and forest green, though there were a few modest floral prints.

Besides offering her stories for the entire community, she was especially blessed that so many of her customers appreciated her historical knowledge. Not only did it allow her to share her stories verbally, but it also encouraged customers to come to her with ideas for new stories, ones she hadn't heard of before but was happy to research.

She washed the mugs at the sink at the back of the shop, looking out the window into the darkness as she did. At least she didn't have far to travel to reach her little home. It was just across the lane.

After she slipped on her warm coat, pulled on her gloves, and secured her bonnet, she picked up the envelope off the desk. As she stepped out into the blast of the icy wind and swirling snow, she held on tightly to the envelope until she reached the mailbox. With another prayer for Arleta and her family, Jane slid the envelope inside the box and raised the flag.

Another story in the mail, ready for her readers.

She'd lived on her family farm her entire life, all sixty-three years. For the last thirty, she'd lived in the *Dawdi Haus* on the other side of the lane. Her brother had built the large quilt

shop four years ago. Before that, she'd run the business from the front room of her house.

She was grateful for the life she had: the column for the paper, the quilt shop, the women who shopped there. Jah, God was good.

As Jane reached her front porch, she turned toward the shop and wondered about the next column she'd write. She prayed silently for a story and then for the next woman the Lord would send her way. One who needed the sort of perspective only a historical tale could provide, who needed to seek the Lord's will in her life.

Make me an instrument of your truth, Jane prayed. It was a desire that stayed consistent, past or present.

Perhaps there were some things that stayed the same, after all.

CHAPTER 1

Savannah Mast

*December 23, 2016
Oakland, California*

The countdown was on. In one week, Ryan and I would be at our wedding rehearsal at Grace Cathedral, getting ready for our New Year's Eve wedding the next day. Dreams did come true. I'd soon be Savannah Woodward instead of Savannah Mast.

I pushed away from my desk and stepped to my office window, gazing out toward the Bay Bridge. It wasn't that I had a view, just a glimpse of the ribbon of asphalt lanes suspended over the water. Just enough to encourage me to leave and head to San Francisco for the rest of the afternoon. It was the day before Christmas Eve, and my boss, Mr. William Hayes, had already left an hour ago.

I worked as a manager for a nonprofit health company, mostly guiding my team in their attempts to control costs, while Ryan worked across the Bay at the medical center as an

administrator in the information systems department. He was on track, according to some, to become a vice president of the organization.

After stuffing my wedding to-do list in my bag, I sent Ryan a text. *On my way!* Then I slipped into my raincoat and straightened it over my skirt and blouse. As the heels of my boots clicked down the hallway, my phone pinged.

Wait, Ryan had replied.

What did he mean? Surely, he wasn't having a last-minute meeting.

Why? I texted back.

Something's come up. . . .

The ellipses gave me an ominous feeling. *Is everything all right?* I typed.

I waited in the hallway for him to reply. I was getting worried. Finally, I texted, *Ryan?*

When he still didn't reply, I took the elevator down to the street level, pulled up my hood against the December drizzle, and walked the six blocks to my apartment. I hoped Ryan would text back soon. Perhaps a system server was down, or the electronic charting software had crashed. Or the pharmacies had gone offline.

I sidestepped a thirtysomething woman wearing a rain poncho and a beanie, panhandling on the corner, and then dodged two men wearing designer suits who were deep in conversation.

Oakland was home to all kinds. I'd enjoyed my time in the city on the east side of the Bay but looked forward to living across the water. My father had been horrified—even more so than when I enrolled at UCLA—when I moved to Oakland. He still remembered how it had been in the late eighties, when he first moved to Northern California from Indiana. He remembered the crime, the drug trafficking, the robberies, the killings.

It wasn't that there wasn't still crime in Oakland—there was in any big city—but it wasn't as bad as it had been. Like many other places on the West Coast, it was being gentrified, which meant housing costs had skyrocketed. Hardly anyone could afford rent in the area anymore, a horrible affront to those who used to call Oakland home.

