

*From the farthest places*

*~ Gary Marks*

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## PART 1

“We are like islands in the sea,  
separate on the surface but connected in the deep.”

-- William James

~ Eugene Cernan was the last man to walk on the moon.  
He wrote his daughter's initials in the lunar dust.  
They will still be legible in the year 52,000.

## 1

My eighteen-year-old daughter, who seemed to be entertaining the thought that she could be a he if she wanted to, because gender is just "a social construct," promised me as I drove her back to her UC Berkeley dorm that she would spend ten minutes a day meditating, preceded by absorbing a few episodes of *Rick and Morty*.

I tried to persuade her not to get a Samurai haircut. She had such beautiful long blonde hair. But her therapist told my wife and me that this was her decision. She was eighteen, a legal adult, and if she wanted a Samurai haircut, paid for with our money, that was her right. Because apparently, we were too enmeshed. She was relying too much on our approval. Basically, we were being told we all loved each other too much, which apparently was no longer acceptable these days.

At eighteen she needed to explore her identity and her independence and express her opinions -- as long as her opinions agreed with the therapist's opinions.

Living in a dorm on her own with two other equally confused rebellious girls, and spending all day listening to world-famous professors talk about how artificially intelligent beings would have to become more moral than humans for us to survive their species, and ours, was apparently not enough stimulation at eighteen -- they also had to stop listening to their parents. IDK, as they say.

During the holy (money-making) event at Cal called Parents Weekend she expressed concerns about her mental well-being -- her persistent mania (which we used to lovingly call hyper-energy), her occasional depression, her occasional feelings of grandeur inevitably followed by the devastation she felt from any kind of failure.

As a physics major she was skeptical of concepts like God (the brain can't know beyond itself) and love ("I mean, why all the romanticism about it? Love is just another feeling. And anger is just as powerful. For instance, love creates babies, anger creates wars that kill the babies once they come of age. So really it's a tie.")

She also admitted to me that the A minus she received in calculus was graded on a curve. She really got a 74, which may have been the worst grade she'd ever gotten in her life. So the A minus was a total sham, "another social construct." The errors she made on the test were *real*. "Failure sucks so much." She shook her head in despair.

I said, "Well, yes, but actually you got an A minus. "

She said, "Define 'actually.'"

I furled my brow and said, "I think it's up to you to define actually. You're eighteen now."

She said, "Okay then, I'll use it in a sentence: Actually, why try anymore?"

"Why try *what* anymore?"

"Why try to love you, or to love myself? Why try to study, exercise, shower, dress, live?"

I stopped her: "Wait a minute, are you serious?"

"Yes, Dad!"

"Okay, well do you really want to know what I think about that? Or do you just want to keep telling me what you feel? Because I don't mind listening, I'm okay either way."

"Well, I want to know what you think, I guess."

"Will you let me rant then? Because it will have to be a rant. Because that's just me. I don't sound-bite."

"You do sound-bite sometimes. You're decent at it. But sure, go ahead."

She was used to my rants. Writers rant. Writers who've been writers for forty years rant a lot.

I was driving her back to her dorm from Palo Alto, where I had just introduced her to a college friend of mine who worked at Google assisting the renowned scientist, Ray Kurzweil -- one of my daughter's heroes. They had an interesting conversation about quantum computing, of which I understood only the word "and." Conceptually, quantum computing was apparently neither here nor there.

I also remember that during my rant in the car the Google Map voice kept interrupting me. I'd have to pause my monologue so this emotionally dead automated voice could obnoxiously repeat things like, "Use the left two lanes to stay to the right for Oakland 24 West."

But I persevered. I said, "When I first started writing songs at sixteen I wrote them to get attention from girls. After that started to happen with some consistency I wrote songs to gain respect from great musicians, so I could lure them into my band. Then I started to crave respect from faceless, nameless audiences. Then I started writing novels, mostly to get the attention of the girls who didn't like my music. Because I still hadn't found your mother yet, of course. Then as I got older I wanted to get paid for my 'work,' as if songwriting and novel writing were actually work.

"Decades later I married your mom and we had you. During that time my motivation for writing changed. I thought to myself, if I write songs and novels that are truly great, timeless, honest, maybe when you're older you would respect my work. You will hear all the cool messages I'll be whispering to you in metaphors and you'll grow wiser -- hopefully wiser than me. Maybe one night on my birthday you'll take me out to dinner and honor me over a glass of red wine."

"Or a resveratrol pill with ice water," Paris interjected.

"Exactly, but don't interrupt me."

"Sorry. Proceed."

"Then I thought -- and what if *your* children were also moved by my writing?"

"My children?"

"Hypothetically. Wouldn't that be amazing if they also liked my writing? I could achieve a modicum of immortality. My ideas and my music would live on, possibly for generations. But then, my thought-experiment got out of hand. Because I imagined the world a thousand years from now. Who would be alive to listen to my songs or read my words, and actually care? And even if humans survived the AI Wars and *did* still care about my songs and novels, what about a million years after that, or a billion years?"

"I realized *eventually* my imprint is going to disappear. As will The Beatles and Beethoven and Steph Curry and Hitler and Barack Obama. They will all be as forgotten as a dust mote. It will be exactly as if they, or I, never existed in the first place. Which might mean I don't exist now, except in some infinitely brief and infinitely insignificant way. So of course, I hit the ever-ominous existential brick wall at that point and came to the real question floating through the back of my mind. The one question that we all hide from minute by minute. The same question I think you're asking now: *What's the point?*"

"*Exactly!*" she exclaimed.

I was happy she was still listening because I had an answer.

But first I had to navigate the Caldecott Tunnel. The lights in that tunnel were dim enough to remind me of an alleyway in Athens but without the art or romance. I found myself joining the helpless mouse trails of cars trying to get out of the tunnel as fast as possible, which does a terrific job of making anyone wonder out loud, "What's the point?"

"The *point*," I said to her, "is liberation!"

"*Suicide?*"

"*No!* My God, how could you interpret liberation as suicide?"

Suicide is only contemplated by the enslaved. Not the free."

"Yeah, I didn't think you were talking about wanting to kill yourself, Dad, you're too arrogant." She smiled.

"I know. But you're interrupting my rant again. . ."

"Stay right," the Irish male Google Map voice advised. Then he repeated himself every one hundred feet until I obeyed and swerved onto Highway 13.

"You have to learn to free your *self* from yourself. That's liberation."

She rolled her eyes as if to say, "Seriously?"

Her arms were folded as she slumped back against the passenger seat. This was a boring cliché ending, if there ever was one. The old Buddhist Dad talk.

But she was staring out the front window instead of looking at her phone, so I knew she was still listening, hoping beyond reason that I was actually going to say something of value.

"So what do you think I'm trying to say, Pairs?"

(Pairs was the name Paris had recently given herself, she called it her quantum name, and her therapist insisted I call her this name too.)

"You'll have to give me an F, Dad. I have no freakin' clue."

We arrived at her dorm, a building creatively named Unit 1. Leave it to those stoners at Berkeley.

"I have to go. I'll see you and Mom tonight." She kissed me goodbye and smiled, "Thanks for trying. *Really*. You're a good dad, you know?"

I took a long look at her, my beautiful daughter, who seemed to be taking on the weight of the world. "Pairs, look, I know how much you respect logic. You value science over feelings, and math over psychology, and I get that. But what I'm saying is, if you don't spend a good deal of your time being a mind-scientist too, your mind will never figure out a way to win

the game. You're just going to find a thousand ways to lose. Eventually."

"And the game is?"

"The game is reality -- *your* reality. The game is about who gets to decide and define reality; who gets to define every thought in your head, including the word '*actually*.'"

## 2

I'd gotten lucky. I'd found a two-hour parking space right outside her dorm. So I suggested we grab a late lunch on Telegraph Avenue instead of saying goodbye.

"Sure, I'm down for that."

"I'm down for that too," I said, and turned my Cal hat backwards on my head. When in Rome.

The street sellers were busy profiting from all the parents who, after flying in for Parents Weekend from all over the country, were now wandering up and down Telegraph Avenue looking for their child, because their child had disappeared with a group of their friends as soon as their parents looked down at their iPhones.

This was supposed to be a bonding time after two months of estrangement. But their child was now looking for an open Ethiopian restaurant with a table for ten. No adults invited.

The parents were left staring at jangly jewelry hanging from corkboard hooks after adroitly avoiding getting a Taro reading from a lady that looked like she'd just escaped from the Salvation Army after losing the war.

Paris was, amazingly, still willing to continue our conversation. She was trying to find inner salvation. Because after getting her first taste of independence she realized it wasn't going to be as easy to navigate as she thought.

I continued my rant. "So I began to wonder what Hinduism would be like if they didn't insert Brahman into the end of the story. Or what if there was Buddhist psychology without the need for a transcending Buddha?"

"I'm losing the point, as any good Hindu might."

"Okay, look, I'm saying freeing ourselves may not ever really happen until we accept the possibility that what's beyond the

mind games may be nothing at all. It's a mental paradox, because the mind thinks itself to be real and that it's attached to some kind of God or universal consciousness that will never stop existing. But we also know we're being jerked around by our thoughts and we don't know what reality, or 'the self,' is. How do you reconcile those two things? So the answer I came up with is to try to make peace with the time-roller-coaster -- *not* by believing that fairies are waiting at the exit when the ride is over, but by simply staying present before, during, and after the ride, because that may be all there is."

"And what's the point of believing that's all there is, Dad?"

