

# One

**L**isten to me, Norman. I'm not going to say this twice. You call Bill Roberts back and you tell him I said he'd better get his little business plan together or I'm going to do it for him and he won't like that, Norman, he won't like that at all!"

Song frowned deeply as she listened to her assistant's reply on the cell phone in her ear. Norman could be such a wimp! When he was done whining on behalf of the owner of the latest company acquired by her father, a company headed toward failure without some serious reorganization, Song rolled her eyes and stamped her bare feet in the sand. "He'll do it, Norman, and he'll do it on time exactly the way I told him to do it unless he wants to be on the street looking for a new job. And Norman? You might be out there with him. Now, shut up and do what I tell you! *Now!*"

"Uh, Song?"

Song cut her eyes toward the man standing beside her. "What!"

"Well . . ." the man drawled, "the preacher just asked you a question."

"Oh!" Song clutched the flowers in her hand and looked into the deer-caught-in-the-headlight eyes of the woman standing in front of her.

"Would you mind repeating that? *Not you, Norman!* I'm doing something here. Just hang on. Better yet, hang up!"

"Now?" the woman asked, plaintively.

"Now," the man beside her said before Song could.

"Will you take this man, to have and hold . . ."

Song nodded. "Yeah. Got it. Sure thing. I do."

"Attagirl," he whispered to her.

Song looked up at him. "Cable. I'm sorry. I just had to solve this. I told

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Norman not to call for the next hour. Norman, *hang up!* Don't call me back until you get this solved. Goodbye!" She snapped her phone closed.

Cable laughed. "I love you."

Song squared her shoulders. "I love you too."

The minister prattled on, rings were exchanged, and then she said, "I now pronounce you husband and . . ."

*I'm married!*

That was Song's astonished thought as she heard the final words from the barefoot minister. Her second thought was, *This is crazy*. She looked into the lake-blue eyes of her groom. "Boy, are you in trouble!" she said to Cable while inwardly, she said, *So am I*.

Her entire life, Song had wanted to love and be loved. Her smart tongue, her New York attitude—that's what she had shown the world. But now, here he was. This man, finally, at the right time and the right place, who saw through her, saw her as she really was, or at least as she thought she could be. Nothing else mattered at that moment but him. At long last. Her phone played its little song. She quickly turned it off.

Cable kissed her and she eagerly kissed him back while their fellow just-marrieds laughed and applauded. When they came up for air, Song threw herself on him in joyful abandon and, heedless of her white sarong, wrapped her legs around his hips and gave him another long, enthusiastic kiss. Whoops and cheers covered them like a wave. Song threw her head back and laughed. It was perfect. The sun was just dipping below the crystal blue sea. Love had finally reached her. It had taken long enough but, never mind, it was hers.

She whispered in his ear, "Do you really love me, Cable?"

"I surely do, Mrs. Jordan," he answered with an easy grin.

She still couldn't accept it. "Why?"

His killer dimple made an appearance. "Why do you think? Because you're you."

Which was exactly the reason Song had asked the question. Loving her, she believed, had to be a hard thing. She was a complicated woman and exuded toughness in a small, durable package. Men didn't like women who were complicated, and they didn't like a woman who was a fighter by trade and inclination. Yet, there he was and here she was, standing together wiggling their toes in

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the sand on a lovely beach on the island of St. John, also known famously as Love City. It was that, and more. Perhaps due to the dangerous combination of romance and rum, St. John was also known as the isle of marriage, which, as had occurred between Song and Cable, sometimes happened between couples who had planned nothing more than a little fun time in the sun.

They were quite the pair.

She was Song Hawkins, the daughter of one of the richest men in the United States. He was Caleb “Cable” Jordan, the son of a coal miner who’d been killed in a mine. She was the “point man” for the acquisition of new properties in her father’s company. He was the superintendent of a coal mine. She had been on the cover of *Fortune* magazine. The title of the piece was, “You Think Joe Hawkins is Tough? Meet His Daughter.” He had been on the cover of *Mining Equipment News*. The title of the article was “Ventilation and Brattice Curtains in the Modern Mine.” Her mother, the heiress to a Hong Kong family fortune, had been an adventurer who had fallen to her death in the Himalayas in an attempt to be the first Chinese woman to climb K2. His mother lived in Panama City, Florida, in a doublewide trailer with her second husband, a retired plumber. Song lived in New York City. Cable lived in Highcoal, West Virginia.

