

PRELUDE

Every Life is a Prelude to the Next



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Preview Edition

Prelude

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Cheryl A. Malakoff & Robert A. Clampett

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This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, businesses, places, events and incidents are either the products of the author's imagination or used in a fictitious manner. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, or actual events is purely coincidental.

ISBN: 978-1-69678-234-0

Widening Horizons, Inc

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P.Y., your infinite love found me, again

and to

Julie Lynn Valentine

who graduated with honors.

Synopsis of Prelude

Riveting Metaphysical Mystery Shatters the Myth of Death

When psychologist Carol Klein's previous life is revealed in vivid detail through hypnosis, she begins an arduous quest filled with twists and turns to verify her recent past as the heiress-activist, Iris Middleton Paulson. With the aid of an Asian physician-mystic and her skeptical, politically ambitious attorney-fiancé, this mismatched team builds a fact-by-fact case to prove her claim.

After the discovery of an unclaimed inheritance—worth millions and sequestered for decades in a Montreal Bank—they have the concrete corroborative evidence that radically alters the playing field. Emboldened, the trio embark on a trailblazing mission to prove the validity of reincarnation in a court of law, pitting deceased Iris against her elderly living children.

A landmark trial follows, setting off a firestorm as riveting testimony from authorities in science, medicine and religion puts our fundamental understanding of life and death at risk—shattering beliefs in a final mortality. The ensuing explosive courtroom drama threatens to upend legal, medical and religious institutions worldwide.

As a fast paced, true-to-life medical/legal mystery, *Prelude* seamlessly merges the boundaries of scientific facts with metaphysical beliefs of the ages. Well-researched, this intelligent and captivating story is as entertaining as the evidence is eye-opening... with an unforgettable outcome.

**Consistently Gets 5 Star Reviews on
[Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com) and [Net Galley](https://www.netgalley.com)**



**This edition of *Prelude* is also available for the
[Kindle \(.epub\)](#) and [iPhone/iPad/Nook \(.epub\)](#) at:**

ReadPrelude.com

Praise for *Prelude*

“Prelude is an unforgettable thriller about the afterlife—impossible to put down. This riveting mystery about the greatest of all mysteries is an unexpected treasure. Told from alternating perspectives, the ensuing story is an epic referendum on death that defies easy categorization (let’s call it a legal thriller with metaphysical overtones). In the end, *Prelude* is, above all, unlike any book you’ve ever read.”

– **BestThrillers.com**

“Prelude is an amazing book! It's captivating, incredibly interesting and entertaining. Even after reading the summary, the story took me by surprise. Now that I'm done reading the book, I miss it....always a sign of a really good read. This book should be made into a movie, though it would be tough to make it as good as this fascinating book.”

– **Amazon Verified Purchaser**

“Wow, I wanted a quiet easy read and ended up with the most thought provoking book I have ever read. With a storyline that delves into the deepest darkest idea of reincarnation and the law, unmissable!!”

– **Lisa J.
NetGalley Reviewer**

“This is a thought provoking story embracing mortality, teaching the purpose of life and focusing on past life regression together with a roller coaster of a ride with twists and turns all rolled into a novel.”

– **Pam T.
NetGalley Reviewer**

“As an exciting journey through life and death, this imaginative, well-written and gripping book is a must read. There is no way to review this novel without giving away the plot so suffice it say, buy yours today and pick up copies for friends and relatives. It is headed to be one of the blockbuster books of our time. I warn you, once you read the first words you won't be able to put it down.”

– **Patti Pietschmann
Los Angeles Correspondent**

“I couldn’t stop reading it. I am ready for the Movie. Actually I’m ready for more stories how reincarnation effects our lives. I want to share it with everyone and have ordered two more for friends. I loved the quotes at the beginning of each chapter. I have added them to all my notes that I had made from the book. It has a healing message in so many chapters. I get so excited with what I read that I

think everyone should read it.”

– **Brenda Gray**
Regional Sales Manager

“Prelude is a well written and intelligent novel that gracefully interweaves deep spiritual teachings with a captivating and unusual story. It both entertains and educates the reader at the same time with an enthralling story. I must warn you, though, that once you start this book, you will have a very hard time putting it down. Be prepared for a few nights with less sleep. This novel is in fact more truth than fiction, and is a must read for anyone who wants to understand the purpose of life.”

– **Larry Raye**
Marketing Executive

“The plot is stimulating and pulsing with intrigue. This book got me to thinking more about my own fate and the destiny of my own soul. Highly recommend this book to those who think about the meaning of life and about what comes before and after. Gripping, insightful, stimulating. A must read!”

– **Bernie R McKinney**
Musician

“Prelude is a fascinating journey into the world of past-life regression, its viability and potential consequences. This book is a bit like a rich layer cake— one layer examining theological interpretations of death, another focusing on medical analysis into end-of-life possibilities and yet another examining scientific appeals for empirical evidence that proves reincarnation as an option on a continuing cycle of the life/death process. And, as if this multi-pronged embrace of mortality is not encyclopedic enough, the entire cake is frosted with a blanket of jurisprudence.”

– **April Rhodes-James**
Author and Poet

“An intriguing look at the different aspects of being. Thought provoking research backs up a suspenseful story line, with some amazing twists. I really enjoyed this book.”

– **Shirlene Romain**
Retired Counselor

“Finished it in one sitting flying cross country and gave it to someone who books author events. It is indeed well written and thought provoking yet still a page turner.”

– **Laura Nole**
Manager, University Book Store

Why This Preview Edition of Prelude?

Dear Reader,

Prelude is an intelligent, thought provoking story that explores the existence of past lives from the perspective of both the scientific/medical community and the universe of metaphysical beliefs. These worlds converge in a hotly contested legal case over an unclaimed inheritance worth millions, the outcome of which threatens to upend legal, medical and religious institutions worldwide.

We're offering you this complimentary look at the first 35 chapters of this riveting mystery. It's our way of introducing you to this life-altering story that can change your understanding of how:

- ◆ Medicine may be using an incomplete model for healing
- ◆ The legal system may not be accounting for the 'whole truth'
- ◆ The Law of Cause and Effect is the root cause of all success and obstacles in life
- ◆ Death is not the final chapter

Read it, enjoy it. The remaining 50 chapters await should you decide to finish this amazing story. Once you read this free preview edition, we're confident you'll want to purchase the full version rife with escalating suspense and high drama, and a compelling courtroom encounter you will never forget. Available in paperback and Kindle.

Not sure this is the right book for you? Just read the enthusiastic reviews on the previous page, or visit these pages for even more reviews:

[Amazon.com Reviews](#) [Net Galley Reviews](#)

This offer is made because we know, like many, you may feel an inner urge to grow, expand and actualize your true essential nature. *Prelude* will introduce you to many new concepts and is a must read for those who think about the meaning of life. We offer this opportunity as our contribution to you and a world in need... with love, peace and harmony.

As fellow travelers on the journey,

Cheryl and Robert

P.S. The Preview Edition of *Prelude* is also available for the **Kindle** (.epub) and **iPhone/iPad/Nook** (.epub) at:

ReadPrelude.com

Prelude

Every Life is a Prelude to the Next

How Fascinating

*How
Fascinating the idea of death
Can be.
Too bad though.
It just isn't
True.*

Excerpt from The Gift

Poems By Hafiz, The Great Sufi Master

Translations By Daniel Ladinsky

CHAPTER ONE

*And the day came when the risk to remain in a tight bud
was more painful than the risk it took to bloom.*

-Anais Nin

She couldn't have seen it coming.

Windblown, the maple leaf flew free, twisted, tumbled across the campus quad, landing smack onto her forehead, plastering it like a blood-red second skin.

Startled, Carol Klein, newest member of the university's psychology faculty with a freshly minted Ph.D. peeled off the leaf skin with a laugh; thoughtfully admiring its beauty and structure, thinking, "You know, you're not so different from us; starting life as a tiny bud, growing ribs and veins, until you curl up and fall, ready to enrich the planet. And like us, probably never knowing what seeds we've planted for future generations. Nature, the ultimate recycler; we should be so useful."

Clutching the leaf in her hand, she walked briskly across the sun-kissed quad, sparkling with the aura of a new academic year. She loved the sight of students scurrying to classes; an age-old scene repeated each fall. The crisp scent of autumn filled the air, triggering a visceral memory of her own days as a student, not that long ago. Drinking in the scene sighing, "Winter's around the corner and this will all be just a memory."

Her offices on the second floor in Watson Hall, an ancient brick building with a chiseled limestone edifice, was home to the university's Department of Psychology. She had entered these doors a thousand times as a graduate student, but now, having traded in her student backpack for her doctor's white lab coat, she recognized, that although the change was small, the difference was great.

Climbing the well-trod stairs that led to her office, she walked in the footsteps of her predecessors. Opening the creaky walnut door that was part of the original architecture, she was greeted by the receptionist, a bright cheery graduate student only a few years younger than herself.

"Morning Elaine," Carol said, "brisky out, eh?"

Eyes gleaming, Elaine looked up from her desk.

“Sure is. I can see it in your cheeks,” she nodded, lifting a file folder, and handed it to Carol. “Your first appointment; in about half-an-hour. No messages. There’s a fresh pot in the lounge if you’d like.”

“Thanks. Maybe later.”

Carol turned, walked through the door into her consulting room, her name imprinted in black lettering with gold trim — Carol Klein Ph.D., Department of Behavioral Medicine.

Once inside, she donned her white lab coat touching the pearl necklace tucked inside her blouse. She’d need them for later. But for right now, it’s all business. There were no more training wheels.

Mid-morning was her favorite time of day, the east-facing windows receiving the morning sun; light and shadows bathing her consulting room in a warm glow. She’d decorated the room in robin egg blue chintz, set off by an antique light green Persian rug with an eye towards calming the patients. Her work station: an English wing chair and the matching couch, highlighted by a framed reproduction of Van Gogh’s *Starry Night* behind her desk.

Carol settled into her Queen Anne wing chair with the blue file folder labeled: Susan Alden with the day’s date-stamp: September 18, 2000. *“Susan Alden. Age 42. Married. No children. Lifelong chronic RIGHT HIP involvement. The orthopedic team is most concerned about continued damage to her weight-bearing surfaces that may be the source of her pain. Our primary goal is to renew her stability, elimination of pain, and improve her range of motion. Additionally, we’re running tests on possible femoral head necrosis, prolepses of lumbar inter-vertebral discs, osteoarthritis, and osteoporosis. Non-remitting pain, unresponsive to traditional treatment including high dosages of pharmaceutical pain medications. Tensor unit also had no abating effect on pain. Next treatment recommendation is surgical replacement of her right hip. However, given the patient’s age and the surgical ramifications, this recommendation is cautioned at this time.”*

Recalling what she knew of human hips as, “Biomechanical work horses, carrying the weight of our mass in symmetry and balance, the physics of motion, thrusting us forward. Without our hips, we’d be like sticks in the mud. The metaphysics, on the other hand, a different story: hips deal with feelings around our desire to control what happens to us. Our bodies swim in an ocean of emotions, always talking, giving us messages, signals of strain and pain. Sometimes we listen, often we don’t. And that stress can lead up to ninety-five percent of our illnesses,” she stated with an air of authority born from education, yet devoid of real clinical experience.

She read the yellow Post-it on top of the blue folder:

“Doctor Klein, a colleague recommended you as a specialist in clinical hypnosis for pain management. As you can see by my notes, traditional procedures have provided

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no relief. Please see what you can accomplish with Ms. Alden. Best to you, David Yarnell. M.D.”

She closed the file knowing full well that there were many missing pieces in this picture of Susan Alden. Doctor Yarnell’s report only included his best diagnostic suspicions. She glanced at her watch, knowing before she looked—10 AM on the dot. Rising from the chair, she opened her door and walked out to the waiting room seeing a slender woman seated chatting with Elaine.

“Elaine, bless her heart,” Carol smiled, “she could make a door talk.”

Carol reached down, extending her hand to her new patient, “A pleasure to meet you,” while taking in one gulp the whole of Susan Alden. She looked old for 42 and very fragile, like a tower built of wooden blocks not stacked quite correctly. The soft fleshy part of both hands were calloused, likely caused by her having to apply tremendous force on the aluminum walker folded at her side, her weight pressing down on her palms as she hunched over to support her battered body.

Susan’s teeth clench as she pushed herself up from the chair, deep lines etched around her mouth as she pulled herself to standing, a task likely repeated many times a day.

Carol’s warm smile exuded confidence and trust, an integral practice in meeting new clients. Synchronizing, like a tuning fork, Carol tried conveying her own strength to Susan, thinking; “Psychology’s one part science, one part intuition, one part hope.”

Susan slowly shuffled into the consulting room, so focused on moving each step that it wasn’t until she was in the middle of the room that she looked around for guidance as to where to sit, speaking solely with her eyes. Carol thinking, “What must it be like to live in a body that tortures your mind and hurts that much?”

She motioned towards the couch; noting the relief in Susan’s eyes to getting her feet up and taking pressure off her right hip. Susan placed two down-filled pillows as orthopedic supports around her right hip and under her right knee, a pain relief-seeking routine obviously well-practiced.

Carol sat down in the chair facing her new patient. Speaking in her most supportive voice, “Doctor Yarnell has sent me your file and I can only imagine how you must feel that no one’s come up with the solution to your condition.”

Susan exhaled and nodded in agreement.

Carol beamed a reassuring smile, “Have you undergone hypnosis before?”

“No,” Susan uttered, “I haven’t. And I’m not so sure of it.”

“Well good,” Carol reassured. “Then it’s a new beginning, a fresh start.”

Carol bent forward and began her Lecture Number One.

“Clinical hypnosis has been accepted by the American Medical Association for over fifty years. It’s an incredibly powerful tool that can tap into your

unconscious mind. Think of it as a window into how your body and your mind are connected.”

Leaning back, Carol continued, “We only use about ten percent of our conscious minds. The other ninety percent is our unconscious, the storehouse of everything else. Did you know that our minds are the largest pharmaceutical house on the planet? We possess the inner wisdom that knows exactly what we need and what to do to heal ourselves. Our job is to get out of its way.”

Susan’s eyes widened as she tried to absorb the barrage of information.

Sensing her plight, Carol paused, switching streams. “Susan, have you ever been driving along, just cruising as usual, then somehow, you miss your exit?”

Susan uttered a barely audible, “Yes.”

“That’s like being in a subtle trance. We often put ourselves in a light hypnotic state. We do it all the time. It’s like a little bit of a rest, rejuvenation break from the endless chatter that goes on inside our heads.”

Susan nodded, smiling at having understood something.

“Actually, hypnosis is a natural state of mind. It’s simply what happens when we increase our concentration on a particular thought. It’s a kind of light sleep in which you’re able to access your subconscious intelligence.”

Carol paused, letting that thought soak in before venturing to the next phase, lowering her voice into a soothing lilt, “Susan, today, I’m going to take you into a light alpha state. It’s the frequency we use to access meditation or like when you’re daydreaming.”

“Your subconscious is similar to a computer; one you can program with specific information. Believe it or not, this part of your brain holds seventy trillion memory traces, the complete record of your experiences. And our goal today is to tap into this storehouse and bring information into your conscious awareness that can help reveal the source of your current condition. Then, hopefully, we can eliminate it.”

“Now, before we get started—anything you’d like to share with me that maybe Doctor Yarnell hasn’t included?”

Susan’s glazed eyes darted around the room. Carol could tell that she was running through the files of her mind, scanning what to share and what not to. She understood. It’s difficult to fully trust someone you’ve just met a few minutes ago. In fact, it may be almost impossible. Trust is something that develops over time and usually has to be tested.

“No,” Susan sighed, “not right now; nothing I can think of.”

Carol did an internal check of her own readiness. Pen in hand, notepad open, double-cassette tape recorder ready, one tape to record the session, the other to provide tranquil background music. All the equipment a doctor could need.

“Okay,” she grinned, “here we go,” turning to push PLAY on the recorder, the room suddenly filled with soothing music. “Now, Susan, I’d like you to look at the picture behind my desk. That’s Van Gogh’s *Starry Night*. Just quietly look

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into it, pick out a set of stars and let yourself be drawn into that night sky. Drift with the music; let it take you where it may. Feel like you're floating on a soft fluffy cloud on a warm summer's day. That's it. Just float."

Susan's eyes honed in on the painting, her eye lids, fluttering, closer together, getting heavier in wave-like motions until they rested, closed.

"Good," Carol whispered, "keep focusing on the night sky behind your closed lids. Let the music soften all the inner noise. Whatever was concerning you when you came into the room today—just let it float away like a soft spring breeze. Let the music relax you even further. Now, a nice deep, breath. Low, slow, full deep breaths into your lower belly. Good. The more you let go, the more supported you'll feel. You're doing great Susan. Just notice how the music unwinds your whole body. Now, letting go still more. Drift even deeper into the couch, feeling how completely the pillows support you. Allow yourself to let go completely, you're feeling lighter and lighter. Good."

Carol watched in silence for several seconds assessing the session thus far.

"Now, just listen to my voice. I'm going to count down, from five to one. When I get to one, you'll be more relaxed than you've been in a long, long time. Let your subconscious open its wisdom to you."

Carol took her own advice and drew in a deep breath. She felt her own spine flattening into the back of her Queen Anne chair, soon relaxing more fully into herself as well. This was very familiar territory. Her confidence grew when she could reach this point, doing that which she was most familiar. In her training, she'd been here many times. This territory was well mapped—here she knew exactly what to do—hypnosis for pain relief, psycho-neurology, releasing the mind's powerful healing effect on the body.

Hypnosis was like a beautiful symphony with a beginning, a middle, and an end. As the conductor, Carol had memorized all the notes. And Susan Alden, eyes fully closed and breathing deeply, was going to be a prototypical client, a willing participant, one precisely for whom these procedures were developed.

Carol glanced at her watch, "Right on schedule."

CHAPTER TWO

The greatest use of life is to spend it on something that will outlast it.

-William James

It was a command, “Look into their eyes.”

George Mansbridge III stood tall, pointing to a mounted painting of a crowd assailing four young women whose faces were frozen in horror.

“Feel the fear in those eyes, the terror in their hearts.”

He faced a joint session of the Massachusetts House and Senate, one hundred sixty in all, called to exonerate the few remaining victims of the 1693 Salem witch trials.

His voice echoed throughout the Chamber as the assembled squirmed in discomfort, wincing at the sight of mounted oil paintings depicting scenes from the Salem horrors.

He walked the floor fronting the paintings slowly, allowing the silence to intensify the impact, news cameras in the aisles following his moves. He sensed feelings of disgust, shame and guilt from the onlookers, as if they themselves somehow had been at fault.

Dressed in a perfectly-tailored navy blue Southwick suit, he’d added a powdered wig for the occasion. Well-known by his audience, he was a member of the state House and the latest in a long line of a powerful political family. His father had been a state senator for four terms, while his Uncle Nicholas served first in Congress and then as a member of the Cabinet during the Carter Administration in the 1970s. Now, at age thirty-one with ruddy good looks, it was George Mansbridge III’s turn to fly, having recently announced his candidacy for the United States House of Representatives.

He leaned forward, shoulders squared, his baritone voice rising with every sentence.

“Ladies and Gentlemen, what we do today will provide long overdue aid and comfort to the poor souls so unjustly charged and punished. Punished by those who went before us in the colonial days of Essex, Suffolk and Middlesex counties of our own Commonwealth. In Boston, Salem Village, Salem Town, Ipswich, Andover and Charleston. Twenty-six innocents, convicted, set afire,

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hanged, crushed to death under heavy stones, some imprisoned until death.”

He trumpeted, “One hundred fifty citizens, men and women, all cited as witches or wizards, were tried and convicted, with fourteen young women and twelve young men, executed, their lives snuffed-out, in the name of, what, the Colony? Or was it simply marching to the drumbeat of false beliefs in order to maintain a superstition?”

Turning again, he took several steps, stopping before a cameraman. He reared his head back, lifting his baritone voice. He spotted two men standing far up in the back row of the balcony, his father and uncle, nearly out of sight, hidden in the shadows.

George straightened, making him appear somehow taller, more imposing. His head turned, eyes searching the audience before continuing, now in a cadence of measured words. “They were not choked by the hanging rope. They were not crushed by the granite stone,” his words soaring through the hall, rising to the balcony above.

“No,” raising his right arm, “not by rope!” Then raising his left arm, “Not by stone!”

He brought both hands together over his head, for an instant. “They were strangled by the beliefs of their age. Crushed by the intolerant. The fearful. The ignorance of their times.”

He lowered his arms, dropped his head as if looking at the floor, his wig slipping forward covering his eyes and nose. Quickly, he slid the wig back in place, muttering just loud enough for some to hear, “No wonder we gave these up!”

Polite laughter and mild applause filled the chamber, followed by a wave of mumbles.

George walked to stand between the two largest oil paintings, spaced just far enough apart for his presence to fill the void between.

In lowered voice, he declared, “While most of these victims have been exonerated, eight souls still remain to have their names cleared. That is our purpose here today; to finally give exoneration to them all. Do it for them. Do it for us.”

He paused, looked left, pivoted, than glanced right, before arriving directly into the focal point of the audience, “Today, together, let us be the ones to correct yesterday’s wrong, with what we know today is right.”

His voice rising to new heights, “Representatives of the Commonwealth, Senators of the people, you have the power, and the opportunity, to make an impact of historic proportions. Your vote today for exoneration will erase the ugly stain of ignorance, the stench of injustice, and the horror of unspeakable punishment from a history that is ours and ours alone. Please join your colleagues, in both the House and the Senate, to place your vote for exoneration.”

Once again opening his arms wide, his head arched forward, gaze fixed on the center of this auspicious audience, he passionately advanced, "Today, join me in this vote. A vote, to make a difference."

A lone male voice rang out from the assemblage, "Hear, hear," followed by a buzz throughout the room, the echoes reverberated for several seconds.

George lowered his arms, winding-up for his grand finale, eyes set directly into the lens of a TV camera, smiling, "Thank you, one and all. God Bless this Commonwealth. And God Bless America."

Applause erupted like a tidal wave undulating off the mahogany walls of the old state house building. George bowed grandly, one hand holding his wig firmly in place, much to the crowd's delight as the sound of a gavel pounding called for decorum.

"Order!" the voice of the Speaker rang out. "Order. We shall recess until two o'clock, at which time the vote on exoneration will occur. We thank you, Representative Mansbridge, for your leadership on such an overdue cause."

George nodded deferentially to the Speaker, then glanced up at the balcony. Empty. The roar of the audience went silent in his ears, the vacuum in the balcony having deafened him.

He snapped back to attention as several people walked up to congratulate his performance. Handshakes and pats on the back abounded as he removed the powdered wig, setting it on the arm of the adjacent easel.

"Good show, old man," said an elderly Senator. "For such a noble cause, it's nice how you got your slogan in there," stated another. George grinned, nodding in amusement. "Don't think we didn't notice," smiled an assemblywoman, hand extended, "good luck."

To his left, a young woman called out, "ABC Boston. May we have a minute?"

George's antenna went up as he motioned to her in response. He excused himself from the small crowd starting to break up before him. Running his hands over his recently trimmed hair, he walked to where she and a man with a shouldered camera stood waiting.

"Alicia Rhodes, ABC Boston," she announced, extending her hand to George. A camera light suddenly brightened them both. She clenched a hand-held microphone, signaling to the cameraman, then turning back to face George, with a thought-provoking piercing look in her eyes.

"Representative Mansbridge." She began, "Just how important was it to exonerate these final victims of the Salem trials."

George put on his most somber politician-running-for-office face. "Alicia, anytime we can do something that brings justice to the people of Massachusetts, living or dead, it's important," he answered. "It's taken far too long for this injustice to be made right."

"Does today have anything to do with your campaign for Congress?" she asked brashly.

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George smiled at her, “Let’s just let the people decide whether my taking this stand and providing the leadership to exonerate the final innocents makes a difference or not.” He paused, adding, “I believe anytime we can do something to right a wrong, to overcome an ignorance, to move past faulty beliefs, well, let’s just say I’m pleased to play my part.”

Alicia nodded, “Well, Congratulations Representative. Thanks for your time.” She turned full-face to the camera, “Alicia Rhodes, from the State House, ABC, Boston.”

Standing alone, leaning against the back wall of the chamber, a thin man in an ill-fitting suit, arms folded nonchalantly, caught George’s eye. The man nodded at George, who frowned slightly, then nodded in return. He walked slowly to the back of the chamber, stopping before him. George glanced to see who remained in the chamber, then in a near whisper, “Okay, Harrison, over there, conference room B.”

Before long, he and Harrison stood behind tightly closed doors in the mahogany and leather darkness of conference room B for an impromptu meeting.

George looked inquisitively at his Uncle’s longtime aide and strategic gofer.

“Looks like they ate it up,” Harrison said.

“Yeah,” George III responded. “Shootin’ fish in a barrel.”

“Saw your Dad and Nick showed up, sorta.” Harrison smirked, “Enter stage balcony, who’d a guessed it? No one runnin’ the firm?”

“Knock it off,” George spouted at the verbal jab, “whacha’ got?”

“Good stuff,” Harrison’s lips curling into a sly grin. “Up to seven commissioners now along with two union bosses, all bought and paid for. The right guys too.”

George’s eyes squinted trying to get his world in focus, “Can you, no, guess not, eh?”

“Names?” Harrison countered, “You know better. No way, José.”

“But they’re cool?” George asked, feeling the tainted words under his skin.

“As ice,” Harrison softening the blow. “No way anyone will know nothing. Not to worry, pretty boy. Keepin’ your profile clean as a whistle. You’re our go-to-guy.”

“Okay,” George said accepting the benefits, “let’s leave it at that.”

“Pleasure doin’ biz with you, future Mister Congressman,” Harrison voiced. “The media’s still be out there. You go now. I’ll stay here, then slip out in a few. After things calm down. We’ll be in touch.” The two men shook hands concluding their tacit agreement. George walked out into the House floor, relieved to be in cleaner air.

“Mister Mansbridge. Over here, please. Channel Seven News,” calls out the perky young reporter, standing near a man with a handheld camera.

George smiled broadly, adjusted his tie and walked towards the waiting

interviewer.

CHAPTER THREE

*Experience is not what happens to a man, it is
what a man does with what happens to him.*

-Aldous Huxley

Carol was pleased.

Susan was a great subject. She had taken to hypnosis easily, going under in less than seven minutes; breathing rhythmic, face relaxed and feet slowly turning outward, as her leg muscle tension eased.

Carol had instructed Susan to drift into her own inner awareness. Then, to go deeper still, searching for “the part of yourself that holds the key to releasing your pain.”

Something on Susan’s face caught Carol’s eye, “Why were her closed eyelids flickering?” she wondered. Then, with a sudden jerk, Susan’s shoulders twitched as if startled, her right arm grasped her hip. Grimacing, her mouth opened as she took one deep breath, then, suddenly screamed as if in extreme agony, “AEEIIEEAHHAAEEEE,” her eyes filling with tears; her body elevating above the couch for just an instant, then falling onto her side, twisting in order to grasp her right hip with both hands.

Carol jumped to her feet, notepad and pen flying to the floor. A cold sweat coated her forehead, ice coursing down her spine. Susan screamed again “EEEEEEEEAAHHII,” an eerie, tortured cry; her body twisting over, contorting into a pretzel-like bend as the last howls drooled from her mouth, like the bloodcurdling scream of a wounded animal.

“Susan!” Carol blurted, “Listen to me. Please! You’re okay; you’re safe here. Whatever’s happening, you’re only witnessing it, like a movie. Susan!”

“My God,” breathing hard, she realized, “I’ve got to get her out of this!”

She forced herself to speak calmly, “Susan! Listen to me! You’re in complete control here. Whatever’s happening, you’re just watching it. It can’t hurt you.”

