

(T)here

Gary Marks

© 2009 by Gary Marks / Marksland Entertainment LLC

All rights reserved.

No part of this book may be reproduced
without written permission from the author.

1

I found the spot I was seeing in my mind all summer. I simply recreated the dream from there.

I remember her skin glowed in the full moonlight. We began to shiver so we covered ourselves in blankets. When we kissed a storm hit and the earth turned dark and lush. Time cancelled itself. Stars darted in and out of clouds. Things grew; rain fell. There was water everywhere; we were surrounded by it.

I couldn't speak. I just kept listening to her heartbeat. Waves of joy and sadness; connection-loss. Ocean swirling above us in the dream. I tried to come out of it but I couldn't lift the wave of energy off me.

Wild eyes looking at me and past me. Sea of stars in full view as the clouds vaporized. I whispered, "Are you okay?"

"Of course," she whispered back. "You knew I would be."

Her answer confused me, but I was still captive. Images melting; accelerating. I didn't think to respond.

She added, "You know other things too."

"What do you mean?"

"You know we don't make it," she said. "You know we aren't supposed to be together in the end, but you don't know why. But... you *know*."

A chill came over me. "Did you feel the same thing I felt when we first met?"

"Yes. I have a sense, like you do. I think it's not as strong as yours. But I can see what you know sometimes."

"I thought you were just... *normal!*" I stammered. "I didn't recognize anything like that in you!"

"That's because I'm part dolphin," she smiled. "Dolphins can dive beneath the radar. But they also love life, despite what they know about the future. That's the most amazing thing about them."

2

Kelsey knew what I knew – that I would know her long into the future, but not as my wife, and not intimately like we'd been this night. This was our time for that. This season. But then a new time would come.

On our drive home she said, "I know you love me, Jacob. That's the other thing I sense clearly. Or I never would have come to the beach with you."

When I was back home, just before sleep, this is what became clear to me:

The mind gathers up fragments of time, possessions, and concepts of death – and compiles them into an hour glass -- reality, until the hour glass runs out, and we wake up.

3

At some point in my early teens, before Kelsey, I discovered that I had this sense that others didn't. Some people would call it "psychic." But, really, I hate that word. I don't believe or trust anyone who calls themselves psychic. But occasionally, randomly, I would pick up on people's thoughts and feelings, or know that something would happen in the future, and then it would prove out.

It's like there is a *here*, where we all seem to exist together in time. We experience a present, a past, and a future headed towards "an end."

But there is another place I call *there*, where the present, past and future are fused, like when two lenses merge your vision at an optometrist's office. Once you've experienced it you realize that looking through two lenses is the only clear way to see. But that's a very difficult thing to do moment to moment.

When you live only here, it's like being deaf and blind in many ways. But when you are here and you try to live *there* all the time, you end up crazy, unable to function in either world.

When you learn to live in both worlds, you are what I call "(t)here." It's not a perfect place. But it's as perfect as our intervening mind allows it to be, until something even more timeless comes along.

4

I had a dream that I died. Most of the time people who dream they're dying wake up before they're dead. But in this dream I actually experienced being dead.

As in many near-death experiences reported by others, I saw the tunnel filled with light as the nerves in my eyes began to tense up and wither. I saw dead friends and family members as my brain drained all but the most powerful primal images from its memory banks. But when I actually *died* things went beyond "blank." There was an imageless floating sensation. But that floating sensation was being consciously recognized by some "ex-self" observing it.

Then I woke up here.

The wordless, imageless void filtered into my waking moments for a long time (t)hereafter.

5

You can learn lessons from memories. They either pop up out of nowhere and pass by like a breeze while you're not paying attention, or if you concentrate hard enough the memory will usually surrender the lesson it's trying to convey.

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

6

“Sensing” is far less powerful or useful than one might assume.

For instance, unless it’s an extraordinarily clear connection it’s not possible to pre-know the name of a card randomly picked from a deck; or know if it will rain tomorrow; or who will win a horse race; or an election. It’s also not possible to know someone’s thoughts unless it just suddenly happens.

That’s because focusing the “sensing” onto a subject makes you too aware of your desire for an answer. You become out of sync. Instead, the subject chooses itself, without you necessarily wanting any information about it. Just as a dream chooses the subject at the moment of its choosing.

When I remember sensing something I always wonder if it was my imagination. Or when things happen that I knew would happen I wonder if it could have been coincidence. Sometimes it is. But when it’s happening, I remember, “Oh yes, *this* is how clear it is when it happens.” It’s like music you hear in your head while you’re walking around through the day. Others don’t hear it. But it’s there. You could sing it aloud note for note if you wanted to. That’s far different than dreaming about singing a beautiful melody then waking from the dream.

Neither Kelsey nor I discussed our ability to sense things with anyone else. It wasn’t anything people, even

parents, would have been able to understand, or believe. You'd either be called crazy or considered a spooky freak. So we both learned, even before we knew each other, to simply let it be.

But now that it was out in the open between Kelsey and me, we would occasionally talk about it.

When she thought about us she would say, "Knowing we won't be together at some point is the sense. But at the same time it feels like this will never end. So maybe it's no different than normal couples in a way. They make plans, talk about getting married, having children together. But they know some day their time will run out. One way or another. The difference is I feel tears running down my face sometimes, and I don't know why I'm crying until I remember."

"Maybe since death separates everyone eventually that's all we're sensing."

"Yeah, maybe," she said. But we both knew too much -- there was no marriage, no children.

Sometimes we thought about eloping, getting married, and proving our sensing wrong. But we also knew that whenever we tried to do things like that in the past the sensing would only be wrong temporarily, because the main thing we sensed at first would still end up being right later.

"I wish it could help us ace a math test," I laughed. "Imagine being able to know the test answers known only by some senior genius nerd who just got accepted to M.I.T,

seeing the equations in our minds just as they are being written down!"