"*What?*"

"I mean, if some people believe in God or spirits, and others don't believe, why is one person observably better off than the other?"

"Observably?"

"Okay, I mean, what's the point of accepting *what is* in the present moment if when it comes right down to it, you're still prone to freaking out about life when it hits you? Like, why not just jump off the roller coaster at the top of the ride if in the end it doesn't matter anyway? Or *not* jump off? No difference, right? There's no right or wrong to either choice."

"No, I think the mind is better off not tripping out with guilt or sadness about the past, or anxiety about the future. If we let go of all that then we're free to just love being *here*, without our ego ruining everything by insulting us all the time about how we should have done this or that differently, or how we have to accomplish this or that particular thing if we want to be happy. And without fear creating spider webs of safety nets for the ending, like heavens and nirvanas. Until you finally get to a point where you can just truly experience life *right now*. That's the only truth! It's like Buddhism or Hinduism, but you don't have to

believe there's a prize at the bottom of the Cracker Jack box. Nothing but now! It's freeing, don't you think?"

Paris was processing all this, organizing it internally. She didn't respond for a long time. We just kept walking towards some mythical restaurant. "Your thoughts are cool, Dad. But I mean, it's basically like a commercial for Eastern religion. The only difference is none of the characters in the commercial survive to be in the next commercial. I don't totally buy it. Because insisting on only thinking about the present moment is like being the roller-coaster mechanic, not the one on the ride. You're *still* too in your head."

"Well, in Zen you try to extinguish the I. . . ."

"Let's extinguish our hunger first, then I'll tell you why I think extinguishing the I is just as pointless as not extinguishing the I. There are some really great restaurants another few minutes from here. Are you down?"

"I'm as down as down is."

"Cool. Because desires are terrible, but I love mine. By the way, you want to know what *I've* been thinking about lately?"

"Of course!"

She said all this while the UC Berkeley campus receded. I was wondering about that two-hour parking space, and whether we'd have time to beat the clock before the parking police showed up. Exactly one hundred twenty minutes after the chalk mark on my tires are set down, I'd be screwed. Getting a parking ticket was a cat and mouse game I hated to lose.

"We have all these insane discussions in my AI Ethics class. Like, *why* are our *human* ethics so automatically right? So I started thinking that consciousness is either a powerful gift that is unique in the universe, or the only living *curse* in the universe. It either has *hella* value, or it's totally valueless and stupid and a massive burden for those unfortunate enough to have to deal with it. And also, I don't buy the 'accept what is' stuff or Zen stuff because

you're still just theorizing things that have no pragmatic use in your life. For instance, I can tell by your face you're starting to worry about getting a parking ticket. How does that fit into staying in the present moment?"

"Oh my God, you're amazingly. . . insane."

"Don't be a hater of questioning minds, Dad. It's too ironic."

"I'm not! Look, do you believe that *everything* is impermanent and an illusion of the mind?"

"Yes, of course, *Rick and Morty* proved that to me fifteen episodes ago."

"Okay, and then religion says -- no wait, there *is* one thing that's permanent."

"Yeah, God. Or Brahman. Or whatevs."

"Right. But what if I told you I could convince you there *is* one thing that's permanent that's not God?"

"I'd say pass the psilocybin."

"My God, how do you know about psilocybin?"

"Psilocybin is the new LSD, Dad. How do *you* know about psilocybin?"

"Well, to be historically accurate, LSD was actually the new psilocybin. But whatevs."

"Well, I'm saying if you're going to convince me there is anything truly permanent it needs to pass the end of the universe test. Does it still exist after the end of the universe?"

"It does."

"After all the universes die?"

"Yes."

"Wow. By the way, Kim's older brother once saw this hysterical thing on the front page of the *National Enquirer* -- a fake photograph of a city lit up on a distant cloud with the caption, 'Hubble Telescope Finds Heaven!'"

"Yeah, I saw that one too, walking out of a CVS drugstore years ago. But no, my answer to what is permanent isn't about heaven or a God, necessarily."

"Necessarily?"

"Well, we can't know. But let's assume it's a no. Ever hear of supreme consciousness?"

"Oh no, not supreme consciousness. "

"Surprise! That's not necessarily it either," I smiled.

"Dad!"

"Sorry, I'm teasing you."

"You're becoming a spiritual comedian now?"

"Trying. Humor is extremely important, you know."

"But it's not permanent."

"No. I guess."

"Especially yours."

"If it ever existed in the first place."

"So then, go ahead. What's permanent beyond infinite impermanence?"

"*What is.*"

"Yo, what?"

"Whatever *is*, even if it's nothing, that's still what is."

"Semantics."

"No. Not really. Look, there may, or may not, be some permanent thing out there. And there may, or may not, be other universes. And yes, if they exist all of them may be gone someday too. Or, maybe we are in a repeating loop where everything, every second, repeats endlessly and we just think there is a past and a future. Or, maybe we're all just code in some super intelligent being's computer game. I've heard of all of those possibilities, and there are plenty of other possibilities I haven't heard of. But *beyond* all of them, whatever is true, is true. What is, *is* -- *permanently*, beyond time, even if change ends. It's still *what is* in that present moment."

"What the fuck, Dad."

"Hey!"

"Sorry."

"What's the matter?"

"What *is* is, and *is* is. Fine. Then define 'is.'"

"Come on. Think about it, Paris."

"It's *Pairs*."

"Sorry. *Pairs*."

Finally she came back to the original question: "What's the point?"

"You have to find that out for yourself."

"Shit, you could have just said that in the first place."

I sighed. "Pairs, can I be honest with you."

"You haven't been?"

"Yes, but I mean honest right now, even if you might not want to hear it?"

"I'm not going to be able to be a super-intelligent immortal cyborg?"

"No."

"I knew it."

"I mean, I think a lot of what you're thinking is brilliant. But a lot of it is putting way too much pressure on yourself. You say you can't stand failure. No one can. But when you say you can't stand failure, and if you can't be great and make a difference in this world then you may as well kill yourself, *that's your OCD*."

"I don't have OCD. I'm low spectrum bipolar with a lot of underlying anxiety."

"Well, your therapist says you're not bipolar. You just have OCD."

"I think *she* has OCD. It's transference."

"So you don't believe her?"

"In a quantum way, maybe. But I can't really explain that to you properly yet. You'd have to study quantum physics. It's nuanced."

"Try me."

"Well, for instance, did you know my 145 IQ can literally dip into the 120s if I'm under stress? I suddenly become only nominally above normal, sometimes simultaneously. So if I'm stressed taking an advanced Calc test I could have a 120 IQ at that moment while at the same time if you asked me a question about astrophysics I would answer you with an IQ of 145. That's what I mean by 'quantum.' Sometimes a defined thing is unable to be fully defined unless you account for opposites being simultaneously real."

"Okay, but. . ."

"Meanwhile, I'm hella hungry for lunch. Do you want the best Nepalese food in the world outside of Nepal?"

"Maybe tonight when we go out with Mom. I just want a little something to hold me over right now."

"Oooo, there's a bagel store across the street. We can get toasted bagels and toppings. I like hummus."

"I'll split one with you."

"Kk. Then let's walk back to my dorm after that and I'll see you and Mom later. I have stuff to do."

When I got back to my car a ticket was on the windshield. But all I could think of was how much I loved her.

It was fall. The leaves were turning colors.

## 3

These kinds of conversations with my daughter were not extraordinary. After all, we had been having deep conversations since she was a little girl. She would also imitate everything I did back then. I would catch her observing me all the time.

As a result, at a young age Paris became a songwriter, just like her dad. Her songs were as exceptional and quirky as she was. She wrote her first really good songs when she was eight years old.

But even before that, when she was three, she came up to me while I was writing and said, "Daddy, when I grow up I want to do what *you* do for work."

I nodded and said, "Good."

She thought a little more and said, "So, what exactly do you do?"

I laughed, "Well, that's a good question. Sometimes I don't even know what I do until I do it."

She smiled, "Me too."

From the time I was a teenager until my mid-thirties, pretty much everything in my life revolved around rock 'n' roll. Songwriting, recording, band rehearsals, tours, managers, contracts. I was in my little bubble. My image was who I was to me. There was hardly a separation.

But in my mid-thirties I also wrote a novel that was published. Suddenly I had a second career. I had always wanted to take my lyric writing to another level, expand upon the themes. Novel writing seemed to be a great way to do that.

While I was happy to take full credit for all of my work, I was also aware of this gateway into the unknown when I was improvising, or writing a song, or in the flow as a novelist,

watching the story type its way forward onto the page. Because it became clear to me that it wasn't all my doing. I wasn't the only one deciding things moment to moment. Of course, it *was* me. But it felt like there was some energy co-creating with me.

Over the years I became more and more interested in what that something else might be. It was an odd, almost mystical feeling. I could never conjure it up at will.

I met Allison when I was in my mid-forties. She was in her twenties. She was a yoga teacher and a watercolorist. We were a perfect match from the beginning because we were perfectly different. We filled in spaces with each other. We also had an amazing sensual connection, which is always on the very top of any rock 'n' rollers list. The connection never went away. But it was more than that -- Allison became a true friend. You wouldn't necessarily find that on the top of any rock 'n' rollers list, but it's fatal when it's missing. We were married in 1998. Paris was born in 1999. I had just turned forty-nine.

Paris was named after the city Allison and I both loved. We had vacationed there a number of times, always adding it on as the first or last stop to our European trips.