Horried, Carol heard the voice screaming in her head, “No harm, no harm, no harm. *Primum non nocere*, first, no harm!” Her heart raced, pounding the beat into her ears, the voices arguing, “Bring her out of the trance now! No. Go even deeper! Don’t lose this chance! No! Just end it, get help. Call 911?”

Carol squeezed her eyes shut, “I bring her out too quickly, nothing gets resolved. If I keep her in this trance too long—I don’t know what.” She was well aware of the downsides; from post-traumatic stress to possible irreparable harm as a catatonic psychotic break.

Going on pure instinct, she trusted her choice.

Delivered in carefully measured tones, “Susan, pay attention only to me. Now, take a deep breath, we’re going deeper; 3-2-1. Tell me every detail, what’s happening, what are you seeing?”

Susan slowly rolled onto her back, stretching her legs out on the couch. She crossed both arms over her bosom, a smile forming on her face as her eyes remained closed.

The incongruence of the blood-curdling scream and now this soft smile was extremely disturbing. Carol noticed something different, a qualitative shift even more puzzling about Susan, “Is it my imagination, or does she look, younger?”

The dominant voice inside Carol’s head commanded, “Let Susan take the lead.”

“Susan,” she urged, “the movie? Tell me what you see....”

All at once, in the voice of a young girl, Susan began singing, “*Oh where have you been Billy boy, Billy boy? Oh-oh where have you been charming Billy? I have been to see my wife, she’s the apple of my life. She’s a young thing and cannot leave her mother.*”

Carol’s mind raced wildly; yet she forced her voice to remain calm and gently prodding, “Susan? What’re you seeing?”

Susan, back in her own voice stated with detachment, “*A little girl, maybe twelve or thirteen, sitting on a wooden bench. It’s a covered wagon. Only, it’s me. I, I’m right there, on that bench, singing.*”

“What else?” begged Carol, “What else do you see?”

“Well,” Susan continued, “*a long line of wagons, both in front and behind me. We’re on a real rocky trail. Going up a slope, pretty steep, heading into the mountains.*”

“Where?” Carol urgently probed. “Where are you?”

“*Don’t know exactly,*” Susan reverting to the child-voice, “*except Pa says we’re headin’ west to Oregon, someplace like that.... I think he said somethin’ about goin’ into Wyoming, into the Laramie range.*”

“Susan, this is important. Can you tell me when this is happening to you, what year?”

“*It’s July, 1838 I think,*” she stated matter-of-factly, “*don’t know what day it is though.*”

Carol’s thoughts were spinning, “Was this some kind of reactive psychosis or a delusional episode? Was Susan’s pain so unbearable that she’s losing her mind?”

Grasping at straws while trying to find solid ground in this shifting landscape,

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she pushed forward, “What else? What are you wearing?”

“Oh, my blue calico dress, with white polka dots. Ma’ made it for me, just before she died, back on the farm.”

Carol began sweating with worry. Had she gone too deep? Should she keep going? It was like being inside a kaleidoscope with every turn changing the picture.

Susan continued in the child’s voice, *“I’m all by myself in the wagon, holding the reins. That’s Billy and Brutus up there, the oxen pullin us.”* She beamed a bright smile, *“Kitty, she’s here, on my lap. She likes it when I sing.”*

Susan’s right-hand was making little wavelike motions in the air, as if she were petting a kitten. Her face softened, she looked remarkably calm.

“Then, oh, loud thunder! Scared kitty. She jumped off my lap, back into the wagon. I, I reached for her, but then, a really loud crack noise. But it wasn’t thunder; it was a wagon wheel snapping into a rut, or something. Next thing I knew, I’m flying off the bench, out of the wagon, into the air. Oh!”

Susan’s breath-rate increased, her child voice rose, nearly staccato. Tears started forming at the corners of her closed eyes.

“Ow!” she hollered, *“The rocks hurt, hard, just off the trail. Oh No! The wagon, it’s tipping! Towards me! Gotta’ get outa’ the way! Gotta, can’t move! Here it ... OOF, it’s on me! My hip! Ow. My legs! My, Oh God in heaven!”*

Torrents of hot tears began flowing down Susan’s cheeks.

“Oh, it hurts. I’m scared. But, huh; I don’t hurt no more!”

Susan’s eyes flashed wide open. *“I see Pa and my brother, Jeremiah, they’re both running to see me. Pa’s crying. Jeremiah, oh no, he’s throwing up, I think. It’s really raining hard. Then kitty’s here, licking my face. Pa and Jeremiah, they’re trying to pull me out, to lift the wagon. But they can’t do it. Pa’s grabbin ’my shoulders, he’s pulling, hard. But I’m trapped under the axle. I tried telling Pa that I don’t hurt no more, but he don’t hear me.”*

Susan’s breath became short and rapid. Her eyes remained open.

“It’s still on me—and in me. But, I can’t feel it. I don’t feel nothin!”

Susan’s eyes widened, her pupils rose up to the top of her eye sockets, as if looking up to the sky, her voice faltering, falling slowly into a whisper, *“Now they’re pulling back, standing up, looking down at me I see their faces, they’re crying. Now Pa’s on his knees. Then, then, I’m floating. I can see the whole scene from, well, just above them. Just above the wagon, with me half under it. Even though, I, I could ...Oh, no!”*

Susan’s breath sputtered, panting, out of breath, her face tensed, her teeth ground together.

Carol commanded with raw instinct taking over, “Susan! Let it go! You must let it go. Now!”

Carol cleared her very dry throat and firmly directed Susan out of the abyss, “Listen to me, only to me. When you hear the clap of my hands, you will wake

up. You will remember nothing of this event. Nothing. Then, you will let it go, forever!" In a command, she mustered her most authoritative voice, "When you hear my hands clap, let it go!"

Carol clapped, sharp and loud, "Now!"

Susan's body relaxed as she slowly began to stretch, full-bodied like a cat. She blinked, her eyes fully opened, wiping her wet cheeks with her fingers and turned her head, looking around the room, eyes stopping at Carol who sat with a look of alarm on her face.

"Susan," Carol exhaled in relief, "it's over."

Susan's forehead furled, "Is, uh, anything wrong?"

"No, no," Carol reassured her, "but, how are.... how do you feel?"

"Great!" Susan chirped. "Just, well, great. Wow, I feel tired and at the same time, well, refreshed. How odd. This happen with hypnosis often?"

Overwhelmed by what she just witnessed, Carol nodded while hiding the trembling inside. "Keep it together!" The right words, which more often than not, effortlessly flowed out, just wouldn't come. Her mouth felt stuffed with cotton balls. At this moment, there wasn't a cogent thought that she could pull together. "What could she say? Holy- holy cow! Where do we go from here?"

To Carol's amazement, Susan effortlessly rolled her hips off the couch, placed her feet squarely on the floor, a Cheshire cat-like smile on her face.

Still mystified, Carol managed to utter an encouragement, "You did great for a first session. Really. Great. I'd like you to make another appointment with Elaine on your way out." Well aware of her complete ineptitude, "How lame was that?" And yet knowing that was the very best her tattered nervous system could muster.

Susan stood with ease and stared directly into Carol's eyes, saying, "I don't know what you did, but this is the best I've felt in a long time. I can't thank you enough."

With that, Susan turned and began walking towards the door.

"Susan," Carol pointed, "your walker?"

"Oh. Sorry. Thanks." Susan chimed, grasping the familiar but folded-up piece of equipment. Without unfolding it, she walked to the door carrying it with one hand, leaning it upon her right hip. She walked out saying over her shoulder, "See you next week Doctor. And thanks again."

As the consulting room door closed, the doorway to Carol's whirling mind opened wide.

She paced absently, running her fingers over the familiar objects in the room, desperate to confirm a tangible reality. "God in heaven!" she muttered pleadingly, throwing herself into her chair, shoulders trembling, questioning the validity of her senses, "what was that?"

She sat up, feeling a shudder course through her body. She threw back her head, fingers tightening into fists, crying out, "What have I done?"

CHAPTER FOUR

It is a rough road that leads to the heights of greatness.

-Seneca

A sharp gust of autumnal wind blew across the steps of the Statehouse as two imposing men pushed through the exit doors, stopping only to wrap their raincoats tight against the wind-blown rain. Protection from the elements securely fastened, they walked down the well-worn marble steps of the State House, striding nearly in cadence as if in a changing of the guard ceremony.

Shoulders back, eyes looking down, both men walked stiffly, not unlike the marble columns rising behind them. George Mansbridge, Jr. and his older brother Nicholas, a former Congressman and Cabinet officer in the Carter administration, navigated the downward trail of steps that resembled an enormous frozen river cascading to the sidewalk below. The men flowed down the staircase with a well-practiced gait.

Over the years, they had done this many times.

Below, parked alongside the walkways, media vans loomed in shapes not unlike moon-based land rovers, satellite dishes and antennas raised on high.

“Looks like it’s time to rein him in Nick,” declared George, Jr. with an air of finality.

Nicholas, without turning his head, agreed, “We’ve just got to put an end to these sideshows, George. Gotta’ stay on message. Do as he’s told, for God’s sakes! We’ve a lot riding on this. Especially now, what with Global and all.” He shook his head in disgust, “Gotta’ keep his eye on the ball.”

George looked at his older brother as the two men stepped onto the sidewalk. He had aged considerably; the years in the White House had taken their toll. “Don’t underestimate him Nicholas, he knows what he’s doing. Besides, I had Harrison brief him just as soon as the media circus ended.”

Nicholas turned, spat on the sidewalk saying, “Sure. That’ll work. If he can get Georgie-boy away from the news cameras for a minute.”

The younger brother laughed. “You should talk, Mister Secretary of bullshit, long as there’s limelight.”

Nicholas harrumphed, “Polls show this bachelor thing’s hurting us. Hard for

people to take him seriously.”

“What’d you suggest?” George smirked.

“Well, isn’t he pretty involved with that doctor at the university, the Klein girl?” Nicholas asked. “Couldn’t we get him to move that along?”

George turned his head, squinted at his older brother. “Could be,” he said grimacing, leaving nothing to chance, “not sure. Klein? Could be Jewish. Might be a problem.”

“Nah,” Nick barked. “We can camouflage that. I’ll talk to the kid about it soon; get him to announce an engagement. Doesn’t have to go any further than that.”

George’s gaze dropped, “Guess not,” he mulled over, now looking at his Berluti shoes on the pavement. “Guess not.”

They walked to a waiting limousine. A uniformed man slid out from behind the steering wheel to open the back seat door for the two. A sudden squall of cold rain started to pelt the windows just as they entered the confines of their warm vehicle.

Ominous black clouds pushed towards them from the south.

“Looks like more rain,” Nicholas stated.

“Ever the obvious, old boy,” chuckled George, Jr., “ever the obvious.”

CHAPTER FIVE

To find yourself. Think for yourself.
-Socrates

Carol sat motionless behind the steering wheel of her blue 1998 Volvo sedan.

“She walked out under her own power?” she said aloud. “That scream, that child-voice and the whole covered wagon thing?” The only thing she was sure of was that this was a work in progress.

She’d recognized that things are rarely what they appear to be; knowing each patient speaks in their own private code. Her job was to unearth the Rosetta stone capable of cracking their secret ciphers.

She turned the ignition key, shifted the car into drive firmly, needing something familiar with a known cause and effect.

Losing herself in the pleasure of doing something habitual, she flipped on the radio, retreating into the comfort of memorable tunes from the eighties.

As she left the wooded acreage of the University, rain began coming down, so light she couldn’t hear it but could only see the remnants streaking the windshield.

Distracted by her wandering thoughts, she drove onto the highway, as if the car knew precisely where to go. She was at last ready to put aside the day’s events, leaving her role as doctor in the rear view mirror thinking only of the evening ahead simply as a woman in love, “something about as non-scientific as you can get.”

Steering with her left hand, she loosened the French twist atop her head, shaking her tresses, which fell into place around her shoulders. She freed the top two buttons of her silk blouse, pulling out the pearl necklace that had nested on her bosom all day. She caressed the pearls for a brief moment. They had been her mother’s favorite. Smiling, Carol feeling these pearls was like being embraced by her mother’s love. “I may’ve been raised by Grammy, but I’ll always be my mother’s daughter.”

From the radio came the lyrics, “*The Things You Do for Love.*” Laughing aloud, “Oh yea, the things I do for love!” She began humming slowly recalling a moment, one she would never forget. She was five, maybe six, sitting on her

mother's bed, watching her brush her lustrous dark hair with a tortoise shell-handled hairbrush. Carol had been chatting non-stop, telling her mother all the things she wanted to be when she grew up, "How about a nurse, that would be good, or maybe a teacher, though bein' an astronaut would be more fun, and"

Her mother slowly lowered the hairbrush, turned fully around and in a knowing voice stated, "Carol, just remember this—life is one disappointment after another." She turned back to the mirror and continued brushing, Carol was speechless as she attempted to ponder her mother's message, "One disappointment after another?"

She had since come to believe disappointments simply meant she was pointing in the wrong direction. "Isn't that why I studied psychology; to learn a science that gave meaning to the world created by our minds and to trust only the quantifiable; what I can see, feel, touch?"

Approaching her destination, she reached into her leather satchel on the passenger seat, pulling out the black silk evening purse. She snapped open the rhinestone clasp and pulled out two pearl earrings, clipping them onto each earlobe to complete the picture. She reached back into the satchel lifting a black satin evening shawl like a trick from Houdini. Flipping it around her shoulders, finally feeling better than she had all day.

Slowing the car, she pulled into a driveway leading to the Commonwealth Club, coming to a stop under a portico set aside for valet parking. Instantly, a familiar face appeared through the driver's side window, Nigel in his valet uniform, a short red jacket, and black tuxedoed pants. He opened Carol's door, his grin a crescent moon.

"Evening, Doctor," Nigel warmly greeted her with, arm outstretched in a well-practiced gesture.

"Evening, Nigel, could you?" She handed him a pair of black satin high heels. Grinning he carefully set them close together on the curb. Slipping off her practical pumps, Carol swung her legs outward, slipping her feet snugly into the waiting sexy heels, her evening transition complete.

Nigel leaned back, applauded, "Eight second shoe switch," he whistled, "a new record."

He extended his hand to help Carol rise to her feet, steadying herself onto the heels.

The transformation from Doctor Klein to Carol the lover was complete.

He grinned it, "Funny, our uniforms define us at work then, after hours, we change back into our real selves."

Carol nodded, "You're so right," pausing, "on more levels than you know."

"Well, have a good evening, doctor; or is it Miss Klein?"

"Right now, lets hope it's just Carol," conducting a quick inventory of herself from head to toe: everything in place, then moved past him through the double

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front doors of the Commonwealth Club, a portal between two worlds.

Carol walked to the freestanding desk of the maitre'd, Godfrey.

"Good evening Doctor Klein," Godfrey said. "Your Mister Mansbridge is waiting; follow please." He took the lead, escorting Carol to the far end of the elegant and dimly lit dining room.

From across the room Carol easily picked out George's profile. She could recognize the back of his head in any crowd. How many nights had she lain awake, watching him sleep; the silhouette of his head etched into memory. She could easily trace his outline on the canvas of her pillowcase with the brushes of her fingertips.

"You beat me here, darling," Carol smiled it as Godfrey pulled out a chair for her as George stood, smiling back.

"Thank you, Godfrey," she said, speaking over her shoulder.

"Bon appetit," he responded, walking away leaving the couple to connect.

"Only by a few minutes," he said. "I've just ordered."

"So I see," Carol grinned, eyeing the martini before him.

George shrugged off her comment, "Rack of lamb tonight with a nice Bordeaux."

She gazed at him warmly, feeling relaxed for the first time since this morning's incident. Scanning his eyes as if they were readouts on a computer screen, she saw beneath his confident exterior a hidden need for reassurance, a call for loving support. She knew instinctively something was troubling him.

Carol reached across the table and clasped her hand over his, "How'd it go today?"

His body language read like a mystery, a smile contradicted by a shrug of his shoulders.

She tried using another tack, "It went well?"

George shifted in his chair, leaned back, raised his head as if announcing it, "Well enough, exoneration passed unanimously. I got a standing ovation. Media was all over it."

"Good," Carol smiled it. "I'm proud of you. It was a noble thing to do."

George nodded, smiled.

"You wore the wig?"

His smile evaporated.

Carol read this one loud and clear; nothing incongruent here.

"Yeah, it slipped once. Gave them a good laugh. But all in all, a good day."

"Well then, congratulations," wondering what blanks needed to be filled in.

He lifted the stemmed martini glass, sipped it, looking into Carol's eyes, "You look terrific tonight, as always, that is," chuckling at his near faux pas.

She grinned, letting the silence bring more conversation out of him.

His eyes left Carol's.

"Father was there. With Nick," he said, in a low monotone.

The picture was coming into focus. Before she could offer soothing words, Rodney and Henry, two of George's former colleagues from Harvard appeared at their table.

"Good show today, Georgie Boy!" bellowed Rodney, fingers holding a tumbler of some amber-colored liquid.

George acknowledged both men with one perfunctory nod.

"Loved the powdered wig," scoffed Henry, tugging on his own styled hair.

George laughed, "Had to get into character guys."

Henry barked a taunting laugh.

George winced at Henry, "Besides, it passed. That's bottom line."

"Too bad you weren't around back then to defend those poor souls, eh?" Cajoled Henry.

George stared at Henry, "C'mon you guys, justice, better late than never." He chuckled out loud, glancing down as if enjoying an inside joke to which only he was privileged.

Flinching at the hollowness of this juvenile male bonding, Carol shifted in her chair.

Henry snickered, "Nice how you got your slogan in there."

Rodney, as Henry's Tonto, blurted, "Yeah, Georgie. Got to make a difference."

Both men laughed, a little too loudly. Carol noticed nearby diners turning their way, scowls on their faces.

The Sommelier arrived at the table, adorned in his black tuxedo, white linen towel over one arm carrying a wine bottle, the Bordeaux George had ordered.

"Thanks gentlemen," George said dismissively, "do have a good night."

Henry and Rodney nodded towards George, then to Carol.

"Night, you two," Henry throwing in his last two cents.

Carol forced a fake smile.

Snickering, they turned away, whispering together like secret conspirators.

George shook his head, looked at Carol as the Sommelier opened the wine.

"Some fan club," he said, "Glad they have such a good time at my expense."

"Don't listen to them," she countered, "What you did was important. I'm proud of you."

His shoulders dropped noticeably, "I'd like to think so."

"Your father? What'd he think?" Carol asked, stepping through the land mines that potentially lay ahead.

"Don't know. He left before the close," George concealing the raw nerve as he reached for his martini glass, a higher priority, took a long sip, draining the glass, then smiled shyly at Carol.

This was apparently the source of his distress. She leaned back in her chair, eyeing George cautiously, testing, sticking her toe in, "You know dear, today I had a big day too."

CHAPTER SIX

*Man cannot discover new oceans until he
has the courage to lose sight of the shore.*
-Christopher Columbus

It was a short drive from the Commonwealth Club to George's waterfront condominium overlooking Boston's historic harbor, one he could navigate in his sleep. So, why this feeling of anxiety?

He wondered, "Was it adrenaline lingering from my State House act, or just 'cause Dad didn't stick around? Or is it the dirty work I'm doing with Harrison?" It gnawed at him, the incongruity of aiding criminal polluters while being called a hero for righting a wrong. "Some hero," he echoed.

He slowed the Mercedes to a stop at a red light; he took the opportunity to unbutton his collar. Things were already too tight around his neck. He longed to be more comfortable in his own skin. The sidewalks were empty. Finally, the traffic light switched. The green light shone. He started forward a bit too fast, tires slipping on the wet pavement. It took the car a moment to regain forward traction on the road.

"Then, there's the campaign," How he dreaded what lay ahead: the meetings, the promises, the deal making, the lies. "Make a difference," he muttered. "Sure."

Looking into his future and weighing the consequences he foresaw, he squinted hard trying to erase these taunting thoughts. Leaning back against the car's headrest, he inhaled deeply, seeking respite from these haunting implications. Things just didn't feel right.

"Was it that I was so short with Carol tonight? Or today's Statehouse dramatics?" Pausing, he cleared his throat. "Rod and Hank certainly didn't help. Then, there was that last martini." He felt a flush of wet heat infuse his face.

"What was that she said?" The thought struck him like a two by four. "Something about her day?" he tried to remember. "Better call her when I get home," he reasoned.

Suddenly, a deer, a mature doe, standing on a downtown Boston street corner in the rain, ears up, nose shining wetness in a streetlight glow, eyes

honed in on George. He blinked, squeezed his eyelids hard; opening them within a second. Sure, there were wiper streaks distorting images through his windshield, but he'd seen it through his side window as well. Hadn't he? A deer, here, in the middle of Boston?

He slowed the car, looking into the side mirror viewing the corner now behind him. Nothing. He considered turning and driving around the next block, returning to the intersection from a different angle.

"No," he said aloud, convinced whatever he'd seen was a figment of his imagination.

He took a forced, sobering breath, blowing out, "Quite the day, quite the day."

Once inside the security of his high-rise penthouse condominium, George saw the blinking light of his telephone answering machine in the darkness—a message. "Friggin' media," he said under his breath, switching on a lamp. He stared at the nagging light, pulsating incessantly as if it was the most important thing in the world.

He turned away from the machine, walking instead over to the teakwood sideboard holding a number of bottles, all shapes and colors. Opening one side of the cabinet's doors, he looked over the collection, finally reaching in and grasping an unopened bottle of single-malt Scotch. From another shelf he opened the door of a bar refrigerator and pulled out an ice tray, extracted two ice cubes, clinking them into a waiting crystal tumbler. Twisting open the bottle, he covered the cubes with Scotch, stopping just as the ice was beginning to rise from the bottom of the etched glass.

"There," he said to himself, swirling the elixir around the tumbler. He took a sip, a short one, followed by a longer one, then set the glass down on the tray.

He turned to the red flashing machine, reading its only visible information: one message. He pushed the Play button, plopped down in an overstuffed leather chair and listened to the raised telephonic voice of his father.

"My God, George," it said in a tone of rebuke, "what was that? You think that fiasco, that clown act in the Statehouse helped? A powdered wig? Where did that harebrained idea come from? What the hell you thinking?" The voice made an inaudible sputtering sound. "You're not a court jester! You're a Mansbridge! And for God's sake, start acting like one!" clearing his throat, a sound of disgust. "Okay. Now get this straight. Nick's got some campaign guys coming to the office Thursday morning. First thing. I expect you to be there on time. Don't even think about being late." A loud click, end of message.

George stared at the machine, head drooping from the weight of his father's voice. He sighed, reached for his tumbler, took yet another long sip, emptying the liquid amid the clink of the ice cubes.

He stretched, slowly rose from the chair, tumbler clenched tightly in hand. He walked back to the cabinet, poured yet another heavy load of fragrant Scotch

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over the now somewhat diffused cubes, filling the vessel to the brim. He turned, and walked to the glass doors at the far wall of the condo. Sliding them open, he stepped out into the damp night, onto a terrace overlooking Boston Harbor. A light rain added a somber mood.

The tall ships were in port, at least some of them. He stared at these symbols of nobility for some time, thinking about the men who once sailed the world in the narrow but sleek confines of these stately creations; men who stood tall and firm; men who conquered the challenges of the sea, the world. Men who would never back down, partly because they had little choice but to face each and every challenge as it came to them, their currency nothing less than bravery and daring.

George took a long sip of his drink, toasting his acknowledgement to the tall ship men of the ages, his gesture sailing into the night. His eyes rose to the sky. The moon was vivid, shining its brightness intermittently between the cover of dark moving clouds. He looked down, turned, walked back inside, and sliding the glass doors closed behind him.

He turned to face the far wall, where atop a mantle over the marble fireplace stood a framed portrait photograph, taken three years ago when he was made a partner in the prestigious Mansbridge, Perkins and High legal firm. He is seated before the standing president of the firm, his father George Mansbridge Junior, whose palm rests upon the seated George's shoulder. Both men dressed in tailored business suits, unsmiling and serious.

George stared at the portrait.

"When?" he said, his voice rising, "when is it ever going to be enough?"

He plopped down hard in the overstuffed leather chair, Scotch splashing from the tumbler onto his hand. He set the almost half empty glass down on the tabletop.

He buried his face in both hands. "Why?" he muttered aloud, "why?"

He leaned back into the cushions, thinking; "Wasn't there something else, something I was going to do?" He closed his eyes as the muted haze of Scotch captured him. "A deer." he thought, smiling. "How about that?"

He fell into a dreamless sleep, blissfully oblivious to the world and everyone in it.

CHAPTER SEVEN

*Great spirits have always encountered violent
opposition from mediocre minds.*
-Albert Einstein

The mid-morning sun streamed through the broad lead-paned windows. A shaft of brightness crossed the room illuminating an engraved nameplate: Isobel M. Freeman Ph.D., Dean, Behavioral Science, atop an oversized walnut desk. Carol sat, silently, in a hard-backed visitor's chair, leaning forward on one side of the dean's desk in the appropriately sterile office of the department's head honcho.

Sitting behind the desk was Doctor Freeman, a woman in her early fifties, today sporting a tailored red wool business suit with brass buttons. It was styled to complement her strong frame. A translucent smoky Topaz ring, the same honey-brown as the Dean's skin, shone in the glare of the sunbeam; the tones so well-matched one might think the only difference between this jewel and the long slender finger it encircled was internal temperature. Small diamonds surrounded the gemstone, sentinel-like, as if protecting the prismatic crown.

The chasm between her and the dean was an assumed slanted playing field. Atop Isobel Freeman's desk lie the open file labeled Susan Alden. Carol tried to appear calm and confident in her white lab coat, pen in hand, notepad on her lap. Inside, she was anxious to the point of dread, fearing the dean's rejection of her own explanation of this, the most unsettling case she had ever encountered.

The only sound in the room was the continuous whirl of the tape recorder's motor rewinding between them. Then, slowing, followed by a sudden, disturbing loud Click, as if announcing the raising of the curtain to the first act of a drama. The play was set in motion.

Isobel's poised finger pressed the Play button, topaz hand hovering over the recorder for several seconds, like a sentry ready to pounce at a moment's notice.

Carol's voice, speaking slowly and warmly reassuring, is heard administering the steps of putting her patient into a hypnotic trance. Doctor Freeman's finger descended, fast-forwarding the tape for several seconds skipping this predictable opening.

She pressed Stop, then, Play.

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Carol's voice, sounding desperate, "Where? Where are you?"

The child-voice, "*Don't know exactly, 'cept Pa says we're headin' west to Oregon, someplace like that.... I think he said somethin' about goin' into Wyoming, into the Laramie range.*"

"Susan, this is important. Can you tell me when this is?"

"*July, 1838 don't know what day though.*"

Isobel frowned, reached once more for the set of buttons, Fast Forward, Stop. Play.

"*Ow! I'm, on the rocks, hard, just off the trail. Then, then, Oh No! The wagon, it's tipping! Towards me! Gotta' get outa' the way! Gotta' but I can't move! I couldn't move. And, OOF, it's on me! My hip! Ow. My legs! My, Oh God in heaven!*"

"*Oh, it hurts. I'm so scared. Then, I don't hurt no more, not at all.*"

Isobel sighed heavily, hit the Stop button firmly. Click, the sound reverberated throughout the room.

"That's enough," Isobel declared. She picked up the folder, quickly browsing through the file, turning pages a bit too rapidly, as if some clue, some hidden information might pop out and reveal itself.

"Don't you want to hear the rest?" Carol pleaded.

"No," Isobel replied sharply. "What I need to know should be in this report. No need for theatrics."

Perplexed by the reaction, Carol sputtered, "Is, is that what you think, theatrics?" She hushed, instinctively silent while the Dean, brow furrowed, turned back the pages of the folder to the beginning. Without looking up Isobel restated, "Forty-two, married, no children." She paused for what seemed like an eternity, until, "Long-term condition. Usual medical protocols failed to relieve pain."