She smiled, "I never thought of that one. But I did think it would be great if I could tell my dad what lottery ticket to pick so we could win and become rich. Then he wouldn't have to work so much." She thought a bit longer about that idea then added, "Then we could buy a little sailboat and sail off together for a whole day like we did once when I was ten."

"My dad never took me sailing. Actually, I'm afraid of sailing," I admitted. "For some reason I'm afraid of drowning. I have tidal wave dreams."

"You do?" Kelsey's eyes widened. "I do too!"

We recalled sparse fragments of individual dreams to each other. The ending of the tidal wave dreams were the same for both of us. We both saw the wave falling above us, covering the sky, just before waking up.

* * *

We were wandering through the state park at the edge of town with no one else around, where no one else could hear us. We walked on for miles until we saw an old abandoned cabin off the path. We ran up to it and looked inside the cobweb covered windows. We couldn't quite see in. The air smelled a few degrees cooler and fresher in the

shade. The forest unfurled uphill swirling with the pastel colors of autumn.

I took the time to look at her, to really see her there, standing so straight, shoulders back in a relaxed way, like a confident soldier. Her sweater was too big on her and fell back at the neckline to expose a few freckles on her pale skin. Her face was cheerful, but she had dark gray eyes. Her light-colored hair, sometimes the color of sunlight – smelled like something I've never smelled before or since. Every time I came close to her hair, even just to touch it, I immediately wanted to kiss her.

She didn't notice me; I had caught her staring uphill where the sky was replaced with Martian red, gold, and dark orange leaves -- a mountainside meeting the first signs of winter with joyous surrender.

We merged into a tight little ball as we leaned against a tall tree. Leaves tumbled from the branches like spray from a wave, falling upon our hair as we kissed. We fit together perfectly. We didn't make the other feel alone, or like an outcast. We sensed who the other truly was.

7

I may have met my dad after he died, in real life.

My dad passed away at fifty-five from a heart attack. It made no sense really, since he exercised all the time and ate healthy food. He had lots of stress at work, but that wasn't a rare thing. I was seventeen. Kelsey and I had been together for about a year by then.

A few weeks after he died I had this very real dream. I was in a valley. Music was echoing in the air. The song playing was "Sherry" by the Four Seasons. It was an old song from the '60s, back when my dad was a teenager. Cream sherry was also his favorite drink. He would sip it before bed sometimes when we were on vacation while finishing up some work on his laptop.

I wandered over to where the music was coming from until I saw the band singing the song live. *The Four Seasons*. Frankie Valli was the lead singer. There were people standing in front of me watching. Other people sitting in the grass swaying to the song.

Then I spotted more people across the valley sitting in wooden bleachers. I was about to move closer to the band when a face in the crowd caught my eye. It looked just like my dad. I mean exactly like him. But that couldn't be.

I somehow drifted over to the bleachers, like you can do only in dreams, until I found myself making my way across a row of people. I sat in an empty space right next to

him. I stared at his face for a long time but he didn't notice me. He was watching the music. Suddenly I was sure it was him.

"Dad?"

He turned to look at me. "Hey, boy!" he said casually.

This stunned me. Only my dad called me that. It was him!

"But... I thought you were dead!" I stammered, the words were whispered in a frightened tone. It was hard for sounds to escape my mouth. I felt frozen.

"I am."

Suddenly I felt myself being pulled out of the dream, lifting up into consciousness, back into the world of the living, here, with clocks ticking and the feel of the blankets covering me, but still half-sleeping.

I didn't want to leave the dream, not yet. As I was being pulled away I asked him, "What's it like to be dead?"

Just as I awoke I heard his voice whispering clearly in my left ear, "It's great!"

It's great?

That's what he said!

I tried to find him again in future dreams. But I never did.

8

What's beyond *there*? Maybe there are other dimensions with entirely different laws of physics; different mathematical answers to solve problems. Or maybe there are black holes with five dimensions. Sometimes I sense that.

None of us know the answers to these things when we're here. But we don't know the answers when we're *there* either.

Conclusions, and dreams we have of the future, they are all usually the way we choose to see ourselves before the next thing happens in the opposite direction.

9

The summer before our senior year, Kelsey and I decided to spend a weekend away together. We told our parents we'd be going with friends. But I don't think they believed us for a minute.

We decided to drive out to the tip of Long Island to Montauk Point. Kelsey and I scraped up enough money to pay for a small cabin uphill from a quiet beach. The cabin had no heat and no hot water. It had a single faucet with a slow stream of what felt like recently melted ice running through it. And it had an outdoor shower connected to the same icy water.

In the daytime we took long walks on the beach amidst thousands of broken shells, driftwood, emerald seaweed, and tall thunderous waves crashing in long slow rhythms right before our eyes.

On our last day, just before sunset, I felt an odd brooding feeling. It made no sense. This had been one of the best days of my life. But the dark feeling persisted.

After dinner I told Kelsey I was going to take a walk and that I'd be back soon. She offered to come but I said I wanted some time alone.

She seemed concerned just before I left.

"I'm just in a weird mood," I said. "I don't know why. It's not about you, or us."

“I know that.”

Although she did know this wasn't about us, I can still remember the worried look on her face as I left to walk down to the water.

Usually the sea soothes me. But nothing could calm my nerves. I began to think something bad was going to happen to Kelsey. I didn't have a psychic sense of knowing it, but the feeling was very intense. She was up there in the cabin alone.

I turned around and ran back uphill as fast as I could.

She was inside packing up a few things for our morning departure.

“Hi,” I said out of breath.

“Hi back! Why were you running? And how come you were only gone for a few minutes?”

“I don't know. I just had a feeling that I should run back here, to kiss you.”

She walked towards me to comply but then I had another episode of darkness overcome me. “No, wait, not now. Something is wrong, but I don't know what it is.”

