

A Time to Reap
Excerpt

Prologue

The scent of seaweed rose from his shoulders, and all around them mist and fog drifted in the candlelight. Their skin wore delicate drops of moisture. His hands knew her, had sculpted her from stone, and she lifted toward him with a cry of recognition born in a long ago time. His cry matched hers, floating out of the garden, joining the calls of seabirds riding the Pacific currents.

Later, he covered her with a blanket from his studio. He stroked her hair, her face. Neither spoke but fell into dreamless sleep, curled into each other.

The next morning, Maureen awoke to the sounds of birds and the smell of coffee and biscuits. She would meditate near the water and hold this to herself for a while longer. The usual wisps of mist blew across the windows as she slipped into a sweater and out the back door, the sensations of joy and satisfaction flooding her like warm brandy. Her body seemed to walk ahead, unaware of the light rain or the clouds lowering on the horizon. The temperature dropped, but Maureen walked in a cocoon of sunshine.

The fog thickened as she neared the ocean, the surf booming far below. She looked around, puzzled, her smile fading. She must have missed the path. The fog swirled at her feet, parted briefly to reveal the rocky coast, and then closed again. She heard a muffled voice calling, but the fog tricked the ear so she couldn't tell which direction it was coming from. She'd better go back to the lodge. Brigit had warned them about how quickly the fog could move in, but she wouldn't have been able to imagine this. She turned back the way she thought she had come, and the earth opened underneath her. She hit her head as she slid through the jagged rocks, felt herself flung like a rag doll into the freezing whirlpool below. Some part of her remembered she hadn't told Brigit about the break in the cliff. She could hear her name as the water closed over her head, the pain erased in the ice-blue cold. She heard the voice pleading for her to stop and wait for him.

She was falling but without fear, lightly, as if she had wings. The frigid water turned her blood to shards of crystal, piercing her heart, before the surf pulled her out and under, into a soothing blue warmth. She felt solid, sleek, and powerful as she spiraled deeper. Others escorted her descent, their skin gleaming in the purple light cutting through the midnight waters. Her breathing was one with the water, the rocks, and the seals that called to her in their mournful human voices. She gave up to the unknown, floating alone into a familiar cave, her eyes flared like anemones. The walls of the cave trembled and leaned inward as the tide surged, licking up the rocks like tongues of cold fire. A whirlpool pulled her backwards, swirled her toward the entrance that was slowly filling up with the tide. It was then that she saw him, suspended in front of her, the water around him shimmering, his long hair caressing the tenderness of his neck and shoulders.