

Rebekah's Closet
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Chapter 1

It is October, and the chill is returning to the air, as the leaves begin to paint themselves brighter colors again. A middle-aged woman in a black dress approaches a silvered gray shed and circles it, pouring kerosene on it from an old watering can. Her dress looks like it came from the early 1800s, has all sorts of things attached to it, pieces of old books, spines and pages, bells, pocket watches, skeleton keys, pieces of ribbon and string, pieces of colored fabrics, wispy. She is whispering something to herself, and her movements are childlike. When the can is empty she giggles and begins to whisper louder and skip like a girl, reciting a nursery rhyme. Then she begins repeating:

"... Believe what you will, do no harm, and let Karma find the guilty ..."

She stops at the door, strokes it with memory, then pulls out a box of matches. The woman thoughtfully strikes a match and goes around the shed again in a reverse circle, lighting it with matches as she goes. The shed begins to catch on fire and she begins to cry and laugh alternately. It makes an inferno and she steps back.

A hand comes to her shoulder and she is with a band of scarecrows, only they are alive. The fire burns to the ground as they dance around it. When the fire is dying, the scarecrows leave her and she reaches for a hand that reaches for her from the nearby woods across the road. It is the hand of a living tree, which takes her into its embrace as night begins to fall ...

The next morning, a man's worn boot kicks at the cold coals of the fire. His hand is now reaching into the ashes for pieces of metal, pieces of woodworking tools ...

Chapter 2

1974, Cartersville, Georgia: Rebekah soaks up the Sun on her skin, on the grass in the back yard, her dog beside her, panting. When she becomes too hot even for her, because she loves the

intense heat, she begins inspecting the trees, the garden, for buds on the daylilies, for decay of yesterday's lilies, for ladybugs, studying the angle of light through the leaves of the trees in the late afternoon, for the growth of the apples on the apple tree, wishing that the tiny fruit on the pear tree would grow at all.

She imagines that she is inside the bloom of a peach-colored daylily, inside its burnished rose throat, deeper than the bees and butterflies can go. Inside is a room like *I Dream of Jeannie*, because this is the 1970s, a room lined with a bank of soft rose pillows, where she can sleep for as long as she wants, where no one will bother her, no chores, no school, no ... she is inside the room, sitting cross-legged on the grass, inside the room and on the grass. She can wink and have anything she wants, lemonade, iced tea, books, peanut butter, hot dogs, French fries, anything.

A spiral of pain in her chest begins to ache, until she makes herself stop daydreaming, because her mother said it's wrong to have your head in the clouds. She's not sure why it's wrong, but she's afraid of her mother enough to pull herself out of any heaven. It's better if she pulls herself out, rather than being startled out of a dream by her mother's reproach.

Maybe she should go back inside and watch TV, or something? She heads back inside the house and her dog follows, hoping to get back inside where the air conditioning is on. She closes the door behind her in the kitchen and the world is close and oppressive again. She feels hotter than she did outside, but not a good kind of heat, only the cool linoleum of the kitchen floor feels good on her bare feet. She gets a tall glass and fills it with ice, then pours iced tea from the brown glazed pitcher, and takes a long drink. Her brothers are watching a Western on TV, so she'll read more of her book for the Summer book reading contest sponsored by the local library.

Her brothers are sprawled out, one in an easy chair and one on the couch. The air is suddenly tense as she enters the room. "Hey!" one says, "You're in biggg trouble! We've been looking for you." "What? What did I do?" she asks, thinking it's one of their many jokes. One brother sits up on the couch and takes hold of her arm. "You have to come with me now." He leads her down the dark hallway to their parent's room, where it is quiet and decorated in white and cream, with a print of two egrets over the elegant bed, pale blue carpet, her mother's dresser carefully

kept immaculate, her father's tall dresser also neat, but she can't see the top of it because it's taller than her sight, she just knows.

Her brother pulls out the rope and so she knows he's going to tie her up again. Big deal, he does this all the time, but what do they mean by her being in trouble? Her brother started tying her up years ago, as punishment because she wouldn't stop trying to hang around them. They wanted to be left alone, and then because she cried out, he began stuffing one of the rolls of her father's socks from the upper left drawer into her mouth. It would hurt her jaw so badly that the pain made her cry. The tears would stream and stream and there was no end to the pain, the tears stinging as they dripped from one eye to the other, and she couldn't wipe it with her hands tied behind her back. Her brother was surprised to see that he had hurt her and after that used duct tape to cover her mouth, which hurt when he would take it off.

She didn't really understand why he did this, but it was just something to be endured. She would sometimes fall into a state like sleep, where she would forget where she was and what was happening and not feel pain anymore. She became accustomed to it. Eventually if he didn't tie her up when their parents would leave the house, she would bring the rope to him, because it was routine and she even thought she must like it or something, although it was painful, but how could she like it? It was confusing. She wasn't sure and the fog came when she tried to answer even herself now sometimes.

She racks her brain and can't think of anything she's done wrong, because she's learned to be as quiet as possible, to stay out of her family's way, to go to her room and read, to do her homework, to go outside, to do her chores, to do whatever it is she's supposed to do. Sometimes she would lose track of time and would get in trouble because she was supposed to be doing a chore or something, and she couldn't explain how the time had passed without her knowing it. But that hadn't happened lately. What could it be?

He ties her hands behind her back as usual, and then her ankles together, quietly. "You're in big trouble with Jack - he's really mad at you - I don't know what you've done, but he's really mad with you." "But what did I do?" she asks. "I don't know. He won't tell me, but he's really mad so it must have been something really bad. I'm going to leave you here and when he's ready

he's going to come in and deal with you himself." "What is he going to do?" she asks, beginning to be scared, this isn't their normal prank. "I don't know that either, but when he's done I'll come in and untie you, but you can't tell anyone about this or you'll be in even more trouble."

She lies there on the pale blue carpet, cold in the a/c because it's always cooler at the back of the house, shivering. She can't think of what she's done wrong. Maybe it is just a joke after all, because she can't think of anything, can't think of anything she's done wrong. It's a long time before Jack comes in, and he shuts the door behind him. Usually when her other brother ties her up, he leaves the door open. This is serious, or is it? She turns her head to see Jack's face and she's never seen him like this - he IS really mad.

He kneels behind her head and says, "You're being punished because you've done something really wrong and I've told you and told you but you just won't stop. I have to punish you to teach you to stop. Do you know what you've done wrong?"

"No, Jack, I don't, but I'll stop if I know what it is. You don't have to punish me," she says calmly, hoping that she can reason with Jack.

"No, I've tried everything and you just don't get it. There's no other way to get you to stop. I'm going to ask you again -- do you know what you're doing wrong? If you don't, then I'm going to have to punish you."

"No! I don't, please, Jack, just let me know what it is and I'll stop", she began to plead, still racking her brain for what she's done wrong.

He stands up and goes to the closet, opening the left side of the sliding closet door, and pulls out one of their father's black wing-tip shoes. She's often told her father that she especially loves those shoes on him -- she doesn't know why, but they seem so elegant and fitting for her tall, slim, quiet father, who when he speaks, has such thoughtful, thought-provoking things to say. She wishes her father were here now, because he wouldn't let this happen -- this is wrong.

"I'm going to ask you one more time to tell me what you're doing wrong, and if you don't tell me, I'm going to beat you with this

shoe," Jack says, kneeling behind the back of her head again, where she is lying on her side, facing the closet.

"I don't know, Jack -- I really don't know! I swear I don't!" she pleads again.

Then suddenly she feels the wing-tip shoe hit the back of her head, wham, and she is stunned -- how can this be happening? What is wrong with Jack? She hasn't done anything wrong! She is surprised it doesn't hurt more than it does, and it does hurt, but it is like the back of her head is numb, she has an instant to wonder but not speak out loud before Jack says again, "Okay, now do you know I'm serious?"

"Yes."

"If you don't want me to beat you any more you need to tell me what you're doing wrong."

"But I don't know!" Wham! Wham! Wham! She begins to go to that foggy place and see images that don't relate to where she is, shadowy images begin to appear, like dreams. She has trouble focusing on where she is.

This continues over and over with her not knowing and being beaten for not knowing for some time, with Jack hitting her on the back of the head harder and harder each time. "You are so stupid!" Jack said. He laughs. "I mean, I'm hitting you on the back of the head as hard as I can and you still don't remember."

"Well," she says, trying to be tough, "it doesn't really hurt that bad, and I don't know why."

"Well, maybe I should beat you in a different place then," and he hits her on the other side of the back of her head. This time she sees bright lights and almost passes out from pain.

"Owww!! That really hurts!" she says.

"Good! Now we're making some progress. So, if you don't want me to keep beating you there where it hurts, you better tell me what you've done wrong!"

"But I don't know!" Wham! Wham! Wham! And she begins to pass out, to not be able to speak, to not feel, to go into shock

while he continues to beat her on various parts of her head, avoiding the part where she is numb. He places the shoe in front of her face on the floor and stands up.

"I'm going to leave you here for a while, until you figure out what you've done wrong." She doesn't answer -- this is crazy -- Jack is crazy -- she hasn't done anything wrong.

Her head is pounding and she can't feel. She stares at her father's shoe until she doesn't see anything but black, then closes her eyes and sees swirling red and yellow. She passes out.

Jack comes back in eventually and starts again with the question and the beating until the other brother comes to the closed door and says, "Don't you think that's enough?"

"No!," Jack says. "I'll say when it's time." But he begins to slacken and finally says, "Well I guess I have to tell you what you're doing wrong, but only if you'll promise to stop."

"Yes," she says very quietly from some space very much removed from the floor of her parent's immaculate bedroom.

"You have to stop looking at me like that."

"Like what?"

"You know! You know!"

"I don't know!" Wham! Wham! Wham! "Okay, I'll stop looking at you like that!" she says with a voice of someone else, not her, while the room spins. She thinks, I'll never look at you again as long as I live. Then she wonders how she can do that, and looks forward to Jack going off to college in a few years.

"Okay. See, I had to beat you to get you to stop, so it's your own fault for not remembering, and for looking at me like that in the first place. And if you tell Mom and Dad, I'm going to beat you again, but it will be worse." And he leaves her there on the floor for some time, she passes out again, but now even though she is unconscious, she feels enormous pain, someone, some part of her is still aware that she is in enormous pain.

Her other brother comes to the door quietly and wakes her. "Man, you are in so much trouble. I don't know what you did,

but Jack is furious. He says you guys have an agreement now, though, and believe you me, you better keep it."

She doesn't say anything or move, although she is awake. She shoe is gone, and the closet door closed. When her hands are free she wipes her eyes and touches her head, and suddenly remembers that Jack has beaten her and starts crying uncontrollably.

Her older brother unties her ankles and says, "What did he do? What did you do wrong?" then he stops himself. "This is between you and Jack, but if you tell, you're gonna get it from both of us, you hear?"

She nods. She has trouble standing, very dizzy and he helps her get her balance, hugs her very briefly.

"I know, it's not fair, but you deserved it, because Jack wouldn't have done that over nothing."

She doesn't say anything, but goes down the dark, spinning hall to her bedroom, closes the door and lies down on her bed. She is conscious for a few moments and then passes out again.

When she wakes her brothers have told her parents that she got sick so they put her to bed. She doesn't argue with the lie. Her head pounds and she starts to cry, silently, as she's learned to do over the years, until her pillow is wet with tears, so she flips it over to have the dry side soft against her face.