I sat on the small bed feeling angry with myself. “I'm sorry,” I said.

“Should would go home tonight?” she asked.

“Yes. I think we should.”

We packed our knapsacks and put the remaining food in a bag for the four-hour trip back.

Just as I was about to zip up my pack my phone rang. It had fallen all the way to the bottom of my pack, lost under a web of clothes. My fingers accidentally got blocked by my toothbrush during the third ring. Finally I fished it out and saw the number on the caller ID. "Hi Mom... what's up?"

"Jacob!" she was breathing heavily, crying.

"What's the matter, Mom?"

"Jacob! It's your father. He's had a heart attack. We're not sure what's going on, but he's on his way to the hospital. You need to come..." her words were broken, "home."

Having already packed before the phone rang, we raced to the car and headed back.

As I was driving Kelsey said, "No wonder you were in a dark mood."

I hadn't connected the dots. But it was clear now. The pieces fit together in my mind.

During the drive I tried to tune into him. I loved my father, he was a great dad, a great friend. He loved me and accepted my oddness. He loved my mom, and because he so clearly did, he taught me how to love in subtle ways. He was only fifty-five years old. He was still playing basketball with his thirty-year-old friends every weekend.

I tried to sense how serious things were, searching the night air as I drove. Kelsey was quiet, hands folded in prayer. I became hypnotized for a while by the white lines of

the road flickering by. I was trying to sense that my father would be all right. Searching for that “knowing.” But every time I focused my mind there something became blocked.

My dad died a few days later.

He was lost to me.

Until he came to me in the dream, when I saw him in the valley with the music playing, and people dancing.

That was another thing I recall about the dream – so many people were dancing.

10

Kelsey and I were both accepted to the same college. We had so many plans. We were months away from leaving home, together.

Kelsey's dad rented a boat and took her sailing to say goodbye to her. He knew everything was going to change. He wanted a final time with her, maybe to talk to her about the future, and how proud he was of who she had become.

She was happy the night before. She told me she wasn't often happy without me around. Some piece always felt missing. We couldn't see enough of each other, or kiss too often, or talk too much. None of the rest of the world mattered, or was even taken into consideration.

But this day she was happy because her father offered to take her sailing, and all the warm memories of her childhood came back to her. She said she would tell me all about it when we saw each other the following night.

Kelsey didn't sense a thing, even seconds before being thrown under the ocean. The rogue wave that slammed into the boat struck them from behind and knocked them unconscious. They had no time to fear or sense anything.

11

After I heard the news I didn't want to be here anymore. I felt like I was the one who had drowned. In fact, one day I literally felt myself drowning, unable to breathe. Another tidal wave dream. But something, some energy beyond my will always pulled me out at the last moment.

At the end of one of those dreams, right at the last moment when I knew I had to take a breath – that was the first time we reconnected.

I began to sense she was around. It wasn't frightening because I thought it was just the end of the dream. I thought some healthy part of my mind wanted to save my life, for reasons unknown.

I remember that evening I had eaten a late dinner. My mom had left a plate of food in the fridge for me. Eating food was a painful chore. I saw no reason to feed myself. But I knew that's what people did to survive another day, so I went through the motions, lifting the fork to my mouth, chewing, lifting the fork again. It was the same chore I performed the day before and the day before that.

I went back to my room after dinner and locked the door, as I always did. My mom and I were both living like strangers. She couldn't express her grief about my dad. And I couldn't express my grief about Kelsey. We couldn't bring ourselves to burden each other with still more grief from the other. So we stopped talking about anything more than what errands she was going to do that day, and what she expected

of me. No discussions about my future ever took place. I didn't go to Boston University that fall. She knew she couldn't force me to go out of the house, or eat, or live. She could only pray I'd find my way, and cook our food, and offer me as much love as she could the few times I would accept it.

As I lay there drowning in my dream I heard Kelsey's voice in my ear, very much like the time a few years back when I heard my father's voice in my ear.

I gasped air into my lungs. I didn't even hear what she was saying. I only heard that it was clearly her voice and not my thoughts. I decided I was insane. But then she began to speak again, this time more clearly.

"Take these words with you and imprint them forever into your mind, Jacob:

"We will always be. Stay in the time you've been given, until you can feel why you're here. You have that strength in you. Don't give it up because of me. Live because of me. The only path to find your way back to where I am is by living."

I stood up in one quick motion. I began hyperventilating. I was trying to decide whether or not sanity had completely left me – as when someone in the dark fears they're suddenly blind and tries to see something in the light-void blackness, and they can't. Just like that, I immediately came to the conclusion that I had no sanity left.

But then Kelsey's voice came to me again. Not really this time. I was simply remembering it, and focusing on what she had said. The words repeated themselves to me,

word for word, this time not in her own voice but as a kind of voice-image. I heard her clearly now. I understood what she was trying to tell me.

But she would have to come back again. I wasn't quite ready.

12

A voice urges me to live. Another doubts the voice's existence.

I was worried I was making all this up as an excuse to stop grieving. But I also sensed there was more. The words were hers.

Slowly I came out of hiding to look around. Something had shifted in me. The sun was still shining out there. The day turned to night, then day again. At least in these elemental ways, nothing had changed about the world since my hibernation.

The following September I left my home forever. Boston University assumed I had taken a "gap year" to work or to travel around the world. It felt like I had done a bit of both, but without leaving my room.

I would be a nineteen-year-old freshman, but certainly with no more self-security than an eighteen-year-old freshman. I had been in a time warp.

Kelsey's words were still with me. In fact, she was the only reason I was attending. I had a lofty goal at the time -- to become moderately happy somehow so I could survive life for no particular reason and be fine with that.

But while I attended college I also promised my mom I'd find a psychologist. I could understand her concern. I figured I had at least a fifty percent chance of being declared insane, "sensing" things, and hearing voices from the dead.

