

From the Farthest Places

~ Gary Marks

*/GM2**

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PART 1

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

1

As I drove my eighteen-year-old daughter back to her UC Berkeley dorm I tried to persuade her not to get a Samurai haircut. She had such beautiful long blonde hair. But her new therapist told my wife and me that this was her decision. She was eighteen, a legal adult, and if she wanted a Samurai haircut (paid for with our money) that was her right. Because apparently, we were too enmeshed.

We were told now that she was eighteen she needed to explore her identity, become more independent, and freely express her opinions.

Living in a dorm on her own with two other equally confused rebellious girls, and spending all day listening to world-famous professors talk about how artificially intelligent beings would have to become more moral than humans for us to survive their species and ours, was apparently not enough stimulation at eighteen -- they also had to rebel against their childhood, and maybe unconsciously even try to dress and look more like androgenous AIs than individual pheromone-coated humans.

During the holy (money-making) event at Cal called Parents Weekend my daughter expressed concerns about her mental well-being -- her persistent mania (which we used to lovingly call hyper-energy), her occasional depression (which we somewhat proudly reframed as hyper-sensitivity), and her occasional feelings of grandeur (well-deserved given all her talents), inevitably followed by the devastation she felt from any kind of failure (which we assured her was due to her inner drive and holding herself to high standards).

As a physics major she was skeptical of concepts like God ("the brain can't know beyond itself") and love ("I mean, why all the praise and enthusiasm about the power of love? It's just

another feeling. In fact, anger is just as powerful. For instance, love creates babies, anger creates wars that kill the babies once they come of age. So really, at best it's a tie.")

She also told me that the A minus she received in advanced calculus was graded on a curve. She really got a 74, which may have been the worst grade she'd ever gotten in her life. So the A minus was a total sham. The errors she made on the test were *real*. The grade was subjective.

I said, "Well, yes, but you *actually* did get an A minus."

She said, "Define 'actually.'"

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

She said, "Okay then, I'll use it in a sentence: *Actually*, I got twenty-four out of one hundred answers wrong, but they gave me an A minus to make me feel better. So *actually*, why try harder if they're going to hand me As when I *actually* get Cs?"

"Because..."

"In fact, why try to study, or exercise, or shower, or dress, or live?"

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

"Yes, Dad! It's all a sham."

"Okay, well do you really want to know what I think about that? Or do you just want to keep telling me what you feel looking up from the bottom of a well? Because I don't mind listening more if..."

"No, I want to know what you think, I guess."

"Will you let me rant for a minute then? Because it will have to be a rant. You know, that's just the way I roll. I don't do sound-bites."

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

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

I was driving her back to her dorm after spending a few hours in Palo Alto, where I had just introduced her to a college friend of mine who worked at Google assisting the renowned scientist-inventor, Ray Kurzweil -- one of my daughter's heroes. They had an interesting conversation about quantum computing, of which I understood only the word "and."

Conceptually, I gathered that quantum computing was neither here nor there.

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

But I persevered. I said, "When I first started writing songs at sixteen, I wrote them to get attention from girls. After that started to happen with a bit of consistency, I wrote songs to gain respect from great musicians so I could lure them into my band. Then I started to crave respect from faceless, nameless audiences. Then I enjoyed making money from what I now called work. Then I started writing novels, mostly to get the attention of the girls who didn't like my music but might like my stories. Because I still hadn't found your mother yet, of course. Then as I got older, I wanted to get paid for my novel writing and call that 'work,' too. I pretended it was work by occasionally wiping pretend sweat from my brow. It was part of the show.

"Then I met your mom, and we had you. And during that time my motivation for writing changed. I thought to myself, if I write songs and novels that are truly great, timeless, honest, maybe when this sweet little daughter of mine is older, she'll respect my work. She'll hear all the cool messages I'll be whispering to her in metaphors, and she'll grow wiser from them -- hopefully wiser than me now. Maybe one night on my birthday

many years from this day she'll take me out to dinner and honor my artistic wisdom over a glass of wine."

"Or a lion's mane mushroom extract pill with a glass of filtered ice water," Paris interjected.

"Exactly. But don't interrupt me. I'm getting to the point eventually."

"Sorry. Proceed."

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

"My children?"

"Hypothetically. Wouldn't that be amazing if they also liked my writing? Then I could achieve a modicum of immortality. My ideas, and my music would live on, possibly for generations.

"But then, my thought-experiment got out of hand. Because I imagined the world a thousand years from now. Who would be alive to listen to my songs or read my novels, and actually care? And even if humans survived the AI Wars and *did* still care about my songs and novels, and the English language was still a thing, what about a million years after that?

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

"*Exactly!*" she exclaimed.

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

But first I had to navigate the Caldecott Tunnel. The lights in that tunnel were dim enough to remind me of an alleyway in

Athens, but without the art or romance. There's nothing worse than unintentionally poor lighting, I thought ridiculously. As I rose from my reverie I found myself joining the helpless mouse trails of cars trying to get out of the tunnel as fast as possible.

"What's the *point*? Ironically, I think the point is, liberation," I stated with all the intellectual confidence I could muster.

"*Suicide?*"

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

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

She tried to hide her smile.

"*I know that!* And I know *you* know that. But you're interrupting my rant again...."

"Stay right," the Irish male Google Map voice advised. Then he repeated himself every one-hundred feet until I obeyed him and swerved onto Highway 13. Someday the Irish voice will just man up and drive the car without me.

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

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

She folded her arms and slumped back against the passenger seat. This was a boring cliché if there ever was one. The old Buddhist Dad talk she'd heard during every single one of our reincarnations.

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

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

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

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

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

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

I took a long look at her, my beautiful daughter, who seemed to be taking on the weight of the world minute by minute. "Pairs, look, I know how much you respect logic. You value science over feelings, and math over psychology, and I get that. But what I'm saying is, if you don't spend a good deal of your time being a mind-scientist too, your mind will never figure out a way to win the real game we're all playing. You're just going to find a thousand ways to lose, including losing your self to the game. Eventually. The mind is very tricky."

"And the game is?"

"The game is who gets to decide and *define* reality as the seconds go by; who gets to define every thought and every word in your head? Including the word '*actually*.'"

2

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

"Sure, I'm down for that."

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

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

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

The parents were left staring at a row of Telegraph Avenue street sellers -- yawning as they watched the wind gently jiggling jangly jewelry hanging from corkboard hooks, after adroitly avoiding getting a Taro reading from a gray-haired white lady with dreadlocks that looked like she'd just escaped from the Salvation Army.

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

I continued my rant. "So, I began to wonder what Hinduism would be like if they didn't feel the need to insert Brahman into the end of the game. What if Buddhist psychology made its case without having to include a transcending icon?"

"I'm losing the point, as any non-practicing Hindu might."

"Okay, look, I'm saying freeing ourselves may not really be able happen until we accept the possibility that what's beyond the mind may be nothing at all. It's a mental paradox, because the mind thinks itself to be real, and thinks the self is one single thing -- which is not only 'selfish,' it's chemically not true, because as you know there's no one place in the brain where the self is located. But the self thinks it's *one thing*, living in linear time, so it assumes some kind of God or universal consciousness created it, and that universal consciousness will never stop existing, so the self will never stop existing. But we also know we're being jerked around by our fearful selfish little thoughts, and we don't know what reality really is. So how do we reconcile thinking that we know something as big as what God is when we can't even figure out what the self is? The answer I came up with is to try to make peace with myself, *not* by believing that fairies are waiting at the exit when the roller-coaster ride is over, but by simply staying present during the ride, and enjoying the ride here, now, as much as possible, because that may be all there is. And *that* is liberation in its highest form!"

"And what's the point of believing that *this* is all there is, Dad? What exactly is so liberating about that?"

"*What?*"

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

"Observably?"

