

In The Mood

CHAPTER ONE

SUMMER HILL, FEBRUARY 1946

Robert was surprised when he saw the atom blast on film, the mushroom cloud billowing up to the sky, so peaceful and final-looking. So natural-seeming that this was what would end it.

At the time he'd been on Bougainville, in New Guinea, preparing to advance. Not preparing to die any more, though. There's only a limited number of times you can do that before you're always prepared to die. Yet he couldn't have been utterly resigned, either, because that was the closest he ever came to crying, when he heard about the bombs. Some of the men *had* cried. This meant they wouldn't be fighting any more. They wouldn't be dying any more. This meant they would be going home.

Home was her, Catherine, in her blue cotton dress, dancing to the radio in the living room, the furniture pushed back against the walls to give her space. Him sitting on one of the chairs against the wall, entranced, not just by the glimpses of thigh and garter belt, her skirt in a perpetual flying ruffle, but her energy, her hips and hands and every part of her so alive.

'Come on,' he said on his first night home, 'let's dance,' and he walked over to the radio and turned it up loud. She smiled at him, but shook her head and put her hands behind her, backing up to the wall as though she wanted to join the furniture.

It all looked magical to him, like one of those Hollywood films they'd watched over and over on leave in Moresby. So familiar from fantasy and yet so unfamiliar in life. He could hardly get it through his head that he was going to live here now. Stay here. Be here on and on. It all seemed so unlikely, and for the last twenty-four hours every taste and smell and sound had pricked at his senses like the remnants of some delicious yet fast-fading dream.

This morning he had woken in a panic, sweating, his heart thumping. He leaped to his feet, staring about himself wildly.

‘It’s only the night carts,’ she said softly, her eyes watching him, her whole body soft and soothing for him to rest his gaze on.

He stared at her, drinking her in. She was going to have to be his reality. She was going to have to be his clue, for the next days and weeks, that he had escaped, and that he had survived.

It wasn’t until later, at dusk, when she brought him a cold beer foaming and beautiful in its glass, that he remembered she had been awake at daybreak. Had she slept at all? he wondered. He didn’t ask. Instead he drank his beer in silent appreciation. Another great moment in a long necklace of them, ever since the troop train had pulled in to Central Station the day before.

‘Heaven in a glass,’ he told her, and she smiled at him properly then.

Always handsome, she had skipped prettiness and become beautiful, thought Robert. Or maybe it was the surprise of seeing her again. Her face had fined down, leaving hollows in her cheeks and her eyes and mouth larger in her face. With dark hair and pale skin, she could look striking or washed-out, depending. Tonight she looked impressive, rather than alluring, her thick hair pulled into an elaborate roll over her temples and falling into fat curls on her shoulders, her full mouth painted a glossy, dark red. He was glad to see her nails were unpainted, as though she had given up on the extremities, and that her fingers still bore the ink stains and short nails of her profession.

‘You’re not having any?’ he asked.

She raised her own glass, filled with liquid a dark green colour, like absinthe.

‘Better watch out you don’t poison yourself.’

‘It’s just cordial.’

He nodded, yet wondered. She’d always said she didn’t trust a person who wouldn’t have a drink with you. That was when he decided they would have to dance. She’d always said she didn’t trust a person who wouldn’t have a dance with you, either – present company excluded, of course, she would hasten to add, although many, many times, he had wondered about that, too. He’d thought about it while he was waiting – those endless hours, bearable only because they were better than the alternative – and regretted it. Why hadn’t he danced with her when he’d had the chance? What kind of madness was that? Shyness, self-consciousness, a notion of superiority perhaps – was that all it had been? What madness. But everything was

mad. There was no way to reconcile these things. That's what Keith had said.

Robert raised his beer to the dusk, the sky glowing pink and golden now behind the eaves of the house opposite. Identical to theirs except that it was painted a more sensible cream with beige trim.

'The future is pink,' he'd said when the elderly widower who'd sold the house to them showed them the stockpile of paint in the garage. He didn't mind. It was pretty and feminine. The way a home should feel.

Their house sat on the corner of two wide streets of similar houses – three bedrooms, bathroom, living room, dining, kitchen and toilet out the back – eight blocks away from the shops and the station. 'Everything the busy mother could need', said the ads, 'but for Father, just a twenty-minute train ride into town.' The streets had a heavy calm, the gaiety of the wrought-iron lace on the verandahs balanced by the gravity of the Moreton Bay fig trees planted one between every three houses next to the footpath, in the road.

