

Rain Dreams

- Gary Marks

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Chapter 1

Saint Sarah first emerged many years ago during the dark ages of my youth – yes me, the wretched character she found sitting on her friend’s couch struggling through a Robinson Jeffers poetry book that had been placed prominently on the coffee table.

My hair was a mess, my clothes were wrapped around me like rags. I had just been out walking in the snow. I was glad to be reading something that seemed intelligent, if not a bit over my head, whilst getting warm before a well captured fire. (Words like “whilst” -- Jeffers inspired -- even as I reminisce.)

Sarah was also reading a book, cross legged on the floor, in our mutual friend’s vast New Hampshire living room. She was in a pair of blue jeans and a blue and white plaid shirt borrowed from a closet upstairs. She was wearing her reading glasses, looking more diffused and ghost-like than shy. A blonde bang curled across her forehead, hiding part of her Nordic face. Her skin was paler than usual in the middle of this frigid winter. In fact, she was so pale she was almost invisible, which is the way she preferred it.

Her hair was pulled back in a bun to keep it out of her face. Not a word escaped from her -- a meditating librarian -- unresponsive to my occasional friendly glances, so I in turn paid her very little attention. I didn’t need her company. I was happy to be away from my humdrum workaday life, here on holiday.

The windows were frosted. Outside pine trees stood in a flock, each a hundred feet tall, glowing, ice white, their giant white birds’ wings spread. We were days away from the New Year. Everything but time was frozen in the town of Lyme, just outside of Hanover.

When Jeanie, the happy home owner, came bounding downstairs fresh and warm from her hot shower she introduced us, seeing that introductions had not yet occurred to either of us. Sarah had arrived last night. I arrived a few hours later while Sarah had already retired to her room. We found each other both waiting for Jeanie, and breakfast, and a promised hike in the snow up to through the hills behind her house.

Sarah squinted up at me for the first time before returning to her book. A quick nervous “hi” parted her lips, with a perfunctory smile, before she sank back into her story. Not the kind of hello that expected or wanted a response. Yet not rude. More like a message that said – I am a painting of pale translucent colors. Like Jeffers’ delicate world of clouds and stars. Please don’t disrupt the synergy of my dreamscape, and I shan’t disrupt yours.

Did that bother me? No. There was no immediate attraction on my end. In fact, I was more interested in Jeanie. She was classy, wealthy, effervescent, and enjoyed my company. At twenty seven she was still comfortable with her single status, with no need for commitments, which, along with her natural easy going beauty, made her very sexy.

We'd had our fling long ago and ended up best friends. We both knew something didn't click for us as a couple back then, but neither of us knew what that missing thing was, or how to describe it. It was just a feeling we both succumbed to. We stayed friends and occasional lovers and enjoyed our time together. Nothing much else was spoken about how things had fallen out of sync.

Our relationship had fallen in pieces more than it had fallen apart. We shared an inner hope when we were away from each other that maybe the next time we were together the pieces would finally fit for good. But the puzzle remained. This time would likely be no different.

The hike in the hills lasted just about all day. We were all avid hikers and all used to the cold. We came back late day, cheeks red, and took long warm showers. Jeanie then made a beautiful dinner of salmon, rice and olives, risotto style. She was part Italian, part Irish, part French, part English, which means that most of her parts could cook, and all of her parts could drink, though she rarely imbibed to excess.

The forced air heat was cranked, the wood stove had a raging fire. It began to snow. Flakes hit the dining room window and clung to the glass for as long as possible before succumbing to the dream of water. It had fought a good fight, but in the end it was not meant to live forever as pure white snow. Nothing ever is.

After dinner we decided to make vanilla ice cream from a recipe book. If we had to live in snow we wanted it to taste good. Vanilla ice cream was our edible metaphor. Jeanie had an old fashioned ice cream maker. We each took turns with the crank until our arms ached. Sarah and Jeanie, then Jeanie and I, sat at the handmade wooden kitchen table holding the barrel steady, cranking, and talking and laughing at the little things. Notice the omitted social combination: Sarah and I didn't turn the crank and hold the barrel together, or say anything directly to each other, but instead gathered all information through Jeanie.

The topic landed on politics for a moment but we quickly darted away from such dark brooding despair. The Republicans were in control of Congress, happy to follow Bush and Cheney down their various roads to Hell. Why bring up a funeral at a party?

Then we began to speak about music. Sarah liked classical. I liked jazz. Therefore, despite our unspoken political affiliation we immediately wrote each other off. But Jeanie was the great stabilizer. She liked all kinds of music – she was able to diplomatically span the world of Scofield and Stravinsky without noticing any hostility from a bored third party. Mercifully, through Jeanie's dogged diplomacy we found common ground -- we all agreed Springsteen was good. And Don Henley. Song writers with great lyrics that could rock got through to all three of us for different reasons. Sarah loved their imagery. I loved their politics. Jeanie liked to dance.

The ice cream turned out thin and sweet. We had added too much vanilla. That flawed batch of ice cream is a taste I yearn for to this day, but have not been able to replicate. We ate it clothed in thick sweaters, sitting by a big orange and green fire while the air outside chilled to well below zero.

The next day Jeanie went to Vermont to visit her mother for the afternoon. The plan was she would bring home a pot of her mother's homemade minestrone soup for dinner. Sarah and I were to go on separate walks and eat separate lunches and then take separate naps and baths waiting for Jeanie to glue us all back together come nightfall. But an hour after she departed the snow, which had succumbed to an open sky the night before, began to cascade down from a colorless sky. The wind came up mid-day and a full blown blizzard rolled in.

Sarah and I both came back early from our hikes to get out of the unfriendly weather. We got back to the house about fifteen minutes apart so I offered to make us lunch. She demurely told me not to bother but I told her it was no bother. I made a salad with pears and walnuts. She ate it in silence and thanked me for the supreme effort.

After lunch we went to our neutral corners, back to our books, with the heat vents blasting and the wood stove raging. We were trapped in a three thousand square foot wooden cave wrapped in white gauze, well insulated in these forlorn New Hampshire woods.

A leaned back on Jeannie's soft couch and stretched like a contented cat. This was a good life. Why we worked like dogs day after day for almost a straight year just to savor a few days off like this was a cultural mystery shared by cultures world-wide. What wouldn't we give up to have the opposite be true. I imagined a year 'round life of music and hiking and eating, disrupted only during the holidays when the entire world got to work repairing the roads and restocking the markets with food. Obviously, there were certain flaws in this utopian system but my mind was too lazy to work them through.

I let my errant thoughts melt away and finally began to sink back under the spell of Jeffers as best as I could. Sarah leaned forward and took a few tightly wrapped braids out of her hair and let them fall to let her hair dry more fully after a warm afternoon bath.

I glanced over at her for a moment, for reasons only the unconscious can fully explain, then turned back to my book, but then turned subtly again to look more closely at her face. It had lost all of its rigidity. She looked shimmery in the flickering yellow light of the fire; no longer ghost-like but angelic. Yellow hair melting into the hues of the fire, Venus-like marble soft features, a wizened glow in her eyes as she read.

My heart began pounding and I became nervous. What a bizarre rocket-like transition from having someone in the house that only peripherally interested me, to being captured, captivated, literally from out of nowhere.

The image of her stayed clear and glowing in my mind, even as I stared at my book.

Then Sarah did the most inexplicable thing. She stopped reading and smiled at me as I glanced over again, pretending to scan a book on a shelf directly to her right.

I quickly returned my eyes to the page I was pretending to read. Her smile expanded into a phantasmagoric play of energy, exponentialized as the sun began to set. Something had happened to me, and it was unfurling like a slow motion hydrogen bomb. I was self-destructing,

no longer in present tense. Gone was the world of Jeffers' natural imagery. It had disintegrated in the blast. It was radioactive angel dust. I was no longer having a happy carefree holiday vacation at Jeanie's. My brain was ruining everything.

Speaking of Jeanie, as fate would have it, she called us around dinner time to let us know she was stuck at her mom's because of the blizzard and would have to spend the night there. These are the kinds of things that always happen when you take the time to look back. . . .

But I was actually not happy about this. I was hoping Jennie would come home and serve as an intermediary between Sarah and me. I was hoping Jeanie could lighten the atmosphere and cool down my raging thoughts with small talk about some neutral subject. That way I could re-introduce myself to Sarah with my best foot forward in a slow and casual manner. But Jeanie could only direct us by phone to a casserole dish of frozen lasagna, apologizing for the poor substitute, since her mom's minestrone soup had turned out to be "a masterpiece."

Two hours later, Sarah and I were wordlessly eating lasagna across from each other as the clock struck seven o'clock. She was no longer an opaque ghost shimmering in and out of existence like a sub-sub-atomic particle. She had become pure and delicate like a sunbeam. Peaceful, mystical, indelible in me now, like a Saint. The Saint of Sun and Snow. Covering such extremes. She seemed totally unaware of my focused attention. I tried to engage her by reaching out into her world of books.

"Have you read any Robinson Jeffers?" – spoken in an off the cuff manner.

"Yes, I think he's a wonderful writer," she said softly.

My own true unspoken opinion -- some of his poems were great. But some were too wordy. Some of the images went over my head, escaping the creation of an internal image even when I reread them a few times.

For desert we ate what was left of the overly-vanilla ice cream, and then I brought the Jeffers book over to the table. I put it in front of her. She began to scan it. So I asked her to read a poem aloud.

She seemed very uncomfortable with the idea but then she must have wondered to herself – why not take the chance, be someone you have never been able to be? Why not just go ahead and jump over the abyss? She began to recite one of the shorter poems after comically clearing her throat. Her voice was translated by my senses into silk and high bells as she translated Jeffers directly to the core meaning, even though she tried to make light of the situation after she finished.

Every few minutes more colors of the spectrum lit up in my brain, rainbowing her. This was becoming full circuit irrationality.

Soon thereafter she excused herself and went to her room for the night.

I stayed in the living room. I couldn't sleep. I stared out the silver black window. The snow fell in a fluttery pattern, tilting to one side, like down feathers shaken out of a huge pillow in a light wind. The scene was back lit by the outside house lights. Beyond that was pure black, a vacuum of light. The moon was trapped in the clouds, its light frozen there. These are the things that can cross one's mind when there is no TV and with the words of Jeffers bending one's thoughts into space.

Time slid slowly towards midnight on the old grandfather clock. I imagined creating a way that I might accidentally brush up against her arm tomorrow just so I could feel a jolt of electricity shoot through my body by touching such a seemingly untouchable being.

I imagined her touch would feel like an overly-vanilla kind of warmth, liquidy, that would sink deep into my skin. Warming the frigidity in me, the frigidity that coats all human beings in a gray glassy film after too much life causes them to hide and scheme and plot and plan, holding on to past and future illusions.

Through the glassy film, there is a small open window we are occasionally pulled through for short periods of time. I wanted her to pull me like this. I wanted to join her through the open window.

I retreated to my room two doors down from hers and slipped under the icy sheets, only to toss and turn, poisoned with what could only be described as the cold sickening thing one calls longing.

The morning found me no less frozen drunk with her. As you can imagine, a newborn obsession like this doesn't just erase itself and drop you off into a calm yawny summer morning like Dorothy in the last scene of the Wizard of Oz. There was also no let up of the storm outside. The snow was piled up three feet high against the door. Jeanie called around noon and told us the roads were still too dangerous for her to drive and to go ahead and raid the fridge until she got home later tonight or tomorrow.

Over lunch I thought I noticed a shift in Sarah. She was a bit more animated. We both decided to take a winter hike (I had no idea if she intended to hike with me or alone) but the blizzard precluded us from getting very far. We couldn't get past the driveway without sinking up to our hips in snow.

An hour later, Sarah laid her book on the kitchen table and made herself a cup of peppermint tea. I hoped to engage her before she retreated into someone else's words again.

"I've never been in prison," I said cheerily. "How about you?"

She was slow to respond. Her blonde eyebrows furrowed. “Not recently.”

She stared at me a bit nervously, thinking I must be borderline crazy. She thought I was just a boringly normal friend of Jeannie’s. But “crazy” was now a distinct possibility.

“Well, this is kind of like a prison, don’t you think?” I continued. “Being trapped inside this house, no way out. Big difference is the food is a lot better here.”

“How would you know? Have you experienced prison food?” A half smile arose. Thank God I was not crazy. It was just an interesting segue, thought she.

“And the company is better in this prison as well,” I added, getting closer to the point than maybe I should have.

“How would you know that?” she inquired. “I bet there are a lot of colorful people in jail. With some pretty unique stories to tell.”

“True,” I said, as I began clearing her empty cup of tea.

“You don’t have to do that,” she protested, “Slavery died, the North won.”

This genuinely made me laugh.

I came back to the table and pulled my chair close to hers.

“So tell me about your life.” I was helplessly unable to match her loquacious aloofness. Persistency was my only weapon.

“Why?” She was acting as if this was an absurd request.

“Why? Well, there’s not much else to do but share each other’s company until Jeanie gets back. So I thought you could tell me a little about yourself!”

“Nothing to tell. Really, nothing at all.”

I pleaded. “What do you have to lose? I promise to forget everything you say right after you say it!”

“That’s encouraging.”

“Well, then?”