"Okay, I mean, what's the point of accepting *what is* in the present moment, and believing *this* is all there is, and that nothing really matters because we're virtually equal to nothing in the infinite, if, when it comes right down to it, you're still prone to freaking out about life when bad things happen? Whereas, people who believe in something after life might actually feel more peaceful *in* life. Maybe they're better off and more liberated

believing the fairytale. Like, if you're only living in the present moment, why not just jump off the roller coaster at the top of the ride if things look bleak, and in the end it doesn't matter anyway? Or *not* jump off? No difference, right? There's no right or wrong to either choice. Or any choice. Because inside infinity and nothingness, it's all pointless. In fact, I think your rant ended up proving my point that everything is suicidally worthless!"

"No, no! *No*. . . The point to pointlessness is that if we let go of all past failures and future fears and just stay present, then we're free to just love being here. Free to feel the love and the mystery of it all while we're here. Free to *feel*. Not just think and think. Free to have heart, and passion about things. And create out of that passion. Because this *is, here*, is the only truth! It's like Buddhism or Hinduism, but you don't just buy it because you think there's a prize at the bottom of the Cracker Jack box."

Paris was processing this "feeling" concept versus overthinking things all the time. She seemed to be organizing it internally. She didn't respond, but her phone remained in her back pocket. So I knew she'd say something eventually as we kept walking towards some hypothetical restaurant.

"You know, Dad, your thoughts are cool enough, sensible enough, logical enough. But I mean, it's basically like a commercial for Eastern religion. The only difference is none of the characters in the commercial are the main character, and none of them reincarnate to be in the next commercial. Plus, by the very fact that you're thinking about this stuff and talking to me about it, I think *you're* still thinking too much."

"Okay, well, is hunger feeling or thinking, because..."

"Just wait. There are some really great restaurants a few minutes' walk from here. Are you down?"

"I'm as down as down is."

"Cool. Because desires are a terrible thing, I get that, but I love food. Hey, by the way, you want to know what else I've been thinking about lately?"

"Of course!"

She said all this while the UC Berkeley campus receded to a small hazy dot. I was wondering about that two-hour parking space, and whether we'd have time to beat the clock before the parking police showed up. They are hauntingly prompt. Exactly one-hundred-twenty minutes after the chalk mark is swiped on my tire I will be out fifty bucks. Getting a parking ticket was a cat and mouse game I really hated to lose.

3

"Here's one thing I wanted to tell you, Dad. We have super insane discussions in my AI Ethics class. Like, why are our *human* ethics so automatically right? I mean, consciousness could either be a powerful gift, unique in the universe, or, the only *living curse* in the universe. It either has *hella* value, or it has a negative value, and is a massive burden for all those unfortunate enough to have to deal with it. And also, I don't buy the 'accept what is' stuff or the Zen stuff, and the letting go of the 'I' stuff, because we all have to go to class, or go to work, or drive. You know what I mean? I'm not being metaphorical. In fact, I'm being practically anti-metaphorical. For instance, I can tell by your face you're starting to worry about getting a parking ticket, right? *Right?* How does that fit into staying in the present moment with me here? But your mind is going to think about it anyway. You can't stop it."

"You're amazingly insane."

"Don't be a hater of questioning minds."

"I'm *not!* Obviously, I love talking to you! But I'm just asking you, don't you agree that everything is impermanent and an illusion?"

"Yes, of course, *Rick and Morty* proved that to me fifteen episodes ago." She looked at me, "You *do* know about Rick and Morty, right?"

"Isn't it some kind of cartoon?"

"That's like saying my calculus class is a cartoon. But go ahead, what were you going to say?"

I smiled, "Okay, what if I told you I could convince you there *is* one thing that's permanent, and that it's not 'God?'"

"I'd say pass the psilocybin."

"How and why do you know about psilocybin?"

"Psilocybin is the new LSD, Dad. Like everyone's into micro-dosing one or both. But how do *you* know about psilocybin?"

"To be historically accurate, LSD was actually the new psilocybin. Anyone with a PhD in The History of Psychedelic Chemistry would know that. But whatevs."

"Well Dad, I'm just saying that if you're going to convince me there is *anything* that's truly permanent, and it's not a made-up God, it needs to pass the end of the universe test. Does it still exist after the end of the universe?"

"It does."

"After all the universes die? Every single cute little bubbly one of them?"

"Yes."

"Did you figure this out on Ketamine?"

"What's Ketamine?"

"Never mind. Just don't take it if you don't have a shrink to guide you through the trip. It's a shitty party drug. Anyone with a PhD in The History of Psychedelic Chemistry would tell you that."

"Thanks for the tip. By the way, this is funny -- Kim's older brother once saw this hysterical thing on the front page of the *National Enquirer* -- a photoshopped photograph of a luminous city sitting atop a distant cloud, surrounded by the black of outer space. The caption read, 'Hubble Telescope Finds Heaven!'"

"Yeah, I saw that one too," she laughed, "walking out of a CVS drugstore. It's a classic. Then they made Trump into the media-manufactured God, and all *that* happened. The genesis of fake news."

"Yes, well, back to the future."

"Yes, right, and the answer to your riddle is what? What is forever permanent beyond universes if all Gods are taken out of the equation?"

"Ever hear of supreme consciousness?"

"Oh no, Dad, not supreme consciousness."

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

"Dad!"

"I mean, it could be, we can't know, but not necessarily."

"Okay, fine."

"Sorry, I'm teasing you."

"You're becoming a spiritual comedian now."

"I'm trying. Humor is extremely important to me, as you know."

"But it's impermanent. Especially yours. It fades very quickly. In fact, one could question if it ever existed."

"True."

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

"*What is.*"

"Yo, what? That's what I'm asking you?" she frowned. "Is this like the Abbott and Costello baseball thing you showed me on YouTube?"

"No, I mean, whatever *is*, even if it's *nothing*, whatever *is*, is a true and permanent thing."

"That's just semantics, Dad. You can't use that!"

"Why not? Look, there may or may not be some permanent thing out there beyond time and space. And there may or may not be other universes. And yes, if they exist, all of them could be gone someday too, in a 'time' dimension anyway. Maybe some distant October 10th! At 2:30 eastern. Or, maybe not. Maybe we are in a repeating loop, where everything, every second, just repeats endlessly and we just *think* there is a past and a future. Or, maybe we're all just code in some super intelligent being's computer game, like you suggested to me a few months back. Okay fine. I've heard of all of those possibilities and many more, and there are plenty of theories I haven't heard of yet, any of which could end up being the new '*right!*' But *beyond all of them,*

whatever is, is what's true. Whatever is, *is* -- *permanently through time*, and beyond time."

"What *is*? Then define '*is*.'"

"Come on. Think about it, Paris."

"It's *Pairs*."

"Sorry... *Pairs*."

Finally, she came back to the original question: "Okay then, what *is* the point?"

"You have to find that out for yourself. "

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

I sighed. "My dear daughter, can I be honest with you?"

"You haven't been?"

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

"You're gonna tell me that I'm never going to be able to become a super-intelligent immortal cyborg, is that it?"

"Well that too."

"Okay fine."

"Look, a lot of what you think is so brilliant it amazes me. But a lot of what you think just puts way too much pressure on yourself. You say you can't stand failure. No one can. But when you say you can't stand failure, and if you can't be great and make a positive difference in the world then you may as well jump off the edge, *that's crazy*."

"Of course it's *crazy*. According to my therapist, I have OCD with underlying anxiety and depression. So I'm like, literally crazy."

"Well maybe *she* has OCD with underlying anxiety and depression, and you don't. Like some kind of reverse transference."

"So you don't believe her?"

"Do *you*? I mean, are you sure?"

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

"Try me."

"Well, for instance, did you know my 150 IQ can literally dip into the 120s if I'm under stress? I suddenly become only nominally above normal. So if I'm stressed taking an advanced calculus test I could have a 120 IQ at that moment while at the same time if you asked me a question about astrophysics or artificial intelligence while we're walking down the street I would answer you with an IQ of 150. That's what I mean by 'quantum.' Sometimes a defined thing is unable to be fully defined by location and time. Which means that static statistical analysis becomes oxymoronic and automatically error-prone."