A year after Paris was born I stopped touring. I wrote songs and novels but refused to leave home, no longer interested in marketing myself. Of course this greatly diminished my ability to make money, but I had enough to last quite a number of decades by then. I just wanted us to be a normal family where we all ate dinners together and talked about our day.

As a young child Paris was quiet, contemplative, and already intellectually unique. She asked wild questions about everything. At age four she asked me, "If there's gravity, why isn't the sky down here?" At age nine, "Where does the charge come from inside electrons?"

But she never strayed much from our side. She was shy and very obedient, which was the opposite of her two parents. In fact,

even when she was ten years old she would respond to my "I'll give you till the count of five" threat by doing whatever I said before I got to five.

When she was eleven she said to me, "What happens if I don't do what you say by the count of five?"

I shrugged and said, "I don't know."

That was enough of an explanation for her to keep obeying me. She considered it a game to play. Until she turned thirteen. Then she said, "It's not working Dad, you're going to have to come up with a new threat."

Around that same age she began relying on me, not just as a source for learning music and lyric writing, but as a life teacher.

Paris also loved her public school experience, especially when the work got harder. She didn't take to sports, but she fell in love with science early on, at first obsessed with the science of lightning, then astronomy. She read *How to Create a Mind*, by Ray Kurzweil when she was fourteen. Sometime after that she wanted to become a "super-intelligent immortal cyborg."

She told me when she figured out immortality scientifically she wanted to transfer my mind into an avatar, but first she had to figure out a way to download "me" into a computer program.

Of course, back in 2015, that sounded absolutely delusionary. By 2017, as a student at Berkeley, not so much delusionary as visionary. Sometimes it's hard to know the difference. Sometimes there is no difference.

## 4

We were always very affectionate with Paris. But by the time she was ten she had a hard time with physical affection. She would hug people sideways, even us, even before bed. We thought she might have a mild form of Asperger Syndrome. This continued into her teen years, so when she was sixteen we decided to get her tested by a neuropsychologist. That's when we found out that she didn't have Asperger Syndrome, but that she did have an extremely high IQ, and also had OCD -- Obsessive Compulsive Disorder.

The OCD ruled her most of the time, but not in the typical ways you hear about, like constant handwashing. Paris felt guilty if she didn't do something perfectly. We'd always be sure to tell her that perfection was overrated, just do your best. But that had no effect on her obsession to be perfect.

Her other recurring obsessive thought was: if you can't be one of the world's most amazing humans, why live?

The neuropsychologist said to her, "Paris, you don't have OCD -- *it has you*. It's like your perfectionism and your OCD are running hand in hand through a meadow, dragging you behind them through the mud."

Paris' response to the neuropsychologist was that the image of being dragged through mud in a meadow seemed to be mixing metaphors to a degree, but she got the point.

What exactly was the OCD stirring up in her? Her fear of being imperfect, fear of failing?

The problem with being so good at everything you try is that failure is not a natural part of your experience. And when it happens it can feel almost catastrophic to someone as driven as she was.

After Paris got accepted to UC Berkeley Allison and I debated whether she should go to such a rigorous competitive school. She was accepted to all the schools she applied to, some of which were great schools, but quite a bit less intense than Cal. But Paris insisted she wanted to go to the best school in the world for physics. And we didn't really have good enough reasons at the time to refuse her.

## 5

By the age of fifteen Paris had written an album's worth of amazing songs. Of course albums no longer existed, and CDs were about to go the way of albums. Let's just say she wrote eight great songs. She recorded them with Lynn Porter, the recording engineer for my latest two CDs. Lynn was someone who had become a good friend. I wanted him to be a source of encouragement and inspiration, to give Paris confidence while she was recording her tracks. It turned out that was unnecessary. Paris blew him away. Almost everything she sang and played was perfect on the first take. Lynn also loved her songs, and her passionate performances. So as it turned out, she was the source of inspiration.

Since she had no fan base, the only thing we could reasonably do after the songs were recorded was to put her music on SoundCloud and Spotify. There was no real way to market her music.

So when she was sixteen I decided to let her be my opening act for one night in a two-thousand-seat hall in Boston. She wanted to play solo with only her voice and guitar. She had no fear. It was crazy.

She sat in a simple wooden chair with her guitar. Her vocal mic was angled just right on a boom stand so the audience could see her face. One white spotlight shined on her. She looked down at her guitar most of the time when she sang, but at instinctively correct moments she'd look at the audience and smile in the middle of singing a phrase.

She wore her favorite jeans, a sleeveless white T-shirt, a long sparkly necklace Allison bought her years ago, and a thin sleeveless short red jacket that she wore open. She sang like a total pro. She was as calm and aloof as a superstar. Allison and I

were blown away with her poise and energy. We could see where all this could easily lead, so after my part of the show ended we had to have "the talk."

We had already had the sex talk a few years back. She found that a bit boring. This talk was far more complicated.

I said, "Paris, you were great tonight. The question is where to go from here, if anywhere. I mean, you could either just continue to live the life you're living and write songs when you feel like it. Or you could try to go for it, like I did. These days you'd probably start by writing with some established writers in L.A. Writers that have connections. Maybe you'd eventually find a band, get some head shots, try to get signed to an indie label and all that. Does that kind of thing interest you?"

She seemed distracted. "Does what interest me?" She was eating the buffet food in the dressing room with both hands. Table manners were never a strength of hers.

"Becoming a professional musician, getting your songs out there for the world to hear!"

"Oh that. No. I mean, that doesn't interest me at all, really. But thanks for the offer, Dad. I mean, I kind of just want to write songs for myself and play them when I feel like it."

I shook my head in wonder. "That's great. That's called sane."

"Oh, I thought it was called art."

"Very funny! Then what do you call what *I* do?"

"No offense, Dad. I love your music. But I don't need what you need in order to get off."

I smiled and nodded, "You're way better off, babe, believe me. Pack up your guitar and let's go home. You have homework to do."

"No I don't. I finished it before sound check."

This was Paris at sixteen. Focused, driven, hoping to get into a great college with the dream of being a scientist someday, and at the same time naturally connected as an artist, easily accessing the mystical place where great songs are born.

She could have been great.

## 6

We lived in a beautiful three-story house in an upscale neighborhood in Cambridge, Massachusetts. It snowed heavily in the winters. But we loved the coziness of our living room fireplace. We were also near Harvard (which Paris didn't apply to because it was too close to home). Understandably, there were a lot of creative, intelligent people everywhere we went, which we all loved.

Allison and I slept upstairs, in what could be described as a huge loft. It was a big open wooden room with a towering A-frame roof and a wood stove. Our picture window looked out over our neighbors' rooftops. We needed a lot of extra blankets on snowy nights. It was our favorite time to talk about things and then make love to get ourselves warm before sleep.

Paris slept one floor down in a room that had a separate sitting area under a big window. She replaced her stuffed animals with guitars and an amplifier early on. And replaced her shelves of children's books with books on science, mostly astronomy, physics and futurism.

By then Allison knew Paris was going to be our only child. We'd tried to have more children, but after a few years of enjoying the attempt a doctor declared Allison had "secondary infertility." There would be no second child. So, of course, Paris became all the more precious to both of us.

Snow was falling when Paris came home from Cal for Christmas; the only Christmas break she would ever have, since she would drop out of college soon thereafter.

## 7

We got into our typical philosophical dinner conversation the day before Christmas Eve, which we eventually came to call Christmas Eve-Eve. This became a special holiday for us, since starting on Christmas Eve, and all the way through the New Year, a certain mindlessness took over the Judeo-Christian world. This was our attempt to offer a counterpoint to all that.

Christmas Eve-Eve was a serious evening. We would all share our latest creative endeavors. Allison unveiled her recent series of watercolors, many of which were sold in a local gallery downtown. Paris and I might share our latest songs.

Then we would talk about things that were far more important than which New Year's party we would attend. We would talk about where we hoped our lives were headed in the next year.

Of the three of us, Allison was usually the most unselfish when looking forward. This Christmas Eve-Eve was no exception. She said she hoped I would find continuing success with my novels, but then she good-naturedly reminded me that she married a rock songwriter, and she expected me to continue to write great songs. She said, "I don't care if you ever tour again, James, but keep writing songs."

Then she turned to Paris and said she hoped she would make some good friends at Cal next semester, and also keep up her good grades. "But one more thing. I do love your songwriting too, Paris. I guess you inherited your dad's genes. Don't ever surrender that. It's an important part of who you are."

Paris responded, "Thanks, Mom. You know, it's like you're so happy to live in Dad's shadow, and mine too in many ways. You're always setting good things up, then stepping back to watch what happens. But you're a great artist in your own right."

So what I hope the future holds for you this coming year is a hundred more beautiful watercolors that just flow out of you, like colored stories bequeathed upon you from the rain gods. And maybe you can get to live inside your favorite one for a whole day."

That was Paris. Even her compliments were eccentric.

On Christmas Day night I suddenly thought of an idea I had to run by Paris, since she was my toughest critic.

I said, "I've come to the conclusion that the key to happiness in this lifetime is convincing yourself that the *nothingness* we're all likely to become a part of when we're gone could be just as good, and just as fulfilling, as joining up with a God, or a supreme consciousness. It could even be better than all the mind-made outcomes."

She said, "Dad, I think trying to talk yourself into that one is a waste of time. Because you can't know what's true until you're there, and not here. Think of it this way -- *Here*, the mind is just a brain mirror. That's all it is. It can't know anything outside the brain. It's like we're like trapped in a machine!"

"The mind is just a brain mirror. That's good."