At my university, Dr. Steven Riker was not only a brilliant professor of psychology, he was also a practicing psychologist. He could not work with *his* students, but he did work with students that weren't in his classes. So while I didn't register for his class, I decided to sit in on at least his first class of the semester, in a lecture hall with fifty other students, to see what I thought of him and hear what he had to say.

I sat way in the back so I wouldn't be noticed. Dr. Riker walked in and took his coat off without looking at anyone. He was tall and slender, with straight brown hair that was a little too long, falling almost to his shoulders. He was wearing jeans and a blue shirt with a red tie. When he finally did make eye contact with us everyone in the class became silent.

"Good morning, students, welcome to your mind, and everyone else's." A few kids laughed, some murmured in the back of the room. I was hoping the ones in the back wouldn't call attention to me.

"Please read the outline I have put on your desks. You can also download it from my website. It won't mean much to you now but keep it with you. Hopefully by the end of the semester this outline will have changed your life. You all came here to change your life, I presume? If not, you do have one week to transfer into another class. Perhaps PE might be more interesting. If not the mind, perhaps the body?"

Soul Logic

The Road to Peace, Wisdom, Happiness, and God (if you want one)

1. *How to talk back to yourself. Because it's not you.*
2. *Understanding the long-term consequences of thinking:*
 - a. *Creating goals, happy times, and other illusions.*
 - b. *Searching for "the one." -- The Assassin Story.*
3. *The Soul Connection*

13

I recorded his lecture on my phone. I still have it to this day:

“So I have a series of questions for you. Do all living beings have some form of conscious awareness, or is that reserved only for those special magical beings called humans?

“Are any humans truly conscious? Do we even know what it means to be conscious? On the other hand, could our consciousness be inferior to, let’s say, the consciousness of a rock?

“Why do we assign such a high value to consciousness? What’s so hot about it compared to non-consciousness, if there is any?

“These words – soul, awareness, consciousness, spirit – anyone studying and practicing the art of psychology has to be very careful about how you use them.

“According to one of our deepest cultural myths, Adam and Eve were blissfully unaware – an interesting oxymoron for those intellectuals in the room. Eden was a place of contentment in the present moment, with no awareness that there was anything else but that moment, or that there was anything that could ever go wrong, anywhere.... until something went wrong. That contentment, the lack of duality, was apparently God’s gift to the original world. The

gift was found everywhere, in everything, humans included way back then.”

“But the tree of knowledge was also put there by God, as the story goes. Suddenly they were given a choice to *know*. To become aware. But in doing so they suddenly became aware of a then and a now, both beauty and ugliness, good and evil. Humans soon found things to fear, snakes to blame, hate as well as love, shame, guilt, depression, and self-made madness -- as opposed to just simply being connected to *all time* with no further definition needed. So back to my point – what’s so hot about consciousness?

“Most animals are apparently not aware of this kind of knowledge. They react, they remember certain important things, they feel fear and protect. They feel love and desire. But they don’t judge these things as good or bad. Pain is pain. Avoid it. Food is food. Eat it. Love is love. Make it!

“Maybe the animals are the ones on the right path and we’re still searching for the way back to where they are. Maybe their form of awareness and love and connection is far more enlightened than ours.”

He paused, waiting for a bit of nervous laughter to die down.

“But back to our ancient story. Here is where Eden really becomes interesting: Cain killed Abel because Cain felt that God valued Abel more than Cain. God chose a favorite. And Cain was the loser.

“This was Cain’s crude evaluation of God’s thinking. This is critical to *your* life to understand this -- self-

evaluation, self-assessment, would never occur to an animal. This was a new human construct. Cain had the capacity to self-reflect, to evaluate the thoughts and desires he was creating in his own mind. But it wasn't a practiced art form. And still isn't. He was just following *some crazy voice he was hearing inside his head*. Sound familiar?"

I knew he wasn't talking about me hearing Kelsey's voice, or sensing things. I knew he was talking about the broader issues of self-assessment. But when he said with such emphasis - *some crazy voice he was hearing inside his head* - I got shivers. I became really scared I was insane. He continued speaking, but the uneasy feeling stayed with me:

"Cain, by listening to his random initial thoughts and desires and passions became *disconnected*, not more connected. He used his own misguided initial conclusions to catapult himself far away from what some might call his 'soul.' In other words, his thoughts became his religion!

"The 'Cain gene' is in each of us. Cain was listening to his own small voice chattering away minute by minute. He built his sense of reason into a personal church, a church which gave him the right to hate, and to mistrust, and to literally kill his brother. All the while this voice is telling him - 'I'm right.'"

I could relate. My depression over Kelsey's death and my father's death had to do with the very clear thought I had, and still have, that I won't feel okay or happy ever again. But believing *that* thought made me feel more depressed, and therefore fulfilled my own prophecy.

“Cain was then left to wander in the land of Nod, in permanent disconnectedness, never to return to his true home.

“We have all since followed in his footsteps.”

It was a bizarre way to end the class. So of course I had to come back to the following one. I still wasn't sure where all this was leading.

14

During our next class Dr. Riker started teaching us how to meditate. He felt this was the only way for us to truly understand how the mind operates, and he was willing to be our weekly guide. He warned us that we wouldn't be able to concentrate for more than a few seconds on anything, even nothingness. I tried meditating during the class, and for the rest of the week, since it was the only homework Riker assigned. After that week I thought I must be the worst meditator in the entire class. Until I found out, after attending the third class, that, of course, everyone thought *they* must be the worst meditator.

"So let's talk about your meditation practice, which I assume you found to be quite painful and completely useless.

"Let's also assume, because most of you are teenagers, that you are, for many legitimate reasons, pissed off, insecure, depressed, sex-starved. All of the above. So, how do you get from there to *wisdom*? I am talking about the bridge. Where's the bridge?

