

FICTION | *George Dila*

Maid of the Mist

Running

One night many years ago, according to what I've been told, a Bent County sheriff's deputy found me walking alone along a narrow two-lane road in the middle of nowhere. It was past midnight. It was summer. I was three years old. The story goes that I told the deputy I was looking for a new home. I have to invent some of the details now, create my own version of the truth, because there is no one to say exactly how it happened.

I'm going to say that it was a cool night, because that's the kind of summer night people pray for on the harsh plains of eastern Colorado—cool, sweet nights to give relief from the hot, mean days. I'm going to say that there was a good moon for traveling, a moon that was enormous and red in early evening when it was low, close to the ground, like a giant, glowing coal, but small, bright and white later when it was up high in the sky. A moon to light my path and to show me, softly illuminated, the fields that stretched flat in every direction uninterrupted, for all I knew, until the ends of the earth. Occasionally there was a dark mass of trees against the sky, sheltering a farm house. Lightning from an electrical storm crackled on the horizon, and I heard the soft roll of thunder, like Indian drums, a sacred ceremony happening a long way off. I'm going to say that I wore only shorts and a little shirt, and rubber thongs on my bare feet. I rubbed my arms for warmth. I was hungry.

Well lookit here, I imagine the sheriff's deputy saying when he found me walking along the side of the road.

Do I remember the bright headlights of the patrol car looming up out of the darkness, blinding me? I stopped and put my hands over my eyes to block out the glare.

Well lookit here, a little bitty girl.

He squatted down so he could look into my face, sitting on his haunches, his forearms resting on his knees, fingers entwined. Wearing an Indian ring of silver and turquoise.

Sweetheart, what are you doing out here in the middle of the night, huh?

He reached out to touch me but I pulled away.

Give me your hand, sweetheart. What's your name, anyway?

Bee-trice, I said.

He tried to take my hand again and I jerked it back.

Ah-ha. Resisting arrest, huh?

Won't go home, I said.

Your folks are probably worried sick wondering where you're at.

No.

The deputy walked away, the heels of his boots crunching on the gravel. There was a pop as the trunk of the patrol car opened. He came back unfolding a brown army blanket.

Everything's gonna be all right, sweetheart. He draped the blanket over my shoulders. Yes, honey, everything's gonna be all right.

But everything would not be all right. Taking me back to Mama and Da would not be all right. Bellyache all the time would not be all right. Baby sister Rachel always hungry, crying, would not be all right. I screamed.

The deputy pulled back, his mouth open.

Sshh, sshh. You're going to wake the dead, for God's sake.

I screamed louder, looking straight into his eyes, my face a tight, crimson knot, my fists like little rocks. Then I struck out, hitting him on the head, knocking his Smokey Bear hat cockeyed, and with the other fist I hit him in the chest.

Holy shit!

He reached out and pulled the blanket from my shoulders. I started to run but he tossed the open blanket

over my head like a net and as I struggled to break free he pinned my arms to my sides, lifted me off the ground, and carried me to the car. I could only kick and one of my thongs flew into the weeds where it may still lie this many years later. In the back of the patrol car I burrowed my face into a corner of the seat and beat my fists against the cushions, against the doors and windows, against my own head. I kicked at the front seat where the deputy sat, giving him jolt after jolt, and he kept repeating, trying to calm me, It's okay, honey, we're going to get you back to your mom and dad quick as we can. His radio buzzed with static and another voice, a woman's voice, tinny through the speaker, said, Bring her in.

That may be the way it happened, many years ago.

Pictures

I was returned to Mama and Da, although I do not remember it. And I do not remember later being taken from them with my baby sister, Rachel, and going to live in a new place with many children who were strangers.

And I do not remember with any detail the weekend my new parents came to pick me up at the foster home in Las Animas, although there are pictures to record the event. One picture shows my new mother and me in the swimming pool at the Bent's Fort Inn. She is standing close behind me, her belly against my back, her arms wrapped tightly around me, her head tilted down so that her cheek is against the top of my slick wet hair. The aquamarine water sparkles around us. Another picture shows my new father pushing me on a swing in a park. It is a barren place, the grass dry and sparse. In one picture the three of us stand next to the carved wooden sign at the Kit Carson Home and Museum. In another we are at the entrance of Old Bent's Fort. I cannot look at any of the pictures now without reading into them. In some pictures my new mother seems desperate, her smile forced and tense. In others she looks hopeful, cheerful. My new father appears distracted, glancing away or towards his

feet. I examine my own image looking for clues. Who is this girl? What can I learn from her face, from the eyes, my God, the eyes, coiled like western rattlers ready to strike? Certainly this child, this wild thing who stuffed food into her mouth with both hands, who slept on the floor, who could only grunt replies to questions, this could not have been the little girl of their dreams.

