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Lily didn’t leave anything for Uncle Miles, certainly no forwarding address or information other than that she was leaving Kansas to dance. Then, Lily walked out of the house and climbed into the Aviator’s waiting car.

It was barely after four A.M. when she stood with him in the bus depot parking lot. About her neck Lily wore a fine gold chain on which she’d strung her mother’s engagement and wedding rings—a graduation gift from Aunt Tate. Lily pulled the rings from beneath her blouse, fingered them and thought of her mother’s hands dusted in flour, sewing a button on her father’s shirt, and teaching Lily how to tie her shoes. Had her mother braced those beautiful hands on the dashboard when she saw the Aviator’s car coming?

“I’m sorry I didn’t make you a gift,” Lily told him. “But nothing would have been enough, and I didn’t know what would say goodbye in the right way.”

The Aviator took her chin in his hand. He lifted her face, and for a moment she thought he might kiss her lips. A part of her wanted that. Instead, he slipped his thumb into the cleft of her chin, let it rest there, calm and steadying. She saw that he might cry, and so she took his wrist, closed her eyes, and kissed his beating pulse.

Leaving the Aviator was like leaving her real family, once and for all. The finality of it hit her, hard, and she felt her knees threatening to drop her to the pavement. Instead, she turned and walked into the bus terminal.

AT SOME POINT, every girl in Kansas dressed as Dorothy for Halloween. Pinafore, petticoat, simple white blouse, a straw basket for trick-

or-treat candy, demure ankle socks, and red shoes. *Goodbye, Dorothy*, Lily thought, *good riddance to you and all of your “There’s no place like home” bullshit.*

Lily remembered when a teacher had told them that Kansas was once a vast inland sea. She’d hunted fossils with Beverly Ann and tried to imagine how change could have occurred on such a massive scale. She remembered the tadpoles she and Dawn had caught and watched grow. If Kansas could go from sea to prairie, if a frog egg could radically transform itself from an almost-fish with gills to an amphibian that left water for land, then Lily could transform, too.

At the Colorado border Lily decided that her new self deserved a fresh name. Lily Decker would become Ruby Wilde. She thought it worked—her dark red hair, the elegance lent by that extra *e*, like *shoppe*.

Lily looked at her palm, studying the lines of influence on her Mount of Venus at the base of her thumb. The lines were said to represent the friends, teachers, enemies, and lovers who change and shape existences. Lily had countless fine lines on her palm, and many of the lines touched, even traveled across her life line. She recognized the deep lines of her childhood: Aunt Tate, Uncle Miles. The Aviator. Her parents. Dawn.

People come and go, Lily thought. Sometimes they vanish unwillingly, the resulting break adamant, like a sharp slap of the ruler across the palm—decisive, unequivocal. Others leave with as little thought as the tip of the finger that snuffs out the life of an ant crawling across a pantry shelf.

Beyond her window, Lily saw fence posts and dull-eyed cattle. Black hawks circled, eyeing the ground for deer mice and lizards. Clouds coalesced and broke into discrete puffs. It was June 9, 1967, exactly ten years since her family had dissolved like sugar stirred into iced tea. Lily settled back into her seat and relaxed. She’d done it. Ruby Wilde was on her way.