I reached my building, a brick three-story complex, and walked up the staircase to the second floor. After digging my keys from my bag, I unlocked the door as I checked my phone again. Still no text from Ryan.

I turned on the lights, pulled the blinds against the darkness falling outside, took off my raincoat, and placed my bag on a chair. I unzipped my boots, feeling a little lost with the recent change of plans. Should I put on my sweats? Or stay in my skirt?

I pulled off my boots and stepped into my fuzzy slippers. Then I checked my phone again. It was now 4:50. It had been thirty minutes since Ryan texted me last. Even with an emergency, it wasn't like him to not respond.

Something's come up. . . What did he mean by that?

I held my phone in the palm of my hand, weighing my options. I sent him another text. *Can you talk?*

He didn't answer that one either, so ten minutes later, after I changed into my sweats and a long-sleeved T-shirt, I called him. He didn't answer, so I left a voicemail, trying to sound as upbeat as possible. "Hey, I hope everything's okay. Call me ASAP."

I dropped my phone on the couch and sat down to watch HGTV, barely concentrating on the *Love It or List It* episode. Every few minutes, I checked my phone. No text. No call. No nothing. An hour later, I called Ryan again.

Just as I expected it to go into voicemail, someone picked up. "Hello?" It was a woman's voice.

"Hello," I managed to say. "I need to talk to Ryan."

“With whom am I speaking?” she asked.

I stuttered out, “Sa-van-nah. And with whom am I speaking?”

She laughed. “Guess.”

I stifled a gasp. It was Amber. His ex. Why was she in town? And she obviously knew it was me. My picture would have come up on the screen when she answered the call.

She called out, “Ryan. Phone!”

After a long pause, she said, “Sorry, he can’t talk right now. He’ll call you back.”

My heart raced as the call disconnected. What was going on?

UNABLE TO EAT or sleep, I stared at the TV for the next six hours, along with bombing Ryan with texts and phone calls. There hadn’t been an emergency. He was with Amber, the woman who’d dumped him three years prior. I’d met her once when she crashed a work party of Ryan’s a year ago. She had a memorable face and body—beautiful and svelte. And an unforgettable deep and sexy voice.

People seemed to either love her or hate her, and whenever her name came up, everyone went silent. She was older than Ryan by five years. I’d had more than one person tell me, quietly, that she was the reason he’d become an administrator by the time he was twenty-eight. Why he was on track to become a VP by the time he was forty.

She’d pursued him relentlessly, then dumped him and left for Washington, DC, where she took a job at a health policy think tank.

Why had she returned? Why had he agreed to see her?

Ryan had been so honest and vulnerable when he’d told me

about how she'd broken his heart. Life had broken my heart too, which made me sympathetic toward him. And made me feel, all the more, as if I could trust him. He wouldn't break my heart the way Amber had broken his—I was sure of it.

Or at least I had been.

Eventually, I forced myself to stop texting and leaving voice-mails, knowing I sounded as desperate as I felt. I needed to give him the benefit of the doubt. Maybe Amber had come back for the holidays and decided to take the opportunity to apologize to Ryan for how she'd treated him. And maybe he thought seeing her would be freeing before he and I married. Perhaps there was some other reason. Surely he would call any minute and explain what had happened—even thank me for being understanding.

At some point, I fell asleep on the couch, under the baby blue afghan Mamma Mast had crocheted for me years ago. I awoke just after five in the morning and checked my phone, expecting to see a text from Ryan sent hours before. There was nothing.

A garbage truck rumbled by on the street below. I'd planned to move most of my things to Ryan's condo in South Beach today and then the rest into storage when my lease was up, right after we returned from our honeymoon. Should I still plan on doing that?

Unable to fall back asleep, I grabbed my warmest coat, stuffed my phone into my pocket, slipped into my sheepskin boots, and headed out for a cup of coffee. The sky was dark, without a single star shining, but the glow from the coffee shop was like a lighthouse on the edge of the sea. I'd planned to grab a cup and head back to my apartment, but instead I slumped into a chair and checked my phone again.