She thinks of her elderly cousin Beatrice and her garden, her house in the country, that one afternoon she and her mother visited her there. The tall, round green clipped hedges lining the straight path to the front porch of the white house, her cousin's beam of a warm smile that made her cry, inexplicably, embarrassing her mother. The garden in the back with its dark green bushes like the shapes of teddy bears, and the soft white glowing hydrangea breathing slowly in the rare Summer breeze, drifting off to sleep in her mother's lap, the hydrangea becoming pale yellow round paper lanterns festooning an outdoor evening dinner party, a whole string of them flying off into the fields beyond the yard, off into the horizon, blending with the intermittent lights of the fireflies at dusk, blending into the deep blue of the sky and sparkling stars.

She is very far away now, part of a simple floating light, as simple as a loving life might be, loving smiles, sleep.

Chapter 3

1973, Cartersville, GA: The hollow gray eye of the submarine comes closer to the girl in her dreams. The girl swims up to the glass, her hands pads on the luminous green hull, slipping, and she places them back again, places an eye to the eye, trying to see inside, without luck. Instead, she senses what's inside the sub, variously, chuckling Russian seamen, infuriated captain and mystified crew, following orders. What orders? Standoff. Now the girl laughs and the eye becomes that of the Luna moth's disguise, and she dissolves into a different shade of green, into a jungle leaf, into a leopard's tongue, very thirsty. Thirsty, thirsty, the insistent body says, and the girl is pulled away from dream to her day bed, the sheets in disarray from the pain she had been squirming to get away from in her head, a migraine again, so severe she would black out and fall into fever-like dreaming. Her eyes wearily open and scan the spines of the books stacked on the bedside table, C.S. Lewis, Laura Ingalls Wilder, Alexandre Dumas, Emily Dickinson, Charlotte Bronte, Edgar Allen Poe ... everything hurts, she thinks, closing her eyes again. She sits up and drinks half a glass of water, then back down into the softness of the bed, its coolness in spite of her heat.

Aching, dizzy, hot, the water cool down her throat, but can she go back to exactly the same place in her dream? The memory of the dream split into doorways of neural cells, then muddied, and somewhere new offerings of dream possibilities, distraction, delirium, she turns again on the pillow, trying to find a new, cooler place. So tired of being in bed all the time, so sick, and Summer through the long windows with its lush shimmer of breezes that pulls ghosts out of shadows, pulls light from the air, for brief dances.

She can hear the neighborhood children at their games, sometimes shouting, piercing squeals, abandon, freedom from school, or laughter, then quiet, and mothers tilting their heads at once in fear of silence, then relieved to hear them again, just playing, just playing still. Rebekah listens differently, imagines them and what they look like, what they were up to, as if she were putting her eye up against the gray of the unknown again, sensing, imagining play.

Rebekah is asleep again inside the code of her mind, reshaping her body to form each fragment, to feel the memory and the meaning -- only to recoil in pain again from the shard, to jump to another piece, for her awareness to shift in perspective, reflection -- then she is an arrow, starting with the first letter of the code, piercing the center of each one but leaving them intact on the page of her consciousness, until she has felt the full encryption, both the code and its mystery and the knowledge of its intent. She is an arrow pointed toward the center of the Earth, with the legs of a huge Galapagos lizard, red and chocolate and charcoal, angling each foot forward with an ancient gait, moving closer and closer to intense, fiery heat. She becomes the heat, becomes fire, is melting like wax into a pool on the floor, she slides under the windowsill and into the backyard where her older sister is playing with her friends and slips past them to the underside of the garden's subtropical flowers where it is cool, burrows into the Earth's soft mantle, back toward the center of the Earth, back to the fire.

Chapter 4

It is late Spring in 1982. Dr. Akin has flushed a deep rose, which often happens when he gets excited, and most often he is excited by English Literature, his true passion. In his early forties, his hair is blond, almost white, his eyes the palest blue, a small, soft-spoken gentleman of letters, with an old-fashioned yet modern air for such a young man, recalling a Southern literary tradition of independence and white linen suits in the warmer months, his favorite author Eudora Welty, who he catches lecturing as often as he can manage, afraid that in her old age she could die at any minute.

The high school advanced placement English class in a sleepy north Georgia town is a perfect match for him, to bring the wonder of the literary greats for the first time to the students, to see their eyes and souls light up with understanding, to see the world in new ways. Well, that is his vision, anyway.

This afternoon, with the cicadas beginning to sing and the heat becoming closer, the tater tots and corn dogs from the lunchroom warm in their stomachs, the students are beginning to fall asleep, except for two or three. Dr. Akin's soft voice is reading *Ode to Psyche* by Keats. But one student, Rebekah, a sprite-like senior student with big hazel eyes and long light brown hair alternately flashing red, inherited from her Irish roots, is

hanging on every word. Her mind and soul are grasping at meaning and imagery, collecting all of the words in her head to form the picture Keats was painting, and a picture of her own, a world her soul craves.

*O Goddess! hear these tuneless numbers, wrung
By sweet enforcement and remembrance dear,
And pardon that thy secrets should be sung
Even unto thine own soft-conched ear:
Surely I dreamt to-day, or did I see
The winged Psyche with awaken'd eyes?
I wander'd in a forest thoughtlessly,
And, on the sudden, fainting with surprise,
Saw two fair creatures, couched side by side
In deepest grass, beneath the whisp'ring roof
Of leaves and trembled blossoms, where there ran
A brooklet, scarce espied:
'Mid hush'd cool-rooted flowers, fragrant-eyed,
Blue, silver-white, and budded Tyrian,
They lay calm-breathing on the bedded grass;
Their arms embraced, and their pinions too;
Their lips touch'd not, but had not bade adieu,
As if disjoined by soft-handed slumber,
And ready still past kisses to outnumber
At tender eye-dawn of aureorean love:
The winged boy I knew;
But who wast thou, O happy, happy dove?
His Psyche true!*

Rebekah becomes lost in the poem, no longer in the room at all. She is stringing flowers with others in a field, surrounded by a deep green forest. She can hear the laughter and gossip of the others, some couples falling behind or having run ahead, kissing, chasing, jubilation. She can hear herself laughing and she is no longer in the field, though she is still stringing flowers, and walking with the others toward the brook in the forest – she has become part of the sky, the light, the white clouds tracing palest blue. She is back in her body, the Sun is warm on her skin, and the cicadas are singing in the trees and in the grasses. Now again she is not anywhere at all, floating on words, each one entering her ears and sending her softly further on, each one unraveling into its meaning inside her head ...

*Yes, I will be thy priest, and build a fane
In some untrodden region of my mind,*

*Where branched thoughts, new grown with pleasant pain,
 Instead of pines shall murmur in the wind:
 Far, far around shall those dark-cluster'd trees
 Fledge the wild-ridged mountains steep by steep;
 And there by zephyrs, streams, and birds, and bees,
 The moss-lain Dryads shall be lull'd to sleep;
 And in the midst of this wide quietness
 A rosy sanctuary will I dress
 With the wreath'd trellis of a working brain,
 With buds, and bells, and stars without a name,
 With all the gardener Fancy e'er could feign,
 Who breeding glowers, will never breed the same:
 And there shall be for thee all soft delight
 That shadowy thought can win,
 A bright torch, and a casement open at night,
 To let the warm Love in!*

The poem ends, and Dr. Akin asks the class, "Well, what do you think?" his heart pounding. Silence from the students, cicadas and heat its own voice weighting the humid air with thoughts of deep sleep. Rebekah jumps a little at her desk as she suddenly reenters her body. "I love it!" she says. But knowing that Dr. Akin expects a more studied response, she begins following her index finger as it scans the words on the page of the book on the desk before her, to begin explicating the poem into its elements, structure, characters, tone, with an excited interchange between Dr. Akin and herself. Two more students also note key details of the poem, and the four of them begin to have an understanding, beyond the class, beyond time, beyond grades, of the presence of natural beauty, as the others doze with their eyes open, so affected by the heat.

Dr. Akin explains more structural elements for which he has brought the poem to the class, and Rebekah begins to enter the poem again, becomes silent. She is in the field again, and this time she sees the other two students and Dr. Akin with her -- he is talking in his soft Southern voice, they are all headed for the forest for their festival ... the Sun ... the cicadas ... the heat ... Dr. Akin's sweet simple laugh and rosy face as he watches Rebekah, and alternately the other students, and the words under his index finger, walking and reading a few lines from the poem again to them to reiterate his example ...
 RRRRRRRRIIIIIIIIIINNNNNNNGGGGGG! They all have a jump in their seats to hear the school's bell. Rebekah and Dr. Akin look at each other disappointedly.

The sleeping students have awakened behind their eyes, and gather their books to shuffle out of the classroom. Rebekah and the two other students are more carefully closing their books, still sensing the magic in the room, that is slowly dripping through the corners of the room, out the windows into the light.

"Thank you," Rebekah says to Dr. Akin, waiting until the others have filed out. "What a beautiful poem."

"You should read more of Keats," he says.

"I will," she says somewhat sadly and dreamily, her world bruised from the loss of the dream, back to the world of the next class, World History, as limply taught by the school's football coach.

"See you tomorrow," he says, closing his books, and preparing himself for his next class.

He sighs as she leaves the room, and Rebekah walks down the crowded, rushing hall and up the stairs, avoiding contact. In a flash, she remembers the field and the light for a moment halfway up the stairs, waiting for the clogged traffic of students to organize itself into two movements, one going up, one going down, "and there shall be for thee all soft delight that shadowy thought can win." She smiles and enters the next world of World History, consisting apparently of periods of time marked by scientific innovations and war.

Chapter 5

Now Rebekah is in a wheelchair on a manicured, glowing green lawn in an asylum, dozing in and out of her dreams and hallucinations, unable to control her consciousness for the time being. She sometimes wonders if the turning will stop again and clarity, stillness return to her mind and emotions, spirit and heart again. It was if she were standing on a bright star, mirrored and patchwork like a disco ball, a crystal ball, it never would stay the same when she would focus on it. She could only breathe and think positive thoughts, try her best to remember good things, like flowers, the clouds and Sun, the green green grass she could see beyond her silk ivory slippers and sky blue terry robe.

Not far from her is a wooden park bench, sharing the shade of the same old Sycamore tree, and her nurse sits there, reading patiently

and calmly. They seem to think it's only a matter of time, she thinks reassuringly, then begins worrying again, as flashbacks and sense memories invade her again.

It feels as though someone is touching her, as though something disgusting is in her mouth, and then she is filled with confusion and rage, sadness, numbness, shock ... then flowers again, the soft bumblebees drowsily working each flower's most private parts, the most innocent and beautiful things, followed by the most horrendous ... she has no control ... remembers to breathe, blacks out again and slumps forward in her chair ...

The nurse comes over and adjusts the pillows behind her and sits her back again so her system is supported while she is in this state. The nurse shakes her head ... it will take several weeks for the medication to take effect and stop this torture ...

Chapter 6

It is Winter of 1983. Rebekah, in a ridiculously oversized pale gray sweat suit that had been worn by her brother Jack, a pair of Keds that she had dyed a luminescent pale yellow years ago, and a warm brown wool overcoat that her mother had made for her, is late for class. She is always late for everything now, cannot seem to truly wake up anymore, and feels as though even when she is awake, that she is dreaming, that nothing seems real. She feels though she is a ghost visiting herself, so far distant that conversations are almost impossible, and the world she experiences is only for sending waves to her senses for decoding.

