

Sunlight and Shadow

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SUE BOGGIO MARE PEARL



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To Our Beloved Parents:

Joe and De Overturf
and
Dave and Fredia Pearl

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Sunlight and Shadow reached so many readers in its 2004 NAL/Penguin edition, and so many readers reached out to us to let us know how much they connected with the good folks of Esperanza and that they hoped that their story would continue. At the same time, we began to experience a deepening drought in New Mexico with serious ramifications to the environment, devastating fires, and hardship for the local farmers.

We began to imagine how this would impact the Vigil's chile farm, Sol y Sombra. Those issues, plus a few lingering ramifications from *Sunlight and Shadow*, sowed the seeds for our new novel, *A Growing Season*. And now, *Sunlight and Shadow* is reborn to join *A Growing Season* as its companion piece.

We are so grateful for the love and support of our parents and husbands. Our children and grandchildren enrich our lives beyond measure. We treasure our lifelong friendship and writing collaboration and feel so fortunate to be able to share our work with you, the reader.

Chapter 1

Abby dreamed differently now that she was pregnant. Her dreams pulled her into complex worlds that felt like an alternate universe populated with fascinating characters and illustrated with vivid colors never before seen or named.

Lying in bed, drifting between one of those compelling worlds and her real world, Abby felt her baby move for the first time. At first she thought it was some sensory trick of the dream. But as the dream dissolved, the quick insistent flutter just above her pubic bone told her this was real. She kept still, held her breath, and hoped it would happen again.

Abby wished her husband were there. Though it would be impossible to feel, Bobby would place his strong brown hand over the small tight mound of her belly and swear he felt his first child dance. He would grin and excited Spanish words would tumble out, too fast for her to translate. His impeccable English was for routine communication. Anything springing from passion came out in Spanish, whether it was when making love, watching his precious San Diego Padres baseball team, or tasting one of her new creations at her restaurant.

Two more days and he'll be here, she told her baby in the silent language that crosses through the placenta and whispers gently into tiny ear buds. She looked down to the gap between her short gray cotton tank top and bikini bottoms and peered in the early morning light at her white, faintly freckled abdomen. She was only in her fourth month, so Bobby would be with her for the most important part of her pregnancy. He was finishing the last three-month rotation of Navy submarine duty he would ever do. After twelve years, ten of them as a married man, Bobby Silva was finally coming home for good.

She loved to call him by his full name. Bobby Silva rolled off her tongue in a faintly erotic way. She learned she was pregnant the day before he shipped out. He hadn't missed much. Aside from her long hours at Abigail's, her successful restaurant in the Gaslamp District of her native San Diego, all she did was sleep. The very bed she lounged in was directly over her restaurant's kitchen. Thank God she didn't have morning sickness since her entire life revolved around food.

The phone rang and she knew before picking it up it would be Edward, her chef. Edward was the closest friend she had. Despite her very public life, sharing her public self with an entire city, only Bobby got to see behind the veil. Emotionally, he was her entire world, the world that mattered. Edward was her friend because he understood that.

"Good morning, Edward," she said.

"Do I have to come up there and throw you in the shower myself?" Edward asked.

"I'm pregnant, Edward. The baby just moved and I felt it."

"You're what?"

"Don't panic, it won't affect the restaurant. I'm just tired of keeping it to myself."

"How dare you keep it to yourself anyway! Is it mine?"

"Edward, we've never had sex. And without a doubt, you are the most gay man I know."

"Really? Thanks! But that's the only reason or I'd be jumping your bones every night your gorgeous husband's away."

"See, Edward, you'd rather jump Bobby's bones."

Before Bobby could set down his duffel bag, Abby had him in bed. No one told her pregnancy would cause such intense arousal. She was constantly finding the rub of her own clothing so stimulating, the increasing tightness of her bra against her ever-erect nipples, the hot dampness of her panties between her legs. It was a kind of physical hunger she had never known and even after pressing her own hand to her insistent flesh, the relief was marginal and short-lived. These were animalistic, primitive urges vastly different from her usual enthusiastic but more cerebral sexual feelings. Hormones, she realized with newfound appreciation for biology.

She came so violently she couldn't breathe, her strangled cries turning to sobs in Bobby's arms. She laughed and cried as the shudders finally subsided and she could hear Bobby's worried voice asking her what was wrong.

"Never leave me again," was all she could say.