She fidgeted with her book, then sighed, “Okay. . . . Born in New York. . . jerk of a mom. . . idiot milquetoast dad stayed with jerky mom longer than necessary. I got a job in high school as a cashier in a book store. Earned enough money to buy a broken down car, and drove out of Dodge

on the morning of my eighteenth birthday. They've never tracked me down, or tried to as far as I know. I moved to Connecticut. Got a job in a computer store. Learning graphic design in my spare time. The end."

"A Cliff Note life!" I laughed. "How about boyfriends?"

"Yes and no."

". . . What does that mean?"

"Yes then, no now. Thankfully."

I nodded nonchalantly, trying to assess if she was saying "thankfully" to me, to wave off my obvious interest. Or, being that I am an insanely eternal optimist, could it be "thankfully," because now I'm here with you, mon Cherie, in this beautiful moment. . . .

"To be honest, boyfriends bore me. I'm not much interested in the subject anymore."

Optimism abort due to temporary system failure.

But I responded, "Well," a bit too perky perhaps, "maybe you just haven't found the right guy yet. Who knows where he may show up?"

"And you?" Sarah asked, eager to change the subject. Although I interpreted it as perhaps her asking if I was indeed that right guy.

"What about me?"

"Would you like to tell me your life story? I'm sure you are looking forward to having a captive audience."

"My life story?" I smiled.

She nodded. "I promise I won't remember either."

"My story could be a lot longer than yours. But since Cliff Note versions are in vogue at the moment, I'll do it that way. . . ."

"Jeanie says you play music."

"I write songs and short stories, and a few poems here and there, not up to Jeffers' standards, I'm afraid."

"And the rest of the Cliff Notes?"

"Are you going to time me?"

She nodded and looked at her watch. “Wait. . . She waited for the second hand to hit an easy mark. “Okay , go.”

“Well, I was born in New York, like you. Yearned to live on a mountaintop in Tennessee like Davey Crockett, until I fell in love with the Beatles. Then Springsteen. Then Clapton, Steve Winwood. I hate country music. I’m embarrassed not to be black sometimes when I try to sing. Came here to Jeanie’s to get away for the holidays from my nightmare of a job, which I refuse to talk about any further even in a Cliff Note format. Parents? Yes, got ‘em. Not in my life right now. And one brother. He’s pretty cool but a lot older than me so I really never knew him and I know him even less now. We don’t talk anymore. The end.”

She nodded.

“How did I do?”

“Thirty nine seconds. I bet you could cut it down to thirty if you tried.”

“None of it’s worth repeating, even if you promised to remember. Plus it’s kind of depressing to be able to fit your life into the time span of a TV commercial.”

She agreed by changing the subject: “How come you didn’t add that you want to be a musician, and not just work for the rest of your life at your crappy unmentionable job?”

“I don’t know. I guess I don’t assume I’m good enough to have that option. And/or I don’t want the art destroyed by trying to make money from it. Art and money are a bad mix most of the time.”

From this natural end of the conversation I fell into an introspective funk. The chemistry between us turned inward. I tried to go back to reading Jeffers but I just watched the words drip by and melt away. Disconnected, I wondered when Jeanie would get home.

Before dinner the snow let up a bit and we ventured outside again. We shoveled the snow away from the door and cleared the walkway as best as we could, but we were still unable to get beyond the driveway before the perfunctory hot cocoa called us back into our little warm wooden cell.

That night we watched a video. Sarah seemed touched by the movie but not overwhelmingly so. And there was no romantic element in the film. Things were not going as well as I’d hoped for as far as creating a mood. I really couldn’t engage her in any lasting conversation. Her shyness and evasiveness were apparently a well practiced art form.

It was getting late; she told me she was going to bed. I told her I was going back to my room to read. . . .In other words, “I am as studious as you are.”

But about ten minutes after I retreated to my room I just couldn't take it any more. I am not a subtle person. Nor particularly patient, I admit that. I sighed. Put the Jeffers book on my night stand. Too dense. Too tiring. Tired. But not sleepy. Toss and turned. Tumultuous thoughts thundered through my head.

Dangerously socially inappropriate fantasy scenarios began to emerge from the inner turmoil. Highly unlikely to work in the real world. But the silence in the house was doing funny things to my brain. I was living in a snow coated box in the middle of nowhere. It had me believing in impossible things, even if they were just an escape from the monochromatic.

Suddenly I knew I had to take a big risk. The odds were miniscule. This would likely end whatever positive relationship I was building with her, but that wasn't much to begin with. So I would simply go from zero to minus ten, which would catapult me back to where I started a few days ago when she refused to even make eye contact with me.

I walked out into the hallway, walking a bit too loudly on purpose, letting the floor creak to its maximum, hoping she would hear me approaching. The last thing I wanted to do was make her think I was sneaking up on her.

A photograph of Jeanie was framed on the hallway wall. She was with a girlfriend, arm in arm, both of them smiling like Cheshire cats at the nameless photographer. I was sure they would get a kick out of this as well. I would be laughed out of town.

I knocked.

"Yes?" She sounded wide awake.

"Sarah, I forgot to tell you something about Jeffers," I said.

"What's that?" she inquired from her bed.

"May I come in? It's not really one sentence long. Unless I'm disturbing you."

"Okay," she said hesitantly.

As I entered the room I heard her rustling the covers up over her. She was wearing a thin light yellow sweat shirt to keep her warm. Her yellow hair evaporated into the color of the sweatshirt. The snow looked like panda fur out her window. Through the window nearer to her bed snow blew off a pine tree branch. The flakes were lit up in the spot light above the garage – ghost fragments split asunder from the wind, zig zagging down into the heat of the lamp, transforming into smoky rain drops.

"Well," I said, sitting down at the foot of her bed, "Jeffers is really in his head sometimes, even when he's talking about nature and the present moment, which bothered me when I first read him. But the way you read that one poem of his made me realize that there is more passion and

energy in his words than I first thought. So he's now officially become my favorite poet. So I just wanted to thank you."

"Good, okay then." She smiled, untrusting, expecting more. Surely I didn't come in here just to tell her that?

"And," I said, not allowing myself to stop fearing the moment would be lost, "you have become my favorite visual poem. You haven't said much, but, to be honest, you've completely turned my mind inside out, and I can't make sense of it, I can't sleep. And rather than making you feel even more awkward by waiting for you to respond to this I'm going back to my room now. To leave you be."

She was as still as a movie frame held up to the light. No evolving reaction whatsoever.

"But I do have one completely wild fantasy I can't get out of my head," I continued as I stood up heading towards the door, "It's not as poetic as Jeffers. It's more like a Beethoven fantasy. Because it's raw, it's just pure crazy out of control passion composed on the spot. I'm hoping that sometime in the next one thousand seconds you'll come into my room and abandon all logic, all sense of known reality and make love with me, and spend the night sleeping next to me so we can wake up together to a new life, and let all these gray 'all too proper' undertones between us fall away."

". . . *What?*" she whispered somewhere around the word "gray," stomping all over "undertones" with her face animated for the first time. She laughed nervously to herself and shook her head, sliding deeper under her sheets. "I would never, and besides, you're with Jeanie, and I absolutely. . ."

"Whatever gave you that impression?" I was a bit stunned.

"You and she are. . ."

"Are *what?*"

"You know. . ."

"I do not know!"

"*Lovers!*"

"That was *years* ago! We're friends now, just friends, like you and she are friends."

"Well, I never slept with her!" Sarah laughed.

"Well, I did. And we ended up friends. But it's all it can ever be. If she ever found out we were together she would laugh her head off, she'd be happy for us! She wouldn't care."

“Well, there won’t be anything for her to laugh about! But I’m not so sure you’re reading her right.”

“She has no interest in me, Sarah. Don’t tell me she has told you that!”

“Not in so many words. . . .”

“I’m not interested in Jeanie that way. I haven’t been for years.”

“Well, that’s all besides the point now isn’t it, because I don’t know you. And I can’t even imagine. . . .”

“Is that why you’ve been so distant with me? You thought that I was with . . .”

“Distant with *you*? That’s just me, kiddo! That was actually me trying to be massively cheery and sociable!”

I laughed, “Well you might want to try harder! Because I want to get to know who you really are beyond the Cliff Notes! And what better way to do it than to just take a massive leap of faith on a wild snowy night at Jeanie’s Magical Resort?”

“You mean ‘Last Resort!’” she interrupted. “That’s what it is for you, I see.”

“Very clever.”

“You’re just bored. A bored and restless guy trapped in a little white prison cell without a friend. And you want company for a night.”

“That’s not true. I don’t just want company, and not for a night. I want to match the intensity of the wild storm outside! That’s what I want. That’s something I can relate to – it’s a bit more raw passion than you might be used to, taking illogical chances, opening yourself to someone on pure instinct.”

“Well, you should know for the record I’m not a wild storm, sorry to say. Quite contraire.”

“Well I am! And I’m waiting for you to join me there! You’ve gotten to me, Sarah. Completely, in fact. And I can’t explain. . . .” She stared at me with such a strange look that I stopped. She seemed to study me for a moment, like one would observe an amoeba under a microscope.

“I’m a good fairy and take you back to Kansas.”

I frowned.

“I know what you are really looking for, by the way,” she raised her voice slightly. “I admit that. But put on your glasses! Don’t you see who I am? I’m a mess pretending to be half a mess! I have nothing to offer you or anyone!”

“Quite contraire,” I echoed back to her. “I know you do.”

She pulled the covers up again and closed her eyes.

I went to the door and apologized for putting her in such an awkward spot and retreated to my room.

About five or six hundred seconds later I heard what I thought was a moan coming from her room. At first I thought she might have dropped her book behind her bed. It was that kind of frustrated, “damn it” kind of moan.

Then came a rustling and the opening of a door. My light was out by then. I was wrestling with sleep in the dark.

She entered the room without knocking. Said nothing. I saw a silhouette of her pulling her yellow sweat shirt over her head. She slipped under the covers. I touched her skin for the first time. Electric vanilla skin.

And what happened after that was something that almost stopped me from writing this book. . . because I have never been able to explain it in words. Not to her. Not to intimate friends. Not to anyone.

Chapter 2

But, since I *am* committed to writing this book -- I have to at least try to verbalize what happened to me, even though it's a little off theme with where all this is heading: When we made love I experienced a literal chemical reaction between our bodies that I had never felt before with anyone else, but experienced a thousand times thereafter, only with Sarah. Almost every time we made love I felt this. It was beyond the ecstatic feeling lovers experience in the silent afterglow of co-joining. Our bodies had fallen in love far more deeply than our minds had. In fact, after that first night our minds never stood a chance.

Instead of waking up the next morning calm and easy and stroking her hair and telling her how much fun I had, and how much I liked her, I instead felt insanely nervous, and as soon as she woke up I made love to her again, and then again a few hours later.

What struck me as amazing was that she never stopped me. Instead, she began to blossom. She started making fun of my boundless passion. She began making jokes about us, and during lunch she sat close to me, and at one point shyly brushed her fingers across my face to push my hair out of my eyes.

Just as the refrigerator was beginning to run out of food we heard the door open and Jeanie walked in. She carried a huge pot of soup in her arms which she hurriedly put down on the counter. Then she looked at us sitting there eating, sitting very close to each other, and a puzzled look came over her face.

"You two look nice and cozy together," she smiled as she took off a thick silver thermal coat reminiscent of an astronaut's space suit. "Did you guys fall in love or something while mommy was gone?"

She expected us to laugh nervously, and for Sarah to blush and say, "Jeanie, stop it!"

Instead she was met with silence. I looked at her sheepishly.

"Ha ha!" Jeanie said. "It was a joke, don't take it personally."

We both looked down at the floor.

"Wait a minute," she came closer and inspected us. "You two?"

Then she smiled, "Ok, I get it, you decided to fuck with me, right? Long endless hours, nothing to do, let's figure out a way to mess with Jeanie's head when she comes home. And you make up this wild 'let's fool Jeanie' plot. Very very funny." She shook her head and began to walk back towards the pot of soup.

She looked at us sideways as she picked up the handles of the pot, then stop mid air and put the pot back down. We were still silent.

“Oh my God! Oh my G. . . *really?*”

Sarah met her eyes and bit her lower lip.

“Okay, Sarah, prove it! Prove it to me, you little faker. Kiss him! Go ahead.”

“*Jeanie!*” Sarah blushed.

“*I knew it!* Look, I absolutely don’t believe you. So the only way this is going to work is if you go ahead and kiss him. And I don’t mean a little peck on the cheek.”

“*No!*” Sarah hid her face in her hands and began to laugh.

“Well then, you kiss her!” she said to me.

“I don’t want to embarrass her,” I responded.

“Yeah, I bet. You were always so sensitive in that way! Sarah, can he kiss you? Because otherwise I’ll know this is just a bunch of BS.”

Sarah said, “Jeanie, would you be mad if”

“Honestly, not at all. I’d be thrilled for both of you. But that doesn’t mean I believe you!”

Jeanie looked at me, then down at the floor. “Ok,” she said. “Do it.”

I took do it to mean really do it, something convincing. . . so I pulled her up from her chair and kissed her, and then I put my hand on her sweater near her breasts. She didn’t pull away.