She is aware that she has become somehow lost from herself, but thinks that it's just part of adjusting to college life, to adjusting to life away from home, the facts of which become a wall that will not give her answers, or even a list of facts, only a watery, painful substance that keeps her from feeling the whole of her life.

Everything happened so fast, that now it's a blur. Classes, professors, new friends, her roommate, the love of her life rejecting her, dates with guys in whom she has no interest but can't say no to. She can remember the beginning, before the blur, of those first three political science classes with Dr. Hay, in which she quickly learned that the world was not as it seemed, not a post-war modern century with a somewhat mixed up but

still technologically bright future, this having been communicated to her by her high school football coach's class on World History. Vietnam was over. The sixties were over. Big sigh of relief, now we can have normalcy, while our lives are improved with innovative solutions, faster than we can even keep track of.

No, Dr. Hay's course shattered her world view in a friendly, but truthful way – global warming, pollution, overpopulation, desertification, civil wars in many of the Third World countries, extreme poverty and disease, even with vaccines for polio, for example, and people still dying of polio. Polluted water, air, land, infrastructure, investment, corruption, a ship that is sinking, and we are only rearranging the chairs on the deck. Unless, Dr. Hay said, unless people realized what was happening, began to take note, to recycle, to get involved, to contact their officials. "It's up to you," he said. An enormous responsibility, "Not everyone can carry the weight of the world," becomes a favorite lyric from an REM cassette she listens to in her Walkman, walking around campus, to the dining hall, back to the dorm, to class, before sleep, The Psychedelic Furs, Elvis Costello, The Pretenders, The Police, The Rolling Stones, Echo and the Bunnymen.

But she would rather have known, she thinks to herself. Knowing is better than not knowing. She thinks this about life now -- that it is a series of rude awakenings. The first three classes had coincided with the other shatterings from those first few weeks, and the wall comes up when she tries to remember what happened, a big watery blur.

She thinks maybe it was what happened over Christmas holidays, when Jack had brought home his old college clothes to be washed before he gave them to Goodwill – "Don't throw those out!" she had laughed – "I want those!" And she had begun wearing the sweats every day it seemed, even though they were laughable, it was a joke that somehow made sense to her, none of the clothes she had brought with her to school felt right anymore, only the sweats.

She had begun letting her hair blow in the wind without restraining it, or putting it behind her ears, or in a bun, like she used to. She let it blow and fall wherever it pleased, to the point that some nights when they were over at Georgia Tech partying at a frat house, some curious young man would part the waves

of hair away from her face, to find that she was pretty, and very very drunk. She had never gotten drunk before freshman year, either, but had come to like it very much, as it made the wall move, because oddly enough when drunk she felt she could feel, not feel, feel, felt something moving, and then forgetting again, the painful mornings after that layered into the forgettings, the renewed loss of feeling once the nausea and headaches past.

Over the holidays, Dr. Akin, her English professor, had passed away in his sleep, at only 41 years. She is in shock that Dr. Akin was gone – so young, so unexpected. She has waves of pain and loss from time to time, until she thinks they are a block of feeling everything, and she forgets again, as if trying to remember a dream or nightmare, slipping from her mind's fingers.

Sometimes she cries and she doesn't know why. One day before the end of Winter quarter, when she has to get herself in gear to make the best grades she can during the exam period, she stops crying.

She doesn't realize until many months later, after the school year has ended, when she starts remembering, when the wall of memory and feeling comes down. She finds herself in many pieces, at a friend's house. The world becomes terrifying all around her, as she tries to relate to her parents over the Summer, without luck, only with their criticism for her bad grades. She finds no way to communicate what she doesn't understand, some aspects of the wall forming again, so becomes silent again, determined somehow to keep it together enough to make the best grades she can the following year, as a sophomore.

Chapter 7

She must be dreaming, because now she is at the gates of a park she has never seen, but can see now vividly. When she reaches the ornate gates of the park, her peripheral vision picks up a bit of movement. The sculpted acanthus leaves of the gate seem to be blowing in the wind. They're at it again. It being mid-day on a weekday and the air beginning to gain a hint of Winter to come, the park is largely deserted, even though it is beautiful year-round, night or day.

She moves closer to the patch of leaves in question, and they refuse to move again. Peripherally she sees yet another movement, but this time on the part of the condor at the top of the gates. Instead of moving closer to the center of the gates and the condor, she holds her ground and waits, watching the whole structure now, for any signs of life. Again she sees movement, to the side of his vision, but now it is by the dragon-headed gargoyle, and the vision to the sides of her eyes is becoming more adept, for this time she sees the flash of the fish tail of the gargoyle.

She laughs, and wonders if she really needs to wake up, for this is truly remarkable, something is in the air today. The condor's wings stretch up into the air, and flap, trying to be free of the gates. The bird looks sharply at Rebekah as if she is the jailor who causes the bird to be imprisoned there, its claws part of the metal gate itself. The bird tries to lift each leg away from the gate, still trying to use the force of its enormous powerful wings, without luck.

The gates begin to hum, and the gold acanthus leaves turn green, then gold, then green again. "Okay then, fellows, shall we be off?" she asks, and Rebekah enters through the central portal, with one hand strumming the bars of the gate as she passes, stirring it into further movement. The condor shrieks, as a gargoyle shakes off the steel and lacquer and swims through the gate after the her. Headed toward the park's lake, no doubt, she thinks, its scales thirsting for the feel of water, as she herself thirsts for ... the unknown to be revealed, for a sense of peace with the unknown and its brother reality.

As she walks down the path, the leaves of the trees are falling apple colors and spirals, showing her the wind's currents. Ghosts appear from the shadows and begin their promenades, their children scampering among the fallen leaves. The condor flies over her with another shriek, and Rebekah looks back at the gate -- the condor is still there as well. Yes, both, for that is how it is with these things.

Through the leaves still clinging to the trees, the Sun is shining and dappling the ground with light. Through the leaves still being held by the trees, looking up, the Sun is also dappling the sky. She sees the tiny dots of green and yellow of one leaf and realizes that it is not solid, that it is really cells held together by

magnetism, by the life of the leaf. She sees the cell walls of a single leaf cell, the nucleus and atoms shivering with energy, the energy that defines the leaf experience, a very simple life really. She remembers the skeletons of leaves one finds on the ground in late Winter, beautiful forms, ghosts of Summer, disintegrating into dusty Earth, the soil made up of everything that was ever alive.

She feels a wind blow through her. She is clinging to something, something is holding on to her, pages of books she has read and will read ruffle in the wind, her pen on paper, the feel of the paintbrush in her hands, paint on her fingers inevitably, the texture of fine fabrics between her fingers, the clack of the typewriter, she rubs her eyes, and in a straight line from her feet, a rush of energy erupts in a flash through her spine and out through her head.

She is clinging to theory, a formula, the physics of a dialectic, a mystery with photographs and news clippings fluttering, for the wind has started blowing through her again, startling the photos. The people in the photos whisper to each other, for they already know the formula of her existence. She has walked this path before, many times. She sees herself walking in the park, in the current moment, can feel it in the marrow of her bones, yet she sees herself looking back at herself from somewhere else in the future, wistfully. Enjoy now, she thinks.

The photographs cause little whirlwinds of their own, especially the ones with faces she's never seen – who? When? How can they cause a train of thought, of memories, of tall ships and steam engines and rockets? Maybe one day she would know.

She senses that she will never die, just like these ghosts on their eternal promenades, she will always be part of the worlds she has known, even without literally knowing them in this lifetime, for they evoke wonder and discovery from afar, as if she did experience them in some other lifetime, lifetimes.

If the condor fell off the gates, the condor would still be there, and still be free to fly, even when it was carefully and securely reattached to the top, symbol of the freedom and the continuity of parks, of simultaneity. She feels himself to be continuous somehow, yet somehow always somewhere else, flying in multiple directions at once, sipping a Pernod at this café, an espresso at another, reading the same morning's

paper every day, the same words, in and out of the words into other worlds, and then back for another sip of the present.

A female golden retriever dashes past Rebekah into the open field in pure and utter joy, running as fast as she can, utter freedom, her fur flying in the wind, part of the wind. Rebekah hears voices behind her and knows that soon they will overtake her, for they are out for a real walk, and she is out for ... possibilities, and walking at a much slower pace, stopping to reflect here and there. The couple pass her, arm in arm.

"Well and then she told them all about it," the woman says.

"No, she couldn't have!," her lover says.

"Well she'd had a bit of wine and you know her tongue's never still as it is."

"Well, I'm glad Adolfo was there to take her home."

The couple passes her, and fade into the distance, along with the sound of their voices.

Rebekah begins to walk with more certainty, for by now the fountain has stirred the continents from under the water, the Caballitos de Marly are looking for the castle, and the figures of El Cerro have begun the battle again, departing from their red base of stone, beneath Liberty's triumphant wings. Soon they'll be galloping by, no doubt, but she must visit a certain man. She looks at her watch, a little more time and maybe he will have stirred, hard to tell at this hour, and no moon. Even when the others have stirred, sometimes he remained in statue, looking up at the sky, waiting.

She walks on to the fountain, and sure enough, the brigade is on its way, in a thunder of hooves and the dust of so many years, out through the gates and into the battle. The golden retriever ahead has stopped to nuzzle an acorn out from its rest in the fading yellow grass, and her owners stop as well, but the dog looks up as the brigade passes, staring off into the distance of the gates, sniffs the wind, barks twice, then back to the world of acorns.

Rebekah reaches the fountain and finds the moving shadows of its figures and forms, except for the male statue, still motionless.

The winged cherubs are hovering over the top of the fountain, and then come closer to Rebekah, until she feels the air vibrate, such sweet spirits. She takes a deep breath. The figures of the four continents that ordinarily form the base supporting the fountain are walking gravely nearby in a very slow circle, sometimes forwards, sometimes retracing their steps, remembering when they were one land mass, pondering fault lines, continental drifts, earthquakes, volcanos, hurricanes, the sea and something ominous they are unable to define, something incredibly beautiful they are just as incapable of expressing.

It does no good to try to wake the statue directly. One never knows what will be the charm each time. She walks around the statue twice to the left, slowly, once to the right, then looks back at the statue, walks to be at his feet. She thinks of a poem by Mallarme:

*Si tu veux nous nous aimerons
Avec tes levres sans le dire
Cette rose ne l'interromps
Qu'a verser un silence pire*

*Jamais de chants ne lancent prompts
Le scintillement du sourire
Si tu veux nous nous aimerons
Avec tes levres sans le dire*

*Muet muet entres les ronds
Sylphe dans la pourpre d'empire
Un baiser flambant se d'echire
Jusqu'aux pointes des ailerons
Si tu veux nous nous aimerons.*

~~

*We'll love each other if you choose
With speechless lips a little while
Do not interrupt that rose
Or worse silences shall spill*

*Never yet from song arose
The radiance of a sudden smile
We'll love each other if you choose
With speechless lips a little while*

Softy, sylph, between the rounds
In purple robes go softly still
A flaming kiss torn off shall rouse
The very wing tips with a thrill
We'll love each other if you choose.