They'd brought a gift, a pink stuffed rabbit. I ripped off its arm and tore at its ear with my teeth.

Bea, no! my new mother said.

They also brought a picture album, carefully arranged to show me my new family. We sat together to look at it, the three of us, cross-legged on the motel room bed. I picked at a scab on my ankle.

Don't do that, honey. It's not ready to come off.

Here's your new brother, sweetheart. Bradley. He's six.

My eyes darted to the picture, then away.

He's adopted, too. He's a wonderful boy.

I pushed the album off my lap. My new father picked it up, held it open so I could see it.

Bradley's staying with friends while we're here.

Back in Denver. That's where we live. Near Denver.

We call him Brad. He can't wait to meet you. He's always wanted a little sister.

This is our house. Your house.

Rachel. I said my sister's name. Rachel.

Somebody else is adopting your sister, honey. A very nice family.

This is a picture of your room, sweetheart. Do you like the wallpaper? Rainbows.

Sure she does. Don't you, Bea? Everybody loves rainbows.

I pawed at the plastic pages of the album, digging the pictures out of their sleeves, looking at them and throwing them to the floor.

Careful, honey. Don't hurt the pictures.

This is your aunt and uncle in Florida. These are your cousins in Detroit. Your backyard. Your dog. Your very own Hot Wheels.

Be careful of the pictures, sweetheart.

I put my finger into the moist wound on my ankle where the scab had been.

We love you, darlin'.

Rachel, I said.

We can't take Rachel, honey. They're finding another family for your sister.

We're going to give you a home.

A real family.

A family that loves you.

Love

This family is built on love, my mother would say.

Do you know how much your mom and I love you? my father would ask. More than you can ever imagine. You're our best girl.

Bradley and I shared a bedroom for the first few weeks. He would speak softly to me after lights out.

You'll like these people, he'd say. You'll be safe here.

I responded with silence. He was not my brother. Later, I would go into his room when he was not there. I stole his baseball cards and threw them in the garbage or gave them to neighbor boys. I put holes in his stereo speakers and scratched his records and unraveled his tapes. I took his books to other places in the house, hid them and forgot them.

I hate you, he told me one night. He had come quietly into my dark room, had knelt down at the edge of my bed. I hate you, he whispered harshly next to my ear. You're crazy. I hate you.

My mother and father often told me they loved me. Sometimes they said this as I raged, pinning me to my bed as I struggled and screamed, the effort taking all of their strength. My first therapist recommended this holding technique.

When I was eight we moved to Michigan where my mother and father had grown up. I met new aunts and uncles, new cousins, and two sets of grandparents, all who told me they loved me.

I hurt things, broke things. Radios, telephones, toys, watches were soon in pieces. My dolls lost their hair, their hands and feet, their heads. I held the neighbor's pet bunny to my chest until it stopped breathing, loving it to death. You monster! the neighbor shouted. My fingernails were chewed to nubs. I sucked on pennies, scratched and picked at my skin, bit my lips until they bled. I was moved from school to school, from therapist to therapist, from drug to drug. My parents were determined to help me find a normal life.

Sometimes I asked my parents about my first family, about Mama and Da. They would tell me the story they were told, how I ran away when I was only three, how I was found on the road at night. My birth parents didn't know how to take care of me or my sister Rachel, my father said. They mistreated us. There's a scar on the back of my leg, a burn scar, they were told. I was a failure-to-thrive baby, but I was tough. I was trying to take care of my sister Rachel when I was only three and she was two. The judge took us away. I was almost four when I was adopted. I weighed less than thirty pounds, they told me.

I asked about the house I'd lived in but they didn't know much about it. It was in the country, a pretty awful place, they heard. I asked them why Rachel didn't come to live with us. They told me that the adoption people thought it would be better if Rachel had her own home. I think they were afraid that I would boss her or hurt her.

Why can't I see my sister? I asked.