"Here you are, being forced to do absolutely nothing for fifteen minutes a night, while harboring an abject fear of how bad the final is going to be -- isn't that what you really want to know?

"Here is your answer: Don't listen to Cain! If there's one thing you probably all found out during your meditation it's that he never shuts up. Even when you're

trying to be quiet. He's always going to be chattering away, trying to kill you. He's deadly.

"Fortunately, there's a deeper voice. It's the one who knows that Cain is trouble!

"Some call that deeper voice 'The Witness,' or 'The Observer.' Some call it 'the soul.' Call it whatever you want. But it's beyond debate that, psychologically, it exists, and it possesses a deeper intuitive awareness than the voice we listen to in our heads second by second, every waking hour.

"The next question that needs answering in order to climb Jacob's Ladder is: What exactly does this deeper voice have to say to you?"

I noted his reference to my name – Jacob. I decided to research more about Jacob's Ladder. I did, but it was years later!

"Each of us possess both a Cain and the voice of the soul to counteract him. It's hard to find that deeper voice, that knowing, that instinct for right choices. But one thing is clear – the moment to moment chatter in your head that you think is 'you' will almost always lead you astray."

Someone in the class shouted out, "Yes, but what about Abel? Was Abel self-aware?"

"Good question, sir. The names of Cain and Abel in English are coincidentally very clever. Abel was 'able' to hear his own soul's voice. His brief life was filled with peace and connection. Cain needed a crutch, a 'cane,' to teach him about that connection. But he never found it.

“The only cane that Cain was left with in the end was the one that led him to the land of unconsciousness – the land of Nod – where he was doomed to limp across the earth for all time, in a world without meaning.

“Our task – as I see it – is to transcend our relationship with Cane, that very unholy father, and find our way back to Eden through ourselves, as we wander through the land of here and now.”

15

I tried to meditate every day. But I couldn't stop my moment to moment voice. It was screaming at me. It was screaming what I strongly felt to be true: Kelsey's love for me, and mine for her, was probably not repeatable. Could there ever be another "one?" I remembered looking at Kelsey's face every time we were together and immediately wanting to kiss her. There was no doubt, no hesitation about "us." Could that ever occur that strongly with someone else? I doubted it.

Then I realized something far more disturbing. I had been stubbornly waiting for Kelsey to come back from the dead. At least by hearing her voice again.

16

The time came for me to have my first private session with Dr. Riker.

I walked into his private office for the first time and looked around as he was typing something on his laptop. There were quotes on his wall. He told me later that he wasn't the author of any of them.

One said: "You may not know the subtle progress you are making. Therefore do not stop."

He turned towards me and greeted me by my first name. Then he said, "If you have a cell phone please turn it off."

"But I usually record everything you say," I responded.

"So I'm like a rock star," he smiled.

"Not quite. But I think you're worthy of being recorded!"

"We are a country of two."

I shuffled over to a couch that looked like it was waiting for me to sit on.

"Okay, you can keep your phone on, but the ringer off," he said. Then he brought over a few two-by-five cards and laid them face down on the oak table between us.

“Each one of these cards has a part of the original outline you saw the first day you came to class. You did audit the class, am I right? You were the silent one way in the back?”

“Yes.”

“I’m assuming you never registered for the class? You received no grade from me.”

“Correct.”

“Please also know that if you’re not comfortable you can stop at any time. I will understand. Okay?”

“Yes.”

“All right. I want you to know I’m committed to your mental well-being. I’m also here to do the best I can to help you integrate what you’ve learned in class. You saved yourself a lot of time! Have you been practicing meditating?”

“Every day. But I’m terrible at it.”

He pointed to the exact words I saw when I came in the office: “You may not know the subtle progress you are making. Therefore do not stop.”

“Do I need to say more?”

“No, I guess not.”

“Okay, since you audited the class, I’m going to skip ahead a bit, so to speak, and ask you to pick a card. *Any card!*”

He spread the homemade cards out on the table face down – there were only four of them!

“We’ll let fate decide where to begin. I would rather get to know you through directed interaction like this rather than have you just talking to me on a couch for fifty minutes. Is that okay?”

I nodded. Then I reached towards the table and picked the card on the outside right. I looked at it, then put it face down on my lap, as if he were a magician and I was waiting for him to guess which card.

“Which one did you pick?” he laughed. “You have to tell me!”

“It says ‘The Assassin.’” I was a bit perplexed, as well as a bit uncomfortable. I didn’t like where this was going.

“Ah, that’s a good one!” He rolled his chair back towards his desk and wrote something down in his notes.

“You seem uncomfortable with that word?”

“Yes.”

“Why?”

“Lots of reasons.” That’s all I said. Thoughts of Kelsey and my father flooded me. Who was the real assassin? Fate? God?

He looked at me: “Okay, I’m going to start with a personal question that might seem very far removed from what you saw on the card: Are you searching for someone to

love, or do you feel you have you found that person already, or don't you care about searching?"

"All three," I said.

"Good answer," he smiled. "Would you be willing to explain further?"

I took a deep breath. I felt darkened but I forced myself to speak. "I found love, then I lost it. Now I am searching again for some *thing*, but only because she asked me to. But in all honesty I don't really care anymore. Because I still love her, even though. . ." I took another deep breath. It was hard to get the last words out. ". . . even though she's not alive anymore."

"Oh my. Seriously?"

"Yes."

I covered my face a bit and wiped away a tear.

"And, here's the crazy part," I said. "This is the part where you can call the psycho ward to come get me. She has spoken to me, after. And she said, '*Don't give up because of me. Live because of me.*' So I'm trying to do that."

"I see." He became very somber. I'd never seen him like this. I could see that he cared on some level, but I also saw his mind was whirring around thinking about how to respond.

"So now what?" he asked me.

“I don’t know! Kelsey was ‘the one.’ She was the one I felt sure of. But I also learned from auditing your class to be careful about what I say to myself.”