She recites the poem to the statue of the man, standing beside his base, looking up at his face, his arms, his hands, taking him in, such a marvel. She looks up in the same direction that the statue is looking for a long time, giving him the words from such a distant time. She often wonders what it is he sees – the future, past, the world of their dreams? She tries to imagine what could inspire such a determined and clear gaze, what formed him into being, becomes lost, imagining the sculptors' paper sketches to clay form, shaping him, caressing him as a Creator would, forging him into existence.

From the top of El Cerro, from its massive red stone base, created to honor the battle that liberated Chile, Peru and Argentina from Spain, and from which the brigade has sprung in minutes past (for a brigade is never truly at rest), Liberty, that triumphal angel yet with work to be done, begins to speak a long record of painful journals of prisoners and laborers, wives with children making ends meet and husbands with dulled senses on their way home after tedious exacting days, of people who have otherwise lost their souls in pursuit of something they've forgotten they already have, of soldiers meeting each other from opposite sides only for death, for a named victory for a time, yet battles endless. Far from the quiet, interrupted by the whispers and cries of lovers, the voices of newborn babies are crying for understanding, how to understand the world they have just entered, for comfort, for milk, without yet knowing the name for what it is they seek. From the base of El Cerro, the people are listening intently for the words that will spark that delicate balance of true happiness that eludes them.

Liberty stands and sees far beyond and within, raises her stately wings and calls to the condor from Los Portones, and the second condor beneath her, and they both take to the sky to join the first, in an unending search for themselves and each other, for moments and waves of clarity, off into the stars beyond the Sun's mid-day rays. Rebekah is amazed, watching them reach higher and higher into the clouds. To imagine liberty, it will be. Is that how it works ultimately? She wonders

from what it is she seeks to be free, when she feels the freest in her life, what binds her. What does her statue man think of liberty? Is that what fixes his gaze so intently? Would someone else see the same liberty, the same vision? The statue begins to stir, shhhh ...

The statue lowers his arms to his sides and stares up at the sky, then shakes himself fully awake. "Mmmmm," he says, "It's getting cold again," and looks her full in the eyes with a gaze that evokes centuries. God she missed him, and she meets the man's gaze with the present tense, with simultaneity and love, and they laugh the same laugh as before.

He reaches for her hand, "Care for a promenade?"

"Yes," she says, and places her hand in his.

She adores these moments of serenity of being with him. They slowly walk hand in hand to the Rosadera, as is their habit. They admire the delicate pinks, vibrant reds, and pure white of the rose petals, the intoxication of scents, the poignancy of the roses that remain, remembering earlier blooming cycles, when the leaves were full and green and the light shone gold through them, the wind carrying the scent of the roses into the trees, the leaves whispering secrets and love stories to the rosebuds. They stop to rest on a bench where they can view the Rosadera fully, and talk of philosophy, poetry, history, geology, anthropology and their observations of the simple complexity of time unfolding and refolding into itself. As they talk, the roses bloom, the petals fall, the roses that have faded rebloom and fade again, the Rosadera of memory remembering itself, until they and the roses reach a state of blissful contentment, and the desire to nap for a time.

It was at this point that she would always begin to return her to the Fuente to resume his mission of inspiration and mystery. As they walk, her light and graceful hand in his, she tries to determine how to ask him what it is he sees when he is part of the fountain, as she has innumerable times before, and, as usual, she gives up in favor of simply sensing his presence, and the way the wind and light change as they walk together.

They reach the fountain, the man steps up into himself, and he turns and kisses Rebekah's hand once more. For some time they gaze into each other's eyes and she believes she has almost

seen what he sees, in a rush of history and peoples and gardens and clouds, wars and stormy disasters, the passage of the Sun, light on the water, the faces of the continents returning to their posts for further contemplation. The man looks into their eyes one by one as they pass him solemnly and their faces brighten with renewed determination, after seeing what he sees, in a rush of visions for each one: Africa, Europa, Asia, America – Rebekah sees what he sees and is becoming overwhelmed but she continues. He touches his forehead, dizzy, and then resumes the visions, as each pass them for their places on the dais.

The cherubs begin to return, after a few last circles and zooms over their heads. The man looks again into her eyes with tears, causing her own eyes to well. The man begins to freeze and turns his head back toward the sky, his hand becoming statue again. The wings of the cherubs blend with the sounds of the water, which Rebekah had not heard for some time now, even though the fountain's flow was ceaseless. She becomes lost watching the water and light play together.

She slowly brings one of the many pocket watches up from her black dress to check the time. Yes, just enough time, she thinks. She walks back through the park as the leaves fall and blow around her, and the ghosts are also ending their promenades, calling their children to their sides, to return home for a time of siesta. She'll have time to rest and dream, for her own contemplations of what she has seen of the future and the past, of possibilities, combinations, theories. As she walks, the gargoyles, the condor, Liberty, the brigade, the people who supported the brigade, all the statues that have come to life, bring themselves back to their places.

She walks through Los Portones and the creatures and acanthus leaves are alive, but moving more and more slowly. As she turns for home with a deep sigh, they become still in the light of the Sun.

Chapter 8

It is 1984, in Decatur, Georgia. Decatur is a small city close to Atlanta, which by now seems to be part of the larger metro area. Rebekah is in her second year at a women's college, with an intended double major of Spanish and International Relations, so she's getting to focus a bit more on her primary

coursework, with lots of political science, history and economics, and gradually learning the Spanish language. Her first year was so chaotic that she barely passed Spanish grammar, and now she is feeling it, but catching up quickly by mid-year. She has a Spanish grammar class and a contemporary Spanish literature class, just beginning to taste real flavors of the language, of meaning, beyond basic dialogue and into life's experiences, with maybe ten to twenty percent of comprehension at first reading of an assignment in Spanish literature. It is early February, Winter quarter.

In her political science courses she is learning about the current situation and political history of the world. She has begun to experience a different world, even more than those first weeks of freshman year, of cycles of history that underlie current events, and how the peoples of the world, where they are located, do not forget their own histories, even though other peoples of the world may be ignorant of them. That once a civil war has occurred, the people do not forget, as she knows from growing up in the South, where she has heard stories of relatives who fought for the Confederacy and how hard the period of Reconstruction was, visited major battle sites near her hometown, how her church was used as a blacksmith shop during the war, imagining horses in the place where she sang Handel's *Messiah* at Christmas and Easter with the choir, how she knows that slavery was wrong, the Southern way of life was wrong in its structure, but how the war was also economic, ultimately, how it left scars across generations.

She learned to be proud of being Southern but be modern and open-minded, not racist, to accept that the South lost and that it was a good thing, growing up north of Atlanta, where General Sherman burned a path through the state through her hometown all the way to Savannah, in her mind he used tactics that were unforgivable, in order to break the strong will of the South, surely there could have been another way.

She continually parses her Southern-ness and the culture around her for what is appropriate, and what is wrong, what is prejudiced, and has collected a certain funkiness, an independence of spirit, of pride, of a peculiar sense of humor, of deep roots in music and literature, of deep green, cicadas, extreme heat and humidity in the Summers that bathed her in a warmth she adored, revels in, fantasizes of steamy lovers trying to survive in the heat, wondering why people insist on wearing

so much clothing in the warmer months, and remembering that civilization to a certain degree is associated with layers of clothing, not being naked.

She also knows of the history of the Cherokee Indians, who had been forcefully removed from the area where she grew up, their land placed in a lottery, and about their Trail of Tears to displacement in Oklahoma – a story so cruel she could not comprehend how it was an accepted part of life, riding her bicycle to the local pre-Cherokee burial grounds near the Etowah River, that had only been found when a local farmer was plowing his field, and his mule fell deep into the Earth, where the Cherokee had covered over the burial ground for their own farming so long ago.

She would imagine that she was a Cherokee, walking in the forest, so softly that no one could hear her moccasins, and hoping that when the fields were plowed each Spring that she could find some of their arrowheads, but never found one. When she is in Nature, she is happiest, and feels that she understands the Native American reverence for the Earth, now so polluted, with the threat of nuclear war ever-present in the news, in the air, overpopulated, toxic, at war, animal species becoming extinct for the first time, such a precarious future to look forward to, with no sign that it could be averted, transformed into a healthy place to live, a peaceful world.

Learning about current civil wars in Central America and the tens of thousands of people killed or disappeared without a trace, horrible tortures and mutilations even of dead bodies by death squads sponsored by the governments there – and then interacting daily with other students who had no awareness or understanding of this other reality, these other realities – she becomes isolated in this new awareness, dissociated from a reality too hard to bear or too pretty to be real, the students around her too unaware to have understanding of the facts of what was happening, or too like her, helpless to make a difference. She is only present when she needs to be, in conversations, in daily functioning, but mostly she is like a ghost to herself.

What little TV she sees also seem so distant from these realities, its reality not being the real truth of what is going on, a reality so dark that she stops talking about it to other students and men she meets at fraternity houses off campus. Instead, she walks to

and from class, the dining hall, or just around campus to have some sense of beauty, for it is a beautiful old campus, elegant, romantic, inspiring academic excellence from all of them, whether or not they could keep up with its standards. Even so, this dark knowledge bled from her as she absorbed the true reality, in contrast with the peaceful grass with long strands of light from the late afternoon Sun, the pale Gothic details contrasting with the reassuring red brick on the main academic building and library, so beautiful.

She loves getting lost in the racks of books in the library, taking the elevator to a random floor, smelling the dust of the books and the paper very slowly aging, finding a random book that matches her current thought process or challenges her.

She loves going to the stone amphitheater, where no plays are given anymore. It beckons her to sit for a while on its curved pale gray rock seats, as images of Greek theater appear to her like shadows on the grass stage. The stage is framed with a forest for backdrop, and she thinks about the birth of democracy in Greek culture, democracy that now is struggled for at such a price. She thinks of laughing drama students from the fifties and sixties, racing up the aisles to greet their parents and littler siblings after the performances, from when the amphitheater was still in use. Rebekah has always been very aware of ghosts, of presences and the amphitheater seems to be full of them, in many transparent layers.

She sometimes sits in the upper section of the amphitheater, just high enough where passersby could see her and not be frightened on their way to and from the Observatory, but low enough so that she could be herself in waves, totally feel everything or nothing, in private. Sometimes she couldn't sit there at all, so overcome with feelings of despair and helplessness, for how could so many people be dying and so few people here either know nothing about it or not have it affect their lives after she had told them what is going on in Central America, Argentina, and Chile?

She is most real when she is in class, although even then she slips out the window in English Literature to an earlier time, or imagining what Spain is like, was like, what the Moors were like when they ruled Spain from the Alhambra, what horror the Spanish Civil War was, a training ground for German pilots who would later bomb London. Her world is one of shifting

awarenesses, based on her ability to comprehend, to cope, to escape, to experience beauty or rage, or simply being a teenager, a college student – oh, she needs to focus on the lesson again, she hears a song by The Smiths, *How Soon is Now*, The Church, *Reptile*, back to the lesson.

She can barely relate to the young men she dates, and she has retained her pattern of becoming incredibly drunk on the weekends, with isolated demon men and charitable savior men, otherwise known as knights in shining armor, but she has little regard for what happens – it is just part of the world that makes no sense, for the young men also have no sense of these other terrifying realities, of the precariousness of the world, so she stops trying to explain the inexplicable horror of it all, the surreality of reality.