"Okay, but..."

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

"Maybe tonight when we go out with Mom. I just want a little something to hold me over right now. I'm suddenly less than famished."

"Okay. Well, there's a bagel store across the street. We can get toasted bagels and toppings. You like hummus, right?"

"Maybe I could split one with you?"

"Sure. But then I really need to get back too. I have stuff to do. Then I'll see you and Mom later tonight."

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

I put the ticket in the glove compartment and sat back in the driver's seat before starting the engine. I looked out the window. It was quiet for that one moment. No traffic in either direction. It was autumn. The leaves were turning colors.

4

These kinds of conversations with my daughter were not out of the ordinary. We had been having deep conversations like this since she was a little girl. I was her hero back then. I would catch her observing and imitating me all the time.

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

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

I nodded and said, "Okay, great!"

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

I laughed, "Well, that's a good question. Sometimes I don't even know myself. Sometimes things just come to me. I guess I'm lucky. "

She smiled and said, "Me too!"

So what *did* I actually do? Well, from the time I was a teenager until my mid-thirties, pretty much everything in my life revolved around music, specifically rock 'n' roll, songwriting, recording albums, band rehearsals, tours, dealing with managers, producers, record contracts. I lived in my little bubble. The image of who I was became me. There was hardly any separation.

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

I met Allison when I was in my early forties. She was in her mid-twenties. She was a yoga teacher, and painted watercolors. Many were sold in art galleries. We were a perfect match from the beginning because we were so perfectly different. We filled in spaces that were missing in each other. We also had an amazing physical connection, which is always on the very top of any artist's list when looking for his muse. The physical connection between us never went away. Even after we were married, even after we had Paris. And for all the years after.

But more than that, Allison became a true friend. You wouldn't necessarily find female friendship on the top of a rock 'n' roller's priority list, but as we all find out eventually, love becomes fatal when it's missing. Our love survived because of it.

We were married, and then we had Paris almost exactly a year later. Our daughter was named after the city Allison and I both loved. We vacationed there a number of times after we met, always making it the first or last stop on our European itinerary.

A year after Paris was born, I stopped touring with the band. I wrote songs and novels but refused to leave home anymore. I no longer had an interest in marketing myself, or in receiving random adulation. Of course, this greatly diminished my ability to make money, but I had enough saved to last us quite a number of decades by then.

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

But she never strayed much from our side. She was also very obedient, which was the opposite of her two very stubborn eccentric parents. In fact, even when she was ten years old, when I sternly said, "I'll give you 'til the count of five," she never continued whatever she was doing beyond four.

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

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

That was an honest enough explanation for her to decide to just keep obeying me. She considered it a mutually agreed to game we played -- until she turned thirteen. Then she said, "It's not working Dad, you're going to have to come up with a new threat."

Around that same age, she began relying on me, not just as a source for learning music, particularly songwriting, but as a life teacher. I would go on these long philosophical rants trying to express all sides of her question. She was very patient with my disjointed musings. She thought it would help me write to ask a question and then just listen to me improvise.

Paris also fell in love with science early on, at first obsessed with the science of lightning, then astronomy, then physics. She read *How to Create a Mind*, by Ray Kurzweil when she was fourteen. Sometime after that, she decided she wanted to become a "super-intelligent immortal cyborg." She told me that after she figured out the immortality part, she wanted to transfer my mind into an avatar so I could live forever. But first she had to figure out a way to download "me."

Of course, back in 2015, that sounded absolutely delusional. But by 2017, as a freshman at Berkeley, Paris was not defined as delusional, she was defined as a genius.

Sometimes it's hard to know the difference.

Sometimes there is no difference.

5

We were always very affectionate with Paris. But by the time she was ten she had a hard time reciprocating. She would hug people sideways, even us, even before bed. We thought she might have a mild form of Asperger Syndrome -- which doesn't even exist anymore. Now it's called "on the spectrum." This behavior continued into her teen years. So when she was sixteen, we decided to get her tested by a neuropsychologist. That's when we found out that she wasn't "on the spectrum," but she did have an extremely high IQ, and also had a form of OCD -- Obsessive Compulsive Disorder. But it wasn't typical OCD, like excessively washing your hands. It was "Extreme O." Obsessive thinking.

The obsessive thinking ruled her most of the time. For instance, she felt guilty if she didn't do something perfectly, and couldn't let it go. We'd always be sure to tell her that perfection was very overrated, just do your best.

Another one of her recurring obsessive thoughts was: If you can't be one of the world's most amazing humans, why bother, why just take up space?

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

Paris's response to the neuropsychologist was that the image of being dragged through mud in a meadow seemed to be a bad metaphor, since meadows usually evoke a pasture of grassland and colorful flowers. But maybe it had been raining heavily. Anyway, the point was made.

The problem with being good at everything you try is that failure is not a natural part of your initial experience. And when it

finally happens at some evolved stage of the experience it can feel almost catastrophic to someone as driven as she was.

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

6

When Paris was fifteen, she wrote an album's worth of amazing songs. It was actually her third album of amazing songs. Of course, albums no longer existed, and CDs were about to go the way of albums. Let's just say she wrote eight great new songs. She recorded them with Austen Porter, the recording engineer for my latest two CDs. Austen was someone who almost exclusively worked with famous musicians. He was paid by the label, not the artist. But we had become good friends. I wanted him to be a source of encouragement and inspiration, to give Paris confidence while she was recording her tracks. It turned out that was unnecessary. Almost everything she sang and played was perfect on the first take. Austen also loved her songwriting, especially the lyrics. He saw that she was unique enough, quirky enough, and had that rough-edged "no make-up" scruffy look. But when he looked at me smiling, I shook my head no. I didn't want things to get out of control. I didn't think it would be good for her.

Since Paris had no fan base, the only thing we could reasonably do after the songs were recorded was to put her music on Spotify. There was no real way to market her music without a full-on commitment to the game, which none of us wanted to pursue, including her.

When she was sixteen, I decided to play a local gig for my birthday, and agreed to let her be my opening act. It was in a two-thousand-seat hall in Boston. I played with my old band. She wanted to play solo. She had no fear. It was crazy. She sat in a simple wooden chair with her guitar on her lap. Her vocal mic was angled just right, so the audience could see her face clearly. One white spotlight shined on her. She looked down at her guitar most of the time when she sang, but at instinctive, emotionally

correct moments she'd look at the audience and emote half a smile in the middle of singing a phrase.

She wore her favorite jeans, a sleeveless white T-shirt, a sparkly necklace that Allison bought her years ago, and a thin sleeveless short red jeans jacket with silver buttons. She was as calm and aloof as a superstar at a rehearsal. Allison and I were blown away with her poise and energy. We could see where all this could easily lead, so after the gig was over, I decided we had to have "the talk."

We had already had the sex talk a few years back. She found that a bit boring. She had no interest. This talk was far more complicated.

I said, "Paris, you were great tonight. The question is, where to go from here? Or *if* to go anywhere from here. I mean, you could either continue to live the life you've been living and write songs when you feel like it. Or you could try to go for it, like I did at your age. Maybe you'd eventually find a band, try to get signed to an indie label and all that. Does that kind of life interest you?"

She seemed distracted. "Does what interest me?" She was eating the buffet food in the dressing room with both hands. Table manners never seemed to be one of her strengths.

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

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

I shook my head in wonder. "That's great. That's called sane. You're way better off, believe me. Let's go home. You have homework to do."

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

This was Paris at sixteen. Focused, driven, hoping to get into a great college with the dream of being a famous scientist

someday, and at the same time a natural and gifted artist, easily accessing the mystical places where great songs are born.

7

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

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

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

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

Snow was falling when Paris came home from Cal for Christmas.

8

We got into our typical philosophical dinner conversation the day before Christmas Eve, a night which we reverently called Christmas Eve-Eve. It became a special annual holiday for our family of three. It was a serious evening of conversation. We would all share our latest creative endeavors. Allison unveiled her recent series of watercolors, many of which were destined to be shown in a local gallery downtown. Paris and I might share our latest songs. Then we would talk about where we hoped our lives were headed in the next year, and, of course, how much we appreciated each other.

