

Author's Note: This is a portion of the final draft of The Bomber Jacket which was deleted from version that went to print. Because Naomi is a minor character in the story, and it was necessary to shorten my very lengthy novel, this segment was deleted. However, I believe readers will enjoy learning more about Naomi through these scenes.

Naomi's story

In the intervening years, Gretchen wrote sporadically, no more than several times a year, her letters often missing whole paragraphs clipped out by the censor. She wrote as if she and Naomi had not had a terrible fight the last time they saw each other. But, Naomi thought, that was just like Gretchen to avoid unpleasanties. Or never make apologies. Just to gloss over the obvious and pretend it never existed.

Their mother Ada claimed she was a terrible letter writer so the task of keeping Gretchen informed of the news of home fell to Naomi, who wrote short, factual letters with little emotion.

Gretchen's letters to Ada were filled with stories of her adventures and the hangar dances and the RAF pilots she dated. She spoke of Henry, who ended up stationed for a while not far from Edinburgh where she continued to live with Fionna and work in the office of her uncle's manufacturing firm. In the very few letters Gretchen wrote to Naomi, she didn't mention Henry. The letters were often received months after they had been written and posted.

It was by letter that Naomi conveyed the news of Henry's enlistment in the Canadian Air Force as a mechanic in 1939 so he could volunteer for the British fight against the Nazis. Of William's enlistment the day after Pearl Harbor and his death in the Atlantic the following spring. Of their father's death later that summer of a heart attack, while he was weeding tobacco on a hot, parched August afternoon.

From time-to-time Henry wrote to Naomi. Letters of condolence after William's and Mr. Dunst's deaths, otherwise just one-page notes that said hello and how he missed her cooking and especially her strawberry rhubarb pie and to say hello to Mrs. Dunst. He never spoke of the war in his letters. He spoke more of some of the places he had gone to visit on leave. Scottish sounding names like Glasgow, Loch Ness, The Isle of Sky, Coigach Peninsula, Achiltibuie. And then of places in England after he was stationed further south.

Naomi always wrote back, once a month for several months, letters filled with all the detail she left out of Gretchen's letters. How things were at home. The struggle to keep the farm going. Her mother's increasing withdrawal. The tone and temper of the local events. News about neighbors and friends they had known growing up.

If she hadn't heard back from Henry after three or four letters, she would wait to heard again before she wrote any more letters, not wanting to appear forward.

Naomi followed the war through the newspapers and newsreels on the rare occasion that she got to the cinema. After William died, she paid little attention to the news from the Pacific or North Africa or the Russian front.

Naomi kept all of Henry's letters tied with an old velvet ribbon, tucked away in a beat-up cigar box in the bottom drawer of her bureau. Every Sunday, she would get them out and re-read them all, starting with the very first one, till they grew worn from constant handling. She loved the sound of the crinkly paper and Henry's neat, precise handwriting that had won him penmanship awards in high school.

With just her and Ada to tend the farm—and Ada wasn't much help—there was little time to be idle. Most of the fields were planted and harvested by the neighbor who had bought the old Schmidt farm in exchange for a half-crop share, but Naomi still had to weed and top the large tobacco crop and tend the garden. Somehow the years crept by, punctuated by letters from Scotland and England.

In the spring of 1945, the news from Europe was all about a war that would soon be over. The Americans freed Paris, Mussolini was hung as a traitor, and the allies were closing in on Berlin.

As she did every year, Naomi planted the huge kitchen garden that supplied them with fresh vegetables in the summer and plenty for canning, freezing and drying for the cold months. She started with the seed potatoes in March, followed by the spring onions. The other seedlings she tended carefully on the kitchen window sills.

She hadn't heard from Gretchen since January when that extraordinary letter, dated in October 1944, had come with its cryptic message of "fabulous and wondrous news." Naomi hadn't shared that part with her mother, as there was no mention in Ada's latest letter from Gretchen of such news. No telling what Ada would have said or how she might have reacted.

Most days Ada just sat on her rocker by the kitchen stove, feeding coal into its iron belly, heating up the kitchen to some unbearable temperature, ignoring Naomi's, "Mother, you're wasting the coal." Ada would sit there, rocking back and forth, as if she were trying to rock herself to some other place, something she had done increasingly in the years since William and Papa's death.

Naomi, peeling potatoes or making soup, would nearly scream from the relentlessness of the rhythm—thump, kathump, thump, kathump—as the rocking chair rolled over the uneven floor board near the stove. She was relieved to go down to the end of the lane for the mail, just to get out of the overheated kitchen.

