

## CHAPTER ONE: AWAKENING

I CAME TO AWARENESS ON A SUMMER DAY in June 1934 as though waking from sleep. I am here; there is the sun; there is sweet-smelling black dirt under my bare feet. I am digging in the dirt with one of my mother's soup spoons. This is *my* hand. The little boy sitting in the toy fire truck is *my* brother, Jackie. We call him Buzz. He is a bit too big for the truck. The little girl digging the dirt beside me is my sister, Jeanette. Her blonde hair is bleached to tow by the sun, and her pale face is speckled with penny-colored freckles. She has magical white eyebrows.

Near us is a large bush heavy with red berries. A white chicken, the wind ruffling its feathered rump strolls by, given a low "craawk". We shoo her away. Stupid chicken. A few yards away from us, a tall lilac bush is weighed down by its intoxicating purple blossoms. I will bend them down to kiss for their unutterably delicious perfume. Butchie, the cat, has gotten tired of being dressed in doll clothes and has run away wearing a bonnet. Our red dog, Jigs, is asleep under the back porch.

This place is a farm. Ma and Dad, Jeanette and Jackie, and Sis live

here—with me. All around there are things growing—trees, flowers, grass, insects, and a garden with tomatoes, beans, and strawberries. There is a newly painted white chicken house a little way up the hill, and a lush waving hayfield beyond. There is a low brick barn next to the fruit orchard where plum and apple trees grow. We have fourteen cows and one hundred chickens, more or less.

I know that Dad is just over the hill behind the house. He is plowing with our horses Doc and Judy. There is a breeze. I can see the clothes lines where Ma is hanging out the sheets and towels. They are billowing and flapping, sweetly caressing her. She laughs and brushes them away. If I walk out of the shadow of the house, I am in the sun. If I walk into the shade, it is cool. Above is the sky, huge and overseeing all—the only place fit for the Father God.

On that first day of my consciousness, I looked up from the delicious dirt in which I had been digging, and from which I had come, and my awakened senses brought good news to my heart, which had continued its beating without interruption since its invisible, unheard, unfelt beginning. The news that my heart opened to was: I am here, in this backyard, in this sun and shadow. I am delighted with the sight, the sound and the smell of life. I love the sun and I love the shadow. I am in the care of my lively and resourceful mother. I am aware that my father is strong and does the hard necessary work that sustains our life, although I don't see him right now, I know him. I love my red haired brother especially for his irrepressible cowlick. I love Jeanette's dimpled wrists and her astonishing white eyebrows, and I love Sis who takes care of me and likes to wash and comb my hair into little curls. I love the arching bush with the red berries whose name I will never learn. I love the celestial lilacs and their subtle perfume that will always have the power to return me instantly to