They napped together then. Abby woke to the scent of roses and thought she was having olfactory hallucinations until she saw the bouquet Bobby had brought her scattered around the bed with them. The red roses seemed perfectly placed around their heads and in the folds of the white sheets, as if some interior designer had arranged them while they slept. She wanted to get them into some water but didn't want to disturb Bobby. They were entwined, his arm around her middle, his head on her breasts, her legs over his. The contrast of their skin tones reminded her of vanilla fudge swirl ice cream. A strand of her auburn hair wound over his dark thick locks. This was the moment she would keep in some inner pocket. A moment so complete and imbued with a clarity missing from the countless other moments lives are comprised of, when like insects, people go about their busy tasks failing to notice the perfection that surrounds them. Her baby stirred, her breaths matched Bobby's in tempo. Inhalation, exhalation. Rhythmic waves lapping the beach of this private shore, this sacred place.

Later, as they were dressing for the restaurant, Abby caught Bobby staring at her. She let her black slip slide over her head and settle over her like a second silken skin. She shook her collar length hair, finally growing out after that too short bob. What had she been thinking? A couple of passes through her auburn strands with her fingers and her hair curved naturally to rest against the base of her neck. Still, Bobby sat on the edge of the bed, his socks in his hand, burning holes into her with his charcoal gaze.

"What?" She blurted and then softened it with a smile.

He sighed, shook his head. "I look at you and I'm so happy it hurts." His hand still holding a sock went to his heart. "I can't feel this much happiness without feeling pain."

Abby came over to him, cradled his head against her abdomen. "Pain?"

"You are my heart. *Mi corazón*. You and the baby. I could never lose you—"

She wove her fingers through the black denseness of his close-cropped hair. She was used to the intensity of his feelings by now. In the beginning, his extreme passions were startling and foreign. Whether it was his culture's influence or just Bobby's own nature, she loved his capacity to experience everything so fully. "We aren't going anywhere. And finally, you won't have to go anywhere, either. It's over, babe. No more waiting months to be together, dreading you having to go again—it's over. We can be together all the time. You'll probably get sick of me!" She tousled his hair.

But when his eyes looked up at her, the shadows remained. "If anything ever happened to you . . ."

She knew then he was thinking about his mother, Magdalena. She had been pregnant with her second child and four-year-old Bobby had just been told he would be getting a new baby brother or sister when a drunk driver took them both away. Abby realized her own pregnancy must be stirring up the long buried trauma. "Hon, you didn't lose your mom because she was pregnant, it was an accident, a tragic, unpreventable accident. Think of the odds. Women have babies all the time, and everything goes perfectly. I'm healthy and strong. This is a happy thing, you don't have to be so worried."

He put his hands on her small waist and backed her up a step so he could stand to his full six feet two inches, and look down into her eyes. Abby could feel him summoning his strength, his adult male power.

"I don't think it's good for you to work so hard. On your feet for hours—"

"I'm not doing as much. Besides the doctor said to keep doing all my normal activities—"

"Normal is taking a walk, not lifting heavy hot trays from the oven, working nonstop for twelve, fourteen hours a day!"

"I hired two more sous chefs for Edward. I'm doing less actual work and more supervising. Edward is taking on more. I'm not much more than a glorified hostess!" She knew he wouldn't buy that last one. She was compulsively hands-on. "And now you're here to help."

"What about all the stress? There's a crisis every five minutes—"

"It isn't stress when you love it as much as I do. Look, we'll have to

fight about this later. We need to get down there.” She could feel the energy throbbing beneath her feet in the restaurant below. The pace had picked up in the kitchen. Only she could ever discern such a thing. No one could love it more.

“Great night,” Paul said, snapping shut his laptop. Edward’s brother had been Abigail’s accountant and bartender since opening six years earlier. The Jimenez brothers couldn’t have been more different from each other or more important to Abby. Paul took a gulp of his scotch, knocking the rocks together for emphasis. “We keep making money like this, we’re going to have to get some of it sheltered or the taxes are going to break our balls.”

“You’re such a poet, Pauly,” Abby said, stifling her yawn. It had been a great night. Incredibly smooth. Just the kind of night she prayed for to show Bobby this place practically ran itself. Edward had choreographed the kitchen into an up-tempo dance of fire and knives. Edward, Jamie, Christoff, and the new guy, Peter, turned out stunning plates in record time. Abby had started out the night checking every entree before her three seasoned servers whisked them to each of the twenty tables. Seeing it was hardly necessary, she spent her time circulating in the dining area, visiting with her guests, keeping an eye on the busboy. Paul had tried to convince her to put another six or eight tables into the room. There was space for it. But she liked the airy feeling, the privacy only twenty tables afforded and the number seemed right for the size of the kitchen, keeping the pace manageable.