The mail hadn't arrived, and the late April day was chilly, like it had forgotten to be spring. She shivered, the wind whipping her dress around her legs, her cotton sweater not warm enough for the day. She stood by the mailbox and surveyed the rolling farmlands which stretched

out all around her, more sharply rolling to the south and covered in winter wheat, beginning to ripen in the warmer April days.

Wheat for the soldiers. And sailors. And pilots. And their crews. For Henry.

It was as though thoughts of him on that cold April day—her never-voiced longings, her stifled dreams of attention, devotion, love—materialized in the form of a letter which the postman handed her, along with yesterday's newspaper and a bill from the power company.

She hadn't gotten a letter from Henry in almost a year. All of his news came in Gretchen's letters to Ada, in which Gretchen would say things like, "Henry says hello," or "Henry says he can't wait to bite into one of Naomi's strawberry-rhubarb pies," and Naomi would plant more strawberries and freeze more rhubarb just in case the war ended and he came home.

She would run the fingers of her right hand over the words *Henry says he can't wait* as though she could hear the timbre of his voice through the ink, and his deep laugh that filled her with joy, his, "Why, Naomi, you're the best cook this side of the Appalachian Mountains."

Naomi was afraid at first to open the new letter, until she remembered it would be a telegram that would pronounce him dead. Or missing. Like it had William's, arriving in the hands of a thin, tall, stiff officer who pulled up in the driveway in a black car flying a tiny American flag on its aerial. But then, if Henry had been killed in the war, no telegram would have come to her house. It would be his next of kin, who would receive the notice, and she might not know for months.

At first she just held the letter, savoring the sight of her name in Henry's precise, neat handwriting. Naomi Dunst. RD3. York, Pennsylvania. The crisp, light airmail paper made delicious crinkling sounds as she fingered it, as if it were saying Naomi in his voice.

She didn't want to read the letter in front of her mother, so she stuffed it in the pocket of her worn, gray cotton cardigan, threadbare from years of use, and hurried up the lane. She'd give her mother the newspaper and escaped upstairs to her bedroom on some pretense of changing her socks or gathering the laundry.

Naomi needn't have worried. Ada had gone into the parlor and lain down on the couch for a nap, covering up with the thick red afghan she had knitted years ago. Naomi thought Ada looked more like a lump than a body on the deep green sofa.

Since she had the kitchen to herself, now more temperate without Ada's obsessive attention to the coal stove, Naomi went about finishing the lunch dishes. She put the plates, glasses and silverware away in the cupboard, placed the beef bones from Sunday's roast in a pot of water to boil down into broth, then put the tea kettle on to heat. The letter lay like a lead weight in her pocket, but she refused to rush. That's something Gretchen would have done. Torn open an envelope, not even examining the postmark or stamp.

Not until she had brewed an extra strong cup of tea and splurged with a nip from the sugar castor, did she sit at the table to open the letter.

It was a long letter, not just a note on a folded piece of paper like the last letter she had gotten. Not the usual, "I should be ashamed for taking so long to write after all your faithful correspondence." No, it was full of stunning news and a question that Naomi had dreamt about for years, but never expected or dared hope to hear, especially in a letter that had traveled across the Atlantic.

"Naomi, I'd like you to consider the possibility of marriage."

It wasn't the first thing he had written or the last. But it was what burned itself into her mind like a brand. The rest of the letter was a jumble of news she could not fathom, so she thought only about that one sentence for days, until the rest of the letter began to sink in.

Until the first paragraph finally made sense.

I don't know how to say this, to make it easy, or to soften the blow. There is no way, but to tell you outright. Gretchen is dead. I can't believe it. I can hardly write it, put it down on paper, and even then, it seems like a horrible mistake. There is a child, you see. We had planned to marry, but we didn't, there wasn't time.

And the last paragraph explained it all.

I need you to be the mother this child needs. Without you, I will not be able to bring her home or raise her. She'll be more than a niece to you. She'll be your daughter. And she'll be my daughter.

It wasn't until years later than Naomi realized he hadn't said, *She is my daughter*

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Now four months later, Naomi pushed open the kitchen screen door and stepped out onto the wraparound porch, escaping the stifling kitchen where the oven poured out waves of heat. The succulent smell of roasting beef and the tangy sweetness of a baking strawberry-rhubarb pie followed Naomi into the muggy August afternoon. Carrying a glass of freshly made lemonade, she walked around to the front of the house and sat down wearily on the freshly-painted porch swing.