"But I'm not saying that the brain couldn't be a conduit to something else either. Have you ever heard of the big-C and little-C theories of consciousness?"

"No."

"So, Dad, in quantum theory the question becomes, is consciousness a thing that exists by itself, but requires a brain to become real? For instance, imagine consciousness is a real image in the dark, but it requires light and eyes to see it and interact with it. That's called the big-C theory."

"Wow, that's wild! So what's the little-C theory?"

"Little-C is that consciousness is just biology. It's simply energy produced by the normal evolution of our brains

functioning to survive. Consciousness doesn't exist independently of brains."

"I see."

"No one can prove or disprove big-C versus little-C yet. But, I mean, if you're going to come up with all these crazy theories in your head, Dad, I think you need someone calling you out when you're lacking information or using false logic."

"Right. Right."

She brushed her hair away from her face.

"So define logic," I smirked.

"Logic? Logic is what's true with no refutable argument. Like me getting beat up by a bum in the park in Berkeley because I was stupid enough to be walking by myself after dark. It's logical that it could have happened, and it's irrefutable 'logic' because it did happen."

"Wait. Did it really happen? Or is this just an example of. . ."

She looked at me steely-eyed, brown irises darkening into a storm. "Yes, really."

"Were you hurt badly? My God!"

"He grabbed me. I kicked him. He hit me. I kicked him again and tried to bite him, then I ran. I was bleeding but that's about all. I called the police on my phone while I was running back to the dorm. The cop on the phone basically told me it was mostly my fault for walking alone in the dark. So I said to him, 'Oh, of course, why assume the fucking world is safe.' Which was illogical to say, you know? Because he was a cop. He knows the world isn't safe. He must of thought I was just a stupid kid who didn't know shit about anything." She started crying. She almost never cried.

"I'm so so sorry, Paris."

"It's *Pairs!*" she screamed through her tears.

"Sorry. I mean *Pairs.*"

My mind started reeling out of control. You see, spiritual theories are beautifully logical as long as you are sitting peacefully, like Narcissus in front of a mirrory lake.

But when reality hits, when something bad happens to you or someone you love, when the bullets starts to fly, all you want to do is load your gun.

## 8

One mid-February afternoon Paris called from her dorm in Berkeley. Allison and I were visiting friends in Cape Cod. Paris asked me if I was alone so I stepped outside to talk to her. It was one of those rare windless, cloudless February days. I was comfortable walking along the shore without a heavy jacket.

"Dad, I need to run my thoughts by you because they're pretty radical."

"Would I expect anything different from you?"

"Dad, I thought I wanted to be a scientist but now I don't know. I mean, I *do know* that I don't. I go to class with these kids that have brains like computers and they're finishing their equations in ten minutes while I'm still asking the teacher a what-if question, you know?"

"What do you mean, a 'what if' question?"

"I mean I see where the equations are leading conceptually but I'm more interested in what you can do with the concepts than doing that one equation, so I get distracted and don't finish the calculations before the class ends."

"Are the professors okay with you asking questions?"

"Yeah. Most of them say, 'Oh, I never thought about that. Why don't you present it to the class next time,' and things like that. But the problem is, they don't have any answers, and I don't like the class work enough to actually do the assignments. So I've been skipping class and going to clubs and stuff instead."

"Clubs?"

"Not clubs where you drink and play music. Clubs, like, have you ever heard of ICE?"

"The drug?"

"No! ICE, the agency that's trying to throw immigrants out of the country."

"Oh, yeah, I know what you're talking about now."

"Well, they need to have search warrants to enter a place. Did you know that?"

"Actually no."

"So this club I'm in, well it's kind of like a club. Anyway, we go to these places where the leader knows that ICE is showing up and we block the entrance and demand that we see a search warrant. And they never have one, and it's amazing, but they have to leave!"

"Well, that's great, but. . . "

"And I also joined this Nepal Club where they talk about all the amazing ashrams and the kinds of meditation and yoga they do there. You know some of the yoga classes are like three hours long. It's like there's wrist yoga, and I mean, every part of your body. . . I'm gonna tell mom."

"She'd love to hear about it."

"But what I'm trying to say is, I really don't love math. And I'm not that good at it. I mean I'm S.A.T. good at it. But I'm not Berkeley good at it. And physics is kind of boring. And I hate biology and chem. So I don't really want to be in the science program anymore."

"Have you tried other majors related to physics and math like computer science and other kinds of tech stuff?"

"Yeah, but computer science is too much about programming. And CogSci is science and psychology, but I've had enough psychology to last me a lifetime."

"Okay."

"So, there *is* one thing I'm passionate about. One thing I'm absolutely sure I want to do. And that's play music."

"Well, great! That's awesome!"

"Yeah, but Dad, I'm not gonna major in music at Berkeley, it's a waste of your money. And I don't read notes anyway. There's no place for an indie songwriter here, or any other music

school I know of. But all the learning I need to do would be by studying bass and guitar online at home and playing with a band. Which you could help me with, right?"

"But then. . . "

"Yeah, I guess I'd be dropping out."

I was too stunned to respond.

"I mean, I don't absolutely love any of the kids here. And some of the professors are amazing, but they don't have time to deal with me as a person. I'm there to get a grade. And I'm hardly even going to my classes anymore anyway. So is it okay if I drop out?"

"*Drop out?* Well, I mean, you should talk to Mom too, but regardless, I just think you need to consider the consequences for longer than a day."

"Oh, and they said if I get a note from a therapist saying I'm too mentally fucked-up to go to class they'll give us a partial refund, and then I can come back here as a student any time I want, no questions asked. Like, even in twenty years. Cool policy, huh?"

"You've already talked to your advisor about this?"

"Yes, but also, Dad, don't be mad, but I've lost my dorm key, twice. And that costs \$75 each time. Sorry, but they're like really small keys, and I'm feeling really disorganized. I mean they're *really* small."

## 9

Allison and I talked things over and had a rather large difference of opinion. Allison graduated from a good college. I dropped out of college in my freshman year to become a musician, just like Paris wanted to do now.

Allison blamed me for Paris' ambivalence about Cal. I suggested that she call Paris and talk to her about her decision. If Paris ended up staying at Berkeley it was fine with me.

"Oh really?"

"Obviously!" I screamed. It was not our finest hour.

But Allison's call did not go well. Paris, who still wanted to be called Paris, was already making plans to leave. She was upset with Allison because she was trying to guilt-trip her into staying, while Dad was "being cool about it." Allison's interpretation of the call was that Paris was mentally off the rails and that a lot of this was probably because of her OCD.

I called Paris privately and asked her to consider what her mom was saying, suggesting maybe it would be best if she at least finish the semester. There were only five weeks left to go. But Paris said she'd been playing music for ten hours a day for the last three days and not even going to classes anymore.

So I said, "Listen, if you want to come home and study music and write songs, I'll work things out with Mom. But the compromise is that you need to see a therapist here. Mom and I want to make sure this isn't just anxiety or the OCD making you run from potential failure to achieve on a high level there. Because we know you can if you wanted to."

"Dad, it's not OCD. I want to play music. I don't want to be a scientist. I'm sure."

"Okay."

"So then buy me a plane ticket. I want out of here."

## 10

Allison flew to California to help Paris pack up all of her things and apply for a partial refund. She wanted to go alone to reconnect with her daughter.

Paris came home with her mom without the usual fanfare of a returning college student to her family. This was not a holiday. It was ten days before Thanksgiving. Paris unpacked quickly and locked herself in her room. She would come up for food and water. Sometimes eat meals with us, sometimes not.

We could hear her playing music in her room. She was listening to Universal Hall Pass and an all-girl math-rock band called Tricot. Then she would practice bass, an instrument she picked up when she was seventeen and had a natural talent for. She was watching YouTube videos learning how to play funk and slap, and texting me asking if she could get a five-string bass at some point. I texted her back, "Of course."

She continued through the holidays not saying much. She was playing and writing amazing songs. She would come to me asking what I thought of ideas she was coming up with. Is this a bridge or a verse? But when it came time to talk about the future there was just a shrug of the shoulders. She looked at me with no trace of sarcasm saying she just wanted to be in the present moment.

She didn't want to see friends or relatives. She would leave the house to exercise, which she seemed to be overdoing by playing an app called Zombies, Run. She was in contact with "base camp," who would tell her when the Zombies were coming and where to run. She was running and walking five miles a day up and down hills avoiding Zombies. Sometimes texting me if she got caught. Sometimes she'd text me, "Home soon. Have to finish my mission."

For downtime she watched *Rick and Morty* reruns with me and found other animated cartoons beloved by her generation of kind-hearted nerds, like *Steven Universe*.

A week before she was scheduled to see her local therapist for the first time since being home, she became depressed. Didn't want to exercise, or eat, or play music. She began to sleep twelve hours a day.

One night while Allison was out with friends she asked if we could talk.

"I'm way down, Dad. Can't get out."

"I know. Do you know why?"

"Embarrassed."

"About what?"

"Failure. I'm failing at everything."

"I'm seeing you practice and doing what you love, and writing and growing as a musician."

"No. I'm wasting a lot of time. More than you know. More than I'm letting on. I'm watching animations and spacing out, because I don't want to admit certain things to myself."

"Like what?"

"I *failed* at Berkeley. I couldn't handle it. I'm failing as a person. I'm failing at everything. I'm realizing I'm not going to ever be great at anything. And that's like standing at the beginning of a long dark road for me."

"Music?"

