



THE FOURNIERS

BOOK TWO
GLAMOR GIRL

VERA JANE
COOK

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For my mother, Vera Leona Ray
And for Alice Henry Thomas Henry Decker,
My Alice

GLAMOR GIRL

The Fourniers

VERA JANE
COOK



INDIES UNITED PUBLISHING HOUSE, LLC

Sheela Fournier
1920 - 1976

Chapter One

Sheela did not remember her aunt's motel in Clearwater very well. She and her sister had been so young that summer back in 1926 when Wade showed up out of the blue and insisted on driving his children to Aunt Rena's for the summer. It had been the only time her father ever wanted to take her anywhere. She had a vague recollection of her mama staying behind in Jacksonville because she was waiting on the new baby, begrudgingly allowing Wade to take Sheela and her sister, neither of whom wanted to part from their pregnant mother. But Wade got his way, as usual.

Sheela remembered her Uncle Charles more clearly than her father's sister, Aunt Rena, and sometimes even more clearly than her father. Uncle Charles had been a funny man who sang the silliest songs she had ever heard. He taught the children how to put their fingers in the dirt and plant flowers. During that summer trip, he'd often take them to the beach, and he'd blow up big colorful beach balls for them to play with. Neither her aunt nor her father ever came to the beach that summer, but her Uncle Charles loved to stand in the water and watch her swim. He would tease her with lots of splashing. But she'd swim away from him. Sheela swam out much too far for Uncle Charles to follow, even though she could still touch the bottom when she stood. He "swam like a duck," she told her sister, and it used to make them laugh like crazy to watch their Uncle Charles waddle over the waves.

She heard Uncle Charles fell down the stairs and broke his neck about a year after the Depression set in. Rena used the insurance money to keep the motel running. Wade Jr. told his sisters there was a rumor all over Clearwater that Rena had pushed Charles to his death so she could use the insurance money to get her through the Depression. Rena married less than six months later, but according to Wade Jr., her new husband lived only a year. He had a fatal heart attack while repairing the roof of the Sea Spray, and of course, more insurance money followed.

Sheela's aunt was on her third husband by the time she picked up the girls from St. Stanislaus Catholic Orphanage in 1938. Sheela felt sad thinking about showing up in Clearwater and not seeing her Uncle Charles and his funny handlebar mustache, soft and unruly as the fur on an old teddy bear. She hadn't seen her aunt since that summer when

they'd been so young. Her mother was still alive back then. After her mother died, the only person to ever visit them at the orphanage was her older brother, Wade Jr. Sheela had some fleeting memory of a short woman with dark hair who liked orange neck-scarves and spoke English like her father with that French dialect. Wade Jr. never talked about where their father was or what he was doing. Sheela never asked, and she certainly never saw *him* walk through the doors of the orphanage.

Their Aunt Rena was more remote and stern than the nuns she had left behind in Jacksonville.

"Don't talk while I'm driving," she told them. "It makes me nervous listening to the chatter of young girls."

Sheela and her sister Leda sat in the back seat and gave each other wide-eyed stares and winks that almost made them laugh aloud. They had to put their fists into their hands to keep back the laughter. It was as if laughter was something no one ever wanted them to do. Back at the orphanage, they were always sneaking it behind their hands, or else biting their lips so hard to stifle it their lips stung all day. The only nun at St. Stanislaus the girls ever saw laugh was Sister Vincetta and Sister Mary Veronica, who left so abruptly. Legend had it Sister Mary Veronica had a giggling fit during a church sermon because of the way Father Timothy said "Jesus." Sister Vincetta told them that Sister Mary Veronica was just a child herself and prone to giggles. Sister Vincetta laughed as loudly as Sister Mary Veronica when she told the girls about Father Timothy's constant referral to "Jaysus" and the hysterical nun in the quiet church on Sunday morning.

Sheela identified with Sister Mary Veronica that day, unable to stop herself from feeling silly. She and her sister stuck out their tongues at passing cars and each other while they slid down as far as they could in the back seat and made faces at their aunt behind her back. Rena Soldar hunched over the wheel, her two hands clutching it, both of those large hawk eyes of hers riveted on the road, talking about the Sea Spray and what chores the girls would have before and after school. But neither Sheela nor Leda paid much attention to their aunt that afternoon. They were too busy trying not to break up into hysterics while the miles slipped by, and all those yellow and green houses peered back at them from the road, looking so sadly neglected and worn. But the sky was so blue that day it made them too happy to notice, and there is nothing like a warm blue sky to make two teenage girls feel kissed by paradise, just by being under it.

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