Using the tips of her shoes, she put the swing into motion, trying to make a breeze. Off to the west the clouds were rapidly piling up in fantastic formations, like huge mounds of cotton candy, hinting at a thunderstorm that might break the heat wave that had baked the farm for weeks.

With the sun obscured by the massive clouds, the sky had turned a weak yellow. Everything was still; even the birds had gone quiet so they wouldn't compete with the only sound Naomi wanted to hear—the crunch of tires on the dry, rutted lane.

Naomi looked around the porch, critically eying her week's work. Having scraped together enough money to buy several gallons of paint, she had worked frantically to give the

railings, posts, and window frames of the front porch a coat of fresh white paint. The rocking chair and the front porch swing got their own baptism of white. With several coats of gray she covered the fading, cracked porch floor and steps, first hammering down the loose floor boards with rusty nails she found in the barn on her father's workbench.

She had filled the flower boxes with red geraniums from the farm stand down the road and sewed a new cushion for the rocking chair from a bright, red polka dot sundress she found in Gretchen's closet.

She hoped the brightened porch would distract Henry from noticing the rest of the house, weathered from years of neglect, with paint peeling on the second story windows, several missing slates on the roof torn off in the terrible storm of last summer, and the broken attic window, stuffed with a cotton sock.

Naomi looked at the farm from her vantage point on the wide swing where she and Gretchen and Henry had sat so many summer Sunday afternoons. Though the fields were bursting with corn and wheat and tobacco, and the large kitchen garden was freshly weeded, the barn and the outbuildings looked worn and neglected. The farm had already begun looking run down four years ago when the war began.

After William died, it was Naomi who had taken over running the farm, as both her parents wandered around in a fog of grief and indifference. There had been no money to hire anyone to keep after the maintenance of the house or farm buildings. Naomi had scraped by with William's life insurance payment, the income from renting out the land to the neighbor, and selling her baked goods every Tuesday and Friday at the farmer's market. What little life insurance her father had went to bury him when he died of a heart attack the year after William was lost at sea in the Pacific.

But now that Henry was coming, Naomi didn't want him to feel sorry for her. She didn't want him to think he was doing her a favor by offering marriage, even if it did come with a baby, her sister's baby. Naomi knew at thirty-two there wouldn't be any other offers of marriage. There were too many widows anticipating the arrival of returning servicemen.

Naomi looked up at the sound of shuffling footsteps to see her mother come around the corner of the porch. She almost choked on her mouthful of lemonade as Ada sat down on the rocking chair.

"What are you staring at, Naomi? You've got bug eyes."

"I'm not staring, Mother."

Ada made a grunting noise. "We've got guests coming. Thought I'd spruce up a bit."

Naomi bit back her "a bit?" response. Naomi had hardly been able to get her mother to take a bath or comb her hair, and here she was freshly bathed, her graying hair arranged in a neat bun, arrayed not in her usual ragged cotton housedress, but in a crisp, blue linen Sunday dress with a freshly starched white collar and cuffs.

“Guest, mother. Henry. A baby is hardly a guest.”

Ada made another grunting noise. “A baby is always a guest. A welcome blessing. Especially this baby.” Naomi tried not to respond to the sorrow on Ada’s face. She had taken the news of Gretchen’s death in a silent grief, rarely voicing her feelings. Only once Ada had muttered, “All gone, all gone,” and Naomi had angrily shot back, “And what do I count for?” But Ada had either ignored her or not heard her.

Ada said in a louder voice, “Not sure you think this baby is a blessing, though it’s the baby who’s making your blessing possible.”

Naomi refused to be bated by her mother and remained stubbornly still.

“Henry was always in love with Gretchen.” Ada said it as a matter of fact.

“And Gretchen’s dead, mother.”

Naomi heard her mother rise from the rocker but, looking resolutely away, was unprepared for the stinging slap Ada laid across Naomi’s face.

“And you are happy about it. Don’t you think I know that. That now Henry needs you. Because of Gretchen’s baby. As old as I am, I’d make that baby a better mother than you will, Naomi.”

Naomi jumped to her feet and grabbed her mother by her bony shoulders.

“I deserve some happiness,” Naomi hissed into her mother’s face. “I’ve given this place everything. I kept us together, kept the farm going, kept food on the table.”

“Happiness bought at someone else’s expense.”

