

The Return of the 5th Sister, Phase One, Kimberley Lynne

Lights dim to the sound of a tornado's wind, followed by a crash. Lights up on interior of a kitchen with wooden walls, USC window, fireplace mantle, doors right and left, a table and four chairs. Prudence, 35, and her sister Charity, 30, are fighting panic. Prudence is holding a sheet; Charity is clutching a bucket. It is Saturday morning in early fall.

Horses whinny in the distance.

Prudence She's come home.

Charity She said she would. She said she would when we were ready.

Prudence She said she would after Roy left and he's been gone for years.

Charity I didn't believe her. What did "ready" mean?

Prudence Maybe I always knew she would, but not like this. She's eating her way through the orchard. How long before the apples run out? Then what? Why is she back? It's rained a lot lately. Maybe she's back because she's hungry. She's so big. How much food do we have?

Charity You know. Enough in the cellar to last the winter. I hope.

Prudence She could be out there for a while. Time's not the same for her. Did you see how clear her face is? Not a line. She looks like a teenager. As if time stands for her and we go on.

Charity I didn't see her face.

Prudence When she's centuries old.

Charity You're confusing her with her story.

Prudence Did you talk to her?

Charity No. No, did you?

Prudence No, I didn't get that close. I wanted to. I didn't know what to say. She tilted her head as if to listen to me inside. To hear my doubt inside me.

Charity I saw her and bolted for the house. Silly of me. How can the house protect me? Us. I brought a bucket. You're holding a sheet.

Prudence Let's be rational. She won't hurt us.

Charity She takes over the sky.

Prudence How can we explain this to Grace? She was a baby when Eve left.

Charity She'll find out soon enough. We should tell Earl. He's around. He said he'd take a look at that lower fence today.

Prudence Grace probably won't go near the orchard. We should be the ones to tell Grace. She should hear it from us.

Charity How do we say it? Your big sister's out there and means to test us. No, that doesn't sound right. Eve's come home. It's that simple.

Prudence It's Saturday. She doesn't ride near the orchard on Saturday.

Charity What does it matter? How can she miss her? She can see her a mile away. I bet they can see her from the road. I bet they can see her all the way over in town. I'll go check.

Prudence No, wait, we have to think. We camp in here for a couple of days. We have a couple barrels of flour, bags of sugar, some baking powder, some salt, half a dozen hams, some apples, a few eggs.

Charity *(Over Prudence.)* Some baking powder, some salt, half a dozen cured hams, the preserves, some apples, a few eggs.

Prudence We should bring the livestock in. The chickens won't last the night with her out there.

Charity You don't know that. How can you say that? This is our sister.

Prudence She's changed.

Charity That's a story The Council tells.

Prudence It's written down.

Charity . . . I don't think that makes it real.

Prudence We found the bodies, the blood.

Charity Anyone could've done that. I mean, I had reached a point when, heaven help me, I half believed their stories, hearing them over and over, but, now, now that I've seen her in the trees . . .

Prudence She's as big as the trees.

Charity She was smaller then. Wasn't she?

Prudence If she wasn't that big . . . We can't afford to lose any of the animals. We have to be ready for winter. I worry about losing what little we have. I worry - - -

Hope *(Offstage, yelling.)* Charity! Prudence!

Charity We have to be calm - - -

Prudence *(Overlapping.)* I'm not worried about Hope. Hope, I'm not worried about - - -

Charity In front of the others.

Prudence She'll be fine.

Hope *(Bursts in, carrying sheaves of papers. She is their 25-year-old sister. The open door lets in the sound of chickens.)* She's come! I saw her! She's sitting in the orchard, eating apples by the fistful. She didn't say a word. That's her, right? I mean, who else could it possibly be?

Prudence Hope, sit down. Breathe slowly. You're all flushed.

Charity There's no need to panic.

Hope I'm excited; I'm not panicked. Nothing like this has ever happened. Well, not since I was a child and she left. I feel dizzy. I have cramps. My ovaries are contracting. I can feel them.

Prudence Are you in your cycle?

Hope My chest is tight. I didn't expect her to be so . . . tall. She's sitting and she's as tall as the trees. When I was five and she was grown up, she didn't do that, did she? Where did she get a dress that size? Was she this big before or was I that little?

Prudence She changes her shape.

Hope . . . That's hard to think about - - - wait, how do you know?

Prudence The night she left, she grew as high as the evergreen out front. What? I've told you this.

Hope Oh, no, you've never told me this. I would've remembered this.

Charity She told me this when we were kids. I thought you were doing it to scare me.