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

Then she turned to Paris and said she hoped she would make some good friends at Cal next semester. "But remember that I love your songwriting too, Paris. Don't ever take that for granted. It's an important part of who you are."

Paris responded, "Thanks, Mom. What I hope the future holds for you this year is a hundred more beautiful watercolor paintings. They're like colored stories gifted to you from the Rain Gods. Maybe someday you can get to live inside your favorite one, for as long as you want."

That was Paris. Even her compliments were eccentric.

On Christmas Day night I found Paris reading about something she seemed quite engaged in. "What are you researching?" I asked.

She said, "Have you ever heard of the Big-C and Little-C theories?"

"No...."

"So, Dad, one question posed in physics long ago looking at it from a cosmic perspective is this -- Is consciousness a thing that exists by itself? For instance, imagine consciousness is a real image existing in the dark, an invisible cosmic thread that sews existence and non-existence together, but it requires light, and eyes to see it, and a conscious mind to interact with it. That's called the Big-C theory."

"That's wild. So what's the Little-C theory?"

"Little-C is the theory that consciousness is only part of the human brain's biology. The human brain is a mirror staring at itself and wondering how it got here. Consciousness evolved simply to help us survive as a species on this particular planet. And that's all it is or ever will be. It has no specific value other than evolving the species (even though in the end it could prematurely destroy the species). Consciousness doesn't exist independently of the brains that created the concept of consciousness, it just cleverly divides it into sub-categories of higher and lower consciousness, and develops things like the Turing test to see if AIs can develop our definition of consciousness. But it has no 'reality' beyond the human mirror it interacts with."

"I see."

"No one can prove or disprove Big-C versus Little-C yet. But, I mean, if you're going to come up with all these crazy theories in your head, like nothingness being better than something-ness, I think you need to consider Big-C and Little-C as part of your thought experiment. Otherwise, the core premise of your sci-fi

novel may just be re-visiting cliches created by your limited consciousness!" she laughed.

"Right. Right. That's logical."

She brushed her hair away from her face.

"So define logic," I smirked.

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

"Wait. Did that *really* happen? Or is that just your horrible example of...."

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

"Were you hurt? My God! Why didn't you tell us?"

"I'm telling you now. This old guy grabbed me. I kicked him. He hit me. I kicked him again and tried to bite him, then I ran. I was bleeding a little but that's about it. I called the police on my phone while I was running back to the dorm. The cop on the phone basically told me I shouldn't walk alone in the dark. So I said to him, 'Oh, of course, why assume the fucking world is safe.' Which was *illogical* to say, you know? Because he was a cop. He *knows* the world isn't safe. He must of thought I was just a stupid kid who didn't know shit about anything. Another logical assumption." Paris became teary-eyed. She almost never cried.

"I'm so sorry, Paris."

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

"Sorry. I mean *Pairs*."

My mind started reeling out of control.

You see, spiritual theories are beautiful to contemplate, as long as you are sitting peacefully, like Narcissus in front of a calm clear lake.

But when reality hits, when something bad happens, sometimes all you want to do is track that thing down and destroy it before it destroys you, or someone you love. The world becomes full of allies and enemies. Right and wrong becomes something crystal clear in the mind.

Universes and debates about God are of no use in that reality. When fully present and fighting danger, is this life and time in the present moment the illusion? Or is thinking about the universe and what happens after stars burn out the illusion?

That night the answer was clear. I would have killed that man who attacked her with my bare hands if given a chance.

One mid-February afternoon, Paris called me from her dorm. Allison and I were visiting friends in Cape Cod. Paris asked me if we could talk privately, so I stepped outside to talk to her. It was one of those rare windless cloudless winter days. I was comfortable walking along the shoreline without a heavy jacket. Not a person in sight.

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

"Why would I expect anything different from you?"

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

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

"I mean, I see where the equations are leading conceptually, but then I want to know what we can do with the concepts once we learn them, so I get distracted and start asking the professor what if this, and what if that, and then I don't finish the calculations before the class ends."

"Are the professors okay with you asking questions?"

"Yeah. Most of them say, 'Oh, that's interesting. Why don't you present your question to the class next time?' But the problem is, the professors don't have the answers to the questions I'm asking because I'm too hypothetical and dreamy and off-logic, and I don't like the class work enough to actually want to do the assignments anyway. They're difficult, but super boring. So I've been skipping classes, and going to clubs and stuff instead."

"Clubs?"

"Not night clubs! Clubs, like, have you ever heard of ICE?"

"The drug?"

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

"Oh, yeah, of course."

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

"Actually, no, I didn't."

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

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

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

"She'd love to hear about it."

"But what I'm trying to say is, I really don't love math. Not anymore anyway. And I'm not that good at it, really. I mean I'm S.A.T. good at it. But I'm not Berkeley good at it. And physics is kind of boring in the beginning, and I'm not quite interested enough to want to find out where it goes mathematically. I like the concepts more than the equations. And also, I hate biology and chem. So, I don't really want to be in the science program anymore."

"Okay, well how about just picking another major?"

"I checked out computer science, but it's too much about programming. And computers will end up programming themselves pretty soon anyway. And CogSci is not so much science as it is psychology, but I've had enough psychology to last me a lifetime when I was living at home."

"Okay...."

"I like political philosophy. But there is no such major. I got into it because I've come to realize I'm an anarchist. In fact, I found this really cool bumper sticker in the campus book store that says, 'Organized Anarchy,' and I put it on my guitar case. Because anarchy is actually very organized. It has to be. There is a system to it. It's mostly about no one having legal authority over anyone else unless they commit an obvious crime. But you definitely have to make commitments to each other. Everyone has responsibilities. It's far more like an Israeli kibbutz than some lawless form of chaos. It's actually like an interlaced nest of Kibbutzes or communes, with no one commune having power over the other. They make trade commitments, or sometimes even defense commitments, but they..."

"Listen, that sounds like an interesting thing we can talk about sometime. But is that what you want to focus on?"

"No. Not really. There is still only one thing I'm truly focused on and passionate about. One thing I'm absolutely sure I want to do. And that's play music."

"Well, great! Awesome!"

"But Dad, I don't want to major in music at Berkeley, it's a waste of your money. And I don't read notes anyway. There's no place to thrive for an indie songwriter here. Anyway, all the learning I need to do I could learn online, and by playing with a band. Which you could help me with in the beginning, right?"

"Yes. But then..."

"Yeah, so I guess what I'm trying to say is, I'm dropping out."

I was too stunned to respond.

"I mean, I don't absolutely love any of the kids here. And some of the professors are amazing, but they don't have time to talk to me as a real person. I'm there to get a grade. And I'm

hardly even going to my classes anymore anyway. So, is it okay if I drop out?"

"Well yes, if that's what you're sure you want to do, but I just think you need to consider the consequences for longer than a day."

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

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

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

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

Allison blamed me for Paris's ambivalence and wanting to leave. So I suggested she call Paris and talk to her. If Paris ended up staying at Berkeley, it was fine with me. She was welcome to try to talk her out of it.

"Oh really?" Allison said.

"Of course!"

"It's not about her being a mini-you?"

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

Allison's call with Paris did not go well. She reminded Allison she still wanted to be called Pairs, and told her she was already making plans to leave. As the call went on Paris said she was upset with Allison because she was trying to guilt-trip her into staying, while Dad was "being cool about it."

Allison's interpretation of the call was that Paris was mentally off the rails, and that a lot of this was probably because of her OCD. But some of it also had to do with me giving her permission to screw up her life by leaving college.

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

I said, "Listen, if you want to come home and study music and write songs, I'll work things out with Mom. But the compromise is that you need to see a therapist while you're

writing and studying. Mom and I want to make sure this isn't just anxiety or OCD making you run from what you see as a potential failure. Because we know you can do the work if you put your mind to it. And we also know how fearful you are of not being able to succeed at the highest levels."