"I don't want to be great at music. Music just is."

"But you could be really good at it. In fact, you already are."

"I'm *me* at it. I can write about failure and depression and how love is bullshit and all that. I can be angsty. I can be honest. But if I try to be great, then all I'm going to write about is how I'm trying to be great. I won't destroy myself like that."

She made so much sense to me. "Wow. Okay, I get it. What can I do to help?"

"Not sure. Maybe meds. Or maybe I need to get away. Leave home, be on my own. Maybe go to Asia or Africa. Start over."

"I don't think you should go anywhere until you stabilize and Dr. Sarah says you're ready to be on your own."

"Yeah, whatever."

"Sorry."

"Dad, tell me a story about the hippie days."

She was aware that any time she asked me this it meant I was going to tell her a story relevant to her current situation -- even if I had to make it up. She liked it better than me just straight-out lecturing her.

"Okay, well, did I ever tell you the story about my conversation with Don the Harvard med student?"

"No."

"He was staying in this rundown apartment complex in Cambridge where I was renting a room. He was a super smart dude, but he hit a brick wall trying to get through med school and started seeing a therapist to get him over the hump."

I saw the look on her face and said, "This is not a story that ends up nudging you back to Cal. So don't think that's where it goes. I'm not *that* transparent."

"Sometimes you are."

"Well, not this time. Anyway, so Don is sitting on the porch overlooking the neighborhood traffic, sitting in this old beat-up chair with his legs stretched out to the railing. He's holding a beer in his hand."

"I said, 'Hi Don, your beer's looking kinda warm.'"

"He said, 'Yeah I been out here for a while. About five hours, in fact.'"

"I said, 'Since four in the morning?'"

"He said, 'About that.'"

"So I sat down next to him just to see if he wanted to say more. He was a really smart kid. Ended up being a surgeon. Anyway eventually he says, 'Ever hear of the Trickster?'"

"A movie?"

"An internal movie. My therapist says I have an unconscious need to stir things up. It's born from boredom, and from being out of touch with myself, and feeling out of control. It will destroy anything it can get its hands on -- relationships, studying for an exam, happiness -- because the Trickster idealizes people and circumstances and inner goals until they feel beyond your reach. I have a lot of the Trickster in me, eating me alive. I broke up with my girl last week. Don't even want to return her calls. But I can't figure out if it's because she's not good enough, or I'm not good enough. See? The Trickster. Then Trickster got to the juicy stuff -- I'll never be a great doctor. I'm just one of a thousand brilliant kids in med school. I'll be lucky if I can get a job as an intern when I graduate. Therefore, why graduate? Why study? And I'm sitting here thinking, and drinking this beer one sip at a time, continuing to be under its spell, because I can't think of one fucking reason why the Trickster is wrong."

"I said, 'Wow. But then why didn't the Trickster get to you before now?'"

"And he said, 'It has, plenty of times. It's been ruining my life since I was little. I never wanted to be a doctor until I found out I was smart enough to be one. Then the Trickster really poured it on, guilt-tripping me into becoming the great Dr. Donald J. Madison someday. Harvard grad. Except the real me deep inside never wanted to be that.'

"I whispered, 'What did you want to be?'"

"He said, 'A soccer player! All I ever really wanted to do was play soccer.'"

I looked at Paris.

She said, "Is that it?"

"Yep."

"So what's the point? You've become opaque in your old age."

"The point is we all have the Trickster lurking in us. We have to become very aware, very perceptive, in order to separate that voice from our own true voice. I don't think your true voice is the one activating your depression right now. I think the Trickster is."

A few days later she called her old therapist, Dr. Sarah Feodorovna, for the first time in over a year. It was time to get back to the real work.

## 11

I knocked and entered Paris' bedroom, which looked like a hurricane had hit. Clothes and balled-up pieces of paper littered her floor. A guitar was lying on top of her winter jacket. But I had been told by Dr. Sarah not to get into anything OCD-related before she started therapy so I ignored it.

"Hey Pairs, I came up with a new revelation, and this one really makes sense. Ready?"

"Always ready, Dad. Let me get the Dalai Lama on the line so he can hear it too."

"Well, let me see what you think about it first. I don't want to bother him with the undeniable truth if it turns out to be bullshit."

"K. Go."

"What happens after death should not be my concern -- ever again! See, once I let go of the question then I'm free to live, and free to die, not knowing. And I don't have to waste one more second of my life while I'm still alive trying to figure it out."

"That's it?"

"Pretty much."

"Yeah, I actually like that one. But maybe not for a writer. And anyway, Dad, then what do you *do* with your life while you're alive? Isn't that the next question? What do you do with all the extra time you'll have when you're not messing up your head with thoughts of the after-world."

"Well, I just make sure the present moment is as wonderful as possible, every moment. *Be in it*. Feel it. Why try to guess what's going to happen in the future if guessing makes you anxious and afraid?"

"That's actually good."

"Right? It's like a guy who's lived in the woods his whole life and never had any other person around. Imagine his parents left

him alone as soon as he learned to take care of himself. And he's never heard of death. He doesn't even know death exists! I mean, he sees animals dying but he doesn't think that has anything to do with him. So he has no idea. Then one day he's dying, and he's wondering what the hell is going on. But he still doesn't know that he has to be concerned about the whole death thing. He's just experiencing it. That's all."

"Well, I still think he'd be just as freaked out as someone who *knows* about death."

"Okay, maybe so, but at least he'd have all those years before the end comes, *not* freaking out. Don't you think that would be better?"

"You know, Dad, that's an interesting one to consider. I kinda like it."

## 12

Paris signed a release form before she began her first therapy session. That meant Allison and I could communicate with the therapist about Paris at any time and she could communicate with us.

This was very unlike the strategy of the therapist Paris was working with in Berkeley, who insisted that Paris as an eighteen year-old should declare her independence from us immediately during her first semester of navigating Cal. And that their therapy sessions were a private matter between them.

Dr. Feodorvna, or Dr. Sarah, as we all came to call her, had been working with Paris since she was fourteen, trying to help her through her OCD issues. She had Paris name the OCD. The name was to be well thought out, symbolizing that part of her thinking that was trying to control and take over her life with illogical conclusions. The ingenious name Paris named her inner OCD voice, without even thinking about it for more than a second, was Hunter.

Hunter was controlling Paris' peace of mind like the Trickster had controlled Don Madison's mind. He became a surgeon. But that didn't mean he was free of it.

Hunter hated failure. Hunter was proud of Paris' high IQ. He also renamed her Pairs. Hunter was a he, and according to Paris he was the reason she sometimes felt like a boy, or a girl and boy at the same time. Quantumly, that is. Hunter and Paris' own thoughts were separate yet the same.

She said to me, "Dad, I can't defeat him. So I'm trying to join forces with him. We're making a pact. One day, when I'm ready we're going to run away together and start to live in the real world. We're going to travel, meet people, and not try to be

anyone special. Just be. Just live. No goals. No need to be great, or save the world, or save you."

Beyond the disturbing last three words, which I didn't quite grasp, this all sounded like a positive step. I'm not a therapist. I didn't know how to read between the lines, or ask the right questions. So all I said, to my everlasting regret, was, "Sounds good."

Allison and I entered Dr. Sarah's simple office on the second floor of a building filled with therapists. She always sat in a chair with her computer in front of her on a swivel table. She was able to take notes without looking at the keyboard.

"So James, Allison, I think we need to try something a bit different. I'm a neuropsychologist, as was the doctor who tested Paris last year. The good news is there's nothing wrong with her brain chemistry. She has no sign of schizophrenia or bipolar. And I know she's not a multiple personality. She's incredibly integrated, brilliantly so in many ways. But she does suffer from anxiety and depression. And after my initial sessions with her I do believe the root cause of both the anxiety and depression is her OCD. OCD is not usually a symptom. It's a cause. So what I suggest is that we take a break for a few weeks and let a psychiatrist assess her for medication."

"Medication for what?" Allison asked with no small amount of alarm. We were both wary of medication, and allopathic medicine in general, unless it was urgent.

"There is specific OCD medication. Like Clomipramine. If the psychiatrist agrees with my thinking there are a number of different medications to try, that's just a typical one. The medicine won't get rid of the OCD. That's *my* job. But they will allow Paris to become aware of her non-OCD thinking. She'll be able to separate out the thoughts that her Hunter voice is planting, and see the difference between those thoughts and her more healthy normal way of thinking."

I was skeptical. "Paris. I mean Paris, is an amazing person just the way she is, Sarah. I don't think she dropped out of school and didn't want to be a scientist because of her OCD."

"That's possibly true, James. But I believe the OCD nudged her into skipping classes, and had her stop trying before she was sure. And I don't think there would be a Pairs without Hunter. She'd just call herself Paris. The impulsivity Hunter brings to the table had her playing music for hours a day instead of studying for class. And of course, if music is her path that's fine and good. But the timing and the way she threw herself into it without at least finishing up the semester makes me think the OCD was part of the decision-making process.

"Also, she is extremely unfocused and disorganized. The OCD tells her little things -- liking cleaning her room, or learning to drive, or making a point of not losing her dorm keys twice in one week, aren't important. Only the biggest and wildest things are important. The problem is, if and when she hits failure a deep depression ensues. The big wild dreams collapse and reality sinks in. The OCD meds will allow her to find her real voice, a more realistic and more compassionate voice, that won't shame her when she fails, and won't demand she somehow become super human."