It wasn't as if Ryan would call or text me now. He wasn't a morning person, especially not on a Saturday. Perhaps it was my dad's work ethic, an essential part of who he was from being

raised on an Amish farm, but I grew up thinking that sleeping in was for sloths.

That wasn't the only difference between Ryan and me. I jumped in to help whenever we were guests in someone's home, while he was fine being waited on. I could clean up a mess in minutes, while he'd simply stare at it. I was frugal; he was a spender. He had to eat at all of the latest restaurants in town. I was fine cooking at home. In fact, I could do more than cook—I could preserve food, sew, and live on a budget. Both my Mammi Mast and my mom had taught me well. Mom had been a hippie midwife, which, surprisingly, ended up having a lot in common with an Amish grandmother.

Ryan found my domestic skills “sweet” and “comforting,” which made me feel as if I was the opposite of Amber's sophistication. Now I feared that's what he valued more.

I checked my phone again. Nothing.

If it wasn't so early in the morning, I might have called or texted his mom. Not to bring her into our drama, but to make sure everything was fine with Ryan. Both of his parents had been kind to me, but I'd especially bonded with his mother, Nita, even though I'd only spent a handful of time with her—the previous Christmas, when Ryan asked me to marry him, and then in the summer when she came up to San Francisco to help with wedding planning. She seemed especially sympathetic to the fact that my mother had died when I was a teenager.

But what would I say to Nita now? Ask if she knew what Ryan was up to? He got along with his parents, but they weren't particularly close. If I did contact his mom, it would probably come across as if I were tattling on him.

I tried to calm my jagged nerves with a sip of coffee, but my heart only raced faster. Caffeine probably wasn't the best idea. My thoughts began to fly as fast as my pulse. Perhaps Ryan had

been hurt. Maybe he was in an ER somewhere. Maybe Amber had done something to him out of spite, even though she'd broken up with him.

I felt utterly helpless sitting in the coffee shop at 5:30, all alone. What would my mother tell me to do if she were alive?

Move!

I reached my hand into my pocket and felt my key ring. I had a key to Ryan's condo. Why hadn't I marched over there and thrown open the door the night before?

I'd do it now.

I'd sold my car the week before, so I ordered a ride-share. Thankfully, my driver wasn't the chatty type and didn't ask any questions. I kept my eyes on the water as we crossed the Bay. For someone who grew up in the hinterland of Northern California and spent summers in Indiana, the Bay enchanted me. I never tired of watching the water.

Once we reached San Francisco, the driver quickly maneuvered along the narrow streets and then double-parked in front of Ryan's condo. I thanked him and jumped out quickly, glancing at Ryan's bedroom window. The light was off.

Fearing I'd lose my nerve, I marched up the front steps and unlocked his door. The alarm was off, which didn't mean anything. He often forgot to set it.

As I turned on the lights, I noted that nothing seemed out of order. I flipped on the switch near the staircase, imagining him seeing the light and stumbling from bed, ready to apologize. And then he'd give me a convincing explanation for his behavior over the last fourteen hours.

I reached the top stair. The door to his room was open.

No one was home.

I checked his closet and then his bathroom. No clothes seemed to be missing. Neither was his toothbrush.

The helplessness I'd felt before grew more intense. Where could he be? Most likely with Amber. But I'd check his office just in case. Maybe a system *was* down.

I called for another ride and took it to the medical center. However, not surprising, the administration building was locked. I called his number again, vowing it would be my last time. At least for a few hours.

Surprisingly, he answered with a weary, "Hello."

I could barely contain how crazy I felt. "What's going on?" I tried to keep my voice from wavering. "Where are you?"

"I should have called last night. Sorry."

I didn't reply, afraid of what might spew from my mouth.

"Listen," he said. "We need to call off the wedding. I'll pay for anything we can't get refunds on, of course."

"What . . . what's going on?" I asked again, even though it was obvious. He was dumping me a week before our wedding. Why did my voice sound sympathetic when inside I felt like I was going to implode?