Jeanie shook her head, “Oh my dear Lord. God in freaking. I STILL somehow just don’t believe you!” She started laughing hysterically. “I’m sorry. I just don’t!” Her eyebrows raised with the pitch of her voice as she touched the counter to steady herself, “But Sarah, you were good. To let him do that! I never thought you could. . . .” She began laughing again.

We stared at her. It was getting a bit crazy. Hadn’t we gone far enough for proof?

She put her hands on her hips, school marm style. “Seriously,” she said.

So I slowly put my hand under her sweater and touched her bare back, kissing her even more deeply this time, and then slid my fingers down the side of her bare torso.

Jeanie stared at us, becoming truly stunned.

I slowly unzipped Sarah’s jeans while kissing her neck. I felt like laughing, but with my passion growing wilder by the second I was getting too turned on to laugh aloud. I began to slide my

hand down gently while kissing her warm mouth, then licking her lips with my tongue. She only made a weak effort to stop me, her hand on my wrist but not pulling away.

“Okay, stop. *Stop!* You win.” She shook her head and abruptly turned around to start heating the soup on the burner. “And when did this all happen? Last night? The first day?”

“Last night,” I said. “It started when she read me some poetry.”

“You decided out of the blue to read him poetry?” Jeanie said, looking at her shy friend.

“I didn’t volunteer it,” Sarah said defensively. “He asked.”

Jeanie came closer. “You know I was with this guy for a while, right?”

Sarah’s face darkened. A shadow crossed her face. “He said you were only friends now, and had been for years!”

Sarah looked at me mistrustingly for the first time and started to panic. Jeanie was her best friend, for many years, even though they lived in different states; even though in many ways they were mirror opposites of each other. In many ways Sarah felt the same attraction for Jeanie as she felt for me: she loved Jeanie’s passion for life, her vibrancy, her sense of humor, her willingness to be direct. Jeanie was a bit crazy, over the top. While Sarah tended to talk and act with such extreme caution – until last night anyway.

“We are just friends, Sarah,” Jeanie said. “It’s true. . . .I guess I was just thinking, hoping, honestly, that I might entice him into one last fun winter fling this weekend. It’s been a long time. It wouldn’t have meant anything. But that’s honestly what I was thinking as I was driving home today. . . .Guess I’m too late! But it’s really fine. . . .it’s more than fine.” She smiled at us, laughing gently.

“Go ahead,” Sarah interrupted. “He’s more your friend than mine. And you were together longer than”

“Sarah, stop!” Jeanie said. “Don’t put yourself down.”

“I’m not! I’m just saying. . . .”

“Wait a minute,” I barged in.

But that’s all I said. Because I was trying to assess something was going on that made my heart sick. Sarah was pawing me off.

Did she not feel what I felt? Was this just a fun holiday fling for her? Someone to bring her out of her shell? A little social experiment? Is that all?

Meanwhile, Jeanie, who had known Sarah since college and knew how shy she was, still could not totally read what was going on. Sarah was never impulsive like this. Sarah's reaction to what she'd said seemed off key to her as well.

"Are you trying to push me back together with Jay, trying to make me feel jealous? Is that it? Is that what this little play is about?"

Sarah looked at her: "No!"

"Hey, do I have any say in this?" I interrupted. I was met with silence.

They looked at me for the first time.

"Sarah and I are together, I think. And I want to be with her." I looked at Sarah and said, "Do you feel the same way?"

"I don't know yet. It's too soon for me."

I felt a twinge of panic, because I was so sure, so quickly. Too quickly. And I wanted confirmation back from her that she was as crazy as I was. But she wasn't.

"I need to slow down a bit," Sarah said. "Less than twenty four hours ago we were complete strangers. I don't know you."

"*Well, I know him!*" Jeanie said looking at me.

She turned to Sarah and her eyes softened. "He's a good guy, Sarah, and knows how to be a good friend. You can trust him. He'll probably want to marry you and have kids some day if you fall in love with him. He's just like that. I don't know why we couldn't get there ourselves, but that's life, that's timing, that's chemistry. Whatever." Jeanie took a step closer, speaking directly to me now:

"He's the kind of guy you can trust would never cheat on you, or lie to you. And he's street smart. I think he'll make a lot of money some day doing something he loves to do, because he's smart about a lot of things, not just music, and he's too restless to live a normal life, and he thinks differently than everyone else. And he has passion about things, about almost everything! So I give you Jeanie's Good Housekeeping Seal of Approval."

Sarah stood there in silence, not wanting to disappoint me, or her friend. "Well, you're right, I didn't know those things about him, Jeanie, because you know him far better than I do. I just know he offered to clear my dishes at lunch, which was gentlemanly, and has quirky tastes in videos like you do."

I smiled appreciatively. But a lot was left unsaid. I was holding my feelings close.

“It’s just too bad I didn’t get a last chance to give you a proper hug goodbye before you ran off with my best friend!” Jeanie said to me, with a measure of wistfulness in her voice. “I had these silly thoughts in the car, because my damn car was so cold, I guess. And because I still love you a little. But mostly as a friend. That will never change.”

Sarah said, “I told you I wouldn’t care, Jeanie, if you want to be with him. Isn’t why you invited him up here this week? It wasn’t to introduce him to me, I know! So I mean it. I’m still trying to figure out what’s going on for me, inside of me. . . It’s too soon for me to start feeling jealous over someone you’ve been friends and lovers with for years and years.”

Sarah turned to me, “See, that’s why I didn’t want to get involved! I *knew* on some level this was happening.”

“*What* was happening?” I protested. “That I was secretly in love with Jeanie but wanted to trick you into sleeping with me? Is that what you think?”

“Hold on, hold on,” Jeanie said. “I just had a little sexy dream in the car about this sweet guy here. That’s all it was. You two need time to check these feelings out. Our time to check things out came and went a long time ago.”

She came over to us and physically pulled us together. “Come on. I want us to be friends. If our friendships fall apart because of this I’m going to be *really* upset. That’s the only thing that could really upset me! Is if you two don’t give this a chance.”

“Well, I just need some time and space to think things through,” Sarah said.

“What does that mean?” I asked, trying to keep my words light. Trying to smile while saying it.

“It means -- I live in Connecticut. I work for an environmental agency doing computer work and graphic design. I’d like to write poetry some day, but so far after ten years of trying I can’t seem to write more than a line or two a month, even though I’ve read half a library’s worth of great poets and authors to inspire me. *That’s me!* Who are you? Beyond the Cliff Notes? I don’t know anything about you except what Jeanie just said!”

I’ll tell you more then, I said moving closer to her and touching her arm: “I want to fall in love with you and run away with you to California and start a new life! Right now I work as a guitar tech in a hideous excuse for a music store, but, I admit it, I really want to play music on stage and write songs and write novels some day, and swing in a hammock in the back yard of some pretty house north of Marin County. I’d like Jeanie to quit her job and sell this house and move there too and become our neighbor, so she can baby-sit for us until she falls in love and has kids of her own. And then we can all . . .”

“Baby-sit?” Sarah interrupted. “Do you have a child?”

“*No!* But I’d like to have children some day, with. . . .”

Sarah backed up from me, “Wait, wait. This is way way too far out! Total crazy talk. I don’t know if I even want children, or marriage, or a straight life like that. I think you climbed up the wrong tree last night, looking for a full moon.”

“That was poetic, Sarah! But my response to you is, I would do anything to be with you right now, even though I don’t know you. And I’m not going to apologize for the way I feel, or what I want, or who I am. Maybe I just know what I’m feeling more quickly than you do. Maybe, I’m hoping you’ll come around.” I smiled at her, but she looked at me quizzically and then stared down at the ground, lost.

So we ate Jeanie’s mom’s scalding hot soup, which had been left to boil on the stove too long, in silence, except for our occasional compliments to the absentee cook.

We stole glances at each other that could have meant several things. A kaleidoscope of looks. Cross currents flying every which way, wordlessly. Jeanie laughed occasionally, almost to herself, before digging her spoon back into the thick Italian broth. Sarah and I weren’t laughing.

Chapter 3

The snow began to fall yet again. Blizzards in New Hampshire around the Christmas holidays were certainly not rare. But this one was a four day blizzard, which felt like half a year. We began to turn on the radio for local reports. Electricity had gone out in the towns and hamlets around us. We were going a bit stir crazy.

I did the dinner dishes and went to my room to read and play my guitar quietly; lamenting. Confused. Pulled back down to earth just like the frozen sky during this storm.

About half an hour after I had closed my door a knock came.

“Hey,” I said, looking down at my guitar, as I tried to figure out a picking pattern to a song I was writing.

“Hi,” Jeanie said, then opened the door a crack and poked her head in half way.

“I came to make peace,” she said shyly. “I’m sorry if I screwed things up.”

I was about to say she hadn’t done anything wrong when she walked through the door with Sarah directly behind her.

Jeanie’s pixie brown hair framed her face perfectly. She had subtle lines under her green eyes, set in such a way as to portend a smile even at the saddest times. It normally elicited a sense of trust and joy. These lines had fooled me in the past.

Sarah was wearing a silk beige colored button down shirt. She seemed perpetually soft to me now – her skin, her face, the clothes she wore. Even in her personality I saw the warmth beneath the sarcasm, and the honesty beneath the shyness -- no harsh edges.

“Play us a song,” Jeanie said. “Show Sarah that side of you. Let’s change the mood a bit.”

I picked up my guitar and played a new song I had been working on. I sang the lyrics a bit hesitantly, realizing as I sang that they weren’t quite done yet. Then I played a few rock ‘n roll favorites Jeanie used to like to hear.

Sarah seemed pleased. She was smiling occasionally. Moving almost imperceptively to the beat.

The last song I sang was a Jeanie favorite – California Dreamin’. After I was done, Jeanie said in a half whisper, “Ya know, I wouldn’t mind living in California.” She said this while looking wistfully out the window at a forest of snow. “Last winter it snowed on April 10th here. Pretty depressing!”

“You remember the date?” Sarah asked incredulously.

“It’s her birthday,” I said.

“Oh, I forgot! Leave it to a really good friend to remember something like that.” It was the first truly warm comfortable smile Sarah had shown me. Her face was radiant. So much more to know. . . .

“Well, California sounds nice,” Sarah continued, “but I’d like to spend a year in Europe! Get a fast pass and just go every place I can, catching my sleep on the night trains!”

“Me too,” Jeanie chimed in excitedly. “I always had a dream of doing that. Living in Paris and then renting a little cottage house in Dordogne, and then another in Tuscany. Tripping around, going to all the out of the way museums. . . and local restaurants -- hiking and biking everywhere.”

“Let’s do it!” Sarah responded! “I’d pick up and leave as soon as it turns spring. We could leave on your birthday, in fact!”

This completely derailed me. Was Sarah trying to hurt my feelings on purpose, or was she unaware that I was sitting right there next to her? Did she care?

“Don’t tempt me, Sarah, I’d do it,” Jeanie responded.

“Well, I’m serious!”

“Hold on,” I wailed! “What about me?” It sounded pathetic, like the whining of a puppy watching its human parents, keys in hand, parade joyously out the door to go to out for the evening.

Jeanie looked at me, dead pan: “We’d be right back. It’s just one little summer.”

That was it. I laid down on my bed and put my hands over my eyes, feeling completely darkened. They really didn’t get it. I couldn’t handle this.

“I’m sorry,” Sarah said to me earnestly. “I was just dreaming aloud. I’ve dreamt of going to Europe since I was fifteen years old. I probably couldn’t afford it anyway.”

They looked at me, and at each other. Then Jeanie leaned over and kissed my cheek. Then Sarah leaned over and kissed me in a direct imitation of Jeanie – mockingly -- kissing me for exactly the same length of time on the same spot.

But as she pulled away I pulled her back towards me and kissed her mouth. Sarah let me kiss her for a moment but then pulled away. Jeanie then leaned over and kissed my mouth in direct imitation of my kiss with Sarah as she mocked my passion. Sarah let out a laugh.

What planet were these girls were coming from? I couldn’t figure out if this was a dream or a nightmare.

Jeanie said to Sarah: "He's a bit blue, a bit down. Love does that. Let's make love to him and cheer him up."

"*Oh my God!*" Sarah gasped. "No way. You go ahead and do what you want. I'm leaving."

Sarah began to get up, but Jeanie said, "Sarah, you say you want to be adventurous, leave your job and go to Europe, but that's just a fantasy and you know it! But this is real! Do you really want to drive away from here without letting him know you care and that you really want to see him again? . . . You stay! *I'll leave!*"

Sarah said, "Enough craziness from you two jokers. You're both out of your minds."

Jeanie continued. "We both know you can be kind of secretive and overly cool sometimes." Then she said almost in a whisper, "I know you better than that. I know it's just a protection. But you don't need to protect yourself with us."

Sarah said nothing. She was at a still point, a crossroads. Two Sarahs. Which one would she choose to be? The one that skitters nervously off? Or the other one only she knew existed.

Jeanie leaned over to her and continued in a whisper: "Come on, Sarah. Where's your sense of humor?"

"Come on, what?" Sarah jolted back. "Humor about what?"

"Well, I guess I want one last time with him," Jeanie confided as if I weren't there listening, "but I'd need you to show me it's okay by being with him too. . . . It could be a real turn on. We've never even seen each other naked."