Naomi struggled to keep her rage under control and stepped back from her mother. As she did, the sound she had been waiting for all day reached her from the distance. Turning to face the lane, she saw a car driving slowly up the bumpy farm lane, making obvious efforts to avoid the deepest of the ruts.

“We will not discuss this again, Mother,” Naomi said in a voice full of steel. She smoothed her starched white apron and tucked a stray hair into a bobby pin. “The pie’s done by now, please go take it out”

Ada grunted and shuffled around the edge of the porch toward the side door and into the kitchen.

Naomi tried to still her shaking hands and clasped them tightly in front of her. She had wanted to be calm, welcoming, but not emotional when Henry arrived. Now, her heart racing in anger at her mother’s insufferable treatment, her face still red from the sting of Ada’s slap, Naomi felt tears gathering at the edges of her eyes.

No, she willed herself. No, I will not make a fool of myself this way.

But as she stepped slowly down the porch steps in the direction of the parked car, she felt the tears on her cheeks. And when Henry, achingly handsome in his crisp blue uniform, lifted a small white wicker bassinet out of the front seat, she knew he thought she was crying about

Gretchen and the baby whose fretful crying was the only sound other than the rumble of distant thunder.

Naomi could think of nothing to say. She stood, dumbly, staring at Henry, who looked older and tired but more attractive than she remembered. His blonde hair was clipped very short and his round face was thinner. He looked taller though, and broader at the shoulders, but his eyes were the same pale blue nearly transparent color that had always made her feel you could see through him into his gentle soul.

How could it be six years.

Those blue eyes had only given her a glance, however, and were now turned downward in the direction of the fussing baby, who was dressed in a white, frilly dress and a matching bonnet.

“Come in, come in.” Naomi said at last. “There’s lemonade, fresh made. Can I get you some? I made strawberry rhubarb pie,” she added, desperate to say the right thing.

“Sure, that’s be right-o. Lemonade that is.”

Naomi looked up to see her mother standing at the top of the porch steps.

“You bring that baby right up here to her grammy,” Ada said in a hearty voice. “And you make yourself right at home, Henry boy.”

Naomi glanced back at Henry, who had a wide smile on his face at Ada’s warm greeting. “Nice to see you Mrs. Dunst. You are looking well.”

“Thank you, Henry. That’s mighty kind.” Ada walked to the rocking chair and sat down heavily. Naomi walked around the side of the porch toward the kitchen to get Henry a glass of cold lemonade and when she came back, just a couple minutes later, she was taken aback to see her mother rocking the baby and Henry, squatted down beside the rocking chair, making cooing sounds.

Naomi walked around Henry and sat down on the porch swing. “Here’s your lemonade, Henry,” she said, holding it out for him to take.

Henry stood up and walked the few paces to the swing, reaching out to take the glass of lemonade, but did not sit beside Naomi. Instead, he went and perched on the porch railing across from Ada and the baby. Naomi watched him, noticing ribbons on his chest and insignia on his shoulders and arms, none of which she recognized.

He looked every bit the returning soldier, and she wondered if he had been greeted in port by girls who kissed him just because he was a soldier back from the war.

The thought of kissing Henry sent a wave of heat across Naomi’s chest and she sat up taller, taking an extra-large swallow of lemonade, none of which Henry noticed because he was busy chatting away with Ada about baby care.

“She’s a bit fretful. Has a touch of colic, I think,” Henry was saying. “And the heat is so hard on her. It was so much cooler, even in the hottest part of Scotland, than this.” He waved generally in the direction of the sky.

Ada was rocking the baby, who Naomi thought looked scrawny and wiry. With her bonnet removed, she was not the plump, pink tiny thing Naomi had been expecting. Not like the pictures in the catalogues.

“So how are your aunt and uncle, Henry?” Naomi asked, finally, to make conversation.

“Oh, well. The war’s been hard on them, as it has on everyone,” he replied, looking away from the baby toward Naomi. “But they’ve been very welcoming and have made just such a fuss over Rhiannon.”

“And are they still living in the same place in Carlisle?”

“Yes. Yes, quite.”

“And your uncle got you a job in the factory, then?”

“Yes, yes, he did. Machine maintenance. I’ve got some learning to do.”

“But weren’t you a mechanic in the war?” Naomi asked, puzzled.

“Aye, I mean, yes...can’t stop using these Scottish slang words...but it’s a lot different maintaining Lancaster bomber engines than machinery in a manufacturing plant.”

“Oh, I see.” Naomi didn’t see but didn’t want to appear stupid.

