



The alarm went off at three thirty a.m. and I opened my eyes to darkness. I stared up at the ceiling, and began the inner battle with myself to get out of bed and start my day.

Shortly after my fifteenth birthday, I'd started working at the local bakery, Sugar Street Sweets. Every May through October since then, my days have started at three-thirty in the morning. It has never gotten any easier.

A few years ago, the owners decided to move permanently to Sun Valley, and I offered to buy the bakery. I changed the name to Born and Bread, and now it was mine to manage. But I was looking forward to November, when I would finally get some sleep.

Rolling to my right, I swung my feet out of bed, and slid them into my furry plaid Toms slippers. The air outside was cold and humid, and I could feel it rolling in from under the front door of my cottage.

The carpet felt damp. I grabbed a notepad and pen from my nightstand, making a note to myself to get a draft stopper for the winter. Fall had arrived, and this weekend would be one of the last big weekends before I closed the shop for the season.

I stood and grabbed my black bathrobe from the back of my bedroom door, and wandered out into the kitchen to make my coffee. While the coffee brewed, I took a hot shower and ran through the day in my head. Bake the bread; make the cinnamon rolls, the croissants, and the scones; and do my weekend shopping.

Stepping out of the small shower, I wrapped myself in my robe, and used a towel to wipe the fog off the mirror above the sink. My reflection stared back at me, and I was grateful for the smudge on the glass so I couldn't see the tiredness in my eyes. It was soooooo early.

After finishing my morning ritual of tooth-brushing, moisturizer, and mascara, I stepped into my kitchen and poured myself a mug of coffee, added cream and sugar, and took it with me to my room to get dressed. The cottage I lived in was small, and the bedroom didn't have a closet. All of my clothes hung on racks or was folded neatly in a dresser.

I grabbed black leggings and a black knit tank top. I layered with a black long-sleeve Henley and a black fleece jacket. Slipping into my Birkenstocks, I sighed. My efficient morning routine meant I would arrive at Born and Bread at exactly 4:15 a.m. It also meant my life was pretty boring.

I piled my long, black hair up on top of my head in a messy top-knot. It was wavy and it would look like a lion's mane by the end of the day—and it was a nuisance when I

baked. Whenever I was in the shop, I would put a bandana on to keep it away from my face and the goodies.

Hanging on the coat rack by the door was my messenger bag, and I threw it over my shoulder as I ran out the door. The frayed edges made it appear old and worn, and I loved it. My younger brother, Jason, had given it to me as a Christmas gift almost ten years before, and I couldn't part with it. He'd died in a car accident when I was twenty-two, and it gave me comfort to keep using the bag.

The saltwater smell of the ocean hit me as I stepped outside, and I inhaled deeply. My cottage was one of two that sat on my parents' property. The driveway connected to a longer road that veered right towards my parents' place, and left towards the main road. My parents' house was on the sound, so I had a beautiful view of the water through the trees.

Opening the door to my Volkswagen Bug convertible, I threw my bag over to the passenger seat and stepped into the car. It was too cold this morning to put the top down, but I would do so later when the day warmed up.

The keys were in the ignition, and I started the car to head into town. Pulling out of my driveway, I took a left and drove the road along the bay. The fog was low on the water and my visibility was limited. I drove slowly, even though I knew no one else was out at that time of the morning. I had a feeling the fog would burn off as the sun came up, and it would be a beautiful day.

Turning into the village, I drove another quarter mile and then turned into the small strip of stores where my bakery was located. The building was low and old and still had a gravel parking lot. The bakery was one of six storefronts that shared a covered wooden deck out front.

At one end was Amy's Pizza Garage—a wood stove pizza restaurant—and at the other end was a real estate office. The Island had grown in popularity a few years ago, after a Hollywood blockbuster had been filmed here. This was now the 'in' place to buy a vacation home. In between the pizza restaurant and the office was my bakery, an art gallery, a small clothing boutique, and a barber shop.

I parked around back. After unlocking the rear door to the bakery and turning on the lights, I looked at the clock on the wall. Four fifteen, as expected.

The smell of flour and sugar, almond and cinnamon, hit me, and I breathed deeply. I hung my bag on the hook by the back door and pulled my prep list out of the cupboard above the oven. In another hour, two high school girls would be here to help me. I loved their vitality and girlish ideals, not to mention their impressive work ethic.

My first task was always to prepare the croissant dough. I grabbed the milk out of the industrial refrigerator and heated it on the stove. While it was heating, I prepped for the cinnamon rolls.

There is never downtime in a bakery. While one treat is baking, another is being prepped. The cinnamon rolls and almond butterhorns were my favorite treats to make, but my bread was how I made my money.

For twenty minutes I punched and kneaded the dough for the baguettes. My timer went off and I pulled myself from my trance. The croissants needed to be rolled, and I decided that today I would make them with a stick of chocolate.

The girls showed up to help at five thirty a.m. As they came in through the back door, I greeted them with a smile.

