

# Flower Children

AN EXCERPT BY LAURA HURWITZ

CAVE JUNCTION, OREGON, 1970

The full moon seemed to be racing them, flying along the telephone wires, slicing through treetops. Shoshanna rested her head against the cool vinyl of the car door. They had been driving since early morning, stopping twice: once for gas and once so that she and Mara could pee, squatting in the brambly grass behind a tree at the side of the road. She couldn't figure out which ached worse, her head or her stomach. How long had it been since they'd eaten? Her mother had given them cereal for breakfast, but they had to dump it over the porch rail because the milk she'd hastily poured on top was clotted and sour. Mara was sound asleep, slumped sideways like a rag doll. Her tangle of gold hair spilled across the seat and onto the floor, ribcage rising and falling with each soft snufflely breath. Shoshanna touched her fingertips to her sister's shoulder. Mara stirred slightly, scratched her nose and murmured something about pancakes before sliding back into sleep.

Shoshanna knew not to ask her mother where they were going, or how much longer they would be driving. She turned to look at the moon again. So, this was freedom. She could hardly believe it. After months of planning, they had gotten out. Never mind that Sweet Earth Farm, clinging like a burr to the outskirts of Cave Junction, Oregon, population 800, had been the only home she'd known for the past five years. Never mind that Adam was her father and she'd probably never see him again. She knew that they would be better off just about anywhere else because things had gotten so badly out of hand.

The three of them had hatched this plot. They conspired before they went to sleep, talked in the orchard when they were alone, counting and crating apples. California, land of endless sunshine, orange groves, and Disneyland. To Shoshanna and Mara, California sounded like paradise. How could life be anything other than perfect in a place like that? First, though, they had to escape, which was not an easy thing to pull off. For one thing, they were stuck smack dab in the middle of nowhere. It was twelve miles to Grants Pass,

the nearest real town; twelve hilly and perilous miles at that, along a rutted, narrow road. There were only two working vehicles at the commune, the ancient pick-up truck that was used strictly to bring Sweet Earth's crop of organic apples to the farmer's market on the weekends, and the station wagon. You had to ask permission to use the wagon far in advance, and even then you usually had to share it with other Sweet Earth people going in the same or roughly the same direction at around the same or roughly the same time. Shoshanna remembered a time she'd gone into Grant's Pass with Adam and eleven other people and two dogs. They had been packed into the car like sweaty sardines, only to be forgotten after they finished their errand (Adam needed a hash pipe) and they had to wait outside in the rain for four hours because it took that long for the others to get home and realize they'd left them behind. Adam had been so pissed off that he didn't speak to anyone for two weeks.

Today, so far, the plan seemed to be working. Ella said that she had to take the girls to the free clinic in Ashland because they had worms. She told them to scratch themselves for a couple days for authenticity. Both girls set to scratching with dramatic gusto. No one on the commune wanted worms to spread to their own kids so they were quick to tell Ella to take the car and get the girls the hell out. Ella promised to be back by noon. She didn't want to stir up suspicion by packing, so she told Shoshanna and Mara to put two extra layers of clothes on under what they were wearing and grab the things they didn't want to leave. There wasn't much. Mara took her pink blanket and a small pocketbook crammed with old crayons, elastic bands, and some bits of brightly colored turquoise and lapis lazuli left over from the jewelry Ella made. Shoshanna had a dog-eared copy of Kipling's *Just So Stories* that had been dumped into the trash after the flea market a few months before (even though she was nearly eleven she hadn't learned to read, but she loved the pictures) and a color snapshot of their family from a couple of years ago, when things were better. She was sitting on