“Okay, I understand. That’s touching, to bring up that core point I was trying to make in class, I mean that.” He chose his words carefully. He didn’t say more. So I kept talking.

“I want to find someone to take the pain away. . . .” My voice trailed off. “But that’s not love.”

Dr. Riker remained silent.

“But Kelsey, our love, is still too real.”

“Exactly!” he said. “Too real.”

A pause occurred before he said, “Okay, close your eyes. Sit back and close your eyes and try to relax. I want to help you if I can, if you’ll let me try.”

He took me through a systematic relaxation technique that lasted a few minutes. It put me in a state of light hypnosis. I was in a half-dream state. He said quietly, “I want you to conjure up, while keeping your eyes closed, an image of ‘the one’ – but it’s someone you haven’t met. Do the best you can. Use your imagination. It’s not Kelsey. She represents something else. And that’s important to remember. There’s no reason to let go of her and what she represents to you. But I also want you to stay in the living world with me right now. What kind of person comes to mind, physically, mentally. Describe her face, tell me about her personality.”

I didn't respond at first. I had been driven deep underground and it took me a full minute to speak.

"Describe what you are thinking and seeing now," he said patiently.

My voice sounded lower in pitch than normal, and my words were spoken much slower than my normal cadence. When I saw the image of the girl in my mind so many of the physical features were like Kelsey's features, but it wasn't her. It was someone else. "Okay, her face... soft features, a kind smile. Kind of a boyish grin. Her hair is blonde. Like Kelsey's was. But it's not her. She's very funny, this person, she likes to make me laugh. She understands the pain I've been through. And she likes to see my heart open. I'm courageous around her. I feel strong like I used to feel. I feel like I want to try again when I'm around her." I stopped to focus harder on this person's face. It was all very abstract, the image was fuzzy.

"Okay, very good," said Dr. Riker in a warm tone. "After I've counted down from ten to zero you can open your eyes slowly. Take a moment to be here. Then we'll talk."

I felt myself coming out of the dream he put me in as he slowly counted all the way down.

"Tell me what you're thinking now," he said quietly.

"Thinking about 'the one' made me feel sad, not happy. Because not knowing her feels empty. And because I'm not hopeful I will ever find her. It makes me anxious to think

about her. Because she can never really be. I keep thinking about the girl who whispered to me one night."

I looked at him, waiting for him to say something.

"The one you hope to find, and want to find, but don't think you will ever find. . . I actually know her. I know this person you described, I know who she is."

I was stunned. Then I realized it was a psychological trick of some sort.

"It's still Kelsey?"

"No, it's definitely not Kelsey. She belongs to you on another level. That's not it."

"My mother?" I said, dejectedly, thinking of the typical pop psychology response.

"No!" he laughed softly, "I don't do that kind of therapy. It's definitely not your mother."

I thought about this puzzle he was setting up. Could he actually know someone on campus I should meet? Could he be playing matchmaker, setting up with some sort of bizarre blind date? "Is it really someone you know?"

"Yes," he said.

I shook my head. "Please tell me."

He leaned back in his chair, to break it to me as gently as possible. "She's wearing a mask, Jacob. Who is behind the mask?"

"I have no idea!"

“If you take off her mask -- a beautiful face she has -- but you will see who she really is.”

He let another moment go by for added drama.

“I give up.”

“She is your murderer.”

“My what?”

“She is your assassin.”

“How, why?”

“She exists to murder your present moment, and kidnap you from everyone who wants to become close to you. Because they won’t ever be her. And, of course, they can’t be Kelsey. No one will ever be Kelsey. No girl anywhere can match the power of your fantasy. So if you can’t be with Kelsey, and you can’t ever find the fantasy girl, you will always be alone. And I agree you’ll never find her. Not the one you saw. So, you’ll always be alone. She killed you.”

My head began to spin. “Then I have to get rid of the fantasy? I have to ban the image? Another death?”

“No, no! It’s not another death, I assure you! Don’t destroy her!”

“But you just said...”

“Look closer, Jacob. *Look closer.* We have to go deeper still. The murderer is also wearing a mask. Use self-assessment. That’s the key. There is another mask to be

pulled off. Pull off the second mask! The mask of the assassin. Look who is behind that mask!”

I tried to play his game for a moment but I really had no clue.”

“It’s God. . . .” he whispered. “Your God. Your image of God, for you. It’s the force within you that is so very capable of creating love, sensing love, and feeling it very deeply. But it’s everywhere, in everything. It’s not just a single person, not just one girl. It never has been, Jacob. It’s not about someone out here. It’s *Eros*. It’s sensuality, and an open heart. It’s in the wind when it’s circling through tree branches, it’s in the smell of a flower. It’s clouds forming from nothing in the sky. It’s not *no one*, it’s not *never*. It’s not an ending. It’s *everything*. *It’s now*. Do you get it?”

I did get it. But I had no words to speak.

“You, more than most people, are capable of connecting to this state of high awareness. Because you know it exists. You’ve experienced it. When you stand at the edge of a mountain and look out to the vastness, it’s there. At the outer edge of all things, it’s there. Don’t you already know that?”

“Sometimes.”

“Exactly! It’s only *sometimes*. But it’s far better than never! I know that this can also bring you a lot of pain, Jacob. The pain is real. There are the memories. And there is the longing. But love is a brave choice. It has to begin inside you.

“Let me end by telling you this: You already know the path I’m offering you to walk down, because your love for Kelsey is guiding you every step of the way.... Take the next step.”

17

The next few days were spent, perhaps, “taking my next step” too literally. Because I found myself endlessly wandering through the city of Boston. It was the weekend. I worked on papers due the following week, and read the required books at night, sometimes until the early morning hours. But then after far too little sleep, I just wanted to walk again towards no place in particular.

