

Chapter 1

Susan Tate never saw it coming. She only knew that her daughter was different. The girl who had always been spontaneous and open, had suddenly grown opaque.

Lily was seventeen. Maybe that said it. A senior in high school, she had a loaded course schedule, played field hockey and volleyball, sang in an *a capella* group. And, yes, Susan was spoiled by the close relationship she and Lily had always had. They were a family of two, fully comfortable with that and each other.

Inevitably, Lily had to test her wings. Susan knew that. But she also had a right to worry. Lily was the love of her life, the very best thing that had happened in all of her thirty-five years. As achievements in life went, being a good mother was the one she most prized.

That meant communicating, and with dinner too often interrupted by email or texts, eating out was warranted. At a restaurant Susan would have Lily captive while they waited to order, waited for food, waited to pay - all quality time.

She suggested the Steak Place, definitely a splurge, but lined with quiet oak booths. Lily vetoed it in favor of Carlino's.

Carlino's wasn't even Susan's second choice. Oh, she liked the owners, the menu, and the art, all of which were authentically Tuscan. But the prices were so reasonable for large plates of food that the whole town went there. Susan wanted privacy and quiet; Carlino's was public and loud.

But she wanted to please Lily, so she gave in and, determined to be a good sport, smilingly hustled her daughter out of the November chill into a hive of warmth and sound. When they finally finished greeting friends and were seated, they shared hummus on toasted crostini, and though Lily only nibbled, she insisted it was good. More friends stopped by, and, in fairness, it wasn't only Lily's fault. As principal of the high school, Susan was well-known in town. Another time, she would have enjoyed seeing everyone.

But she was on a mission this night. As soon as she was alone with Lily again, she leaned forward and quietly talked about her day at school. With next year's budget due by Thanksgiving and town resources stagnant, there were hard decisions to be made. Most staff issues were too sensitive to be shared with her seventeen-year-old daughter, but when it came to new course offerings and technology, the girl was a worthy sounding board.

Susan's motive actually went deeper, to the very heart of mothering. She believed that sharing adult issues encouraged Lily to think. She also believed that her daughter was insightful, and this night was no exception. Momentarily focused, Lily asked good questions.

No sooner had their entrees come, though - chicken with cannellini beans for Lily, salmon with artichokes for Susan - when a pair of Susan's teachers interrupted to say hello. As soon as they left, Susan asked Lily about the AP Chem test she'd had that morning. Though Lily replied

volubly, her answers were heavy on irrelevant facts, and her brightness seemed forced. She picked at her food, eating little.

More worried than ever, Susan searched her daughter's face. It was heart-shaped, as sweet as always, and was framed by long, shiny, sable hair. The hair was a gift from her father, while her eyes - Susan's eyes - were hazel and clear, her skin creamy and smooth.

She didn't look sick, Susan decided. Vulnerable, perhaps. Maybe haunted. But not sick.

Even when Lily crinkled her nose and complained about the restaurant's heavy garlic smell, Susan didn't guess. She was too busy assuring herself that those clear eyes ruled out drug use, and as for alcohol, she had never seen bottles, empty or otherwise, in Lily's room. She didn't actively search, as in checking behind clutter on the highest shelves. But when she returned clean laundry to drawers or hung jeans in the closet, she saw nothing amiss.

Alcohol wouldn't be a lure. Susan drank wine with friends, but rarely stocked up, so it wasn't like Lily had a bar to draw from. Same with prescription drugs, though Susan knew how easy it was for kids to get them online. Rarely did a month go by without a student apprehended for this.

'Mom?'

Susan blinked. 'Yes, sweetheart?'

'Look who's distracted. What are you thinking about?'

'You. Are you feeling all right?'

There was a flash of annoyance. 'You keep asking me that.'

'Because I worry,' Susan said and, reaching across, laced her fingers through Lily's. 'You haven't been the same since summer. So here I am, loving you to bits, and because you won't say anything, I'm left to wonder whether it's just being seventeen and needing your own space. Do I crowd you?'

Lily sputtered. 'No. You're the best mom that way.'

'Is it school? You're stressed.'

'Yes,' the girl said, but her tone implied there was more, and her fingers held Susan's tightly.

'College apps?'

'I'm okay with those.'

'Then Calculus.' The Calc teacher was the toughest in the math department, and Susan had worried Lily would be intimidated. But what choice was there? Raymond Dunbar was thirty years Susan's senior and had vocally opposed her ascension to the principalship. If she asked him to ease up, he would accuse her of favoritism.