"Good morning, girls."

"Hi, Evie," they both responded, and put their coats and bags next to mine on the rack. I put them to work loading the not-yet-baked goodies into the ovens. My goal was to

have the bread baked and on the shelves by six forty-five. The treats would be in the display case for the early risers by seven a.m.

I put the coffee on and asked the younger of the girls, Kira, to make sure the mugs, sugar, and creamer were ready on the cart.

“When I’m finished, do you want me to go get us some egg sandwiches from the market deli?” Kira asked. Most likely she wanted one for herself, so I agreed. I gave her some cash, and finished baking the treats for the morning. At eleven a.m. we would make pizza for the lunch crowd, and then we would close by three.

Kira returned a short while later with my egg sandwich. I took off my apron, grabbed a cup of coffee and my sandwich and went out on the back deck to enjoy the calm before the rush. The back deck looked out towards the Sound, and, as I had predicted, the fog was lifting and the sun was warming the day.

The morning passed by quickly. I spent most of my time in the back, baking cookies for the afternoon and prepping for the next day. Kira and my other helper, Courtney, worked the cash register and kept the coffee brewing.

I loved my bakery. I loved the customers, both local and tourists, and I loved watching them sit on the deck enjoying the baked goods and each other’s company.

I brought the pizza out a little after eleven, and I saw my sister-in-law pull up out front in her Range Rover. I put the pan of pizza on top of the display case, grabbed two chocolate croissants and went outside to meet her. She was struggling with the baby in the back seat, so my nephew came running up the steps alone.

“There’s my beautiful boy!” My heart burst with joy at the sight of him. I held out my arms, and he ran to me.

“E-bee.” He couldn’t pronounce his v’s yet, and I smiled at his word. I squatted down to him, and he squeezed me as hard as his little-boy-arms could.

I pulled back from him and stared into eyes that were so like mine and my brother’s—an azure blue that looked like glaciers. His hair was messy, as it always was, so I ruffled it some more. He had on little hikers and a North Face fleece jacket. I thought, briefly, that only my older brother would spend that kind of money on a little boy.

I handed him a chocolate croissant and said, “Hey little man, what are you doing today?”

My sister-in-law, Shaye, took that moment to interrupt us as she came up the steps, looking a bit frazzled. “Evie. I need coffee.”

“You know where it is,” I told her, and then added, “Give me baby Ellie, I need to kiss her.” I took Ellie from her and squeezed her. My nephew, Jason, was running up and down the deck trying to catch the birds. I kissed Ellie’s fat cheeks.

Shaye came back onto the deck and sat down next to me. She was sipping her coffee and picking at the other croissant I had brought out with me.

Our road back to being sisters had been long, but over the past few years we had become so close, and I know my life would be less shiny without her. She had dated my younger brother years ago, and then he’d died. She’d disappeared after that for almost eight years. When she returned, she fell in love with my older brother, Nick, and she never left the Island after that.

“Jason, stop chasing the birds!” Shaye shouted down to my nephew. I handed Ellie back to her and she put her in a baby carrying pack across her front. Ellie was sucking on a pacifier and looking around.

I laughed at Shaye. It was amusing to me that she thought she was going to restrain her son—especially since she’d named him after my younger brother. “You are in so much trouble, Shaye. He is fearless.” I smiled lovingly at her.

“He is. And he is excited to see his Daddy,” she told me.

“When is Nick coming back from Seattle?” I reached across and grabbed a chunk of her croissant. Her look turned wistful, and a ghost of a smile graced her lips. I laughed again at her. “Oh, please, stop. I didn’t ask for details, I’d just like to see him.”

Shaye snapped out of her daydreaming and responded, “He is coming in on the five o’clock float plane. I’m going to take Jason down to the beach to play this afternoon, and we will wait for him to fly over. I was thinking you might want Jason tonight. You could join us for dinner, and then take him back with you.”

“Oh really?” I laughed and finished off her croissant. “You were thinking? What’s in it for me?”

She put her finger to her chin and looked up and to the right as if pondering what would make it worth it to me. She snapped her fingers and said, “I will help you close up the bakery for the winter. Free labor.”

“Whatever. You always help me anyway.” I pretended to be put out. “Fine. I will take him, but you seriously owe me. I am not your resident baby-sitter when you guys get all moony over each other.”

She reached across to hug me, and squished Ellie in the process. Ellie let out a howl, and I called for Jason.

“Jason, come over here.” He was down at the bottom of the steps picking at rocks. He looked up at me, and I had to repeat myself. “Jason, come here. I want to talk to you.”

He stood up from his squatting position, and his chunky little legs carried him up the steps. “Look, E-bee, a siney wock.” He meant to say shiny. I knew this because what he had was a small piece of hematite. When he reached me, I picked him up and put him on my lap.