When he didn't answer, I lowered my voice even more, whispering, "What happened?"

"I've had a . . . complication."

"Amber?" I was juggling pain, rage, and despair, trying not to reveal any of them.

"Look, I'm sorry I didn't explain things last night. I haven't slept because I've been thinking about you. But I can't go through with the wedding. Not right now."

My nostrils flared as I spoke. "Where are you?"

"At home."

I clenched my fist, my nails digging into my palm. Now, besides being deceptive, he was outright lying to me too. "I was just at your place. You weren't there."

"I *was*," he said, without hesitating. I was taken aback by

how easy deceit seemed to come to him. “I left about an hour ago.”

“Where are you?” I asked again.

His voice grew deeper. “At a hotel. Downtown.”

“Are you alone?”

“I think you already know the answer to that.”

“Can we meet? And talk?”

“That’s not a good idea. Look—” his voice faltered for half a second, but then he continued. “I’ll contact my guests. You contact yours. You cancel the vendors. I’ll cancel the honeymoon. It won’t take long to clear up this mess.”

Mess? Was that how he thought of me now?

“I wish you the best, Savannah. I do. And I’m sorry, but in the long run, this is what’s best for both of us.”

He made it sound like a middle-school breakup. “So that’s it?”

“Pretty much.”

I heard a rumble of laughter in the background on his side of the phone.

“I’ve got to go,” he said. “Bye.”

The call ended before I could say another word.

I SPENT CHRISTMAS sobbing and ignoring phone calls from my father.

The next day, it took me a couple of hours to work up the nerve to do what I needed to do. After two cups of coffee and another good cry, I began calling the vendors, asking them to put all the costs on Ryan’s credit card, which they also had on file, instead of mine. Originally, he and I had decided to put the wedding charges on my card for the air miles, for future trips.

Once the final bills for the wedding all came in, we would then split the costs and pay off my card.

Everyone was sympathetic. The florist said, “This happens more often than you’d think.” But I doubted that many grooms called it off just a week before the wedding, not like Ryan had.

Next, battling my embarrassment and shame, I called my father on his landline because he still didn’t have a cell. I hoped he was home. It would be like him to work the day after Christmas.

My stepmother, Joy, answered. I could hear their little girl in the background. My father had been forty when my mother died. Two years later, he married Joy, who is just ten years older than me. A year after that, they had a baby. I was twenty-one when Karlie was born; she’d just turned six a week ago.

My feelings toward my father and his new family were complicated. To anyone but us, it would appear we were estranged. But we weren’t, not technically. True, we hardly saw each other, but without a doubt, I loved my dad. I loved Joy and Karlie too.

But it was a painful love. Too much of a reminder of what I used to have—and what I’d lost. And a reminder of how quickly Mom and I had been replaced.

“Savannah,” Joy cooed. “How are you? Making the most of your last week as a single gal?”

“I need to talk to Dad,” I said.

Her voice grew concerned. “Everything all right?”

Afraid my voice might give out, I managed to say, “Not really.”

She paused. I prayed she wouldn’t ask me anything more.

“I’ll get your father,” she said. “You just caught him. He was ready to leave to check on the calves.” He worked for one of those big operations where the cows calved year round.

“Savannah.” Dad’s voice was as deep and soothing as ever. “You okay?”

I took a deep breath. Best to be matter-of-fact and to the point, just as I'd been with the vendors. Best to leave my emotions out of it. "Ryan called off the wedding. You don't have to come to the city after all."

"Baby," he said. "I'm so sorry."

I burst into tears. So much for leaving my emotions out of it. The last time I'd felt so lost and alone was when Mom died. Well, when Dad remarried too.

"Do you need me? I'll drive down right now."

"No." I may have said it more forcefully than I needed to. "I'll be fine. I just wanted you to know so you and Joy could change your plans." Since they were going to stay in my apartment, they didn't have to cancel a hotel reservation, but I knew they'd both taken time off work.

"We can still come down," he said.

"No, please don't," I answered.

"Savannah . . ."