He took a long draught and raised his glass again, to pink houses this time, and blue cotton dresses, and long cold beers at dusk. This was the last gift from Keith. The realisation, finally, twenty-four hours after arriving home, that he'd made it. Keith had none of this. Or, what was it he said he was going to do on his first night home? A roast dinner with all the trimmings. Candlelight. Sherry beforehand and a plum pudding after, and his wife, Lila, dressed up in evening clothes. Keith was missing out on it all.

Robert had envied him sometimes, during the last months of fighting on Bougainville, when his hands developed a permanent involuntary trembling, and he wished for an immediate end to it all at any cost, even if that meant death. Even on the train down from Townsville, coming home, he'd envied Keith again, so safe from anticipation and disillusion. What kind of attitude, what kind of temperament did you need to have to cope with all this? he'd wondered, sick with worry and fighting off his dreams.

But he'd reckoned without the overwhelming physical reality of it all. He had walked up the front steps and for the first time in five years had known, without a doubt about it, that he was safe. He who had become so good at absenting himself, suddenly found himself . . . here, and it was as though his body and his soul were finally back in one piece, in a world that he wanted.

He couldn't understand any of it any more. The last five years up north, the whole of his life really, once the world sank into war. But when he looked

back, to the time before, at the man who wouldn't have a beer at dusk with his wife, or a dance when a jazz tune came on the radio, he wondered if he ever had.

'Come on, let's dance.'

Catherine let him pull her into the living room, and even helped him push the furniture back against the walls, their heavy wood skidding over the polished floorboards and wrinkling up the rug. But when he turned on the radio, that squat lurking presence, spilling over with bad news every time she touched the dial, a jazz tune was playing, and her knees turned to jelly and she had to sit down. She held on to his hand, wanting him to sit down too, but he pulled away, launching himself into a frantic dance of his own that seemed to have nothing to do with this easy music.

He wasn't a natural dancer, even though he looked like one – long legs and a lean body, narrow shoulders and elegant hands – a regular Fred Astaire. But he moved jerkily, always a few beats out of time. Until now.

She looked on with growing amazement and dismay as he swung himself into the rhythm as though it were a current, moving with a cool and zesty elegance she'd never seen in him before. And then swinging himself out of it again, playing against the rhythm, syncopating with movements of his elbows and his knees, his hands flying out to accompany the trills on the horn while his hips kept time with the snare drum.

His hair was short and grey now – she'd had to stop herself exclaiming. It had been dark brown the last time she'd seen him, and flopping over his forehead like a boy's. His face was furrowed, and his eyes squinted as though he were looking into harsh glare, giving him a pained look even when he was smiling, like now.

She watched until she couldn't bear it any longer, and then she stood up, shying away from his eager hands reaching to pull her into the dance, edging past him to the radio, and snapped it off.

He kept dancing for a few moments more, as though he had the music in his head, and it was playing on.

'Where did you learn to dance like that?' She hadn't meant it to sound like such an accusation, but she felt her lips, sticky with the unaccustomed lipstick she'd painted on in his honour, forming the words and pushing them out at him like a criminal charge.

'The Pacific.'

He shrugged at her, dismissing it all, his eyes glowing with the love for her that had been burning into her like a hot coal of accusation ever since he'd arrived.

The Pacific. Obviously they knew two different Pacifics. Her Pacific was the sea at Bondi, where they'd lived together in one of the new purpose-built flats in Edward Street, just after they were married. Not overlooking the ocean, but close enough, they told each other, close enough. Close enough to know it was there when they closed their eyes on a windy night and could hear the crashing of the waves, close enough in the mornings when they looked out the window and caught a blinding flash of sun reflected on water. And when they walked out to the tram stop, close enough to look down the hill and see the expanse of blue covering the horizon, beckoning them to forget work for the day and go down to paddle in the waves. She'd always been trying to persuade him but he had never given in. He thought of himself as a good worker, and wouldn't dream of missing the tram. And then on Sundays, when it would have been so easy to go down to the beach, they'd be seduced by the prospect of a morning in bed, and not even make it into the shower until the afternoon, when it was time to start thinking about where to meet up with friends, and what to wear, and whether to eat beforehand or have a blow-out for once and eat out.