But Lily said, 'Mr. Dunbar isn't so bad.'

Susan jiggled Lily's fingers. 'If I were to pinpoint it, I'd say the change came this summer. I've been racking my brain, but from everything you told me, you loved your job. I know, I know, you were at the beach, but watching ten kids under the age of eight is hard, and summer families can be the worst.'

Lily scooped back her hair. 'I love kids. Besides, I was with Mary Kate, Abby, and Jess,' her three best friends. Daughters of Susan's best friend, all three girls were responsible. Abby occasionally lacked direction, like her mom Pam, and Jessica had a touch of the rebel, as Sunny did not. But Mary Kate was as steady as her mom Kate, who was like a sister to Susan. With Mary Kate along, Lily couldn't go wrong.

Not that Lily wasn't steady herself, but Susan knew about peer pressure. If she had learned one thing as a teacher it was that the key to a child's success lay in no small part with the friends she kept.

'And nothing's up with them?' she asked.

Lily grew guarded. 'Has Kate said anything?'

Susan gentled. 'Nothing negative. She always asks about you, though. You're her sixth child.'

'But has she said anything about Mary Kate? Is she worried about her like you're worried about me?'

Susan thought for a minute, then answered honestly. 'She's more sad than worried. Mary Kate is her youngest. Kate feels like she's growing away from her, too. But Mary Kate isn't my concern. You are.' A burst of laughter came from several tables down. Annoyed by the intrusion, Susan shot the group a glance. When she turned back, Lily's eyes held a frightened look.

Susan had seen that look a lot lately. It terrified her.

Desperate now, she held Lily's hand even tight and, in a low, frantic voice, said, 'What is *wrong*? I'm supposed to know what girls your age are feeling and thinking, but lately with you, I just don't. There are so many times when your mind is somewhere else - somewhere you won't allow me to be. Maybe that's the way it should be at your age,' she acknowledged, 'and it wouldn't bother me if you were happy, but you don't seem happy. You seem preoccupied. You seem *afraid*.'

'I'm pregnant.'

Susan gasped. Freeing her hand, she sat straighter. She waited for a teasing smile, but there was none. And of course not. Lily wouldn't joke about something like this.

Her thoughts raced. 'But - but that's impossible. I mean, it's not *physically* impossible, but it wouldn't happen.' When Lily said nothing, Susan pressed a hand to her chest and whispered, 'Would it?'

'I am,' Lily whispered back.

'What makes you think it?'

'Six home tests, all positive.'

'You're late?'

'Not late. Missed. Three times.'

'Three? Omigod, why didn't you *tell* me?' Susan cried, thinking of all the other things a missed period could mean. Being pregnant didn't make sense, not with Lily. But the child didn't lie. If she said she was pregnant, she believed it herself - not that it was true. 'Home tests can be totally misleading.'

'Nausea, tiredness, bloating?'

'I don't see bloating,' Susan said defensively, because if her daughter was three months pregnant, she would have seen it.

'When was the last time you saw me naked?'

'In the hot tub at the spa,' she replied without missing a beat.

'That was in June, Mom.'

Susan did miss a beat then, but only one. 'It must be something else. You don't even have a boyfriend.' She caught her breath. 'Do you?' Had she *really* missed something? 'Who is he?'

'It doesn't matter.'

'Doesn't matter? Lily, if you are - ' She couldn't say the word aloud. The idea that her daughter was sexually active was totally new. Sure, she knew the statistics. How could she not, given her job? But this was her daughter, *her* daughter. They had agreed - Lily had *promised* - she would tell Susan if she wanted birth control. It was a conversation they'd had too many times to count. 'Who is he?' she asked again.

Lily remained silent.

'But if he's involved - '

'I'm not telling him.'

'Did he *force* you?'

'No,' Lily replied. Her eyes were steady not with fear now, but something Susan couldn't quite name. 'It was the other way around,' she said. 'I seduced him.'

Susan sat back. If she didn't know better, she might have said Lily looked excited. And suddenly nothing about the discussion was right - not the subject, not that look, certainly not the place. Setting her napkin beside the plate, she gestured for the server. The son of a local family, and once a student of Susan's, he hurried over.

'You haven't finished, Ms. Tate. Is something wrong?'

Something wrong? 'No, uh, just time.'

'Should I box this up?'

'No, Aidan. If you could just bring the bill.'

