

*Junos
Daughters*



• CHAPTER I •

Here in This Island We Arriv'd

There was one day in early June of each year when theater-loving residents of San Juan Island, Washington, listened more eagerly than usual for the echoing horn of the ferry in Friday Harbor. It was the day the Equity actors, professionals from New York and Los Angeles and Ashland, Oregon, arrived on the island to take their roles in the annual Shakespeare production. They came in their city clothes, or in brand new fleece and Gore-Tex, and fanned out to the spare rooms and converted garages and guest cabins happily offered up by islanders.

To the tourists who poured in from Seattle and Portland and San Francisco, it was a day like any other, an opportunity for bike riding on Lopez or whale watching in Haro Strait or strolling through the Westcott Bay Sculpture Park & Nature Reserve. Islanders who, like Jenny, helped with the sets or took the smaller parts, looked forward to this day the way they watched for the blooming of the red columbine. It meant that summer had finally come.

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Dale and Peg, the founders of Props to You, had come to San Juan Island from the Oregon Shakespeare Festival in Ashland fifteen years before. They had arrived like so many of their neighbors: burnt out from the city or unhappy in their jobs or marriages or looking for a safer, more uncomplicated place to raise children. Back then you didn't have to be a Microsoft millionaire to buy a plot of land on San Juan or Lopez or Shaw. The ratio of old hippies, glassblowers, and lavender farmers to heiresses and rock stars was still higher than visitors to the islands could believe when they looked out their hotel windows at the views of Mount Baker.

The pair of actors had arrived with all their worldly goods in a VW camper van and bought five acres of land on Egg Lake Road. At the time it was just a pasture and a barn. They lived in their van for two years until they could finish their cabin and then immediately thereafter had framed a stage out of two-by-fours covered in plywood. They had begun casting their first production before the plywood was even painted. *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. People who had been around a while still talked about how the guy that Dale had convinced to come up for the summer and play Puck went for a psilocybin-induced walkabout on Turtleback Mountain and had to be rescued by the Washington Wing Civil Air Patrol. They talked a little less about what went on between him and Peg that summer, though they all knew. Everyone liked Peg.

It was in February of each year that Dale and Peg revealed the play they'd chosen for the coming summer. In no time, copies would be passed around from bed-and-breakfast owners

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to groundskeepers to whale watching captains to real estate agents. By May it would not be at all surprising to hear the owner of an art gallery and a souvenir shop clerk on a bench overlooking Friday Harbor speculating on how mistaken identities complicated the plans of young lovers or laughing about the machinations of this or that clever servant.

This year it was *The Tempest*, and by arrival day everyone on the island knew that Miranda had played a girl with multiple personality disorder on *Law & Order SVU* and that Trinculo and Caliban were regulars at New York City's Roundabout Theatre. Ariel was coming from Seattle, where he had recently starred in a production of *Peter Pan*. Prospero? Well, of course Prospero would be played by Dale himself.

His waist had thickened over the years and his beard, once streaked with gray, was now entirely white. It was easy to picture Dale in a long robe promising *calm seas* and *auspicious gales*. Speculation had been rife for weeks about who from the island would be selected to fill the minor roles. There was the question of the O's (Alonso, Gonzalo, and Stephano). There were the three spirits, Ceres, Iris, and Juno. There was the Boatswain.

Jenny had read this year's selection with particular interest. Lord knew she was no scholar like the shipwrecked Prospero. She had dropped out of college in her second year to marry a rock musician and spent her days working in an antique store and weaving table runners and place mats from home-dyed alpaca wool. She was, however, the mother of two teenage daughters. She knew as well as anyone what it was like to raise girls

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on an island. She would have loved to see Prospero, even with the help of his two magical companions, Caliban and Ariel, try to keep her older daughter, Lilly, out of trouble.

Jenny's daughters were four years and several worlds apart. Thirteen-year-old Frankie had her sister's jet-black hair, wide-set eyes, the same ability to sing harmony, and a dislike of what she and her sister both called "hairy fruit." At times, that seemed to be all they shared. Her older sister, Lilly, could be foolish, but she was canny. She could tie a sailor's knot at seven and drive a car at fourteen. She was in kindergarten when Jenny finally got up the courage to leave Monroe, and Jenny couldn't help thinking that it had to explain at least some of the difference between her girls.