She is a circus dancer for them, walking a tightrope that sometimes has a net, sometimes not. Her unconscious records everything for her, but she learned a very long time ago that none of this was to be called to consciousness, part of a realm, a part of her identity that she would never have recognized, never remember, fragments of her soul, each holding different memories, pain, pleasure, confusion, terror, rage, despair, loss.

She becomes a different person when she is making love, or having sex, depending on the amount of concern her lovers have for her and she for them, in unpredictable ways. There is a person inside of her who takes over, of whom she is only briefly aware, who knows what to do with a great deal of confidence, only to wake from this person when it's all over, with enormous waves of loss and despair, sometimes crying uncontrollably, her lovers variously getting dressed and telling her to leave, asleep and snoring, or adoring her, she not being sure exactly what has just happened, but that it is dark and mysterious like her fantasies, that one day maybe she will understand, with the right guy, that something will click and she will feel at home in his arms.

Her International Relations major is created for only a handful of students, and consists of an agreement between three departments for its curriculum, a challenging major on its own. Her professors have advised her to drop Spanish as a major because it is too hard to have a dual major, but she persists. She must know the language well enough to truly relate to others

who speak it, instead of insisting that they learn English, or stumble in Spanish herself.

Part of the curriculum for her sophomore year is "Marxism and Varieties of Socialism," and when she registers for the course, she is told she needs to see the Registrar for approval because there is a problem. The Registrar does not want her to take the course, and will not say why, yet it is on her curriculum for the major.

Rebekah argues that she needs the course to better understand the ideologies of political systems in the whole world, not just the democratic world, that just because she takes the course it didn't mean that she will end up being a socialist, or worse in the nuclear Cold War of the time, a Communist. If there is to be peace in the world, she argues, there needs to be an understanding of these different ideologies and dialogue. Eventually the Registrar relents, and Rebekah is allowed to take the course.

In the course, she learns the history of the development of thought for Marx from Hegel and the theory of the dialectic of change, and how in application his theories ultimately were very imperfect. Stalin, Mao and Castro killed so many people, intellectuals and artists and teachers, who disagreed with them, or who they thought might disagree with them. She would never want to live in a country where she wasn't free. She is accustomed to living in the US where she can think and study freely and speak her mind.

She believes that the theories and their applications keep failing because they lack the ability for the individual to truly have a voice. She also believes in the role of spirituality, not as "an opiate of the people" but as a true need for people to be able to reflect on their lives, to try to be better people, to have mystical and spiritual, even magical, experiences. She believes in democracy fully, and struggles with the ideas of socialism throughout the course, ultimately deciding that democracy makes the most sense, but tempered with concern for the society as a whole, and the welfare of every single individual.

In her Spanish literature class, a new world is opening to her, and she is learning that the world is a series of opening worlds. They are reading from a text called *Cinco Maestros*, highlighting five Latin American authors. They are just finishing several stories by Borges, an Argentinian author. Although the page in Spanish still

muddies before her eyes as if it is in code, she can pick out more and more Latin roots and guess at meanings until she comes up with a string of meanings, learning new words and storing them in the new section of her brain where the Spanish words are kept, as the class reads along with the professor, taking turns as volunteers or as called upon, sometimes giggling with the difficulties of pronunciation, sometimes mortified in fear but encouraged by the gentle, affectionate Profesora Herbert.

As they read the stories, the professor frequently dialogues with them in Spanish, asking them questions about the paragraph or turn in plot that they have just read, layering meaning and vocabulary and inspiration, so they remain interested in the story instead of giving up. Rebekah's impression is that Borges is on a level of writing that she has never considered possible, of such technical ability and imagination, so clean, that she is astounded that she has never heard of him, that in other parts of the continent they have their own libraries full of such intoxicating literature, waiting to be explored. She thinks of the dry John Donne poems they are studying right now in English literature, so many worlds removed in time and experience from Borges, the John Donne world similar to the world she knew before college, dry and sterile and innocent, of a different order, a narrower perspective or world view.

In the Spring she begins to feel again, warmth, life, having forgotten that she had stopped feeling it, even though she had begun again to stand on the steam vents for the rest of the colder days, now more able to see the shadows and magic in it. One night she shows the vents to a young man she is dating, but she doesn't remember what happens after. The buds of the magnolias on campus are blooming with their lemon scent, after the dogwood, the cherry, the buds of the leaves, a slowly unfolding reality, a layer she becomes aware of slowly in a series of transparencies, as if she is waking from a very long dream.

Chapter 9

In Paris on a Sunday afternoon, and an older Rebekah takes a break from painting in her studio, and walks to nearby Rue Pierre Leroux.

She has cut her hair short like a pixie, and it curls playfully away from her head. Her eyes sparkle or become luminous with wonder, alternately, at a moment's notice, as something occurs

to her, an original thought, a change in perception, a memory, a feeling, a collage or streams she is following in her soul. Her eyes are wide and hazel, and she now has to wear glasses occasionally in order to read and write, but she will not need them for her walk, although she slips them carefully into her short biker jacket pocket just in case. One never knows. Her Earth brown corduroys are soft and she feels as though she is moving as smoothly as a big black cat, off for a prowl among shadows and dustbins. It is as though the city is in code, and she goes from sign to sign, piece to piece, collecting clues, endlessly, and it fascinates her to no end.

Paris defies her metaphors and continues to morph the more she discovers it, studies it, whether it be by foot, through the glass of a taxi window, or in her dreams, her memories, collecting leaves of understanding in an ever-changing kaleidoscopic mystery. It seems simple enough, she had thought when she first arrived, so many years ago now -- I'll get a map, I'll learn the city, she had thought then. But it isn't. It is beyond maps of understanding -- she can only gather pieces of experience and try to fashion a perception that is true to the way Paris feels to her, and this takes time, a lifetime.

There is something about Paris that draws her as it has others for so many years, an aesthetic passion, a freedom to live and be oneself, even if that means one loses everything to sleep under a sheaf of newspaper next to the Seine, curled up to a wall, or to find a reasonable existence, as she has by now, some modicum of happiness, from which to explore the city's codes.

As she steps outside into the night, she takes a deep breath in, for one can tell a great deal by the smells. It is late Winter, a brisk freshness is her first sensation, then, as one tastes the rolling flavors of a sip of a different wine, layers unravel to the back of her nose, fresh bread, dry leaves being blown back and forth down the street, dust, exhaust (she sees just then the taxi at the corner down the street), the darkness itself, the scent of stars on a moonless night, the scent of the infinite blackness above her, an ancient, infinite purity beyond comprehension. A good night for it, her Italian boots fitting her feet basically and with a fineness born of centuries of craft, for flying, whatever the journey, she is ready.

She tucks her burgundy muffler closer around her neck, flips its tail over a shoulder and walks down the street named for the

humanist, socialist philosopher Leroux. Leroux had proposed a triad of human beingness to the dualist world: of sensation, feeling and thinking, inseparable, a universal beingness.

There is always something that is escaping her, the loss is ever-present, and she is ever seeking it, although she is learning more and more ways of seeing, of perceiving, portals, the doors of perception. The loss adds weight to everything, a bittersweetness, as she goes forward, balancing with wonder and delight.

She turns right onto Rue de Sevres, with the night fallen into all of the corners of the neighborhood, random lights in some of the windows, streetlights casting shadows of light, and a presence in each one that she feels as she passes under them, similar to the what she felt when he noticed it was eleven pm on a Sunday night, that peculiar time before the week begins, when everyone's hopes and dreams for their lives become possible for brief moments, but only if you are looking, for they are best glimpsed then, rare birds, the cobalt blue plumes of the Quetzocoatl bird, a flash, and then they are gone.

She has found that if you look directly at the bird it will disappear, but if you are aware of its presence there, its quick heartbeat, its ever-watchful eye, and go about your business, that it will stay. She goes about her passion and for this reason her dreams are coming true, even though she longs to soak her eyes in such a magnificent blue as the bird's feathers – it's best to not look luck straight in the eye, for it is a wild creature – she has been learning the ways of wildness, animals of all kinds, all of his life, animals of the imagination, animals of the jungle, skittish passionate beings.

Avenue de Saxe is before her, and she takes a right again, a tree-lined shortcut to the Avenue de Breteuil, a long park with the glowing round cap of the Eglise de Dome of Les Invalides at its end in the distance.

She wants to be free, for the pieces of herself to be as random as life itself, those bits that appear before her as she walks, with inexplicable and profound poignancy, inexpressible. Life between the spaces, between the ticks of the clock and the days, between people passing each other on the street, choices, inclinations, variations, versions, options – it is all incredibly fluid and dependent upon what she chooses to see,

to allow to occupy the forefront of her vision, or letting them jumble themselves delightfully as children romp in a pile of leaves and toss the leaves into the air. They are the leaves falling from the trees, from the children's hands. There is no way she can do it, no organization or machine that will provide the random collage she seeks to express, to offer, a puzzle of meaning, of pieces of life.

The stars are listening to her mind and are in full agreement with the fluidity of time and reality, which she finds very comforting. The dark expanse of the park before her, dotted with couples and people also out for a stroll on a Sunday night, grounds her and frees her, too, with its cleanness, openness, and the tree branches reaching for the sky fill her with a sense of purpose, such graceful and determined growth toward the light of the star Sun.

She stops at one of the fountain pools and sits down on the ground beside it, the Winter grass stiff but soft at the same time beneath her, the edge of the pool a firm round line against her back. Another deep breath and she looks up and falls into the endless galaxy above her with its whispering stars. She closes her eyes and still sees the stars in a different darkness, a pulsing image bay, a window. She stays there for some time, listening to the Paris night, mostly quiet, with some cars, for now, imagines mothers putting their children to sleep.

She walks on toward the dome again, with the figures of people also slowly walking, except for three teenagers kicking a soccer ball around on the green a block ahead. The quiet is calming. She reaches the dome and her blood is warm, she feels so alive, so happy, and turns for home. That this park exists seems such a miracle, one of so many lovely parks here, this one so peaceful, that the city was planned with the need for people to have respite from their schedules without interruptions, this place reminding her of fields in the Provence countryside, reminding her that they still exist away from buildings and windows and bills, things to do. Suddenly she is in the countryside at night, walking among the fields of lavender. There it is a full Moon, still hot.

She picks a sprig of lavender and rubs it on her hands, against her nose. She is following a man, her lover?, she wonders. They walk for a time, one behind the other, along a row. The man walks up closer to her and wraps his arms around her, nuzzling

the back of her neck, smelling her hair. She murmurs a wordless approval, looking up at the Moon and then closing her eyes, turning her chin down. He feels her breasts, her bottom, her thighs, lifts her skirt and rubs against her with his pelvis. She turns to face him and kisses his forehead, then his mouth and they kiss. He whispers something to her and she nods, laughing and sits down in the furrow. He kneels before her and then gently lays her down into the furrow to make love to her in the ancient way of encouraging the fertility of fields.

Chapter 10

1995, Atlanta, Georgia. Rebekah lives in Little Five Points, a funky and fun neighborhood, where she works at Ethan's, a vintage clothing and design boutique. She has a fascination for styles from eras long past, and has learned not only how to repair delicate dresses and suits, but how to create new clothing using vintage materials, or inspired by classic and funky designs she has absorbed. She really seems to have a creative knack for it all.