Edward and Bobby emerged from the kitchen, laughing and goofing around. Good. Bobby looked relaxed. He’d stuffed himself on at least four courses that Abby had seen.

“God, the food is amazing! My God, that crab dish! I need to come here more often.” He sat on the bar stool next to her and poured himself another glass of wine. He clinked her glass of sparkling water in toast.

“How’s the new guy?” Abby asked Edward as he poured himself some tequila.

“Skilled. A little intense, though. He gets a very naughty look in his eye when he torches the crême brûlée.”

Abby felt a contentment that at last was complete. Her recently

refinished wood floors reflected the warm glow of the candlelight; an eclectic collection of art from local artists graced the walls she and Edward had replastered and sponge-painted themselves. Everywhere she looked she saw the materialization of her lifelong dream. She half-closed her eyes and listened to her precious husband's lightly accented cadence as he and Edward continued their banter . . . the words didn't matter, the lilt of their voices and laughter was music composed just for her. The scent of her various culinary creations still hung in the air, an olfactory accompaniment. Her baby moved, stirring her to an even deeper, soul-expanding epiphany of perfection, of gratitude.

Paul put his empty glass in the tub under the bar and gathered up his briefcase and laptop. "Don't leave my bar a mess. I'm outta here. Sandy'll cut me off if I'm any later. Here's your loot." He laid the bulging cash bag on the bar in front of Abby.

"Night, Paul. Have a great day off, say hi to Sandy for me." Abby squeezed his hand. "Thanks for everything." As emotionally ebullient as Edward was, his brother was only marginally tolerant of such affection, though she suspected he enjoyed it more than he let on.

Edward tossed back the last of his tequila. "I need a ride, Bro, my car's in the shop—"

"I told you that car would be nothing but trouble—"

"But it's a guy magnet, I swear."

"Yeah, it attracts big burly mechanics who screw you—"

"I should be so lucky."

As the door swung shut behind them, Paul pointed to the keys in the lock and motioned for Abby to lock up after them. What a sweetie. So gruff, but always looking out for everyone.

"Finally, I have you alone!" Bobby leaned over and planted a wet, merlot-flavored kiss on her mouth. "Let's go upstairs."

"I'm going to snag a snack to take up, I'm hungry already. Your baby has one hell of an appetite."

"I'll just tidy the bar and lock up—"

The door burst open, the keys jangling uselessly in the lock. Two men in ski masks thrust guns in their faces. It happened so fast, Abby could only be disoriented. "What are you—?"

"Give us your cash, bitch!"

Bobby hesitated, the cash bag next his elbow. The man who spoke

suddenly struck Bobby on his temple with his gun, knocking him from the bar stool onto the floor. Abby jumped down to him so quickly, both men cocked their guns.

Bobby sat dazed, a line of blood trailing down from his scalp to the side of his face. As Abby cried and cursed and tried to shelter him, one of the men pulled her away by her arm. His gun prodded her back, forcing her to stand.

"Leave her alone!" Bobby managed to moan. "Take the damn money and get out!"

One of the men laughed. "What a tough motherfucker! I'm scared!"

The other man ran his hand along Abby's shoulder. "She's even hotter than she looks on TV. Let's take her to the back—"

The first man grabbed up the cash bag. "Naw, we gotta go. We'll be sure to come back for a little taste of Abigail!"

"Specialty of the house, man!"

Abby nearly retched when the man who held her squeezed her breast before shoving her to the floor next to Bobby.

As soon as they rushed out, Bobby scrambled to his feet. "Call the cops—"

"Wait, are you all right?" Abby tried to stop him but he tore away from her, running to the stairs in the kitchen.

By the time Abby finished calling the police, her emotions had caught up to her. She had always been like that. So mechanical in a crisis. Numb and robotic until in the aftermath she dissolved into a quivering heap.

"I'm going to kill those punks!" Bobby said, taking the stairs two at a time. He'd retrieved his service revolver.

Abby blocked his way. "Stop, they're long gone. Let the police—"

She pressed herself to him, her tears starting to erupt.