You have a new life now, they told me. You have a new family.

Then my father told me this story. Up in heaven, when God was getting ready to send me to my family here on earth, there was a mistake and I was accidentally sent to the wrong family. A cosmic screwup, my father

said. It took almost four years to get things straightened out, but now I was finally with the family God wanted me to be with. And Rachel was with the family God wanted her to be with.

My father told me this story more than once.

You're a survivor, he would say. You're little but you're strong. You never gave up. You're a very special person.

You're a beautiful girl, my mother said. God gave you the gift of beauty.

Let your true colors shine through. You have a good heart. Let it show.

You've got to learn to control yourself.

Stop it! my father would shout at me when I began to rage, clenching and unclenching his fists, his face thrust forward into mine, his jaw working hard. Get yourself under control, now!

But I could not.

The Brink

The summer that I was ten we took a trip to Niagara Falls.

We're going to do all of the things my parents wouldn't do with us when we were kids, my father said.

We put on yellow plastic ponchos and went out on a platform next to the cataract. We reached out over the railing but we could not touch the water.

Can you feel the force of the falls? my mother shouted over the thunder. I can feel it, she said. I can feel the energy all through my body.

Then we went down a long tunnel behind the falls. Small chambers had been carved out of the rock, and holes dug all the way through to the outside where the curtain of water rushed by.

We went on the *Maid of the Mist*. The boat churned its way up the channel almost to the base of the falls, its engines rumbling and straining against the force of the

current. The terrible noise filled our heads, and the fine, cold spray blew across our faces.

Awesome, Bradley said.

That night we went to a special theatre to see a movie about the falls on a huge screen. It showed how the falls were formed, and about its history. The first person to go over in a barrel and survive was a woman.

See, a woman, my mother whispered, nudging my shoulder.

Then the movie told about a boy who had gone over the falls. It had happened years before. He and his father and mother were fishing in a little boat several miles upstream. But his father couldn't start the motor, the kind that starts by pulling a rope wound around the top. The boat began drifting downstream faster and faster, and there was nothing they could do. They put on life jackets. People along the river bank could think of no way to save them. Eventually they entered the rapids, the boat capsized, and the father was killed. The mother was swept close to the shore of Goat Island and was pulled out just before she reached the edge. The boy went over. People on the *Maid of the Mist* saw something bobbing in the water. They pulled the boy out, safe.

That night I lay in my bed at the motel and tried to imagine what it would be like to go over the falls like the little boy. I imagined myself being swept through the rapids. I imagined myself screaming, flailing the air, clawing at boulders, clutching at the foam. But when I neared the brink, my fear turned off the picture, would not let me look at it, would not let me continue. I lay there for a while and then tried again to imagine it. I was in the rapids, choking and sputtering, but again the picture went dark. Finally, I willed myself to continue, not allowing my fear to turn off the picture, forcing myself to look towards the edge, it came so quickly, the incredibly smooth surface of the water curving downwards, and then I was there, at the brink. I felt a small hand in mine, Rachel's hand. Looking down into the maelstrom I went

into freefall. I must have made a sound, because from the other bed Bradley said, What?

More Love

Sometimes we talked to Rachel and her parents on the phone. They lived on a farm in Colorado. I would be very excited to talk to her, but I was never sure that she knew who I was. I overheard my mother talking to her mother about therapists and school, about attachment problems and mental age. Rachel told me that she was in love with Prince Harry, Princess Di's son, and that he was in love with her and that they were going get married some day.

I was fourteen when a man first told me he loved me in a romantic way. His name was Doug, he was twenty-three, and he lived next door with his parents.

He's a re-tard, Bradley told me.

It was summer, early evening, and Doug and I were alone on the playground.

Are you a re-tard, Dougie? I asked.

He let out a burst of laughter, like a machine gun, uh, uh, uh. Yeah, I'm a re-tard.

Dougie, do you like girls?

Yeah, I like girls. Uh, uh, uh.

Do you like me, Dougie?

Yeah. I like you, Bea.

He took my outstretched hand and I led him off the playground and up a grassy hill. At the top was a cluster of trees and bushes. I let go of his hand and ran for the hiding place, Dougie running behind me, and when we reached the safety of the trees we fell to the ground panting. I leaned back on my elbows. The grass was cool and scratchy against the backs of my legs. I pulled Dougie on top of me but he held back, so I put my mouth full against his and he slowly relaxed, lowering his body onto mine.