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

"Okay then."

"So will you buy me a plane ticket? Like now? I want out of here. Please, Dad!"

"Of course, of course. We'll bring you home."

11

Allison decided to fly to Berkeley to help Paris pack up all of her things and apply for a partial refund. She wanted to fly there alone, to reconnect with her daughter.

When they arrived back home Paris unpacked quickly and locked herself in her room. She would come out only for food and water. Sometimes she would eat meals with us, sometimes not.

We could hear her playing music. She was listening to Melissa Kaplan, the vocalist, lyricist, and composer of her bands Universal Hall Pass and Splashdown. Plus a band called The Sundays, with its singer songwriter Harriet Wheeler.

Then she got into a brilliant instrumental band called Animals As Leaders. Crazy, wild, complicated stuff I couldn't even imagine playing.

She would practice bass for hours -- an instrument she picked up when she was seventeen and had a natural talent for. She would watch YouTube videos of Tal Wilkenfeld and Victor Wooten, picking up how to play funk, and learning slap bass. She texted me from her room asking if she could get a five-string bass at some point. I texted her back, "Of course."

She was playing and writing amazing songs. She would come to me asking what I thought of certain ideas. Should this be a bridge or a verse? When I brought up the future she answered with a shrug of the shoulders. With no trace of sarcasm, she simply said she wanted me to be in the present moment with her.

She didn't want to see friends or relatives. She began to leave the house to exercise, which she seemed to be overdoing, by playing an app called Zombies Run. In the game she was in contact with base camp, which would tell her when the Zombies were coming and where to run. She was running and walking

five to ten miles a day, avoiding Zombies. Sometimes she'd text me, "Home soon. Have to finish my mission."

For downtime she watched *Rick and Morty* with me, to teach me what kids her age were "actually thinking about."

Days before her next session with her local therapist she became depressed. She didn't want to exercise, or eat, or play music. She began to sleep twelve hours a day.

One night while Allison was out with friends, Paris asked if we could talk, just the two of us.

I came into her room and sat on the floor.

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

"I know, Pup. Do you know why?"

"I'm embarrassed."

"About what?"

"Failure. I'm just failing at everything."

"I'm hearing you practice, and watching you do what you love -- writing songs and growing as a musician."

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

"Like what?"

"I *failed* at Berkeley. You know that. I couldn't handle it. I'm failing as a person. I'm failing at everything. I'm realizing I'm not going to ever be great at anything. It feels like I'm staring down a long dark endless road -- it's the road I have to walk down -- because it's my life in linear time. But it's not a good place to travel. It's not going to be easy."

"But music?"

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

"But you *could* be great. In fact, I think you already are. I believe that."

"I'm just *me*. I'm not a great player. I just write about me. I write about what I think and feel. I can write about failure and depression and all that for the rest of my life. I can be the crazy angsty indie rock girl. Or I can be honest. I can create mosaics of dreams, or write about the non-verbal ideas I have, that no one will understand in lyric or instrumental form, nor would I want them to. But if I try to be *great*, then all I'm going to write about is what people my age want to hear -- it's like ego in code. I don't want to destroy my music like that."

She made so much sense to me. She was speaking like a true artist. "I get it. What can I do to help?"

"I'm not sure.... Maybe meds.... Or maybe I need to leave home, be on my own. Learn something, learn something else. Maybe go to Asia, or Africa or something. Start over."

"I don't think you should go anywhere until you feel stabilized, and until Dr. Fairley says that you're ready to be on your own."

"Yeah, whatever."

"I'm sorry. I love you."

"... love you too, Dad," she mumbled.

12

Paris's bedroom got more cyclonic by the day. Clothes and balled-up pieces of paper with abandoned lyrics littered the floor. Her guitar was lying face-down on top of her rumpled winter jacket.

But I had been told by Dr. Fairley not to get into anything potentially OCD-related, so I ignored what I saw.

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

She began to smile. "Wait. Let me get the Dalai Lama on the line so he can listen in."

"Well, let me see what you think about it first. I don't want to bother him with some undeniable universal truth unless it's Paris proof."

Her smile widened. "K. Go. But..."

"I know, it's *Pairs*."

"Go ahead...."

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

"That's it?"

"Pretty much. I mean why waste my time, thousands of hours of my life, contemplating the worst and scariest thing that can happen, even if it's inevitable?"

"Yeah, I actually like that one the best so far. But it may not be a good solution for a writer. Because, well, I mean, I guess you could write a book called, "Shut Up!" But if you don't spend your time writing the Shut Up book, what else would you *do* with your creative life while you're not questioning anything? Isn't that the obvious next question? What do you do with all the extra time

you'll have when you're not contemplating unanswerable questions about the after-world?"

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

"That's actually good. I like it."

"Right? It's like a guy who's lived in the woods his whole life and never had any other people around. Imagine his parents left him as soon as he was old enough to take care of himself. And he's never heard of death. He doesn't even know death exists! I mean, he sees animals dying but he doesn't think that has anything to do with him, so he has no idea. Then one day, he's dying, and he's wondering what the hell is going on. But he still doesn't know that he has to be concerned about the whole death thing. He's just *experiencing* it. That's all."

"Dad, at that point I think he'd be just as freaked out as someone who *knows* about death. Don't you?"

"Maybe. Maybe not. But at least he'd have had all those years before that *not* freaking out about the future. Don't you think that it would be worth not knowing?"

"You know, Dad, I think that's true. So please go ahead and delete all thoughts of death and the hereafter from your hard drive. And, I think it's time to call the Dali Lama. He's going to want to know."

She leaned her head into my stomach. I rubbed my hands through her hair then kissed the top of her head. She pulled away and said, "I feel so much better now. But I don't know why exactly."

Paris signed a release form so we could be included in the individual discussions between her and her therapist, Dr. Fairley. It was no different than years past except Paris was now a legal adult. Dr. Fairley had worked with Paris and Allison and I for many years now.

This was very unlike the strategy deployed by the idiot therapist Paris was seeing in Berkeley, who insisted that Paris as an eighteen-year-old should declare her independence from us immediately, right at the beginning of her first semester at UC Berkeley.

Fairley -- her full name was Dr. Fairley Jacobson -- had already spent a number of years trying to help Paris through her OCD issues, and her adolescent and teen years in general. A few years back she had Paris name the "OCD part" of her thinking, so she might be able to better recognize it when it started running her. The ingenious name Paris blurted out, without even thinking about it for more than a second, was Hunter.

Hunter was hunting for success and perfection. Hunter hated failure. Hunter was proud of Paris's high IQ. He also renamed her *Pairs*, so he could be included as part of her. Hunter was a he, and according to Paris, he was the reason that she sometimes felt like boys were far more intelligent and powerful and emotionally more stable than girls.

She said to me, "I can't defeat him. So I'm trying to join forces with him. We need to make a pact. One day, when I'm ready, we're going to live in the real world as a team. We're going to travel, meet people. He's more self-centered than I am. He has no need to be great, or save the world, or to save you from mortality, unfortunately for you, Dad."

I'm not a therapist. I didn't know how to read between the lines, or ask the right questions. So all I said, to my everlasting regret, was, "Sounds good."

14

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

"So Lindsey, Allison, I think we need to try something a bit different. I'm a neuropsychologist, as was the doctor who tested Paris last year. The good news is, there's nothing wrong with her brain chemistry. She has no sign of schizophrenia or bipolar disorder or any kind of personality disorder. She's not dissociative. But she does suffer from anxiety and depression. And I do believe the root cause of both the anxiety and depression is still her OCD. Or Extreme O -- the obsessive thinking. So I suggest we take a break for a few weeks and let a psychiatrist assess her for medication."

We were both wary of medication, and allopathic medicine in general, unless it was urgent. Fairley saw the looks on our faces.

"There is specific OCD medication. Like Anafranil. The medicine probably won't get rid of the OCD entirely. That's *my* job. But it will allow Paris to become aware of her non-OCD thinking. She'll be able to better separate out the thoughts that Hunter is planting, and see the difference between those thoughts and a more healthy way of thinking, and living."