Frankie was just a nursing baby when she last laid eyes on her father. It was that, believed Jenny with a confidence bordering on the mystical, that accounted for her younger daughter's blessed innocence. No one had ever been unkind to her. Nerve endings, which in Lilly's case had very early been tuned to the moods of men (and she had proved remarkably adept at that), had been free in the person of Frankie to concentrate on salt breezes and birdsong and the scratching of insects moving over the island soil.

Jenny thought of both her children often as she read the play. She tried to decide which of them was most like Prospero's daughter Miranda. Frankie might have Miranda's innocence, she decided, but there would be no doubt in anyone's mind, least of all her own, that it would be Lilly snatching up any young prince who happened to wash ashore.

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Jenny had worked for years alongside a handful of her friends and neighbors building sets and sewing costumes for the show. She had read the play twice through by that day in June and had been excited for weeks about the possibilities for incorporating yarn. Lately she had been hand-painting raw wool that she bought at a discount from the alpaca farm on the east side of the island. It was too soon to tell if there would be a market for the stuff, but she could already see it swinging from the trees on Prospero's island.



She was behind the desk at work, picturing a vest woven of silver and gold thread to look like armor for Ferdinand, when the bell rang at the front of the store. Her eyes traveled down the aisle packed with Native American baskets and totems, Victorian butter churns, sleds, musical instruments, paintings and prints, lamps, skeleton keys, silver tea sets, and an ever-changing collection of miscellaneous treasures, and she saw two skinny teenage girls in matching pageboy caps. She broke into a wide smile, but it melted when she realized it was only two o'clock. Friday Harbor middle school didn't let out until three-thirty on Tuesdays.

"Frankie?"

"Relax, Mom. It was a teacher workday, remember? We got out early."

"We turned in our last book-share of the year on Monday," said Frankie's best friend, Phoenix, with a reassuring smile.

Frankie and Phoenix. The girls had been friends since be-

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fore they could walk. They wore their long hair tucked under their caps in a style they must have invented because neither of them owned TVs and so far they weren't much interested in computers. On their matchstick wrists they wore bracelets woven from strands of Jenny's leftover alpaca wool, dotted with clam shells that they turned into ornaments the Indian way, by rubbing the highest point of the curve against a stone until a small hole wore through.

Now that Jenny remembered the teacher workday she realized that the kids had been out of school for an hour or more. In three days they would be out for the summer.

Lilly had graduated barely a week before. Though ostensibly working at a landscaping job, she was perpetually short of cash and had called Jenny earlier asking to borrow ten dollars. At Frankie's age, Lilly would have taken advantage of a free afternoon to careen around the island with deckhands from one of the big yachts, a joint tucked into a hollowed-out tampon container in her purse. Once or twice Jenny had almost had the sense that Lilly did what she did in part to say to her mother *this is how it's done. This is living.*

From the back door of the store Jenny could look straight down the hill to Friday Harbor and see that the ferry was just pulling away. It was the inter-island ferry, running regularly between the major islands. The large boat, cutting slowly through the water past the fishing and pleasure craft, sent a quick jolt of excitement through her.

The show moved around during the short season, performing on San Juan and Lopez and Shaw. Major props had to be

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small enough to fit into a framed backpack. The set for *The Merry Wives of Windsor* had depended largely on the collection of oversize beer steins Jenny had found at the shop where she worked and whatever big tables could be located on the island they happened to be on for the play.

Before the play opened in one of the big venues, there was a smaller, private performance on Waldron, one of the tiny islands without ferry service. Only the cast traveled to Waldron for the show, and the audience consisted entirely of the people who lived there without city services of any kind. Rocky and wild, Waldron was farther off the grid than most. There were just a hundred or so residents, and they grew their own food, rode bicycles or drove unregistered vehicles, and read by the light of generators. There was a community school, but no telephones or ambulances or stores. Nor (it was rumored) were there any wild animals larger than mice. The rabbits, deer, and even possums supposedly had been eaten by the islanders.