He had barely left when Lily leaned forward. 'I knew you'd be upset. That's why I haven't told you.'

'How long were you planning to *wait*?'

'Just a little longer - maybe 'til the end of my first trimester.'

'Lily, I'm your *mother*.'

'But this is *my* baby,' the girl said softly, 'so I get to make the decisions, and I wasn't ready to tell you, not even tonight, which is why I chose this place. But even here, it's like you can see inside me.'

Susan was beyond hurt. Getting pregnant was everything she had taught Lily not to do. She sat back, let out a breath. 'I can't grasp this. Are you *sure*?' Lily's body didn't look different, but what could be seen when she wore the same layered tops that her friends did, and the days when Susan bathed her each night were long gone. '*Three* missed periods?' she whispered. 'Then this happened ... ?'

'Eleven weeks ago.'

Susan was beside herself. 'When did you do the tests?'

'As soon as I missed my first period.'

And not a word spoken? It was definitely a statement, but of what? Defiance? Independence? *Stupidity*? Lily might be gentle, often vulnerable - but she also had a stubborn streak. When she started something, she rarely backed down. Properly channeled, that was a positive thing, like when she set out to win top prize at the science fair, which she did, but only after three false starts. Or when she set out to sing in the girls *a capella* group, didn't make the cut as a freshman and worked her tail off that year and the next as the group's manager, until she finally landed a spot.

But this was different. Stubbornness was not a reason for silence when it came to pregnancy, certainly not when the prospective mother was seventeen.

Unable to order her thoughts, Susan grasped at loose threads. 'Do the others know?' It went without saying that she meant Mary Kate, Abby, and Jess.

'Yes, but no moms.'

'And none of the girls told me?' More hurt there. 'But I see them all the time!'

'I swore them to silence.'

'Does your dad know?'

Lily looked appalled. 'I would never tell him before I told you.'

'Well, *that's* something.'

'I love babies, Mom,' the girl said, excited again.

'And that makes this *okay*?' Susan asked hysterically, but stopped when the server returned. Glancing at the bill, she put down what might have been an appropriate amount, then pushed her chair back. The air in the room was suddenly too warm, the smells too pungent even for someone who wasn't pregnant. As she walked to the door with Lily behind, she imagined that every eye in the room watched. It was a flash from her own past, followed by the echo of her mother's words. *You've shamed us, Susan. What were you thinking?*

Times had changed. Single mothers were commonplace now. The issue for Susan wasn't shame, but the dreams she had for her daughter. Dreams couldn't hold up against a baby. A baby changed *everything*.

The car offered privacy but little comfort, shutting Susan and Lily in too small a space with a huge chasm between them. Fighting panic as the minutes passed without a retraction, Susan fumbled for her keys and started the engine.

Carlino's was in the center of town. Heading out, she passed the book store, the drug store, two realtors and a bank. Passing Perry & Cass took longer. Even in the fifteen years Susan had lived in Zaganack, the store had expanded. It occupied three blocks now, two-story buildings with signature crimson-and-cream awnings, and that didn't count the mail-order department and online call center two streets back, the manufacturing complex a mile down the road, or the shipping department farther out in the country.

Zaganack was Perry & Cass. Fully three-fourths of the townsfolk worked for the retail icon. The rest provided services for those who did, as well as for the tens of thousands of visitors who came each year to shop.

But Perry & Cass wasn't what had drawn Susan here when she'd been looking for a place to raise her child. Having come from the Great Plains, she had wanted something coastal and green. Zaganack overlooked Maine's Casco Bay, and, with its hemlocks and pines, was green year-round. Its shore was a breathtaking tumble of sea-bound granite; its harbor, home port to a handful of local fishermen, was quaint. With a population that ebbed and flowed, swelling from 18,000 to 28,000 in summer, the town was small enough to be a community, yet large enough to allow for heterogeneity.

Besides, Susan loved the name Zaganack. A derivative of the Penobscot tongue, it was loosely interpreted to mean 'people from the place of eternal spring,' and though local lore cited Native Americans' reference to the relatively mild weather of coastal towns, Susan took a broader view. Spring meant new beginnings. She had found one in Zaganack.

And now this? History repeating itself?

Unable to think, she drove in silence. Leaving the main road, she passed the grand brick homes of Perrys and Casses, followed by the elegant, if smaller, ones of the families' younger generation. The homes of locals fanned out from there, Colonials yielding to Victorians and, in turn, to homes that were simpler in design and built closer together.