I was skeptical. "Paris is an amazing person just the way she is. I don't think she dropped out of school because of her OCD. She wanted to play music."

"That's possibly true, Lindsey. But I believe the OCD nudged her into skipping classes, and had her stop trying before she was sure. And I don't think there would be a *Pairs* without Hunter. She would just call herself Paris, and be fine with it. The impulsivity Hunter brings to the table had her playing music for

hours a day, instead of studying for class and playing music in her spare time. And of course, if music is her path, that's fine and good. But the timing, and the way she threw herself into it without thinking it all the way through, at least finishing the semester to have some closure, makes me think the OCD might very well have been part of the decision-making process.

"Also, she is extremely unfocused and disorganized lately. The OCD tells her things like cleaning her room, or learning to drive, or making a point of not losing her dorm keys twice in one week, are not important enough to think about. Only the *biggest* things are important enough to focus on. Like futuristic ideas, scientific problems to solve, great songs to be written. Big things. The problem is, if and when she hits failure, a deep depression ensues. The big wild dreams collapse and reality sinks in.

"The OCD meds will hopefully allow her to find a more realistic and more compassionate inner voice, one that won't shame her when she fails, and won't demand she somehow become superhuman and constantly successful."

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

Allison said, "I'm open to whatever she needs. Lindsey and I both trust you, Dr. Fairley. So choose a psychiatrist you trust, and let's see what kind of meds she needs, and *if* she needs them. I'm hoping she won't."

"I'm not *positive* she needs meds, Allison. I'm proposing we get a second opinion. Let's start there. But sometimes you get to the point where you actually hope she does need meds, and that they work, rather than living with what she's having to deal with at present. Just keep that in mind."

15

Paris dutifully went to the psychiatrist. He saw her six times in two weeks. He said she was "very complex."

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

Three thousand dollars later the assessment came: Paris should take Anafranil. It was specifically prescribed to help her OCD.

When the psychiatrist broke the news to Paris that he thought she needed medication, she stayed silent. She folded the paper prescription in her pocket and left the office. But when she came home, she said, "I'm not taking this, Dad. I would rather find a way for Hunter and me to co-exist. My motto is Integrate, Don't Exterminate."

"But maybe integrating is what the meds would help you do!"

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

"That's not true at all! I'm trying to get you to make peace with your thoughts, and yourself, so you can lead a better life."

"How about if you deal with *your thoughts*, Dad?"

"Pairs, you're not being rational."

"Really, Dad? Define rational."

Allison threatened to force her to take the meds if she was going to live at home with us, and eat our food, and spend our money on therapy. She told Paris, "We're not going to stand by and watch you get more and more depressed. You can't just ignore what two separate professionals think you need to do to get better."

Paris got angry, "I'm not *sick*, Mom! Psychology is not a science, it's an art form. The only one who really knows anything about me is *me*."

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

"Pairs, I don't know what the answer is. I can see both sides. But you're my daughter. I love you as much as I love myself. I want you to feel good. I want you to feel great! And I don't know how to help you do that. I don't know how to help get you there. So, honestly, I think it's worth trying the meds. Because you can always stop if it's...."

"*Hunter* is writing the songs, Dad! It's his crazy thinking that leads me to create my unique chord progressions and weird melodies and totally insane lyrics. Not *literally* insane." she shook her head, getting teary-eyed. "But you know what I mean."

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

"But he's the other part of me that makes us a pair. *We are separate, but one*. I'm not talking about an alternate personality! I'm saying that voice, Hunter's voice, has always been a part of me, even when I was a little girl. He is the quirky voice. He never wanted to be a scientist. He wanted me to do what I'm passionate about, not what I thought I needed to do to save the freaking world. And, yes, he doesn't want me to fail. But he doesn't want me to surrender to failure either! And that's not a bad thing! Right now, I don't want to surrender to the meds. Or to you, or to Mom, or to life! That's my strong instinct. I want you to trust me. All of me. Not trust some fucking shrink whose seen me all of six times in his entire life."

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

She took my silence as approval and quickly found a segue.

"Wanna see the lyrics to a song I just wrote? It's about Hunter."

She handed me a piece of paper:

Significant Other

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

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

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

what else can i let go of

what else can i consider

forget their messages
what do you see?

* * *

A week later, she wrote this on a piece of scrap paper and handed it to me. She seemed to be talking about she and me, while at the same time speaking for her budding new generation in some way.

Us

Reflecting now upon the home we left
Our minds cannot grapple with the emptiness
The mess the world has always been
Makes it hard for us to breathe everything in.

Why do we do the things we do?
It has nothing, almost nothing, to do with you
We try to find our own rules
Trying to find a perfect storm
to carry us away from all the love gone wrong

We are the youth that you created here
We search for truth but it never does appear
The truth is we'll be here,
then never here.
Just like you -- a whisper from the inside of infinity, I fear

So now I stand, barely alive
I still hear your voices --
suggestions from the hive.
They move me, they do
But it's dangerous to remember
It's dangerous to become you
It's too dangerous to go back
to the beginning of us.

Why do we do the things we do?
To distract our hearts from ever missing you
But here is one thing true about me and about you
We're forever missing...
We're forever missing...
Something.

* * *

These words tore at me. They were powerful and heartbreaking to me for no reason that I could sufficiently articulate to myself or anyone else.

A week later, she ran away.

PART II

Paris had packed enough clothes for a week at the most, and took her Baby Taylor guitar -- a small lightweight practice guitar that was easy to carry. She left her bass and everything else she owned behind.

We considered hiring a detective through our family attorney. But the legal conclusion was daunting. She was of age. She was a legal adult. There was nothing anyone could do to forcibly bring her home, short of offering proof of potential self-harm, or proving she'd been kidnapped. I called Dr. Fairley and pleaded, "She *has* been kidnapped. By Hunter."

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

Felton was no help.

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

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

In fact, a month after she left I surrendered and texted her asking if she needed money, or wanted me to visit, or needed anything at all. I decided to support her decision to be on her own and wanted to help her get settled in her new life. But she just texted me back with three words: "I've got this."

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

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

Allison was getting so desperate she considered the idea of us not paying for her phone service anymore. But when she floated the idea to Paris via text Paris responded that we were the only ones she was communicating with, so if we wanted to lose touch with her completely that was our choice.

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

That was a compromise she accepted, but only if in return we wouldn't ask her to come home anymore.

One day she sent me the lyrics to a new song she wrote. When I asked her about how she came up with the title, Seven, she said it was because the song was in 7/4 time:

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

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

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

During the next text communication, she told us we needed to get WhatsApp. Otherwise we wouldn't be able to communicate with her anymore. She was going overseas.

Her first WhatsApp text came to me a few weeks later.

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

controller

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

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

who do you even do these things for?
 do you even think of me,
 did i make it worse?
 so now i'm isolating myself,
 ignoring who talks to me,
 phasing out

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

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

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

hey -
 so I met someone and we're far away
 actually Nepal
 at an ashram in an amazing village
 far from the farthest places.
 if you're wondering where i got the money to get here
 don't worry i'm not doing anything illegal
 his name is Chaitanya which ironically, dad, means
 consciousness.
 so you probably guessed i'd never been with anyone before
 in body connection terms
 i now have knowing
 -- quite beautiful occasionally.
 no more side hugs.

kind of like a new color never seen on earth before
... no that's bs. just poetry
anyway he's taught me many things, as i have taught him.
we are meditating every day
and doing yoga mom
he's also a great musician -- grew up in an ashram and
invited me to visit when we met in the US.
he was kind of a monk as a child
but i guess not so much anymore, right?
anyway, it's amazing here
the most beautiful place on earth. tall mountains, verdant
expanses. Insanely clean blue skies.
i've never been to paris
but i really think it's more amazing here
could be wrong - giving you guys the benefit of the doubt!
anyway, i won't be here much longer
i'm on a mission.
off by myself soon to WWOOF.