"I can't believe this, Jeanie! You're just being too weird!" Sarah hissed, almost choking on her words. A bit frightened it seemed to me. But then she did something strange. She laid down on the bed next to me and sighed a frustrated sigh, an exasperated long exhale, lying far enough away so as not to be touching me. She put her hands over her face, shaking her head incredulously. She didn't know what to do next. She couldn't commit to this lunacy. But she was also perversely curious about what this could turn into. She was attracted to the strangeness of it. She didn't want to leave.

Jeanie touched her arm and rubbed it, but Sarah remained as still as a person in a trance. So Jeanie started rubbing her feet. She started to hum softly. Laughing occasionally as she sang. Then she touched her shirt softly with her hand. Then she unbuttoned a top button and waited. Sarah remained motionless. So Jeanie continued to unbutton her shirt, lightly and quickly now, as a gentle wind blowing across her body. After the shirt was unbuttoned she didn't try to spread it open to reveal her breasts the way a male lover might, but instead lightly drew a line with her fingertip from her neckline down to her stomach, and then unzipped her jeans. She did this while her other hand made a wispy circle on her stomach, like a butterfly alighting.

“This is really so crazy,” Sarah moaned almost inaudibly to herself. But she remained still, hands over her face. I watched as Jeanie slid off Sarah’s clothes, it seemed as if in one slow calm motion, hardly breaking the stillness. I touched Sarah’s stomach lightly as Jeanie slid her own pants down. Then Jeanie laid me down and took my clothes off in the same slow manner while my hand touched Sarah’s but otherwise remained motionless, entwined there.

Jeanie came on top of me and straddled herself over me. She was very turned on and began making love to me, first slowly with a sigh, then furiously, hungrily. But she also had the presence to whisper “come on Sarah,” while pulling her to turn towards us and merge in the silky dream that was licking up into the air like a newborn fire.

Sarah turned to me and rubbed my shoulder calmly while Jeanie was moaning and going wild. I was having a hard time controlling myself except I kept telling myself if I didn’t wait I might not be able to make love to Sarah, maybe ever again. I didn’t know how this triad-centric song was going to affect the composition of my life. But I had plenty of reason to think this was more like a weird ending of something than the beginning of something beautiful. .

Jeanie gasped, then laughed aloud, slowed down her rhythm, kissed my face gently, then slid off of me. She took Sarah’s arm gently and pulled her closer until Sarah was almost on top of me. Sarah pretended not to be interested, but apparently this scene had done more to excite her than to undermine us. I was greatly relieved, and moaned as I kissed her. Then I pulled her closer to me and we began making love. Again I went into the outer space dream world she put me in. Soon there was a merging of three bodies -- mouths and skin kind of slid around everywhere. I lost track.

It was a scene that was never repeated between us.

It was a night that simply would never exist. Only in my mind. No one ever spoke of it again.

Chapter 4

Leaning over the sink the next morning while brushing my teeth I noticed rivulets of water holding on to the side rim of the porcelain bowl, escaping the harsh blast of the spigot, refusing to join the rest of their kind in the death march down the drain, and I thought to myself, these are observers, not rebels. These are the safe ones who just want to go their own way, stay out of danger, and not get involved. But not getting involved is a difficult thing to achieve in this world. Even rivulets are going to have their problems eventually. Assimilation, evaporation. The cleaning lady. It's always something.

That is what made Sarah so unique: even at twenty five she had somehow remained an observer, never getting too involved with life, since the response from life in return whenever she had joined in for a moment here and a moment there was anything but encouraging.

But now I had now come along, casting a different light, lighting up the shadows. Because I saw her observing ways as graceful, intelligent. I intuited the compassion and gentleness she tried so hard to hide. I had nudged her back into the present, made her start to care about her life. And she didn't like it. She didn't want to let her guard down and take a chance, or maybe even dare to feel love one day. This was her fear. And my hope.

Pancakes were made. A joint was passed around, saved up for a winter day such as this. We ate ravenously, sponging up the sweet cakes with generous amounts of Vermont maple syrup.

“So,” Jeanie said, “I think it's time for the next step.”

“Have mercy!” Sarah said. She had taken enough steps in the last thirty six hours.

“A hike?” I suggested, trying to take her words as literally as possible, or else trouble was bound to follow. This was Jeanie. Pixie-like, light-hearted, daring, brutally honest, and always willing to push the envelope. She was a rip-roaring good friend to have, and to play with, and to get stoned with. But these same qualities were intimidating. Because at the same time she was hard to read.

“Yes, Jay Jay, a hike of sorts -- down the amusement park steps, o'er to the merry-go-'round of time,” she waved her hands like a drunken carnival barker. “It's time to play – da dadada – ‘Reveal Your Past Lovers,’ or who knows what kind of trouble it could cause down the road, even long after you're married?”

“What?” Sarah's eyes widened. “You're out of your. . . “

“Let each other know from whence you came,” Jeanie continued. “Lay everything out on the table.”

“I don't want to lay my past lovers on the table,” I mocked. “Sexy as that might be. I'm a pillows on the floor guy myself.”

Jeanie pretended not to hear me. She stood up and cleared her throat. “I will be the moderator, to make sure no low blows or fist fights take place. And, of course, the moderator will choose the player who goes first.”

“Please, don’t do this,” Sarah blushed. “I just want another pancake, then we can call it a brunch.” She reached over for one last flapjack and flopped it onto her syrupy plate.

Jeanine was not about to let this go. “Jay, why don’t you start it off so Sarah gets the concept. Sarah, you splattered a bit of syrup on that lovely sweater.”

She looked back to me, “You and I have played this game before, long ago, remember? So aside from discussing present company, let’s go back in time, Jay – for the official record, Jason Essex – Sarah did you even know his last name? – and glimpse a piece of your precious past. Let’s begin by reviewing last week, for instance, and working our way back!”

Sarah looked at me and raised her eyebrows. Her curiosity had awoken now. She loved quiet little dramas of the absurd like this just as much as Jeanie did. But I was betting when I finished Sarah would find a way to change the subject before the spotlight turned her way.

I began by defending myself, “First of all, last week, and for many weeks before that, I was involuntarily celibate.” I cleared my throat, trying to be as impressively literate as possible under these stoned, rather zig-zag circumstances. The pancakes had filled me nicely and I was now laying back in my chair, basking in the glow of the present moment, talking about the past, with no fear of screwing up in the future by doing so.

“My only other serious relationship aside from those present was with a girl named Deana. . . Deana Kelly since we’re being formal about names. We met at a party in New York. A crazy disorganized party with too much drinking that neither of us were much into. So we actually met on the balcony which overlooked the Statue of Liberty. She was a dancer and a gymnastics teacher living in Madison, Wisconsin, visiting New York on a lark with her mostly platonic friend, Carl.”

“*Mostly platonic!* That sounds so familiar!” Sarah looked at me, then Jeanie. I didn’t take the bait.

“Okay, the scene fades to a sunny day in Madison, picnicking by the lake, laughing about all the little things lovers laugh about. She had some very cool qualities, like she was willing and able to do a cartwheel in stride while walking down a crowded street. She was willing to do almost anything, in fact. She was actually adventurous to a fault. In that way, we brought out the worst in each other, pushing each other to our rational limits, mocking monogamy, mocking jealousy, cackling at commitment, inviting mental danger at all times. We were giddy, drunk on love itself. Not necessarily with each other, I think she would have admitted that. But at the time there was a feeling that this kind of love was true love, because it would never die. Lovers could come and go in our lives but we’d always come back to each other, because we were free of that kind

of clingy love, unfettered by traditions and cultural rules and government laws and the need for security in our lonely weakest moments. And, I bought it. I bought it hook, line, and sinker.”

“Try not to use hackneyed idiomatic expressions,” Sarah interrupted. “You were doing so well before that. . . . Go on.”

“Thank you for the critique, professor. . . . As I was saying, a year into our crazy illogical trust in each other, regardless of what we did to defy that trust, everything actually seemed to calm down. We found an odd kind of peace being around each other that no one else seemed to understand. We had a secret: we were truly free. No one could reach her but me, I thought. But in truth, I don’t know what she was thinking.

“I began thinking of settling down with her. I know, the paradox is obvious. But I was falling for her. I began telling her about the positives of monogamy. And being a couple. And maybe owning a house together one day. She looked at me like I was from a distant planet. But she didn’t argue the point, so I thought maybe I was getting through to her. *And I was!* Yes, I was. Because, shortly after this time of normalcy and calm, she ‘fell in love’ with a gymnastics coach, who inconsequentially happened to be married at the time. She told me over the phone one day that things were not going to be the same with us but that she wanted to stay friends. I was game, thinking that “friends” meant something similar to what we already had. Anything to keep her in my life at that point.”

I looked at them and saw a flash of empathy on their face. I guess my face began to show some of the pain. . . .” A sickening nightmare took over the next half year of my life. She fell more and more in love with this now divorced gymnastics coach, a six foot three gymnastics coach for the University of Wisconsin. I couldn’t compete, obviously. She pulled the monogamy card, thanking me for pointing the concept out to her, and left me not only without her physical love but questioning every second we’d spent together.

“Was I looking for someone completely free emotionally, ergo, eternally unavailable? Someone who would allow me the space and freedom I needed to love them? Therefore, someone who would never really feel love for me in return? Was this the perfect relationship for someone who considered himself ultimately unlovable?”

I looked wistfully at Sarah, awaiting sympathy. She had a sarcastic smirk on her face, then burst out laughing. “This ends our programming for today. But be sure to tune in tomorrow for another”

“Thanks for being so sensitive to my plight.”

“Maybe you are the plight!” she laughed.

But then she sighed and added, “Well, I guess we’re all just so fucked up beyond repair, what’s the difference?”

“Thank you for your honesty,” I said.

Sarah sighed, “And now it’s time for a nice walk in the snow. So if you’ll excuse me. . . .”

“Ah, ah, ah!” Jeanie crooned. “Before any attempt to escape us, please, the moderator has called your number. It’s your turn!”

“Mmm hmm,” I added smugly. “And don’t hold back. This is the new Sarah, remember? The one who dares to dare.”

New Sarah was also quite high. So she bought into the dare. Her guard was down.

She told us about her only “long-term” (one year) relationship, with Daniel. She never talked about him with me again, so Jeanie was right to have presented me with this lone opportunity.

Apparently Jeanie knew about Daniel, had met him once, and therefore added a few juicy details along the way. Jeanie called him, then and now, “Daniel, the Forest Man.” Sarah thought it was a romantic nickname for him at the time but later saw it differently.

Sarah sighed and closed her eyes for a moment before beginning her soft spoken soliloquy: “Daniel, who hated to be called Dan, just in case you wondered, was one of those tall silent Daniel Boone nature boys, who took me deep into the forest for days at a time and tore away at my skin at night from inside an unlit tent as the moon stood guard. In other words, I liked Daniel, but I detested what some might call our love life. But I admired a lot of other things about him. He was a strong self-reliant man. A poetic throw-back to the days when men were independent and strong willed and comfortable in nature.”

“A combination of the father in House on the Prairie and Tarzan,” Jeanie added.

“Yes, something quite like that!” Sarah admitted. “But he apparently had no time for sissy girly things like wanting to hear about the books I was reading, for instance. Books could not conquer the wilds! Books could not catch fish! Books could not start a fire from twigs before the sunset turned the land cold and lifeless! Contrarily, books just pushed wimps into the worthless world of fantasy and doubt and chaos. Ripe for every prey.”

“Prey like him.”

“I suppose, Jeanie, but it actually just pushed me even deeper into my reading, as I tried to figure out why I hated him so much!”

They laughed.

“In the end, I guess I chose fantasy over fish; and fairytales over fire. That about summed up my relationship. . . .”

“With Tarzan,” Jeanie chimed in, “according to the tale told by the unwitting Jane,”

“Well, you only met him once.”

“Plenty for me.”

“Go back to the tent scene,” I said, squirming around in my seat.

“You wouldn’t want to know,” she responded.

The good news was that I was certainly not a Tarzan. Not a House on the Prairie guy. Not a guy who could make a fire or set up a tent or cook fish on a stick over that perfect orange blue fire out there amongst the marshes. In fact, I couldn’t even roast marshmallows.

All I had was my sense of adventure, and my quickly growing love for her. That’s all I could offer. She had offered me back a passive allowance to drag her along. In that way, she was still playing Jane. I was dragging her along through the cerebral tree tops to a new world I spied from afar.

And the rivulets of our lives merged a bit more during that hour, to form one small stream of water, evaporating into the first show of sunshine in five days. Blinding yellow waves washed through all the windows on the eastern side of the house.

We sat beneath the light, huddled beneath the warm square on the rug and soaked in the miraculous end to the blizzard.

The sleepy magic of the moment was firmly broken when I asked them to move to California with me.

Sarah was leaving for home in a few hours, driving back to Connecticut, and now the weather would not stop her. So I had to take my chance or regret letting the opportunity slip away.

“Great idea!” Jeanie said. “But I like my house and my job at the university. On the other hand, nothing is stopping Sarah. Right dear?”

Sarah, well, she surprised me. Being stoned, and feeling the warmth of the sun on her face, she mustered up the immediate courage to let go of the gravity and effort it took to stay isolated in her cold time-corroding cryogenic life, which for all these countless years seemed to salute her constant uninvolvedness. No more clinging to the sidelines. She let herself free-fall through the curvy unknowns of future time with a resounding, “Fine, okay, maybe.”

