



The
FOG
MACHINE



A NOVEL

Susan Follett

REMEMBERING
FREEDOM
SUMMER
1964

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LUCKY SKY
P R E S S

CHAPTER 1

April 1959 *Unexpected Directions*

The black wrought iron table called out to her as if it held a sign: *Reserved for Joan Olivia Barnes*. It was the best table in King's Drugs, the one that let you see everyone. As she skipped across the linoleum, her petticoat billowed out the skirt of her white eyelet dress like a cloud.

"May I, Mademoiselle?" said her dad.

She giggled as he held one of the heart-back chairs out for her, just as he had for her mom, scooted her up to the table, and wandered off to chat with the druggist. She swung her legs, careful not to scuff her new patent leather Mary Janes. Her mom peeled off her gloves, one finger at a time, and set them on her purse. Studiously, Joan did the same.

Now what?

"We'll go out after Mass to celebrate," her mom had said after both grandmothers sent cards with money for Joan's First Communion. "Anyplace you want."

"Just the three of us?"

Her mom agreed. C.J. was called to take care of Joan's little brother. She was at their house right now, missing her Sunday services, but Joan's mom said that was okay for Baptists.

Well, here they were. Right where Joan asked to be. But where were the other kids? No one else was in the store—unless you counted Howdy

Doody on the Colgate display, waving just like he did on the show, the Negro sweeping the floor nearby, and, of course, Mr. King.

Joan slid lower in her chair. She poked her little finger through one hole, then another in her skirt. Her mom chatted about the morning at St. Stephen's—whose communion dress she liked the best and how proud and tall Joan had stood, waiting her turn to receive the host. But Joan was thinking about Carol Gleason. Carol was so lucky, celebrating at this very minute with more relatives than any one person ought to have. She almost hated Carol, even though Carol was her best friend. And what about every other first-grader at St. Stephen's Academy? Celebrating with dozens of cousins, aunts and uncles, grandmas and grandpas, no doubt. Grandma Olivia lived in Wisconsin and Grandma Joan in Illinois, too far away to come for Joan's big day. Good thing, too. If her friends heard her grandmothers talk, they'd be thinking Joan was a Yankee for sure.

The bell over the side door jingled. In came a wave of late morning April heat and a girl about Joan's age. The girl's skin was dark, like C.J.'s. She kept her head down and slid soundlessly on worn-out shoes over to the man sweeping the floor. Joan sat up. Now things were getting interesting. Maybe the girl's dress was from St. Vincent DePaul. Joan's Brownie troop helped organize donations, but she only knew one other person who wore clothes from there. She peered at the girl, studying her. She hadn't seen many Negroes this close—just the men who rode on the back of the garbage truck, women coming and going from neighbors' houses, and C.J.

“Must be Sam's youngest. Addie, I think,” Joan's dad said, sitting down.

With their heads bent toward each other, the Negroes whispered, like they had secrets. How did her dad know them? Negroes didn't get sick much. She'd never seen a single one in the waiting room at her dad's office, and C.J. had certainly never missed a day of work on account of feeling bad.

The Negro man pulled a coin from his pocket. His daughter stretched to kiss his cheek, then hurried over to the red case with “Coca Cola” in big white letters. Joan liked the way the girl's hair crinkled away from her

forehead and gathered at her neck, all wrapped up in a braid. Addie—she liked the girl’s name, too.

Addie fumbled with the bottle opener, finally got the cap off, and disappeared back outside. Through the window, Joan could see her sitting in the sliver of shade cast by the drugstore’s wall, nursing the stubby green glass bottle.

Even inside under the giant ceiling fan, sweat ringed Joan’s face like beads on a tiny rosary.

“Why doesn’t Addie stay inside where it’s cooler?” she asked.

“The Negroes don’t get as hot as we do,” her mom said. “Now what would you like?”

“Cherry Coke, please. At the counter.”

When her dad nodded, Joan ran over to the stools. She was certain she could get up all by herself if she grew just an inch or two more.

“Here, Joani.” He hoisted her up.

“Spin me, Daddy.”

After sending her around in several circles, he warned, “Now don’t do that by yourself,” and went back to the table.

Joan patted the gleaming Formica countertop and watched Mr. King work. Dark brown liquid shot out of a spout, followed by cherry flavor and the fizzies. In the mirror behind him, she saw a man and woman come in with two children.

“Another fine sermon this morning, Mr. King,” called out the woman. “Such a shame your business keeps you from joining us at First Baptist.”

Mr. King handed Joan a tall frost-glazed glass and a straw in a white wrapper just as the boy and girl hopped onto stools.

“My sister and I’ll have us some banana splits,” said the boy.

Joan ran a fingernail up and down her glass, making patterns on the frost, watching Mr. King peel bananas and slice them lengthwise into long glass dishes. He doled out perfectly round scoops of vanilla, chocolate, and strawberry ice cream, drowned it all in chocolate syrup and whipped cream, and added a cherry with a stem.

“Your parents letting y’all sit here, too?” Joan asked.

“Course,” said the boy.

“What you wearing such a fancy dress for?” asked the girl, her spoon poised over her dish. “Easter’s done come and gone.”

“Today was my First Communion.” Joan touched her hair where her veil had been.

“Huh?”

“At St. Stephen’s.”

“Must be one of them Catholics,” the boy said.

“Oh.” His sister was busy making a muddy river of syrup and ice cream.

“No. Cath-*licks*. Get it? Like this.” The boy leaned over his dish, stuck out his tongue, and slurped up a gob of whipped cream. The girl laughed.

What a dumb joke; they were dumb. Joan wouldn’t let them ruin the day for her. She shifted to keep from seeing them and concentrated on peeling paper from her straw. The Coke tickled her tongue. She sucked on the straw, absently twisting her stool ever so slightly. The arc grew wider and wider until, glass in hand, she spun full around. Suddenly, the glass slipped from her grasp. It crashed to the floor, sloshing cherry Coke all over her dress.

Joan came down immediately behind the glass, grabbing the seat to break her fall. She clung to it guiltily.

“Joan Olivia, what did I tell you?” Her dad was at her side, plucking her from the stool and standing her away from the broken glass. “You could have been hurt. And look at this mess.”

Sam hurried over. “I’ll clean that up, Doc Barnes.”

“Oh, thank you, Sam. Joan, wait outside until your mom and I are finished.” Before her dad headed back to the table, he gave her that look that said how disappointed he was.

She stared at the stain creeping across the front of her beautiful dress. The snickering of the awful boy and his sister seemed to roar in her ears.

Someone jabbed her shoulder. She looked into the boy’s nasty face, crowded with freckles and a smear of whipped cream still on his cheek.

“You deaf?” he hissed. “Your daddy said get on outside now. Niggers—” He was shaking his head.

Joan's eyes shot clear across the store to her parents. She'd gotten in big trouble for repeating that word one day after school. Her mom and dad said it was disrespectful and they wouldn't have it. She peeked at Sam. His head was down, as if the figure-eights of his rag mop needed to be perfectly drawn.

"—and Cath-licks," the boy went on.

Enough with the dumb joke. Joan planted her feet and got ready to say so.

"Shouldn't niggers or Catholics be in here." He glared at her.

Her mouth flopped open. As tears stung her eyes, she rushed through the side door into the bright sunlight and tripped over something. She looked down and realized it was only the Negro girl. *Excuse me* died on her lips.

"What'd you do wrong to have to sit out here?" Addie asked.

"Got born wrong is all I can figure." Joan slid down against the wall. Addie nodded knowingly. "Me, too."

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