A dark cloud descended upon me. The truth finally hit me. My daughter was not well. She needed help, and neither Allison nor I would be able to help her, or completely heal her on our own. I became teary. Then embarrassed by exposing that.

Allison said, "I'm open to whatever she needs. James and I both trust you, Sarah. So choose a psychiatrist and let's see what kind of meds she needs."

"I'm not *positive* she needs meds, Allison. I'm just proposing we get a second opinion right now. Let's start there."

## 14

Paris dutifully went to the psychiatrist, who was charging \$400 an hour. He saw her six times since she was "very complex."

He said to Allison and me, "I don't care who she says she is. I need to find out who she is. Until then, I can't know what meds to give her. Or if meds are even appropriate."

Twenty-four-hundred dollars later the assessment came: Paris should take Clomipramine. It was specifically for OCD.

When the psychiatrist told Paris he thought she should take meds she stayed silent. She took the paper prescription and left the office. But when she came home she said, "I'm not taking meds, Dad. I would rather find a way for Hunter and me to be one. Integrate, don't exterminate."

"Well, that's what the meds would help you do!"

"I think what you really mean is, it will help you and Mom deal with me."

"*That's not true!* I'm trying to get you to deal with your thoughts so you can lead a better life."

"How about if you deal with *your thoughts*, Dad? And I deal with mine."

""Pairs, you're not being rational."

"Really, Dad? Define rational."

Allison threatened to force her to take the meds if she was going to live at home and eat our food, and spend our money on therapy. She told Paris, "We're not going to stand by and allow you to ignore what you need to get better."

"I'm not sick, Mom! Psychology is not a science. The only one who knows me is *me*."

Paris came to me after Allison went to bed. She looked at me with her eyes wet with tears and said, "Et tu, Dad?" My heart broke.

"No, Pairs. I don't know what the answer is. I can see both sides. But you're my daughter. I love you as much as I love anyone in the world. I want you to feel good. I want you to feel great! And I don't know what the answer is. But, honestly, I think it's worth trying the meds. You can always stop."

"*Hunter* is writing the songs, Dad. It's his crazy thinking that leads me to create my crazy chord progressions and weird melodies and totally insane lyrics. Not literally insane. But you know what I mean."

"*You're* Hunter, so *you're* writing the songs, Pairs."

"But he's the other part of me that makes us a pair. *We are separate but one*. I'm not talking about an alternate personality! I'm saying that voice, Hunter's voice, that's always been a part of me, is the quirky voice. He never wanted to be a scientist. He wants me to work at what I'm passionate about, and, yes, he doesn't want me to fail. He doesn't want me to surrender! But that's not a bad thing. And I don't want to surrender to meds. Or to you, or to Mom, or to life! I want you to trust me. All of me. Not some fucking shrink."

I was at a loss. This was way over my head.

She took my silence as approval and quickly found a segue. "Wanna see the lyrics to a song I just wrote? It's about Hunter."

She handed me a piece of paper:

### **Significant Other**

seeking with paper minds  
it's not you, it's just your subconscious stabilizers  
filling in the blanks

how are we gone, i can't seem to read it  
how are we gone, a built in need to run

we feel through fascist eyes  
but i'm waking, fighting everything.  
all you seem to do is agree  
nothing left to gain

how are we gone, i can't seem to read it  
how are we gone, a built in need to run

i will learn how to calm down  
face down desire and fear  
forget their messages  
what do you see

what else can i let go of  
what else can i consider

forget their messages  
what do you see

A week later, she ran away.

## PART II

I am not afraid. I don't know why. I am so calm, it is sometimes as if I were standing on the parapets of the palace of history looking down over far distant lands.

-- Etty Hellesum

Paris had packed enough clothes for a week at the most, and took her Baby Taylor guitar -- a small lightweight practice guitar that was easy to take anywhere.

We considered hiring a detective through our family attorney. But the legal conclusion was daunting. She was "of age." There was nothing anyone could do to forcibly bring her home short of proving she'd been kidnapped by a cult. I called Dr. Sarah and said, "Well, she *has* been kidnapped by a cult. The leader of the cult is named Hunter."

"That won't fly, James. And I can't in good conscience file a report saying she's a danger to herself or others. Because she's capable enough. I don't think her psychiatrist, Dr. Felton, would either. Although I can't stop you from asking him. I understand the position you're in."

Felton was no help. He told me on the phone it wouldn't even be worth my time or money to schedule an appointment to talk about it.

What we did in the end was to zero out her debit card. We thought that would eventually force her to come home. But cutting off her access to money didn't deter her.

I received texts from Paris from time to time. She would ask me to tell her mom that she loved her, but she never texted Allison directly, even though Allison was sending her texts a number of times a day. And she never told us how she was making enough money to survive, though we asked her several times.

In fact, two months after she left I texted her to ask if she needed money, or wanted me to visit, or needed anything at all. I decided to support her decision to be on her own and wanted to

help her get settled in her new life. But she just texted me back with three words: "I've got this."

Allison's tactic was completely the opposite of mine. She was begging Paris to come home, and in fact, insisting on it.

I therefore got to play good cop, because I didn't have to say what I probably would have had to say if Allison hadn't been playing bad cop. At least I was able to put myself in a position where Paris could confide in me, and continue to communicate from time to time.

We considered not paying for her phone line anymore. Allison wanted to threaten her with that. But Paris said we were the only ones she was communicating with, so if we wanted to lose touch with her completely that was our choice.

Eventually Paris agreed to text us every few days, even if it was with just the word "safe."

She sent me the lyrics to a new song during month three of her journey. When I asked her about the title she said it was because the song was in 7/4 time:

### **Seven**

what's it like to feel alright  
 without every last drop in its right place  
 i'll undermine them all and then i will tend to myself  
     internal fields form we get caught up in the act  
     internal fields form distracting me from everything  
     that matters  
 we don't even try to not have filters  
 i wish units materialized and were rational  
 take off my senses  
 now my reference angle is gone  
 erasing arbitrary anchors  
 -- true nature.

For many weeks after that we didn't hear from her except for one-word texts two or three times a week that said "safe."

We would text her back. We would ask her to call. We could see she was reading our texts because, thankfully, she had turned on her "read-receipt." But she never responded even when we asked her to.

The next text communication from her she told us we needed to get WhatsApp. Otherwise we wouldn't be able to communicate with her anymore. WhatsApp was for overseas texting and phone calls.

Her first WhatsApp text was to me. "Hey, Dad, so Hunter has kind of gotten the best of me lately. But I'm fighting. I'm fighting to tame him and stay his equal. I'm not going to let it end like this. Here are lyrics to another new song. I think you'll get what and who it's about:

### **controller**

i'm not going to pretend i can imagine the situation  
that you're in  
i can't assent to this  
can't submit to you, but i did

i let you borrow me  
it didn't teach you anything  
i let you borrow me  
neither of us deserved it

who do you even do these things for  
did i make you think of him did i make it worse

so now i'm isolating myself  
ignoring most of who talks to me  
phasing out

ruler of me  
please stop this war  
clear the controls  
stop this obsession

The second WhatsApp message we received came a day later. It just said, "i'm borrowing someone's computer. read the email i'm sending you."

She sent it to Allison's email. She ran upstairs to where I was sitting so we could read it together:

dear mom and dad  
so I met someone and we're far away at this monumental  
moment  
actually Nepal  
at an ashram in an amazing village  
far from the farthest places  
if you're wondering where i got the money to get here don't  
worry i'm not doing anything illegal  
his name is Chaitnya which ironically dad means  
consciousness. so i don't know if i told you but you probably  
guessed i'd never been with anyone before in body  
connection terms  
i now have knowing  
-- quite beautiful.  
like a new color never seen on earth before  
in a way. . .no that's bs.

it's way more deadly beautiful than that  
anyway he's taught me many things, as i have taught him.  
we are meditating every day  
and doing yoga mom, wait til i tell you about this.  
its 3 hrs of yoga a day. like even wrist yoga, and i mean you  
wouldn't believe the focus it takes.  
he's also a great musician -- grew up at the ashram and  
invited me to visit when we met in the US.  
so that's how i got here. he was kind of a monk  
but i guess not so much anymore.  
anyway, it's amazing here  
the most beautiful place on earth. tall mountains, verdant  
expanses. Insanely clean blue skies.  
i've never been to paris  
but i really think it's more amazing here  
could be wrong  
anyway, i won't be here much longer  
i'm on a mission.  
off by myself soon

ps -- love means something.

i know you both have known that  
thanks for the 365 non-stop  
means a lot

- intense sparks from the infinite indefinite / P

## 16

That was the last we heard from Paris for over a month. Then I received a new WhatsApp text. It looked like new lyrics but this was all she typed:

meta

what if there was a leader  
life given to the world

would it be that hard. . .  
the only thing that stops me from growing  
is that i'm never forced to

she breathes in her castle of air that she helped to save  
it's where she lives

maybe we are all heroes with nothing to save  
is this how we react to boredom

she lives in her house in the ground  
making small decisions

she's not trapped there  
she's not trapped there

to be part of elysium sounds like asphodel to me  
but it's all greek to everyone but her

The next text came to our regular US account, so we assumed she was back in the states.

Settling in by myself.  
I don't need people. Or like them very much.  
Except you, and mom. But I can't see you or I'll break.  
I have to stay focused.

Of course our friends thought Paris was crazy. "First she drops out of Berkeley, then she runs away. That's tough. That's horrible. Our condolences."

