

EIGHT

SWARTHMORE, PENNSYLVANIA 1998

Beth Tokunaga sat on the bench in the foyer of her home and laced her running shoes. She used a pink hair tie to put her long blonde hair in a ponytail and glanced at the antique mahogany grandfather clock in the corner: 5:45 am. The house was quiet. Empty, except for Julia asleep upstairs. Normally, she found the serenity at this hour to be a welcome respite from the chaos of her daily life, but today the silence was a weight that seemed to represent the emptiness she felt . . . about her life . . . about her marriage.

Daniel hadn't called.

He'd missed their last family dinner, then he'd rushed to the airport for this emergency in California. She knew she couldn't blame him for that, but it irritated her just the same. At the very least, he could call to tell her what was happening. It would take him two minutes to let her know his mom was still alive and breathing. He should know she'd be worried.

REPENTANCE

They rarely talked anymore. Not about anything real. Nothing outside of their schedules and what the kids were doing. She stood up and opened the front door. The sky was overcast, a film of moisture coating the driveway and street beyond. She shut the door and strode between the giant oaks that straddled their flagstone front walk. Reaching the street, she turned left and started to run.

When did everything go so wrong? she wondered, searching her memory for their last big fight or the last time she'd felt so desolate. There was nothing she could pinpoint. No specific turning point. When she thought of their relationship, a wave of apathy suffused her body. She felt her legs slowing. But she wanted to sprint! To pump her arms and drive her knees ferociously to numb her frustration. Daniel never ran. *I have enough stress in my day job to get my heart pumping*, he once told her when she suggested jogging was something they could do together. It was hard to criticize someone who got up and left the house even earlier than she did each day. It was always hard to criticize Daniel. Everything he did was always more important—the problems of regular life never stood a chance in comparison.

Swarthmore's winding, wooded streets were quiet this early. She headed for the college—her favorite place to run—and took the path that went through the center of campus, past the student center, past the visitor's center and two residence halls. After a quarter mile, she came to a hill with a path that ran up to Parrish Hall. She drove ahead at a hard sprint, faster than she'd ever run it, and waited for the burn. She wanted to feel it in her legs and her lungs. The burn made her feel alive and distracted from reality. There it was. Pain. In her chest. In her side. She powered onward, slowing slightly, cresting the hill. Then a feeling of lightheadedness. Her vision began to swim. Panting, she jogged over to a tree and leaned against it.

Catching her breath, she turned and took in the view of Swarthmore's quadrangle—geometric green spaces dotted with

century-old trees. A thin mist hung over the grounds, and the smell of freshly cut grass. In the distance, two students walked together, a boy and a girl, arm in arm, the girl's head seeming to rest on the boy's shoulder. Were they early risers or had they stayed up all night? Beth sighed.

What did that feel like? To be young and in love? And happy? It was hard to remember. Lots of Beth's friends thought her life was perfect. She lived in a mansion. She'd raised two wonderful, intelligent children. Her husband was a successful and world-famous cardiac surgeon who was faithful to her, as far as she knew.

Those friends didn't know she sometimes felt miserable. They didn't know how often she questioned if what she was at the present moment was all she would ever be. And she didn't know if her marriage was truly failing or if it was natural for people to simply drift apart after twenty years together.

These thoughts had brought her to the point of tears in front of her daughter yesterday morning. She hadn't even told Julia what was bothering her. Julia had merely asked why she looked so sad and Beth had suddenly started crying. Part of her wanted to explain it all to her. How she'd once aspired to go to medical school herself. How she'd started the post-baccalaureate courses but needed money for tuition and started working as a surgical technician. It was only supposed to be temporary, a stepping-stone, but then she met Daniel and her life took a different course. She never consciously gave up her dreams. Other dreams just took their place: to be a supportive wife, to raise good kids. But now, more than anything else, she wanted to tell Julia not to waste her time at Stanford. To use these years to discover something she could be passionate about, and to pursue it. To look far ahead and possibly avoid finding herself as Beth did now—unsure of what to do next.

The pair of smitten undergrads drifted away, into the morning mist. Beth straightened up. Quit feeling sorry for yourself, she thought, frowning her brow and setting her jaw.

REPENTANCE

Do something about it. Because things can't go on like this. Something has to change.

And as she started to run, heading for a pair of gates on the far side of campus, she knew just what she had to do.