She'd gone down to the sea just once while he'd been away, catching the tram out to Bondi after work on a Saturday, but it didn't look the same. Everything was run-down for a start, and long poles with barbed wire snaking between them stood sentry on the sand. The holiday atmosphere of shore leave that lit up Taylor Square and George Street on a Friday night hadn't extended this far – not on a cold afternoon in winter at any rate. She'd been meaning to walk past their old flat, but when it came down to it she hadn't felt able to. Instead she'd bought some hot chips wrapped in newspaper and eaten them, crouched on the sand dune, staring at the sea. She had tried to imagine him out there somewhere, in Papua or New Guinea or – who knew? – perhaps beyond.

So that was her Pacific. A honeymoon place of sunbathing and sandcastles, and later an empty place, waiting for his return. Nothing about it would have taught her to dance if she hadn't already known.

And now here he was, the embodiment of her dearest and most tightly held wish. Dancing in her living room and drinking beer on her porch. The

two of them standing together in the middle of the living room, the silence beating all around them like an enormous invisible heart.

He reached for her wrist with his long fingers and drew her hand up between both of his own.

‘This might take a while,’ he told her, his eyes soft with that awful love again. ‘It’s going to take a while.’



She had prepared a roast chicken dinner for him the last time he came home, three years earlier, in November of 1942.

After fifteen months straight of malaria and dysentery and dengue fever they’d shipped him back to the hospital in Townsville, and ten weeks later he was fit enough to come back down to Sydney. They’d offered him a discharge – men likely to start hallucinating in the cockpit of a plane are not desirable pilots – and Robert felt he had no choice but to accept. The day before boarding the train, though, he’d walked around the corner from the RAAF hospital and joined the infantry. They weren’t interested in his medical history as long as he was strong enough to march and carry a gun. In two weeks he’d be returning to commence basic training, and after that, he assumed, he’d be going back.

He didn’t tell Catherine any of this until after the fact – he had written to her weekly in those days. He didn’t tell her because he knew she’d try to persuade him not to re-enlist, and beg him to wait out the duration with her. That’s what all women wanted, he presumed. He wanted it too. And so he’d done it immediately, before coming home, because he knew that once he’d seen her, once he knew what it was like to be back at home, he might be weakened enough to agree.

Robert had asked her not to meet his train, but instead to wait for him at home. He’d been intending to find a cab, but the crowds around the station were so huge that in the end he had walked all the way from Central to Newtown and taken a train from there. Everything had changed. There were sandbags in doorways and windows boarded over. Backyards had been dug up for trenches and he almost missed his stop because the sign for Summer Hill had been removed, the idea of Japanese troops wandering lost through these suburbs filled with a wealth of resources and women not as difficult to imagine or as comical a prospect as it once would have been, and he overheard some men on the train agreeing that they would kill their women and children before they let them be taken prisoner.

Yet in spite of all this it felt as though he had been saved, and everything from a drab terrace house prettied up by a lace curtain hung in its front

window, to the sight of a woman and child crossing a road, their hands clutched tightly, filled him with an emotion he couldn't name. His throat constricted and his kit bag became heavier, and when he got off the train he paused and closed his eyes for a moment for some respite from it all.

When he walked up their quiet, tree-lined street and saw her waiting for him at the gate, just as he had imagined all those times, he took a deep breath and let it all go.

'My God, Robert, where have you been?'

'New Guinea, darling.'

It was easy to be cheerful, now that he was home, although she seemed to have fallen apart. Her thick dark chocolate-coloured hair, set in smooth waves to her shoulders usually, framed her face in a wild halo, and she had put on weight, something she had been vigilant about before the war. It didn't worry him. If anything he thought her more lovely.

While she prepared their dinner he told her about the war, or tried to.

'So I'm lucky really that they didn't send me to Europe, or Africa, like a lot of the RAAF chaps. Sounds like they're having a time of it over there.'

'What about you, though?'

'Us? We were just flying recce missions and waiting, mainly.' He saw no point in telling her the truth. It would only make her worry. He'd heard some funny stories though, and while the chicken and potatoes roasted and the greens boiled merrily on the stove he sucked up the salted nuts she'd put down in front of him and drank glass after glass of chilled beer.