Against any reasonable calculation of odds, they had met and fallen in love. And now they were married.

He’d asked her in the most endearing and oh-so-Cable-like manner. It was right after her morning yoga. She was lolling in the hammock on the veranda of their cottage when Cable came and took her by her hand. “I want you to meet someone,” he said.

“I can’t meet anybody dressed like this,” she’d protested, motioning to her string bikini.

“Aw, you look great, honey bunch,” he drawled, and pulled her to her feet. She took the time to toss on a spaghetti-strap jersey and followed him to the open-air terrace. To Song’s astonishment, at the piano sat someone she had never met but instantly recognized: Jim Brickman, her favorite romantic musician. Brickman was scheduled to sing at the resort the next day, an event Song had been keenly looking forward to, but here he was, the actual, real person, greeting Cable like he was an old friend. It turned out they had known each other for all of a half hour, but that was Cable. He liked people, so different from Song

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who always held back from strangers unless they were part of a company she was interested in buying.

Brickman nodded to her and said, "Cable asked me to sing a song especially for you," and, without further preamble, his fingers danced across the keys and he began singing a song called "Destiny."

*What if I never knew,  
What if I never found you,  
I'd never have this feeling in my heart.  
How did this come to be?  
I don't know how you found me.*

*But from the moment I saw you,  
Deep inside my heart I knew,  
Baby, you're my destiny.  
You and I were meant to be.  
With all my heart and soul,  
I give my love to have and hold.  
And as far as I can see,  
You were always meant to be my destiny.*

Song's knees felt strangely weak, and she leaned against Cable. Brickman finished his song, then said, "My friend Cable has something he wants to ask you."

Cable went down on one knee and took her hands. "Song, will you marry me?" he asked.

"That's ridiculous!" Song blurted, but when she looked into Cable's eyes, she saw he was serious. She was utterly astonished.

"You want to marry *me*?"

"I do. Right here on this beach. I've already talked to the resort manager. She said she can make it happen in a day. It'll be fun, and the right thing to do too. We're gonna get married sooner or later, aren't we? You know it's true."

"You're crazy, Cable. I don't know any such thing."

"Never make an easy thing hard," he said. She rolled her eyes, having heard it all before.

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“There are no easy things,” she replied with the certainty of experience, “only things that appear easy but aren’t.”

Still holding her hands, he stood up. “I know that’s what you think, but what a terrible opinion that is of this old world! I love you, you love me, and I don’t see that changing. All we have to do is stand up on the beach like all the other couples we’ve seen at this resort, say I do a couple of times, and we’re good to go for the rest of our lives. What could be easier than that?”

Brickman was signing autographs. Their new friends, mostly couples who had come to St. John to be married or to honeymoon, gathered around, urging Song to accept.

Song gave them a cold smile, then pulled Cable aside. “Marrying may be easy,” she said, “but marriage isn’t.”

“Is that a no?”

Song did a quick check of her heart. It was giving her a steady signal.

“No, it’s a yes,” she said, almost sadly. “This is going to get complicated, Cable, very complicated.”

Cable gave out a shout. “She said yes!”

Cheers followed, Brickman played triumphant chords on the piano, the other couples came up and hugged them, and Song was washed away in an emotional tsunami. When she came up for air, she looked into Cable’s blue-gray eyes, searching for even the slightest hint of doubt. She saw only a rock steady certainty.

“You’re amazing,” she marveled.

“Is that good?”

“Not always, Cable. Not always.” She took his hand. “Let’s go back to our cottage.”

“I’ll go back with you,” he said. “But I’ll be sleeping in the hammock tonight. Once you decide to get married, you got to start acting right.”

She had never known a man like this. “All right,” she said. “Does this mean I can wear white at the wedding?”

He laughed. “Just make sure you can get out of it in a hurry.”

“You goofball. I guess Jim Brickman is right. You’re my destiny whether I like it or not.”

“Then I guess it’s a good thing we’re going to get married.”