WWOOF-ing, we found out, is a way to work on organic farms while travelling the world. "World Wide Opportunities on Organic Farms" gives its workers room and board and teaches them sustainable farming techniques. They also have plenty of time to befriend the other WWOOF-ers, and plenty of free time, in Paris's case, to write and play her music, by herself, for herself.

She mentioned to me in a text a month or so later that it was "kind of like organized anarchy," especially on one farm where apparently the owner wasn't there much, and the WWOOF team without any one leader, made all the decisions about the planting and harvesting and the composting, using the knowledge of the most experienced WWOOF-ers. Everyone volunteered for only the work they wanted to do each day. It just kept working out.

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The next WhatsApp text looked like new lyrics, but she didn't specify. This was all it said:

meta

the only thing that stops me from growing
is that i'm never forced to

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

she lives in her house in the ground
making small decisions

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

to be part of Elysium sounds like Asphodel to me,
but it's all Greek to everyone but her.

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

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

18

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

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

This pushed Allison over the edge. She'd been teetering right at the edge, swaying, dizzy, almost falling, since the day Paris ran away. But this was too much.

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

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

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

Paris's disappearance catapulted Allison into a serious depression. The undeserved publicity in the local press was beyond embarrassing for her. It was an indictment of her parenting. She also developed severe insomnia. At the advice of Dr. Fairley, Allison started taking Zoloft. At some point she became so mentally unstable, even taking the meds, Fairley considered hospitalizing her.

One night she decided to tell me the truth as she saw it. She had come to blame me for Paris's numerous ill-fated decisions.

"You were so hard on her writing. Why did everything have to be perfect before you gave her your approval? I mean, starting at eight-years-old, it was all about pleasing her rock star father, her hero. Wanting to do what you did, and be as prolific as you, and be as good as you. Instead of just letting her find her way, and learn how to just be an eight year-old, you were relentless."

"I was *teaching* her."

"You were pushing her to be perfect at too young of an age. You pushed her to be perfect. For you."

"So you're saying *I* created Hunter?"

"You *are* Hunter! He is *you!*"

"Allison, that's ridiculous."

"Really?"

Allison also blamed some of Paris's crazy thinking on all the spiritual rants I would apparently burden her with, especially when she was far too young to fully process what I was saying. I shouldn't have tested out my morbid theories about what happens after death, and the apparent impossibility of there being a God, on such an impressionable brilliant young mind.

That same night Allison also blamed me for creating characters in my books that were based on Paris, and others on

her. Why couldn't I keep my readers' attention without bringing all of them into our private life?

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

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

I calmly pointed out, "Her last email was to you."

"You know *why*?" Allison cried, "Because she knows you don't check your two million emails a day anymore, Mr. Rock Star. That's why. The fact is, she doesn't want to talk to me, or be anywhere near me, because she knows, and Hunter knows, I'd spend every waking second of my life making sure we get her back to who she was when she was at her best."

I was going to ask Allison who exactly she thought Paris was at her best? And when exactly that was? But I decided to take a run instead. It was commonly the way I relieved stress, and cut off arguments that were leading nowhere.

I ran up and down the long hill a few blocks from our house, but in the dark this time. I was gone for over two hours.

When I came back Allison apologized.

I kissed her. I wiped away her tears.

She laid her head on my shoulder.

But I felt something was lost between us.

I came to realize, as my anxiety continued to increase without my conscious consent, that all my spiritual theories were too abstract to do me, or anyone else, any good. They were more about me finding solace in the moment, and running away from my fear of death, rather than finding truth. If there was any such thing.

I concluded I was a fool.

I started to lose interest in playing music and writing. And I certainly wasn't about to go back on the road. What if Paris were to come home and I wasn't there?

Sometimes I started hyperventilating for no reason I could think of at the time.

Allison suggested I see a therapist and maybe take meds, but I refused.

Like daughter, like father.

We were starting to get into intense fights, each blaming the other for what happened. It *must* have been something we did, or said, or didn't say. Maybe Allison was too strict. Or too angry too often. Or maybe I was too much of a friend to Paris, and not enough of a real father. Or maybe it was the contrast between our two parenting styles that messed with her mind. What other explanation could there be?

Then came the inevitable.

Allison moved out.

Like daughter, like mother.

Allison found an apartment in Cambridge and quickly made a new group of friends. She told them stories about our rock 'n' roll days when she was on tour with me.

She told some of them about a few previously very private arguments I'd had with the guys in the studio, which I didn't appreciate very much. But why care at this point? I had nothing to hide, no image left to live up to.

Besides, I didn't blame her for trying to find herself through all this. Telling her friends how she negotiated peace between me and the band members, and how there were times when she literally kept the band together -- why not tell these stories? Why not build herself back up after having been broken down by the events of the last year? Left unstated, in stark contrast, she couldn't keep our family together, and she felt terrible about it.

She often told me after she moved out that she knew we should still be together. But I knew why she couldn't move back in with me. She wanted to forget about what happened with Paris and create a new life, and hopefully feel free again.

I couldn't do that.

21

Every once in a while I would read a science article on Furturism.com, or see something that would initiate me texting *her*, hoping to connect somehow.

But this time my sharing ended with this text from her:

Dad, I think about you every day. When you text me things about science, or like when you tell me to watch the Chasing Trane documentary. I do love Coltrane's music, and him, for the same reasons you do. But wanting and hoping to hear from you feels like it's enabling the enemy in me who "needs" things and people too much. Needing always leads to pain.

She finished by saying,

Yeah, I guess it's good when you don't text me, actually. I like to initiate and end the conversations. If you stay radio silent, I'll text you again soon."

The next text from Paris that said anything more than "Safe," came weeks later.

She told me she was becoming a poet, and might even write a novel someday. But she would never want to share her writing with anyone. That wasn't the point. She also said she was meditating and doing yoga every day.

A few weeks later she texted me this:

Chaitanya came to visit for a few weeks . . .

Love kills demons, births others.

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

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

Then came a rare email. She alerted me to check my email with a text, knowing I never checked my emails anymore. I didn't want to hear from anyone, or respond to anyone....

Dad,

Remember all the spiritual talks we use to have?
Here's the truth as i see it this morning, after lots of
dreams:

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

Why sink into mortality fears and questioning meaning all the time? It's like someone in search of electricity. Someone says it's behind the wall. So you knock the wall down, but you still can't find it. Then someone says it's in the wires behind the wall. So you cut the wires -- but there's nothing there to see. It's just empty air.

So you conclude electricity is a fake. It doesn't really exist. Revelations are fables. The mind is filled with lies.

Meanwhile, everyone is enjoying the swirling lights above your head, and dancing to the music coming through the speakers. Electricity exists -- you just won't ever, can't ever truly understand it. Understanding it, understanding anything, can be a crazy waste of time.

I think you're lost, Dad, like me, because you keep trying to find what exists vs. what doesn't exist. What's true vs. not true. Not realizing *all* of it might be true -- sometimes. All of it exists, sometimes.

I broke down and cried for an hour. The email was from a general mailbox so I texted her back, my typical rant, but without knowing if it would touch her, or scare her away, or not reach her at all.

Paris. I loved your email. I love you, and miss you so much. Honestly, this is too much for me to bear. Please come home, just to visit. Just for a while. Or let me come to you. I'll come to wherever you are in this world. I won't force you to leave where you are, or stay where you are if you want to move on, or be who you're not. All I want is a chance to hug you, even if it's to hug you goodbye. Please. I'm falling off the edge a bit here.

She responded:

Dad, you should know by now, people are an addiction.

You and Mom are the last people addictions I have. And I am probably yours.

I do love you both. But I can't need you. I'm past that path. I hope you understand. I have to finish my mission.

I emailed her back

"What is the mission?"

"i'll contact you when I know more."

In a separate email a few minutes later she sent me these lyrics. All she said was ... "this one is to/for the real inner me."

timeshift

Maybe one day someone will code me a world
and I'll know what inner space is
then I won't be so truth hungry --

All the labels we create from our limited senses
are so vast we can't label them all
so I'll give myself work to do.