Tell me you love me, Dougie, I whispered. Say you love me.

Uh, uh, uh, uh.

He put his mouth over mine this time, and began a rhythmic movement of his hips against mine, and I responded with a grinding movement of my own. Oh, oh, Dougie, say you love me. I felt him against me, growing, getting hard. Say you love me, Dougie.

I love you, Bea. I love you, Bea. Then he jerked against me. When he got up there was a wet spot on his pants.

Back home I went to my room, closed the door and got into bed with my clothes on.

Honey, is everything ok? my mother asked through the door.

What's up, babe?

I pulled the quilt over my head and closed my eyes and tried to remember Mama and Da. I imagined a house I'd seen in a movie about poor country people. A shack of unpainted wood. Maybe like my first home. I imagined myself as a baby, neglected, smeared with my own shit. I saw myself at three years old, finding something to eat for Rachel and me. A bag with bread in it. I tore off small pieces and put them into her mouth. I had left her there. I had run.

What's wrong with her now? I heard Bradley ask.

That night I tore my bedroom apart, threw my TV to the floor, crushed my porcelain dolls against the wall, tore the sheets and blanket from my bed, ripped my clothes from their hangers, emptied the dresser drawers into a heap in the center of the room. When my parents tried to hold me, I scratched and bit, I tore my mother's glasses from her face and broke them, and put the imprint of the sole of my shoe on the side of my father's face where it remained for nearly a week, a red welt, a reminder of our struggle. Finally I was subdued, the act taking all of their strength and their will, holding me down on the bed as I continued to fight, to thrash and to spit, to butt with my head, hissing, I hate you, I hate you both. You're not my parents.

I know they hated me at that moment, but they kept repeating again and again, between our heaving breaths

and our sobs, We love you. We love you, sweetheart. We love you, Bea. You're our best girl, our wonderful girl, and we love you.

Later, I heard my mother tell my father, I can't take it anymore.

But of course, they did take it, and they told me they loved me, and I told them I loved them, and it was all true.

Running Home

In high school I was always older than the other kids in my class because I'd been held back. For two years during school I worked part time as a bagger at the local supermarket. I learned to drive. I had sex with lots of boys. I got better at controlling my rages. I still had trouble reading and doing arithmetic, but they let me graduate.

In the quiet of early morning after my last day of school, while my mother and father still slept, I left home in the four-year-old Honda that had been my graduation present, heading west towards Colorado to find my sister Rachel. I had her phone number in my purse, along with about 500 dollars I'd saved. I took some clothes, a bag of apples and pears, a blanket and pillow, and my father's road atlas. The money would last if I was frugal, if I ate the apples and pears for most of my meals, and if I slept in the car.

I started out with my favorite station on the radio, oldies, and when it finally faded into static I switched to the strongest station I could find until it too faded away, and then I switched again. I heard country music, more oldies, a lot of rock, sometimes news, and occasionally a preacher. I stopped only for gas, and to go to the bathroom.

I spent the night in a parking lot behind a grain elevator in eastern Iowa. The sound of heavy trucks woke me in the morning and sent me on my way west. By the next evening I had crossed Iowa and Nebraska without

seeing much besides the road ahead. Just west of Ogallala I dipped down into Colorado on Interstate 76 and pulled off at Sterling. I stopped at a church advertising an all-you-can-eat fried chicken dinner and ate my fill. That night, in the quiet dark of the Honda, I tried to remember. Did I really call my first parents Mama and Da? No matter how hard I tried I could not imagine the sound of their voices. Is it possible that they never spoke to me? I could conjure up no sensation of touch, no memory of an exchange of feelings. Was it only my imagination, or did I actually remember seeing Mama sitting on a straight-backed wooden chair, her feet hanging limply, her toes barely touching the floor, her arms wrapped around herself, holding herself as she rocked her torso forward and back, forward and back, a tiny movement from the waist, endlessly, forward and back, forward and back, her lips moving without speaking, her eyes closed? Rocking forwards and back.