Chapter 5

I drove up to meet Sarah in Connecticut just two weeks after we first met. We had spoken on the phone most nights since then, but when we saw each other, when I got out of my car and said hello, reality hit. Seconds froze as I tried to connect back in with her. Her face had only gotten more beautiful than I remembered – but that first second our eyes met she looked away for just a split second as if embarrassed. We both realized how little we knew about the other. It wasn't a scene where two lovers flew into each other's arms. Quite contraire, as she would say.

She brought me up to her room – an attic loft in a house in Greenwich. It was a small room with slanted beams. Dark wood lined the walls and ceiling in perfect rows like the ruled lines on school paper. The ceiling was so low you had to bend slightly to prevent yourself from hitting your head. Books and CDs were everywhere. Shelves and shelves of them. One corner of the floor had a neatly stacked row of clothes where a dresser might otherwise have been. In another corner was a small table low to the ground where she could sit cross legged and work on her computer. A maze of wires hid behind the table masking the complexity.

“So we meet again,” I said nervously.

“Welcome to Howth Castle and environs,” she said. I didn't get the joke. She saw the look on my face, “I'll have to read a passage to you tonight from Finnegans Wake. It's a perfect metaphor for our relationship.

“Really, why?” I said, happy for the friendly response.

“Because after I'm finished it won't make any sense to either of us!”

We both laughed. Maybe for different reasons.

We sat down on her bed. She had a photo album ready to show me, which had photos of her and Jeanie from many years ago. They had met at college. They seemed to play the same role in every picture – Jeanie leading the unwilling Sarah on some adventure caught by the camera's eye.

Sarah's bed was just a thick mattress on the floor with no box spring, covered with lacy sheets and pillows and a hand made quilt. A family heirloom perhaps? What was the story behind that, since she no longer had any contact with her parents. Or maybe it was just a stunning find from a neighborhood thrift shop. Greenwich was a well-to-do town.

“So we aren't really going to do this, are we?”

“Do what?”

“You know.”

I kissed her on the cheek.

“No, not that. I mean all this talk about moving to California, to be whatever, roommates, ‘mostly platonic’ friends. I mean, this is all just your silly fantasy that makes no sense to me.”

“I definitely never want to be mostly platonic friends with you. Ever.”

“Well, you never know how things might turn out.”

“Well, who does, about anything? But it doesn’t stop people from trying.” I became concerned she was trying to back out

“I just don’t want you to make the same mistake you made with Deana Kelly. You know, you can’t just rely on passion and adventure all the time!”

“You’re not anything like her. And that’s not what I want.”

“So what exactly do you want then? Aside from wanting to take off my clothes? And take me on your next adventure as your side kick?”

She was so disarming, so maddening, but I was determined not to let her confuse me. I decided to be just as direct in return: “I want to find someone to share my life with, to have children with! I’m thinking you might be the one.” I looked in her eyes, “Am I scaring you to death? Because I’m scaring me!”

“Yes!”

“I’ve already given up my apartment in New York, Sarah. I found someone to buy my car. I’m taking you away to California.”

“Not yet,” she said.

“Why not?”

“Because, I have to show you around my home town first. I was born in Greenwich, you know.”

“Oh, I . . . “

She put her hand on my shoulder and guided me down onto the quilt. Then she lifted her sweater over her head and said, “Welcome to Connecticut.”

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Chapter 6

I wanted to leave for California the next day. Nothing was stopping us. We were going to fly stand-by to save money.

But Sarah wasn't quite done here.

After a breakfast of fruit and toast she told me she was going to need to disappear for a day or two. I wondered if she might need to say goodbye to someone, an old boyfriend she neglected to mention, perhaps? I felt a bit jealous, a bit uncomfortable about it. But she insisted she just had something personal to take care of.

When Sarah was fifteen -- she had gotten a job at Longs Drug Store. She worked long hours, squeezing in her homework assignments late at night. She had a plan from the day she began -- to save up enough money to buy a used car so that on her eighteenth birthday, the first day she could legally leave home, she would get in that car and drive away from her mother and never look back. Her father had disappeared long ago disappeared. She certainly could understand why. He got out when he could.

A week before her eighteenth birthday Sarah fulfilled her dream. Three days after graduating high school with honors she bought a used Buick with all of her savings. It was already filled with gas. She parked it in her driveway, not telling her mother about her plan to leave. She just told her she had saved up enough to buy herself a birthday present. But her mom grew suspicious. Sarah came home from her last day of work, the day before her birthday, with a thousand secret plans in her head. But her mother announced at dinner that the car was a trade for room and board for Sarah having lived there all those years, and that she had hidden the key. Sarah was furious but she refused to show any emotion.

The next morning, on her eighteenth birthday, a friend of hers picked her up at 5 am and dropped her off at the bus station downtown, and that was that. It was the last time she had seen or spoken to her mother, or gone back to the house, until today.

Now she was going to drive the scene in reverse. She took a morning bus back to her old house. She knew her mother was at work. She also knew where a key to the house was hidden.

Once inside, she found the key to her Buick hanging on a hook near the door to the garage. Nothing in the house had changed since the day she left. Everything was cleaned and dusted and organized. Her room was the same. The bed was made. Some of her clothes still hung in the closet. It was eerie.

The car started up immediately. Apparently her mother used it from time to time. The exterior was clean and shiny.

Sarah drove her car to a used car dealer downtown. She pulled out the pink slip she'd had in her wallet since the day she left, and sold it on the spot.

Before she left her house for the last time, she wrote a note for her mother and placed it on the kitchen table. It said: “Cras amet qui numquam amavit quique amavit cras amet.” She didn’t sign it.

She had laughed all the way to the used car dealer. The Latin quote was perfect!

Back at the loft later that night she told me about her strange adventure with uncharacteristic excitement and drama. Of course, at the end of her tale I asked her to tell me what the note meant.

She answered me indirectly, “It said exactly what I wanted to tell her. I left it to drive her crazy, because I know her, she will never stop, she may not even sleep, until she gets a translation. But,” she began to laugh and shake her head, “it’s an idiomatic phrase written in Greek! So if she tries to translate it word for word it still won’t make any sense!” She laughed again, this time even louder. It was a laugh I had never heard from her before.

“So what exactly does it mean?” I asked again.

She said, “Can you keep a secret from my mother?”

“I promise,” I said, while praying that I would never have to meet her.

“It’s taken from the end of a novel called ‘The Magus,’ by John Fowles. ‘Cras amet qui numquam amavit quique amavit cras amet.’ It means. . .” – she came closer to me until her blue eyes were staring right into mine:

“He who has never loved, let him love tomorrow. And he who has loved, let him love tomorrow.”

She said, “Do you understand?”

“Not really,” I admitted.

“It’s the most optimistic thing I have ever put on paper!”

“Okay, that’s great, but why, *why* would you write that to your mother?”

“It will kill her that I’ve survived her insanity and meanness. That I’m happy. That I’ve found some peace and love in my life. And she’ll have to spend months just to find out that her attempt to destroy me failed.”

Then she added, “I have a lot of money saved up now.” She took a wad of bills out of her purse. Between work and the sale of my precious Buick, about \$11,000. . .That should be enough.”

“Enough for. . .?”

She nodded, as if she knew I knew. “It ought to be enough to get us settled in California.”

I smiled.

She didn’t.

She went downstairs for a moment and came back with a bottle of wine. We drank from the bottle together until we were quite high.

She put on Dylan’s “Simple Twist of Fate,” and we danced together, stumbling a bit, until we floated down onto her bed.

She got up momentarily to switch CDs. Then we made love to “Facing You,” by Keith Jarrett, quite a bizarre segue, which pulled me into a vortex so deep, so wondrous, I felt like the entire sensual world had been decoded.

I crashed out around 1 a.m.

She packed her things in the middle of the night while I slept.

Chapter 7

Our first year in California was a one long stream of unbroken beauty. We were living in San Anselmo in Marin County, amongst the golden hills of summer, and the rain-drenched emerald hills of winter. I remember the hikes Sarah and I took around Phoenix Lake, with the smell of sage framing the senses as the eyes drank in the glass-blue water hundreds of feet below.

There were day trips to Stinson Beach, where the cotton-thick fog gave way to sparkling skies mid-day; where the iron-hard wind merged with icy heroic waves, both roaring in their own way, spilling hard against miles of cliffs and soft white shore line.

We both had jobs to get us by. She was able to keep the old computer job she had in Connecticut. They allowed her to work remotely. She was making a fairly good wage.

I, on the other hand, dabbled around with various projects until they failed. (Not my fault.) I had not found my true calling yet.

Nights were often filled with music and books. I would listen to CDs that were off the beaten path, trying to find a spark that would inspire my own writing. She would read poets and authors long forgotten, foraging through the backwaters of the local book stores on San Anselmo Avenue.

We lived in a small flat right on the main drag, above a small store that sold hippie beads, Indian clothes, and a house-made perfume called, "Blue." The owner's golden retriever was permanently sprawled out sideways across the most well traveled isle. We only went in there once a month to step over the dog and pay the rent. We always came out smelling like patulli oil.

Making love was still as it was in the beginning. We would never say it aloud, but there was a truly perfect quality both during and after the time our bodies merged. As if destiny was saying: your bodies belong together. Your minds must find a way to work out the rest.

Early one spring evening, after our work day was done, while sitting in a park across from one of her favorite book stores, I asked her to marry me. She looked around for a moment, observing something silently, thinking about some image before her, then focusing on my eyes for just an instant, the way a bird's eyes might just before coming closer, sensing trust, and then nodded yes. Wordless.

The wedding was the first time we saw Jeanie since we had moved West. My long lost older brother showed up for the occasion as well. As did my long lost parents.

My parents were an oddity in that they were not bad parents at all, but they never touched me in any deep way, and I never seemed to touch them. We were so different -- that was apparent early on -- there was just no opportunity for us to connect. They never spoke about how they felt or about their past. Everything was a big secret, a secret I eventually lost interest in decoding. I wore my heart on my sleeve and talked incessantly. There was a similarity between Sarah and

me, I saw that. They were like Sarah, I was still me trying fiercely in the beginning to unravel their secrets, win their love, open them up to the world of emotions and adventure. She was willing to reach out to me, meet me somewhere in the middle. They never did.

Sarah's parents were permanently lost to her, emotionally and otherwise. It made her happy that on her wedding day they were far away, without a clue.

We were married in our friend's back yard in the neighboring town of Fairfax, amidst flowers, muddy dogs running around chasing each other in an open field, a calico cat sitting atop a 1975 black BMW up on blocks, tables of fruit and fish and cake, streamers, balloons, and an embryo.

Sarah was three months pregnant at the wedding. An internal wedding gift to both of us. No one else knew.

We went to Maui for our honeymoon and instantly fell in love with the place. We drove around the island in an open top jeep, swam in waterfalls, walked through bamboo forests. Memories of Daniel the Forest Man flashed before her eyes a few times, but before she could get too uncomfortable we would drive up to a nice hotel and would spend the night amidst the luxuriating rich and the free spending honeymooners. Although she protested that the surroundings, the menu prices, and the live music, were all a little too bourgeois for her tastes, she seemed to enjoy the experience as much as I did.

After we settled back into life in the flat, I wrote occasional songs that she seemed enthusiastic about, even while other listeners and the friends we'd met didn't show much interest.

I would write poems occasionally too, which she would encourage me to burn before someone with serious talent read them.

That just made me feel even more challenged by the task. So I submitted some of my finest work to a local poetry magazine. While they rejected most of my poems, the editor offered me a job as assistant editor, which I happily accepted since it paid more than the boring manual labor job I presently had.

The owner and chief editor, Maxwell Haley, surprised me my first week on the job by publishing what he thought was the best of my poems.

Sarah, I said, I have an "in" now. Submit your poems. Use your maiden name and send them to my attention. You'll be published! Of course, she never did.

Not that she had that much time to submit anything. Within a few months of my working as the assistant editor the magazine folded (no pun intended). But it was not my fault. My poem really wasn't that bad.

I scampered around for another job with an even higher pay scale than twice the minimum wage and landed a gig writing technical articles from outlines submitted by the authors for mechanical

and science journals. It wasn't what I would call difficult work but it took up a lot of my time. I was working day and night, meeting deadlines.

I made a commitment to myself not to have this type of writing *ever* affect my fiction writing. My music had gone silent -- I hadn't picked up my guitar in months -- my creative writing was the one thing I didn't want to screw up.

But then again, clear and simple outlines were sometimes quite alluring, especially after spending months wading through poetry submitted by dreamers and meandering schizophrenics.