Susan lived in one of the latter. It was a small frame house, with six rooms equally spaced over two floors, and an open attic on the third. By night, with its tiny front yard and ribbon of driveway, it looked like the rest. By day, painted a cerulean blue, with sea green shutters and an attic gable trimmed in teal, it stood out.

Color was Susan's thing. Growing up, she had loved reds, though her mother said they clashed with her freckles. *Dark green*, would be better, Ellen Tate advised. *Or brown*. But Susan's hair was the color of dark sand, so she still adored the pepper of red, orange, and pink.

Then came Lily, and Susan's mother latched onto those colors. *You have a fuchsia heart*, she charged despairingly when she learned of the pregnancy, and though Susan discarded most else of what her mother had said, those words survived. Loathe to attract attention, she had worn black through much of those nine months, then a lighter but still-bland beige after Lily was born. Even when she started to teach, neutrals served her well, off-setting the freckles that made her look too young.

But a fuchsia heart doesn't die. It simply bides its time, taking a back seat to pragmatism while leaking helpless drops of color here and there. Hence teal gables, turquoise earrings, and chartreuse or saffron scarves. In the yarns she dyed as a hobby, the colors were even wilder.

Turning into her driveway, Susan parked and climbed from the car. Once up the side steps, she let herself into the kitchen. In the soft light coming from under the cherry cabinets for which she had painstaking saved for three years and had largely installed herself, she looked back at Lily.

The girl was Susan's height, if slimmer and more fragile, but she stood her ground, hands tucked in her jacket pockets. Pregnant? Susan still didn't believe it was true. Yes, there was picky eating, moodiness, and the morning muzzies, all out of character and new in the last few months, but other ailments had similar symptoms. Like mono.

'It may be just a matter of taking antibiotics,' she said sensibly.

Lily looked baffled. 'Antibiotics?'

'If you have mono - '

'Mom, I'm *pregnant*. Six tests, all positive.'

'Maybe you read them wrong.'

'Mary Kate saw two of them and agreed.'

'Mary Kate is no expert, either.' Susan felt a stab. 'How many times have I seen Mary Kate since then? Thirty? *Sixty*?'

'Don't be mad at Mary Kate. It wasn't her place to tell you.'

'I am mad at Mary Kate. I'm closer to her than I am to the others, and this is your *health*, Lily. What if something else is going on with your body? Shouldn't Mary Kate be concerned about that?'

Lily pushed her fingers through her hair. 'This is beyond bizarre. All this time I've been afraid to tell you because I didn't know how you'd react, but I never thought you wouldn't *believe me*.'

Susan didn't want to argue. There was one way to find out for sure. 'Whatever it is, we'll deal. I'll call Dr. Brant first thing tomorrow. She'll squeeze you in.'

Never a good sleeper, Susan spent the night running through all of the reasons why her daughter couldn't be pregnant. Most had to do with being responsible, because if Susan had taught Lily one thing, it was that.

Lily was responsible when it came to school. She studied hard and got good grades. She was responsible when it came her friends, loyal to a fault. Hadn't she gone out on a limb to campaign

for Abby, who had set her heart on being senior class president? When the girl lost the election, Lily had slept at her house for three straight nights.

Lily was responsible when it came to the car, rarely missing a curfew, leaving the gas tank empty, or being late when she had to pick up Susan.

Hard-working. Loyal. Dependable. Responsible. And ... pregnant? Susan might have bought into it if Lily had a steady boyfriend. Accidents happened.

But there was no boyfriend, and no reason at all to believe that Lily would sleep with someone she barely knew. Was sweet Lily Tate - who wore little makeup, slept in flannel pajamas, and layered camis over camis to keep her tiny cleavage from view - even *capable* of seduction?

Susan thought not. It had to be something else, but the possibilities were frightening. By two in the morning, her imagination was so out of control that she gave up trying to sleep and, crossing the hall, quietly opened the door. In the faint glow of a butterfly nightlight, Lily was a blip under the quilt, only the top of her head showing, dark hair splayed on the pillow. Her jeans and sweaters were on the cushioned chair, her Sherpa boots - one standing, one not - on the floor nearby. Her dresser was strewn with hair brushes and clips, beaded bracelets, a sock she was knitting. Her cell phone lay on the nightstand, along with several books and a half-full bottle water.