'It wasn't in Moresby but further up north, on one of the islands. Attack in the middle of the night. Don't know how that happened. Not meant to. No one ever tells you much.' Out of the corner of his eye he looked at her and wondered if this story was such a good idea. 'Night attack. Anyway, one of our poor buggers thought the pigs had got out. They were keeping pigs, see, pigs that the natives had left behind. Planning a nice barbecue at some point, and this poor bugger thinks they've escaped. So instead of running down the hillside, like the rest of the men, he runs up the hill, towards the enemy. He's well inside the pig hut by the time he works out what's actually going on. The Jap, meanwhile, hares straight past him and on down the hill. So he sits the whole thing out with the pigs.'

'What happened to the others?'

He shook his head and popped a nut into his mouth.

'Aren't they meant to take prisoners?'

'They were probably as frightened to have stumbled on this lot as the poor bugger in the pig house.'

She stopped basting the chicken at the open oven door and turned around, her eyes wide.

‘All dead?’

He shrugged again. When he’d first heard the story at the base he’d roared with laughter, like all the men. None of them could believe it. Saved by the pigs!

‘Dear.’ He faltered. He wanted to tell her that to be upset about the deaths of the others was pointless. That to even think about the deaths of the others was missing the point. The point was that this man, the pig man, had been saved. And that what had saved him was a crazy, just-woken-up, fundamental misapprehension of the situation.

He liked the story, he supposed, for the same reason the other men did. It proved how random it all was. There was nothing you could do, or not do, to survive. If your number was up it was up, and no amount of running down hills was going to help you. And then, on the other hand, you might be saved, and it might even be some pigs that might save you.

‘I see.’ She turned back to the chicken.

He could see from the set of her shoulders that she didn’t. After that he didn’t talk about anything like that again.

Over dinner she made him tell her every film he’d seen.

‘I don’t believe it! You’ve seen more Hollywood films than I have!’

‘There’s talk of Betty Grable coming out at some point.’

‘You stay away from her.’

‘Her legs are nothing compared to yours.’

Giggling, she flapped her napkin under the table at his marauding hands. ‘What else?’

‘Well, the Jap propaganda station plays all the time if anyone’s near a radio. It’s a bit of a joke really but the music’s good. They play all the latest tunes.’

‘Like what?’

‘Glenn Miller, Benny Goodman, Muggsy Spanier, Artie Shaw . . .’

She shook her head. ‘I’m out of touch.’

‘You’ve probably heard them,’ he said kindly, ‘you just don’t know their names.’

She nodded, but remained doubtful. She didn’t go in for that kind of thing, and neither had he, before. They told you to make sure nothing had changed, but in the eleven months since she’d last seen him, he seemed to have, utterly. His favourite composers had been Shostakovich and Brahms, before. He had collected symphonies and string quartets in towering piles of thick records, hovering over the gramophone, his face twitching with

concentration as they played. The radio had been for concerts, and listening to the news when Prime Minister Menzies had announced it was war.

That had been his last leave in Sydney. After that fuel rationing tightened, and his leaves had been spent in Moresby and Townsville, in a welter of pubs and gambling and strange women, so different from Catherine that they hardly seemed like women at all. They hung off the men in droves, one always attaching herself to Robert, seemingly without any invitation or decision on his part needed for the contract to work. But for the whole of that one precious leave in Sydney he had stayed at home, in their house and garden in Summer Hill.

Catherine had wanted to go out, to dinners and nightclubs, anywhere you could dance and drink. To show him off, he thought, wondering whether in all those years before he ever wore a uniform she had somehow found him lacking.

But she couldn't bear the atmosphere at home. His heavy dread, and her rising panic at losing him again so soon. When they were out they belonged, somehow. On streets thronged with women and soldiers searching for relief, she felt a part of it, and that one aspect of them, their public life as a married couple, had not changed.

He couldn't bear it, though. Out on the street with her he felt lost. As though he could only barely keep himself from running out of control, or fainting from the despair of separating from her again so soon. At home he could pretend none of it was happening. That it was in the past, and that he was home now, and it was over. And some days it almost worked like that. He would dig in the garden, or fix things around the house. One day he even got out some of his drawings and tried to study them again, to see buildings and streetscapes taking shape through them as they had before. But he quickly put them away again. To look at them now was like looking into a future he knew he would never have, and he thanked God they had no children, so that at least he didn't have to bear those extra losses this time as well.