As a builder of sets rather than an actor, Jenny had to rely on the firsthand reports of those who had gone. She'd heard that Waldron's entire population came to the beach for the show. She could picture it. Even islands like Orcas, which rose into evergreen-covered peaks and harbored mountain lakes and streams, and others like Lopez, which were flat and mild and rural, all had private coves that were dotted with bleached driftwood logs and hidden by ancient stands of pine. It was on one such spot on Waldron that the summer play was performed each year.

During the first half the children swarmed over the benches

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and on top of the rough-hewn picnic tables near the beach, their eyes shining in the setting sun. They ran off to play in the woods during the intermission and then crept back again when the play started, like raccoons inching toward a campfire.

When Monroe first brought Jenny and Lilly, then two years old, to the San Juans, he had talked about wanting to build a cabin on one of the islands without ferry service, like Waldron, Obstruction, Crane, Cypress, or Doe. There was something about the wildness of the Sound, the rocky shores and ancient trees, that made even a chain-smoking guitar player feel like he could build a house out of logs. You still had to buy the land, though, and in the end all they could afford was a two-bedroom trailer on a hillside near Cattle Point Road on San Juan Island. In retrospect, it was a very good thing, too. She shuddered to think of what might have become of her and her children had they settled in someplace seriously remote.

Jenny looked at Frankie cooing over some china animal figurines and tried to imagine her changing so much in a few years that she would skip out of a job at Café Demeter to caravan to the Oregon Country Fair as her sister had done just the previous summer. She couldn't picture it.

In addition to the cap, Frankie wore cords with frayed hems and a Hello Kitty T-shirt that her sister had picked up for her at a secondhand store in Seattle. She had a spray of small pimples on her forehead and a bandage on her thumb where she had cut herself trying to saw a piece of driftwood in half.

And she couldn't remember her father at all. Thank God.

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Jenny remembered for the both of them. The clap of Monroe's hand hitting the side of her face; strangely, she heard the sound before she felt the sting. The very last blow he'd landed had had such force behind it that it sent her reeling. She had been knocked to the floor and the baby had screamed in outrage at being clutched so tightly to her chest.

Jenny's best friend, Mary Ann, owned the store that she had worked in ever since she had arrived at her friend's door with an infant sleeping in a sling and a kindergartener crying at her side. It had been thirteen years now, but Jenny would never stop being grateful.

She could still remember the iron taste of her own blood in her mouth, from the times that Monroe had hit her in the face. It tasted like shame, her own blood. Though she knew now that it had been the start of a better life for them all, she could remember feeling so sorry for herself on that drizzly afternoon they fled to Mary Ann's, and for her daughters. Especially Lilly, who had arrived with mud-splattered tights and only a small portion of the things she owned stuffed in her mother's backpack. Frankie had conked out in the sling—walking always put her out—but Lilly wouldn't drop off that night until midnight, and even then Jenny could remember the shuddering breaths she took in her sleep. Jenny had felt sorry for herself, and for her girls, and even for Monroe, who had hurt her.

"Didn't we have good times?" he had asked on the phone, pleading with her to come back.

When she hadn't answered immediately, he had listed them



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himself, describing each as if he held a happy snapshot of the event in his hands: camping on the Oregon coast, on tour with his band in Las Vegas, their wedding on the Russian River. He drew the pictures vividly in her mind, until she could almost taste the grapes they had swiped from a vineyard growing close to the road. The dusty burst of sunshine in your mouth. What he didn't understand, though, was that, if you were afraid, the good times never really burrowed in. Fear was like a screen that kept them just out of reach.

Jenny rubbed her biceps, which were suddenly covered with goose bumps, though the store was warm. She was slender enough to have been more than once mistaken for Lilly from the back, but she was stronger than she'd been before. Her legs could take her up Mount Constitution on a bike and she could use a chain saw to get rid of dead trees on her property, push a wheelbarrow loaded with cinderblocks for a garden wall, and if she ever needed to, run with four times the weight of baby Frankie in her arms.