The stifling quiet continued. Dead silence like the prismatic crystal in her ring, the vitreous luster would not reveal its specific gravity. Isobel continued turning pages without taking her eyes off the file, "No head trauma. No history of delusional behavior. No hypochondria. No drug abuse."

Carol felt Isobel was talking to herself, rather than engaging in the problem-solving discussion she had hoped for. Isobel lifted her right hand to her lips, tapping her polished fingernails repeatedly, pondering the implications of what she'd exposed. She closed the file, folded her hands on top of it, uttering a statement of fact. "Facing hip replacement surgery."

At last on *terra firma*, Carol nodded in the affirmative.

Isobel gently shook her head side to side, looked up, eyes boring in on Carol's, "You say her pain was relieved. You're certain?"

"Doctor, she practically danced out the door. She folded up her walker and carried it out! I've never seen anything like it."

Reluctantly, Isobel nodded her head in acknowledgment of Carol's clinical account. However, the deep furl in her brow clearly communicated how

incredulous this therapeutic disclosure seemed.

“I’ve spoken to her orthopedic specialist twice since,” Carol pounced, pressing what she saw as her advantage, “her pain seems nearly gone. She’s gaining greater functionality.”

Isobel continued nodding her head, lowered her eyes to the opaque folder before her.

Sensing an opening, Carol scooted forward to the edge of the chair, “What’d you make of her voice?” she approached cautiously, “the young girl’s voice? And the wagon train?”

Slowly, deliberately, Isobel looked back up, riveting her stare at Carol.

“A dream,” she said firmly, “something she read. Or saw on television. This is an obvious case of suppressed memory. Possibly some form of cryptomnesia.”

Carol caught her breath as Isobel paused. “Those are the explanations you should be looking for.”

Carol’s head was swirling. She leaned back in the chair to regroup, reeling with soundless internal cries. “No, no, no, I know what I saw. That’s why I brought you the tape. Please, help me understand!”

Isobel waited for a reply. The silence felt like a suspended sword over Carol’s head.

Finally, she blurted it out, “Yet it’s as if she was there. An experience she’d had in a previous....”

Instantly, Isobel interrupted. “No!” she pounced. “We do not go there!”

Carol shuttered at the fierce rebuke, eyes widening.

“But, you heard her,” she pleaded. “Doctor Freeman, you’ve got to hear the entire tape, the whole session. Being thrown out of the wagon onto the rocks, Susan experienced it! And then to awake with her pain resolved? There’s got to be something else.. Or...”

“There is! And you should be looking for it. Go back and retrace your differential diagnosis, but only in the realm of clinical protocols. You must stick to our accepted medical standards.”

Carol caught her breath, regained her composure attempting to project a modicum of professional decorum in this otherwise mismatched relationship.

“Doctor Freeman, I’ve heard the tape a dozen times. I *saw* what happened, with my own eyes. I know that whatever caused the pain in her hip, it was ended by her reliving the accident while under hypnosis, almost immediately.”

She stared pleadingly into Isobel’s eyes, “Please Doctor Freeman, couldn’t the pain in her hip have been lodged there from a trauma? And by experiencing it again, resolved this problem buried in her psyche? Maybe correcting something so traumatic that happened, trapped from the past, embedded in her cellular memory?”

Isobel’s agitation was becoming more visible. “No. Don’t even think about it,” her body language as terse as her reply.

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“What else could it be?” Carol objected.

“That’s what I’m instructing you to find out,” Isobel bellowed in a raised voice, “within accepted medical standards.”

At an impasse, both doctors sat silently reassessing their positions. Gradually, the air settled quietly between them. Isobel’s face softened, she smiled warmly at Carol with a more conciliatory tone.

“Look, Carol, I respect you. I want to see you succeed at this University. You’re a good therapist. But please don’t jeopardize your career by going down the wrong road. You’ve a future here, don’t put your career at risk.”

She paused, leaned forward and spoke the words in a near whisper, “I know this, trying to practice medicine outside the lines does not work.”

Her face tightened, “I’ve seen it. It happened to one of our most gifted staff doctors, a colleague, one who I deeply respected; until he started dabbling into the past lives of his patients.”

Carol’s throat tightened, she gulped.

“He saw some of the same things you’re referring to, sudden, unexplained healings following deep hypnotic regressions. He was told to stop. When he refused, his defiance cost him his University professorship and professional clinical standing. A very high price to pay for curiosity.”

Carol’s eyes widened, eager for more, “On staff, here?”

Isobel turned her head and fixed her eyes beyond Carol, as if looking into the annals of her own history. Her demeanor changed, softened with apparent sadness, “Yes, Phonyong Lee. He was a brilliant doctor. But, he wouldn’t listen to reason. Got carried away. Way away. Just, too bad.”

Isobel stood, scooped up Alden’s file in one fluid motion, handed it to Carol, “Forget this nonsense, find an answer that’s within standard medical protocols and write it up. Your conclusions in this file are not acceptable. I’ve a funding committee meeting in less than an hour. Now, you’re excused.”

The cues were unmistakable. Carol rose from her chair and instinctively reached for the tape recorder. Isobel clasped her hand on Carol’s arm, “I’ll keep this.”

Carol let her hand drop to her side, knowing it was the end of their meeting. Turning, she walked to the door, feeling both dissatisfied and rebuked.

Isobel called after her, “On your way out, tell Randall I need to see him immediately.”

Carol nodded, walked out, stepped to the desk of Dean Freeman’s administrative assistant, Randall, who was an enigma to many in the department. Young, gangly, a splash of human gaiety, he was a sharp contradiction to everything else within the somberness of Isobel’s well-appointed department. Randall seemed thoroughly out of place in the pristine setting of the university.

“She said she wants to see you. Now.”

He leapt up with exuberance, nearly bumping Carol. “You got it, Doc,” with a smile of sarcasm, walked quickly into Doctor Freeman’s office.

“Monitor Klein’s e-mails from here on out,” the Dean directed her subordinate.

Randall grinned it, “You got it, Doc.”

Isobel dismissed Randall expediently, “That’s all.”

Randall pivoted on his heels, rubbed his hands together and sniggered to himself as he walked back to his desk.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Faith is the bird that feels the light when the dawn is still dark.

-Sri Rabindranath Tagore

Despondent, Carol walked down the shadowy corridor of Watson Hall to her office.

She sat down, heavily, before her computer, feeling hung out to dry. She stared into space not really knowing where to go next. Heaving a sigh, she absent-mindedly began opening her e-mail file. Several messages immediately appeared. She glanced at them for a brief moment, then began the process of scrolling down, deleting the waste-of-time e-mails, one by one.

The last message caught her eye, *Yarnellmd@Mercy re: Susan Alden*.

She highlighted the line and clicked it open.

“Impressive work with Susan Alden. I’ll be forwarding files on three more patients seeking similar results. Let me know when you can schedule them.” David Yarnell, M.D.

Carol was knocked back in her chair by the weight of the message. The strain of today had put her close to her tipping point. Now this.

She felt trapped, cornered, without recourse. Her only retort was to push herself back from the computer. She began to walk slowly in an elliptical path. Her eyes scrutinizing the pattern on her rug as if looking for the trailhead, thinking, “There’s got to be a solution, an explanation, but what? Does Isobel have an ax to grind, her own private *bete noire*?”

She was not ready to throw in the towel. She stopped, looked over her shoulder at the monitor screen, feeling the pull from one end of this tug-of-war.

She walked to the window, seeking solace. It was dusk. The sun had set and there was a pinkish-orange hue remaining on the horizon, a watercolor background beyond the silhouettes of deciduous trees in transition. A few leaves remained, holding on tenaciously as if to defy their inevitable fate. Others, the leaf leaders, had relinquished their posts and had gone on to become fertilizer for next year’s assemblage of foliage as a matter of course.

Pivoting on the ball of her right foot in a spontaneous pirouette to gain some forward momentum, she squared off facing the computer screen again. The

one-eyed Oz might have the elusive explanation, a unified field theory embracing the elusive art of human consciousness and the science of medicine.

The weight of this monkey on her back added to a desperation welling up inside her gut. She felt fractured like a broken mirror, unable to accurately reflect the picture she saw. She only wanted to clarify this conundrum. She loathed this feeling of split loyalties, between trusting her intuitive truth on one side and the age-old institution of proven science that had guided her this far on the other.

What could she count on? Who should she believe? What was the real truth?

Staring back at the computer, she reached for the mouse, hesitated, her hand frozen in midair. This was now one of those decisive moments; one in which you either stay sitting on the curb watching life—or you move into the uncharted territory of action.

She looked straight into the face of the computer, “In order to see the invisible, I’ve got to go for the impossible.”

She had to find the truth, to make sense of Susan’s experience. In the back of her mind, she saw a small light through her bundled nerves. Determined not to be at the mercy of Isobel Freeman’s limitations, she leaped into the deep end; moved her cursor, clicked on the search box, typing in, the name: Phonyong Lee M.D.

“There it’s done; once something becomes visible it can no longer be denied.”

Instantaneously, the website appeared, a navigation bar at the top of the home page. She clicked on ‘About the Doctor’.

Phonyong Lee, M.D., Ph.D. -- medical degree, New York University, 1973; doctorate in psychology, Yale University, 1983; behavioral psychologist, Tufts University; behavioral research, Jakarta Institute (Indonesia); Medical Fellow, London Psychiatric Society; Director of Research, Santa Barbara Institute of Consciousness; Founder and Editor, Journal of Science Frontier, Boston, Massachusetts.

She crossed the abyss, the bridge between science, new and old; one absolutely known and agreed upon, the other—a horse of a different color. She scrolled across the navigation bar, clicked on ‘Research Papers’.

She felt her body warming, “Could it be?” she thought, “was there an understandable explanation of what I saw with Susan?” Her apprehensions feeling temporarily assuaged just by finding somebody out there who is prepared to look beyond Doctor Freeman’s standard medical protocols; someone who might help her comprehend this inexplicable episode.

She scrolled down the long list of titles. She had no idea that research like this even existed.

- *Diagnosing, and Treating Antisocial Behavior Through Past Life Hypnosis.*

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- *Hysterical Blindness: Three Case Histories of Unresolved Past Life Trauma.*
- *Beyond Fear: Relinquishing the Ties of Our Past.*
- *The Future of Psychotherapy: Optimizing Interdisciplinary Therapies-- Including Past Life Regressions.*
- *Eliminating Pain Neuropathy by Removing Past Life Memories.*
- *Substance Abuse: the Etiology, Pathology, and the Roots in Reincarnation.*
- *Personality Theory: A New Perspective of East-West Philosophy on Reincarnation.*
- *Ethical Considerations For Mental Health Professionals Regarding Past Life Accounts of Regression Through Hypnosis.*
- *Understanding Previous Existences and Their Positive Influences on Your Life Today.*

She was racing through these articles as fast as her eyes would move across the computer screen.

The references at the end of the articles seemed even more enticing than the research papers. Page after page read like an anthology of collected western philosophy, eastern spirituality, quantum physics and modern psychology.

Filled to capacity, she was overloaded. This was way too much additional input on top of today's turmoil. She'd have to come back to this another time and cut it down into more digestible bite-size pieces.

But the glaring question couldn't be dismissed as easily as book-marking this website: "Why was this immense body of information completely absent from my training?"

She was at a turning point. Maybe like Christopher Columbus claiming the New World, again, one thousand years after it had been first discovered by the Norseman. "Is each generation required to rediscover the evidence of previously known facts? Does the wheel need to be reinvented in every age?"

She wanted to study the entire website, but this was not the right time. She had a more urgent and immediate need. She went back to the navigation bar and pressed the contact button. Immediately, Phonyong Lee's address appeared:

<http://www.jsf> followed by the e-mail address: Leemd@jsf.com.

Hitching her fate to someone else's wagon, her fingers hit the keys.

To: Leemd @ jsf.com.

Subject: I've had an incident.

CHAPTER NINE

You must be the change you wish to see in the world.
-Mahatma Gandhi

Even with the buzz of the crowd, the music seemed a bit too loud.

Stepping outside the jam-packed hall festooned with red, white and blue campaign banners, television reporter Alicia Rhodes had to speak loudly into her microphone to be heard.

“The mood here in the Colonnade ballroom is festive,” she reported, “as George Mansbridge the third officially opens this, his campaign for Congress before a gathering of what appears to be some three hundred or more supporters. If elected, he will become the fifth Mansbridge to represent this district in the nation’s capitol. Former Congressman and Secretary Nicholas Mansbridge is about to take the podium to fire up this noisy and appreciative band of supporters. For now, the crowd is content to tap their toes while the band plays, as I’m sure you can hear, the campaign theme song, ‘What a difference a day makes.’ Live from downtown Boston, Alicia Rhodes, Boston ABC News.”

Men and women of all ages, from children to octogenarians, filled the ballroom, sitting at tables, standing in clusters, chatting, some swaying to the music as waiters wended their way between tables and through the crowd, attempting to deliver hors d’oeuvres and keep the drinks flowing.

On stage, draped with one large banner, “*Mansbridge—Make A Difference*,” behind, the small band ended their number with a crescendo flourish, giving rise to scattered applause.

Two tables had been set up closest to the stage, one for the Mansbridge women, including George’s mother Althea, his aunt Rosalyn, cousins and nieces, all cloistered together as if in a nunnery. As the family’s matriarch, Althea was holding court. Despite the proceedings going on before her, she was intent on telling anyone who was listening details of a major kitchen remodel she was planning. Her husband, who was standing behind her was focused on seeing who was seated where and with whom in the ballroom, and was not listening. However, the aunts and cousins were utterly engaged in the slightest

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details of cabinet color, assorted appliances and features that were part of the matron's master plan, including the state-of-the-art wine cellar.

The adjoining table was reserved for George's father, the VIP guests, and other clients including local political bigwigs, men in blue suits leaning their heads close together, some chuckling as if sharing a joke. An empty chair was yet to be filled.

Off to the left, at the fray of the crowd, seated at a table with young supporters, many of college age, Carol Klein watched the proceedings with the keen eye of a social observer; her head shaking in awe and wonder at her boyfriend's political right of passage, the initiation party of the Mansbridge men.

"Am I alone on this island?" Carol sighed to herself, wondering what life might be like were she seated at the table of Mansbridge women, with whom she had yet to be invited.

Backstage, George was deep in conversation with his Uncle Nicholas. "We've got you a bought-crowd out there," Nicholas spoke commandingly, "so things should go well. Got some of the big guns in the house too, so do your best. I know you will. Just play the regular 'Joe' role, be humble, thank everyone you can think of. For everything."

He gave George's shoulder an attaboy pat, "Now, before I go out there, there's one more thing I want you to think about. You and that Klein gal, you're pretty smoochy, right?"

George winced, "Yes, you could say so."

"Good," Nicholas said, "that'll make it easier. Here's what we all want you to do. Get her an engagement ring. Whether or not you really mean it. Just do it."

"You're not serious," George flinched.

"Dead serious," pausing to let it soak in. "Look kid, long as you're single, people'll think you're an irascible playboy and it will leave you open to speculation. It will cost you votes. People want a family man. Got it," an order from his Uncle Spin.

Backed into a corner at sword-point, George stared at him in dead silence.

"Okay, we'll go into this in more detail later. You won't really have to do anything. I've already got Harrison taking care of details. Now, watch me go warm 'em up."

Nicholas stood up, smiled down at the shell-shocked George.

"Knock 'em dead, kid," Nicholas ordered, knowing the sky's the limit, having been there himself. "Break a leg."

With that, he turned and walked towards the closed side curtain behind the band, which was ending a number right on cue, the crowd politely applauding for the musicians.

The cheers grew louder as the smiling Nicholas Mansbridge walked out from the curtain to a flag-draped podium on center stage, accompanied by a brief

fanfare from the band. As the notes faded, Nicholas raises a hand signaling silence, still beaming ear to ear.

“Alright, sports fans,” he boomed, “quiet down. Please. Your attention please.”

The crowd grew quiet, slowly.

“As you know,” broadcasting it, “I am Nicholas Mansbridge,” before he could finish applause and cheers erupted. “Nick, Nick, Nick,” followed by appreciative ovations and the buzz of chatter. Several people left their seats, crowding up to the stage, some, drinks still in hand.

Nicholas loved every second of the crowd’s adulation. He missed being in the political spotlight, wishing he could once again throw his hat into the ring, but he knew this old battleship had long since been decommissioned.

His voice boomed, “Many of you know me as your former Congressman, or as the Secretary of Interior in the administration of our great president, Jimmy Carter.”

Another round of cheers erupted.

“Thank you, thank you all. But tonight, my role here is to help kickoff this important campaign to elect a very good man to serve you in the House of Representatives of the United States of America, my nephew and colleague, George Mansbridge the third.”

Another cheer, this one louder than the others; a chant began, as if orchestrated, “Mansbridge, Mansbridge, Mansbridge.”

George listened passively to the roaring crowd, “Had he heard Nick right? Really? Guess it can’t hurt, probably inevitable. I do love the girl. But, what’s Harrison have to do with it? Jeez. Can’t deal with it now. Back to you, Unk.” He focused on Nick’s performance on stage.

“Let’s hear it,” Nicholas hollers over the crowd. “Wanna’ make a difference?”

“Difference. Make A Difference,” the crowd shouts back in waves of sound, then breaks into one loud, long cheer.

“Fire ‘em up Nick,” he thought, “nothing like an opening act before the main show.” George had been through this routine many times, even from childhood. He had learned all the tricks, all the edges. “Keep ‘em laughing or keep ‘em scared. And be certain you build a wall between you and them. Convince the poor saps they can’t do without you. And be certain to tell them you’re the key to making a difference. Whatever the hell that means!”

Glancing out through a fold in the backstage curtain, George caught a glimpse of his father sitting up close with some Global honchos. He frowned, turned, seeking familiar faces, finding many. “Looks loaded alright, can’t miss.”

“Ladies and Gentlemen,” Nicholas boomed it, “it’s time to put your hands together for the next Mansbridge to serve as your voice in Congress, following his great-grandfather, grandfather, yours truly and his old man, George the Second.” He paused as laughter built, then subsided, “Tonight, it is my privilege,

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to give you, as the next Congressman from Boston, Massachusetts, the best of the breed, my own flesh and blood, George Mansbridge the Third.”

Spotlights raced across the ballroom, bathing the stage in red, white and blue as the curtains part, revealing George, standing stiffly, head lifted high, a big smile on his face, arms raised in the air forming a giant ‘V’. He puffs out his chest, turns his body left, then right, beaming as the crowd erupts in applause and cheers. He lowers his arms, bows his head slightly and walks to the podium where he reaches his arm out to shake the hand of Nicholas, who leans in and hugs him tightly.

Speaking low into Nicholas’s ear, George hissed, “Nice job, Unk, thanks for the warm up.”

“Go get ‘em.” Nicholas said firmly as he squeezed George's arm as though passing the torch, “Don’t screw it up.”

Cheers and applause are nearly drowned out by the band which begins playing the tune of “People” as a female singer with a too-nasal voice started singing a set of re-written lyrics, singing, “*Mansbridge, we who vote for Mansbridge, are the luckiest people, in the world.*”

George III released Nicholas, who turned to the audience, waved his right arm high in the air, walked off the stage to the applause of this cherry-picked crowd.

George beamed at the assemblage, turned to Nicholas stepping down from the stage, “How ‘bout that man? Secretary Nicholas Mansbridge, my dear uncle.”

The cheers increased.

“Thank you, thank you for being here. Each and every one of you,” nodding in appreciation to the turned-on crowd.

“So” he said in an amused voice, “you wanna’ keep this Mansbridge thing going?” The crowd roared in approval. “Well then, let’s see what we can do, together, to make a difference.”

Carol’s back stiffened, sitting up even straighter, straining to see Nicholas Mansbridge joining the table with George’s father and the bulky men in blue suits and one slight man in an off-brown sport coat. They all shake hands, grinning at each other, like the cat that just ate the canary.

George III pulled out his note cards, waited for the noise to lessen, then began, “Fellow Bostonians; fellow Americans, I am humbled ...”

CHAPTER TEN

The hardest thing to learn in life is which bridge to cross and which to burn.
-David Russell

“Damn!” Carol huffed, kicking her shoes off, one by one and tossing her bag onto the antique marble Bombay chest by the front door. This was not her usual entrance into her 1920's Beacon Hill brownstone apartment. Tonight she did not feel the comforting sense of warmth and balance that the high ceilings and Turkish tapestry carpets usually afforded.

Tonight was different, she felt agitated and put upon. The evening events made her loath the social spotlight and the unremitting pressure of George's burgeoning political career. The sides of her mouth ached from the jaw stretching forced smiles. “As if I'm not under enough pressure already! Now I'm supposed to put up with his dog and pony show too?”

Even though her black silk sheath and white St. John's sweater had formed the perfect evening ensemble, her inner voice told her she'd become little more than a prop in George's campaign circus. She began to strip away what felt like contaminated clothes, leaving a trail of garments resembling the strewn bones of a recent massacre.

“I will not be the sprinkles on his icing! And if I hear ‘make a difference’ one more time, I'll scream! As if he's the only one to make a difference? Must I give up who I am, just to be loved by you, George?”

In her head, she knew this wasn't where she wanted to go, but her heart had a different agenda. Knowing power struggles could kill a relationship, she didn't want to make this a push-pull contest.

Brushing her resentful thoughts aside, “Okay, what's the real truth here?” Her inner voice replied, “You're cranky and tired.” A genuine half-smile emerged.

She recalled her Grandmother's trick. Even before grade school, whenever she was upset, her Grandmother would chant, “Carol, my dear, when things around you don't feel good—stop, stand very, very still and hold onto your heart with both hands. Hold it tight. Until everything is alright.” Carol knew it was true then and even truer today. More relaxed, her instincts called for solace in a

warm bath.

Carol turned the antiquated bathroom faucets of her claw footed tub on full force and poured in a generous handful of lavender bath salts. Submerging herself into the foaming liquid, she slipped deep into its luxurious warmth allowing herself to slip, far away from this long day, drifting in wonderment, “How does this work? Is it the negative ions in the water? Or is it just the placebo effect? Who cares, really? This is Heaven.” At last coming down from her psychological ledge, she stepped out of the tub and wrapped herself in the softness of an oversized Egyptian cotton towel.

Snuggled in a thick fleece robe, she walked into the kitchen for a cup of soothing chamomile tea. Finally, she was glad to be home by herself, knowing George, his father and Nick would be up all night reviewing reaction to the announcement and awaiting media coverage. The stats would be in before dawn.

Waiting for the water to boil, she set the laptop up on the kitchen table and opened to the current e-mails. Five new messages flashed in succession, one catching her eye; D.Yarnell.MD@Mercer. She hesitated only a moment, highlight, clicked.

Doctor Klein, I recently met with Susan Alden again and am pleased to share my report on her functional improvement with you in the first attachment. The other two attachments are the additional cases I would like you to review and schedule at your earliest possible convenience. Thank you. D.Y., M.D.

She closed her eyes, allowing everything to go blank not unlike rebooting a computer, “No. Think. What are the ramifications? Say ‘yes’ to Yarnell, I violate Isobel’s order? Yet, by scheduling his patients, and if it works like it did with Susan, I might get more ammunition, more results to convince Freeman.”

Her thoughts swirled with splintered possibilities. The burden of proof was hers; was this just a wild goose chase, or window of opportunity? She didn’t like being out on the skinny branches.

As the teakettle whistled, her thoughts evaporated. Absentmindedly, she opened the cupboard door, and reached for the tea canister, when the blue box of pasta caught her eye. She stared at the flat boards of lifeless lasagna noodles through the small cellophane window. But on the left side of the box, was a colorful photo of a sumptuous lasagna, dripping with melted mozzarella, chunks of tomatoes, shredded basil, grated Parmesan sprinkles. Lifting the carton from the shelf, she turned it over. There it was: directions on how to transform the lifeless pasta into an epicurean masterpiece.

“That’s it; follow the directions,” she mouthed, “follow the recipe.” The sudden ‘ahha’ moment extinguished her doubts. She would see Yarnell’s patients. She would research Phonyong Lee’s works. She would temporarily

suspend Isobel's warnings to leave it alone.

Yet, she knew one other dilemma was not so easily resolved, as she thought of George. "Of course," she reflected, "it always came back to him. Despite whatever her head spoke, her heart had the louder voice. George was the wild card in her life's equation. His solitary vote counted over all others."

In affairs of the heart, self-analysis can be a bitter pill to swallow. She was well aware of the one last itch that was not yet fully satisfied. Like the irksome grain of sand in an oyster that becomes the prized pearl, her irritation, even though she was ashamed to admit to herself, was to be more than Doctor Klein.

She longed to be Mrs. George Mansbridge III. Then her struggles would be over, wouldn't they?

CHAPTER ELEVEN

It is our choices...that show what we truly are, far more than our abilities.

-J.K. Rowling

The day was glorious, breaking like an impressionist's painting in the most vivid palette of fall colors, one of those peak New England days they touted in tourism brochures.

Although it was Saturday, she still felt like she was playing hooky. If she weren't going here, she'd be on her way to the Cambridge flea market, her favorite excursion that often would turn into an adventure of treasure hunting.

But today, she was headed in the opposite direction.

The doubts she harbored a few days ago had given way to a new feeling of determination. Her decision to resolve this academic question that had captured her curiosity in a most compelling way. She could hardly stop thinking about the possibilities. At the very least, it would make today a totally non-habitual experience.

Carol knew the biggest mistakes of life were always made when she didn't follow her intuition. She wasn't going to repeat that mistake again, if she could help it.

Driving down the road of this well-kept neighborhood, she drank in the grandeur of this cultivated community. These big older homes with manicured lawns and great oaks on the outskirts of the University's hub probably had decades of stories to tell. She felt her own deep longing to be settled in such a home; to have her own place in the world.

Carol's trusty Volvo slowed as it pulled alongside the curb scanning the numbers on the houses. There it was, #196. Her destination. From the outside, it was indistinguishable from the other well-kept houses on the street.

Taking a moment to gather herself, she glanced in the mirror, checking herself out, just like before meeting George at his club. Common sense told her this was going to be quite different, this wasn't George she was meeting. A voice within whispered, "It's not too late, just leave now; no harm, no foul." She knew she could leave, just drive away and go back to living life in peace. Peace with Isobel, George, her students, and herself. No ripples in the current of her well-

planned life.

But the louder counterpoint was more enticing. Knowing that she was about to cross a threshold from which there might be no return. She wanted answers, today. “Get on with it already, ” she spoke it, “finis, kaput, the end,” this, the goal. “Indecision brings no reward.”

The mere fact of being here, parked in front of #196, was the choice, even as her inner voices completed their final arguments. The verdict: ‘go forward, damn the consequences’. As she opened the car door, a burst of cold fall air sent a chill to her bones.

Grabbing her briefcase, she shut the car door, walked up the sidewalk, past a manicured lawn, a laurel hedge, a couple of soaring sunflowers, towering lavatera, bowing down in vivid bloom. She faced the ornately carved wooden front door.

She pressed the doorbell, Asian bells chimed in melodic succession, like a Pavlovian response, echoing back to her for what felt like an eternity. Moments after the chimes silenced, the door opened, slowly.

There, standing in the doorway, with no shoes, was a slight Asian man in his 50s, Phonyong Lee, M.D., Ph.D., his face an enigmatic smile with piercing black eyes. He bowed his head slightly, looked at her, grinned it, “I’ve been waiting a thousand years.”

She recoiled, trying to interpret what she had just heard, “A thousand years?”

He stepped back to open the space for Carol to enter, keeping his eyes on her. They remained fixed as if he were scanning her like a rheostat assessing every pixel. Her comfort zone stretched, she was used to being the gazer, not the gazed. His stare made her feel uncomfortable and she was grateful for the distraction of the small bench just inside the door inviting visitors to leave their shoes behind. She broke the eye contact, while bending forward to step out of her shoes.

“Come, this is the way,” he said, pointing toward a door at the end of a long corridor.