Little Five Points has several fun clothing shops, the Little Five Points Pub with live bands each night and great graffiti on the bathroom walls, great restaurants, two bookstores, a healing crystals store, a furniture store, an old cinema where you can drink wine at tables and have popcorn with real butter should you choose, and a health food store. Skateboarders, punk, gothic and hippie kids frequent the neighborhood as a place where they can be themselves, and get cheap, excellent pizza.

After she graduated from college, she worked for a few years for local social advocacy groups, but it became too stressful and she wasn't able to sleep, she was so worried about the world's problems, so she decided to simplify her life and expenses, moved back to her old college stomping grounds in Little Five Points near where she went to school. She asks if they need help at Ethan's, where over the years she has been buying collectible vintage pieces for special occasions and learns the new trade with her hands and a fun sense for design.

Her hair is now short again, for the first time since she was a little girl, emphasizing her big green eyes, and she is still as lithe as ever, as if she were a sylph, not real, but some sort of sprite come to life. She enjoys costuming herself each day, in a quirky neighborhood where this is acceptable, one day in an elegant

French suit, the next in an American fifties retro print shirtdress. It is Summer, and she is happy to be back to baring her skin to the Sun, with sundresses and fun tops, picnic-themed prints.

She lives with her boyfriend of three years now, Matt, but their relationship is too explosive, and is crumbling, only to be patched back together frequently, a wrenching push-pull, push-pull for her heart, for both of them. They had fallen in love with each other initially, when they met after a poetry reading, because they were each so passionate, each poets and in love with literature, with knowledge, philosophy, questioning, and often heated discussions ended with their falling into bed to devour each other hungrily.

Their home is full of books and papers, and most often they are talking about something that puzzles them, a theory of perspective, a beautiful line in a poem, a discovery in a book they are reading. Matt is getting his doctorate in clinical psychology, and it is getting harder on him the closer he gets to his deadline for submitting his dissertation. The pressure is exacerbating the tension in the relationship to a breaking point.

Matt's face has handsome, clean and sharp features, he has soft short brown hair, intense green eyes, and a dazzling smile that, coupled with his wry, silly or biting humor, stuns her like a deer in the headlights. His body is well-sculpted from working out, and he walks as if he were a leader, an entertainer, an explorer, a philosopher with a fresh step, combined with the sinuous smoothness of a stalking lion. He mystifies, challenges and intoxicates her, but now things are deteriorating very quickly and she's not sure what to do.

When they first met, that first night, Matt had told her he was an alcoholic, but that he hadn't had a drink for five years, and in the first two and half years that they had dated each other seriously, he hadn't touched a drop. Lately, in the past six months, she has been finding six and twelve packs of beer in the closet in his study, found because she could smell it one day when he was gone to the library and went into his study to find the source of the smell.

When she opened the closet and saw the brown bottles strewn on the floor, she almost fainted. It was the most horrible smell, the worst thing she could imagine, the most horrible day she could remember for a very long time. She went into shock.

What should she do? She had never encountered this before with anyone, much less her lover, the most dear friend in her life.

She waited a few days before confronting him with it, not sure when the best time was, afraid of angering him, wanting to be sensitive but firm. He simply had to stop drinking again as before, and she was committed to helping him stop, but having no idea how to do that or what it would be like. Every day now, she can smell the alcohol fermenting through his skin, which makes her feel sick to her stomach.

How could this be happening? He had been so strong for so long that it had never been an issue. His eyes were dulling, losing their fire and spark, and he was becoming angrier by the day, more violent, slamming cupboard doors, leaving the house suddenly. She asks him about it and he denies it, until she walks into the study and opens the closet door in front of him, only to find even more beer bottles in there. He becomes furious with her, and she becomes very quiet, trying to find a strong, calm place from which to help him see what he was doing to himself, to no avail.

He was in denial that he had a problem, even though it was one of the first things he had ever told her about himself. He said he could drink now if he wanted to without it being a problem, that he was no longer an alcoholic, that he just wanted to have some fun, that the pressure from getting his doctorate was too much, that he needed something to help him escape.

Using terms and phrases from his studies in psychology, he was framing his denial professionally -- he had it all figured out, as if he had practiced it all over and over before lying to her like this, as though this was what he repeated to himself, to turn off his consciousness. There was no way he could see himself, wrapped up so tightly as he was in his own logic, wrapped up in a false understanding of what he was doing to himself and their relationship.

By now, they are no longer having dialogues about ee cummings, Kant or Nietzsche. Now every night she goes to sleep long before he does, while he stays in his study drinking and working until early in the morning. When he comes to bed he reeks so badly that it makes her nauseous, but she is afraid to say anything.

He has always had horrible nightmares that plague him, that he can't describe to her, afraid that he'll upset her. They've always been able to talk about them in general, though, as he processes their effects the next morning. Now he's been having increasingly violent nightmares, tossing in his sleep and talking, even crying out with words she can't understand. She stays on her side of the bed, listening, trying to send him good thoughts, hoping the nightmares will let him go soon so he can rest, so they both can rest.

One night, she decides to try to wake him from the nightmare and from out of nowhere he punches her in the jaw, without waking up. She sits there beside him in the bed, on her knees, incredulous and in enormous pain, and the night shudders into a wavy black mirror, where everything is dripping and broken, shaking inside and around her, as he continues to thrash and call out beside her.

She begins to cry quietly, tears streaming over her cheeks until her pillow is soaking wet, her jaw throbbing sharply, opening and closing her mouth to test whether or not it is dislocated, because his punch was so powerful and her physique, her face, is so tiny to absorb such an impact.

The world is reeling around her, she is unable to hold a thought or feeling, it is all spinning inside her brain as if there is no safe place to land, a roulette wheel, a wildly rotating gyroscope, a kaleidoscope, stomach churning ball of lights and flashbacks in the darkness, with only a dim light coming through the bedroom windows from the streetlight outside.

She is afraid to make a sound lest he wake and do worse harm to her, but even that fear is something that of which she is only aware for a millisecond before it changes to something else. She lies awake, unable to get back to sleep, in and out of numbness and shock. She starts hearing things in her head, of him shouting at her over and over, of other people shouting out her, until she is shivering, even in the heat. She is like this for several hours, until at some point she loses consciousness.

When she wakes, he is gone, off to classes for the morning. The daylight is surreal, light itself seems a sham -- how could there be light when all she feels is darkness, when the world feels like a bruise and she aches all over? She suddenly remembers what he did, and even though he was asleep, she is afraid of how

violent he has become, how abusive he has become psychologically, even to the point of not trusting her when she comes home from work, where has she been, did she spend any money? What did she buy? Where's the receipt? He was becoming more and more controlling every day, while he himself was losing control over his own actions.

She begins to wash her face, to wash up and get ready for work and can't believe it when she sees her face in the mirror, her eyes puffy and red, blue circles under her eyes, her jaw bluish and swollen on one side, swollen around her jaw joint near her ear. She is only partly able to look herself in the eyes to see how she really is, because to do more is too painful. Some part of her instinct gels from some old understanding of what to do – she decides she is going to have to leave him somehow, without his knowing, suspecting, for fear that in his confusion and passion and violent sickness, that he would force her to stay, that it will just get worse over time, as it has been.

Suddenly she feels extremely intoxicated and high, as if she could feel no pain at all anymore, and her body relaxes. She imagines her escape in detail, and goes over it and over it until she has already gone, and she feels at peace, but something else has happened. She is no longer herself, the self she or anyone else knows. Rebekah has grown into a quiet woman over the years since college, introspective and kind, with a quick laugh that retreats, a great listener for her friends and affectionate, but always skittish, even in a bold printed dress, she has a shy reserve about her even then, even with her most trusted friends, as if someone else were dressing her, another wearing the clothes, then another.

But now she is someone else. She is an old piece of herself, a younger bolder, more extroverted fragment that has stepped forward to survive reality by disassociating to such a degree that she will have no memory of it, of what Matt has done, or what she is doing. Her personality has split again from the tension that has been building for the past six months, up to last night.

When Matt hit her he threw her psyche into fragmentation. Some part of her learned a long time ago how this works, how to survive, although it is not a conscious decision. She is not aware that she has changed, she is not aware of anything, another personality is washing her face, washing her body, putting on makeup, pulling out a large handbag and filling it with overnight

items in case she has to leave in a hurry, getting ready for anything.

She puts on a cheery sundress that has a retro print of bright red cherries on it, fun Grecian leather sandals that tie lightly up her ankles. She wipes bright red lipstick back and forth over her lips, when ordinarily she would only dab them for a hint of color. She puts on more rouge than normal, styles her hair with passion, with points and sparks, and puts a red barrette on one side, drawing attention away from the bruising.

She leaves on time as usual, and walks down the block. She turns left and walks another block to Little Five Points. Her walk is open and free and sexy, not reserved and cautious as she normally would be. A man honks his horn as she walks by and she waves, her eyes glazing over somewhat as she does, then looking forward again. She can feel the Sun on her skin but she is only aware of herself as if she were walking backwards, being carried forward by someone else, who will interact with people, who will talk for her all day.

She loves the transformation that always occurs when she steps into the main block. She is younger, she is journeying, she is safe, and among a community of independent, creative, mystical, experimental folk. It's too early to see the skateboarders, students or others from the neighborhood, because the shop opens at 10 am, and that's still early in this neighborhood of late nights. Even so, there is the bustle of the shopkeepers and restaurateurs, delivery trucks and neighborhood commuters.

She is startled a bit when she reaches Ethan's storefront windows, into reality – what is happening? She gets dizzy and then regains herself, her old self falling down again to some dark corner where she can hide, observe, function, but not feel, not express what is happening.

The glass door with the crystal doorknob opens with her key like the key to a treasure chest, an ancient world within a world. She flips the "OPEN" sign over and calls out to Ethan, because she can hear him and his wife Julie talking back in the storeroom. She goes back and asks them what she needs to start on this morning.

They are startled by her mannerisms and the extra makeup, and then they see the bruise, but they don't say anything, not yet.

They just look at each other knowingly, and then tell her that there are a few repairs from a shipment that just came in, and some estate sale finds from over the weekend.

More treasure! Like an archaeologist, she reviews each piece for its history, its structure, with her hands scanning the fabric and her eyes dating the style and what needs to be done. Part of her old self comes up and begins to function, feeling the fabric in her hands, and getting situated behind her sewing machine and worktable. Then she sits for a while with the dress that will be the most difficult to repair, to determine how exactly she's going to conserve it, and fix it in such a way that it will be show no signs of her repairs, wearable again.

She gets lost in her work for the morning, still dissociated from what happened, not feeling, somewhat zombie-like now from lack of sleep. For the rest of the morning, until lunchtime, she finishes the repairs handily, getting them out of the way so they can get to the fun stuff later in the day – designing new clothes!

At lunchtime, she makes a call with her international calling card, in French, to a friend named Riassa. Then, she talks with Ethan and his wife about her need to leave Matt, and they are upset that she will need to leave, but supportive.

That afternoon, the three of them turn to looking at bolts of fabric Ethan has bought from old design houses in New York and Paris, and some new fabric made in an old style, also from France. Ethan's is a very trendy place for people to shop, people who are looking for that special flair, something unique but classic or retro, artists, designers, and other creative professionals. They also do a good business around prom time, for students who are tired of run-of-the-mill, standard evening gowns and tuxes, and around the holidays. All in all, Ethan has hit upon a gold mine over the past twenty years, with an eye for style, a working network of vintage clothing and fabric sources, and regular trips to thrift stores, estate and yard sales, and to New York, London and Paris.