On the day his train was leaving she put on her special London Tan outfit, with the soft broad-brimmed hat and lace-up high heels, and had his things all beautifully ironed – she who couldn't iron to save herself had somehow managed to smoothly pack everything into his duffle bag without an unnecessary crease. Even his hat.

'You shouldn't have.' He tried to smile.

She hoped that she might be relieved to have him going at last, for this fake time to be ending. Fake because he wasn't home for good. He had told her he would be leaving on his first morning back at home, leaving her to

this empty house again. By that time she was spending as little time here as possible, but for the last week they had been here together every day, and it had almost felt as though he was back again. He was looking better already. Less yellow, and old, and exhausted, although his appalling fits of shivering hadn't lessened. She almost said the words that kept passing through her mind. That she didn't know how she'd cope if he left her again. That he never would have re-enlisted if he loved her. That she couldn't bear it.

And he – he almost said he wasn't leaving. That he would be a deserter, a conscientious objector. That he would send a message saying he was still too sick, anything rather than going out there again. At least the dead were dead. At least it was over for them. His survival so far had counted for just one thing, that he would be coming home. Now he was leaving again, and this time he knew what he was getting into.

He almost said it, the words were filling his mouth. But she had ironed all his clothes, and she said she loved a man in uniform. She wouldn't want him if he failed like this. No one could. And how could he stay here, knowing what the others were going through over there?

At the end it seemed to her that he was eager to leave and, although unreasonable, for the first few weeks after his leaving she had thought bitterly of him, sure that he couldn't love her the way she loved him to have gone off like that, so jaunty and gay in his uniform. Then the loneliness closed in on her again, and the grim routine of her responsibilities, and she forgot her bitterness and anger, and sank back into the yearning and waiting that she mastered over the next three years.



The next morning Robert woke with a start, as usual, but this time he didn't jump out of bed. Instead he rolled over, and, with a feeling of stealth and cunning he could hardly understand, pretended, as though still asleep, to fall against her. Just the touch of the skin of his forearm against her satin nightie was enough to send a thrill through him so startling that he became aroused, and without even trying, just lying there, his breath held and his eyes squeezed tight shut, but picturing her soft body and peachy skin, he breathlessly and helplessly came. It wasn't pleasurable, it was aching and straining and relieving.

He had done this countless times while away, of course, in tents and burrows and trenches. It was rarely pleasurable then, either, more a desperate hunt for relief, for something else, a distraction or moment of escape. He had ceased to even think of it as sexual. He thought of Catherine at those times, but so mechanically, so despairingly, that afterwards he was

always filled with sadness, a sadness that even then was a relief, some kind of reassurance that he could still feel something. And now – the irony! His lips curved in a grim smile – he had the woman herself, and the bed, and the privacy, and the time, and instead he came just as he had on the battlefield, with a distant image of her in his mind and an aching loneliness in his chest.

He pressed his hand against the damp patch on his pyjamas and collected himself, his eyes still closed, his breathing slowly returning to normal. Then he rolled against her once more, and this time was calm enough to press himself all along the length of her. She sighed, and moved against him, and that sent a thrill, this time of startling happiness, right through him. No, no more aching loneliness, he told himself, suddenly hopeful, because she was here now and all those hours of obsessive remembering, of trying for an inventory of her, inch by inch in his memory; of imagining so hard it became a fantasy with a life of its own, so that after a while all his thoughts of Catherine were tinged with the panic that he was forgetting her; now they were redundant, wiped out by the simple fact that she was here. Or rather, he was here. He was not there, he was here.

‘What are you thinking?’ Her voice a whisper, sending a light breeze across his cheek.

‘About you.’

He opened his eyes and saw the line of her cheek, and with the double vision of close range she had three eyes, overlapping and blinking at him in unison.

She pushed herself against him, so that a soft breast in pink satin collapsed against his arm.

‘I’ve been thinking about you, too.’

He put his hand on her hip. They hadn’t made love yet, and this was the first time he had touched her like this, without symbolism or special meaning. Not *The First Kiss*, or *The Kiss Goodnight* or *The Hug That I’m Home*. Simply touching.

Again and again he had to draw himself back to the present with a start. As though every sense sent a charge through him so strong, of impressions and heat and light, that he was swept away, and it took a few moments each time to regain his footing and bring himself back. As though he were a time traveller, sent by himself from last year, or any time really in the years before that, into the future to bring back some comfort, some reality and sensation from home to sustain him.