Henry didn’t reply, but looked back at the baby who was continuing to fret in spite of Ada’s steady rhythmic rocking and cooing noises.

For a while, the kathunk kathunk of Ada’s rocker and the squeak of the porch swing chains made the only conversation.

“Well, I think we’re in for a storm,” Naomi said, after the silence felt as heavy as the still, muggy afternoon.

Henry looked over his shoulder in the direction of the ever-darkening storm clouds.

“Could use some rain.”

“Yes,” Ada replied. “It’s been a dry summer; corn is looking wilted.”

“Nice to see crops growing. Everything looking so normal. Hard to believe there’s been a war, to come back here.”

The baby started to cry in earnest.

“Well, is it time for her bottle, then?” Ada asked. “We’ve got some fresh milk in the icebox. Have you got bottles, Henry?”

“I did bring a quart of milk. It’s with her things in the car. Be back in a jiff.”

Naomi watched Henry’s hurried steps toward the car, his ease and self-confidence. She watched as he took the porch steps two at a time, then sat down on the top one and rooted around in a small knapsack, pulling out a glass baby bottle and a screw-on lid and rubber nipple and a quart bottle of milk.

“Good, it’s still cold,” Henry said, holding up the milk. “But she likes it a bit warm. I like to take the chill off the milk. It seems to upset her tummy less.”

“Naomi,” Ada said in a commanding voice, one Naomi hadn’t heard in years, “go fill up the baby bottle and warm it up.”

Naomi stared across the muggy afternoon at her mother, trying to fathom how to follow her directions. When Naomi didn’t respond, Ada said in a disgusted voice, “Here, take the baby and I’ll do it.”

Naomi felt a panicked knot in the pit of her stomach. How long had it been since she held a baby?

Naomi put her lemonade down slowly on the porch floor and stood, looking at her mother, then the baby, and finally at Henry. She saw that Henry was smiling, as if he was eager for her to hold the baby.

But Naomi did not hold out her arms or reach down to take the baby from Ada, but stood, awkwardly, unsure what to do. She saw Ada’s frown of frustration and then watched as Henry bent down and with expert hands lifted the baby from Ada’s arms and cradled her in his own. All the time he was making soothing, gentling noises, like he used to with the horses and the cows.

“There, there, little Rhiannon, hush, hush, poppa’s got you. Come, time to...meet... your...”

Henry’s voice choked and she heard a smothered sob as he clutched the baby, Gretchen’s baby, closer in his arms. Naomi felt a chill raise the hairs on her arms and she would have sworn that Gretchen’s ghost was standing there, between her and Henry. It wasn’t Henry’s stricken face she saw, the grief of Gretchen’s loss still fresh in his eyes, but her sister’s mocking smile.

“I’m not...I haven’t been around...babies...much....” Naomi tried to make excuses for herself but she saw no empathy in Henry’s eyes. Only a deep, aching sadness.

“Time you learned,” Ada harrumped, “Sit down and hold the baby.”

Naomi knew she should reach out and take the baby from his arms, caress it, fuss over it. It was what Henry was waiting for. But Naomi could not unclench her crossed arms, could not bring herself to welcome Gretchen’s baby, even if it was Gretchen’s baby that was giving her what she wanted most in her life—Henry.

Naomi reached down and picked up the quart of milk and the baby bottle. “I’ll go get the bottle ready,” she countered and walked away, afraid to see how much Henry missed Gretchen. And how much Naomi could never take her place.

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Naomi strode with a purposeful step to her bed where the sleeveless, ivory sheath lay waiting. Because she knew there would be no one to assist her this morning, she had settled on a

dress that would require no help with tiny buttons or zippers in the back, or with fancy bows or yards of train. It was a simple dress that reached to mid-calf, with a touch of lace at the bodice and accented by a matching ivory-colored wrap.

She picked up the dress, and raising her arms over her head, let it fall slide down her arms. It descended like a whisper over her head, brushing her breasts, pausing for a moment at her hips, then caressing her thighs and stoking her knees and settling about her upper calves with a contented, silky sigh.

An image of Henry touching her on their wedding night in the same way took form in her mind, saturated all of her thoughts for one heated moment before she blinked the picture away.

“Naomi, stop it,” she rebuked the woman who gaped back at her from her grandmother’s full-length oak mirror. Its speckled, silvered surface reflected a tall, thin woman of thirty-three whose terrified eyes should not belong to a bride. She and Henry weren’t taking a wedding trip, just an overnight visit to Harrisburg, while Ada kept the baby.