Frankie and Phoenix jostled each other on their way to Jenny and, having arrived, dipped their slender fingers into the jar of peppermints that Mary Ann kept on the table with the cash register. Jenny smiled at the way Frankie held the candy in her cheek like a squirrel.

"Where's Lil?" Frankie rolled the mint in her mouth.

Jenny glanced at the clock on the wall. "She's coming by any minute. And then I think she said she was heading over to Snug Harbor to help wash Jack's boat." The ten dollars was allegedly for soda and snacks at the small camp store.



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Lilly must have seen Jenny fall to the ground holding her baby sister. She was five years old—where else could she have been? She must have been watching, but Jenny couldn't remember noticing her. What she did remember was the way Lilly raged after Monroe left for work and Jenny began packing their things. She would *not*, she insisted in all her kindergarten fury, go to Mary Ann's without telling her father good-bye.

Frankie nodded. "In Elliot's truck?" She looked over at Phoenix. "Maybe they have room for us?"

Jenny raised her eyebrows. "Elliot Cooper? Is she involved with him?"

Frankie nodded. "Don't tell her we told you, okay?"

"I won't, honey."

Jenny tried to imagine Lilly hooking up with the lanky, brown-eyed boy she had known since junior high. He had a big Adam's apple and a talent for drawing comic book figures. Working at his very first outdoor summer job, he must have been caught off guard in the sudden tractor beam of Lilly's attention. Lean and dreadlocked and gorgeous, she burned through boys like kindling. All the more likely contenders on the island were probably exhausted.

She reached out to straighten the woven bag that her daughter wore over her shoulder like a small quiver for arrows. She heard coins clinking against whatever treasures she kept in there: polished stones, abalone shell buttons, loose beads. She lifted the cap off her head and pressed a kiss against the milk white part in her black hair.

The bell jingled and the door swung open. Bright sunlight

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shot through the dark corners of the store and Lilly's laugh carried to the back, along with the words, "Tell me later," no doubt shouted across the street to someone perched on the front porch of Café Demeter.

Frankie jerked herself out of her mother's embrace with a fraction of a second to spare before her sister appeared before them in ripped shorts, work boots, and a T-shirt that said *Peace, Love, Entomology*. No bra.

Jenny looked from Frankie to Lilly and sighed. The moment you became an embarrassment to your children always snuck up on you. You went from lawful spouse to backdoor lover in the blink of an eye.

Lilly grinned and reached for a peppermint. "Hi kiddos."

Frankie hopped from one foot to the other in delight. She was bursting from the news she had to tell her sister. "You would not believe what Mr. G wore today in Social Studies. I tried you on your cell, but all I got was voice mail. He had on those plastic sandals, you know, with the dark socks pulled all the way up to the knee." She glanced at Phoenix, and they both giggled. "But the thing was, instead of shorts I swear he was wearing swim trunks. And I think they must have been Steven's, too, because they were *too small*."

Phoenix nodded. "Way too small."

"He probably got behind on the laundry," said Jenny sympathetically.

No one else appeared to have heard.

Lilly pressed her hand to her stomach and grimaced. "Don't, Frankie," she said. "I just ate something."

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Jenny raised her eyebrows. "So you won't be borrowing ten bucks after all?"

"*Mom.*" Lilly glanced toward the door, outside of which Elliot Cooper was no doubt waiting, his leash tied to a tree.

Frankie began digging in her pockets for cash to hand over to her sister. "Can we come with you?" She glanced at Phoenix for confirmation. "Cleaning Jack's boat will go a lot faster if you have us helping."

Jenny saw a look pass over Lilly's face and she guessed that boat-cleaning was the last thing on her older daughter's mind. "Look, Franks," said Jenny. "We only have an hour or so until we have to get ready to go to Dale and Peg's. Why don't you and Phoenix go to our house until then?"

"Yeah," said Lilly, avoiding her mother's eyes. "I'll catch up with you guys at the party."