He stood stiffly. "I couldn't do a damn thing. They were going to rape you—"

She looked into his face. The blood encrusting his left temple and eye was like garish Halloween makeup. His dilated pupils and widely opened eyes created an expression she had never seen before. "We're okay, honey. It's going to be all right." She felt him go slack and reached down to take the gun from his hand and place it on the bar. Their arms tightened around each other and they held on for dear life.

Neither of them slept much. The phone rang at eighty-thirty, a few short hours after they finished with the police and paramedics. Bobby picked it up. It was Paul, who had just heard about the robbery on the news.

“No, we’re okay. Hit me on the head, but you know how hardheaded I am—probably broke his gun. Yeah, it’s only money.”

Abby sat up, feeling the strain in her neck and shoulder. The paramedics warned her she’d be stiff and sore. Bobby hadn’t needed stitches, but he was supposed to take it easy today and follow up with his doctor the next day.

“What?” Bobby was saying in a tone that made Abby pay attention. He listened for another minute. “Holy mother of God!”

“What?” Abby asked.

“Thanks, Paul. Yeah, talk to Edward for us. At least it’s Sunday and we can all get some rest. See you tomorrow.” He put down the phone and faced Abby.

“After those punks left us they went to Nunzio’s. Left two bodies in the walk-in freezer.”

“Oh my God!” Abby said. “Was it Antonio and his wife?”

“They haven’t released the names yet. Paul said they must have put up a struggle, the place was trashed.”

“We were lucky.”

Bobby looked at her as if she’d lost her mind. “That could have been us! Those punks are still out there! They said they’d come back for you, remember?”

“They wouldn’t be so stupid! They’re on the run, probably in Mexico by now.”

Bobby got out of bed and grabbed his jeans. “This is no place to have a baby. We should move out of the city. We have the money for a nice house somewhere—”

“Bobby, I need to be close to the restaurant. I can’t be some two-hour commute away.”

He sighed and reached up to feel the bump on the side of his head as if only just remembering it.

Abby reached up to him and he took her hand and tenderly kissed it. He dropped the jeans he held and climbed back into bed.

The phone rang again sometime after they had fallen back to sleep. Abby found it in bed with them as Bobby continued his soft snores.

"Hello," she whispered.

A man with a slight accent asked for Roberto Silva.

"This is his wife, may I help you?"

"This is Miguel Vigil, Roberto's old friend and neighbor. I'm afraid I have some terrible news. His father has passed away, very suddenly, a short time ago. They think it was a heart attack."

Abby held the phone, feeling the pain her husband would have spread through her own chest. She looked at him sleeping and didn't want to wake him. Protectively she watched him breathe in and out, preserving his peace, what little he was finding after their nightmare.

"Are you there?" The man was asking.

"Yes, I'm sorry. I'll break it to him and he could call you back, Mr. Vigil. Would that be all right?"

"Yes, of course. I'll give you my number."

Bobby stirred when she got up to find a pen and paper. He was awake when she hung up the phone.

"Was that Edward?" He looked at the clock. "God it's after noon!" He got out of bed and actually smiled. "I just had the nicest dream of us taking our baby to the zoo. We should go there today, get our minds off this shit." He opened the shades to another perfect California day. When she didn't say anything, he came over to her. "You're right Abby. I'm sorry. We should feel lucky, we're alive. It's an insult to God's mercy if we—"

"Oh, Bobby, sit down, I have to tell you something," she said and began to cry.

He cried for his dead father. Ricardo had raised him alone after Magdalena's death. Abby had never met him, though she had suggested trips back to New Mexico many times. Ricardo stubbornly refused to leave his small farm to visit them. Bobby had returned home once every few years and the visits always took their toll.

She knew he was sparing her from what to him had become an ordeal, a painful penance due for loving a life so far away from home with no respect for his father's wishes. Ricardo had never been the same

after losing Magdalena, and had held on to his son all the tighter. Bobby told her how terrible he had felt breaking his father's heart a second time when he left home at eighteen to join the Navy. He had gone back on the unspoken agreement that he would stay and work the land beside his father. Bobby ripped his life from his father's loving grasp and set out with it to distant shores, foreign waters.

After his last visit home, Bobby said his father was polite but distant and treated him like an honored guest, the worst punishment he could imagine.

Now he was dead and as she watched her husband cry, she felt guilty. Guilty for loving her life here with him, guilty over their happiness that now seemed somehow at Ricardo's expense. Guilty because if the phone call had been about either one of her parents, her eyes would be as dry as stones.