When Henry had asked if she wanted a wedding trip, Naomi, longing for Henry to contradict her, said, “No, it’s not practical. We’d be best saving the money for furniture.” But Henry had not contradicted her and suggested they take an overnight trip to Harrisburg, and have a nice dinner and maybe see a show.

“I figured you’d say that,” he had replied. “You’re a very practical lady.”

She had hoped he would tell her he had planned a trip to Niagara Falls or the Pocono Mountains or even New York City. Somewhere romantic. Exciting. But he didn’t.

Frowning, she carefully zipped the left-side waist zipper so that the dress formed a snug silhouette. The shoulder pads and the pleated waist were a fit, the shop girl had said.

“And they are,” Naomi agreed, twisting to the left, and to the right, to see how the dress lay across her thin hips, giving her a deceiving, flattering, rounded look.

Naomi grabbed the hairbrush from the washstand and began to shape her hair into its everyday bun at the back of her neck. A glint of light reflecting on an oval picture frame on her bureau caught her attention. Pausing in the midst of arranging her hair, she frowned at her sister’s photograph. In it, Gretchen leaned against the archway of a tower window, her face aglow with light and laughter, her hair laying in soft waves around her shoulders. She had mailed the picture from Scotland, soon after she arrived.

Naomi laid the brush on the bureau beside her sister’s photograph and released her long, thick, straight hair. It fell onto her shoulders and down her back. A luxurious chestnut brown, her hair shone in the midmorning September light that danced in through the window. Every night she braided for it sleeping and every day she kept it in a tight bun at the base of her neck

Maybe I’ll let my hair down for my wedding, she thought. *I should have asked someone to help me dress it with some ribbons or some flowers. My hair is really very pretty.* But who would have there been to help? The wedding would be a small affair at the Lutheran church

Naomi's family had attended for generations. Where her father laid buried in the graveyard and a stone marked William's empty plot, his body forever lost in a watery Pacific grave.

There would be the minister and his wife, the organist, Henry's aunt and uncle, a several cousins who were traveling from Allentown. Naomi's mother, Ada's sister Orpha, a few friends from the Women's Missionary Society at church. A couple neighbors. Then a small reception back at the farm.

Ada barely approved of the wedding, warning Naomi she'd better do well by this baby, if she expected to win Henry's heart.

And days after Henry had first visited with baby Rhiannon, Ada announced she had sold the farm. That she was moving in with her sister Orpha who was also a widow and lived in New Freedom, nearly at the Maryland border. And that she was giving a wedding gift to Naomi and Henry—a cash down payment so they could buy a house in Carlisle where Henry was now working. Henry had found a Victorian townhouse that needed a lot of work, but Henry said he could fix it up.

Naomi wasn't certain her mother was doing this for Naomi or for Gretchen's daughter.

Staring at the picture of her sister, Naomi gritted her teeth.

The fuzziness at the edge of her vision warned her that a migraine was imminent. She pressed her fingertips against her temples and willed herself to be calm. The headaches came on more frequently these days. She imagined the bedroom darkened, lying with a damp cloth across her face.

She had agreed to marry Henry under one condition, one that had caused Henry to go silent for a long time when she mentioned it.

I'll marry you Henry, I'll be a good wife to you, I promise, as long as we raise your daughter as our daughter. As long as we tell everyone she is ours. And that she believes it too.

When Henry didn't respond, she went on. *We need a fresh start. You do, too, after all you've been through. And so does the baby. Why bring her up with memories of a mother she'll never know? Confuse her. People in Carlisle don't know us. They don't have to know our background. Besides, that way she won't feel awkward when other brothers or sisters...*

Naomi had stopped, blushing a mottled red, trying not to think of what it would take for the baby to have those other brothers and sisters.

Henry was still for so long Naomi began to regret the words. Maybe she had ruined her chances forever. Maybe Henry would remain so loyal to Gretchen that he would never think of doing such a thing.

At last Henry had said in a small, quiet voice, *If that's how it has to be, Naomi. But she should know her rightful heritage when she grows up.*

Fine, fine, Naomi had responded someone begrudgingly, yet relieved he had agreed. She would worry about what to tell the child when the time came that she was grown up, a time Naomi could not even imagine.

Naomi looked again at the photograph of her sister, glinting in the morning sun. *I won't think of you today*, she thought, slamming the photograph face down on the bureau. Taking up her brush and ferociously yanking it through her hair, she pulled its silky length into a severe bun at the base of her neck.

And I won't think of your baby either.