For the first time she looked around, into a long hallway that appeared to stretch the length of the house. Doctor Lee turned, walked down the passage. She followed, painfully aware that she had yet to say a word. The hallway served as an art gallery, featuring an ornate mirror and dozens of wall-mounted ceremonial masks from varying cultures, each illuminated by an overhead track light. She slowed, admiring the play of shadow and light that no doubt defined their significance. Taking it all in, she wondered where they were from, how old they were, and how they gained their status.

The doctor disappeared through a doorway to the right. She followed and emerged from the subdued hallway lighting into a bright, sunlit room that obviously served as an office. Slanted window blinds modulated the intensity of the daylight casting parallel shadows across the room.

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To get her bearings, she quickly surveyed the room with her eyes. Standing as a sentry at the inside entrance was a large brass doe. The back wall was lined with floor to ceiling bookshelves filled with a mosaic of magazines, a vast array of books of all shapes, sizes and colors, and other artifacts which spoke of travels around the world.

To the right was a wooden display table that held a life-like model of the human brain and two statues of Buddha; one laughing with the characteristic large Buddha belly and one contemplative, slender with head slightly bowed and hands palm up at the juncture between hip and thigh. She knew that the Buddha's belly is not large from overindulgence but because he is so filled with enlightenment.

In front of the table was a carved rosewood raised platform bench with two very thick red Chinese silk embroidered pillows. From the corner of her eye she picked up a sudden movement near the ceiling. To her surprise, a bright green speckled gecko darted across the wall and came to rest near the ceiling effortlessly clinging to the wall.

Without a word, Lee motioned to a maroon velvet chair, welcoming Carol to sit. Realizing she was still clinging to her briefcase like a security blanket, she looked for a place to set it down securely and decided to put it on the floor next to the leg of her chair. It's not as though her briefcase held the answers she came here for anyway.

Before sitting down, she slipped the coat off her shoulders. Without hesitation, Lee extended his hand and completed the task. The coat bridged the space between them. He folded her coat over his left arm. It was the unexpected fluidity that Carol noticed first.

He ran his right hand over the cloth of her coat, his fingers slid along the texture of the hand-stitched outer seams. "Peruvian." he said in a whisper to himself.

Startled, Carol murmured hesitantly, "I'm not sure. Farmers market in Westport, street vendor. Think she said Columbian."

Lee nodded knowingly, "Handcrafted. Someone true."

She watched him place her coat with tender care over the back of his desk chair. Once again, he pointed deliberately to the upholstered maroon chair, she quickly sat down, voice cracking, "Doctor Lee, I'm so pleased ..."

"Pay most attention to the nouns," he interrupted, "only nouns are true. Question all the rest."

Disarmed by the interruption, she couldn't help but wonder where on earth that came from. Since walking through the front door, she felt like she was a foreigner in a foreign land. Was Isobel right? Was Lee really in his own private Idaho? She'd come here to get answers, not to be mired down by riddles.

She reached for her briefcase intent on reviewing the case of Susan Alden. Her mission was to get the information needed to understand what happened in

that session, Susan's unexplained improvement of symptoms, and to clear up this mess with Isobel Freeman.

“No,” Lee’s eyes tracking her every move, “we won’t be needing that.”

Midair, Carol released her grip on the briefcase handle. Without describing Susan Alden’s case, she had no reason to be here. Not knowing the next move, she looked at Lee expectantly waiting for his cue.

Doctor Lee lowered himself onto the rosewood bench and settled into the red silk pillows cross-legged. He folded his hands together in what appeared to be meditation pose as he closed his eyes for several moments, rhythmically breathing from his lower abdomen.

Unconsciously, Carol could feel her breath start to track with his, perceptively slowing her mind, a momentary welcome relief. While she didn’t know what to expect next, she did know that from a place of quiet calm she could navigate with greater clarity.

His eyes opened, his piercing glare hitting the bulls eye. “You have witnessed a bleed-through from the past, one which resolves a pain remaining in this life, embedded, from before.”

“Yes, that's true,” she started to explain. “You see, my patient, Susan,”

Lee cut her off with a hand signal to stop speaking. “Now you know,” he paused, eyes boring into hers. “You must explore this power of the past that lies within the present. There is more, much more, something of extreme importance awaits in your future.”

She flinched at his declaration. This was not what she wanted to hear. She tried to regain some control, find footing in her training, “I, I’ve been told not to go forward in this work. It’s not an accepted protocol, and....”

“Your precious protocols? They will be obsolete in your lifetime.”

Every muscle in her body tensed, the bottom of her world was falling out!

She sat speechless as he stared at her, adding nothing for a long period of silence before smirking, “Your western science of psychology? Barely two hundred years old! Not even a wrinkle in time.”

Lee arched his back slightly, raised his index finger to his right temple. “Your patient’s pain was embedded within her subconscious, to be healed only by revisiting her earlier existence, clearing a blocked energy path, one left over from her previous incarnation.”

Carol didn’t know which was fluttering more, her blinking eyes or her pounding heart. She was being given an explanation for the unexplainable, but it flew in the face of everything she had been taught.

He lowered his right hand from his temple and went on to explain with an open handed gesture, “For thousands of years mankind, on every continent, in every culture, has accepted soul migration from one existence to another as a universal truth. Until your western religions banished this reality, to use fear of death as a tool to control, to gain power through perpetrating ignorance.” His

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cadence was like a drum beat counting the rhythm; only his instrument was words. They required periodic pauses to fully burrow in.

“I, I’m being told it’s nonsense.”

“Would such nonsense be believed by Einstein, Edison, Gandhi, Carl Jung?”

“No, but ...”

He interrupted, “Mark Twain. Tolstoy. Dostoevsky. Schweitzer. Ben Franklin, Henry Ford, General George Patton? All were believers in the reality of human reincarnation.”

Carol began opening her mouth to put together an intelligent response, when Lee raised his hand, the universal sign language silencing her unexpressed outcry.

“If science understood the laws of the universe, there would be no need for research. In truth, science has only been able to discover that which already exists, that which is already there. Scientists do not create. They do not invent. They only uncover and verify what has been placed before them.”

He made a sweeping gesture pointing high up, over the far wall bookcases, his pointer finger directed toward the gecko effortlessly cleaving to the wall, “Today’s science? It’s just now catching up with what our little friend here learned centuries ago.”

Her eyes riveted on the speckled gecko, grasping the magnitude of the small reptile's capabilities for the first time.

“The molecules of his feet mesh with the molecules of the wall. He interacts with the universe in ways we only wish we could.”

Mesmerized, she could only nod.

Lee pushed himself up off the rosewood platform and came to standing.

Carol noticed how fit Doctor Lee was as he rose, moving in one fluid motion. For a man his age there were no adjustments of joints or muscles. She guessed he likely practiced yoga or Tai Chi.

In what seemed to be one long glide, he walked to his bookshelves and with methodical deliberation pulled several issues of the *Journal of Science Frontiers* from the shelf, handing them to her. “These are the histories that will show you why I left University to pursue the truth. Here you will find an entry point of embodied knowledge, well-developed, tested, accessing the body’s profound knowing. Retrieving the elusive memories. Ultimately, a transference of energy, nothing more, nothing less, only steps to realizations.” He smiled, “And a road to truth.”

Here it is. The answers she came here for. She had homework to do.

Deep inside she knew no one could serve as judge and jury of this evidence other than herself. The scales for weighing the facts; what she had observed with her patient Susan Alden and what was being offered her as an explanation. She was about to step onto a bridge between two worlds. She extended her hands, and took the Journals from Lee.

Lee nodded in response to his own inner timing, turned and walked out of his study. Apparently, this was the signal that their meeting had concluded. She felt like a bystander watching someone else's script play out. It was hard enough following his dialogue, no less getting a grasp on who he was. Maybe Isobel was absolutely correct; he'd gone off the deep end.

She started to rise. Lee reappeared in the doorway, announcing, "You will return two weeks from this time, Thursday afternoon. No commitment is of greater importance. You must have first-hand experience, nothing else will do."

He walked away adding, "You may find your way out. Good day."

Looking down at the journals in her hands, she felt exposed and unsettled. They were only invitations to continue their dialogue. She had come here today for answers, not more mysteries. There were no pieces of this puzzle she could put her arms around yet. She wanted to see the whole picture, now. "*Quid pro quo*, Doctor Lee!"

And, what of his invitation? Two weeks from today? That's it. That's when she'd insist on getting to the root causes of Susan Alden's case. Any other agenda items are off the table and were of no interest. Let's just dispel Isobel's concerns and get back on track.

She was sure she had heard him say something about ... "experiencing?"

She turned from the maroon velvet chair, taking one last sweeping view of the room. Everything seemed as it was when she arrived, except the gecko, now moving across the parallel lines of light and shadow cast across the room coming to rest by the window. Without a sound, it had moved stealthily onto new territory.

Reclaiming her coat from the back of Lee's desk chair, she wrapped herself in its comforting familiarity as she walked directly down into the long entry hallway on her way to the front door. The only sound that could be heard was her stocking feet gliding over the bamboo wooden floors, quiet as a mouse.

She sidled into the hallway, slowly indulging her fascination, studying each of the ceremonial masks that were displayed down this long gallery-like wall. Her curiosity was piqued and it would get no satisfaction other than a visceral appreciation. One by one she considered each mask; "who, where, what, why?"

More questions, always questions.

Reaching the end of the display, unexpectedly since she hadn't seen it when she entered the house, was an ornate, oval mirror, spotlighted by overhead track lights.

She stared into her own face blinded by the truth of the revelation; *vultus est index animi*, the eye is the mirror of the soul. So, she thought what's behind this, my own mask?

CHAPTER TWELVE

Life can only be understood backward, but must be lived forwards.

-Soren Kierkegaard

They called these their Getaway Sundays.

Once a month, weather permitting, Carol and George planned a road trip together to escape the grit and glare of their professional lives. This being likely the last sunny Sunday of autumn, George decided on a special treat, something not even Carol had yet the clearance to participate in: a drive upstate in his most cherished 1953 vintage Morgan Plus 4 Roadster, a classic automobile he called Maggie.

Yes, he'd named it. And quite the beauty she was. Brilliant yellow in color with black leather upholstery, Maggie featured the Morgan's trademark leather strap, crossing the bonnet from one side to the other, along with sculpted, elbow-high doors. Powered by a Triumph TR-2 engine, the '53 was the first Morgan so endowed and the first to feature a chromed upper grille with headlamps integrated into the fenders. A true classic, Maggie is one of only nineteen Morgans built that year. To George's left-brained thinking, submitting Maggie to the indignities of the road made him feel guilty.

Yet, on a day like this, with winter and months of no-road trips on the horizon—this was the best of the best. To find a twisty road on a beautiful day in a classic Morgan with the top down, well, he wouldn't soon forget it.

Wrapped snugly in a thick cable-knitted fisherman's sweater and brown corduroy sport coat, he steered Maggie along a two-lane road into the wilds of New Hampshire, having opted off Highway 93 in favor of a variety of country roads. Their destination was Hillsborough in the center of the state, or so George had promised, where a surprise awaited Carol, who sat enjoying the scenery bundled in a thick navy pea coat, a plaid scarf tightly covering her windblown hair as the brilliant colors of the deciduous autumn foliage sped by.

"Wheels made of solid steel," George boasted, a combination of authority and pride. "And sliding pillar independent front suspension. You notice the windshield folds down? Of course, a bit chilly today, for that," chuckling.

"Really, sliding suspension," she chirped. "That's good," trying to sound

engaged or at least, somewhat interested.

George laughed, turned his head to grin at her, "Of course it's good. It's Maggie!"

She leaned in, kissed him on the cheek, pleased to see him this happy.

As Maggie rounded a curve, a small doe, head down munching undergrowth, came into view ahead. The deer looked up, locking eyes with George for a millisecond, her head turning as she followed the flight of the curious yellow beast that roared.

Leaving Dustin Tavern Road, they turned towards the town square of Weare, New Hampshire, population 8,000 and home of the 1772 Pine Tree riot. George slowed Maggie, turning into a parking slot in front of the Old Brick Antique Shop.

He took a deep breath of fresh air smelling the scent of burning leaves off in the distance, turned to Carol, smiling. "C'mon," he cheered. "Let's see what they've got."

Hopping out of Maggie, they both stretched their legs and walked through the front door of the shop. Once inside, they are surrounded by tall shelves of memorabilia from eras long past. They walk together down the closest aisle, shelves covered with metal goblets, ceramic statuary, hundred-year-old hardware items.

A clerk appeared from behind the counter, a young woman in her early twenties, with spiked magenta-dyed hair, sporting hoop earrings and a metal ring piercing her eyebrow, yet dressed in an 1800s-style calico dress.

"Hey," she called out, "anything I can help?"

"Just looking for now," George answered, walking towards an aisle full of old flintlocks and revolution era single shot pistols. "Got some good stuff here."

Carol scanned an aisle featuring shelves of pottery. She lifted an ornately hand-painted vase, about six inches tall and surrounded by dainty ceramic rose-shaped filigree. She turned it slowly in her hand.

"By someone true," she whispered to herself.

"What's that?" George asked from the next aisle.

"Oh, nothing," Carol replied. "It's just ..."

She set the vase back on the shelf, walked into George's aisle. He looked up, turned to face her, his shoulder nudging a display case like the bull in a china shop.

"Oops," he huffed, reaching to steady the case.

"You know," she said, "sometimes you see something you've never seen before, but when you see it, you feel like you have?"

"Sure," George absently answered. "Deja Vu?"

"How does that happen?" Carol asked. "How does it work?"

"Right on," called out the clerk, "we get that a lot. That 'Honey, I know I've seen this before,' thing."

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“Yeah,” Carol supposed. “You wonder why? How?”

“Don’t ask me,” George answered, hefting a long-barreled flintlock pistol with an ivory handle, raising it with both hands, leveled it to peer down the barrel’s gun sight, “You’re the shrink.”

“Looks like you’ve done that before,” smiled the clerk.

George grinned back at her, handed her the pistol, “I’ll take it.”

“Well, to be honest, I gotta’ tell you, it won’t fire. Mechanism’s disabled. It looks good, but it’s just for show.”

“Perfect,” George remarked, “me too. I’m a lawyer.” They all laughed.

George and Carol walked out of the store toting the bagged flintlock, which he placed carefully into the back of Maggie under her black vinyl tonneau cover. While waiting for George, Carol reached down and picked up a reddened maple leaf, twirling it in her fingers. “So many questions,” she sighed, dropping the leaf in wonder. Gathering herself she slid into Maggie.

“I miss something?” George asked.

“No, nothing, just, it’s that client I told you about. The one who screamed, then saw herself as a young girl on a wagon train.”

“Yeah?”

“Something erased a pain she’d had most of her life. And I’ve found hundreds of cases like hers, unexplained. Patients cured of long-standing ailments through deep hypnotic regressions. Into what may well be their past lives.”

George swung himself into the car behind the wheel.

“Nonsense,” looking straight ahead. “Don’t let it worry your pretty head. Besides, we’ve got someplace we’re supposed to be. You’ll see.”

He started the powerful TR-2 engine, roaring it a couple of times for effect.

“Nice car,” the clerk shouted from the porch, having watched them step into Maggie.

George waved back to her, “Now there’s a girl with her head on straight.”

They arrived at Grimes Field off Henneker Street by 3:00 PM. George parked Maggie out of sight in a pre-arranged garage. They walked across a path heading into the offices of Hillsborough Balloon Park.

“Ah, Mister Mansbridge and the lady,” greeted the receptionist behind a counter. “Everything’s arranged. Your Mister Harrison’s taken care of it all. You’re good to go anytime. Carl’s your pilot today and you should have at least a good hour of flight time.”

“George,” Carol cooed, “what’s this?”

“We’re going up, up and away, my dear,” he grinned. “You wanted to see autumn, you’ll see autumn like you’ve never seen it before.” He grabbed Carol, hugged her close. “Trust me,” he jibed, “you’ll love it.” He kissed her cheek, turned to the receptionist, “We’re ready.”

Carl was a man in his 60’s with a grizzled look that spoke volumes. He helped both Carol and George into the wicker-covered basket of a large, multi-colored

hot air balloon that was being inflated noisily by a propane burner, the roar nearly deafening.

“We’ll be taking off soon’s Ralph and Claude clear them tethers for us,” Carl hollered. “You folks been balloonin’ before?”

“Nope,” George winked at Carol, “this is something special for both of us.”

“Case you’d like to know,” Carl shouted, “these here modern balloons are made from about a thousand yards of ripstop nylon or polyester, this ‘uns all nylon. She’s sewn together with miles of seams. This here basket you’re in’s woven wicker. Floors light plywood. Use ‘em both ‘cause they’re light, strong, and flexible. Gonna be noisy for a while. But with these light winds we’ll be floatin’ in the gloamin’ in no time.” Carl looked up at the flaming burner as two teenage boys approached.

“Ready to shove off,” he shouted to the boys, each one grabbing a tether line. Carl turned-up the flame, its roar drowning out all other noise. The basket lifted with a slight jolt. Carl nodded to the boys below. George beamed at the excitement of his surprise adventure for Carol as heat from the flame warmed the basket. The two boys below released the tethers once a balanced attitude had been reached. The balloon began quaking, then lifted.

Up they rose, passing branches, then treetops, into the New England sky. The sun was far into the West but still well above the horizon. Carol was weirdly disoriented as she clutched the basket’s wicker railing, eyes focused on the patchwork dotted landscape below, getting smaller every moment.

“You mighta’ noticed,” Carl shouted, “there’s no steering wheel,” grinning at the expression on Carol’s face. “Only way to change direction is by ascending or descending into a wind goin’ the direction you want.”

George looked up into the bowels of the heated balloon, then down at the receding earth beneath them. “See,” Carl continued, “air moves in different directions at different altitudes. So we’s shiftin’ directions by goin’ higher, or lower, till we gets what we want. Never know where you’re goin’ till you be gettin’ there. That’s part of the charm. Balloon’s gonna’ go wherever the winds take it.”

He reached up, turning down the burner, eliminating the roar of the now flickering flame.

“Here we go,” he hollered, still a bit too loudly.

“This one time,” Carl continued in his rambling voice, “after I’d left my home in Tennessee, it was back in the 1960s. I was hired to help open an amusement park in L.A. They had me dress up in an Uncle Sam suit, striped hat, white beard and all, then take off in a seventy-five footer with a red white and blue balloon.”

Carl now had the full attention of both George and Carol.

“So’s this band’s playin’ *America The Beautiful* as I fire her up and lift off above the park waving my top hat, expecting the offshore winds to blow me down the coast a ways. Well, didn’t happen that way. Damn Santa Ana winds

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blew me out over the Pacific halfway to Catalina Island.”

Carl chuckled to himself, then went on, “So then the wind just flat out stopped, a dead zone, and here I’m stuck just sittin’ there, waitin’ for some breeze to blow me back to shore. And since it was an event, the L.A. news folk are followin’ my flight and reportin’ it on radio, TV, the works.”

Carl turned his head, coughed, continued.

“So’s finally, after a coupla’ hours just sittin’, I get lucky and finagle my way back to shore with a slight onshore breeze, ‘cept the only place I can come down is in a restricted Naval Weapons Station in Seal Beach. Lookin’ down I see three sailors, rifles pointed at me. One of ‘em flippin through a manual, lookin’ to see what your s’posed to do when Uncle Sam comes at you in a red white and blue balloon.”

They broke out in laughter. “That really happen?” George winced.

“Yup! Goes to show ya’,” Carl laughed, “them damn rules and regulations can’t keep up with everything.” Carol shivered, goosebumps signaling her recognition of such a pervasive truth in his words.

Carl reached over to the burner, turned it off; the sudden silence a surprise to both.

“There’s, no wind?” Carol asked. “I thought it’d be windy.”

“Nope,” said Carl. “Can’t feel it cause you’re movin’ with it. Wouldn’t know you was movin’ f’you couldn’t see the ground.”

“Well, I’ll be,” Carol relaxed.

Turning, she grabbed George by the lapel of his coat, kissed him with unembarrassed passion, leaning back into his arms, “You never cease to amaze me.”

Carl turned his back to them, busying himself with this or that.

George wrapped his arms around Carol, held her close, the beat of his heart danced to its own inner tune. “Well, I certainly hope so,” George whispered into Carol’s ear. “Because I’ve one more surprise for you darling. One I’ve been waiting for, for a long time. Especially now, in this setting, away from the rest of the world.”

With that, George released Carol and dropped dramatically to one knee. He reached into a pocket of his sport coat, pulling out a little blue box with the white ribbon, the signature of a purchase from Tiffany’s.

Carol stumbled backwards slightly, mouth agape as George snapped open the box, revealing a beautiful diamond engagement ring, the facets catching the last of the day’s light sparkled brilliantly.

“Carol Klein, love of my life, will you marry me?” George’s voice boomed it.

Carol sputtered. Suddenly, she was mute. Tears filled her eyes, a joyful smile lit up her face. She didn’t need to be in a balloon to be floating on air.

“Looks to me like you’ve caught one,” giggled Carl, peering over his shoulder at the scene.

“Oh, George,” Carol blurted. “Yes, yes. A million times, Yes!”

“Congratulations.” Carl added. “Harrison’s got champagne chilled for ya’ we get down.”

George rose, gathering Carol in his arms. They kissed with a tender passion, holding each other in a tight embrace. They didn’t even hear the roar of the burner as it fired up again.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

*We must be willing to get rid of the life we've planned,
so as to have the life that is waiting for us.*

-Joseph Campbell

Carol was grateful for Wednesday nights. It was George's night to play tennis at the club with his father. She could always count on Wednesdays to catch up on lecture preparation, grading papers or just decompressing. She snuggled on her bed in her favorite flannel pajamas. "If George could see me now he would laugh at such a contrasting costume: plaid pajamas, serious reading glasses; hair in a ponytail right out of the 50's."

Officially engaged for a week, Carol had added the idea of being George's fiancée into her everyday life. She'd begun to see herself in the role of Mrs. George Mansbridge III.

She had so much to plan, the wedding and of course, the honeymoon and the house—his, hers, maybe?

The ring of the telephone popped her daydream. She set down Doctor Lee's Journal, stared at the phone, the reverie of concentration broken, the ringing insistent. One... Two... Three... She heard the familiar click of her answering machine, filling in as her surrogate, then, "Darling? You home? Pick up," the voice of her beloved.

She reached for the phone, hand hovering, then—she dropped the idea. She simply was not in the mood to shift gears to go from flannel pajamas to George's world of white linen and wool tweed. That time was coming soon enough. For now she would just listen.

"Honey? We have an appointment with our PR people, both of us, tomorrow afternoon. Hope you can make it, they want to measure you for wardrobe. You'll look like a million bucks. Love you." Abruptly, he hung up.

She scoffed at the request, This was not what she'd bargained for. She wanted a leave of absence from jumping through these campaign hoops. "Measure me, for a wardrobe? College professors don't wear wardrobes. Look at me now," she chuckled.

She settled back into the pillows against the headboard, looking at the side of

her bed that George slept on. Lifting her left hand, grinning at the sight of her engagement ring, admiring the perfection of the taper-cut stones, “George, are you the rough diamond I’ve been waiting to discover in the rock; is this like Michelangelo’s carving his *Pieta*, removing the excess marble only to reveal a statute of pure perfection?”

Free-associating, “And why is it diamonds? Nature makes no such distinctions. Coal or diamond, to nature it’s all just carbon atoms, arranged this way or that. So, where did the consensus come from making carbon atoms in diamonds more precious than those of coal?”

She smiled, recalling a plum from her undergraduate years, “The word ‘fact’ comes from the Latin ‘factotum’, which translates, ‘to make it up’.”

“Perfect, maybe we’re all just making everything up; what suits us is a ‘fact; what doesn’t fit we dismiss. Maybe we don’t see things as they are, only as we want them to be. So, does George see me as I am, or as he wants me to be?” quickly wiping that thought off her mental blackboard.

Giddy with the free-fall of these thoughts, she turned to the balancing act of making George happy while pursuing her own career. She hadn’t invested all these years becoming a doctor to let it slide away. No way. Along with loving George, her goal was to passionately pursue her career.

Smiling at the thought of their picture-perfect marriage, “Such a pair, congressman George Mansbridge the third and his lovely bride, Doctor Carol Klein-Mansbridge, a leading-edge clinical psychologist.” She paused, “Of course, we haven’t addressed the hyphen issue yet, but surely, he’d be reasonable.”

Smiling at her foolishness, she turned back to the copy of Lee’s Journals that were spread out over her patchwork quilt like large playing cards. The contrast of these journals reminded her of the evolution of early medical research. In Hippocrates’s time illnesses were believed to be caused by bad humors; to be treated by bleeding bad air out of patients, hopefully before the practice killed them. Not until six centuries later during the Renaissance did the invention of the microscope along with the practice of surgical dissection inspire a major shift in medical understanding.

And today’s changes move faster. Especially with all the technological innovations which have radically changed our lives over the past 30 years; computers from room-sized to laptops. In ten years, what by then? What will we believe to be true? Can our understanding keep pace with advancements? Shouldn’t our facts be constantly upgraded, like software?

Scanning the covers of Lee’s Journals spread before her, “If these studies show that the body reflects the mind, shouldn’t medicine look to the mind first? Are these case histories pointing towards a better answer? If Lee is right, that the source of all health crises originate in one’s past, even though consciously forgotten—isn’t that the first place to look?”

She recalled the words of the balloon pilot, what’s his name? “*Goes to show*

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ya', rules and regulations can't keep up with everything."

She turned to a new page in her notebook and wrote, "Could past life regression be the future of a new medicine?" She underlined the question twice, leaned back and laughed, "Well, sure would change my intake interviews!"

She re-opened the Journal to a marked page, drinking in every word, "*that the breakdown has roots in the body as the result of a prior event. Everything has a context; all events have a sequential logic. Nothing comes from a void; there is no misfortune without a cause. Today's approach to treating symptoms is no more effective than cutting the grass; the lawn will continue to grow. Only when we look deep inside the past for the answer, only then do we pull the weeds out at their roots, eliminating the true core of the problem.*"

Case after case portrayed convincing examples of recoveries following hypnotic regression into patients past lives. Each history led to better, more comprehensive diagnoses while dissipating debilitating chronic problems before they became more serious or even catastrophic.

Closing Lee's journal, she snuggled back into the feather pillows, reminiscing about George's campaign to right the wrongs of the Salem witch trials." Now, we all agree that those ignorant beliefs were flat-out wrong. Couldn't it be the same with our current protocols? Isn't this the same dispute that I'm having with Isobel?"

It was getting late, "Well," she sighed, scooping the pile of journals and papers off her quilt, "later." She was ready, all geared up to discuss these issues with Doctor Lee tomorrow, colleague to colleague.

She switched off the bed lamp, settled back into the deep over-sized, down-filled pillow. Drifting off to sleep, she questioned, "Wonder what's the difference between an innovator and a heretic? The eyes of the beholder, like with the diamond and the coal, or? Hmm. How's that go? If you want to know if a peach is juicy, bite into it."

"Juicy. A peach. A bite. Mmm." She fell into a dreamy sleep with balloons, wedding gowns, towering white-tiered cakes and cherubs dancing around her.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

This above all: to your own self, be true.

-William Shakespeare

She hadn't agonized long over the choice to be made: follow through with Doctor Lee or spend the afternoon with George's PR people. The last thing on earth she'd wanted to do was disappoint her fiancé, but—there was a stronger pull from Lee's comment, "You have no greater commitment?"

So here she was, standing at the front door of Doctor Phonyong Lee's home, having told George that she had an important professional meeting she "just couldn't get out of." He had little choice other than to accept her little white lie.

Still, she felt torn. If she could just share her dilemma with George; but not yet, the timing's not right. She pushed the button, heard the solemnity of the Asian chimes doorbell.

Doctor Lee appeared, greeted her at the door with a deep, arcane bow.

"Sorry I'm late. Thursdays are so..." Carol stammered.