The next morning I filled the tank at a truck stop and washed up in the ladies bathroom that smelled of disinfectant, then headed west on Interstate 76. An hour later at Brush I headed south on Highway 71, a thin red line on the map. The closer I got the more notice I took of my surroundings, for miles and miles broad, flat land, the high, arid plains of eastern Colorado. Gigantic irrigation sprinklers on wheels inched their way across the ground. Millions of tiny green tufts sprouted in neat rows across the endless gray fields. Rocky Ford by dinner time, an apple from the bag, east on Highway 50, another thin red line. Dark as I drove through La Junta. A sign, Las Animas 21 Miles, sent a quiver rippling through my belly. An hour later I was checking into the Bent's Fort Inn.

The next day I found the park where, years before, a picture was taken of my new father pushing me on a swing. There was another family using the swings now. The parents were just kids themselves, about my age, he with a thin mustache and long, limp hair, she with a washed-out complexion and tired shoulders. They took turns listlessly pushing their toddler boy, and for the few

minutes I watched not a single word passed between them. I smiled at the boy and he stared back.

Back at the Bent's Fort Inn I put on a pair of shorts and a tank top and went out to the pool. Two girls, sisters, were taking turns doing cannonballs into the deep end. I eased into the cool water and waded to the spot where, sixteen years before, my new mother had held me in her arms. I closed my eyes, held my breath, and slipped beneath the surface, allowing the water to hold me, refresh me, envelop me, isolate me from the real world above. I let my body sway slowly with the currents, slowly swaying, weightless, wishing I could stay there forever. The play of the sisters at the other end of the pool reached me like distant thunder.

That night, from my motel room, I called Rachel's mother. She told me that my parents had called, told her that I might be headed west. I told her I would call them. She gave me directions to their house, a farm in the country. She said she couldn't wait to meet me.

Their house was a neat two story of white-painted cinder blocks, set in a square of emerald green, an oasis of smooth lawn and large trees surrounded by miles of flat, gray land. There was an old wooden barn and a newer metal barn, and fencing laced together to form what looked like pens for animals. At the entrance to the driveway was a sign in the shape of a pig. Dwyer's Farm.

As if she had been watching for me, the woman who was Rachel's mother came quickly out of the side door. She was rosy and smiling, her arms open wide for an embrace.

Bea, it's so good to see you.

Yes, I said.

You'll call me Liz. You don't remember me, but I met you at the foster home. She put her hands on my shoulders. What a beautiful young lady, she said.

I smiled, but kept an eye on the side door, waiting for Rachel to come out.

My sister, I finally said.

Oh, God! Liz Dwyer said. What am I thinking? She's out back, sweetheart. Go on, go on! She made shooing motions.

As I was walking away, Liz called my name. I turned. Your sister, she said.

Yes?

In the silence I heard the low, rough noise of a tractor in the distance.

Be patient with your sister, she finally said.

I will.

Behind the house there was a small cement patio with potted geraniums lined up along one edge and white plastic chairs pulled up to a round umbrella table. A few yards away was a garden patch about the same size as the patio, perfectly square, with plants of different heights and textures and colors, leaves of green and white and purple, with clean brown dirt raked smooth between the straight rows. Rachel sat in a lawn chair in the deep shade of a large tree at the back of the yard, gazing off in the direction of the fields, lost in herself, it seemed, not waiting or watching for anyone. I kept my breathing under control and went to her, numb, as if I was floating, out of contact with the earth.

Rachel?

She looked in my direction.

Hi, was all she said.

Even though she stayed in her chair I could tell she was larger than me, taller, heftier. Her smile seemed far away. Her eyes were slightly crossed behind thick glasses. She wore a pretty, loose-skirted cotton print dress and sandals. I knelt on the grass in front of her, put my hands on her knees and looked into her face.

Rachel, do you know who I am?

My sister, she replied through the smile. My sister, Beatrice.

I leaned forward and hugged her, resting my head on her bosom, and she held me as we rocked slowly back and forth.

Rachel, Rachel, I murmured, and then I began to cry.

She said nothing, but tugged gently at my arms, pulling me up until I was nearly in her lap, Rachel cradling me, and then she began stroking my hair, silently, gently. We stayed that way until I was all cried out.

She offered me the soft skirt of her dress to dry my face, then she used it to fan cool air onto my red eyes.

I love you, Rachel.

I love you, Beatrice, she said. Would you like to see my pigs? She clapped her hands together.

Absolutely. Let's see the pigs.

My pigs, she said. She came up quickly out of her chair and headed toward the pens by the barn, leaving me to follow.