They review sketches that each of them have made, and decide upon a few dresses for Rebekah to make for now, to keep her occupied. Rebekah is now alone at her worktable again, and takes a long sip of herbal tea from a huge comforting mug, then runs her finger along the curves of the dress designs, with a big sigh. She is getting more and more

nervous the closer she gets to the end of the day, and periodically Ethan or Julie will come by to see how she's doing and give her a hug, as she creates the pattern for the first dress pieces. Tomorrow, she should be able to begin cutting the fabric.

When it's time to leave, Ethan and Julie make sure that she knows she can call them in case of an emergency, and she nods, beginning to lose touch with reality again, but is comforted knowing that she has a place to go if she needs it. She wants to go home with them now, but she's afraid that Matt would just track her down and not only hurt her, but them, so she decides to stick with her plan. This is so hard on so many levels, because she loves Matt so deeply, yet she is so scared of him and the unknown.

The evening is full of light, and she relishes the humidity, like a warm close blanket around her shoulders. Rebekah breathes in deeply. She goes down the block to the local organic grocery store for a few things that will help her make it through, and hopefully calm Matt down, too – some fresh veggies, pasta, more herbal tea, some beautiful soap, but keeps the purchases light, so she won't be weighted down, and hopefully so Matt won't be upset with her.

She turns right at the end of the block and walks slowly, enjoying the heat, the way her skirt moves, remembering when her hair was long and would move like a curtain, like branches of a tree in the wind. The wind comes now and then, giving brief relief from the warmth emanating from the blacktop street and the bright sidewalk, where they have been absorbing it all day. She remembers how warm the road stays even at night, crossing the street, and feels the heat rising up through her feet.

The heat of the Sun and the beauty of Nature have always given her solace, an unquestioning gift, asking nothing of her in return, and never going back on their word, never turning on her suddenly, shattering her trust, her world. Instead, she retreats into Nature's offerings, getting lost in the movement of a tree, the incredible inexpressible beauty of the sky, scents on the wind, colors of leaves, colors of the soil, the feel of soil between her fingers when she is gardening, colors of flowers, fruits, vegetables, grain. This connection to the Earth is deeper than any bond to any human, because it is so consistent a presence, and so full of meaning, wonder, inspiration and beauty.

She reaches a wonderful haven, an architectural antiques warehouse she loves, just down the street. Any time of day, closed or open, it is a marvel to her, with its collection of old antique gates leaning in the yard, elegant streetlamps, garden statuary and ornaments, hinting at the wonders inside. Tonight she is avoiding going home, and walks inside the gates on either side of the driveway. Rebekah wanders around the courtyard of the restored antebellum home, following her instincts, what she is drawn to, what pulls her soul toward it for a closer look.

When she does feel compelled to touch something, sometimes she will get a rush of images, knowing the history of the object, which also has happened with certain pieces of vintage clothing at the shop. An antique street lamp in the yard, curvaceous in black wrought iron, with four white globes suspended in the air as if by magic, so elegant and light its construction, causes her to flash on a street corner in middle America, an old town with Victorian houses radiating off the streets of the main square, with a gazebo for open air concerts. She sees a teenage girl from the 1800s leaving her home to attend the night's festivities, her hair pulled back neatly with a lavender bow, in a freshly pressed white cotton dress, black stockings and black leather button shoes, dreamily walking toward the sounds of the music and the community gathered, talking and laughing, the children squealing and shouting as they run around the gazebo, music lilting on the air, calling her to it.

She touches a set of gates, their white paint crackling and peeling, and sees a Southern garden for a fine white clapboard two-story house, the mother's fairy garden created for the family to enjoy, for the children to play among climbing pink roses, rose mallow, orange poppies, daisies, lilies, below an apple tree which blossoms snow petals each Spring, falling on her hair, falling on the heads of her children sitting around her on the quilt where they are having an afternoon picnic. She sees the mother aging and the house falling into disrepair after her husband's death, the gates outdated and hard for her to open now, her children intervening to spruce up the home and garden to make it more livable for her, crying when they have to let go of and replace the old lovely gates, for something easier for her to maneuver.

As Rebekah passes the cherub and angel statues, water-spouting fish and Greek gods artfully placed on the lawn on her way toward the front of the house, she sees them flicker in her mind's eye, as if they feel a rush of life from her, wondering if she will touch them to hear their stories, too. But she has to be careful what she touches, sometimes she can know too much.

At the bottom of the steps, she looks down to place her foot on the first wooden step, when the owner says "Good evening!" to her from the porch, where he is dusting and rearranging the smaller collectibles there.

"Good evening," she says, shy of his welcoming but somewhat flirtatious expression. He is in his forties, but still fit. He runs his fingers through his black hair playfully, in khakis, a white shirt and wide black suspenders, with a round face, rosy cheeks and laughing brown eyes.

He pulls back into a more gentlemanly manner, although still friendly, "Is there anything in particular you're looking for?" He can't help but admire her fair skin, mysterious expression, and her own light curves in the bright sundress, her ankles. He has a thing for women's ankles.

"No, I'm just looking around, thank you," she smiles shyly still, looking down, and lets him open the heavy white wooden door for her, with its shiny and worn brass doorknob.

"Just let me know if I can show you anything," he says, and leaves the door open, returning to his dusting, somewhat dizzy from her presence.

"I will," she says.

Each room in the house is decorated as if it was a lovely home jumbled with too many antiques, cozy and full, with designer touches here and there, fresh faux floral arrangements, organized with types of collectibles, such as bowls of postcards and old photos, or similar types of china and porcelain, orphaned from their sets, heavy wooden pieces with a delicate or elegant chair beside them, very well-balanced. She realizes she is looking for something, because she can feel it calling her from the back of the house.

She stops where she was looking through the old photographs, their faces shimmering with stories also, to walk her way through the house to the back porch, an enclosed sun room. He has placed two orange trees and has pure white and jewel purple orchids with green glossy leaves blooming in a container at the level of her hips, made of light wrought iron, painted the palest yellow cream, somewhat crackly and chipped in a delicious way.

She is fascinated by the one of the orchid's faces, looking deep into its seductive throat, and imagining the hummingbird that has designed itself for it in the jungle, the flower designing itself after the tongue of the bird, the hummingbird becoming more aligned to its particular scent and shape, coming to pollinate it from some distance in the rainforest, where it forages for nectar all day.

She hears a white wooden cuckoo clock ticking softly and surely behind her on the wall, and feels the tension of its springs and gears, but then she feels it pulsing, what was calling her from the front of the house – something to her lower left, a stack of old wooden and navy steamer trunks, for she is a fool for trunks of all kinds, although she doesn't own any. She laughs to herself.

“Oh, there you are!!” she exclaims excitedly and rushes over to them, to feel their textures, admire their locks and handles. Suddenly she realizes why they have called her, and she begins trying to decide which one, which one is the very one that calls her the most. She touches the chocolate one, the navy, the white, the tan, the sky blue with chocolate bands – that's the one! “Hello?” she calls, “Hello, Sir?”

The owner is taking a break, somewhat allergic to dust, and sipping some iced tea with lemon from a glass and wiping his brow, sitting in one of a pair of wicker rocking chairs on the front porch, when he hears her soft, “Hello?” again – he thought he had heard something, her voice is so soft, even when she is calling out.

“Yes! Just a sec.” He wipes his face with his handkerchief, takes another quick drink of tea, returns his handkerchief to his back pocket, and walks to the back of the house to her.

“Can I see this one?” she asks.

"Certainly!" he says. "That's a nice one."

He lifts off each of the trunks on top of the one she's chosen, into a new stack to the left of them, then pulls the blue one off for her, onto the floor, opening it so that she can see the inside it, with the remainder of light streaming into the room.

"Oh!" she exclaims softly. "It's so beautiful!" for inside the trunk it is bare old wood, its clear lacquer somewhat dusty. The owner sneezes from the dust that was startled by the opening of the trunk.

"Sorry," he says, blowing his nose in his handkerchief.

"No problem," she says, "You're fine. Oh, it's perfect," she says in awe. "I'll take it."

"Wonderful," he says, closing the trunk, somewhat surprised by her quick decision, no hemming and hawing, no bargaining. "I'm glad you found something you liked. I can check you out up front when you're ready."

"Oh, I'm ready now, thank you!" she says, following him to the kitchen area, where he has a café table and chairs, a bright yellow kitchen. She'd like to live here, she thinks.

He puts the trunk down and opens a cupboard to find a dishtowel, adds lemon oil to it, and begins wiping down the trunk for her. She is quiet, still admiring the kitchen and then the trunk, then says, "I've got a question."

"What's that?" he says, pulling the black metal cash box and receipt book from another drawer.

"Is there a way to add removable wheels?" she asks.

"Oh, well, sure, although it would decrease the value of the trunk, but," he says, thinking as he carefully turns the trunk over and holds onto it. He thinks for a minute. "I've got some white porcelain wheels that might work. Yeah, that just might work," he says. "Do you want four wheels or just two removable ones?"

"Four she says, with the option of two," she says happily.

“Well,” he says, “It will take a few days for me to make that happen for you – is that all right? How soon do you need it?”

“As soon as possible, but I don't want to put you in a bind,” she says.

“Let's say, it's Monday now, by Thursday-Friday?” he asks.

“That works. Thank you! I know that's an unusual request,” she says.

“No problem,” he says. “If you'll give me a number where I can reach you, I'll let you know when it's ready.”

“I work just around the corner at Ethan's,” she says, pulling out Ethan's business card. “You can call me there.”

“Oh, cool! I've been meaning to go in there for a while now – I'm too afraid I would buy y'all out of suits that fit me,” he laughs. “I'm bad enough about buying antiques I absolutely have to have -- don't let me loose with some vintage clothing!”

She laughs, too. “Well, if you ever want to just look around, you're welcome anytime. We also do alterations if you find something that almost fits. Happy to help you.”

The owner tells her how much the trunk costs, no charge for the wheels, he has tons of them in a bowl, he says, and she writes him a check.

“ I need you to deposit this tomorrow if you will,” she says.

“Sure thing,” he says, putting it in the cash box and writing her a receipt.

“Any chance you could deliver it?” she asks.

“Sure,” he says. “I can pop over there when it's ready. I really have been meaning to go to Ethan's for so long now.”

“Thank you,” she says. “What size do you wear?” she asks. He tells her and she says, “I'll go ahead and see what we have in your size, so it'll save you time. I know you don't want to leave it closed up here for long,” she says, then adds, “Just for looking,

you know." They laugh. She extends her hand and they shake hands.

"Thank you so much!" she says.

"No, thank you," he says. "I'll have it ready for you later in the week and give you a call before I drop it by so you'll know when to expect me," he says.

"Sounds good! Thank you again," she says and he walks her to the door. "Have a good night!" she says.

"You, too – good night!" he says, and watches to make sure she makes it safely down the steps before closing the door, again somewhat dizzy from being around her, somewhat excited and flushed.