It wasn't like Cain wandering in the land of Nod. I was wandering back to a place closer to Eden, somewhere I hadn't been to in a long time. Like during the time when I was with Kelsey, when I could touch something and really feel it fully with senses open, and laugh, and lose control of myself, and dream, and let the dream carry me all the way out. And then all the way back in. We took in the beautiful madness of the world together.

But for all the sensual intaking, and appreciation of the clouds and wind, and seeing the goodness in the faces of many of the people walking by me, I also realized, that I was still lonely. Eros still led to longing. I was still heartbroken.

I also still had to deal with my ability to sense things. I didn't bring this subject up with Dr. Riker. I thought he had heard enough craziness from me already. I appreciated his brilliance. But I didn't want to stretch my credibility.

In truth, I was sensing a lot of things on these walks. It was like I was everyone's psychic dart board. This part of myself had been completely shut down for a long time. But

now people walking by, total strangers, were throwing their thoughts directly at me. I was so open on every level that the intake was becoming too much for me to handle.

I found that one way to protect myself was by meditating while I walked. So when someone approached me I would just begin to follow my breath, or carefully observe my own thoughts instead of picking up theirs. Or maybe what *I thought* was theirs. It was still possible I was crazy and Riker just didn't know it yet. But I was trying not to let that thought stay with me either. My goal was not to believe *anything* that came into my mind.

Meditation is the practice of watching thoughts go by without reacting to them; without comment or judgment of any kind. No matter how bad or good you think they might be. No grasping, no hoping, no aversion. Just neutral observation. Now I was doing it with what may have been *other people's* thoughts. I was able to let them come and go.

As the end of the weekend grew near I contemplated what it would take for me to find true happiness. Because I was still deeply depressed. I felt like I could never take a deep full breath that was completely free of worry or sadness. I hadn't yet reached a place where I wasn't still drowning with Kelsey.

Happiness was a tricky equation. Dr. Riker said in class one day that almost all attempts at aiming straight at happiness brought the mind to an even deeper degree of misery. Happiness had to be an outcome, not a goal.

18

It was a Sunday night – the early morning hours of Monday morning actually. I hadn't slept. Classes would begin in a few hours, the sun would rise any moment. My senses were saturated, and my mind was completely overloaded. The hard wiring in my brain had been strained to my synaptual limits. Nothing was making sense. . . again.

I closed my burning eyes in a dazed half-sleep, when suddenly I heard her speaking. It was as if I were entering the middle of a conversation that we were already having:

“There is a ‘there,’ a place that you might call more than thought – a place of pure essences.

I was fully awake now, questioning if it had been my mind hallucinating. But then she said:

“Jacob. You are not meant to suffer so much where you are. The universe will have its way, whether you fight with the waves or not. And you already know, you can't fight the tidal wave. In the end, you have no choice but to trust it.”

I felt no earthly sense of time passing. The air was silent while I lay motionless on my bed.

I unwound back to earth. She left me with a feeling of vast love, and then vast aloneness. She was gone. I had no belief I would ever hear from her again.

19

The sun rose and dimly lit my room. I put on some fresh clothes, packed up my textbooks, and headed towards the university. I had a nine o'clock class. I knew Kelsey's intentions were good, if it was indeed Kelsey. I still couldn't be sure -- I was so tired, so mentally spent and physically exhausted it was possible I had become completely delusional.

As I walked onto the campus my feet turned in a new direction. They were headed for Dr. Riker's office. He was the only one I could face in my present state. I needed to know if I had gone insane or not. I felt like someone had vacuumed up everything inside me. I had no ability to think or process. And it wasn't a "Zen" state either. It was a non-functional state. Not helpful to someone trying to stay in college.

I found myself walking faster and faster, afraid someone would stop me to say hello. I had zero ability to make small talk. I entered the psychology building and began to run down the hall to Riker's office. I tapped calmly on his thick dark wooden door. No answer. So I tapped again, this time a little louder. He obviously wasn't there. Finding myself hopelessly confused and fever sick, my body crumbled down in front of his door and I fell asleep.

About an hour later I awoke to see Dr. Riker standing over me. He had a pile of books under his arm, which were

partially hidden by a big black overcoat that was speckled with rain drops.

“Can I help you?” he said in a worried tone.

“I hope so,” I shivered, speaking quietly as if from a trance.

It was only then that he realized what a total mess I was. He put the key in the lock and helped me in.

“Fortunately,” he said, “I don’t have my next class for another two hours. I came to get some work done. But now I see, you are my work.”

I managed to look around. There were open books everywhere. Students’ papers everywhere. He raised the creaky window slightly to allow in some fresh air, and at the same time turned on the old iron heater in the opposite corner. It crackled and snapped awake. I could smell the odd combination of oil and dust as the gas ignited. I was shivering, glad the heat would soon find its way to me.

He urged me to tell him what was going on. So I told him everything that had happened that weekend. In the process of telling him I also mentioned, since I was sure he already thought I was mentally unstable, that I was a bit psychic. I figured it couldn’t sound any stranger than everything else I was telling him.

I told him that from the beginning Kelsey and I both knew we wouldn’t be together some day. But we didn’t know why. My story came out in a jagged, often incoherent way. But he let me go on and on until I was finished.

“That was good, Jacob. Really interesting. It tells me a lot.”

I waited for him to say more. He saw my disappointment in his non-response.

“What do you want me to help you with?”

“First, I want to know if it’s Kelsey speaking to me, or if it’s *me* speaking to me pretending to be Kelsey. A part of me doesn’t want to know. But I need to know. . . .”

“Why?” he interrupted.

“What do you mean ‘why?’” I said too loudly. “I want to know because if it’s true that she’s talking to me then there’s an *afterlife, and she still exists!* But if it’s my brain pretending to be Kelsey then I’m insane! I’d say there’s a pretty big gap between the two!”

“I understand,” he laughed softly.

