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## The Shapes of Fate (Part Five)

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## The Shapes of Fate

(Part Five)

<sup>a</sup>  
Liz Harbaugh

May 26, 2005  
New York City, New York

Matthew unlocked the door to his apartment, nearly falling as he struggled with his briefcase and other files from work. *It would be her twenty-second birthday*, he thinks, for the hundredth time that day. The past months had been agonizing—he'd sold their house a week after she left, for living there was unbearable. Finally he'd found home in New York, where the crowds and the bustle could swallow him. He worked twelve hours a day, seven days a week, as a lawyer for a large company. Several women had made advances on him, all he had refused. One woman kissed him, because she thought it would overcome his shyness—he had looked at her and cried for hours in the hallway at work. They suggested he take some time off. He didn't.

He set everything down in his office and went to find a bottle of Smirnoff. Tonight he would drink himself into oblivion. He passed his bedroom and inhaled deeply, to clear his mind.

She was here. He'd smelled her twice since she left, once on the subway—he'd raced through all the cars twice, for she always seemed just ahead of him. But he never saw her. The second time he had been in the elevator—but he was alone that time, and knew it was only his imagination. But this was she—it had to be.

She sat upon his bed. Her hair was long and dirty, and the dress she wore was filthy—it was her pink ballgown, he saw, the one from her prom. Her skin was covered with bruises and discolorations, as though she'd been sleeping on something hard and cold. Her fingernails were grimy and uncut, her feet bare and blistered.

But her eyes—her eyes were clear. Strong. The eyes he'd fallen in love with a hundred times a day.

He stepped toward her, and then noticed the scars. On her wrists. Tens of them—the newest a month old. He choked back a sob.

“Oh, Matthew. I wanted to stay—I love you so. But I had to leave—I had too—”

He silenced her with a kiss, despite her chapped lips and dirty hands. He covered her face with his mouth, and he knew she was here to stay. He separated himself from her to utter one thing, and one thing only, the three words he needed to tell her.

“I love you.”