She is happy, very happy. Her life can be happy, she realizes, and smiles at the statuary on the way through the courtyard, some of them turn slowly to look at her in surprise, and a Greek god statue with wild curly hair blending with leaves smiles back at her and winks. She laughs and goes through the gates to the hot sidewalk and a wave of intense heat comes up from the street, as two lanes of cars rush past her, zoom ... zoom ... one of the drivers gunning his or her engine to pick up speed.

She gets dizzy and rests her left hand on a rust-brown telephone pole, oozing here and there with drops of black tar, bubbling and sticky. She wipes a bit of tar between her fingers and looks up at the top of the telephone pole, then puts her hand back down on it. Suddenly a rush of wind, damp with the taste of salt and the sea, whips around her, and she has to ground her feet better on the golden sidewalk. She is on a ship with masts, holding onto the mast lightly, in a dove gray dress from the 1800s, she sees the crew at work on deck, the fair day and fine deep blue sea all around them, a fine day. The ribbons of her bonnet fly up into her face with a lock of hair and she raises a hand to remove them, tucking the hair back under her bonnet.

One of the crewmen looks at her and she nods, he nods back. She looks up at the sails of the tall ship, a schooner. She loves schooners, she thinks, and takes a deep breath of the salty breeze. Someone honks their horn and a man leans out of the window of his car and whistles at her, "Hey baby, what you on?"

She is startled away from the schooner and her sundress is blowing against her thighs.

“Nothin’!” she laughs and yells back playfully as the car passes, then gets back on her way home.

Home. The closer she gets to home the deeper she sinks into melancholy, remembering suddenly what happened last night, how tired she is, for she has become so displaced that she lost track of bodily symptoms and signs, like hunger, fatigue, pain, feelings. As she turns the key in the lock, she braces herself as the pungent reek of alcohol greets her. Dizzy. Nausea. “Hello?” she says, hoping he isn’t home. No reply. She breathes.

She puts the bag of groceries down on the kitchen counter, then opens every window of the house, lights candles and a stick of incense, blowing on its tip until it glows red and begins to send a fragrant smoke. She sighs, feeling herself slip away from reality again, in a daze, puts the groceries away, pulls out leftovers onto a plate and starts the microwave. She pours a glass of iced tea and squeezes a wedge of lemon into it, takes a long thirsty drink and sets it down.

She thinks for a moment, looking around the apartment, then goes to her closet and dresser drawers, pulling out clothes into her bag. She is going to have to take only what she absolutely needs, a little at a time, until it is time. She pulls out some tubes of dark blue, white and turquoise acrylic paint, a bottle of glaze, a fine point brush, and puts them in a clear freezer bag, then puts them in her bag, too. That’s all that will fit for tomorrow.

She puts her bag in the closet, closes the door and then hears Matt’s key in the lock. She is immediately very much back in reality, terrified, but takes a deep breath, thinks, shift, no longer feeling, smiles. He opens the door, frowning, slams it, drops his briefcase down on the floor and balances six-pack of beer with his now free hand. He avoids her eyes at first, then attempts a smile but looks at her suspiciously. “Hey,” he says curtly. “How are you?”

“Fine,” she says, moving toward the kitchen. “Just heating up some dinner. You want some?”

“No, thanks,” he says, putting the beer in the fridge, “I already ate.”

She is not curious about where he ate, or with whom he ate. She cannot afford concern. She is as stiff as a board with her back to him, hoping he'll leave the kitchen, hears the clink of him pulling out a beer from the pack. He slams the door to the refrigerator and stands behind her, twisting off the top of the beer, flipping it into the trash, "Score!" he says, takes a huge swig from its mouth.

The microwave timer goes off and she opens the door quickly so that the sound will stop, because it is like someone screaming. She focuses on not getting her fingers burned on the plate of heated food, grabs a dishtowel, carries the plate with it and brings her iced tea to the table away from him, trying to be calm.

"It looks nice in here," he says. "Any special occasion?"

"No," she says, "I just thought it would freshen it up in here." She bites her tongue, wanting to scream at him -- How can you do this to yourself? How can you do this to me, to us? She has flashes of memories and feelings and gets dizzy, a little confused, the room seems to darken, as if all the corners and shadows are growing, wanting to tell him how sick to her stomach she gets when she smells alcohol, when she is close to him after he's been drinking. She tries to calm her self and eat a bite of food to distract herself, "Too hot to eat just yet," she laughs, but really her stomach is in a knot.

"Oh," he says, dismissing her and going into the bathroom.

She is reeling again. How is she going to survive the night? She hopes her stomach will calm down soon so she can eat so he won't think something's wrong, try to get some sleep, maybe she'll try to read until she gets drowsy, even though it's early yet. Sleep is an escape she is praying for.

Matt comes out of the bathroom and takes another swig of beer, standing in front of the table. "You look good today," he says, looking her up and down with familiarity, "Really good. I love that dress on you," he smiles, almost himself, she thinks.

"Thanks!" she says, wanting to crawl deep into a hole somewhere inside herself, her skin tingling and feeling suddenly chill, she shakes herself without meaning to. "Whew! I just got a

chill! Must be the iced tea," she says, "After walking home in the heat."

"Did you work late?" he asks, pulling up a chair, turning it backwards, to sit beside her, taking another swig.

"Yeah. I wanted to finish cutting the pattern for a new dress we're making so I can start cutting the fabric tomorrow," she said, taking a bite, feeling as though someone else was talking for her again, it happens so quickly, she feels dizzy again. She takes a bite of food and is surprised to chew it and get it down, but cannot taste it, not a good sign, that she can't taste it. What is happening?

Matt reaches out to stroke her left arm, where she has it propped on the table and she jumps, startled at his touch, even though she watched him reach out and touch her. "How was your day?" he asks, continuing to explore her arm with slow strokes of his fingertips.

"Good," she says, "It was productive, pretty normal day, though. Beautiful weather today." She takes another bite, trying to ignore the sensations he is stirring with his touch, his familiar touch, trying to forget, not to feel, gets another bite down, can't taste it, takes another drink of iced tea.

"How was your day?" she asks, thinking she has to remain involved or he will know, she can't recoil from his touch or he will know, he will find out.

"Fine, a great lecture from Dr. Cardin today. That guy is fucking brilliant. He blows my mind. He was talking about ..."

She sees his mouth moving and watches the light play around his face, his cheekbones, her lovely lover, her beautiful man, her brilliant man, she forgets everything except the continuous feeding of her mouth, getting it down with perfect timing, because nothing is wrong, nothing, watches his lips curl into a smile and the flash of his teeth, he takes another swig of beer and gesticulates with the other hand, off in his own lecture about the class, god she hopes he doesn't expect her to answer, to comment. He stops and strokes her arm again with one finger. He has finished.

"That's so cool that he's challenging you. I'm so glad you're enjoying it!" she smiles and looks for the man she knows, somewhere behind folding walls and mirrors. He starts to look into her eyes the way he used to, then looks away.

"Hey, you wanna go for a walk later?" he asks, "it's such a beautiful night."

"No," she says, "I'm pretty beat. I think I'm going to go to bed early and read a little."

"Oh," he says, "Okay. I've got to study anyway. Maybe we'll go out later if you change your mind," he says as he downs the rest of the beer and heads for the kitchen to get another. She takes a deep breath, another bite of food, she's almost done herself, connects drops of sweat on the glass of iced tea with a slow finger, gets lost in the blur of tea and ice and glass, her eyes in a brown study.

He stands in the kitchen entryway and takes a huge gulp of beer. He's going to be drunk off his ass in three minutes if he keeps this up, she thinks. She smiles at him, he is so incredibly beautiful, what is she going to do? How is she going to leave him? What is she thinking? How can she leave him and love him so much, after all they've been through? She's getting confused about what to do.

He grins back, his smile more reckless now. He looks her in the eye now but because he wants her, puts the beer down on the table and moves to stand beside her, stroking both her arms now, leaning forward to kiss her on the top of the head, the back of her neck, "You almost finished with your dinner?"

She nods, about to gag, but excited, dizzy and aroused, feeling, not feeling, feeling nauseous, excited by his touch, the feel of his breath on her ear, his voice in her ear, blowing the hair away from her neck as he talks, so close. Jesus, she thinks.

"Because, I'd like to make love with you when you're done." She nods, and feels like she's five years old, a child, incapable of resistance, only of doing what she's told. She laughs, she feels crazy, maybe she's going crazy, things are so mixed up now.

She takes the last two bites of food while he's stroking her, kissing her head and her neck. She finishes the tea as he had finished

the beer, and she can taste the last bites, she can taste the tang of the lemon, the tea, she can feel again, she wipes her mouth with the napkin.

"I'm done," she says in a low soft voice, feeling somewhat older now, feeling that switch that happens when she makes love, that confidence and exhilaration building.

"No," he says, "I'm getting ready to do you, and then you'll be done." He takes her hand and leads her to the bed.

He unzips the back of her dress and begins to peel the sundress away from her skin, where it has been against her in the heat all day, and begins to undress himself, she begins to help undress him, and undress herself the rest of the way. He kisses her and she is down on the bed, he is on top of her moving against her and she is lost, she is feeling everything but she is not herself, caught up in him and his kiss, his touch, starts touching him back, really kissing him back with that other her.

Suddenly he gets more aggressive and pushes himself more roughly against her and she gets a little scared, but it takes a lot for this other her to get scared ... she wakes up and she is in pain, it hurts really badly, it hurts and she can't talk, she can't make a sound, she is freezing up inside, the other her comes back and feels everything, the pain, everything in a strange mix. She is dizzy, she is kissing him, it hurts really badly, he won't stop, he doesn't love me, he's drunk, he's hurting me, what is he doing?

She begins to feel her hips shaking, her calves cramping, her thighs shaking and it feels like her heart is going to stop, to break, she feels cold, he's not looking at her, she convulses and is coming, he is coming and forcing her beyond caring, just having sex with her, without looking at her face, sharing the moment of intimacy, he is hidden behind a shadow of the self she knows -- she goes into shock and is shuddering in and out of feeling.

"Oh!" he says "God!" and collapses onto her as he comes, still not looking at her, but off into the distance as if he is lost, too, braces himself on his elbows so as not to crush her, at least, so she can breathe, she can feel his sweat, it feels good and it feels wrong, both.

He stays there a moment, to catch his breath, and then kisses her all over her face, avoiding her mouth, "You okay?" he asks but not really seeing her, in a fog, a shadow of himself.

She nods quickly, unable to say anything, afraid to say anything. What just happened? He rolls off of her. "God, it's hot in here," he says lying flat on his back with his eyes closed. "Whew! Damn!"

She is staring at the ceiling, pulls the covers over herself, and her knees to her chest, she's freezing, spaced out, can't think clearly, shuddering and pulsing from the come, his sweat now cold on her skin.

"I'm gonna take a shower – wanna join me?" he asks. She shakes her head.

"Huh?" he asks again, looking at her now. "You all right?" She nods.

He gets up slowly as if his body aches and goes into the bathroom, starts the shower. She hears the toilet flush. She is in deep space with her eyes wide open, not seeing anything. She bites her lip, hard, and can't feel it, just checking, she closes her eyes, flashes of light, images, dizzy, nauseous, feels like someone's kissing her, touching her when no one's touching her, a scratch, something painful, hard to breathe, something in her mouth that isn't there, pain, dizziness, then stillness, nothing, sweet intoxication, that high feeling, before losing consciousness and falling into some kind of strange, scary sleep.