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IT WAS THEIR wedding night. Cable was the most marvelous lover. His touches, his kisses, everything he did lifted her higher until at the top of an arc of passion, there was an amazing spontaneous combustion of raw, wild emotion. Song had never imagined such pleasure existed. After they'd made love for the second time, they lay quietly in the warm breeze coming through the open sliders. Gradually, the volcano within her subsided, and her rational self returned.

"What have we done, Cable?"

"We got married, that's what," he answered lazily. He nuzzled his nose into her neck and took a deep breath. "You smell fantastic. I wish I could bottle you up and carry you around everywhere I go. And you are one fantastic loving machine, lady."

Wheels were turning in Song's head, wheels she'd stopped to get married and then make love but were now fully engaged. Without realizing she was doing it, she twisted on her finger the thin gold band they'd bought at the resort gift shop.

"What are we going to do?"

"In the morning, we'll drive up to Francis Bay and do some snorkeling," Cable said. "I heard there's tarpon there."

Cable could be so obtuse at times. It was one of his more endearing traits, one of several that she looked forward to changing. "I mean after our honeymoon. How are we going to work this out? I mean, you in West Virginia, and me in New York?"

Cable's reply was instantaneous. "You'll move to West Virginia. Wait until you see our house. It's up on the mountain that overlooks Highcoal. You can see the mine from there and everything."

"I can't move to Highcoal," she replied in a firm tone. "My father depends on me too much. And I love my job. I couldn't possibly give it up. Why don't you transfer to New York?"

He removed his arm from around her, came up on one elbow, and looked at her with more than a little surprise. "I can't go up there. All they do is crunch numbers in that old office. I mine coal for a living. And I love Highcoal. It's my place. Always has been, always will be."

"You love it more than me?" The question just popped out of her. If she'd thought about it, she wouldn't have asked it, or at least phrased it quite that starkly, but there it was, asked and hanging in the air of the sweet Caribbean night, fragrant with frangipani and plumeria.

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She watched him start to say one thing, then she could almost see him change his mind. “Never make an easy thing hard,” he said, as if that settled everything.

“I told you there are no easy things . . .”

“ . . . only those that seem easy but aren’t. I know.” He gazed at her. “I think you’re beautiful.”

Song had been told she was beautiful by other men, all of whom had let her down. She chose to argue the point. “Beautiful? Hardly. My lips are too big, my nose is too small, and my eyes are too narrow. I’m a funny-faced girl. You know it’s true.”

He traced a finger across her forehead and down her nose and touched her lips. “Your face is perfect. I loved everything about it from the moment we met.”

“I’m too skinny. I’m too short. And I’m flat-chested.”

“You have a figure most women would die for,” he said.

“My hair! It’s so straight. There’s not a bit of curl in it.”

“I love your hair,” Cable said, although now there was a touch of weariness in his tone. “Don’t touch it, don’t cut it, don’t curl it, leave it alone. I love everything about you, I swan—!”

“I swan? You always say that but I never knew what it meant.”

Cable explained. “Coal miners think it’s bad luck to say ‘I swear’ in the mine. It’s sort of like taking God’s name in vain. So we say I swan.”

She pondered him. “Am I going to have to learn a new language with you?”

“I swan you might,” he said, allowing a smile, and so his dimple appeared. But both vanished when he saw Song was not smiling. “You’re really serious about all this, aren’t you?”

She scrutinized him. “We’ve done the most romantic thing, Cable. We got married at sunset on one of the most beautiful beaches in the world, and we did it on the spur of the moment. But now we’re having a business meeting to decide our proper course.”

“A business meeting? In bed on the night of our honeymoon?”

“Yes, Cable. Now pay attention. In any business meeting, it’s good to start with a little truth. Do you know what makes me happy? I mean besides you, of course.”

“Not really,” he confessed.

“My work. I crawl up inside a company for my father, see what makes it tick,

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then mentally take it apart. After I understand everything about it, I either recommend moving on, or buying it. If we buy the company, we maximize its profits by making it better. Sometimes, that means we fire everybody and start over.”

Her job description didn't surprise him, but her attitude did. “You make yourself sound ruthless.”

“I don't mean to be, but I have a job to do and that's to make my father money.”

“A job is an important thing,” he said. “My job is also my town. That's why I can't leave it. It's a responsibility I took on. I can't walk away.”

They fell silent for a few moments.

“Well, I can't leave New York.”