One local Boston paper published an article about how kids of musicians are prone to mental instability. They quoted some local shrink who had gathered these very well researched statistics. They mentioned Michael Jackson's daughter, Paris, and then our Paris in the same sentence.

This pushed Allison over the edge of the cliff she'd already been teetering on since the day Paris ran away.

Back when we first met, Allison was a wild girl. She didn't much care about what her parents thought of her life. She would come to my gigs and hang out with the band. She knew how to party. In fact, her parents blamed me, and hated me for corrupting their daughter, until the day Paris was born. Then they became proud grandparents.

Allison would often come with me on tour before we were married. That served two purposes. One was to keep me away from typical tour temptations -- women and drugs. So while the rest of the band roamed free and would often stumble in bleary-eyed for sound check, I was living straight edge. The other purpose Allison served was to mediate band disagreements. She was a good negotiator. Soft-spoken but logical. And then there was our morning (usually 11:30 at the earliest) band yoga sessions. Some of the band members were more into it than others. My drummer, for instance, was into beer and Coca-Cola upon rising. Each to his own.

Almost twenty years later Allison had come full circle. Instead of Allison ignoring her parents' phone calls and pleas to get her life together, Paris was ignoring our texts.

But Allison had a much closer relationship to Paris than she'd had with her parents. So Paris' disappearance in her life threw Allison into a serious depression. The undeserved publicity in the local press didn't help. She also developed severe insomnia. At the advice of her therapist, Allison started taking Zoloft. At some point she became so mentally unstable, even with the meds, her therapist considered hospitalizing her.

One night she decided to tell me the truth, as she saw it. She blamed me for Paris' numerous ill-fated decisions. She blamed some of it on the crazy spiritual rants I would apparently burden Paris with when she was far too young to fully process what I was saying. I shouldn't have tested out my morbid theories about what happens after death on her impressionable young mind.

In truth, Allison never liked the fact that I would share my spiritual musings with Paris first. Although Allison would often have her own interesting responses, I was drawn to Paris' quirks and unpredictability.

That same night Allison also blamed me for creating characters in my books that were based on Paris. Why couldn't I keep my readers' attention without bringing them into our private life?

After a while I zoned-out. I found myself daydreaming about what it would be like to go on tour again, just to get out of the house, even though I hadn't toured in ten years.

But Allison wasn't finished: "You had her wrapped around your little finger since she was five! Always daddy's little girl. Even now she communicates mostly with you. I'm not even relevant to her anymore. It's all about you, as always."

I decided to take a run. It was always the way I relieved stress. I ran up and down the long hill a few blocks from our house, in the dark. I was gone for over an hour.

When I came back Allison apologized.

But something was lost between us.

## 18

I came to realize, as my anxiety continued to increase, that my spiritual theories were too obtuse. They were more about me finding solace than the truth. Why spend so much time figuring out a way to die in peace? And then wanting, or needing, some kind of confirmation from your teenage daughter.

I was a fool.

I started to lose interest in playing music and writing. I was lonely, even with Allison sharing my bed.

I started having panic attacks for no reason I could think of at the time. Allison suggested I see a therapist and maybe get meds, but I refused. Like daughter, like father.

Then came the inevitable. Allison moved out. Like daughter, like mother.

She found an apartment in Cambridge, made new friends, told war stories about the rock 'n' roll days, when she was on tour with me. She told them about a few previously very private arguments I'd had with the guys in the studio.

It was all just gossip really. I didn't care all that much. I didn't blame her. She was trying to find her strength. She wanted to forget about what happened to Paris somehow and feel free again.

I couldn't do that.

## 19

The next text from Paris that said more than "safe" came months later. She told me she was becoming a writer. But she wouldn't ever want to share her writing with anyone. That wasn't the point. She also said she was meditating every day. She finished by saying, "Yeah, and it's good when you don't text me. I like to initiate and end the conversations. If you stay radio silent I'll send you more soon."

A few weeks later she texted me this:

Chaitnya came to visit for a few weeks . . .

Love kills demons. Births others.

And then a month later, a text came that disturbed me because I couldn't quite read her meaning:

Sometimes it's hard to separate  
the memories of the past  
from the memories that never happened.

The next time I heard from her, it came in a rare email:

Dad, remember all the spiritual talks we use to have.

Here's the truth as i see it this morning after lots of  
dreams:

A lot of mysteries exist in this world. Some of them are waiting to reveal themselves. But if you get hung up on where the mystery is coming from rather than believing in the revelation, you lose the essence.

It's like someone in search of electricity. Someone says it's behind the wall. So you knock the wall down, but you still can't find it.

Then someone says it's in the wires behind the wall. So you cut the wires -- but there's nothing there to see. It just empty air.

So you conclude electricity is a fake. It doesn't really exist, except for the deluded ones.

Meanwhile, everyone is enjoying the swirling lights, and dancing to the music coming through the speakers.

You're lost. Because you keep trying to find what exists, yet doesn't exist. Not realizing all of it is true.

Don't be lost. We dance together.

I broke down. I cried for an hour. The email was from a general mailbox so I texted her back, ranting, not knowing if it would touch her, or scare her away.

"Paris. I loved your email. I love you and miss you so much. Honestly, it's too much to bear. Please come home. Just to visit. Just for a while. Or let me come to you. I'll come to wherever you are. I won't force you to be who you're not. All I want is a chance to say goodbye. Please. I'm falling off the edge a bit here."

She responded:

"Dad, you should know by now, people are an addiction. And you and Mom are the last people addictions I have.

I do love you both. But I can't need you. I'm past that path. But if I call you, I may slip back. I hope you understand. I have to finish my mission."

*"What is the mission?"*

"As we've discussed ad nauseum through the years."

"Please be more specific."

"Discovery until I see clearly. No more, please. I'll contact you when I know more."

I heard nothing more from her for a very long time.

I went into slow shock. Mourning set in. I realized it was possible I would never see her again.

Out of some illogical desperation I asked Allison if she wanted to get back together. She said it would be too painful. She needed to forget, not reconnect.

I had lost all my friends due to my own inability to respond to them when they reached out. I found women willing to date me. I tried to start over. But my thoughts continued to carry me back to a path before their time.

I no longer played music.

I no longer longed to play in front of faceless, nameless crowds of people. I felt like a fake, a puppet, a mannequin, playing songs for no reason whatsoever.

Death seemed to be a good option at some point, especially if nothingness awaited. To blur everything out. To not remember anything about what I had ever thought, or ever felt. No memories. Existence-less. What a comfort.

Eventually, at the very bottom, I realized I had to try to recover from multiple ongoing deaths.

I called Dr. Sarah.

I hadn't been in therapy for a long time. I saw it as a weakness at my age, and with all my supposed wisdom and ability to cope.

I told Dr. Sarah I was hovering at the end of sanity. My entire family had abandoned me. How much of it was my fault? Why did Paris leave us the way she did? Where is she? Is she going to be all right?

I said, "Don't play timid therapist games with me, Sarah. If you have wisdom to share, lay it on me. I can't take things any further on my own. I'm making myself feel worse by the day. So if you have a key, hand me the key."

She said, "Okay. I won't hold back. I believe that you're capable of hearing what I have to say, so I'll be direct."

"Good."

"So James, first let me say, I'm sorry you're going through this. I really am. I got to know Paris fairly well, and I understand what a wonderful and brilliant, but complex person she is. She's a mystery to everyone, even to her own parents. Probably to herself as well. But I can tell you one thing for certain. Paris did not abandon you. She loves you. She flew out of the nest, like all teenagers must. She just did it in a very painful way.

"But I think you need to see the other side of reality here, James. She *is* making it on her own. Without meds or parents or therapists. She's living her life. She's exploring herself and the world, and I suppose she needed to do it without having Allison threaten her independence with demands to come home, and, to be honest, without your very powerful intellectual influence attempting to affect her course."

"But as her father, my instinct is to make sure she's safe. ."

"Wait, why do you think she isn't safe? Has she given you any indication of that?"

"No, not exactly. But whenever her texts stop for too long I feel panicked, Allison does too. I always forward Paris' texts to her. The problem is, I don't know where she is, or how she's surviving, or what she's thinking."

Sarah kept silent. She knew there was more.

"And. . . I can't hear her. I can't hear her voice anymore. I can't hear her music anymore; the songs she's written. I can only read lyrics of songs that will never exist for me; and will never exist in the world. She hides them. So for me it's like she's just a part of my imagination now. Sometimes it feels like she never even existed."

"James, I'll tell you what I think: Whenever you are concerned about Paris' safety and well-being, and her existence in the world, it's a reflection of how much you're concerned about your own safety and well-being, and your own existence in the world as an artist. It's in equal parts, with equal power. Do you understand?"

## 21

In our next session Sarah said, "James, I'm just going to put it out there for you to consider. I think you're one of those people that just love love. You give love easily, but you need love in return, and *lots* of it -- and you think you have to be great at giving love in order to get it. You have to work hard to deserve it. All I can say is, I think you've done the work, good work, as a father and a husband. But I think the problem right now is you are loving only memories. It's dangerous to rely on memories. Memories should exist as bridges, not crutches."

"But as a father, my concern, Sarah, my very worst fear is -- that without the meds, the OCD is making Paris crazier. Her on-and-off communication. The lyrics to her songs. She's not truly Paris *at her most rational*, and I'm afraid that things could get worse as she gets older."

"The OCD medication would have only been used for a limited amount of time so that Paris could hopefully become aware of what it was like to think without the OCD thoughts triggering her. But for her to become truly free of it she would have had to work with a cognitive therapist for quite some time."