"I can't go," said Phoenix. Her pert features composed themselves into an expression of utter despair. "We're spending the night in Anacortes."

"Tonight?" asked Frankie and Lilly in unison.

Frankie reached for Jenny's bag. "Your mom must not know that Dale and Peg's potluck is tonight." She fished around for the cell phone, her hand emerging like a diver with a pearl, her fingers already punching in the familiar numbers.

Phoenix shook her head. "She won't care. She has a doctor's appointment."

"In the evening?" asked Jenny, and then wished she hadn't.

Phoenix's mom, Theresa, was in her early forties, like Jenny. She was also a single mother. As members of the year-round

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community, particularly those who didn't have much extra money, they had often relied on each other to pick the girls up from school and had traded tips on where to find kids' clothes cheap.

Many of the people who visited the islands or bought summer houses there were rich in a way that Jenny had rarely even imagined when growing up with her sister, Sue, in Sacramento. Sue lived in Marin County, California, now and would not be out of place among the people who rented slips in Roche Harbor for the yachts they named *Twenty One* or *Golden Girl* or *Megabite*. On visits to Marin, Jenny felt the distance between herself and her sister acutely.

It helped that on the island there were bald eagles but no high-end shopping malls. She walked over the hill to Roche Harbor and enjoyed standing on the pier and watching the boats chug in to their slips, even though she knew she'd never possess one herself. The tanned couples on board owned the boats, she thought at such times, but they didn't own the sight of them bobbing on the water or the light reflecting off the sails. And she would walk back over the hill content.

That peace of mind had seemed to elude Theresa, especially lately. She'd grown incrementally more tense these past months as Phoenix inched toward adulthood. Groceries had always been expensive, but now they were "highway robbery." Clients at the home day-care center she ran on the south side of the island were nosy and small-minded. The tourists were a pain in the neck. She never mentioned the eagles.

Jenny looked at Frankie and Phoenix, standing with their

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slender bodies tilted toward each other like saplings, their arms pressed together in a jumble of faded fabric, pale skin, and alpaca bracelets, and she could see what the two of them with their four bright eyes couldn't: It was only a matter of time before Theresa left for the mainland. Phoenix would be going with her, whether she wanted to or not.

Standing behind Frankie and Phoenix, Lilly was also clearly planning her escape. She mouthed the words, "Just ten dollars?" over Frankie's head.

Jenny took her cell phone from Frankie and dropped it into her bag. She then extracted the money for her older daughter, who snapped it up and blew them all a kiss on her way out.

Jenny watched Lilly go. She had had a fully-formed woman's body for years now, and seeing her in shorts and a tank top, Jenny felt a mix of recognition and nostalgia for her younger self. She could remember the power of that youthful beauty, the way it got her backstage at concerts, invited to Florence by a sculptor who had received a summer fellowship there, and attracted, with mixed results, the attention of the kind of man Monroe had been when she met him: a brooding lead guitar player for a semisuccessful Seattle band. Lilly exasperated her and worried her in equal measure, but the worries were based in a deep sense of familiarity. She could easily see her making the same mistakes that Jenny herself had made.

Frankie, standing in a doorway with the light reflecting off her hair and her collarbones rising from her chest like a whalebone corset, was different. Frankie and Phoenix had taken to sketching little cottages where they imagined they would



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someday live. Together. Some of them were directly on the beach with French doors and English gardens. Others were suspended entirely in the trees by wires, with spiral staircases leading down to the forest floor.

“What do you girls want to do until Theresa comes to get Phoenix? Do you have any drawing paper?” she asked them.

“Let’s go to my house,” proposed Frankie. “We have hard-boiled eggs in the fridge.”

She had recently mastered a recipe for deviled eggs and made them at every opportunity. Jenny figured they went through more paprika these days than all but the most dedicated Hungarian families.

“Bye, Mom.”

“Wait,” said Jenny, thinking to remind them that the lasagna that was in the fridge was for Dale and Peg’s. By the time she spoke the bell on the door had already rung them out.

In a moment they had vanished, just like Lilly had. They were quick on their feet, those girls. They were gone in an instant.