I started to feel a loss of faith in his ability to help me.

“Jacob, the truth is, no one has answers to those kinds of questions. Even after experiences like yours.”

I let out an involuntary sigh, which he correctly interpreted as complete frustration.

He moved his chair closer to me. “Jacob, I am sorry I am not connecting with you. There is no way I can know from where I sit if what you are sensing is psychic, or just instinct. And there is no way I can tell you with surety that you are crazy because you certainly don’t seem to be, in my professional opinion. You can make yourself crazy by

defining yourself as crazy and then acting crazy. But so far, you haven't done that either. You are still questioning what's happening. People who are truly crazy usually don't think they are. In fact, they get rather defensive about it. Because they are not as good at self-assessing as you are.

"The bottom line is, I can't honestly tell you that Kelsey is speaking to you from some other reality. But there *is* another answer for you that I think is just as important. It's *the answer*."

"*The answer?*" I was baffled.

"Yes. The *answer* is: Don't question whether or not Kelsey is real or an illusion. Or whether she is a part of you, or apart *from* you. Just listen closely to what she was saying. Take her words at face value, let them wash over you. Or discard them, or forget them. *That's your choice*. But don't waste your time trying to know what's going on 'out there.'"

"I remember what she said. Both times. The first time she said, 'Don't give it up because of me. Live because of me. The only path to find your way back to where I am is by living.'

"And then last night she told me to trust, I guess trust fate, or destiny, because she said there really wasn't any other choice. I'd be fighting the tidal wave. And you can't fight the. . . ." I started to feel shaky again and couldn't say the rest.

"Okay, Jacob. Do those things make sense, in the way you *sense* things? I'm asking you, if you were to follow what she said, where would that lead you? Would your life be

better or worse from it? Would it lead you to the next step? Or would you be going backwards?"

"Yes, yes, that's right. I know it would be good for me to remember and believe those things."

"Here's the truth." He was happy to see I was tracking with him. "A lot of mysteries exist in this world. Some of them are waiting to reveal themselves. But if you get hung up on where the mystery is coming from, or how the circuitry works rather than believing in the revelation, you lose the essence. It's like someone in search of electricity. Someone says it's behind the wall. They knock the wall down but still can't find it. Then someone says it's in the wires behind the wall. So he cuts the wires and guess what? There's nothing there. Empty air. So he concludes electricity is a fake. Meanwhile everyone is enjoying the lights and the music coming through the speakers. He's lost, because he kept trying to find it.

"In fact, you could qualify to start your own religion – by being more hung up on the messenger than the message! But believe me, the world doesn't need another religion."

We both laughed. And knowing that the truth can sometimes make you laugh, and not just make you cry, was a good thing.

20

I graduated Boston University a few years later with a degree in psychology. Professor Riker was my mentor, my advisor, my guide, and a personal inspiration to this day.

And I would have been happy and grateful enough for the story to end there. But it didn't. There is still a bit more catching up to do.

During the years of fulfilling my internship, on my way to getting my PhD, I befriended a number of wonderful people. I also had a few girlfriends here and there. I knew I hadn't met the girl I wanted to marry yet. But I sensed I would some day.

I continued to meditate. But after a while I was no longer simply observing my thoughts, or letting them go. Something was happening when I meditated that was purely mine.

Without Dr. Riker's occasional oversight I would have again thought that a part of me was truly crazy.

The way I would describe it now was that I became psychically attuned to places and energies that weren't *here*, by any other person's perception of that word.

From the time I gave up trying to know whether Kelsey had been actually speaking to me or not, the channel between me and her, or some essence of her, continued to grow. My connection to her, or to that fantasy of her, deepened in my meditations.

I began to climb a spiritual ladder to a place where I felt she was, climbing one rung at a time, through time, and beyond time.

Year after year I used my sense, my intuition, to find her. I would find her as a sudden spark. Sometimes as a flash of light that would stay with me briefly. Sometimes it would surround me and stay until finally I saw her face. It was a dream, I knew, but I saw her clearly nonetheless.

And sometimes, I held her hand. I would reach out and I would feel wave after wave of her melting into me. I woke up from these meditations in a state of joy. I had never been happier in my life. I felt complete. Truly connected.

I experienced Kelsey's world to the best of my understanding of it. I lived *(t)here* – traversing both worlds, until finally, I was able to visit her at will, while being fully *here*, living in the real world.

Epilogue

Throughout the first many years of marriage to my wife, Terry, and all the challenges of keeping true love strong over time, including raising three amazing children – I didn't talk much about Kelsey. Terry knew about her, and the experiences I went through in college. But I didn't talk in detail about my meditations. And I still honestly didn't quite know what to make of it all.

But I am sharing my experiences now because something happened. Something that changed everything, *again*.

Something happened to Kelsey, and I don't know exactly how to describe it. But I won't be going *there* anymore.

During one of my recent meditations I was visiting her spirit for the thousandth time, inviting her to play in the dream with me. I wanted to feel it again and again, to learn and re-learn the amazing electric-bright luminosity of a fully open heart and mind. No boundaries. But I found, to my utter shock, that she was gone. She had left this place we had come to share.

She had left me... again.

I was still existing there, but I was alone there now -- bathed in blazing light while at the same time sensing that she had disappeared from that dimension.

I began to assess this new event while coming slowly back into my worldly life, but just as I floated back to the living, feeling my toes, sensing my hands folded in my lap, I heard her voice for the last time --

"I have found a place, Jacob, it's so amazing! A place that love has taught me about, slowly, but finally. It doesn't translate to words. I am going there now. It's time... I am excited! But before I go I will try to tell you what I know: There is no ladder to climb, Jacob. It's so much simpler than that!"

"We are sunlight. Sunlight quickly forgets the sun. But we are still and forever sunlight. I know you'll know this too someday. Until then, until then, live a beautiful life...."

The End

GM