

**Excerpt from ALL THINGS LOST AND FOUND**

*A novel in progress*

Hillary Casavant

It had been my idea to go to the Cape for our honeymoon. Walter wanted to skip it, so we could put the money into our savings. But I persuaded him that a couple days of sea air would do us good. I remembered the week-long vacations I used to take to Old Orchard Beach with our Québec cousins as a child, before the Depression put an end to those trips. I had memories of waves three times my size, of bathing suit bottoms filled with sand. And then there was that September day, not so long before, with Forrest.

A gross violation of Radcliffe's rules, it was. For one thing, Forrest was the teaching assistant for my biology course. For another, the house mother did not look kindly on girls who not only missed curfew but didn't bother coming back at all in the night. He and I drank coffee in the lab until three, studying lists of migratory species and mapping out our route for the following morning. He had borrowed a car, and the moon was still high as we turned onto the interstate. We took a rickety bridge to the other side of the Merrimack, and the cottages that dotted the marshland gave way to hotels and grander summer homes, all closed up for the season, until the paved road became a dirt road that rattled my teeth as we bumped along. When

we parked at the edge of the preserve, the slightest hint of twilight crept on the horizon. The air was cold, autumn already settled into the beach's bones, and a strong northwest wind held the promise of a fallout: that unique occurrence when flocks of migratory birds, deterred from their destination by a weather front, descend from the morning sky. We drank the last dredges of coffee from a thermos, tugged our hats against our ears, and looped binoculars around our necks. We had talked ceaselessly in the hours leading up to that moment but fell silent as we entered the dunes.

The preserve was smaller than it is today. Just the southernmost parcel of farmland, purchased a decade earlier with a naturalist's bequest. But the local hunters were already digging in their heels about it. Dr. Lyman, who was building the case to expand conservation, wanted Forrest and me to catalog every species that pulled off the Atlantic flyway that morning. We selected a spot at the crest of a dune and waited for the sun to rise. Above the sound of the waves, we could just barely hear the hiss of their night flight calls above us, the whisper of a kiss too indistinct to identify.

While we waited, Forrest plucked a cluster of what looked like oversized grapes from a shrub and offered me a handful.

"Beach plums," he said. His eyes were bright in the darkness. "Have you had them before? They taste like September."

I popped one in my mouth. The first bite was tart as a cranberry, but quickly gave way to a flavor like ripe apricot and strawberry jam before my tongue reached the gnarled pit at its center. He was right. It was the bittersweetness of summer's end.

"I'm glad you came tonight," he said and looked at me with an earnestness that burst in my core, ripe as that beach plum. I thought he might lean down and kiss me. How much might

have changed if he had. But I knew Walter was on the other side of that ocean, training in the trenches, and I was meant to wait for him. I remembered that and looked away, down at the purple jewels of fruit in my hand.

The sun broke over the surface of the sea, and the flocks began to drop from the sky. Plovers and skimmers, swallows and sandpipers, and what seemed like every species of warbler in their fall plumage. We worked quickly, Forrest calling out the names and counts, me capturing them in our ledger. By the time the sun reached high noon, we'd identified ninety-four different species in all, and we buzzed with exhaustion and caffeine and hunger and a kind of frenetic pleasure. We collapsed on the beach, and I slept for a few moments in the sun, listening to the gulls circle overhead and Forrest's pen scratch against paper. Had I known what was to come, I might have made myself stay awake longer.

The fallout we captured that morning was merely a footnote in the case made to preserve the island. But I like to think it made a difference. Six summers later, that same summer I married Walter, a bill to eliminate the refuge made it through Congress, all the way to President Truman's desk. But he vetoed the bill, and the land stayed wild.

What might have been if I stayed wild, too?