"Do you think she should have taken the meds? I want your honest opinion."

"James, she's chosen to not take the meds and to deal with Hunter on her own. It may well be that she's worse off in many ways, but then again, *maybe not*. Maybe she's loving the life she's living. However, you're not loving *yours*. You're not able to access a rational life for yourself. That's the deeper issue. And as far as Paris' logic for living the way she's living, and making the choices she's made, do you really think she'd be better off in college right now? Or working as a physicist in a lab? Or being a touring rock star? As Paris might say, "Define rational."

## 22

Ironically, after several more sessions with Sarah, she suggested meds for me. She said I was suffering from chronic anxiety. She said the loss of Paris may have put me in this state by itself, but the loss of Allison created a second layer of stress that could be too much for anyone to handle.

I said, "Allison's on Zoloft. And she's still an emotional mess! Other than sedating her it's not helping at all!"

"There are other medications ."

I felt angry, mostly at myself. I felt I should be able to handle things emotionally. And my concerns about Paris were far more real than even Sarah could imagine. She didn't understand.

"*I'm not taking meds!* I won't do it. I need to work this out myself."

"Sounds like Paris. So I suppose, like father. . ."

"No, no! *Paris has OCD!* I don't think she's well right now."

"And I believe you have a chronic anxiety disorder. That's just as serious as OCD."

In the end, I refused to take medication. I also decided to take a break from therapy for a while. It wasn't helping.

Then one bright sunny morning I took a run, as I usually did. But this run ended a little differently. I became short of breath and started shaking. I couldn't stop hyperventilating. I tried to calm down for twenty minutes or so, but when I couldn't even remember where I was I called 9-1-1.

The fire department showed up with an ambulance. They were all very kind folks. One recognized me and told me he loved my songs. That was embarrassing under the circumstances.

In the emergency room my heart was checked. An X-ray was taken. My blood was drawn. I was wired up like a bionic man while lying in my little beeping white room.

After five hours the verdict came in. I'd had a full-blown panic attack.

Anxiety had bear hugged me into submission.

## 23

I went to Dr. Felton, the psychiatrist Sarah had recommended for Paris long ago. He was the one that legally had to prescribe meds.

Felton was a very weird man. He looked like a scarecrow, but with thick black reading glasses pulled to the tip of his nose. Pretty much every part of him would have scared birds away. He dressed like a homeless person. He claimed to have graduated from Yale, but I just couldn't imagine that. He looked like a pot farmer from Humboldt.

I saw him a number of times. He said I was a "complex" case.

I thought he was arrogant. He seemed constantly distracted - - emailing people on his computer while I poured out my problems. After he assured me he was listening to every word, he proclaimed that, indeed, I needed to be medicated.

Over the next few months I filled prescriptions for a number of different meds, but none of them had the intended effect. They either made me dull and sleepy, or dizzy and nauseous.

I also tried other kinds of drugs that, under better circumstances, could have been more addictive, with their own unique side effects -- like sex with beautiful women who tried to love me despite how messed up I was. And, just like in my rock 'n' roll prime, I tried many different types of alcohol and recreational candy. Then, to honor my post rock 'n' roll days, I ate exotic food in five-star restaurants where it was assumed that three hundred dollars was a fair price for a meal. And for another two hundred dollars I could get a lovely bottle of Moss Wood Cabernet Sauvignon.

But none of this soothed me. None of this reached in and healed the driving force behind my anxiety: heartbreak.

## 24

So there I was, a well-respected songwriter and novelist, with enough money to survive for a hundred years, and a healthy body -- still grieving. Still questioning my sanity. Still questioning the meaning of my existence.

My solution was to find a new therapist. Someone with a different methodology, someone who could actually help me.

The new person I chose was quite famous. A Harvard psychiatrist who had written many books on anxiety, Dr. Sheila Barrows.

Dr. B, as I came to call her, wrote books specifically dealing with how to cope with worry and anxiety. She credited a great deal of her work to a West Coast doctor named Marty Rossman.

The basic premise was that with guided imagery the mind can change brain chemistry in ways that even meds can't.

The way she put it was, meds feed the baby, but the baby can't feed itself. Guided imagery and biofeedback can teach us to feed ourselves, and more to the point literally change brain chemistry back to a more normal healthy state.

I said, "Even for OCD?"

"Yes."

I immediately texted this new revelation to Paris:

I just found out a way to help both of us!

THE MIND CAN CHANGE THE BRAIN.

Without meds!

. . . Call me if you're interested in hearing more!

Her response a week later was:

What do you think I've been trying to do?

I hoped this method would be a way to lure Paris back into my life, but the fallback plan was to at least find a way to lure *myself* back.

"James, listen, the first thing you need to know is that there's good worry and bad worry. Good worry can anticipate and solve problems. All highly creative people like you have a very strong ability to solve problems through focusing, and 'worrying' about a solution. The healthy question to ask yourself is, 'If I worry about this, is it likely I can actually do something about it that will make my life better?'

"But when someone worries endlessly, I call that circular catastrophizing. It's repetitive thinking with no solution. When worrisome or stressful thoughts repeat for a long enough time the thoughts create changes in the brain itself. Your mind can literally infect your brain with worry.

"And the problem with your worries and anxieties in particular, James, is that your imagination and creativity are so strong they can get you stuck into a lock-tight stance. You can always come up with new reasons to keep the repetitive worrying alive and real. So instead, you have to use your imagination to get yourself out of the negative loop you created, not stay stuck in it."

"And what if I can't get out of the negative loop, no matter how hard I try?"

"Then you're literally being attacked by your imagination."

"Yes," I nodded. "That's what it feels like!"

"And *anxiety* is what worry becomes after it declares victory! It can then cause all sorts of physical symptoms too."

"Okay, so how do I get back to feeling normal?"

"Guided imagery and biofeedback is what I'm suggesting."

Dr. Barrows made sense to me. So I tried biofeedback, and it did indeed help contain my worries and anxiety, to a degree. I came to see that Paris, in a best-case scenario, was finding the life she wanted to live. A good life, for her. I imagined that over and over again, with biofeedback helping me input that possibility into my unconscious mind.

But my fears just wouldn't die. I had to deal with each negative scenario before I could make my peace with it.

What if Paris was being overwhelmed by her OCD and couldn't see that on her own?

What if all these cryptic messages she texted me were cryptic to her as well?

What if Hunter had taken over?

Paris said she didn't want to talk to me on the phone, or see me or Allison because "people are an addiction." Maybe the boy that took her to Nepal, Chaitnya, met her in the U.S., helped her get a passport, then paid for her plane flight to come with him, and after she'd fallen in love with him he eventually put her on a plane back to the states while he stayed in Nepal? Then when they met again back in the U.S. he knew for sure he'd taken all he could, all he wanted, and left her forever? Maybe he messed with her more than Hunter ever could? What if after he broke her heart she saw it as failure, her failure? The failure was not being able to control her emotions enough to be able to prevent herself from feeling crushed.

Hunter could easily run with that and take things too far. He had the capacity to literally take Paris beyond sanity.

I wanted to be there to talk to her about Hunter, and the mind, and love, and life, and to heal her in any way I could.

Ten weeks and twenty sessions later, most of the physical symptoms of anxiousness were still there, even though my inner thoughts were calmer.

I asked the biofeedback practitioner why he thought that might be.

He said, it's like your body had to live through an earthquake that destroyed everything. Then it had to live through the aftershocks. Now the ground has finally stopped shaking, and you've survived, but you still have to find a new place to live. Everything has to be built from the ground up.

I said, aside from the West Coast metaphors why do you think I still feel so physically anxious?

He said perhaps there's something deeper going on underneath the worry and anxiety that hasn't been addressed yet. Perhaps an intense feeling of sadness that's still unresolved.

I shrugged.

As Paris would have said, "Duh!"

He then suggested I sign up for another twenty sessions to address the sadness more directly.

I passed.

During my last meetings with Dr. Barrows she said a few things that were memorable:

"Moment to moment we feel either love or fear. The only way to get from fear to love is to trust that everyone you love -- including Paris and Allison -- is doing what they need to do for *themselves*. Then take care of yourself with as much love and dedication as you would help take care of them. Until you can do that, there's no way out of the traps you set for yourself."

She also said: "You've chosen to give up your music, at least for now. And your writing as well. But then who are you? What do you believe in? What do you want *this* life to be about from here? Hopefully you'll find your way."

Finding your way is difficult when you're imprisoned by ghosts. But at least I was aware of my illusions, I suppose.

Therapy had run its course. I was left sitting in the middle of a highway of wise quotes. Mind maps, with broken roadways.

Everywhere I turned I hit a dead end. I wrote songs that didn't fulfill me. I wrote entire novels that didn't have enough passion to ring true. I threw them all away.

I was left with Paris' texts dating back to the beginning. When I reread them nothing became any clearer. Nothing made sense. I didn't even make sense to myself anymore. I was running out of options.

Six months after Paris' previous communication with me a final email came. It was written only to me. Paris had just turned twenty-one. It was the last time I ever heard from her.

*“I have found a place, Dad. It’s so amazing! It doesn’t translate to words. It’s a place in my mind. I am going there now. It’s time... I am excited! But I may not ever come back. My mission is complete. So before I go I will try to tell you what I know:*

*We are sunlight. Sunlight travels off, and soon forgets the sun. But we are still and forever sunlight. I know you’ll know that too someday. Until then, until then, Dad -- live. Have a beautiful life.”*

*The End*

*~ GM*