We spent a few minutes looking at the pigs, watching them lie there, or roll over, or root with their noses into the dirt. Rachel giggled when a pig grunted, or stumbled over another pig, or rolled in a patch of mud.

What are their names? I asked her.

Never name anything you might have to eat, she said. That's the rule. Then she pointed out the few that had names. Big Daddy and Big Mama and Bertha and Andy and Pickles and Porky were like family. Permanent.

Bill Dwyer, who had been working in the fields, joined us for lunch. He and Liz asked about my life, and school, and my family, and I responded with good, positive answers. I asked Liz if she knew where Rachel and I had lived before we were taken to the foster home. Yes, she told me. No one lives there now.

Rachel was mostly silent, and before we were done she left the table and did not come back. Later, I found her in the chair behind the house. I sat on the grass next to her.

I'm so glad to see you after all these years. We're going to be close, real sisters, forever. She didn't answer.

I love you, Rachel.

Before I left, Liz gave me a big hug, then put a small square of folded paper into my hand. I looked at it in the car. It was a map.

I drove for about half an hour, following Liz's directions. Then I was on a narrow gravel road. A cloud of dust followed me for several miles. Occasionally, there was a house, or a crossroad leading toward the horizon. Twice the car scattered gangs of crows picking at the meat of dead animals. It was midafternoon when I pulled up next to the abandoned house. The sun was a yellow blur in the sky. The house was a small one story made of wood, the paint faded, the roof sagging on one side. Most of the windows were shattered. A hot breeze ruffled the trees and insects buzzed up out of the tall weeds as I pushed through them. The back steps looked dangerously dilapidated. I climbed them carefully and put my hand against the door. It swung open into a little covered porch crammed with junk—a couple of wooden chairs, a crib, stacks of old magazines, cardboard boxes filled with empty cans and bottles. A ripped mattress leaned against the wall. A door led into the kitchen. Although the windows were broken out, no breeze stirred. I walked slowly through the empty rooms. Worn linoleum covered the floors. The walls were streaked with moisture stains. Colorless shreds of curtain hung limply at a few of the window frames. I heard the whispered scurrying of small animals.

A film of perspiration formed on my forehead. For a moment I felt chilled, faint. Mama. Da. Were you here? Did you walk through these rooms? Did you occupy this space? Inhale this air? Touch these surfaces? Did these walls hear your voices? Is there anything of you left? A vibration? An atom of your breath? Did you stand naked in this tin shower, the hard soles of your feet on this rusty floor, your face upturned to the spray of water, the sweat of your body, the oil of your skin, the spit of your mouth, loose hairs from your crotch running down this drain? Mama and Da, did the cries of my sister echo here? Is this the place where I was made? Have I seen these walls before? Does any trace of the little girl remain? Yes. I can feel her. If I stand very still, quiet my mind, close my eyes, I can feel her presence. Oh. Oh. Oh Mama. Oh Da.

I sank to my knees in the center of the small living room, my eyes closed, my arms wrapped around my body, and holding myself this way I began to rock, slightly, gently, rhythmically, endlessly, back and forth, back and forth, back and forth, oh, oh, oh, oh, oh...

I awoke to darkness, still on the living room floor. As my eyes adjusted I could see moonlight through the window and the outline of trees. It was cooler now. A faint breeze moved the shreds of curtain. I left the house, pushed through the weeds, walked past my car, and when I got to the gravel road I kept walking. The moon gave enough light for me to see where I was going. It was a bright moon, high and white in the sky. I walked until I came to a paved road, followed it, and then another. It was chilly. I rubbed my arms for warmth. Lightning crackled on the horizon, and occasionally I heard the faint boom of distant thunder. Ahead I saw headlights approaching. As they came closer I continued to stare into the brilliance, unblinking. This time I would not raise my hand to block out the glare. My eyes burned from the brightness but I would not close them. The ground shook and dust flew up as the car sped by. I turned around and walked back to the house.

The next day I returned to the Dwyer farm. Rachel was in her chair behind the house, staring out across the fields. I heard the low muttering of Bill's tractor.

Where's your mom? I asked.

To town getting groceries, she said.

I love you, Rachel.

I love you too, Sister.

I took her hand and she got out of the chair and I led her to my car. I opened the door and she got in without hesitating. I didn't hesitate either. I got behind the wheel and we left together, onto the road and away.