If i ever get there i wont let the panic take me.
if i ever get there i wont let the panic take me,
-- but a timeshift would be nice

Please... just try another way

please, just try another way

i understand you better than the streets can,

better than your fears and habits....

I dont know why they surround you, but please fight

I dont know the sounds you hear from them, but please fight

Is it impossible to explain to anyone outside?

Please use your voice

please use your voice

please use your voice....

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

I went into slow shock.

Mourning set in.

I realized it was possible I would never hear from her again.

22

Over time I lost all my friends, due to my own inability to respond to them when they reached out.

I found women willing to date me, so I tried to start over. But my thoughts continued to carry me back to a place before their time.

I no longer played music. I no longer longed to play in front of faceless, nameless crowds of people. I felt like a fake, a puppet, a mannequin, playing songs for no reason whatsoever other than ego and money. There was no art left in me.

Death seemed to be a good option at some point, especially if nothingness awaited. To blur everything out. To not remember anything about what I had ever thought, or ever felt.

No memories. Existence-less. What a comfort.

Eventually, I realized I had to try to recover from multiple ongoing internal deaths. So I went to see the one person I thought might be able to help.

I saw therapy as a weakness at my age, with all my supposed wisdom and presumed ability to cope. But I admitted to Dr. Fairley that I was hovering at the edge of sanity. My entire family had abandoned me. How much of it was my fault? Why did Paris leave us the way she did? Where is she? Is she going to be alright?

Fairley nodded, "Without trying to diminish any of those concerns and fears, let's also acknowledge that she *is* making it on her own. Without meds, or parents, or therapists. She's living her life. She's exploring herself and the world, and I suppose she needed to do it without having Allison threaten her independence with demands to come home, and, to be honest, without your very powerful intellectual influence attempting to affect her course."

"I just want to know she's safe."

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

"No, not exactly. But whenever her texts stop for too long I feel panic, Allison does too. I always forward Paris's texts to her. There's never any dialogue to speak of. She doesn't answer our texts to her. She just sends more cryptic texts a month later. Or longer. The problem is, I don't know where she is, or how she's surviving, or what she's thinking."

Fairley kept silent. She knew there was more.

"And. . . I can't *hear* her. I can't hear her voice anymore. I can't hear her music, or share that with her. I can't banter back and forth with her. I can only read lyrics of songs that will never exist in sound for me."

My words sounded shallow, hollow. Why should that matter as long as she was alive and safe?

"Go on," Fairley said. "Don't hold back."

"I just want to speak to her, by phone would be fine, listening to whatever words may come. Whatever her thoughts are. Without that, it's almost like she only exists now as part of my imagination."

Fairley said, "Lindsey, I'm just going to put this out there for you to consider. I think you're one of those people that gives love easily, but you also need lots of love in return. Maybe you think you're missing the key to open the door that persuades Paris to love you again. Somehow, it's your fault that you haven't found a way to reach her that deeply. All I can say is, I think you've been a great father and a good husband. But I think the problem right now is, you are loving only memories. It's dangerous to rely *only* on memories."

"Yes, okay, fine. But as a father my concern, Fairley, my very worst fear is - without the meds, the OCD is making Paris crazy, or crazier. Her on-and-off communication. The lyrics to her songs. She's not truly Paris *at her most rational*, or the Paris we used to know, and I'm afraid that things could get worse as time goes on. That's what I mean about feeling like she isn't safe."

"The OCD medication would have only been used for a limited amount of time. She would have had to work with a therapist as well. So just convincing her to take meds, even if you could, really wouldn't do her, or anyone, any good."

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

"Many times in this profession doing nothing is better than doing something just to take action. The mind is very different from the body. If you break your leg it's best to put a cast on it to heal the bone straight. But if your mind becomes lost or broken, sometimes doing nothing and waiting for time to pass leads to the best outcome. The problem is, you never know. She's chosen not to take the meds and to deal with Hunter, her hunter, on her own."

It may well be that she's worse off in many ways, but then again, maybe she's not. Maybe she's enjoying, or intrigued by, and challenged by, the life she's living.

"However, you're not loving *your life*, Lindsey. Let's bring it back to you. You're not able to access a happy or passionate life for yourself right now. It's not even because Allison is gone. It's not because of Paris either. This is about you now.

"And by the way, let's take a step back -- as far as Paris's own *logic* for choosing to live the way she's living, and making the choices she's making: do you really think she'd be better off in college right now? Or working as a physicist in a lab? Or being a touring rock star? As Paris might say, "Define logic."

Fairley said I was currently suffering from chronic anxiety disorder, in part, due to my inability to individuate from my daughter. She said I could either attempt to deal with it as a temporary condition to overcome, or try meds. She wasn't against the idea of meds, at least as a temporary solution.

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

"There are other kinds of medications."

I felt angry, mostly at myself. I felt I should be able to handle things on my own. "I'm not taking meds! I won't do it."

"Paris made that same decision."

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

"And I believe you have a chronic anxiety disorder. That's just as serious as OCD. And that's *my* gut instinct."

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

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

An ambulance arrived. They were very kind folks. One recognized me and told me he loved my music. That was extremely embarrassing under the circumstances.

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

In hour five, the verdict came in. I'd had a full-blown panic attack. Nothing more.

Anxiety had bear-hugged me into submission.

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

I also tried other kinds of drugs that, under better circumstances, might have been more addictive and far more effective, but with their own unique side effects -- rock 'n roll drugs, and sex with beautiful women, many of whom tried to actually love me despite how messed up I was.

I also tried to honor my hedonistic urgings by eating exotic food in five-star restaurants where it was assumed that three hundred dollars was a fair price for a meal. And for another two hundred dollars I could get a lovely bottle of Moss Wood Cabernet Sauvignon.

None of this soothed me.

None of this reached or healed the driving force behind my anxiety: heartbreak.

So there I was, a well-respected songwriter about to turn sixty, with enough money to survive for another fifty years, and a healthy enough body to get me there -- yet still grieving. Still questioning my sanity. Still questioning the meaning of my existence, knowing damn well there were no answers to anything. That was finally clear to me.

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

Therapy had run its course.

Meds had run their course.

Addictions had run their course.

I was left sitting in the middle of a highway of wise quotes and deeply empty experiences.

The mind is full of these kinds of broken highways.

I wrote a song that didn't fulfill me.

I wrote an entire novel that didn't have enough passion and reason to exist for me to even bother to reread.

I threw both the song and the novel away.

I was left with rereading Paris's texts, dating back to the beginning.

When I reread them, nothing became any clearer. Nothing made sense.

I didn't even make sense to myself anymore. I was running out of options.

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Three months after Paris's previous communication with me she again alerted me by text that an email had been sent to my inbox.

It was written only to me. Paris had just turned twenty-one.

"I have found a place, Dad. It's so amazing! It doesn't translate into words. It's a place in my mind... it had always been too far off to get to -- an impossible journey, but not anymore. I am going there now. It's time... I'm excited! But I may not ever come back as me. My mission will be complete. So before I go, I will try to tell you what I am experiencing, what I know to be true:

We are sunlight. Sunlight travels off and soon forgets the sun. But we are still and forever sunlight. That light expands everywhere, in all directions. Not just between you and me.

I know you'll know that too someday.

Until then Dad, until then -- live well. Live well, and have a beautiful life."

She had come to the truth, her truth, and wrote it down for me to consider. I saw that this was my mission too, of course -- to individuate, and find a sense of peace in that all too solitary place. But finding peace and inner connection felt farther away than ever these days.

It's a quantum thing - connection. Paris was a combination of my cells and Allison's cells. You can't individuate from your own cells. And yet she was also something else, and someone else entirely.

So, who was the crazy one in this world now, really? Paris or me? Who was closer to the truth about how to live?

Maybe we were both connected and disconnected at the same time, like sunlight; maybe that's all any inner search could ever conclude.

Or, maybe we were both too far away from the sun to ever know the answer.

The End

~ GM