He rested his head on his pillow, and looked at the ceiling where there were only shadows, not counting a stray gecko.

“Don't worry,” he said, after what she considered too long a time. “We'll figure it out.”

“*How* will we figure it out?” she pressed.

“We'll talk.”

“When?”

“Soon. Not now. I'm sleepy. You know. We just made love and all. Twice.”

Cable clearly didn't understand they were having a meeting, and Song knew it was important never to leave a meeting with a critical question unanswered. She was quiet for a long while, knowing he probably hoped she'd gone to sleep.

“Do you know who else got married on the same beach we did?” she asked, spoiling his hope.

“Well, I'd say about a million other folks,” he answered. He made a show of yawning.

“Renée Zellweger and Kenny Chesney.”

“Who are they? Did we meet them?”

It didn't surprise Song that Cable wouldn't know who the actress was. He didn't seem to know anything about movies or the people who acted in them. But Kenny Chesney? Surely he knew country music. She identified the pair, and said, “They had their marriage annulled, Cable. Some say it was because she wanted to live one place, he another.”

That got his attention. He sat up. “Honey, don't talk like that! It's bad luck.”

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“I don’t believe in luck—except what you make for yourself.”

“Don’t say that, either! Saying you don’t believe in luck is bad luck all by itself.”

“Cable—”

“No more,” he shushed her. “Miners are the most superstitious of fellows. Don’t you know that? Talking about annulments and such on the night of our marriage is like whistling in a coal mine. It just isn’t done.”

“All right, Cable,” she said, shaking her head at his little rant.

“Things will be better in the morning. My mother always said that.”

Song turned wistful. “I wish I’d known my mother. They say she was beautiful and brave. But why she chose to risk her life with a baby at home, I don’t know. I’ve missed her my entire life. I know my father never really got over losing her.”

“My daddy had something to say on that,” Cable replied. “He told me—it wasn’t too long before he got killed—you ever find yourself a good woman, son, don’t you ever let her go, no matter what. Good women don’t come around that often.”

She crawled into his arms. “I am not a good woman,” she said, resting her head against his chest. “I’m complicated.”

“Daddy didn’t say a good woman had to be simple,” he answered, stroking her hair. He adored her long hair and tried to remember to tell her fairly often. Women were always cutting off their wonderful long hair, and men could never figure out why.

“Will it be okay, Cable?” she asked, quietly. “Tell me it will be okay.”

“It will be okay,” he said. “I swan.” His big hands began to explore her again and she arched her back in pleasure.

“You’re beautiful,” he said.

“I almost believe it when I’m with you.”

The business meeting was adjourned.

# Two

It wasn't long ago that Song had been standing in Times Square watching some street dancers. She looked up and there he was, about as retro a man as she could imagine. A snap-brim hat right out of Indiana Jones, blue jeans and a plaid shirt, a country boy in the big city if she'd ever seen one. He wore a bemused smile, as if what he was seeing, not just the dancers but everything and everybody around him, was strange and exotic. Their eyes met across the dancers, and something clicked. One of the dancers lost his balance and fell into her.

Cable pushed through the bystanders to pick her up. He did it so easily, as if she weighed nothing. To her astonishment, he doffed his hat, just like in an old movie.

"I hope you're okay, ma'am," he said in a twang that somehow spoke to her of coal mines and mountains. He smiled, and that's when she first got a look at the dimple in his right cheek. What is it about a dimple in a man that can fire the heart of a woman?

"I'm okay," was her answer, but it wasn't true. Her heart felt as if it was going to beat itself right out of her chest. "I was just going for a cup of coffee." It wasn't pertinent, just something to say.

He stuck out his hand. When she didn't grasp it, he reached down and took her hand anyway. His hand was vast and strong and warm and strangely potent. "My name is Cable Jordan, ma'am, and I'm from West Virginia. Coffee? Don't mind if I do."

And so they sat down together in a coffee shop and it was as if they had been friends for life, desperately needing to catch up. She told him everything, of her lonely childhood without her mother, and of her father, whom she adored, and something of her education, MIT and Princeton, and a little of her job as Property and Acquisitions Manager for Song-Hawkins, Inc.