Prudence It was dark when she left. There was no moon. I was upset. She was waving goodbye. She looked so . . . wistful.

Charity . . . I guess I should believe you now.

Prudence My eyes were full of tears. I didn't believe it myself.

Hope I don't know how I feel about this. Caterpillars and butterflies change shape . . .

Charity I should tell Earl.

Prudence He'd be little help, and he'd only antagonize her.

Hope And he'd probably tell The Council.

Charity She's much too much for us to handle alone.

Prudence Where'd you get the papers?

Hope Oh, she gave me these. *(She hands the papers to Prudence.)* I mean, she shook the tree and they fell out. Like snow. She smiled. I gathered them in my skirts, like harvesting strawberries. I don't think I've ever seen anyone so beautiful, shining from the inside. Light glows around her and butterflies wander in and out of it. Was mother that beautiful?

Charity Yes, mother was that beautiful.

Prudence They're blank.

Hope They have apple juice on them.

Charity They could be a test.

Prudence Maybe we should fill them out.

Charity But that means we'd all have to write - - -

Hope Maybe she wants us to fill in what she missed while she was gone.

Prudence She misses little. I've missed her.

Hope Mama and Papa died. *(To Prudence.)* You and Roy got married. He got sick. Then things were the same for a while - - -

Charity What could she mean by "ready"? What have we done differently today that we haven't done every day? I woke up. I got my period. I milked the cows the same way I do every day. I made Earl's lunch, some cold fried chicken and cheese biscuits.

Hope I got my period this morning too. A week early. That's different. What were you doing, Prudence, when you saw her this morning?

Prudence I was hanging out the laundry, and a poem crept into my head. It made no sense. Something about a bubble breaking. Next thing I knew I was standing in the lower pasture, staring at the orchard, staring at her. I don't know how I got there. The horses whinnied, high pitched and excited. My hairs stood on end.

Charity You know how Earl feels about you writing - - -

Prudence I didn't write it down. It's all in my head.

Hope I wish you'd write them down. Maybe now's the time to write it all down. We could use her papers - - -

Charity Hope, you know The Council objects to - - -

Hope I don't see the evil in it. Just something else that they label as sin so we feel guilt about it and don't think for ourselves - - -

Prudence They don't want me to act like a scribe. Only men can be scribes.

Hope Are their fingers better? Do they tell better stories? And what does it matter? The giant angel in the orchard will change everything.

Charity . . . She will, you know.

Prudence Let's just get through this one day.

Hope This morning, I planted basil seeds. That's what I was doing when I saw her. Well, I felt her. Pulled by her, like the moon, out of the greenhouse. My legs were leading me; I didn't know where they were taking me. My hands have dirt on them. I feel faint.

Prudence Sit. (*Hope sits. Places papers on the table.*)

Hope Tell me the poem, Prudence. Then we'll both know.

Prudence Bubbles breaking on the head of a pin will lead the other on the rocky way through the corn. The water will carry us from one wet age to the next and a stream of self will flow backwards and circle under the foreigner's legs. Isn't that nonsense?

Hope I don't know. It sounds a little like being ready. (*Memorizing the*

poem to herself, under Charity's next speech. Prudence prompts her.) Bubbles breaking on the head of a pin . . .

Charity *(Over Hope.)* That's what the milk did! It was the oddest thing. I was milking Chastity and her milk stream suddenly jumped out, went straight up, hit her in the udder and splashed back down.

Prudence *(Prompting Hope.)* One wet age - - -

Charity As if the same rules don't apply. As if Eve drew me, like the milk, like the moon, to the orchard.

Prudence I feel like I should go back to her.

Hope Me too. Something in the air.

Charity Oh, I'm not ready and the world will change and I don't know what to do.

Hope Milk defied gravity.

Prudence The world might turn different, but we'll be just fine. I'll make sure of that. Don't I? The world changes every day.

Charity Not like this.

Hope Not here.

Prudence Maybe it does but we don't notice. Maybe we miss it because it's so tiny and we can't compare it to anything that remains the same and maybe this is one big, giant something all at once. Don't leave the house. If you must go, meet back here. Everything will be fine. We'll get through this. I'll round up the cows and the chickens and find Grace before she sees - - -

Hope Why round up the animals? You don't believe that story, do you? Eve wouldn't do that. She looks so . . . so beatific.

Prudence I don't think so but I don't know - - -

Hope You can't know. You have to feel!

Prudence We don't know about the world changing, but she's definitely changed. She's stronger and she was pretty strong before. *(She exits. The open door lets in the sound of chickens.)*