"Not true, you are precisely on time." He rose, hushing her with a finger to his lips, turned, walked down the mask-laden hallway. She followed, noting the empty stares of each mask she passed by, a chill coursing through her bones.

She entered his office, eyes drawn to the gecko, now clinging to the opposite wall from where it had been during her last meeting here. Lee already was seated cross-legged atop the rosewood platform bench, the picture of serenity. He motioned Carol to a couch across from him.

He cocked his head, peering at her. "Your energy field is different; an added layer of vitality."

"Well," she blushed, "I became engaged to be married a few days ago," unconsciously raising her hand adorned with an engagement ring.

He nodded, face showing no emotion, "A qualified peer?"

"Yes, you might say. He's an attorney, George Mansbridge, the third. You may have heard of ..."

"Ah," his face lit up, "an ambitious attorney with an appetite for politics. Yes, of course I have. His family is well known."

He paused for a long moment, asked, "What was his full name given at

birth?”

She winced, “You mean on his birth certificate; George Emerson Mansbridge. Emerson’s his mother’s name going back to the...”

Before she could finish, “The central mystery of human evolution, and the date of his birth?”

“October 1, 1968, why?” She had no idea where this was going, or why.

“These are the things that matter, as...,” he drifted into some inner realm, fingers moving in the air as if on an abacus calculating a complex equation, “there are consequences to this development. While we do not know fate, what we can know is destiny. There is much yet to be done.”

She got the words but her mind flooded with confusion. She had no idea what George’s name and birthday had to do with this meeting. She began to feel she’d made a big mistake coming here today.

Trying to salvage her cause, she decided to ignore his mysterious line of conversation. She’d come prepared to conduct this meeting on a footing stronger than the last time, armed with questions demonstrating that she’d read his case histories. She wanted to show her mettle.

She quickly took the lead, “So Doctor, from your journals I have a few questions, what part of our free will plays into...”

If Carol was more attentive to his queues and less immersed in her agenda, she’d have seen that although Lee’s eyes were on her, he was paying not the least bit of attention to her content.

Having uncovered this new evidence on George, Lee concentrated on the structure of Carol’s face; noting her oval shaped features, chevron cheekbones and pale complexion— a picture-perfect model of the Chinese element’s ‘metal face’. He had learned Chinese face reading at the knee of his great aunt. Back to the time of Confucius, in the sixth century BC, Chinese doctors understood that the face represents our inner energies and fortune, revealing knowledge of one’s true personality traits. He had spent much time studying the classic Treatise of the Bamboo Chronicles and the Golden Scissors. The lessons show that the face reflects our emotional profile while mapping our past history, our present condition and predicts future fortunes, “reflecting that which we’ve earned.”

Oblivious, Carol hummed along to her own drum, “... Your hypothesis of why your patients had such rapid improvements, when you. ...”

Intrigued by her features, he concluded, “Yes, she is the one tapped for this assignment.”

The cogs in the wheel of time were now aligning. He admired her stubbornness, determination, strong will and achievements against many odds. He respected her work ethic. It was a pleasure watching her impassioned enthusiasm. The next few moments would unveil what they both had been waiting for, however, at this moment, only Lee possessed this insight, well

aware that both parties must consent. He smiled, “Yes, she will pass the test.”

Still sailing through her notes, she was unaware of the workings of Lee’s mind, as she continued to elucidate her insights, “Of course, your evidence appears anecdotal. However, like physical DNA the meeting of our emotional and ...”

Lee knew that time is our most valuable commodity and that while the young are very rich, we all must spend it wisely. He’d waited this long for her path to cross his. He could wait patiently while she droned on, oblivious to why she was really here.

Ignorant of the impending deadline, Carol ended her barrage, “Doctor, having analyzed what you’ve seen, do you believe we might be able to contact our departed loved ones?”

What came next was the last thing that she expected.

He spoke as if continuing a conversation that had begun some time ago, totally ignoring her presentation, announcing, “Doctor, your legacy will be to show the healing power of repairing past traumas.”

She shuddered at this sudden turn of events as if the rug had been pulled out from under her. She was freefalling, totally incapable of processing what she’d just heard.

Then, the brickbat, “Today we begin our search for decisive moments from your own previous lifetimes.”

Did she hear that right? “No” was her fragile defense, “this is not what I signed up for, I came for answers. Not, what?”

She bolted from the couch. “Doctor, I am not one of your research subjects, No! I’m not here to be a patient, I’m a doctor, just like you!”

In a mock reproach, he nodded politely, listening to her protests. He understood her, in ways she had yet to understand herself. Like an iron fist in a velvet glove, Lee motioned her to sit, disarming her, “One question, Doctor, do you ever have the feeling that you’ve lived before?” Without waiting for her reply, “You know your days on this earth are numbered; the hourglass sand is running. You don’t know when you will be called to leave or return. Think about it Doctor; you are what you were!”

Folding her arms across her chest and determined not to acquiesce, she refused to engage with him. She was clearly over her depth. Trepidation permeated her every pore.

He motioned her to lie back onto the couch, all but dismissing her resistant protests.

“But, that’s not what, I ...”

Without warning, he leaned, whispered into her right ear, “Your only assignment is to follow your rightful dream.”

The words triggered a code that unlocked her core. Astonished, emotion flooded her being, “Follow my dream. Those are my Grammy’s very words!”

PRELUDE

She saw no other choice. It was time to surrender.

Lee raised his hand, a finger pointing skyward, eyes burning into hers. She blinked, feeling thoroughly disarmed. It was hard to put into words, but Lee's calm presence exuded a quality of confidence that filled the entire room with peace and harmony. Applying his gentle gaze, he penetrated her armor, barricades breached. She laid down her arms. Up until this moment she'd never considered exploring such a domain about herself, thinking, "It's one thing to write a prescription for a patient, it's another taking the medicine yourself."

It was incredulous to her that she would ever be searching past lifetimes of her own.

She drew in a deep breath, feeling as if the air in this room were impregnated with powers of its own.

She knew what to expect. This was terrain she'd often explored with her own patients, but now here she was traversing the landscape for herself. She settled deep into the couch with a newfound sense of tenuous comfort. On her own, she took in deep breaths, eyes slowly closed as she drifted inward, deep inside, curling up into that familiar cove of self-awareness, hearing only what sounded like an echo, the distant voice of Phonyong Lee, "I implore you, part the curtain of illusion that separates time now, from time past."

Having fallen into the dimension between the in-breath and the out-breath, she reached her destination, a dominion beyond current experience, fresh, ripened with profound familiarity.

She drifted into a slightly altered state of consciousness, a light trance with a fleeting thought that she'd remember decades from now. But, for now that's all it remained, a fleeting thought, erased as she felt herself drifting into a realm familiar.

The origin of psychology comes from the Greek word Psukhe, defined as the study of the soul and the journey of the spirit. Her book of life open to a page she had once viewed long before.

In utero, auditory senses develop well before those of our visual acuity.

Perhaps that was why the first thing she became aware of was the music.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

Life is the soul's nursery—its training place for destinies of eternity.

-William Makepeace Thackeray

At first, she heard only the piano—rich chords underpinning a melody.

Her awareness sharpened as a scene began to take focus as if out of a fog.

There it was: sheet music, open and propped atop a baby grand piano. Clefs with musical notes peppering the horizontal scales filling the sheet, a title centered on top:

Prelude

Words and Music by

Iris Middleton Paulson

©1941

Now, the hands of a woman playing came into view; fingers moving lightly, easily over the field of black and white keys. The woman, perhaps in her late forties, wearing a neck-high dress with short sleeves at the piano, was playing, rocking side-to-side, head lolling, eyes closed shut.

Filling an alcove, the piano stands framed by a set of double French windows looking over a cityscape, tall buildings beyond a peek-a-boo view of a large park. A summer sun glowed into what likely is a west-facing room. Tucked behind the piano bench, a large davenport in a mohair velvet chocolate brown, close to a French secretary's desk. Across the room a portrait came into focus: a man and woman seated behind two young boys.

Carol saw this as an upscale townhouse, furnished in fabrics of rich brocades, brown and gold before floor-to-ceiling drapes with delicate fleur-de-lis white-on-white patterns, a dark brown parquet floor, covered partially by an intricately patterned Turkish rug.

For a moment, Carol floated with the melody, the piece sounding somehow familiar to her, like a visit from an old friend. Rising, the music flooded the room. She began humming the tune, surprised that she knew the melody.

Suddenly, the woman stiffened, fingers frozen on a chord. She pitched forward; forearms landing hard on the keys, a crashing sound of discordant notes.

PRELUDE

Out of nowhere, two young men scrambled into the room, racing to the woman's side. As she gripped the sides of the piano, her face pressed against the keys.

"Ma!" shouted the taller of the two. Both men grab her arms, slowly lifting her from the bench, a grimace of pain twisting her face.

"My God!" said the shorter man, helping move her to the large davenport where she lie breathing in short bursts, chest heaving, panic in her eyes as he lifted her outstretched hand, fingers pressed into her wrist.

"Ma!" Screamed the taller man, "can you hear me? It's Will. Ethan and I heard the crash, and ..."

The woman's eyes opened, like curtains parting, eyes darting at the men leaning over her.

"It's okay Ma. You'll be okay!" Ethan blurted in a high pitched voice.

He grasped her shoulders, lifting her head slightly while Will placed a pillow behind her neck. He turned to the younger man, "Ethan. Go tell the doorman! I'll call an ambulance. Hurry!"

Ethan leapt to his feet, raced out of the room.

Will hollered after him, "Take the stairs!"

The woman's face turned to the left as she closed her eyes shut again, a long exhale puffed out from her lungs. Will took hold of her hand, pulled it tightly to his cheek.

"You'll be alright Ma," he cried fighting back tears. "Hold on. I'm calling for help."

The woman's eyes follow him as he scrambled to the secretary desk, picked up the telephone, frantically dialing, "Hello, Yes. We need an ambulance!" speaking rapidly, "Immediately. Yes! Two-five-seven, Park Avenue, fourth floor. The doorman knows. It's my mother, Iris Paulson, what? Don't know. Maybe a stroke or something. Forty-eight. Yes, not very responsive. Yes, yes. Me? William Paulson. Her son. Look, just hurry!"

The woman named Iris Paulson closed her eyes, and with the remaining strength in her right hand grasped a gold heart-shaped locket hanging from a twisted gold necklace clutching it tightly.

Ethan reappeared in the room, eyes darting between his mother and Will, "How is she?"

"Don't know," William blurted, eyes glistened with fear, "Ma? You hear me? MA!"

Abruptly, the sound of a loud CLAP shifted Carol's attention; the scene fogging over, fading into nothingness, replaced by the sound of Doctor Lee's voice.

"You will remember every detail. When I count down now from three to one, you will be fully awake, alert and rested. You will remember everything you witnessed, every detail, everything; 3—2—1." Carol became aware that her body was lying on Lee's couch, eyes opening, scanning the room, coming to rest, locking in on Lee's stare.

"You did well," smiled Lee, poised with a notepad, "tell me."

Carol's eyes were blinking as if trying to come into focus. She pressed her

head into the pillow trying to find some reference point. “I, a woman. Iris, something.” She murmured stumbling through her mind’s cloud. “Iris Middleton Paulson. I saw the name on sheet music ... then, she collapsed.”

Lee looked up from his notepad, “Yes, where often we meet, a point of mortal crisis.”

“Pre, Prelude,” Carol stuttered, “I saw the title, of the song. Prelude.”

She bent her arms, interlaced her fingers feeling as if she’d been swept away by a roaring river. She placed her hands under her head. Her impulsive posturing surprised her, recognizing the vulnerable circumstances into which she was treading.

“Then,” she went on, “these two men...”

“Prelude?” Lee interrupted, “you say the title, Prelude?”

Carol nodded “yes” never taking her eyes off Lee, a smile brightening his face.

“It has been written, each existence is but a prelude, one that leads to the next. Then adding on to another, then yet another, as every soul is a complex melody on a journey of transformation. Until, at last, it is complete.”

Unlacing her hands, she propped up on an elbow, furled her brow as she attempted to find the right vocabulary, then echoing Doctor Lee’s words...“A prelude, that each one, I mean, our lives are just part of a journey? One after another?”

“Yes,” he stated, “one after another. And this woman, named Iris, she knew.”

A puzzled look crossed Carol’s face.

“You will learn soon enough,” he grinned. “This moment with Iris, it was no mistake. There is always a reason. Now you have been made aware. No longer can you ignore this truth. More will follow. But for now, tell no one of this experience. It is too early.”

They looked at each other in silence until Carol nodded in agreement.

Lee rose gracefully, stood, placing the palms of his hands together, bowed his head in respect, underscoring their implicit pact of secrecy.

“Please remember, there is more here than is visible. Your Iris will let you know.”

He straightened, turned, and stealthily walked out his office door. She heard from the hallway in the wake of Doctor Lee’s footsteps, “Worth the wait, well worth the wait.”

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

Life shrinks or expands in proportion to one's courage.
-Anais Nin

She had to tell someone.

She desperately needed George. She craved his understanding of what she'd gotten caught up in, despite her promise to tell no one. "But George isn't just someone, he's *the* one," she mused; further justifying her action.

George had agreed to meet her at Emmett's on Beacon, his favorite downtown pub, for a mid-afternoon beverage. She saw him from across the room as he sailed through the door in his tan London Fog trench coat. Anxiety filled her; she had no idea how to explain her plight, let alone make it understandable to her fiancé.

George spotted Carol at an oaken table against the back wall, as far from the bar as you could get. She saw him wink at a female bartender as he walked by. Reaching her table, he pulled out a chair, leaned, lips pursed for a hello peck, then plopped down, heavily.

"Splendid idea," he grinned. "Told my secretary I had an appointment with Mister Adams. Think she's onto me?" laughing at his own joke.

Carol's sugarcoated smile belied the task at hand, a story, improbable, but true. She held her gaze on the bottle of Adams Ale sitting before her, alongside her half-empty schooner.

"Same for you?" asked a waitress in Emmett's shamrock-green apron who suddenly appeared, smiling down at George.

"Yes, please," he answered, eyes darting to Carol, "another?"

Carol shook her head, "No thanks."

"Missed you at the photo session," baiting his remark. "Still gotta' get you measured, for wardrobe you know. Can you get to it soon?"

Carol nodded, guilt coloring her face. "George," she sheepishly uttered, "I have a confession to make."

"Well," he chuckled with playful sparks, "perhaps we can plea bargain. Let's hear it."

"When I missed the meeting Thursday I wasn't at a professional meeting,"

she admitted demurely, eyes looking into her glass. “Well, not really, it was more like an appointment.”

George’s brow furled, his grin fading.

“No, George,” she smiled, placing a hand over his on the tabletop, “nothing like that. But it’s something I want you to know.”

The waitress returned with a frosty bottle of Samuel Adams Ale and an equally chilled schooner, placing both before him. “Maybe I’ll have that next one after all,” Carol conceded, “next time you’re coming this way, might as well bring him one too.”

“You make it sound like I’ll need it,” George groaned.

Carol shifted in her seat, pulled her hand back and leaned in on her elbows.

“What I’m about to tell can’t go anywhere else,” she blurted out, “at least not now. In fact, I shouldn’t be telling you. It’s just—I love you! I’m not to tell anyone, but ...”

“What the hell you talking about?”

Carol leaned back, “Okay, remember that patient I told you about? The one who seemed to return to a past life? As a young girl in a covered wagon in the eighteen-fifties?”

George’s eyes rolled, “Not that again.”

“And,” she pushed, “re-living some event from the distant past, then she practically skipped out, carrying her walker? And now her doctor says she’s nearly recovered!”

George blinked, turned to fill his schooner. He paused, taking a long sip, a practiced timeout ritual learned from years of litigating, his way of pressing the refresh button on his nervous system: Stop. Regroup. Charge forward.

“What’s any of this got to do with your missing our PR session?”

“That’s the thing,” she pleaded, “I’ve met this researcher, a medical doctor, with a Ph.D. in psychology. He’s been studying, cataloging past life regression cases for years. Hundreds of them.”

“And,” peering into her eyes for answers he’d understand.

No longer able to beat around the bush, she launched headlong into her confession, “That’s who I met with Thursday. I’m sorry!” Her face turned crimson, she was on the verge of tears. She looked up at George, pleading with her eyes, thinking, “How can I make him know how hard this is for me?”

Her voice quavering, “He said I had no choice; that I had to be there, that nothing’s more important than ...,” flashing back to her session with Doctor Lee, her voice broke off, she fought to hold back the flood of emotions. She had to be taken seriously, not just as some wimpy woman.

“Jeez, Carol, calm down,” sympathetically taking her hand in his. “Get hold of yourself.”

Carol squeezed his hand a little too tightly.

“That’s not it,” she blurted out, “there’s more.”

PRELUDE

“Shoot,” pulling his hand back, grasped his schooner.

“Here you go,” said the waitress, two fresh Sammies on her tray. Looking at Carol, she knew better than to linger.

Carol composed herself, took a slight sip from her schooner fearing how volatile this confession could get. “Okay, this doctor, his name is Lee, Phonyong Lee, he used to be at the university. But his work in past life therapies got him fired. So, that’s all he’s been doing for years now. As a full time researcher.”

“You already said that,” George’s voice tinged with impatience.

“Sorry,” summoning her remaining strength. “See, I’ve been reading many of his case studies, his research papers.” She paused, gasping for another breath. “I think he’s onto something.”

“You do?” George speculated, “Past life research? Like reincarnation?”

Eyes watering, “Yes. Yes, I really do.”

George huffed, leaned heavily back in his chair.

“There’s more,” she cried, thinking, “here it comes, the big-ticket item.”

Trying to speak as softly and calmly as possible, “On Thursday, Doctor Lee, he put me under. Hypnotically. He wanted to show me; to experience it for myself, go back into a past life. One of my own.”

“Holy shit,” George spewed too loudly. “You didn’t.”

“Just, let me tell you! I saw an event from a past life. I felt it. It could be mine!”

“And who might that have been Carol, Cleopatra?”

“C’mon George! Please! Listen. I really, really need you to understand.”

He turned stoic, saying nothing.

“I saw a woman, an older woman, playing the piano in what looked like a Park Avenue apartment. Yes, that’s it. It was Park Avenue because I heard them mention the address.”

“Them?” George questioned.

“Wait. You’ll see. As she’s playing the piano, she collapses, a stroke or something, falls onto the keys, and two young men, her children I think, come running in to help her. They call for an ambulance, that’s when I heard the address. And, and well, that’s it.”

“That’s it?”

“That’s when Doctor Lee brought me out of it. He said there’s a message there. That something profound is happening that it was not by accident. And that I’m a part of it.” Her mind raced, exhausted at banging her head against George’s brick wall.

George leaned forward to grasp his ale, downed half the schooner.

Carol knocked her knuckles on the table, “George, believe me. It was as real as this table. I saw her playing. I saw the sheet music. Something I’ve never heard, called Prelude, but then again, I knew it. I knew the tune, without knowing it.”

“Ohmigod,” George sighed.

“What I’m telling you is, I went back to a past life, one of mine,” she blurted.

She paused, looking for a reaction other than the one she was seeing as he gaped at her in shocked silence, the logic eluding him completely.

“I know it sounds strange, but it happened,” in a staccato outburst, her eyes moist with tears, “I can’t refute it. Not now, not after this. I know for certain they exist, past lives. And we can reach them. I reached one myself. Don’t you see? How can I ignore that? Just because Isobel told me to stop?”

George’s ears perked up, “Your department head? What’d she say?”

“She told me to come up with solutions other than past lives, that they’re not on the approved list of acceptable standard protocols.”

“You mean, she told you to forget this past life nonsense?”

Carol nodded, cheeks flushing red.

“Maybe that’s what you should do then,” he reasoned, “stop.”

Carol’s face tightened in anguish, “But what if I find that by accessing past lives, I can help heal patients, like in Alden’s case? Don’t you see? I’ve seen what it can do.”

He leaned forward, reached, took her hand in his.

“You know,” he said tenderly, “if she told you that, that’s what you should do. You’ve got your future, our future, to think about.”

Carol pulled her hand out of George’s grasp.

“You don’t believe me!”

“I don’t know what to believe. All I know is, in law, what’s true, is who wins.”

He lifted his schooner, finished off the ale, set down the empty vessel, looked at Carol.

His voice was soft, but his eyes were firm, “Sweetheart, it’s best you just give it up.”

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

Our destination is never a place, but rather a new way of looking at things.

-Henry Miller

Ground fog drifted in wisps across the empty campus, wrapping Watson Hall in its embrace.

She adored the early Sunday morning silence, freedom to think in the softness of the quiet surroundings, alone in her office, journal in hand, Carol's thoughts spilled out about how the concealed truths of our lives shape our experiences.

Except that today she faced a turf war; on one side—that which she knew, on the other—that which she needed to know: pitting the known of medical science against the unknown depths of the mysteries of human consciousness.

She began rocking in her chair, too hard, back and forth, fuming, “Must everyone tell me what to do? Isobel, Lee, George. GEORGE? *SWEETHEART MY ASS!* I can't begin to describe how ticked off I am at you right now. Don't you see how serious I am? You get anything I said yesterday?” She cupped both hands over her face. “And Isobel? What's she so afraid of?”

“Doctor Lee's probably right—what we know of human consciousness hasn't gone far enough. Why do some become a Mozart, others an Attila the Hun?”

Questions racked her brain. Rising, she began pacing back and forth. “If Lee's right—that unresolved issues from past lives are the root causes shaping who we are; influencing who we could become, then, Bam! It's a whole new ball game!”

Her training had stressed that there is no better proof of a scientific hypothesis than direct experience. Anything less is mere speculation. Her meeting with Lee had been just that, personal and tangible. And Susan Alden's episode, and her rapid recovery was also just as transparent.

How could she possibly begin to explain these experiences from everything she had been previously taught?

She scanned her inner files on behavioral medicine, the branch of science bridging the body-mind connection; where psychology and physiology intersect. Somewhere, there must be a brain-heart-soul link, a place where we seamlessly

interconnect with the universe. The mystery of mysteries: how does this work?

Before running too far ahead, she planted her feet firmly back on the ground. Diagnostically, the litmus test of clinical regression is that the person actually *feels* the scene, all the tastes, smells, every sensation—the experience is as if fully being there. It’s the difference between reading about swimming and actually jumping into the deep end of the pool. This form of personal knowledge cannot be imagined.

The implications of recalling our past lives to create a better future felt both daunting and compelling. She began to scroll through the seemingly unlimited applications of regression therapy. “What if the people we know are actually an extension of relationships that were left incomplete from another time? Are we just continuing what we didn’t finish, last time? Holy cow! Would that ever change our understanding of the entanglements in our family dynamics! Or explain the contentious challenges in marital therapy; continuing the relationship we didn’t fulfill with the same players—again and again? Or....,” she trailed off into the most irrational thought of her life, “And how does this redefine ‘until death do us part?’”

She treaded lightly on the repercussions to her career by promoting treatments grown from the seeds embedded in another time.

“Well, either it’s real or it’s not! The only way to test this hypothesis is through scientific analysis,” she mumbled.

Staring down the deluge of uncertainties, she gave voice to her qualms, “How can I continue current treatments when I know there may be a better way?” The sobering thought seized her breath, “Am I willing to risk my career to find out? Do what you’ve been trained in; prevention, diagnosis, treatment. Catalog the observations, then consult with Doctor Lee.” She had to admit, as incredulous as it was, she trusted him. She’d read enough of his papers to know that he was onto something. And she had to know more about it.

“What are my choices?” her tenuous resolve questioned. “Feign ignorance? Pretend I hadn’t opened this door? Conform to current protocols, accepting the limitations of incomplete science masquerading as adequate treatments when I know there is a yet another way?”

Carol rose from the chair, walked back to the window, seeing her own reflection mirroring at her against the background of heavy mist, and like a whisper from eternity she declared aloud; “Okay Doctor, you’re either in or you’re out, there is no second way.”

She turned to her laptop computer. The machine hummed into life. She clicked on the e-mail that was highlighted Susan Alden—David Yarnell M.D., moving the cursor to the reply box, clicked it open.

Carol’s fingers glided over the keyboard. What was previously a blank screen was rapidly filled with the words: *Doctor Yarnell, I’ve received your referrals. I can begin therapy with your patients in two weeks time. C. Klein, Ph.D., moving the*

PRELUDE

cursor to Send, clicked it, saying, "One down," began typing anew.

Doctor Lee: Though I may be out of my league, I am committed to exploring your implications of reincarnation for myself. My knowledge on this subject is limited. My tools for making this connection are inadequate. I'll need your help in order to understand. When can we meet again? Carol Klein, Ph.D.

Either through ignorance or sheer innocence, the tide had turned. Carol closed her eyes, pressed Send, saying, "Game's on!"

She had one more e-mail to write, one which never would be sent.

It was the source of her greatest conflict. Carol wanted to e-mail George and share with him her decision to see Doctor Lee again. But she couldn't. And wouldn't. That risk likely had no reward. Misleading him was wrong. But being disingenuous to herself was even worse.

Outside, the fog had lifted.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

Security is mostly superstition. It does not exist in nature, nor do the children of men as a whole experience it. Avoiding danger is no safer in the long run than out right exposure—life is either a daring adventure, or nothing.

-Helen Keller

Carol awoke slowly the next morning, feeling vaguely uneasy.

“This must be what a butterfly feels like, wings folded back, about to be tested as it emerges from the shelter of the cocoon.” She knew there’d be no going back to caterpillar-dom, not now, not ever.

Enlivened by her new sense of resolve, she stepped into the bright autumn morning, striding off to teach her Advanced Personality class of graduate students. She’d become quite fond of this small class, as it gave her an opportunity to really get to know her students and mentor them through their internships.

Walking through the quad, she mulled over her new determination, feeling the weight of yet another transition, first George—and now, this?

Knowing she was about to dive into the deep end, swimming in a new, pristine sea of discovery, ready to challenge the very authority she’d always relied on. Surprisingly, she felt completely refreshed, more alive than ever. “After all, life can’t be lived by proxy, either you’re on the field as a player or in the stands watching.”

Basking in this new identity, she entered the classroom, chirping a bright, “Good morning, doctors,” as her students eagerly took their places around an oval conference table.

Perhaps overly inspired, Carol inexplicably stepped onto an invisible soapbox.

“Okay students today, doctors tomorrow,” she grinned it. “This morning, I have something different to offer, rather than recap where we left off last week. Today, I want us to look at the history of flawed science and its consequences upon medical treatment.”

Her statement captured their attention; it was not like Doctor Klein to deviate from the syllabus. She waited as the students settled into their chairs, their full

attention on her.

“All set?” she began, “good. Our focus will be on incidences in which mistaken beliefs and faulty science led to errors in treatment, that too often ended in fatal results. Not for the purpose of criticism and judgment, not at all. We know medical mistakes can be made by well-meaning people, doctors who followed the Hippocratic oath. But rather, let’s examine the blunders made due to accepting beliefs in flawed science, causing medical procedures that led to no benefit for the patient or worse, a catastrophic outcome. Over the centuries, too many doctors have been blinded by the ignorance of their times and clinging stubbornly to beliefs that were dead wrong.”

She let the last two words sink into their minds.

“Always remember, doctors, that in spite of our highest ideals; medicine and science are merely man-made constructs, subject to our limitations as human beings. This is not to point fingers or find fault, but rather to learn from the misconceptions in order to advance to the next level of medical knowledge. Doctors, this is your utmost duty: to find the prevailing errors in today’s science that will go to heal your future patients.”

The thought flashed in her mind, “Where’re these words coming from?”

She cleared her throat, “One only has to look back to the once-acceptable treatment of bloodletting, a belief that led to George Washington’s death, for an example of a mistaken belief of their times. And it lasted for decades; until the practice was finally discredited by an advancing medical community.”

Her students nodded, glancing among themselves as she continued.