Chapter 8

There were certain things I did not know about Sarah Berringer before I fell, like a bird shot from the sky, into her quiet shadowy world. Such as:

1. She preferred to avoid hackneyed one-word concepts that failed to live up to any true meaning at all, such as love, God, truth, beauty. So she fastidiously left those words out of her vocabulary. She laughed at me every time I pretended to know what I was saying when using any of them.
2. Overall, I still thought Sarah was a great match for me, a yin to my yang. She was:
 - a. brilliant, whereas I was merely street-wise and intellectually adequate;
 - b. unique whereas I longed to be unique, and occasionally found ways to appear that way;
 - c. quirky, a bit crazy, whereas I would take crazy-assed chances just to appear quirky and a bit crazy;
 - d. quieter than me -- getting her to say more than a few sentences in a row was a rare victory -- whereas the only time I was naturally quiet was when I was writing (i.e., yapping away in silence) or sleeping (i.e., yapping away in my sleep).
3. I came to see we were equally adventurous in some ways. She could match my daring with an equal amount of her own. But what I had not completely understood was that her sense of adventure came from apathy, abandoning her modest desire to survive in the status quo. My sense of adventure came from wanting to explore the world! (Notice the exclamation mark. That's what I mean. Everything was !) Because of these very different motives, she was in truth better at being adventurous than I was because she could handle failure with a shrug. I needed to "win" the adventure, come out on top, conquer the game I was playing. Therefore, I was afraid of losing and being destroyed. . . . She wasn't afraid about either of us being destroyed!
 - a. One of the games I was playing now was to win Sarah, to win her love as well as her admiration in some permanent fashion. But she was not winnable. She was more like a table full of mercury than a modern day version of Venus: The beauty was there. But the love was missing, like the arms of the statue. Sometimes I came to the conclusion that she wasn't capable of truly loving me. Love had no hold on her. She agreed. (See #1.)
4. She was willing to stay with me anyway. At least for now, I told myself. I doubted she would stay forever. (See #3, last two sentences.)
5. Not committing beyond the next adventure, not using the word, "love," not speaking her mind, never saying exactly what she was thinking – to her these things were "romantic." In her mind, mystery added to romance by way of surprise and improvisation.

6. Mysteriousness and the unknown drove me crazy, made me feel like life was on hold.
7. But, just like my relationship with Deana (see pp 15 Chapter 4) I accepted all this mysteriousness, and in fact, became more and more allured by Sarah's unwillingness to be pinned down and "won" by anyone. Even after we were married. So in that way she was absolutely right, her way was more romantic. If romance was defined as "mesmerized to the point of helplessness," her way was more romantic by far.

I sunk deeper and deeper into her opium web. She sat calmly perched upon mine.

And now, as if that wasn't enough, I had full blown writer's block. I was a brief synopsis of my former creative self.

I made a quick outline of what else I could do with my life. . . .because writing poetry and fiction seemed to be the last thing I was capable of anymore.

Chapter 9

In the spring, six months after our wedding, our first child was born. We named her Shelly, since Sarah and I both loved the ocean.

After the birth, Sarah changed considerably. It was a tectonic shift neither of us could have ever expected or planned for.

I thought – and was duly warned – that it was “post-partum.” Otherwise known in the secret world of men’s groups as hormonal insanity.

So I tried to tolerate her quiet moodiness, her growing doubts about life and love, by being overly attentive to the baby, whom I adored, and who also served as a blessed distraction.

But Sarah’s dark irrationality didn’t fade over time. Her outlook on the world became almost paranoid, more protective of herself, and especially of Shelly. She finally had someone whose life she cared about as much as her own. *She* was Shelly’s “Daniel the Forest Man!” She had to supply everything for her to survive. It was about far more than just elementary survival based on food and warmth. Shelly needed unconditional love and care and attention. Sarah had to leap forward and get in touch with something deeper than her old way of approaching life. It took all of her emotional strength. And it scared her. As a mother she had no road map, no memories of a nurturing parent, or how to care for anyone.

She tried her hand at mom’s groups, but they failed to produce any lasting friendships with other moms – “Yoga for Moms,” organized playgroups in the park, “Yoga for Babies,” “Yoga for Independent Moms” -- while the children sat in baskets and cried their eyes out (a New York version of “Yoga for Babies”). Then there was the phase where she met other moms at a high school track for “Moms On the Run,” slowing the pace a bit with “Walking Moms,” “Backpacking Moms,” chilling out a bit during the winter by joining “Café Mommas,” meeting for lunches, with each café priding itself on being more expensive than the last one they met at. Polenta with basil is expensive stuff -- Yuppie caviar.

Yet, alas, with Shelly now turning one year old, Sarah had failed to connect with other moms, or with herself. Or with me. Some thread had been lost and we didn’t know how to get it back.

Chapter 10

Having children stops all the mind games in its tracks. There is nothing theoretical about children. The truth they live in every day is pragmatic, linear, real in so many ways. There are no philosophical musings about “the truth” out there somewhere. The truth is now. The truth is ice cream. There is nothing that is not true about ice cream.

Sarah and I no longer had time for Jeffers poetry, or Steven Hawking books jocularly exposing the realities of ten dimensions curving in on themselves.

No time for books of secrets written by Cadillac-riding sex-starved Gurus.

No time for the musings of Nietzsche.

No time for any of that. . . . Our next daughter, Heather, was born, and then our son, Adam a few years thereafter.

Just four years after Shelly was born we were a chaotic all-American family of five, fairly well respected by our neighbors, if a bit noisy, and fairly well liked, or at least smiled at and tolerated, by the other parents at school. By all accounts we seemed to be getting along well with each other. And up to our necks in “reality.”

Did we have great friends, best friends? Except for Jeanie – now married and still living on the East coast, no.

But finding “best friends” with children meant that all the children and both members of each couple had to all be enthralled with each other. With children of similar ages, I might add. This kind of thing was as rare as finding a baby in a haystack, in San Anselmo.

Sarah was now making over a hundred thousand dollars a year as a very in demand graphics artist, with all of her work done in her home office. And because our need for material fulfillment was kept to a sane minimum by western world standards, and our tax accountant was aggressive, our savings had increased dramatically.

I was also making money, not as much as her. But I was free lance writing and teaching guitar.

We had our health, we had two relatively nice cars, relatively easy work schedules that didn't involve commutes or bosses screaming at us about having to work on Saturdays or Christmas Eve nights. Other than the myriad of responsibilities involving the children, our time was basically ours to do as we pleased.

Nonetheless, no matter what we had, or what next piece of blessed luck fell into our lap next from out of the clear blue sky, Sarah would find a way to reshape it.

I appeased this quality in her day after day, listening to her create brand new ways of drowning us.

Through Sarah's eyes, we were like kittens being carried down a rapid river on a rickety wooden raft. "How did it come to this?" they meowed to themselves with their vacant little eyes pinned to the shore. All the while being sucked into the oncoming mouth of the sea.

She had no idea how to live a normal life inside the culture she grew up in, because every time she skimmed the edge of that world it terrified her. Thoughts of her mother would encourage her to sabotage the situation, so that the outcome would be different. Living inside the mainstream and settling down to live a normal suburban life seemed dangerous to her.

One of the more dramatic outcomes of her soft but persistent complaints was that we eventually moved to Maui. Our honeymoon spot. A paradise on earth. She had read books and sifted through magazines and even found us a house to buy on the Internet.

She defended the move by saying she felt Marin folk were snobby and tended to isolate themselves, especially amongst the community of mothers she had met. She enjoyed the international feeling of the town we were in, Kihei. She liked the warmer weather year round, liked the innocence that seemed to be in the air, good for the kids, she reasoned.

She could keep her same jobs and work remotely. Money was not an obstacle.

The move itself was a mess. We had a container towed to a dock, put on a boat, towed to our new house and emptied at our door step. Things had broken on the journey across the sea. Plates were chipped, chairs arrived crippled. But once we settled in, Maui embraced us with its beaming starry nights, and suited our easy going pace.

Much to my surprise, our work flourished. She had more work than ever, with her clients typically swooning over the fact that she could work and live in *Maui*. And I now had a good reputation as a local writer as well as a guitar teacher.

Most of all, as I look back on this time, I loved being a dad. I loved feeling like a heroic provider -- the clown, the musician, the magician, the provider of hope and adventure and optimism and other opiates young souls need to mainline daily into their hearts and brains.

When they had fears they went to Sarah. When they had questions about the world they came to me. Sarah was still quiet about her beliefs, even to her own children. I could talk about the world for hours -- politics, music, history, images of what it would be like to travel all over the world, modern science and new patents -- I had learned a lot about the latest in scientific research from translating the outlines of mad scientists everywhere.

These were my gifts. And I saw the results: I was proud of who our children were becoming. I was comforted by the steady way their minds worked and was grateful for the kind and respectful way they treated each other.

Sarah, on the other hand, was not adjusting as well as the rest of us. She was not a beach comer at the core of her -- more of a forest person she now insisted (leftovers perhaps from reading all

those nineteenth century romantics, or hanging out with Daniel the Forest Man). She avoided the beaches for the most part – which is pretty hard to do when you live on a round volcanic rock with beaches at every edge. You have to carefully keep yourself in the middle. You have to stay on two lane highways and not wobble too far over to either side.

Nor was she, in all honesty, a natural mom or a nurturer at heart.

Thanksgiving Day: Our five year old boy is being distracted by Jeanie, who has come to our house in Maui on holiday -- a two week hiatus from the frigid Northwest. Without her husband, who she will not discuss.

Jeanie and my boy are playing baseball in our front yard in the ever beautiful weather. She was holding a huge whiffle ball the size of a balloon, and Adam was clutching a plastic red bat the width of a tree trunk, but weighing only about two and a half grams. He swings and misses – a difficult feat under the circumstances. Jeanie falls on the grass laughing. “Great Adam, you are going to be a real *slugger boy*. The wind from your swing just knocked me over!”

He smiled back confidently.

Jeanie saw the change in Sarah first hand and felt bad for me. But she couldn't say too much about it -- not to either of us. She didn't want to get involved. She was a great jokester, but never particularly good at being serious.

I hired a yoga teacher to come by at noon – my gift for Sarah on Thanksgiving Day. A break from the kids, a time to rejuvenate. I joined in, hoping to connect with her in that world. I knew enough Yoga to get by from my days in San Anselmo. Jeanie had taken the kids to the beach. S

Sarah spent most of the class commenting about how weak she was, sick last week, probably allergies. Allergies to the heat apparently – according to some Ayurvedic doctor. She was *allergic* to Paradise. (This did not bode well for her after-life.)

Weak and sniffly and too damn hot. That's why her downward dog wasn't looking as flexible today as it normally does. She nervously explains all this to the teacher who is responding with empathy and ignoring the fact that my shoulders are caving in during my sun salutations.

I tried to make light of her complaining, saying something like – “there's nothing all that bad about a downward dog in heat.”

She shot me a look that said, “What kind of mean, tasteless, stupid kind of pun was that?”

I was in the dog house.

Why am I here with her, doing yoga, or doing anything with her? This was what I kept asking myself during my Warrior II pose.

Of course, there were moments when Saint Sarah re-emerged, like the ghost of Christmas past. For instance, when I hurt my back playing basketball one Saturday. Don't ask me why the hell I was playing basketball at my age. Let's just say, you're never too old to make a cotton picking fool of yourself trying to prove you're not too old. She stayed up all night taking care of me, telling me jokes, stroking my face when the pain was unbearable.

Perhaps if you were a fly buzzing around the room, forgive the disgusting metaphor -- flittering around randomly with no possible purpose on earth -- and happened to watch the entire dynamic of our relationship, you would have seen me as the crazy one!

I was dispassionate about everything but the children and making love to her. I was lazy and for the most part cared nothing about money, nor did I realize the toll it took on her to support us.

After the class she took me aside, I thought she was going to thank me.

"Jay, I need to talk."

This was never a good sign.

"I need you to look at me when I talk to you, can you do that?" She actually talked like this to me now! – a practiced tone from having been a mother for so many years.

My eyes were downcast and remained floor bound. I picked this trick up from our four year old son.

"I'm sorry for the dog in heat joke."

"Fine. Apology accepted. But that's not what I want to talk about. . . .It's about us."

"Can't we talk about us after the holidays? There are so many other more pressing things for you to complain about."

This is how I egged her on, you see? This was my part in it.

"I'm not sure I can do this anymore.," she sighed. I had heard it before. I failed to take her seriously at times like this.

"Do what anymore? *Live?*" I meant it to be biting and angry, but it came off sounding more like an old Jewish man taunting his wife in their little condo in Miami.

Just then Jeanie walked in. The kids scamper in yelling at each other about some game – I won, no I won! Jeanie stands there with wet towels over her shoulder, a red bucket with green plastic shovels held in one hand. A very nice bikini she'd just bought in town seemed to fit her well.

Sarah walks away saying "Excuse me, I have to go check on dinner."

It's only one in the afternoon.

When the kids went back to school after Christmas break, Sarah busied herself by going to the library every day, where the air conditioning was dialed down to arctic. While keeping up with her work she was also trying to write a book so we could bring in even more money.

She studied self-help books of all kinds, "How to" books . . . How to be . . . a Parent, a Chef, a Thief, a Car Mechanic, an Egomaniac." She studied the form the books were written in, not so much what they were saying -- studying the formula for success. I suppose she was intrigued by the phenomena of success without content. But she didn't want to emulate it. She wanted to have something to say, something of immense depth and power. She just wanted to ~~steal~~ borrow the form with which to say it.

She decided to delve deeper into the how-to's of the How-To world before she began to write even a single precious word.

She explored the life of the Quakers for a while, then on to Buddhism -- practicing meditation there in the frigid Maui library, letting her thoughts fade into nothingness, so she could emerge having something important to say.