‘Hey.’ She placed her hand on his, pushing it down into the cushiony flesh of her stomach. ‘Where are you?’

She moved closer again so that now her whole body was pushing itself into his and her soft mouth was against his and his hands were on her bottom and hip and her hands were on his, pressing them down.

I'm here, he told himself in wonder, breathing her in and swooning away. 'I'm here.'

Where are you? She could sense it when he left her. And every time she felt a lurch of fear, a guilty start, as though he might be working it out, and realising, some of it, at least.

The doorbell rang, and before he could volunteer to answer she was rolling out of bed, wrapping her robe around her and skipping away from him on cold feet to the front door.

'Catherine Booker?'

An elderly man in the faded blue and gold uniform of the post office stood on the verandah, holding a thin white envelope. Catherine stepped out to meet him, pulling the door softly closed behind her.

'Yes?'

He waited after handing it to her.

'Yes?'

'Will you be all right then?' he asked.

'Excuse me?'

'I can wait while you open it if you like, dear. You might like to sit down.'

Of course, he was used to being the bearer of bad news. For years she had lived in dread of his arrival at her door. It was wonderful, thought Catherine, how quickly you can forget.

'No, it's . . .' She ran her fingers along the edge of the envelope. *US Forces*, it said in blue writing in the top left-hand corner. What if Pam was in her front garden next door? Or Robert were to follow her out here? 'Thank you, though. You're very kind.'

She turned the taps in the bath on hard and shut the bathroom door. She sat down on the closed lid of the toilet and tore open the envelope.

CATHERINE STOP WHAT THE FUCK STOP Catherine gasped. She had never seen that word typed before. AM GOING OUT OF MY MIND WONDERING STOP ARE YOU ALL RIGHT QUESTION MARK IS THE BABY ALL RIGHT QUESTION MARK WHAT THE FUCK IT'S BEEN SIX MONTHS STOP BACK IN BRISBANE NOW AFTER JAPAN BUT HOPE TO BE GOING HOME SOON STOP HAVE APPLIED TO COME TO SYDNEY BUT SO FAR PERMISSION DENIED STOP DON'T MAKE ME WALK STOP AND YOU KNOW I CAN'T SWIM STOP LEWIS STOP

It was the shortest letter he had ever written.

So he hadn't got her letter, then. Just like he'd told her to, she'd sent it care of the US High Command. But just like he'd told her to, she'd sent it to America, and now it seemed he'd been stationed here in Brisbane all along.

'Catinka? Who was it?'

She stared up at the bathroom door. 'What do you mean?' Her voice shook.

'At the door.' Robert's voice sounded close. He must be standing just a few inches away from her.

'The butcher's boy.'

She caught sight of herself in the mirror above the sink. What lies. So many of them, piling one on top of the other so that she barely hesitated before telling another one.

'I'm going to make a cuppa. You want one?' asked Robert.

'You go ahead. I'm going to have a bath.'

'Rightio.'

Standing up she opened the lid of the toilet and tore the paper into strips, folding them over and over again. Then she flushed, watching carefully until every last scrap had been whirled away.

She splashed her face with the sink's lukewarm water. Her face stared back at her. The same, as always, just the same.

She bared her teeth at herself as she pinned up her hair. It was wirier now, springing away from bobby pins and combs, refusing to follow the lustrous waves to her shoulders which she had in mind for it. Still the same horse face, though. Long straight nose and eyes heavy-lidded, so that they seemed permanently half-closed. Bedroom eyes, said Robert. Labrador eyes, said Lewis. She turned on the taps and put the plug in the bath. It was lacquered to match the rest of the bathroom in a mossy pea green.

You shouldn't feel guilty, she told herself. You shouldn't feel sad. No. She couldn't believe her luck. All the soldiers dying, all the women heartbroken, bereft, young widows left with babies, others with multiple engagements, jilted repeatedly by death, and both of her men had survived.

She hissed for a moment as she lowered herself into the water. She had been afraid, dreading making love for the first time. Now the worst was over, she told herself, and it wouldn't hurt like that again. The skin on her stomach goosepimpled and her nipples puckered as she lay back in the hot water. Was it possible that her body could go through all that it had, and yet still look the same? She stared at her hips and thighs, floating disembodied and luminous in the water. It seemed so. Robert hadn't remarked on anything.