“Unfortunately, the list of blunders goes on; such wrong-headed treatments as the practice of injecting mercury as a cure for syphilis. Or in the early days of mental illness treatments, which included a protocol of injecting patients with insulin, inducing a comatose state. Bad as that seems today, this practice later paved the way for icepick lobotomies, a dangerous, sometimes deadly treatment. Both therapies rendered the patient docile and quietly manageable, that is, before they died. Do no harm? Hardly in play, when you look back at it today.”

Several students looked at each other, showing signs of uneasiness at the topic.

Her voice rising, “It’s barely one hundred fifty years since Doctor Ignaz Philipp Semmelweis contradicted the medical wisdom of the day. It was a time when doctors believed diseases of all sorts were caused by a wide variety of sources, few of which had any relation to the illness themselves. What he observed was a direct correlation between women dying of childbed fever while in the same hospitals where autopsies were being performed. What he deduced was monumental, though most unpopular in that days’ medical circles.”

She smiled, “Why? Because he claimed that the deadly fevers were being transferred to their patients by the doctors themselves. You see, first the doctors

were performing their autopsies and then going directly to examining obstetric patients.”

A few students nodded in acknowledgement of these archival facts.

“So,” she beamed back at the attentive stares, “what was Semmelweis’s radical innovation, his answer to solve this fatal problem?”

She waited, no student raised a hand.

“Semmelweis simply recommended that before conducting internal examinations, doctors should scrub. That’s all, just wash up. Once scrubbing became routine, the number of childbed fever deaths dropped radically. His conclusions were empirically validated.”

Watching her students reaction, a general murmur throughout the room, she spoke up, passion in her voice, “So, how did the establishment react to the good doctor’s scientific discovery? He was ridiculed, rejected and dismissed from his hospital. He was committed to an asylum where he died. Why? Because having to take the trouble to scrub was antithetical to the medical procedures of the day!”

She paused, letting the point sink in.

“Shortly after his death, Semmelweis’s call for cleanliness by scrubbing was vindicated by one of his students, Louis Pasteur, who discovered the source of the bacterium responsible for childbed fever was indeed transferred following procedures during autopsies. Obviously, his mentor had been right all along.”

She dropped her head as in a show of respect, then raised it in challenge.

“Were those doctors of that age indifferent, irresponsible? No! Of course not—they just couldn’t, or wouldn’t, let go of their established ways of doing things. *Res ipse loquitur*, it speaks for itself. They just couldn’t let go of their beliefs, and the consensual definition of their known reality.”

She paused, caught her breath.

“Why am I telling you this today? You students, future doctors, all of you; you must be willing to stand up to those who stubbornly hold onto past precepts rather than accept advances in procedure. You must join the struggle to find new solutions, new protocols if necessary, to do justice to your generation. Just as Semmelweis did for his.”

Pivoting, she turned her back to the graduate students and wrote on the chalkboard in large bold print, “*Verbum Sapientia.*” She turned, looked back at the Latin term, spoke the translation, “Word to the wise. It will soon be your turn to leave your mark. Stand on the shoulders of the courageous pioneers who dared to tell the truth.”

She peered into the eyes of her students, “Even today, medical errors, idiopathic causes, are responsible for more deaths than car accidents, AIDS, and other diseases combined! More than one hundred thousand people still die every year in our modern hospitals from infections received in these institutions and the same number die from surgical mistakes as well.”

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She paused, trusting the sheer numbers to soak in. “Time is an equal opportunity employer. We all have the same twenty-four/seven. What will you do with your time? We know science can’t discover or invent more time. It’s impossible to save it for the future. And not even a king’s ransom can buy it. And yet we all want more. Life is all about time and how we use it. Think how much time you’ve already wasted. How are you planning to invest your future? Particularly, because you don’t know how much you have left. Maybe it seems like you’ve all the time in the world but don’t waste a moment of it. Life goes by way too fast.”

With a grand sweeping gesture towards the large classroom windows she said, “Just look at those falling leaves. Only a few months ago they were green, dancing freely in the sunshine, dreaming of the future, a future they ultimately knew nothing about. And now their time is at an end, at least in this form.”

Having struck a raw nerve in the collective consciousness of her students, their restless squirming ignited a quick inner review of their own timelines.

“I’d like to leave you with this thought before we go on with the rest of our curriculum today, you can change the past with the present. And maybe, someday we will use the mind as a time machine to....”

BRRRRRRING. A cell phone ring tone blared.

All eyes turned toward the piercing sound, as student Dennis O’Reilly fumbled with his phone, quickly turned it off, mumbling an apology.

Carol took this alarm bell as a wake-up call for herself and changed gears.

“Okay. Now, let’s pick up where we left off last week,” she said. “Let’s explore the effects on shaping one’s tendencies through Aversion Theory, Temperament Models and Neural Memory Synapses.”

She gestured towards a male student seated at the opposite end of the conference table, “Doctor Barnett, would you begin by sharing your report please?”

Thomas Barnett pushed his chair back, stood, he adjusted his notes, cleared his throat, “Theoretical Advances in the Behavioral Diagnosis and Management of ...”

Carol could barely keep her attention on Barnett’s oral report. She kept drifting back into the errors of medicine’s history. She felt like she was straddling historical dilemmas in current time. At this moment all she could do was lean forward into the prevailing wind to see where destiny would direct her.

She knew instinctively that when she got back to her office there would be an e-mail waiting from Doctor Lee. She needed to unveil the ‘yet to be explored potential’ she felt in her bones, wondering, “How can I feel so strongly about something I know so little about?”

It was no longer a matter of if she would go forward; it was only a matter of when. Her intuition told her it would be soon, very soon. What she didn’t know was that her ‘intuitive-soon’ was coming before she could’ve guessed.

The class continued with no one noticing she wasn't really there.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

The greater the contrast, the greater the potential. Great energy only comes from a correspondingly great tension between opposites.

-C. G. Jung

It was well past midnight.

The heavy mist off the harbor coated the windshield like a woven linen blanket. Nicholas Mansbridge turned the windshield wipers on reluctantly. Not only did it smear the dirt, but they reminded him of the syncopated metronome that sat on the piano and ticked away his youth.

“Damn waste,” pushing the past out of his head.

Pressing the Bluetooth button on the car’s console, he bellowed at the lighted dashboard; “Call Harrison.” The familiar female computer voice immediately replied, “Did you say, call Harrison?”

Annoyed at being dictated to by technology but having no recourse, Nick spat out, “Yes, Dammit!”

Across town, the jarring ring of his cell phone snapped Harrison from a dead sleep. Like all foot soldiers, he knew the first law of duty is sleep when you can. War does not keep convenient hours.

Caller ID announced in bold letters the sleep-intruder’s name.

“Nick?” Harrison hastily answered, knowing full well his job was 24/7, on call. He was the elephant sweeper, cleaning up the messes after the parade. It suited him well. If he weren’t doing Nick’s bidding on this side of the law, then...well, he’d be a mercenary by any other name for any other side. Either paid very well. He was looking forward to an end-of year annual bonus; his eyes on a new Silver 911 Porsche sports car, just under six figures. So—a few midnight runs a year, easy money.

“Harrison, that Klein woman, I want her vetted, well vetted; to her third grade report card. Go back as far as you can. And her family, too. Don’t want any surprises, got it?”

“Yes, sir.” Harrison well understood the chain of command. He’d hunker down into the trenches tonight and with any luck, he’d have the preliminary report on Nick’s desk by the first light of day. It wouldn’t be the first time he’d

arrive at the office door at the same time the Wall Street Journal was being dropped off. Yes, he was Nick's delivery boy, but the pay was worth it.

The phone line went silent. Nick was never one for formalities.

It would be a long night. Harrison stomped into the kitchen and pounded the strong dark Turkish coffee grinds into his espresso maker. The aromatic steam wafted up from the espresso machine. The dark chocolate colored coffee grounds melting under pressure dripped into the awaiting demitasse cup. The aroma itself had a caffeine charge that alerted his brain cells to 'come to attention'.

In the old days, when they first got started, he'd hit the road in the middle of the night to do his vetting. But tonight the internet, what a marvel for his line of work—more dirt, less time.

"Let's see what you're hiding, Georgie's girl," he chuckled with anticipation.

CHAPTER TWENTY

*What lies behind us and what lies before us are
tiny matters compared to what lies within us.*

-Ralph Waldo Emerson

The slant of the blinds muted the sunlight's intensity into the room.

Carol stretched out on Doctor Lee's couch under a small hand-woven woolen lap blanket covering her from toes to torso, like a corpse. The warmth was welcome on this, a chilly fall afternoon.

Carol knew this was to be her first big test, a requirement to graduate to the next level. She wasn't fully prepared for this moment, but knowing that taking the test sooner was better than later.

She wanted this chapter behind her, to find out once and for all whether to say 'yea' or 'nay'. Her inner conflict came to an end at the drone of Lee's voice: "Life is one great dream from which we all will awaken. Carol, see yourself stepping onto an escalator, going down. Feel the gentle gliding movement down, down, as you relax, deep, now deeper. You are moving ever-so-slowly. Relaxed, so relaxed. You are nearly there. Sights are coming into view, in sharp focus as you move close, ever so close to your goal. You're coming to the bottom now. Take your first step into it, now ..."

At first, Carol saw a man's face slowly come into focus. He is seated at a table at an outdoor café on a sunny afternoon. Then, a young woman arrives, stopping at the table.

"Mister Eastman?" the woman asked, extending her hand, "I'm Iris Middelton."

"And, I might add, right on time," he greeted.

Carol recognized this Iris as a younger version of the older Iris she had seen during her last such encounter. This time she was in her early 20's, wearing a green tweed skirt and a stylish open necked pale yellow blouse that draped beneath a short double-breasted wool jacket.

Eastman motioned her to sit. Iris pulled out the metal chair across from him. On the table Carol saw demitasse cups and a stack of magazines, 'The Masses' dated May, 1916.

Carol's attention riveted on the scene, as if she was watching a movie, frame

by frame.

Iris nervously blurted out, "Mister Eastman? I..."

"Max," he corrected, looked her up and down, a sly smirk on his face, "Sherwood Anderson says you've the right stuff. Known him long?"

"Yes. I mean, no. He knew my father and,..." Iris replied a little too quickly, then tailed off.

Leaning back, elongating the moment, he seemed to enjoy her awkwardness, "Before we published him, he worked in advertising. You know that?"

Iris shook her head, "No."

"He hated advertising. That's what I liked about him," laughing at his insight. "Fear not dear lady, your work is impressive. I like what I've seen of your writings. I believe we think alike; unless I'm wrong, and I seldom am, you'll fit in quite nicely."

She nodded. He smiled, reached for his wallet, pulled out a five-dollar bill and plucked it down on top of the magazines that were stacked on the table. "Let's go meet your new mates."

Just as abruptly, sliding back his chair, Eastman stood. Iris looked up, alarmed as he pivoted on his heels, motioned her to follow, then, in long strides, began to walk away.

She jumped up, rapidly walked to catch up until they were walking shoulder to shoulder.

Carol began to notice familiar landmarks as Iris and Max walked through Greenwich Village. The landmarks were unmistakable: right behind her was Washington Square Park. Remarkably, Carol could hold her awareness of the landmarks and her attention on the storyline at the same time.

Iris asked, "Mr. Eastman? You forgot your..."

He interrupted, "Max, and I always leave copies for the proletariat. It's good for them."

Iris looked up at him, nodded, a relaxed grin brightening her face.

Eastman continued with a blaring prideful grin, "You'll be joining the best damn team of writers in America, the ones who actually run The Masses. We writers do as we please. We bow to no one. Not our advertisers. Not even our readers. We print what's too true for the moneymaking press of this belligerent nationalistic country."

Iris glanced away in astonishment, having no idea how to reply.

Eastman stopped abruptly before a brownstone, stepping up onto the landing of the entrance. With a sweeping motion, he motioned to the door. "Welcome to the infamous salon of Mabel Dodge, the second home of The Masses."

From the building's alcove, Eastman ushered Iris into a lavishly decorated parlor room, a loft overhead and an upright piano on the back wall. They stood in the back, unnoticed for the moment. Carol could see in addition to Max and Iris, two men and four women sat around a dining table with teacups, wineglasses and notepads randomly placed before them. One of the seated men, in his late 20s, handsome features topped with a shock of wavy black hair, was speaking as he leaned toward a

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trim woman who appeared to be in her late thirties.

Carol recognized both, recalling photos from the annals of history: radical writer Jack Reed and feminist Margaret Sanger.

“You still at war with us, Margaret?” Reed asked.

Margaret Sanger smiled at Reed, “Jack, we women, we control birth. We have the power to remake the world. You and your diplomats? You form leagues of nations and have spats like the one I just left in Europe.”

Reed grinned at her, “Yes, this Austrian-Serbian conflict? It’s as if Hoboken declared war on Coney Island.”

The entire group laughed.

Reed continued, “Just watch. All the capitalists will be drawn in. The Germans want the profit. English, French? They both want it all too.”

A man turned towards Reed, “This is their war Jack, not ours.”

“Mister Sinclair, you would think so, but don’t bet on it, Upton old man.”

“Won’t Wilson keep us out of it?” asked a young woman.

“Miss Eastman,” Reed said, “Crystal, since when did you or your brother start listening to the pronouncements of the politicians?”

From across the room Max Eastman answered a little too loudly, “Lies! All lies!”

The whole group at this point turned and looked back at Eastman, “I don’t believe Wilson and neither does my sister. We know all they ever need to start a war is a steady supply of lies.”

Max grabbed hold of Iris’s elbow and guided her to the center of the room.

“Max. Your friend?” asked Crystal.

Eastman replied, “My colleagues. Our newest contributor, Iris Middleton, a Chicago-bred crusader for truth, justice and the righting of wrongs.”

Iris hesitantly nodded towards each of the people around the table making eye contact with each as she scanned their faces.

Max Eastman simultaneously gestured toward each one of his friends one by one introducing them with his characteristic flair, “Our hostess, Mabel Dodge.”

Max paused, “Emma Goldman, champion of the oppressed and in some circles, public enemy number one.”

Grinning broadly he quickened the tempo, “Over there, the infamous commie-loving Jack Reed, one time amigo of Poncho Villa, currently the enemy of the Kaiser.”

Laughter broke out around the table while Max pivoted ninety degrees and gestured towards the remaining men and two women seated at the table. “That well known muckraker Upton Sinclair. My dear sister and co-author, Crystal and, of course, just back from exile in England, our own sexual freedom crusader, Margaret Sanger.”

They all greeted Iris with polite nods as if not quite sure what she was doing there.

Max Eastman continued to dominate the conversation, “Chicago, a cornucopia of talent. Where we found Sandberg. Dreiser, Anderson. Please, welcome to The Masses, Iris Middleton.”

Led by Reed, the group applauded politely.

“Welcome, Chicago,” Reed said. “As a native from the hinterlands myself, it’s good to have you aboard.”

This brought a great smile to Iris’s face.

“WHACK,” a loud clap of hands shocked Carol back into the current time and space.

Her eyes immediately snapped open. She was a well-trained subject and very responsive to Lee’s instructions.

“Deep breath,” he urged.

Carol’s breath came easily and deeply. She stared resolutely at Lee, then finally spoke, “A writer. Iris wrote for a paper, *The Masses*, in New York. She, she was a crusader of sorts.”

Phonyong Lee nodded knowingly, “Something solid, something to follow. It’s nearly time to cross the bridge.”

He abruptly walked out of the room.

She knew better than to lag behind his lead. She lifted herself off the couch and followed him into the room across the hall. She found him already on his computer typing in the search field: *The Masses*, scanning for the name *Iris Middleton*. By the time Carol could put two and two together, the laser printer beside the computer was verifying Iris’s identity and her connection to the magazine. Engrossed in the avalanche of these mounting facts, she hadn’t noticed that Lee had left the room.

She stood alone, trying to decide what all this meant.

Then it hit her, “Bridge? What bridge?”

CHAPTER TWENTY ONE

Shoot for the moon. Even if you miss it you will land among the stars.

-Lester Louis Brown

Had she done it?

Little did she know that she'd already crossed the bridge. On the other side was pure chaos.

Her ordered life was about to be fractured, like Yin and Yang, the irreconcilable opposites that complement each other: male and female, shadow and light, life and death. "You can't know one without the other," she reflected.

Only a few days had passed since her discovery of Iris's existence as a writer for *The Masses* when she arrived for another session with Doctor Lee. She knew, down deep, an irrefutable link had been formed between Iris and herself. But, what? She was determined to find out.

As Lee appeared in the doorway, nodded knowingly before she could say anything, "Yes," he stated, eyes glistening, "I agree, you must visit your Iris again."

Once in his office, he lifted a finger to his lips, "But first, we must agree on two points: one—say nothing of this to anyone. It is too early. Two—now that you have embodied this ability, you must agree to explore it, for itself and for the good of your patients."

Carol's brow furrowed, knowing she'd already broken one of the two agreements, blurted, "Doctor, forgive me, but, I have told someone, my George; about our first session, about Iris. I had to."

Interrupting her, "Do we know what is good? Bad? Everything is constantly changing. Fortune can turn to misfortune, bad can become good." Nodding, he smiled broadly, "Nothing happens by chance, there is a reason. There are no mistakes. Our lives unfold as they should. Now that the secrecy is broken, it shall become of immense value."

Carol looked back at him, dumbfounded.

"Really, I'm sorry," she whispered, "it's just . . ."

"Don't be," he interrupted, "we will learn the reason in due time."

Embarrassed, she turned away from him, walked to the window and peered

out through the slats in the blinds. Had she blown it and lost his respect? “And what did he mean, ‘in due time’?”

Knowing now there was no turning back; she had to go through with it. She had a responsibility, a duty to pursue this goal to the end. “Besides,” she justified, “if, as Lee’s research shows, regressions can reach into past lives eliminating negative habits, phobias and traumas, well, I’ve got to find out.”

Lifting her head, she stared into Lee’s eyes, “What would you like me to do?”

Lee smiled reassuringly, sensing her disappointment in breaking the promise and her desire to continue, “What we have always done, Doctor, we shall visit Miss Iris, together.”

“Yes, Doctor,” Carol yielded, “let’s.”

Lee resumed his characteristic cross-legged lotus pose on his platform pillows, motioning from this perch for her to lie down on the couch. He had a look of equanimity on his chiseled Asian face, like the statue of the Buddha that was on the table behind him; a bearing that was ageless, timeless and infinite.

“This session, we go deeper, to the root. Take a very deep breath, fill your lungs to capacity and hold this breath until I instruct you to let it go.” Lee paused, continued, “deeper, hold, now, let it go. Again breathe in, deeper, deeper still, hold, keep holding. Let it go. One more time, feel the ebb and flow as the veils part. There is no one place to arrive, it will find you.”

Lee leaned over Carol’s prone body and with two fingers gently tapped the center of her forehead three times, she instantly shifted into a deep trance.

Lee continued, “Three..., two..., one..., what is happening now?”

Carol began again as if watching frame by frame a motion picture from an ancient archive.

She saw Iris, who appears as a young adult woman, crouching, an arm covering her face, sobbing breathlessly, “Stop it! Herb. Please don’t!”

“Didn’t I tell you to stop, didn’t I?” screamed a man, red-faced, seemingly out of control. In exasperation, he reaches, slaps Iris’s arm away from her face. Iris recoils from the blow, falling heavily onto a carpeted floor, strewn with scattered folders, pamphlets and sheets of paper.

The man screamed at her, “This trash, in my home? Why can’t you just listen?”

The picture from Carol’s inner eye focused, continuing in slow motion. She noticed a ring on Iris’s finger that matched one on the man’s hand that had slapped her.

He stormed away to a filing cabinet on a far wall, yanked it open, grabbing handfuls of folders, tossing them into the air as if they were confetti; cascading to the floor, some tumbling onto Iris’s languid torso, coiled and quaking on the carpet. Cowering in fright, she scoots across the carpet to cleave at the edge of a nearby couch.

Gasping between sobs of fear, Iris cried out, “Herb, you’ve no right. That’s my work!”

Herbert spitting in a rage bellowed, “Socialist crap! Not in this house!”

Iris scooped a handful of folders, pulled them tightly to her chest and scrambled to

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her feet. Herbert lunged, grabbed her right shoulder, spinning her around, folders flying back onto the carpet. Like a rag doll, Iris slumped against the wall. She slipped down, inch by inch, in a torrent of tears.

In one last fit of frenzied temper Herbert kicked the pile of folders at Iris's feet, emphasizing his disgust, then angrily marched away.

Tears rolled down Carol's cheeks feeling the empathetic resonance with Iris being so misunderstood and abandoned.

With wet eyes still closed, Carol heard Lee's voice, "Now, we go even deeper. Deeper still. It is time to ask, to learn, what it is she wants you to know." Carol shifted perception following his command. Her awareness dissolved into a totally different scene, the townhouse that she'd seen in her first regression session.

Iris appears much older, in her late 60s, in night clothes with a short quilted pink bed jacket over her slender shoulders, lying in a walnut sleigh bed under a fully puffed-up satin down quilt, a gold heart shaped locket hanging around her neck that was softly nestled atop her pink gown.

She is holding a well-worn letter in her thin and bluish hands, the skin on her fingers appeared as paper-thin sheets of onionskin. Now, she held it out at arms length, as if putting it on display, like sharing it with someone or ..."

Carol's focus now was only on the letter, hand-written in clear cursive on printed letterhead paper. The moniker on the letter read:

*Joseph Arthur Middleton, CPA
1122 Allied Commerce Building
Chicago, Illinois*

Iris half-read and half-recited from memory this very old letter;

My dearest daughter, I must make this brief. The indictments will be coming down, I fear for my life, and for your welfare. I have placed valuable secure bonds in your name in a Canadian bank. Only you may access them. Use the numbers inscribed inside your locket. They will open the safe deposit box at the main office at the Bank of Montreal. This, my gift to you, is to further your work and heal my shame. You make me so proud. Dad

Iris fighting back cascading tears, clutched the letter to her bosom, weakly whispered, "Thank you, father. Thank you."

She set the letter down on the satin comforter, reached for the gold locket, held it up, caressingly, turning it over and over again in her aged hands as if warming it up between her palms filling her heart with bygone warmth.

Through tear-filled eyes, she slowly opened the locket. Inside, photos of two young boys, one on each half. And below their pictures are inscribed numbers under each of the photos: 5- 29-19 on the right and under the left picture is 7-8- 20.

"Oh, boys. My dear boys." She cried tiredly.

A thunderous clap from Lee marked the end of this frame on the reel of Carol's movie.

Carol's eyes slowly opened. Her breathing was ragged. Blinking she looked at Lee with questions in her eyes. Too much had already fallen through the cracks, she wanted to know how this movie ended.

"Now you know." Lee smiled. "You have been called to complete what Miss Iris could not. You now know what it is you must do."

CHAPTER TWENTY TWO

The life not examined is not worth living.

-Plato

The handsome young African-American's face momentarily was distorted, reflecting his inner torment as he cried out, "Oh, no! Not that! Not" his baritone voice bellowed, suddenly switching to French, in a slightly higher octave, "*Marie Sainte, la Mere de Dieu!*"

Carol Klein watched carefully as Jonas Tomlinson, David Yarnell's latest referral, twisted on her couch. The double tape hummed as it recorded yet another session of hypnotic regression; seeking to erase what seemed to be repressed memories imprinted in his cervical vertebrae; a condition possibly causing his case of life-long neck pain.

She continued to direct Jonas coaxing the frozen emotions of his past, "Deeper! Deeper. Your body knows how to heal itself. Push! Find it, now!"

Jonas stopped writhing, emitted a long drawn-out exhale. His body stretched, unwinding as if a rubber band pulled to maximum tautness. All at once, the room was shaken by his scream: "*Vous avez votre guillotine Je na'i aucane crainte de la MORT!*"

Carol recoiled. Blinking, she saw his body slowly begin to unwind, his face softening; a small smile. Taking her own deep breath, she offered, "Jonas, when you hear the clap of my hands, you will awaken; with no memory of what has taken place; absolutely none!"

Carol clapped firmly and loudly, her eyes riveted on him. She wanted to memorize Jonas's every move. As a case study, every nuance and subtlety that was not being picked up by the audio was important. She didn't know why yet, but she knew someday it might be of immense value.

Jonas slowly opened his eyes; reached his hand to the back of his neck instinctively.

Carol could not see what he was feeling. But his beaming smile that followed said it all.

"Wow," he said, simply, "wow!"

Without further analysis, Carol nodded, “That’s good, Jonas. That’s very good.”

CHAPTER TWENTY THREE

Your time is limited, don't waste it living someone else's life. Don't be trapped by dogma, which is living the results of other people's thinking. Don't let the noise of other's opinions drown your own inner voice. And most important, have the courage to follow your heart and intuition, they somehow already know what you truly want to become. Everything else is secondary.

-Steven Jobs

Carol stood before her class of graduate students, all in their white lab coats after having returned from their clinical internships at the University Hospital.

Carol was on a roll, “Take particular note of the powerful treatment possibilities in the complex field of quantum biology—the dynamic field of messenger molecules. Here in the study of Epigenetics the data points to the impact our thoughts and feelings have on which sets of genes get tuned on or off. Our beliefs are transformed into our biology. The only question is relative to our thoughts that.... ..”

Mid-sentence her classroom door opened and Randall, Doctor Freeman's administrative assistant, in his flamboyantly out-of-place Hawaiian shirt popped his head in through the doorway and said, “Freeman wants to see you. Right now.”

Annoyed by this interruption, she reluctantly nodded to Randall in acknowledgment.

Folding her lecture notes, she directed her students, “Okay, for now, let's focus on the functions of neural connections. I'll be right back.”

Carol walked briskly to her department head's office wondering what could be so damn important to interrupt her lecture time.

Carol knocked on Doctor Freeman's door, entered, stood before Isobel at her desk.

Isobel looked up and motioned to Carol to sit in the chair facing her.

“Doctor Klein. I wish we weren't having this conversation.”

Carol blinked, a look of confusion on her face.

“I thought we understood each other.” Isobel droned. “Didn't I specifically ask you to stop therapies outside our standard protocols? Didn't I tell you to stay

with our medical standards?”

Dumbfounded, Carol nodded, “Yes.”

“I’ve seen your e-mails to Doctor Yarnell. And your communiqués with Lee.”

Carol’s gasp propelled her backwards.

“My e-mails? You what? My mail? You can’t do that.”

“You’ve been in contact with Phonyong Lee. After I warned you!”

“Yes. I have, but, my e-mails?” she gasped again.

The air between them couldn’t have been thicker if it had been solid.

“Isobel, I’m sorry. I’m a doctor. If I find something that helps my clients, I’ve a moral responsibility to pursue it! For them!”

“I’m not going to debate with you, Doctor Klein,” countered Dean Freeman.

Carol was beside herself, her two worlds colliding.

“What about the Alden case? Chronic hip pain. Gone!” Asserted Carol, “If I found a key that, somehow, unlocks a significant healing, then...”

Carol leaned forward and placed her hands on Doctor Freeman’s desk continuing her retort when the Dean raised her hand in the universal code of: “Silence!”

“Do you realize how close you are to committing actionable malpractice?”

Stunned at this accusation, Carol caught herself holding the arms of the chair.

“What?” Carol tried to blurt out, “it’s just that, there’s so much we don’t know. Do you deny what happened with Susan? Don’t you think there’s something there?”

“If anything had gone wrong,” Isobel challenged.

“Nothing went wrong! It went right!” Carol pled.

Isobel pursed her lips as if in restraint, softened her tone of voice, “Look Carol, I know we haven’t found all the answers, but I cannot let you shift the playing field. And I’m not going to debate with you. Do you have any idea how close you could have put us into a malpractice suit?”

Carol was visibly shocked. She put her right hand into her left palm to keep both from shaking.

“How can I make this any clearer to you, Carol? Unless you stop this, I have no choice but to suspend you from practicing therapies at this university.”