But if she felt guilt, she knew Bobby's was immeasurable.

After calling Miguel Vigil, Bobby sat at their table and stared out the window. Since it was Sunday, the streets were fairly quiet. Neighbors and some tourists strolled the block. Willoughby's Antiques and Coffee Shop across the street was doing a brisk business. Good, Abby thought. The robberies and murders in the neighborhood weren't keeping people away. At least not in broad daylight.

Abby sat next to him, but it felt like she was in another universe. As much as she wanted to be close to him right now, it felt like his grief had taken him where she couldn't follow. She felt hopelessly inadequate. Everything she said felt hollow and wrong. Her tea grew cold in front of her as she hoped being here with him afforded at least some measure of comfort.

"I need to get out of here," Bobby announced. "We need to get out of here."

"We could go for a walk on the beach," Abby suggested.

"No, that's not what I meant. When we go to New Mexico to bury my father, let's stay."

"Stay? Like a visit?"

"Live there, Abby! It would be perfect! It's so beautiful and peaceful there you don't even have to lock your doors. Miles away from the

city, everything so green by the river. The incredible mountains in the distance. I can see our child playing there on acres of his own land, just like I did."

Abby gaped at him in horror. He must be losing it. The ordeal of their robbery, head trauma, maybe he had a mild concussion. The shock of his father's death. He just wasn't thinking clearly. She tried to be calm. "Bobby, I understand, I do, why that would appeal to you right now, but, let's be realistic—"

"I know I'm asking a lot and it's coming from left field, but, think about it! It really is the answer to everything. It's like my dad is giving us this gift, his death is like a sacrifice so that we'll move there and live in the house I grew up in and provide a better environment, a community for our child, around people who look like him. His culture."

Luckily, Abby was too stunned to speak for a moment. What was she? The incubator for his offspring? What about her life, her culture? Around people who look like her baby? Wouldn't her baby look like both of them? "My life is here," she said.

"You and your family don't even speak! You have a restaurant here—so what? You're a chef. You can open a restaurant anywhere. Albuquerque is a big city and it's only twenty minutes away. Or Santa Fe—where all the movie stars go—it's a little more than an hour. I inherit my family's home and land—it's not so fancy as where you grew up. No tennis courts or swimming pools. But it is beautiful and no one is trying to kill you or rape you!"

Now they were getting down to it. Abby knew he'd get to the estranged family part. And now he had last night to throw in her face. "There's brutality and crime in rural areas, and you know it. I've lived here my whole life and last night was the only time anything has happened. It's not fair, Bobby! You said we would live here after you got out of the Navy! I've built something here all these years you've been on a submarine half the time! I'm supposed to give it all up?"

Bobby fixed her with an unrelenting gaze. "I don't remember ever discussing it. I don't remember ever being asked what I wanted. Twelve years I had no say—the Navy owned me! I'm a thirty-year-old man! When do I get a say about my life? The life I want for my family?"

Abby wiped the silent tears that blurred her vision and annoyed the hell out of her. She hated to cry in an argument. It made her feel

weak and manipulative. She wanted strength and respect and a level head. She could see why he wanted to leave but couldn't believe he was asking this of her. He was everything to her. She would never leave him or end their marriage over geography or a business. It pissed her off that he knew it. "What choice are you giving me? What happens to us if you can't be happy here and I can't be happy there?"

He visibly softened; his own eyes were moist and full of sadness instead of anger. "I love you more than my life, Abigail. I swear to you, this isn't some selfish wish to be happy with no thought of your feelings. I never would want to hurt you; it kills me to push this so damn hard. We have a baby to think about now. A baby who will be growing so fast we have to think about his future now. You've never been to my home, how do you know you couldn't be happy there? I have close friends there that are family to me—the Vigils, CeCe and Miguel, are like second parents to me. Their daughter Rachel was . . . my closest friend. I hurt them all when I left. I miss them and I want my child to know them and love them, too, it's all I have left to give him. I want to go home."

"This is our home! I love this city! I love my restaurant! I love the shopping and the movies and the museums and the ocean. You always have, too. What about our trips to San Francisco, Napa Valley?"

"I never said we couldn't ever come back. We could vacation here."

She rolled her eyes. "We could vacation in New Mexico. We're talking about where to make our lives."

He was silent, his fingers drummed the table. She watched him trying to come up with the magic words. A win-win solution. She folded her arms across her heavy, sore breasts. As if she needed to be reminded they were having a baby!