“WOW! Isn’t that cool!” I was overly enthusiastic in my response, and it did not go unappreciated. He grinned up at me as if it was the find of the century. I continued, “I was thinking it would be super fun if you came to my cottage tonight, and you could have a sleepover with Auntie Evie. What do you think?”

I was trying to catch his eye, but he was distracted by the rock and just said, “Sure.” Then he handed the rock to me and said, “You can keep it if you want.”

I looked up at Shaye, who was smiling at me. “He loves you.”

“Yes, well, the irony of this moment has not escaped me. I need another kind of love, and a bigger rock.” I was half joking, but all of the men I had been dating recently never stuck around on the Island. And if a guy was on the island, I had known them since I was a baby, and they only saw me as a sister.

“It will happen, Evie, it will.” She was sincere in her statement, and I just nodded. It took a long time for her and Nick to get together. I knew she believed what she said, and I didn’t want to deflate her.

“What time do you want me to come over?” Lifting Jason up off my lap, I stood to clean our table. Jason went back to his rocks, and Shaye stood up, bouncing up and down a bit to entertain Ellie.

She lifted her coffee mug to her mouth to finish it off and handed the mug to me. “Nick’s plane lands at five p.m., so how about six? That’ll give him time to get settled, and I can get a bag packed for Jason. How does spinach tortellini sound to you?”

“Sounds like I will be drinking a lot.” I told her “I’ll bring the wine.” She side-eyed me and grabbed Jason by the hand. “C’mon buddy, let’s go play on the beach.” She leaned over to kiss me on the cheek, and I hugged her from the side.

“See you tonight.” I picked up her mug, waved at them as they drove off, and walked back into the bakery. The customer traffic was slowing down, and I would head home

shortly. My afternoon baker, Meadow, had arrived at nine a.m., and she would do all the evening prep and lock up the store.

I took the tip jar off the counter and brought it to the back desk to count. The space was too small for a formal office, so I had set up a small computer area by the back window and constructed a five-foot wall around it—low enough that I could see over it, high enough to give me some privacy. The tips would be combined, and distributed out at the end of the weekend based on hours worked. We all worked hard and helped out wherever needed. It seemed the fairest way of sharing tips.

Meadow stuck her head over the wall and asked, “You good for the day?”

“Yes, thank you Meadow. I’m going to lock up the tips. Will you take the day’s sales and make the deposit on your way home?”

I relied on Meadow tremendously. She was a single mom who had moved here from Oregon a few years ago. This job was perfect for her: she could be with her son in the mornings, and home for him in the evenings. There were three other high school kids that rotated working in the bakery on the weekends so everyone could have a break.

“Definitely. Enjoy dinner with your family, and I’ll see you tomorrow.” She smiled sweetly at me and then went back out front to help some customers.

I locked up the cash, said good-bye to the girls, and went out the back door. The weather had changed, as I had predicted, and I pulled the top down on my car. The sun was bright and the sky was clear. This was going to be a beautiful weekend on the Island.

Driving around the side of the building and out onto the main road, I took a side street that lead up to the Island’s fitness center. They had an afternoon cross-fit class I wanted to squeeze in before dinner.

I was naturally thin, but owning a bakery presented some challenges in the weight department. Yoga was my preferred method of exercise, but it didn’t give me the cardio workout that I needed.

The cross-fit class lasted an hour, and I was exhausted at the finish. I left my car and walked to the store for some wine. Not sure what would go with tortellini, I picked up a red and a white and walked back to my car. Driving down the bay road, I synched my radio with my phone and put on my playlist. I scrolled through to find Matthew Dear’s “Bad Ones,” and pressed play.

Putting my arm out the window, I rolled my hand in the wind as I drove. I saw the guys at the kayak shop bringing some of their boats out of the water, and I waved as I drove by. They were cute. I made a mental note to myself to hang out with them soon.

I parked in front of my cottage, grabbed my bag from the passenger seat, and went inside. Taking another shower to wash off the sugar, flour, and sweat, I stood under the hot water and just let the spray wash away the day.

Out of nowhere I started to cry, and the tears mixed with the hot water. Resting my forehead on the glass, I let my tears fall until I felt drained and depleted. Turning off the water, I stepped out into the tiny bathroom that was just off of my kitchen, and dried off.

I made more of an effort than I usually do and put some makeup on. I blow-dried my hair, and flat-ironed it so it draped long and sleek down my back. I put on a tank dress that hung on my body and clung in just the right places. I am tall and my body is slim. No one has ever mistaken me for a femme fatale, but I am toned, and always thought I was at least a pretty girl.

I slipped on my Birkenstocks, rethought that decision, and changed them for a pair of ballerina flats. Grabbing the bottles of wine from the fridge, I walked out the front door and through the path in the woods to my brother’s house for dinner. Reaching their house, I

knocked on the back door and heard little feet running down the hall. My date for the night swung the door open.

“Hey, little man,” I said

“Hi, Aunt E-bee,” Jason said to me, and proceeded to run back into the house screaming, “E-bees here!”