He in turn told her about Highcoal, his hometown in southern West

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Virginia, and his parents, and how his father, whose name was Wire, had been killed in a coal mine just before Cable graduated from high school, and how he'd joined the army, then gone to get his engineering degree at West Virginia University. Now, he said with pride, he was superintendent of the mine in Highcoal, a position he'd always wanted. Atlas Energy, Inc., the company that owned Cable's coal mine, had its headquarters in New York and he was there for a meeting with his boss.

She wouldn't have much cared if he had told her he'd been raised on Mars by Martians. From that moment on, she wanted to be with him. Perhaps it had something to do with the fact she'd recently been rejected by another man, and not for the first time, and now here was Cable with his charming but raw masculine energy. What was a woman supposed to do with a man like that? Run away? She was astonished that he even liked her, and in complete disbelief when he told her, after they'd known each other for a few months, "I've toted things up, and I'm pretty sure I love you."

Her friends made light of him after she'd brought him around. They called him "Garth Brooks," refusing to remember his real name and constantly imitating his mountain twang. Song acknowledged that Cable's cheerful demeanor, his big dimpled grin, and his easygoing attitude were mindful of the country singer although with much better hair, of course.

She also agreed he wasn't much like the other men she'd fallen for. He seemed at times to be of another age. He opened doors for women. He even stood when a woman entered the room. He was unfailingly polite during conversation to everyone, and could not be drawn into debate about much of anything, certainly not anything that had to do with the usual arguments of the city, of the decisions of the Mayor, or the rudeness of taxi drivers, or the meaning of the latest play by a radically left (and therefore praised) playwright.

He did not, in fact, seem much curious about the world. Highcoal, the town where he'd been raised and the site of the coal mine he now managed, seemed to absorb his mind. When he spoke of either, Song noticed her friends would automatically roll their eyes, but he took no notice at all. These things worried her, not that her friends thought less of him, but that they might be right in their assessment. He was too different, yet seemed impervious to change.

But when Cable held her, Song wanted to melt into him, to be as one with

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his enormous strength. She wanted him, needed him, and adored him—that was all she knew. It was all she *cared* to know. Any flaws he might have could be changed. Over time, she would see to that. She would make the man into the man he could be. Wasn't that, after all, a woman's prerogative?

The morning after their wedding and their romance-interrupted business meeting, Song rose while Cable was still asleep. Just as she'd anticipated, the major problem left over from the night before still existed. She still lived in New York, and he still lived in West Virginia. She slipped out on the veranda of their beach cottage to use her cell phone to call her father, who was naturally astonished at the news of her marriage. When Cable came outside, anxious for coffee, she handed the phone to him.

"How you doing, Sir?" he said. "Pretty morning here. Skys blue as a robin's egg, I swan. And you should just see this ocean—it's as clear as air."

"I don't care about the ocean," Joe Hawkins grumbled. "And I don't care about the sky. Or even the air. What I care about is my daughter. Cable, you idiot. You know I like you, but you've messed up now, son. What were you thinking? Did you get into the rum? Now, listen to me. Song isn't going to move to West Virginia. The only thing for you to do is move to New York."

"But I can't do that, sir," Cable protested. "I have a job to do in Highcoal and I've got to keep doing it. I'm not being selfish, not at all. The people there depend on me. Surely you understand."

"I should come down there and thrash you is what I understand," Hawkins said.

"If I was in your place, I'd feel the same way," Cable acknowledged. "But I do love Song, I really do. That's why I married her, after all."

To Cable's surprise, Hawkins chuckled, and his voice dropped to a conspiratorial level. "I just wanted to yell at you a bit, son. You understand. Truth is, I'm glad you married her. I was afraid Song would end up with one of those girly men she's mostly dated. You at least strike me as a man's man."

"I'm happy that's your opinion, sir," Cable said. "So you agree she should live in West Virginia?"

"No, I don't!" Hawkins snapped. "I need her exactly where she is. She's made me a lot of money and I want her to make me a bunch more. She's a sequential thinker, boy, which is rare in a woman. She nearly thinks like a man! She does A, then she

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does B, and she keeps going until she's run through the alphabet and anybody standing in her way. Never met a man who could stand up to her. She's a bit cool and sharp-tongued with most people. Won't give them a chance. I've worried about that—works in business but not so much in life. Maybe you can warm her up a little."