In the faintest whisper, Susan called her name, but there was no response, no movement in this still life. Girl With Butterfly Nightlight she might have named it. Girl. So young. So vulnerable.

Heart catching, she carefully backed out, crept down the hall to the attic door and quietly climbed the stairs. There, at an oak table in the small arc of a craft lamp, she turned to a fresh page of her notebook, opened a tin of pastels, and made her first bold stroke. A fuchsia heart? Definitely. If anything could distract her, it was this. She made another stroke, smudged the ends, added yellow to soften a green, then navy to deepen a red.

Typically, she produced her best work when she was stressed - pure sublimation - and this night was no exception. By the time she was done, she had five pages, each with a unique swath of anywhere from two to five hues, undulating from shade to shade. These would be the spring colorways for PC Yarns. She even named them - March Madness, Vernal Tide, Spring Eclipse, Robin At Dawn, and, naturally, Creation.

The last was particularly vibrant. Violent? No, she decided. Well, maybe. But wasn't creation an explosive thing? Didn't creation have profound consequences? And what if Lily wasn't growing a child but something darker?

Susan returned to bed, but each time she dozed, she woke up to new fears. By five in the morning, when she finally despaired of sleep and got up, she was convinced that her daughter

had a uterine cyst that had been overlooked long enough to jeopardize her chances of ever having a baby. Either that, or it was a tumor. Uterine cancer, warranting a hysterectomy, perhaps chemotherapy. Terrifying. No child, ever? *Tragic*.

Keeping her fears to herself, she got Lily up as usual, dropped her at Mary Kate's and went on to school. The girls would follow later, but this morning, Susan had two early parent meetings, both difficult, before she appeared on the front steps to greet students. It wasn't until eight-thirty that she finally reached the doctor's office.

The only appointment Lily could get was for late afternoon, which gave Susan the rest of the day to worry. That meant she answered email with half a heart, was distracted during a teacher observation, and what little work she put into her budget for the following year, which was due to the Superintendent by Thanksgiving, was a waste.

She could only think of one thing, and any way she looked at it, it wasn't good.

Chapter 2

The doctor confirmed it. Lily was definitely pregnant. Learning that her daughter didn't have a fatal disease, Susan was actually relieved - but only briefly. The reality of being pregnant at seventeen was something she knew all too well.

Susan had become pregnant in high school herself. Richard McKay was the son of her parents' best friends. That summer, when he was fresh out of college with a journalism degree and a job offer for fall that he couldn't refuse, something sparked between them. *Pure lust*, her father decided. And the chemistry was certainly right. But Susan and Rick had spent too many hours that summer only talking for it to be just sex. They saw eye to eye on so many things, not the least being their desire to leave Oklahoma, that when Rick dutifully offered to marry Susan, she flat-out refused.

She never regretted her decision. To this day, she recalled the look of palpable relief on his face when she had firmly shaken her head. He had dreams; she admired them. Had there been times when she missed having him there? Sure. But she couldn't compete with the excitement of his career, and refused to tie him down.

His success reinforced her conviction. Starting out, he had been the assistant to the assistant producer of a national news show. Currently, he was the star, following stories to the ends of the earth as one of the show's leading commentators. He had never married, had never had other children. Only after he became the face in front of the camera rather than the one behind, was he able to send money for Lily's support, but his check arrived every month now without fail. He never missed a birthday, and had been known to surprise Lily by showing up for a field hockey tournament. He kept in close touch with her by phone, a good, if physically absent father.

Rick had always trusted Susan. Rather than micromanage from afar, he left the day-to-day parenting to her. Now, under her watchful gaze, Lily was pregnant.

Stunned, Susan listened quietly while Lily answered the doctor's questions. Yes, she wanted the baby, and yes, she understood what that meant. No, she hadn't discussed it with her mother, because she would do this on her own if she had to. No, she did not want the father involved. No, she did not drink. Yes, she knew not to eat swordfish.

She had questions of her own - like whether she would be able to finish out the field hockey season (yes), whether winter volleyball was possible (maybe), and whether she could take Tylenol for a headache (only as directed) - and she sounded so like the mature, responsible, intelligent child Susan had raised that, if Susan hadn't been numb, she might have laughed.

Silent still when they left the doctor's office, she handed Lily the keys to the car. 'I need to walk home.' Lily protested, but she insisted, 'You go on. I need the air.'

It was true, though she did little productive thinking as she walked through the November chill. No longer numb, she was boiling mad. She knew it was wrong - definitely not the way a mother should feel - everything she had resented in her own mother - but how to get a grip?