She continued backwards in time, down the long flowing stream of religious history, where many kittens have meowed on their little wooden rafts heading towards oblivion -- skipping, thank God, right past the religions of the Dark Ages, alighting upon the ancient Judaic texts and the Kabala.

Because of the latter, we lit candles on Friday nights. Until sometime thereafter she stumbled upon some vague antediluvian form of horizontal pantheism arising from when humans were tribes of nomads hunting for food one hundred thousand years ago and nothing holy was seen in the sky at all. . . . There would have been nothing quite so odd as a Neanderthal priest. Nor would I have wanted to cross one's path. . . . God was in the forest, in the mountains, and under the ground. (This was a number of centuries before Satan took that location over, which, rumor has it, he sub-let from the famous land lord, Hades.)

Finally she was ready to write her own thoughts about the real world, which she'd studied vicariously through reading volumes of books.

Her main message? How to think positively regardless of your circumstances.

. . . .Never trust an author.

Chapter 11

I wondered how and why could such an un-saintly transformation could have happened -- from a

sorrowfully shy, sweetly sarcastic, secretively seductive, sumptuously sexy Sarah . . .

to Sarah the subtropical suburban seeker, and self-anointed scribe?

She was seeking to escape from the grueling routine of motherhood and the withering heat of Maui. She wanted some of her pre-motherhood quirky east coast bohemian life back.

She was rebelling against her own mother in many obvious ways, and rebelling against me as well – I was now, psychologically speaking, a surrogate parent in her mind -- by escaping into her world of written words.

I see now, she was also trying to regain some control over a life that I had in many ways come to dominate with my own needs, my own wishes, my own vision. The children too, were all ideas I first conceived of before we conceived them together. Where were her dreams, her visions?

Such are the trials of modern marriage, I presumed.

I think of Sarah when I'm in a quiet uninterrupted mood and what do I think of? Blonde hair, sparkling swirly blue eyes that often expressed a directness and honesty that attracted me while disturbing others. . . .A petite nose that stayed out of the way from the rest of her face – the best kind of nose, I submit. A still beautiful figure – slender, but not skinny, even after having had three children. . . .Physically, Sarah was stunningly still the Sarah I met on a snowy day in New Hampshire. Some thread still carried through, at least on the outside.

And there remained that intense physical bond we had, that animal attraction between us. This was the glue that held us together through all the other mental nonsense that came and went. Making love still almost always transported me into an altered state. She occasionally admitted she felt the same way. Our bodies adored each other. It's just the way it was -- some unexplainable wild energy emerged with no effort from either of us. Though the event didn't happen as often as it once had, with three kids chasing us around the house, waking us up with their bad dreams, and yanking us into their school to set up their science projects before dawn, still, it remained at the heart of who we were together. That was an inescapable truth.

And when the day was done, when the sun set green and orange behind a cotton candy wisp of cirrus clouds, and the children were all asleep in their beds, Sarah realized the other inescapable truth -- that we all live and die in loneliness. We are all ultimately alone -- even with babies, children, even with friends like Jeanie. Even with a God described oh so well, in a book of oh so beloved scriptures. There's no escape. The awful secret is, wherever you go, no one else is really ever *right there* with you.

Chapter 12

Norman Mailer once said: "Words are a virus from outer space."

I am not that paranoid. I don't think the genesis was alien. I think words are born from mind, and are mangled by mind, or occasionally made into magnificent metaphors by the mind. Sometimes alliterative.

Words spoken without consciousness are too often angst ridden wandering nightmares. Worse – land mines.

Imagine innocence with explosives attached, crisscrossing the great highway of silence looking for its next victim to blow up. Welcome to communication.

I can tell you Sarah did this, and Sarah did that. But those are just more land mines. It was me, me all along. I was the one who in the end was willing to kill love for no reason.

If I could only take back what I did. If I could only make it up to her some day -- even if it's decades from now.

I will end this time of my life with these words -- a poem, a poem about death, but also the death of something that was once love.

I wrote the night before I was swept out to sea:

*Lonely in those last moments,
not knowing if any of me
knew even a fragment of you.
But the dream
was a good dream.*

Chapter 13

The name of the poetry magazine I had become the assistant editor of so many eons ago, before marriage and children, was named, “The Pulse.” (Ironic, since less than six months after I began to work there it stopped having a pulse.)

Nonetheless, one of the unforgettable moments of my time working as assistant editor was when Maxwell and I went down to a café in Berkeley called “The Salamander.” Every Monday night local students and professors of UC Berkeley, along with any other local citizen willing to buy a cup of coffee as the price of admission, could stand up on stage and read their original poetry to the audience (usually consisting of other poets who were only there to read, not listen). Each poet had about three to five minutes to put their best foot forward, or more often than not, stick their metaphorical foot in the allegorical mouth.

Sadly, an hour in to the readings, everything had turned topsy turvey. What some of these poets were hoping would be dark and serious drama made us feel like laughing. Other poets who attempted a blunt stab at sharp wit made me want to cover my eyes and hide. I was madly uncomfortable until one very odd looking poet stood up on stage and dramatically cleared his throat.

He seemed to be about sixty five or seventy years old. Well over six feet tall. Well over two hundred fifty pounds. He had long white hair and a white Santa Claus beard. He also donned a bejeweled King’s crown. He wore a long red velvet robe with a white fur collar. Gold sandals adorned his feet. Whatever was about to happen was probably going to be the worst and most absurd part of the evening. The crescendo to an already vaudeville-like series of performances. I tried to prepare myself so as not to make inappropriate noises – groans, giggles.

He held a crumpled piece of paper up to his eyes and spoke loudly into the microphone with a supremely confident deeply mellifluous voice. He rolled his “R’s” in an almost British affectation. The words flowed out in a staccato rhythm. The piece had to be spoken aloud to get the true effect:

“The bees swimming up into the open sky-i-verse,
filled with all my black holes floating towards where stars sing,
ringing out above telescopic dreams,
buzzing fuzzy wings flee from the people buzzards left on land,
left to pick through the bones of time
kicking and picking at the heart of their beat-less culture.
I, on the other wing,
stream soundlessly into the singular mind of the fris-bees swimming across liquid air
on this rainy day as clouds laugh their tears down
in an attempt to drown us back into ocean.
Better off as amphibians, from whence we were originally born --
like origami or custom-made futons, or homemade ice cream with too much vanilla extract, or
peace sign buttons stuck onto the coats of starving soldiers
-- we were mutated without reason into the unholy forms we see before us. . . .”

He waved his arms around the room to point out all the unholy forms he gazed at, and through.

Then it got a bit more difficult to follow as he spewed out his ending barrage like the finale of a fireworks display:

His voice boomed:

“FE FI FO FOM, where do you think we all come?
And why?
To end?
God sends ends
like puddles of love evaporating
and too soon led astray by fear,
frightened of the milk soup of the primordial insanity
we’ve each allowed our souls to be backed up into.
Yet there we lie. And we lie still. And we lie even to ourselves!
. . . . And the bees
do
not
give
a shit!”

He stopped suddenly after yelling out his final line with ferocious passion. Then he folded his paper from which his eyes had been deadly focused, took a slight slow bow, and left the stage.

No one in the audience knew what to do or how to react. One person clapped. A few others decided the night was over and began folding their precious poems into their precious shirt pockets.

I very much liked what I’d heard. It was different, it was unconscious rather than self conscious. I was looking at Maxwell, as if to say, “Him? Should we dare consider publishing that?”

But before I had a chance to open my mouth the towering figure in ~~his~~ His (he was a King now in my eyes) red velvet coat and King’s crown strode past our table.

I stood up and said to ~~him~~ Him, “Excuse me sir, I mean, *Sire*, thank you. . . that piece was really very interesting.”

He bowed to me without a saying a word, and then I saw. . . the paper that he had been reading from . . . was blank!

I later found out he was a local schizophrenic who lived on the street and begged for spare change on Telegraph Avenue each afternoon, all the while ranting his free form poetry for hours to entertain the gathered crowds.

I thought to myself, *here is the lesson* – here is *the lesson* I have never before fully learned:

Life is random and directionless, like his poem, not pre-determined, not written out beforehand.

There is no destiny we are tracking, there is no “plan” that God sets down before we arrive.

There is no mark where we are supposed to stand on the stage.

There is no logic or rationale for all this. . . .

I use this tale as a preface. . .

one more bad excuse, I suppose –

for why I did what I did

Chapter 14

I am a coward. It's no one's fault but mine.

Golden air looms above these human skies – where spirits ascend through a dome of pure light as all things coalesce into some form of grace. But I breathe only dark fumes now. Wings slashed. Self-inflicted.

I secretly met with Jeanie and we made love.

I knew it was completely wrong before I even stepped foot into her hotel room, but the lure was too much to resist. Everything got very surreal, confusing. In the end, I doomed myself.

Why would I do that? Let's face it, my life became a failure not because of my wife, or her complaining, or the circumstances Jeanie put me in. My life became a failure because my mind could not rise to the heights available to it. . . . I failed life. Life failed me. I failed to will myself into a better world.

I realized something about my mind -- I am mostly lazy. I previously saw myself as an optimist. I was wrong. When inspecting my mind's thinking second by second, I see that actually I have been in a life long bad mood, interspersed with occasional bouts of euphoria, followed by a bout of amnesia regarding the euphoria, which puts me back in a bad mood again. Optimism is simply a passing phase while the pendulum swings back into the bad mood phase.

Even if REALITY is a wilderness of pure wonder, a world of water beneath our senses, that is filled with forms of magic and spirit-life unknown to the typical post-Eden mortal.

A few truly realized beings who have touched these shores have tried to tell us about this wonder with carefully chosen words, or deeds, or legacies

-- some of which have formed the helix of major religions – all of which we vastly misinterpret and spin into some black monolith of our own selfish child-like beliefs.

We then feed this velvety smooth hypnotically deadening pabulum to our newly born, and even try to extend our ideas into the realm of the dead

--and brand their souls with it all – for what ultimate reasons I am not sure.

We constantly try to turn the infinite into the infantile.

All the while, in silence, perhaps with a sense of humor about it all, the *It* exists in some parallel reality, shining, welcoming our awareness (if it ever shows).

Beckoning us to come.

Few of us make the journey across the vast gully to the other side.

Cowards, in particular, are not invited.

Here's how I was sucked into giving up my life as I knew it – a story of Icarus descending:

Jeanie had called me to say she was in trouble and needed some personal advice. She said her husband of just one year, soon to be ex-husband, was going after her New Hampshire house, which her mom had given to her twenty years ago, and was going after her meager bank account as well.

Ex-husband Alex was a handsome fun loving ski instructor with a wide grin and wide shoulders. He loved to party, loved to skate on the surface. He wasn't above going behind people's backs. And he had a lawyer for father. They would meet at the local bar every Friday night with a bunch of mutual friends. That's where Jeanie and he met.

Jeanie and young Alex really had a great time for a few months. She loved feeling protected in his strong arms, like in the movies of old, and carried from one wild experience to the next, marriage being one of those impulsive adventures, until slowly she saw his drinking time increase. In fact, pretty much every night after they got home from work he wanted to meet his friends at a local bar. He always invited her, but went with or without her.

Fights about this nocturnal pattern increased until the fights went from verbal abuse to physical abuse. Too him it was about *freedom!* And he was willing to fight for that freedom, sacrifice anything for that freedom, without ever defining freedom beyond what most people would have called oppressive control, domination.

In her mind it was about responsibility, and letting her into his world, which she now saw closing in on itself and spinning farther away from her day by day.

The abusiveness that the drinking brought on happened once too often. She wanted out of her new marriage He claimed she ruined his career as a ski instructor by demanding too much of his time, especially the time he spent working on remodeling the house. Not exactly untrue, he had worked on the remodel in his spare time, and he made sure to finish it long before the divorce proceedings. It was a story even more compelling when you have a father as an attorney.

I was on a rare business trip to meet a famous classical guitarist in San Diego who had a guitar he claimed was too valuable and delicate to ship, and a schedule too grueling to allow for wasted time. He flew me to San Diego and supplied me with another technician's repair shop for a day. He only wanted me to touch this guitar.

Jeanie was there on a business trip of her own. She was becoming quite the entrepreneur, setting up small locally owned restaurants up and down the east coast, designing the décor, the menus, creating the atmosphere, the buzz, the anticipation. She rarely travelled, doing most of her work with computer models and emails. But this was her biggest gig yet, setting up a very high end café in La Jolla.

The plan was for me to pick her up for dinner at her hotel. Sarah knew we were meeting. She was equally concerned that Jeanie was about to get ripped off by this phony ski bum, and I was anointed to find out what was going on and if there was any way we could help. Maybe even invite her to Maui to stay with us a while.

When I knocked on her suite she answered the door in a yellow silk kimono robe with nothing on underneath. She claimed to have just gotten out of the shower but she had timed it for my arrival and was waiting for me.