Carol’s eyes squeezed shut, trying to shake off this nightmare, her voice now choking up with tears, “Dean Freeman, please, I cannot deny what I saw,” placing her clenched hands together as if in prayer.

Isobel leaned forward, tried to soften the tension, “Look at it this way, Carol. I’m just looking out for you, for your own good. Do as I say. Just stick to our medical standards.” She paused, looked imploringly at Carol, “That’s it. We’re done here.”

“But Doctor Freeman! I ...”

Isobel shot up from behind her desk.

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Carol blinked, forestalling tears, slowly rose from her chair.

“No more.” Isobel ordered, eyes averted, looking down at her desk.

Carol turned, walked awkwardly to the office door, opened it, feeling as a *persona non grata*, unwelcome in her own department.

She spoke tersely over her shoulder, “Thank you, Doctor, for looking out for me.”

Closing Doctor Freeman’s door, her mind running wild remembered Schopenhauer’s observation, which until now, she had never fully appreciated; “*all truth passes through three stages. First, ridiculed. Second, violently opposed. Third, it is accepted as being self-evident.*”

Apparently, she was in phase two. She walked out, closing the door behind her.

CHAPTER TWENTY FOUR

Live a life as a monument to your soul.

-Ayn Rand

If walking the plank has a modern day analogy, the walk back to her classroom felt like it—taking her last gulp of air before plunging into the sea.

Pulling open the classroom door, she refocused on the scene before her: students in their lab coats, some sitting, others standing, a small group huddled around the brain CT scans on the light board; conversations blurring into a cacophony of sounds, drowning out the roar in her head.

She closed the classroom door firmly. A sudden wave of awareness surged through the room. Students turned to face her; many with quizzical looks on their faces; the room paused in silence, followed by the muffle of movement, and then, like a flock of birds, in unison, each settling into their seats around the conference table.

All eyes were riveted on their teacher. The tension in the air pitched like a violin string, ready to snap. Silence filled every crevice of the room as Carol walked to the blackboard, picked up a stick of chalk and in large letters wrote the words reverberating in her mind:

FRONTIERS OF SCIENCE

Turning, she faced her class straight-on, eyes blazing, “Close your books.”

Fighting back the moisture behind her eyes, she walked to the end of the conference table, looked down both rows of students, “You. You wish to be doctors?”

She reached, lifted the nearest textbook from the table, raised it shoulder high, “So be it! Be a good one. But never forget, there are issues, greater than anything in your textbooks—issues beyond anatomy, chemistry, neurology, psychology.” She dropped the book, slamming it on the table with a thunderous bang, startling the now wide-eyed students.

“Today’s new therapies? Not in any of my textbooks, not even a few years ago. Does that make these new advances any less true back then? Just because

they weren't yet accepted by the medical establishment? Just because they didn't fit the conventional understanding of the times."

Voice breaking up, she barked it, "Doctors, the study of life is science—the science of discovery, is life! We have yet, to uncover Nature's great mysteries!"

She cleared her throat, "For every mystery, there are many possible answers. We need to learn to look deeper. If there's more than one answer, shouldn't we explore them all? As scientists, shouldn't we look beyond the accepted, the obvious?"

In raised voice she invoked, "In the words of a wise man, 'the beliefs of one age become the absurdities of the next. And the foolishness of yesterday becomes the wisdom of tomorrow.' There are truths yet to be uncovered, new realities to be revealed."

Her eyes widened as she scanned her students, one by one, pausing for a moment wanting to ground this runaway train, "Yes, think about it. You do realize the crisis we face in medicine today. Costs escalating at staggering rates, yet without measurable improvements. Is medicine healing more problems or just managing new symptoms? We spend the most money on healthcare than any other nation, but do we have the healthiest population? No, not by a long shot! What is the best medicine, or the most effective therapies? People are looking for answers. The landscape of medicine is changing—one-third of Americans are seeking alternative therapies. Why? Because standard medicine's not providing adequate results! What's that tell you, doctors?"

She turned abruptly, walked to the blackboard. Picking up the chalk, she underscored the words, FRONTIERS OF SCIENCE. Turning back, she forced a smile, "Doctors, if we want different results, we need to begin to think outside the box of our current understanding!

"An example? When Copernicus observed that the sun was at the center of our galaxy, not the Earth, his theory ran afoul of the politically powerful church of the times. And for supporting this theory his colleague, Bruno, was burnt at the stake; and Galileo was imprisoned. But that didn't, that couldn't, change the fact that yes, the sun is the center of our galaxy."

"Historically, our country's pharmaceutical monopolies are suppressing alternative cures. Management of disease with drugs is big business! Don't be surprised if, in your lifetime, today's pharmaceuticals will be seen like blood letting was two hundred years ago."

A few students shifted uncomfortably in their chairs at the intensity of her rant.

"Today, medical science's cutting edge is Epigenetics, the frontier where genetics are modified by the subjective states of our minds. Memories aren't just stored in the brain, but in the trillions of body cells. They are capable of modifying our DNA. One researcher has described epigenetics as life's Etch-A-Sketch, saying: 'Shake it hard enough, you can wipe out a family's surge.'

“Irrefutably, current research shows these cellular memories, activated by our feelings, memories, thoughts—are major contributors capable of causing health problems. These findings show that the ability to choose which genes get switched on and off, through our memories, is the most exciting advancement in medicine over the last six centuries!”

Carol noticed looks of disbelief on more than a few faces.

“Yes, Doctors. The research supports that. We can change gene function, our physiology, by changing our thoughts. The most important thing you can do as Doctors is address the underlying emotional issues and the unresolved traumas as causes of illness in your patients.

“Doctors, please, look to the facts. Let the theories you uncover be secondary to the facts of discovery. Too many people are suffering needlessly.”

Striding around the conference table, she fixed her gaze on the eyes of her students. “You,” pointing her finger at each student, one-by-one. “You are the pioneers on the frontier of science. You will choose between what has been, and what will be. With the power of truth as your guide, you will steer healing into the uncharted waters of this twenty-first century. Sail forward, never backwards. Don’t let anyone stop you. Especially your own self-imposed obstacles.”

Having circumnavigated the table. She positioned herself at the front of her class, throwing down an invisible gauntlet, “Now, here’s my challenge to each of you. What will you do when you come face to face with circumstances you can’t explain?”

She placed her hands atop the shoulders of the first student to her right, Thomas Barnett, “Tell me, what will you do when you uncover a successful result you can’t explain?” The bemused student shrugged his shoulders, hoping it was a rhetorical question.

Carol tightened her grip on his shoulders, “Doctor Barnett, what will you do when you face clinical situations that contradict medical beliefs you have learned?” He squirmed under his teacher’s grasp, beginning to answer, but Carol had already turned her attention to the student on his right, Joyce Brulé.

“Doctor Brulé, should you find alternative medical practices more effective than the existing protocols, what would you do?” Brulé glanced at Barnett, seeing no help there, shifted her gaze down at her hands, saying nothing.

Carol pointed to the doctor sitting directly across from Brulé, Dennis O’Reilly. “Doctor O’Reilly, what will you do if you uncover abilities within your patient’s subconscious that you’ve never seen before?”

She sensed that she was losing her students. She may have gone too far over the edge and had better state her case or lose all credibility in front of them. Stiffening her back, she lowered her eyes mustering all the strength to steel her convictions, “ Doctors, how will you address symptoms revealed within your patient’s psyche, embedded perhaps, from a previous life?”

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“From, what?” stammered O’Reilly.

Carol’s eyes were now glazed over with moisture, her bravado wearing thin. This was the most unacceptable state of presence in front of her class she could ever imagine. “What is expected of us as scientists? What should any of us do as researchers?” stammered Carol.

O’Reilly stuttered, his voice a confused plea, “Did I hear that right? A past life?”

CHAPTER TWENTY FIVE

Our greatest glory is not in never falling, but in rising every time we fall.
-Confucius

Carol sat stiffly, very much alone.

She stared out the dirt-cruled window from her hard cushioned seat on the train, scenery streaking by, frame by frame, as if she was watching a movie, complete with a soundtrack—clanking rims against steel rails. She looked out the window, her reflection looking back at her, blankly. “Was she really doing this?”

Yet, here she was, riding the train to New York City, on a mission to confirm or deny the reality of her own regression into the life of Iris Middleton Paulson. If she could only verify what she’d experienced, or find it false—then, and only then, could she move on.

Rolling through her mind was her last class session. She knew she had gone too far. Straddling the fence between her regret for influencing them in her bias and being true to herself—the *nosce te ipsum*, ‘know thyself, your whole self,’ seeking to prove something she could not deny. That door had been opened and she’d walked through.

As the landscape transitioned with each approaching mile, she watched as the postcard landmarks announced the approach to the city, daring not to think how implausible, how impulsive this trip really was. Where was she headed: the future, the past? She fiddled with the notebook in her lap; thoughts of this mission burrowing into her psyche, pondering, “What choice do I have? None, but to put this hypothesis to the test.”

She had been trained to examine the psychological forces that are so much a part of the human struggle: the obstacles in our way, the challenges we face, the unsatisfied needs.

She was willing to at least go this distance from Boston to New York City to seek verification and to examine whether the themes in her life, much as the life of Iris, were reenactments from past imprints. There were so many parallels between Iris’s life and hers. “Lee,” she mouthed, “he was so insistent I make this trip. Why me? Isn’t this task better suited for the sages, or the insane? Both of

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whom see what isn't there!"

She shook that awful thought from her mind, saying under her breath, "Okay, I'm here and I'm committed this far. It could come to an end right here, and then I will go home and sweep this episode under the rug, as only an asterisk in my autobiography."

Yet, she knew that this gate had been unlocked and would not easily be closed. "No," she admitted, "this won't be so easy. Does anyone know the cost of the choices they make, until the payment is due?" she sighed. Lost in thought, she failed to notice that the train had begun to slow its pace.

Whatever lie ahead, she was almost there.

CHAPTER TWENTY SIX

Be realistic: Plan for a miracle.
-Bhagwan Shee Rajneesh

The train heaved to a halt—Grand Central Station.

Carol stepped off the train, headed for an escalator to ride, shoulder-to-shoulder amid a horde of fellow travelers, up into the rotunda, jostled by the maelstrom of people moving in all directions around her, a swirl of humanity in wave-like undulations, a kaleidoscope of colors.

The chaos theory came to mind; that a seemingly minor event, like the flap of a butterfly's wings, can result in far reaching outcomes, a ripple-effect setting into motion a chain of immense reactions. Was she that butterfly?

She knew that coming to this place, taking this one impossible opportunity to confirm her incredulous belief had to be witnessed in person: nothing less than a first-person, direct experience would satisfy these curiosities—both personal and scientific.

Nagging 'what if—and then' questions hammered her mind. "What if Iris's offspring were alive, then they'd be well into their 80s. What if they are alive, then could one or both of them still be living at Iris's address? What if they are still alive and I find them, then, will they even agree to talk to me? Could I make them believe I'm a writer? What if I find ... it's all true? Or not? Then, what?"

She maneuvered over to a row of phone booths, stopping momentarily, assessing which cubicle would forever be marked in her mind as 'crossing the line.' She chose the one that was dead center.

She lifted a tattered Manhattan phone book from beneath the small ledge under the phone; opened the section of the white pages marked 'residences'. She turned the pages deftly stopping at the alphabetized heading on the left-hand side on top of each page, stopping suddenly at 'Pastinni—Paumsa'.

Her fingers flew on autopilot scanning down as the names evaporated above her fingers; coming at last to an eye-popping dead halt: Paulson ... 257 Park Ave.

She bit her lower lip, ripped open her purse with an awkward urgency, fumbled for a pen lodged at the bottom and in unsteady nerves, jotted the address in her notebook. Although she knew the address by heart from the

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information she had received in her regression, she had to write it down to verify and double-check its reality. Glancing again at the phonebook, she verified that which she already knew was correct.

The moment of truth had arrived. She'd been practicing her lines on the train ride down. Her cover story was complete with means, method, and motivation; a sleuthing worthy of Sherlock Holmes.

Taking one last deep breath, she picked up the receiver, nestling it between her ear and shoulder as she inserted her phone card, punching in every number with surgical-like precision. The ring she heard sent a wave of shock through her spine: step one, a valid phone number, the rings continued: time stood still. She never before noticed how long the phone signals take between electronic pulses. Then ... a voice: "Hello?"

Carol's heart nearly leapt out of her chest.

She squeezed her eyes shut, blotting out all other input. The moment felt like a monumental hurdle. Forcing herself through this imaginary barrier, she exhaled and said, "Yes, hello. Is, is this—the Paulson residence?"

The elderly male voice, clearing his throat, "Yes?"

Carol blurted out a little too quickly, "Sorry. I mean, could you have been related to the late Iris Paulson?"

Time stopped. The longest pause in Carol's recollection. She could feel the pressure of the handset wedged between her head and shoulder, grabbed it with her free hand. She felt immobilized—waiting, then ...

"Yes, that I am. Why do you...?"

"My, my name is Carol Klein. I'm a writer, doing a book, on the staff of The Masses, which includes Iris Paulson." Carol stammered with her lamely rehearsed probe, "You were related?"

"She was my mother."

Carol felt like she was walking on eggshells when she said, "Would you be—Will? Ethan?"

Ethan, reservation in his voice. "Why? What is it you want?" Rushing forward without any caution Carol said, "Hi Ethan, yes, you see, I'd like to make an appointment, come meet with you. To talk about your mother. For the book. It would be a big help."

"When? When do you want to do this?"

"Well," Carol replied, "I'm in from Boston for a convention. Could it, could we make it sometime today?"

"I don't know. What is it you want?"

"Just some background on your mother, and her writings." Carol said with a sense of authority that camouflaged everything she was feeling.

"Okay. Let me check. Hold on."

All Carol could hear were muted mumbles as Ethan continued to speak to the other invisible person. Back on the line, Ethan said, "Today's not so good."

Tomorrow? After two?"

Carol's pulse was racing out of control, sweat on her upper lip and palms. But, she never missed a beat, "Wonderful, just after two, I'll be there," speaking as casually as she could.

Ethan politely followed up the invitation, "You know where we are?"

Nonchalantly, Carol replied, "I have the address. 257 Park?"

Carol mouthing the words: "apartment four—oh—two. Like a Zen koan," she thought, "if a tree falls and there's no one to hear it, is there a sound? If no one were to witness my revelations, are they real?" But nobody was there to witness this moment other than the oblivious humanity that was chaotically surging around the rotunda.

For the last time today Ethan replied to Carol, "Fourth floor apartment, four—oh—two. I'll tell the doorman we have an appointment."

"Thank you, I'll be there. Thank you."

Quivering from head to toe, Carol hung up the phone, exhaled for what seemed like an eternity. She needed to empty, freeing her inner space knowing soon enough it would be filled to the brim.

Closing the phone book, a quote written in magic marker on the back cover caught her eye: "*The future of all depends on the few who suspend the belief of the moment.*"

"Okay Miss Doubting Thomas," she said to herself, "have a little faith. Let's see what's next." Placing her notebook and pen back into her purse, she exited the phone booth with a burst of energy. She wanted to savor this moment feeling a sense of unexpected euphoria, "Depends on who's suspending the belief of the moment," the thought snapped short, drifting away before it blinded her.

With that, she stepped through the doors onto the teeming streets of New York City.

CHAPTER TWENTY SEVEN

What the caterpillar calls the end of the world, the master calls a butterfly.

-Richard Bach

The dawning of the day couldn't come soon enough.

Carol awoke in an overpriced room of a Central Park hotel, steam radiators hissing, garbage trucks roaring amid the cacophony of New York City—squeaking brakes, revving motors, clanging cans, ear-piercing sirens.

As the sun arose, Carol tossed one last time, sighing. She'd barely slept a wink all night.

Tossing and turning, she'd wrestled with the specter of her own moral dilemma. It was one thing to turn her own life upside down, but by what right did she have to drag others in—her fiancé? Isobel? Her students?

And now, was she really going to purposefully deceive two old men she had never met?

"What am I doing!" she pummeled herself, "I could still walk away; take the next train back; simply resume where I left off. Yet, walking away makes a mockery of what I believe in, to say nothing of what I'm trying to instill in my students. It would just turn the pursuit of scientific truths into meaningless platitudes."

There was no blueprint on how to proceed, other than to continue forward. The only solace in this whole mess was her ace in the hole; an imaginary exit card, carried in her mental back pocket, knowing she could execute it at any time. Maybe.

Groaning, she stretched her legs, sliding them before her as she left the bed, yawning as she walked into the tiled, antiquated bathroom. That the mirror was speckled and fuzzy she considered a blessing at that moment, splashing cold water onto her face, eyes blinking, then, widening.

It was time. She stepped into the yellowing tub and turned on the shower, nearly scalding herself. "So, is this the way the day's gonna' be?" she resigned, turning the hot water down.

It was but a short cab ride from her hotel. Trying not to look like a tourist, she wore her "I'm here for business uniform," a navy blue suit, briefcase in hand.

The yellow cab pulled up in front of 257 Park Avenue, a stately upscale apartment building of the type that is New York's signature, a forest green arched canopy spanning the front doors to the curb. The gold letters on the awning read: ParcVue Arms.

Carol paid the driver, stepped out onto the curb and was greeted immediately by a middle-aged doorman in a black, high-collared uniform with double-breasted brass buttons and gold braided epaulettes on each shoulder.

Without hesitation she announced, "Carol Klein. The Paulson's are expecting me."

The doorman smiled and opened the polished brass-framed glass doors. Carol stepped onto a royal blue carpeted foyer that was flanked on two opposing walls with heavily carved gold-framed mirrors born of an era of high society. There were two large Chinese blue vases filled with fresh white and red gladiolas adorning the side tables strategically placed beneath mirrors which optically enlarged the bouquets of flowers so they appeared quite grand in size—a formidable introduction to storied ParcVue Arms.

She walked directly towards the brightly polished brass elevator doors, pressing the UP arrow button, gazed towards the ceiling, wondering what awaits three floors above.

A full minute passed before the elevator arrived. Slowly, the door opened. Carol stepped inside the rectangular confines of a smaller-than-most elevator. Pressing the number four button, she watched the door hesitate, then, oh-so-slowly, close.

Her ride started with a mild jolt, followed by a long, slow incline. Looking around the elevator, an odd thought filled her mind: "Are these walls ones I've seen from a past life, and what's my current life—a future past life?" She forced a laugh trying to cut through her nervous tension.

A mild claustrophobia took hold, the elevator motor humming, unidentifiable creaking and groans as it rose, ever so slowly, up. Her eyes focused on the control panel's floor buttons, inching upward—Mezzanine, a long pause.

Up, up ... TWO—a long pause—THREE.

Slowed, then slowing further, the vessel edged to a halt...FOUR.

She had arrived.

She blinked at the door, feeling the confining walls closing in on her. The door remained closed. "My fate," she breathed, "alone in the nether-land of an ancient elevator, stuck?"

One last, short jolt, the elevator door creaked itself open.

She stepped out onto the carpeted, well-lit hallway of the fourth floor, noticing security cameras conspicuously adhered to the ceiling. With only four doors off this central entry foyer, she stopped at the door, numbered four—oh—two.

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She gathered herself, took a deep breath, lifted her hand.

Her hand poised to knock, the glistening diamond encircling her engagement finger caught her eye, grimacing, “Forgive me George, I must.”

She knocked, tapping the door three, then four times. Silence.

Soft footsteps signaled an approach, the brass knob turned, the door gradually opened.

There stood an elderly man, smiling, shorter than Carol by inches, sporting a well-worn smoking jacket over a plaid shirt. He stared at her in silence. Carol’s mind blanked.

She sputtered, “Mister Paulson? I’m Carol Klein. We spoke yesterday,” raising her right hand. He reached, shook her hand, softly.

“Ethan. Please do come in. May I call you Carol?”

Carol silently repeated, “Please, do come in,” questioning what she was coming into.

Regardless how prepared she thought she was for this moment, nothing had equipped her for seeing the physical manifestation of what she had experienced in her hypnotic trance. The stark reality was—“yes, this is the place I have seen.” Calling it *déjà vu* would be a gross misrepresentation: this was beyond surreal—it was real!

She walked into the three-dimensional living tapestry of a scene she had seen only as a diorama, scanning every detail of the living room: it was exactly as she had seen it in her regression. Only the colors had faded, furniture aged over time.

Somehow, it had retained its once-lavish décor: the same fleur-de-lis drapes, Steinway baby grand piano, the chocolate brown sofa, now with a beautiful Tiffany-like floor lamp standing at one end.

Drenched in the vivid details she was now experiencing for a second time, Carol’s mind swirled, eyes drawn to a brown-toned photo of a woman with two teenage boys against a far wall—a shot taken at least 65 years ago. A second framed photo was of Iris and her husband, both in their mid-sixties.

Carol noticed immediately the resemblance of the teenage boy in the framed picture with the gray-haired elderly man she just met as Ethan. But, nothing prepared her to compare the picture of Iris. “She? Me?” Carol gasped, her jaw dropping as Ethan turned to face her, motioning her to a chair facing the couch.

Relieved, she sat immediately, before a coffee table, upon which an ornate heirloom silver music box and two photo albums were waiting.

“Please.” Said Ethan, “We’ve pulled these out for you. It was fun for us, looking at these. Mother was quite a character.” Looking at Carol intently, Ethan continued, “Uh, some tea? Or maybe...”

She replied nervously, “No. I mean, yes. Tea. Thank you. Yes.”

He then shifted interest away from Carol and called into another room, “Miss Klein’s here. Bring tea. And don’t forget the lemon this time.”

The familiarity in which Ethan snapped these orders, Carol could only assume; either it was a spouse or a sibling. She wouldn't have long to wait to find out. She heard an elderly man's voice reply, "Hold your horses. Be there in a minute."

Ethan seated himself across from Carol on the couch. "Don't let Will bother you. Sometimes he's like this. You know cranky old men?"

CHAPTER TWENTY EIGHT

*The only way to discover the limits of the possible
is to go beyond them, to the impossible.*

-Arthur C. Clarke

Carol shyly looked down, fumbling for her notebook and pen in her briefcase, trying to look professional in the part she was playing— a difficult task with every fiber of her being on fire.

She nearly jumped at the sound as an elderly man appeared, pushing a wrought-iron teacart from a bygone age. Atop the teacart was a tray that held a silver teapot accompanied by three sets of matching delicate white Limoge tea cups with matching saucers alongside a beautiful serving plate in which lemon wedges were fanned in a pin wheel.

He stopped before her, lifted the tray and set it down on the coffee table before he looked up sighing, “There,” extending his hand, “I’m Will.”

Instinctively she blurted, “Will. Yes. Glad to meet you, I mean, thank you.”

She grasped Will’s hand and shook it as her heart began to liquefy at the flesh and blood warmth of his hand in hers, thinking, “This is no dream. I’m not in a trance. It’s real!”

She had to shift gears fast or risk losing the few threads holding her together, quickly focusing on the tea tray. Something solid.

Will happily replied, “Oh no. Thank you! We’re glad to have the company.”

Ethan nodded in agreement.

Will lifted the silver teapot and poured the aromatic hot beverage that smelled of cloves and oranges for the three of them. But, before handing the china tea cup to Carol, Will flamboyantly opened an ivory linen napkin and placed it on to her lap. “A remnant of our Mother’s insistence,” he beamed.

A part of her couldn’t help but enjoy the attention bestowed upon her by these two gentlemen. Their hospitality buoyed her confidence, making it much easier to play her role in this charade.

Will continued, “It’s nice to know someone else remembers our mother, besides us.”

She forced a grin, nodded, somewhat uncomfortably.

“I was just telling Miss Klein here what a character mom was,” Ethan boasted.

“A real spitfire, our radical mom,” chuckled Will.

Carol interjected, “Spitfire?”

Both men simultaneously nodded and smiled, a shared gesture between the brothers.

“No doubt. Isn’t that what you’re looking for?” asked Ethan.

Will turned his body sideways to face Ethan, “Have we forgotten our manners?”

Looking back at Carol, “What he means is, how can we help?”

She winced at their willingness to enable her scheme. She quickly flipped open her note pad, burying a rising sense of disgust at her own deceit. She motioned towards the two photo albums on the coffee table. “Well, may we start with these?” Carol reached into her purse and pulled out her reading glasses placing them in the most dignified manner on her face.

Will leaned in, picked up the first black leather album, opening it to page one. He lovingly offered it to Carol as if it were a sacred object. Carol met him halfway across the distance between them and took the open album in both her hands: taped, faded newspaper clippings and photographs of Iris—her timeline frozen pictorially.

“Besides her music,” interjected Will, “she was an early voice for women’s rights.”

“I know, she wrote for *The Masses*. I’ve seen her byline, quite the strong voice.”

“Too strong for Dad,” Ethan chimed. “He said her writing nearly cost him his career. That’s why she had to write under her maiden name, and then aliases at the end.”

“Really?” she asked, “aliases?” She was totally unaware of this development.

“Yeah,” Will beamed, “her favorite was Susan Donim. Get it? Sue, Donym?” Both men laughed at this insiders joke.

“She said nobody ever caught on,” Ethan giggled, “not even once.”

Will blurted, “She said she got to like being someone else for a change; that she could easily get used to it.”

Carol stifled an internal gulp.

“*The Masses*,” Ethan added, “that was the reason she had to hide her identity after a while. It was branded pretty radical back in the twenties. Some even called it communist.”

“Nonsense. It was just ahead of its time,” Carol replied, jotting a note in her pad; surprised at the boldness of her statement.

“Yep,” said Will, “that’s exactly what mom said, word for word.”

She smiled warmly, “You don’t say? Interesting,” eyes back down to her note pad, her mind spinning from Will’s comment.

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Nervously looking up, she began turning pages from the album before her, a distraction to mask her inner turmoil with an outward calm.

She began speed reading, absorbing the material like a sponge, page after page of headlines calling for an end to child labor, opposing the entry into the war; support for a woman's right to choose, column after column by-lined by Iris Middelton, John Reed, Sinclair Lewis, Max Eastman, Floyd Dell, Margaret Sanger.

Ethan interrupted her concentration, saying, "Seemed like father was always mad at her. He was in the diplomatic corps, and here she was, hanging around with The Masses crowd that was criticizing the very government he worked for, radicals like Jack Reed, Lloyd Eastman, Emma Goldman, Margaret Sanger."

"Goldman. Dad despised Emma Goldman," Will added, leaning back into the couch, grimacing in some discomfort. "He called her a full-fledged traitor."

"Had the statement triggered a painful memory for Will?" she silently asked herself, "Or maybe just arthritis or something else?"

Ethan interrupted, "Goldman was a total anarchist. Mom's working with her certainly didn't help dad's career."

Carol absorbed the album pages as quickly as she could, her eyes glued to each page, trying to assimilate as much as she could. However, she felt as if she were eating three Thanksgiving dinners back to back. There was way too much to digest all of this in one sitting.

"That's why mom turned to music," Will added, his back pressing against the couch. "Dad made her leave the magazine and quit writing. So, she composed music instead."

"Same thing," Ethan tagged on, "the messages in her songs were just like her writing for the magazine. Dad never did figure it out."

"Yeah," smiled Will, "he never did quite get it."

Ethan finished his brother's thought, adding, "He couldn't grasp that her focus was all about peace, happiness, finding harmony in the whole of life. She believed everyone in the world was somehow connected. That everything was joined and continuous, a journey without end."

His words hit a nerve, knocking Carol back off center. Something inside her reverberated, wavelike, throughout her system.

"Continuous. What, do you think she meant by that?"

Ethan and Will shot knowing glances at each other.

"Mom believed in reincarnation," Ethan boldly replied.

Hearing those words aloud from someone other than Doctor Lee had a searing effect. They echoed in her mind like reverberating timpani drums.

Will grinned it, "She said she'd come back to visit us." Both men laughed. "Or at least keep a close eye on us," Ethan added, wistfully; followed by a pause in the conversation. Then, as if a chorus on cue, they all reached for their tea cups; Carol's cheeks reddening at that thought.

