

1983

Why was the music these days so awful? She turned the radio off impatiently. Fabulous sounds they'd had in the sixties—The Beatles. The wonderful Abba of the seventies and then, ten years on, it was all rubbish. Madonna even looked dreadful.

Come on.

It was dark and she didn't have a lot of time left. She glanced at her watch. Hurry up. On cue, the battered and rusty ute paused briefly across the road before pulling out again. With a little laugh, she turned on her engine and followed it. Where to? Did it matter? She looked over her shoulder at her beautiful five-year-old son, sleeping soundly, as he always did. He'd be okay. An earthquake wouldn't wake him now. The car turned down a laneway and stopped. They were surrounded by the ghostly white snow gums that always gave her the shivers. Or was something else doing that to her? Anticipation? She pulled up behind his ute, wound down the window a little and then got out and went to the passenger side and opened the door.

"I thought you weren't coming," she said, sliding in.

"I come when I can. You know that. Come here."

Thank God for the bench seat and column shift. Thank God he was here, and her mind began a strange kind of crossing-off of things from a long list of thank-yous. Thank you for taking the decision away from her.

What was wrong with what she was doing? It was incredible. How could this be bad?

Yes, for pulling me on to you, thank you, for he was like a warm heavy mattress, but his arms were strong around her and he quickly pulled up her shirt and rubbed her nipples. Thank you, yes, she sighed into the softness of his throat and he smelled of animals and hay. Delicious.

Her pants were gone. When had that happened? Maybe she'd done it. Two warm, strong fingers rubbing her. It was driving her crazy. Her knee was pulled up and he was inside her and thinking was beyond her. Only thank you.

Afterward, he lit a cigarette and passed it to her. They lay snuggled up to each other, his arm draped over her shoulder. He lit another. In the sudden flare of the lighter she saw his mouth. He had the most beautiful mouth. Full, sculpted.

“Put the window down—I need to hear him if he wakes up.” Now she could tell him what to do. “I’m not supposed to be smoking. I’ll have to chew gum on the way home. Shower.”

“No, you smell wonderful.” He nuzzled her neck and she laughed. “He won’t be home tonight. I’d like to think of you with my smell all over you.”

“This is getting complicated. I saw your wife yesterday, at the school. Your son and my son are friends. I don’t know what to do.”

“Nothing. Nothing can come of this. I told you before. This is what we have. Sex. I told you this. I can’t resist you. You can’t say no to me. So for a little time we enjoy the moment. Okay.”

She finished the cigarette and stubbed it out in the ashtray, almost overflowing with butts. “I know. I know.” She sighed and snuggled back into his chest one more time. “We should stop.” But she didn’t have the slightest idea of how or when.

But she did know why.

This was very unlike her. Not true to form. When she tried to talk sense into herself, she would put it off and even argue back: Not now. I’ll think about it next week, or tomorrow. It was as though she had a little piece of something that was still hers, something that didn’t have to measure up or be pulled apart and criticized. She could be herself, just for a moment in time. Of course, it was like walking a knife edge and if anyone found out, she’d be dead. Yes, she was crazy.

He shrugged, said nothing.

“I want to be back in time to watch Dallas. Poor Bobby, that wretched JR, I hope he get what’s coming to him. But he’s just too clever.” And she was gathering clothes. Dragged her undies out from under him. Pulling down and pulling up. He watched her, then straightened reluctantly and she slowly did up the top two buttons on his shirt.

“Goodnight.” She kissed the tiny piece of chest she’d left exposed. Where the collar bones met.