

## **Farewell**

**Caitlin Breen**

Lisa stood in the kitchen, over the pile of dishes on the counter, staring out at the desperate storm making its way towards the small farm town of Ashland, Kansas. She used to think she would leave this town without taking a glance back; it was the town of her parents, grandparents, great-grandparents and family continued all the way back to the 1840's when everyone started migrating west. Lisa's ancestors' sights set on Oregon, but settled for the flat, fertile Kansas. And ever since then her family had sprouted up like the wheat they grew, planting more and more roots in that forgotten sea of grass. Including now her baby. A swinging Welcome sign groaned with the fervor of the wind, while the fields of wheat bowed and prayed to an unseen god. The white linens stood in stark contrast against the tumultuous sky, bruised with severe grays and troublesome blues.

Although Lisa was worried about the baby - every sneeze and cough led them to Doctor Kent's waiting room - this storm, despite the newsman's crackled warning, did not agitate her so much. She felt the storm awakened a sort of restlessness within her. Lisa wanted nothing more than to watch the destruction of the storm—let Mother Nature exact her price for the land, the wheat, the people she gave life to. But the baby cried out as the windowpanes rattled in protest. Lisa chewed

her lip as she looked over the white crib, looking at the infant, small, and vulnerable.

The howling of the wind undermined the cries of the baby, yet Lisa felt sure of herself more in a tornado than in the nursery. The baby - face red and tear streaked - expected something from Lisa. Lisa felt guilty never knowing what the baby needed; she never seemed to grasp the grace of motherhood. Instead, she flustered through the motions until her mother or a female relative quieted the infant with some soothing words, a warm bottle, and a gentle sway. *"It takes a while to get the hang of it," "It gets easier,"* all her friends told her. Six months later, it hadn't. Her mother told her, after Lisa rushed the baby to the ER for a cough, *"No mother knows what they are doing in the beginning. I didn't know what I was doing when I first had you, but I learned along the way. You don't need a handbook to be a mother; it's natural."* Something didn't feel right, though. Lisa wondered what was wrong with her.

Reaching down, she went to pick up the baby and then decided better of it. She was close to getting one of her "moments" as her mother referred to it. It was as though the world were shrinking into that tiny yellow painted nursery. She walked with urgency to the back screen door and pressed against the wiring, like the embrace of lover gone too long. Her eyes closed. Her dark lashes clung to her senses, but they seemed to slip along the soft curve of her face and plummet from her

chin violently, leaving a water paint streak of mascara behind.

The tornado recklessly twisted to a wild symphony off in the distance. And in that spiral, the whole power of the sky came funneling down, ripping and tearing at the land without reason. The clean linens on the line, after being tormented from strong winds, were set free, flying far away from those wheat fields. Lisa felt nothing...but envy. Watching the chaos ensue, she thought of John. He never got to see the baby or say goodbye to Lisa. He was gone, but Lisa was haunted by him every time she looked at the baby. “*John got out of this place,*” she had more than once or twice thought, “*and look where I am: stuck in nowhere Kansas with a baby.*”

Usually the thoughts that followed made her feel guilty, and she would light up a cigarette in the darkness of her room to ease the nerves. A mother wouldn't think such things, but Lisa did when she was left alone at night. John promised to take her away from this place after the baby was born. Lisa dreamed of moving west...to the coast. She would see the ocean for the first time. The radio interrupted her thoughts insisting that all residents of Ashland report to their cellars. Lisa knew the drill; she had been born in Ashland, after all, and this wasn't her first tornado. She grabbed the diaper bag filled it with the baby's bottle, clothes, and she scribbled on a note and stuffed that in as well. For the first time she walked into that nursery with a sense of purpose.

Lisa leaned over the crib and lifted the crying baby out. Those eyes. Nothing about the baby looked like her, she mused, as she walked through the kitchen and out onto the porch. The rage and the fury of the storm hung heavy in the air, as the winds tore at the two.

As the tornado drew near, the sky blackened and Lisa's heart lightened. She went to open one of the cellar doors, but the wind threw it open like an overeager suitor. Lisa clambered down with the baby and settled the baby in a bed of blankets. The baby had stopped crying as if knowing what she was about to do. Lisa kissed the baby's forehead and inhaled the warm, soft smell of Johnson's soap. She unlaced her shoes and climbed out of the cellar.

The wind lashed at her, but Lisa didn't mind. She continued to walk straight towards the wheat fields, leaving that little house behind. Leaving the little baby behind. The wheat was bending towards one another as if to whisper some secret, their tops brushing against one another. Lisa stood barefooted in the wheat with her old, worn floral dress flying in the wind. With her eyes closed, she could hear the whisper of the wheat. She opened her eyes, and Lisa looked up. She was encircled by the tornado, under the watchful, protective eye. Lisa felt at peace – finally, she would be leaving the little town of Ashland.

After the tornado had passed, Lisa's mother rushed in distress among the debris to her daughter's house. Not much remained except the porch. She ran

across to the cellar and opened the doors; there was her grandson, Johnny, all alone except for the diaper bag beside him. She clutched him as she clutched onto hope that Lisa could be safe somewhere else. That delusion was shattered when Lisa's mother found a crumbled note in the diaper bag with only the word,

“Farewell.”