"What about a compromise? It's the third week in May, no? The baby's due in October. We could sublet this place. Edward and Paul could run Abigail's. We could give it twelve months. One year to see how it goes. If you still want to come back after one year then I agree, no argument. That's how sure I am that once you are there you will fall in love with the place, the people and you will know our baby is better off there, too."

Abby tried to imagine it. Thinking of New Mexico conjured up nothing but old 1950s movies about the Old West and Mexico. Saloons and Poncho Villa.

“Think of it as some time off. Just to be together, slow down and enjoy the simple things in life. The last five months of your pregnancy you could sleep as much as you want. Garden, take walks. Read books. Gaze at the stars. Then we have our baby and we can, how do they say?—cocoon together. No pressures, just time to be together. We have plenty of money, savings, our investments. The house is free and clear. We can generate some income from alfalfa and chile crops if we want. One year out of our lives, it’s all I’m asking.”

She could argue that a year away could kill her restaurant. She was Abigail’s. Once she was gone for any length of time, her regulars might drift away. If it did survive, even thrive, it would no longer be hers in any meaningful way. And forget about being a regular contributor to the local TV show, those appearances were tied to her presence at her restaurant. There was a long line behind her of talented, charismatic chefs from up-and-coming restaurants waiting to fill her shoes.

Trying to straddle two worlds by commuting several hours on a plane would be stressful and exhausting, especially since she hated to fly even when she wasn’t pregnant. Leaving either world for the other on a regular basis would hurt everyone concerned and take all the pleasure out of it.

She realized, their marriage, with ten years of Bobby’s long absences and being stationed in San Diego, had postponed any real discussion or decision that other couples have to resolve all the time. She’d never had to face that a marriage is two people, two individual careers, backgrounds and dreams. But a marriage is nothing if not about how to make a union from two separate entities that will travel through time and that demand sacrifices on both parts for the good of the whole.

She’d had it her way so long and without question, she’d forgotten there was anyone else to consider. Her heart tore when she realized she would be wrong to refuse him this. One year to live his dream and then right of first refusal.

“Do you trust me, Abby?”

“Completely.”

“Then, you know I would never trick you into going there and then go back on my word. I can’t be happy if you aren’t.”

A tear slid down her cheek as the sad irony nearly made her smile. “And I can’t be happy if you aren’t. Do you trust me, Bobby?”

“Absolutely.”

"Then you know I'll go there and I will honestly try to be happy. That's all I can do, is try."

"And if you can't be. We'll move back here. I promise." He reached for her hand and she gave it to him.

"What's the name of this place, again? My new home?"

"Esperanza. It means hope."

In typical fashion, Abby focused on what needed to be done and pushed her emotions into that storage compartment that served her so well. She met with Paul and Edward, redirected Paul's stunned argument and Edward's emotional outburst and obtained their cooperation to run Abigail's in her absence. Her attorney drew up papers securing her position as absentee co-owner, giving autonomous management to Paul, with profit sharing and an option to buy her out in one year if she chose to remain in Esperanza. She filmed her last TV segment with Edward who delighted the station manager and producers with his flamboyant humor and spectacular culinary skills. They agreed to let him transition into her spot. She managed all of this in four days.

Each night when she wearily climbed the steps to their condo, she found Bobby had packed more of their lives into boxes. They would leave their towering potted palms and other plants for Paul and Sandy, who were subletting the place.

Abby had tried to send Bobby on ahead to Esperanza.

"No, I'd never stick you with all of this," he said, stacking another box by the door.

"But the arrangements . . . aren't you needed there?" She sank down into a corner of the sofa that wasn't covered with ski equipment or scuba gear. Even as she asked, she realized Bobby would need her at his side when he confronted the physical reality of his father's death.

"Miguel and CeCe are handling it. The Rosary isn't until Friday and the funeral mass is Saturday afternoon. I can drive while you sleep. The movers will be here to put it into storage until we call from Esperanza to have it transported out to us. Gives us some time to get the house ready. We'll just take a couple of suitcases, anything we need right away. I keep thinking he'll be there—isn't that crazy?" He smiled and shrugged while some tears spilled down his unshaven face.

She stood and he pulled her into his embrace. She felt his sandpaper jaw rest carefully against her temple, his hot tears traced a path down her cheek mingling with her own. Maybe it was crazy. All of it. But in his arms crazy somehow made sense.