The cold air helped. She was a little calmer as she neared the house. Then she saw Lily. The girl was sitting on the front steps, a knitted scarf wound around her neck, her quilted jacket - very Perry & Cass - pulled tight round her. When Susan approached, she sat straighter and said in a timid voice, 'Don't be angry.'

But Susan was. Furious, she stuck her hands in her pockets.

'Please, Mom?'

Susan took a deep breath. She looked off, past neighborhood houses, all the way on down the street until the cordon of old maples seemed to merge. 'This isn't what I wanted for you,' she finally managed to say.

'But I love children. I was *born* to have children.'

Looking back, Susan pressed her aching heart. 'I couldn't agree with you more. My problem's with the timing. You're seventeen. You're a senior in high school - and expecting a baby at the end of May, right before exams? Do you have any idea what being nine months pregnant is like? How are you going to study?'

'I'll already have been accepted into college.'

'Well, that's another thing. How *can* you go to college? Dorm rooms don't have room for cribs.'

'I'm going to Percy State.'

'Oh, honey, you can do better.'

'You went there, and look where you are.'

'I *had* to go there. But times have changed. Getting a job is hard enough now, even with a degree from a top school.'

'Exactly. So it won't matter. Anything is do-able, Mom. Haven't you taught me that?'

'Sure. I just never thought it would apply to a baby.'

Lily's eyes lit up. 'But there *is* a baby,' she cried, sounding so like a buoyant child that Susan could have wept. Lily didn't have a clue what being a mother entailed. Spending the summer as a mother's helper was a picnic compared to the day-in day-out demands of motherhood.

'Oh, sweetheart,' she said and, suddenly exhausted, sank down on the steps. 'Forget do-able. What about sensible? What about *responsible*? We've talked about birth control. You could have used it.'

'You're missing the point, Mom,' Lily said, moving close to hug Susan's arm. 'I want this baby. I know I can be a good mother - even better than the moms we worked for this summer, and I have the best role model in you. You always said being a mother was wonderful. You said you loved me from the start. You said I was the best thing that ever happened to you.'

Susan wasn't mollified. 'I also said that being a single mom was hard and that I never wanted you to have to struggle the way I did. So - so think beyond college. You say you want to be a biologist, but that means grad school. If you want a good research position - '

'I want a baby.'

'A baby isn't only for the summer, and it doesn't stay a baby for long. He or she walks and talks and becomes a real person. And what about the father then?'

'I told you. He doesn't know.'

'He has a right to.'

'Why? He had no say in this.'

'And that's fair, Lily?' Susan asked. 'What if the baby looks exactly like him? Don't you think people will talk?'

A hint of stubbornness crossed Lily's face. 'I don't care if people talk.'

'Maybe the father will. What if he comes up to you and asks why this child who was born nine months after the time you had sex, has his hair and eyes? And what happens when your child

wants to know about his father? You were asking by the time you were two. Some kids do still have daddies, y'know. So now it's your turn to be the mommy. What'll you say?

Lily frowned. 'I'll go there when I have to. Mom, you're making this harder than it needs to be. Right now, the baby's father does not have to know.'

'But it's his baby, too,' Susan argued. Desperate for someone to blame, she sorted through the possibilities. 'Is it Evan?'

'I'm not telling who it is.'

'Do I know him?' Susan wondered if Lily was stonewalling for a reason. 'Was *he* the one who wanted the baby?'

Lily pulled her arm free. 'Mom,' she cried, hazel eyes flashing, 'listen to me! He doesn't *know*. We never talked about a baby. He thought I was on the pill. I did this. Me.'

Which, of course, was one of the things Susan found so hard to swallow. It was like a slap in the face, a repudiation of everything she had tried to teach her daughter.

Desperate to understand, she said, 'Are you sure it wasn't an accident? I mean, it's okay if it was. Accidents happen.' Lily shook her head. 'You just decided you wanted a baby.'

'I've always wanted a baby.'

'A sibling,' Susan said, because when she was little, Lily had begged for one.

'Now I'm old enough to have my own, and I know you might not have chosen to be pregnant seventeen years ago, but I did. It's my body, my life.'

Susan had raised Lily to be independent and strong, but cavalier? No. Especially not when there were realities to face. 'Who'll pay the medical bills?'

'We have insurance.'