"She's warm enough already for me," Cable said, in defense of his wife who, he noticed, was wandering off alone on the beach, kicking at the sand, her head down. She didn't look very happy, not like a woman on her honeymoon should look. He wondered if he should be worried.

It was as if Hawkins was there beside him with his arm around Cable's shoulders, confiding in him. "Well, I'm glad you think she's warm, Cable. I don't know. Maybe it's because she lost her mother so young. She's kept to herself most of her life. She doesn't have many friends, just a few gal pals who live for business just like her. Most of them hate men—consider them weak and spineless. I was afraid Song would join them, be an old maid, get harder and tougher than she already is."

Hawkins barely paused for breath. "I can tell you this much, Cable," he went on. "You married an interesting woman. She's like her mother in that regard. That is not necessarily a good thing. In my experience, interesting women are a great deal of trouble. My daughter also generally gets what she wants. I would hate to be in your shoes right now. Surrender and get it over with, that's my advice." Then, after welcoming Cable into the family, he hung up.

"What did he say?" Song asked when she came back from her unhappy walk.

"He said he was going to thrash me."

She smiled. "How I love that man," she said. "You, too, of course." She took her cell phone back. "Are you ready to talk?"

"About what?"

"Where we're going to live."

He picked up his mask, snorkel, and fins. "I'm ready to go snorkeling."

She scowled. "You're going to put this off, aren't you?"

Cable was honest. "Yes, ma'am, I sure am. We're on our honeymoon. Let's make it a good one. The last day will come soon enough. We'll decide then."

But when the last day of the vacation that became a honeymoon arrived, nothing had been decided. On the ferry from St. John to St. Thomas, they stood on the outside deck watching their magical island shrink until it disappeared in

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the mist of an encroaching storm. Song wondered if the magic that had brought Cable to her was also disappearing in that mist.

"Cable . . ." she began. "We have to talk."

"Not yet, honey," he said, gathering her in his arms. "Let's just savor our last moments here."

As the rain pattered down, they took a taxi to the airport. Her plane was the first one to leave and when they called her to the gate, he held her until, after an awkward kiss, they parted with him promising to call her, to get everything settled. "It's all going to be okay," he said.

"But how?" she asked.

"You're my destiny," he answered. "It has to be okay."

She waved away the umbrella the attendant tried to hand her and walked through the rain across the apron to the airplane, allowing the raindrops to mix with her tears and hide them. She climbed the steps and looked back. He was there, holding his hat, watching her. He started to smile but she turned away and walked inside the airplane.

**THREE WEEKS PASSED.** Song and Cable talked every day on the phone. At first, their talks were long, detailed, but they began to get shorter. She was busy at work, and so was he. He became increasingly difficult to call. He had no cell phone, which struck Song as odd, and his home phone rang and rang. It was only at his work phone, usually answered by a man named (incredibly) Mole, that she had any chance of catching him. Though she kept bringing up their forced separation, he kept saying it was all going to work out because it had to. After a while, she realized he was trying to wear her down.

And to an extent, it worked. On a miserable, lonely day, after a string of miserable, lonely days, Song called Cable. "I miss you," she said, which she'd said before, too many times.

"Well, honey, I miss you, too," he replied. "Tell you what. In a couple of weeks, if I'm running some good coal, I'll come up to New York for a day or two."

"No, Cable," Song retorted. "I want to see this little town you love more than me. I can visit for a week. How about if I fly in next Wednesday?"

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“That new section is giving me fits,” he said. “Time is somewhat limited.”

It didn’t matter what he said because she wasn’t listening. She’d already made up her mind.

“I’ll be there on Wednesday.”

After a short pause, Cable said, “Well, come on, then.” It was scarcely a declaration of his aching need for her, but she let it pass.

Arrangements were made. Song would fly to Charleston, West Virginia’s capital, and Cable would pick her up and drive her to Highcoal. She would stay for a week, get to know the town, and then they’d see what happened next. Everything was incremental—judgments would be made, understandings would be forged, love would be allowed to carry them like an inexorable river to where they needed to go. First there was A, then there would be B, and so on until she and Cable lived wherever they were going to live, as long as it was together. What Song didn’t expect, could not even imagine, was that she was embarking on a journey that would not be sequential, but as chaotic as the jumbled hills of West Virginia.