If I had been asked to plan an affair with her I would have refused to. If I had had time to think I would have seen it coming. But I was blind sided. I didn't see anything except Jeanie three quarters naked in a yellow silk kimono with a sad look on her face, but underneath it all, in her eyes, that certain wrinkled smile presented itself. She grabbed me. It was too late. I felt that warmth of hers right through my clothes, curling up my spine all the way from my feet, and when her kimono fell to the ground and she put my hands on her and spread herself on the bed I was lost. I just allowed something powerful from the past to carry me, to float me across time and senses. We made love quickly, like animals with no time to spare, and then a short time later, after talking about her ski bum, we made love again, for a longer time.

I wouldn't stay the night. Goodbye came, webbed in a haunted exhausted bubble that had smashed reality to bits. She had gotten revenge on her ski bum with someone safe, someone she had once loved in a deeper way than anything she had ever felt for him. She was rejuvenated, satisfied. She assumed it would be a secret we'd never tell.

Chapter 15

I told Sarah in the car, on the way to a movie. I thought we would have some quiet time to talk it out without the kids around.

I thought that this would be another, “It was only Jeanie” thing. And don’t do it again. And, “My God, is her life that fucked up?” And, “What was she thinking, Jay? I need to talk to that crazy friend of mine. We’re not bohemians anymore.”

What do I know? I live in a world of deep fantasy. Dark denial, like a diseased coal miner hacking away on a cigarette, watching TV on a Saturday afternoon while flicking his ashes into an ashtray his wife made him before she died of emphysema.

The first thing out of Sarah’s mouth, calmly spoken, resigned to the obviousness of her decision, with unwavering tone and unfailing resolve was, “I want a divorce. That’s the last straw. I’m done. It’s over.”

Again, because I was not only a coward and a failure, but clueless, I had no idea what the straw before the last straw was. I thought I had a little flex with that last straw, and little bend, a little bit of a grace period between my, “I’m really really sorry, it meant nothing to me,” and her “I want a divorce.” But I was wrong. There was no pause. No need to even let me finish the sentence. “I’m really s. . . “ could have been going a lot of places emotionally. I could have been about to say, “I’m really scared,” which might have set the tone for an empathetic response. Or, “I’m really such a shit,” or, “I’m really stupid, REALLY stupid,” which might have gone a bit further in the right direction than “sorry” would have, but no matter, she divorced me before the end of the “s.”

Let me count the ways I tried to rectify things after that. . . .fifteen (years we were married) exponentialized to $10^{100\text{th}}$ power. That was on the first dayBut over days, weeks, months, I couldn’t beg or apologize or blame my way out of it. She wouldn’t speak to Jeanie. Didn’t want to hear what she or I had to say about anything. It was the termination of the friendship and the marriage. She made that clear to me without a moment or an hour of relief. There was no room for forgiveness.

I tried to enlist the “think about the kids” logic. “You should have thought of that at the hotel,” was her answer. I later tried the old time worn “divorce will wipe us out financially” logic. But she said, “It will wipe you out. I have a job, remember?” Sarah was done with me.

My family was drowning, I was the Captain. I let them down far out at sea. There was no God to save us. No spiritual master to transform us. No one to care. The era of Saint Sarah had ended.

Chapter 16

Surprisingly, the children wanted to see me frequently. This did not make Sarah unhappy since it left her more time to write her permanently unfinished book, and to work extra hours. Financially she was making and saving more than ever.

Jeanie called her when she heard what happened to try to patch things up between them, and between us. She begged Sarah to forgive me. Told her it was all her fault. But Sarah said, “You’ve always loved him more than I have. *Go to him*. It would make the most sense, don’t you see?”

But of course, it made no sense. Jeanie and I were no more compatible now than we were fifteen years ago. We were “mostly platonic friends,” and could never be more.

Sarah had simply gone back to the place she was the most comfortable. Not showing herself to me. Not opening her private thoughts to anyone. Hiding from the world and its invasiveness. She was content with the inevitable death of the illusions we’d created about love and family.

In fact, it was almost like she had been waiting for me to come to the realization she had known all along about love, and about us. She had warned me, and never waivered.

My children seemed to feel my heartbreak more than anyone. They responded to my sadness with hugs and extra attention. It was very beautiful for me to see how they cared for me. Didn’t blame me. How they in fact shared my suffering. They made it clear they thought I had been a great dad. Whether this was said only out of sympathy I wasn’t sure, but I wasn’t going to question the very kind of human warmth I so desperately needed. I loved them so much. How could I have done this to them?

Despite their frequent show of love I was going down. Off the deep end. End of life as I knew it.

My life had been aimless before this. A total meaningless mess. A message-less meandering music-less mess. I was a series of outlines. I sought nothing beyond my aimlessness.

I had once wanted to travel the world -- once, long ago. Not just see the world through books and movies. Not just by telling my children about what I had read, or seen on documentaries. I wanted to GO. Transform my life by experiencing new cultures; immerse myself in a new life.

I wanted to see
New Zealand
 Australia
 India
 Egypt
 Paris!

I ended up going nowhere. I stayed “inside the dishes, and in the glasses,” as Rilke once wrote.

I still never found home. Not even by having stayed.

I had nothing to give as a writer. I had less to give as a father, though they didn't know that. I was the only one they'd ever had so there was n one to compare me to. But in the end I considered myself a failure to them.

I could not get out of bed some days unless the children were coming to see me. I still loved Sarah. As much as I could understand the concept of love, I loved her. A ached for her. I would have begged her, prayed for her, to her, if I thought for one second that would have had any impact at all. The problem was, I thought love was so simple. Follow the feeling! Now here was the feeling: blackness. Another feeling: rage – at myself. And another: despair, as I cried myself to sleep on more than one occasion. I couldn't let go of her, even though she was long gone. There was no way to win her back.

I stopped taking on new work. In fact, I wasn't doing any work. I had enough money (Sarah had given me half of everything we had saved together) to sit home and destroy myself. I was living on Pluto most hours, icy and distant, taking legal drugs to short-circuit my constant trips into the orbit-less darkness of inner space.

I was on my own, just like before we met. But this time it was far worse than youthful loneliness and an unfulfilled hunger to experience life. This time there was an enemy – my mind.

The word “petunia” came to me often when the drugs kicked in – representing the ever-clear preposterousness and absurdity of words – the word “petunia” never failed to make me laugh cynically for reasons that have no thread to anything.

Words simply provided poison for the mind to swallow. Not homeopathic in any sense. Just venomous mind saliva, exploding in the mind-stomach like fat black pellets of arsenic. I wanted to shut off the drivel. I wanted to shut off the shouting. The crying. The whole synaptual mess.

I had finally gotten what I deserved.

Chapter 17

Where are the heroics? How does one learn to be a hero?

I must have slept through that part of the lesson at life school, just like I did as a boy when my dad plopped me in front of an old war film called, "Sink the Bismarck." It was on TV as a Sunday night movie, a classic re-run, long and forgettable to a nine year old who had no sense of, or interest in, history or politics or war. All I wanted to do was play guitar and travel the world with my band of nine year old rockers. Of course, first I needed a guitar, then I needed to learn guitar, then I needed a band.

But that was the kind of dream that lulled me to sleep while I watched the dreary opening scenes of "Sink the Bismarck." I never got far enough into the movie to see any of the heroic parts. I chose youthful narcissism before the second commercial – it was the only stimulant back then, the only aphrodisiac available for a nine year old whose father sat through a movie with him once a year as a way to bond. He was reading the Sunday paper the entire time, I might add.

But you see, if heroism isn't important at the age of nine, that may very well foreshadow a future grown man still not giving a damn about heroism.

I say this because the only way I could have avoided Jeanie's intensely sexual overture that fated evening was if I had a true understanding of heroism; an almost spiritual view of life as a heroic journey. If the image of being a hero had been more important to me -- more powerful than the urge to climb upon her, devour her, excusing it as a brief rip in the fabric of time -- then I may not have done it. . . and I might still be with Saint Sarah and the Three Angels today.

Here is the truth: Being a hero is a hard task for anyone. But if you don't live your life as a hero, then you are a coward. There isn't anything in between. There's no internal compromise.

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Chapter 18

With all hope gone, it dawned on me one day, like an angel floating down from the smoke filled bombed out chaos in the sky, that if all is lost, I had no reason to hold on to anything any more. It was all okay. Every feeling. It was all a part of a thread I was connected to. I didn't have to find something to hold on to. I wouldn't crash. I wouldn't die.

I could let go

Totally surrender.

I could let go

Of her.

Of Jeanie.

Of work.

Of money.

Of caution.

Of my sins and senselessness.

Of the survival of my own ego.

So I tried that on for a while.

I simply didn't care any more about any of my past -- except for the children. They were my one anchor to living now. The only reason I believed in anything. Otherwise, there was no reason I had to believe in anything.

Without judgment. All the things I could do with the rest of my life were open before me.

Alone – but brand new.

Re-born.

Who was I now?

I tried to make an outline; to get to the core of it.

But my dreams were the only thing that made sense now.

Chapter 19

Dream 1:

I was climbing the hills above New Zealand oceans.
I walked through lush forests with green perfumed angels
in the air, with the knowledge of a thousand great crossings.

I travelled to India and slept with old beggars.
I learned to sit quietly in the shadow of silence.
Thought-dream by thought-dream and hour by hour
'til all nightmares drowned in the mind's misty ocean.

I flew off to Egypt and gazed up at Pyramids
dizzy and dreaming and swimming in lost time.
I saw endless deserts that were mirrored inside me.
Drinking in dust 'til the sky broke me open.

I met two girls from Paris while running from rain dreams.
We drank in the cafés and spoke with our senses
'til sunrise, then wandered their magical city:
The Muse de Orsay – Monet coloring rain drops.
Rodan and Camille Claudel entwined together.
Van Gogh screamed through stars; Renoir painted ladies.

In Giverny we kissed amidst water lilies.
They kissed me goodbye at the train as I boarded.
I left them there staring through a rainy train window.

I tried to find home somewhere on the horizon.
I dreamed that I hadn't left home far behind me.

Back in New York I was known now by no one.
No enemy, no friend, and I was the stranger.
Penniless by dawn, cops picked me up lying
in some vacant alley on a street on the East side.
In jail I met people who had lived twenty lifetimes.

I wandered from small town to town like a rain cloud.
I hid above me a wild sun still haunted.

I called my three children and laughed and cried with them.
We spoke in 3-D, in true love's full dimensions.
They told me to come home as soon as I ran out
of hunger and thirst for the church I was seeking.

A church where compassion and all doubt is honored.
A church that allows faith to live without known Gods.

I lived with the homeless, the hungry, and hated.
I rocked in my arms old men that were crying,
Wandering souls that were dream lost and dying.

Death soon appeared as a bird slowing gliding
across the green valleys and through oceans of starlight.
There was no need for more, and nothing here mattered.

I wandered on further until I was time-worn,
until I was carved hard into my true spirit.

I went home to my children, sharing all visions.
With eyes that reflected the love I saved for them.
They saw in my eyes a life finally burning.

I gave them permission to leave their small home world;
something their mother could never have granted --
to find their true voice and purpose and passion,
without mother or father or spouse or friends shaping.

You can never stop searching, until you transform life --
before it transforms you into a shallow grave living.

And I'll be here too on this sea of illusion
with chaos and rivers of gifts all cascading

But remember not to turn your back on the ocean,

'cause even though beauty pours into each heartbeat

it's a hard
it's a hard
it's a hard, it's a hard --
it's a hard rain's gonna fall.

Chapter 20

Dream 2:

I was looking at your face. I was looking at your eyes fixed on mine. I could feel your legs tighten around me as your hands touched my chest. When you closed your eyes crystal-like bubbles sprang out from every part of you -- drifted out from even your finger tips, rose slowly into the air and disappeared.

We were sitting on the floor of your attic room. You were showing me photographs from your childhood in Connecticut. Connect. . .I. . .cut.

You were taking me by the hand. You introduced me to your parents. They had been living in the same house all these years. You thought you had lost them But they had never left. I tried hard to please them. They could see I cared for you; and I was kind to them. But they didn't like my ways.

I went into the bedroom where you had grown up. I was glad for the privacy. I felt darkened and alone. You followed me in, sat beside me and put your hand on my face. "I would come in here to get away too. Just like this. They made me feel the same as you. *That's why I am.*"

Tennessee Valley arose from the dream. Back in Marin County

in a warm rain. We were there together again.

A green hilly trail, a bird flying low, almost landing on your cloud white shoulder.

The gully was filled with interconnecting streams and blooming calla lilies, each bell with a delicate yellow tongue humming. I leaned forward to hear them. . .singing.

The fog suddenly wheeled in from the sea, then it saw something sad that I didn't see, and it retreated.

We were two small birds sitting together looking across the gully wondering if we should try to fly across to the other side. As I gauged the distance I thought - we won't make it. We're not really birds, and it's too far. . . . But we should try anyway.

When I looked over to see what you were thinking you were gone. I looked around for you, but I didn't really need to. I know where you were. You were back in your room in your parents' house in Connecticut.

I was driving a car. But I was pressing on the brake while I pressed on the gas. I drove slowly, across cities, across oceans, vistas, wanting to find you, wanting you to rescue me, but knowing there could be no rescues. Rescues never work in the end. You could find me if you wanted to.

I went back to the hill and sat by the gully. It began to rain. I was trying to decide if I should fly across to the other side alone. The only place to start over. Back there, back home where I was born, away from everything I had ever tried to love.

The End

Gary Marks