'With premiums to which I contribute every month,' Susan pointed out, 'so the answer is me. I'll pay the medical bills. What about diapers? And formula?'

'I'll breast-feed.'

'Which is wonderful if it works, but sometimes it doesn't, in which case you'll need formula. And what about solid food and clothes. And *equipment*. They won't let you leave the hospital without an approved car seat, and do you know what a good stroller costs? No, I don't still have your old one, because I sold it years ago to buy you a bike. And what about day care while you're finishing school? I'd love to stay home with the baby myself, but one of us has to work.'

'Dad will help,' Lily said in a small voice.

Yes. Rick would. But was Susan looking forward to asking? Absolutely not.

Lily's eyes filled with tears. 'I really want this baby.'

'You can *have* a baby, but there's a better time!' Susan cried.

'I am not having an abortion.'

'No one's suggesting one.'

'I already heard my baby's heartbeat. You should have listened to it, Mom. It was amazing.'

Susan was having trouble accepting that her daughter was *pregnant*, much less that there was an actual baby alive inside.

'It has legs and elbows. It has ears, and this week it's developing vocal chords. I know all this, Mom. I'm doing my homework.'

'Then I take it,' Susan said in a voice she couldn't control, 'that you read how pregnant teens are at greater risk for complications.' It was partly her mother's voice. The rest was that of the failed educator whose *crusade* had been keeping young girls from doing what she had done. That educator had failed on her own doorstep.

'I stopped on the way home for the vitamins,' Lily said meekly.

'Do you think the baby's okay?'

As annoyed as she was - as *disappointed* as she was - a frightened Lily could always reach her. 'Yes, it's okay,' she said. 'I was just making a point.'

That easily reassured, Lily smiled. 'Think I'll have a girl like you did?' She didn't seem to need an answer, which was good, since Susan didn't have one. 'If it's a girl, she's already forming ovaries. And she's this big.' She spread her thumb and forefinger several inches apart. 'My baby can think. Its brain can give signals to its limbs to move. If I could put my finger exactly where it is, it would react to my touch. It's a real human being. There is no way I could have an abortion.'

'Please, Lily. Have I asked you to get one?'

'No, but maybe when you start thinking about it, you will.'

'Did I abort you?'

'No, but you're angry.'

Susan shot a pleading glance at the near-naked tops of the trees. 'Oh, Lily, I'm so many things beside angry that I can't begin to explain. We're at a good place now, but it hasn't come easy. I've had to work twice as hard as most mothers. You, of all people, should know that.'

'Because I'm a good daughter? Does my being pregnant make me a bad one?'

'No, sweetheart. No.' It had nothing to do with good and bad. Susan had argued this with her own mother.

'But you're disappointed.'

Try heart-broken. 'Lily, you're seventeen.'

'But this is a *baby*,' Lily pleaded.

'You *are* a baby,' Susan cried.

Lily drew herself up and said quietly, 'No, Mom. I'm not.'

Susan was actually thinking the same thing. No, Lily wasn't a baby. She would never be a baby again.

The thought brought a sense of loss - loss of childhood? Of innocence? Had her own mother felt that? Susan had no way of knowing. Even in the best of times, they hadn't talked, certainly not the way Susan and Lily did.

'Don't be like Grandma,' Lily begged, sensing her thoughts.

'I have *never* been like Grandma.'

'I would die if you disowned me.'

'I would never do that.'

Turning to face her, Lily grabbed her hand and held it to her throat. 'I need you with me, Mom,' she said fiercely, then softened. 'This is our family, and we're making it bigger. You wanted that, too, I know you did. If things had been different, you'd have had five kids like Kate.'

'Not five. Three.'

'Three, then. But see?' she coaxed. 'A baby isn't a bad thing.'

No. Not a bad thing, Susan knew. A baby was never bad. Just life-changing.

'This is your grandchild,' Lily tried.

'Um-hm,' Susan hummed. 'I'll be a grandmother at thirty-six. That is embarrassing.'

'I think it's *great*.'

'That's because you're seventeen and starry-eyed - which is good, sweetheart, because if you aren't smiling now, you'll be in trouble down the road. You'll be alone, Lily. In the past, we've had two other pregnant seniors and one pregnant junior. None of them wanted to go to college. Your friends will go to college. They want careers. They won't be able to relate to being pregnant.'

Lily's eyes widened with excitement. 'But see, Mom, that's not true. That's the *beauty* of this.'

Susan made a face. 'What does *that* mean?'