"I need time alone. To process everything."

I expected him to say more. That he wasn't surprised. That he'd never trusted Ryan. That he hoped I'd find someone more down-to-earth. That it was better it happened now instead of after we married.

But he didn't say any of those things. Instead he said, "I'm so sorry, baby. I really am."

"Thanks. I'll call in a few days."

"All right," he said. "Talk to you then."

After I hung up, I started texting guests I had numbers for and tracking down contact information for the rest. It was a long, tedious process, something I knew Mom would have helped me with if she were alive. Although, it registered—again—that I wouldn't have ever met Ryan if Mom had lived.

A call came through during the middle of it all, but I didn't

answer. When I listened to the voicemail, it was Joy, saying how concerned she was for me, and then asking all of the questions Dad hadn't thought to ask. Did I need money? Did I have anyone to talk to? She asked if I had a friend staying with me or anyone to help notify the guests, that sort of thing. She ended her message with an invitation: Did I want to come up to their place for a few days to get away from it all?

I fought back tears as I listened to her kind words, but I wouldn't call her back. She had a cell phone, so I sent her a text assuring her I was all right and that I didn't need financial help. Any extra money they had was in their savings, which they hoped to use for an acreage of their own.

I finally made it through my list, trying to imagine Ryan doing the same. Maybe Amber was helping him. The thought sent another wave of nausea through me. I poured myself another cup of coffee and headed into my bedroom. My dress, wrapped in plastic, hung on the outside of my closet door. I had the urge to hurl my full cup at it, but I didn't have the energy to clean up the mess.

What to do now? I'd sent my boss a text saying the wedding was off. But there was no way I was going into the office. Maybe I'd spend the week searching for other jobs as far away from the Bay Area as possible. New York. Philadelphia. Boston. Miami. Atlanta.

But definitely not Washington, DC.

My phone dinged again as I stared at my dress. It had been buzzing all afternoon with return texts.

I'm so sorry!

Better now than later!

What happened??!!!

I'd checked the phone each time it dinged, half hoping it was Ryan saying it had all been a big mistake. That he'd had a bad

week at work. That he'd had a reaction to a medication. That Amber had temporarily hypnotized him.

But when a text came through from Nita, I knew it was all over. *I just got off the phone with Ryan. Savannah, I'm so sorry. I can only guess how this must be for you. It seems so out of character for him. I'm not sure if it would help you to speak with me. If it would, please call. I'd like to do whatever I can to help you through this.*

I knew I couldn't call her without sobbing. She was a sweetheart who led a Bible study for new moms and still volunteered at the elementary school Ryan had attended.

I texted her back, thanking her for her kind message and assuring her I'd call sometime in the future. She responded with a broken heart emoji, and then that was all. But she'd reached out, and I appreciated that. I also appreciated that Ryan had been honest with her that it was his idea to call off the wedding.

A few minutes later, my phone dinged again. My boss. Mr. William Hayes. *Sorry to hear that. I need you in the office tomorrow. It's urgent.*

I stared at the text. How could I answer? I finally settled on, *Sorry, I'm in no shape to come in.*

His reply arrived immediately. *Well, get in shape or lose your job.*

Pardon?

No excuses, he texted back. This is an emergency.

My vacation was approved, I texted back.

I just officially unapproved it. We're in the middle of a fiscal emergency. Be in the office tomorrow.

I began to pace but lost my balance and grabbed the back of the couch to steady myself. I wouldn't text him back. I couldn't go to work tomorrow. I couldn't stay in the Bay Area at all. I had to leave.

But I couldn't go to Dad's. Seeing his happy life with Joy and Karlie wasn't what I wanted.

Where could I go?

My eyes fell to the blue afghan inches from my hand. How many times had Mammi Mast told me I was always welcome, no matter what? She still told me that in her letters and phone calls, without fail. Nappanee, Indiana, might be the end of the world to some people, but to me, it always felt like home.

Or, at the least, it would be the perfect place to escape until I could find a new job as far away from San Francisco—and Ryan Woodward—as possible.