“She was dead serious about it though,” Ethan chimed in, setting his cup back in its saucer, “she wrote about it. Said someday, people would finally understand.”

Ethan uttered a deflated sigh, “She always hoped she could prove it; that somehow, we’ll all come back in another life, for another chance.”

“Another chance?” stammered Carol, hoping her interview voice would mask her roiling emotions.

“You know, to get people to listen, to embrace this real truth, what she believed,” Will said, lifting the tea pot. Nodding to Carol, he refilled her cup, then Ethan’s, then his own.

Carol continued jotting in her notebook, trying desperately to retain as much as her memory could. “Another chance,” she uttered offhandedly, “she really said that?”

“All the time,” Will grinned. “More so in her later years. I think she knew the end was near. Her health was failing. We all knew it.”

Carol shook her head side to side as she turned the pages in her notebook and continued to take down as much detailed information as quickly as possible. She didn’t want to lose one shred of evidence.

“What about her relationship with her father, Joseph? Weren’t they quite close?”

“Grandpa Joe?” Will leaned back into the couch, apparently more comfortable this time.

“He was in cahoots with some crooks,” answered Ethan. “Got put away, sent up for stuff today they’d call cooking the books.”

“He worked for some strong-arm Chicago thugs,” Will chirped, “as their accountant.”

Carol could barely hold herself back from probing too deeply, “But, wasn’t he ... really close to your mother?”

Both men locked eyes, a brotherly communication warily acknowledging a heretofore little discussed family dynamic; slowly turning back to their inquisitor.

His head shaking, Ethan snickered, “Yes, Very close. He probably went overboard, writing her, promising things. See, it seems he felt he’d done wrong by her. That he’d let her down. So, he was always trying to make it up to her.”

“And he never did like dad that much,” added Will.

“Grandpa!” Ethan grinned, “Here’s his daughter, with all these causes. And he’s in jail. He died in prison, penniless. Some accountant!”

Now skating on paper-thin ice, she shifted in the chair not quite sure how far to go. Tentatively, she reached for the brass ring, “Didn’t he...?” She stumbled hoping to snag the elusive key that remained unspoken, “he was penniless? He left nothing for her?”

Both men shook their heads, silent.

PRELUDE

Taking a breath, regaining her composure, she motioned towards an unopened album on the coffee table. “And—that one?” she ventured.

Ethan grinned, “That’s mom’s music book. All her songs.”

Will placed his right hand over his chest, patting it up and down in a rhythmic heart-felt manner saying, “She wrote wonderful music. Nothing popular, mostly for herself.”

She nodded politely, recognizing a sense of impatience burrowing in; a call to rip off her mask and simply come clean, screaming, “I want all the details now!”

She wished she could do it the right way; conduct a full-blown intake interview as if Ethan and Will were her new clients. This cat and mouse conversation was more than frustrating. How long could she keep it up?

Wishing she could tell them everything she knew, what she’d experienced in her regression into their mother’s life; to tell them who she really was—but, of course, she wouldn’t dare! “Patience girl, patience, all in good time,” she silently surrendered. Reminding herself, “There’s much more at stake here than my needs.”

In desperation to get back on track, Carol pointed to a closed silver music box, the only remaining artifact on the coffee table, timidly uttered, “And, in there?”

Ethan bent forward, carefully opened the lid of the delicate-looking container.

From her angle, it was difficult for her to see anything other than the stacks of letters that were piled high in the box. The letters were tied with a blue satin ribbon with frayed aging edges.

Impulsively, she scooted forward in her chair with no regard for staying in character and began to remove the top layer of letters out of the antique silver music box. Under the aging letters, was revealed at the bottom of the container, a cluster of jewelry.

There it was, amongst the others: the heart-shaped, gold locket.

She dug the fingernails of her right hand into a fist as a means to divert the feelings of lightheadedness into a more centralized focus of a painful distraction. The pain helped her ground the reality of being here, in the revelation of this moment and not to get ahead of herself. Modestly, she pointed to the locket, “That’s lovely. May I?”

Ethan volunteered, “It was mom’s favorite.”

With surprising dexterity, he pulled out the gold locket without entangling it with the surrounding jewelry. With agility using only his right hand, Ethan opened the heart-shaped locket and handed it to Carol.

The nanoseconds between Ethan opening the locket and Carol taking it from his outstretched hand felt like she was reaching back in time—through the fabric of space—and recalling something once remembered that had been lost and now was found. How could she ever describe this moment of revelation? It was

beyond all the words she had at her disposal.

“Something once forgotten and now remembered, is this Iris’s locket or mine?” Carol couldn’t believe she was even entertaining this inner conversation. She had no reference points for this pattern of thinking.

If she had heard these words in her office during an intake interview, she would have considered a very serious diagnosis, maybe even delusions of grandeur. And yet, right here, Carol never felt more sane, more in tune or more alive in her entire life.

She held the locket cupped in both her open palms. She just stared at it for what seemed like the longest stretch of time. There they were, the small photos of the two boys, one on each side of the locket, and the numbers, just as Carol had seen them before below each of the pictures: 5-29-19 on the left and 7-8-20 on the right.

Carol felt like she was dancing on the razor’s edge. This was way more than she bargained for. “Be careful what you ask for, you might actually get it,” was the voice in her head.

Her heart raced. How she wanted to call Doctor Lee right now; to reach out to George. But she couldn’t. She felt like she was gasping at air like a drowning man, with nothing to hold onto. Nothing had prepared her for this bleed-through of realities.

Ethan broke the spell, “That’s me and Will. I was eleven, Will was nine.”

She ever-so-gently closed the locket, handling it like a fragile flower, blossoming after a long, dormant winter. She looked up, eyes moist, handed it back to Ethan. The glue that normally kept her together had evaporated. The moisture in her eyes began to trickle down her cheekbones.

“You okay, Miss, Klein is it?” Will asked.

“Yes, thank you,” she shuddered, I’ll be all right. It’s just, I find this very emotional, your mother’s struggles. Guess I can relate.”

Both men smiled in sympathy, moved that she was so affected by this discussion of their mother and her life.

“Yes, it was a gift from Grandpa Joe to her just before he went to prison,” Ethan said, carefully placing the locket back inside the open music box, softly closing the lid.

Carol watched the locket disappear from sight, looked away, dipping into her reserve glue bucket. She picked up her pen and began jotting notes in her journal, confirming these artifacts, photos, and dates of birth. She would need this validation to authenticate the significance of today.

She was afraid if she didn’t write it down, right now, she would intellectualize this day as a psychological fugue, a temporary break with reality; or worse, a crack in her own psychic egg.

When she looked up she saw that both men had broad beaming smiles on their faces.

PRELUDE

“They were close, weren’t they.” She said to them in reverence to what she already knew.

Ethan burst into a giddy light laughter, “Like two peas in a pod.”

“Her music?” she asked, “Prelude? One of hers?”

“Yes, you know it?” Will asked, “one of her favorites. She said some day it would make an impact of sorts, or something like that.”

Ethan tilted his head and asked, “Would you like to hear it? We have a recording.”

It felt like there was a stone in Carol’s throat, but in spite of it, she managed to say, “Yes. That would be....I’d like that.”

This was totally way over the top of Carol’s capacity to hold. She wished she’d had a larger emotional container to hold all this added content. She was in the overflow tank of her emotional universe.

Ethan pushed himself up off the couch, walked over to a vintage wooden Victrola in the corner of the room. Carol had not noticed it either in her time with Doctor Lee or when she had scanned the living room earlier this afternoon.

Ethan opened the cabinet and pulled out a 78 RPM vinyl record that was encapsulated in a yellowing paper sleeve with a window to the black-and-white label at the center of this LP.

Ethan pulled the record from its previously secure dust jacket and placed it on the short metal spindle. He placed the manual stylus on the vinyl recording.

A low hum of static began to fill the cavernous living room, then a cascade of musical notes flowed. Each stanza of the music was followed by a series of chords that melded into a crescendo of rich harmonies, each building on the previous melody. Carol recognized it as the music indelibly imprinted in her memory from her regression. Both men were immersed in the music and were impervious to the invisible signs of Carol’s dilemma: How could she ever explain to them that, “she knew things she’d never experienced... before, yet again?”

She felt overwhelmed by the flood of facts, the verification of data and the personal infusion of re-experiencing this information. Although she was a much better actress than she thought, her emotions were like a runaway train; there were no brakes to stop it.

“Ah.” said Ethan, joy in his voice, “haven’t heard this in years.”

Carol’s eyes moistened, she did everything in her power to hold back tears, remaining cordial and appropriate— despite the insanity of this experience.

All three of them sat in silence as Iris Middleton Paulson played Prelude from the grooves that had been etched into a vinyl disk decades before. The piece played on impeccably. The composition was emotionally riveting and evocative as a musical voice of an impassioned woman whose verbal communication had been stifled, but whose creativity continued to be channeled as a means to express its message, enduringly through time.

Iris was with them through her music.

When the composition was complete and the music silenced, she commented in a surprisingly steady voice, “She was good wasn’t she?”

Of course, that’s not really what she wanted to say. She wanted to scream at the top of her lungs. The flood of feelings was overpowering; the colliding of worlds within and without. But she knew she must keep on pretending. So, in lieu of stepping out of her writer’s character, she reached for her teacup, nervously sipping from it as a diversion from her real feelings while adding a distraction for the men to focus on.

In that instant, it felt like there was a momentary electrical-like connection, a circuit of consciousness that was linked between them. Something completed.

Will looked up at Ethan who was still standing by the record player, who looked over at Carol who in turn, made eye contact with Will; like electrons moving at the speed of light around the electrical circuit only faster—moving at the speed of love.

Ethan removed the vinyl record and slipped it back into its yellowed jacket, saying with a teary-eyed smile, “Yes. She was. I’m glad you enjoyed her.”

“Now then,” he added, “tell us about this book you’re writing.”

CHAPTER TWENTY NINE

The roots of education are bitter, but the fruit is sweet.

-Aristotle

It took a long time for them to break through the clouds.

George craned his neck to look at the lake below as the helicopter turned on its side for a better view. Through squinted eyes, he saw the root of the problem, a tongue of discoloration at the water's edge, a sure sign of industrial pollution as seen through the rain from above.

"Thar' she blows," Harrison pointed out, a grin on his face as the pilot righted the copter, the sound of the rotors drowning out George's response.

Turning his head, the pilot nodded to the elderly man seated next to him, then began rapidly dropping altitude, heading for a landing strip in a meadow at the lake's edge. Within minutes the bird had landed, engines off and rotors slowly spinning as the men slipped out onto the wet ground, one at a time.

Hunkering down against the weather, three men began walking, heads down, towards the lakeshore, the pilot remaining behind as the sound of rotors finally came to a halt. They stopped close to the edge of the lakeshore, looking out at the tainted waters of the otherwise misty but pristine view of the New Hampshire wilderness in autumn.

George was the first to speak, "Chester, How long you known this?"

"Not long, maybe a month," said the 72-year old Chester Monson, President and CEO of Sterling Chemical, a Global Industries subsidiary. "Maybe a bit longer," his overcoat billowing in the wind, momentarily revealing his tailored blue pin-striped suit noticeably wrinkled by the seatbelt.

"See?" said Chester. "From here, you can't tell a thing. You can only see it from the air."

Lips tightening, George nodded his head, saying nothing.

"Looks okay to me," said Harrison, "how 'bout you, Georgie?"

George shook his head, blinked. "I'll be dammed, up there it looked awful, but from here..." his voice trailed off. "How many know?"

"Not many," Chester replied, "maybe four, five at the plant, now you. And Blankenship."

“Blankenship?” Harrison blurted it, surprised to hear something he hadn’t already known.

“The pilot,” Chester answered, nodding back towards the grounded chopper, the man still seated, awaiting the return of his passengers.

“How ‘bout Harrison here?” George questioned.

“I’ve known for quite some time,” Harrison interjected, “that’s why I’ve been wanting to get you up here for the past three months.”

“Three months?” George spun around, looking at Chester, “I thought you said ...”

“Could be,” Chester stammered, “told you. I wasn’t sure.”

A gust sprayed moisture on them, rain swirling with sprinkles of tiny snowflakes. They all turned their backs to the breeze.

George scowled at Chester’s answer visibly disturbed at this update, speaking firmly, “What’ve you done about it?”

Before Chester could respond, Harrison jumped in, “Look George, it’s just a little wastewater, maybe some of it a bit caustic, but Chester here, he’s taken the right precautions to keep from being detected.”

“Like what?” George questioned, internally running through the legal implications.

Chester jumped in, “We’ve been diluting the wastes with fire hoses before discharging anything untreated into our local sewers, and some of it just ends up here in the lake. And I’ve personally instructed our employees to say, if asked, that ‘yes,’ we are in fact treating all of our wastewater.”

“I thought you said only four or five at the plant knew.” George repeated.

“They don’t all know it,” Chester defended, “just told them what to say, didn’t tell them why.”

“Holy shit,” George bellowed, “you don’t think they can figure it out?”

He backed up a few feet, looked out over the waters as the snowfall increased, saying “Where’s it come from, this wastewater?”

“Comes from cleaning out our tanks,” Chester answered under duress. “Something we’ve gotta’ do, regardless of these newfangled environmental laws. *Geez*, if we tried complying with all of them we’d take a huge hit on the bottom line. And from Global’s standpoint, you know we don’t want that.”

“Anyone onto you yet?” George asked.

“No one important,” Chester under pressure answered, “a coupla’ nosy reporters is all. But, so far we’ve got them diverted, you know, smoke and mirrors.”

“Holy crap!” George scoffed. “You can’t be breaking federal and local laws. You buying off reporters? You’re just asking for deep shit.”

“That’s why I wanted you to get together with Chet here, see the situation for yourself,” Harrison interjected. “Look out there,” pointing to the sparkling lake waters, “can’t see a thing, just the beauty of a lakeside paradise.”

PRELUDE

“Until they test it chemically,” George barked, “and you can bet your ass they will.”

Turning to Chester, George stammered, “You’d better do your best to find a way to treat this crap properly and legally or there’s nothing else we can do. You can’t keep paying off regulators, reporters, politicians, forever. Someone’s gonna’ break and talk. Then, it’s state fines, fed fines! And the iron bar hotel! What the fuck, Chester!”

Turning on his heel, George walked back towards the helicopter, “Let’s get outa’ here before someone sees us.”

“Or we get snowed in,” Harrison offered light humor, trying to take the edge off.

Chester sneered at the comment as the snow began to fall in earnest.

CHAPTER THIRTY

*You are here to enable the Divine purpose of the
Universe to unfold. That's how important you are.*

-Eckhart Tolle

Overnight, the first snowfall of the season blanketed the streets of Boston. Not enough to tie up traffic, just enough to hint at the magic of the upcoming holidays.

George, claiming he was up to his shoe tops in alligators, had agreed to meet her late that afternoon at their favorite pub, reluctantly, she thought.

"I've gotta' make it short," he insisted on the phone.

"It's important," Carol urged. "One drink?" Knowing full well he wouldn't refuse her.

When George arrived, the bar was filled with shoppers and others who managed to skip out of the office early, "A growing trend," he thought to himself. He spotted Carol, standing near the bar.

"It's too noisy here," she said as George approached. "I can't even get the bartender's attention." She suggested they just go for a walk in the snow, that she had something too important to tell him with all the distractions around.

George agreed, pleased this would shorten their meeting. Bundling up in overcoats, they both stepped out onto the sidewalk, wide snowflakes floating down from above, decorating foliage without sticking yet on the cement. Heads down, they walked away from the direction of the windswept snow.

Without regard for the chill, Carol spilled her whole heart out to George telling him of her visit to the Paulson's in New York City.

"It was all there," she spewed, as they trudged along. "The same room, the same locket, even that song, the one I saw her playing. She wrote it, I found out. George. It's all there, just like I saw it."

"Whoa," he stopped in his tracks, "what're you talking about?"

"My regression," her trembling voice rising, "the one I told you about. I've seen it. It's real. Every detail."

"Hold on. Where're you going with this?"

Carol tugged her cap a bit lower on her forehead, blurted out, fully loaded

PRELUDE

with the facts, “Don’t you see? What I saw was, is—real, the whole thing’s true. Real as, as this snow.”

George stared back at her with bemusement, saying nothing.

“George,” she spoke ever more rapidly, “if I find the safe deposit box in Iris’s name, and am able to open it with the code her father left her, that clinches it!”

“Clinches what?”

“That reincarnation is real,” she screeched with exuberance. “That regressive therapies into past lives could be acceptable, because our past lives are a part of us. Today.”

Carol turned, looked directly at him, grasped his overcoat’s lapels, blurted out, “Look. Since my episode with Susan, I’ve used past life regression to resolve the underlying conflicts in four more of my patients. And it’s worked. Every time!”

She paused, scanning his face, searching for his reaction.

“Four?” his voice quavering.

Carol shook her head, saying, “Don’t you see how important this is?”

George glared back at her in silence.

Tears began welling in Carol’s eyes, in a last ditch attempt, “You with me on this?” she pleaded.

George averted his eyes, saying, “That depends on where you’re going.”

Her eyes brightened at what she thought might be a glimmer of acquiescence, “To Montreal,” she shouted it. “We open the safety deposit box with the code, and we know for sure.”

George stepped back, removing her hands from his coat lapels. He shook his head, “Look dear, you can’t just walk into a bank and open someone else’s safety deposit box.”

Lowering her hands, she took out the only remaining ace, gloating, “I’ve got the six digit code to open it. Isn’t that enough?”

“I thought you said only what’s her name could open it?” he quizzed.

“Then I guess that’s who I’ll have to be.”

Turning, they began walking together in silence, backs to the blowing snowflakes.

Carol cocked her head, peered into the wind at George, “You still don’t get it, do you?”

Wanting this conversation to be over as soon as possible, he dismissively sighed, “Guess not.”

Carol stopped in her tracks. George continued on a few steps before stopping, turned, looked back at her.

“Okay,” she spewed, “Iris Paulson was the only person on the planet who knew where the safety deposit box was, and what the code numbers were. And now I know, me!”

She paused letting the image soak in, then rolled out the coup de gras, “If I

can find that safety deposit box, open it, and find that it holds what I think it does, what the letter says it does, then you've got to believe me that I, Carol Klein, your fiancée, was in a past life, Iris Middleton Paulson."

Stunned at her proposal, George stared back at her in dead silence.

"Don't you see?" she pleaded, "how else would I know?"

George lowered his head, trying to hide his utter disbelief in this farfetched tale and who in the world is this woman he's with? All he could do was look away from her.

"George," she cried, "wouldn't that show that, past lives, reincarnation, is in fact, real?"

Growing irritation mounted as he looked back at her almost like a stranger, saying in a pacifying voice, "Now Carol. Let's slow down here. There's lots to ..."

Cutting him off, she interrupted, "The least you could do is help."

"What on earth could I do," his impatience now more visible throwing his arms up helplessly.

"There's lots you could do," she insisted, "look up the record of Iris's father, a Joseph Middleton who died in an Illinois prison sometime in the nineteen-forties, you could research Iris herself, get her records."

She took a long calculated pause navigating this delicate negotiation, then throwing down the gauntlet making her final request, "And you could go with me to Montreal. You could get us into the bank. You're a lawyer. You're supposed to know how to do these things," defiantly shaking her head, snow flying off her cap.

Sensing his irreconcilable conflict, she began tearing up, her voice trembling, "You could try to understand just how ...," her voice trailing off.

George lowered his shoulders, trying to adjust the burden he now carried.

"You don't understand," she appealed.

George lifted both arms, threw them out in exasperation, still silent.

"You really don't," she repeated in a deflated sigh, the wind having gone out of her sails. Then with one last gust of strength blurted, "Think what you want. I'm going to Montreal!" Carol turned, walked away, heading directly into the blowing snow.

Stunned, George hollered after her, "Carol, c'mon. I need you. The campaign. I ..."

His face drooped as she disappeared into the growing whiteness.

"What the hell am I saying?" he moaned aloud.

The snow began sticking to his eyebrows and the sidewalk.

CHAPTER THIRTY ONE

What you seek, is seeking you.

-Rumi

Carol sat at her desk, alone.

Three days had drifted by since she'd heard from George.

She felt badly about her impulsive retreat in the snow. In her heart, she knew she was off base. It was unfair to expect George to share her belief in the importance of her findings. It wasn't his monkey, it was her's alone. If she wanted to validate that Iris's gift from her father was in a Montreal bank, then she'd have to do it single-handedly.

She felt like a tightrope walker at the half way point, there was no advantage to turn back. Although exhausted by this pursuit, Doctor Lee's insistence on the importance of her mission kept her focused on the quest, knowing full well that her career and possibly her relationship were in jeopardy.

"This is a mad chase. I simply want to return to the normalcy of my old life." But the persistent idea haunted her relentlessly; "What if Iris's father's gift is there, right before my eyes, in my hands, confirming what I experienced of her life is true?"

She began a swaying motion in her chair, unknowingly in time with the music of Prelude in her head. Her mind wandering all over the map, retracing Iris's steps and plotting her own trail to Montreal.

The loud buzz of her intercom jolted her back to reality. Elaine's voice stopped the merry-go-round in her head, "George, line one." Carol slowly reached for the phone, hand hanging in the air a moment, lifted it, "Yes?"

"Carol," his voice at once excited and protective, "I'm sorry I haven't called you since, well, you know, but I've great news to tell you."

Carol hesitated, "And, that might be?"

"Please, don't be angry with me. I've found what you wanted. I had my paralegal search Middleton's records in Chicago: court records, newspaper clippings, bank records, an obit. Well, it confirms what you've been saying. Joseph Middleton was convicted of money laundering for a phony union fund and sent to prison in Joliet. They believed he'd squirreled away hundreds of

thousands for himself. But he died in prison before any of it was found. Also, that your Iris was a somewhat influential writer, married to a career diplomat, Herbert Paulson. It's all true, darling. I'm sorry I doubted you. I'm sorry."

He paused, "You're onto something, not sure what, but your pieces are falling into place. Looks like it might amount to something," his voice drifting off.

After a long pause, she tested the waters, "So, now you believe me?"

"About Middelton? Yes. As for the rest?"

She mulled over his answer, trying to assess what's meant by "the rest."

"Well, there's only one way to find out."

"I know, and if that offer to join you in Montreal stands, I'm in."

"You are? Oh, thank you George, so much!"

"Can't make it more than a long day trip. I'll see what I can do to arrange a flight and contact the bank, let them know we're coming."

"I've Friday off," Carol crooned, "would that work?"

"Will let you know, love. I'll see. Gotta' go; see you tonight?"

"You better believe it, Bucko," Carol sparkled, suddenly filled with joy and playfulness, "I love you."

She placed the phone back in its cradle, filled to the brim with expectation, "It's going to happen, it's really going to happen!"

The merry-go-round started up again in her head, sounds of the calliope growing ever louder.

CHAPTER THIRTY TWO

Service is the rent we pay for being. It is the very purpose of life, and not something you do in your spare time.

-Maria Edelman

George thought he'd taken care of everything.

He had contacted the central trust office at the Bank of Montreal, explaining that he represented a client with an interest in holdings in their bank's possession, under the name of Joseph Middelton, a United States citizen of Chicago. "That well could be," the officer responded, "our bank has a long history serving many Chicago clients, both individual and corporate, as far back as the nineteenth century."

George stated he needed to confirm that, in fact, there were holdings in the name of Middelton. "And," he added, "if so, I and my client, a close relative of the Middelton's, request an appointment to review the contents, as soon as is reasonable."

Within a day, he heard back from a senior trust officer who, in a somewhat surprised tone of voice said, "Yes, we do show a long-standing holding here for a Mister Middelton as you've described. One of our larger safety deposit boxes, secured by a combination code."

The man couldn't hear George's sudden exhale both in surprise and relief at the news.

"Yes, good," he nonchalantly stated, "I believe my client is currently in possession of the combination for the box."

"Very well," the officer replied, "rather odd though, seems this particular account is pre-paid, for a period of ninety-nine years. Something we seldom see." He paused, then added, "may I inquire, as to the nature of your interest in this deposit box."

"As I told your associate, I am acting as a representative of the deceased and the estate," George declared, "also, my client assuredly is in possession of a number code, keyed to the deposit box. She would like to review the contents, to see if we can determine what properties may be deposited there."

"I see," the voice on the other end of the line said, "you say she, your client,

has the combination code that opens this particular box? How was it she came about it Monsieur?”

“From other files of the estate,” George answered. “The box is apparently the only estate property yet to be identified. And since my client has the combination, we feel it imperative to open it, if only to learn its contents.”

“And you would take possession of the contents?” the officer questioned, his tone suddenly wary.

“No sir,” George cautiously replied, “not until legal ownership is proven. We know better than that.”

“I see, I see,” the officer relieved. “When would you like to do this?”

“Soon as I can make arrangements with my client,” George exhaled with a breath of relief, “I’ll call you to confirm our plans. Your name, sir?”

“Décolleté, Henri Décolleté,” he announced. “I look forward to meeting you and your client Monsieur, what is it, Mansbridge?”

“Yes,” George offered. “I’ll call you, hopefully later this week. Good bye.”

“Bon jour,” Décolleté responded, clicking off to end the call.

George leaned back in his chair, glad the conversation was over, “What am I doing?”

The next day, George called Harrison to see if Global could provide him access to a charter aircraft for a day, “Just a quick trip up to Montreal and back, shouldn’t take but a few hours.” Harrison called back, having arranged for a BeechJet 400 through Blue Sky Airways, a charter aircraft service.

“They’ll take off from Logan,” Harrison conveying the logistics, “and get you to Mirabel International, a private airstrip just outside the city. Flight time’s just a little over an hour, each way. What’s this about, anyway?”

George cleared his throat, “Just checking on a financial transaction at the Bank of Montreal. Soon as I set up the meeting I’ll call you back to confirm the trip. Thanks. Gotta’ dash,” hanging up before a response could be given.

As he dialed the trust office of the bank, he thought, “Sweet Mother Mary, with any luck Carol’s ‘Middelton treasure hunt’ will be resolved within a day.”

He sighed, “Maybe that’ll shut her up and I can get on with my life.”

CHAPTER THIRTY THREE

None of them knew the color of the sky. Their eyes glanced level and were fastened upon the waves that swept toward them.

-Stephen Crane

Carol shifted uneasily in the soft leather seat, eyes fixed on the clouds they were passing through, then breaking completely from their cover, suddenly basking in a sun-kissed reality that's been here all the time, just out of sight from the world below. She marveled at the metaphorical aptness of what she'd just experienced—a breakthrough, like an echo of her quest.

“How you doing?” George asked, placed his hand over hers, a reassuring smile brightening his face.

“Nervous, classic case of anticipatory anxiety: a fear of failure mixed with a slim estimated chance of success.”

“Thank you for your professional assessment, doctor,” he laughed. “But how are you?”

“Fine, George, fine. Just that, well, it's just, I feel like with this trip, I'm placing everything on one roll of the dice. If I hit it, wow! If not, I'm out of the game.”

“You mean that? That this may end your pursuit, if it doesn't pan out?”

“I guess so,” she hesitated, sensing the skepticism in his tone. “Let's just wait and see.”

George removed his hand from hers and turned slightly to look out the window into the bright morning sky.

“The waiting,” Carol murmured, more to herself than to George, “it's like standing in the eye of hurricane, knowing that something's coming, something big.”

George's eyes snapped back to her, smiling, “like in West Side Story,” he sang it in tune, “*something's coming, I don't know what it is, but it is,*” she joined him in singing the final phrase, “*gonna be great!*”

“How you folks doin' back there?” shouted the co-pilot, then without waiting for an answer, “we'll be leveling out now, so you can remove your seat belts if you want. Doesn't look too bumpy up ahead. We should be touching down in

about forty-five.”

George nodded his acknowledgement, placed his hand back upon Carol’s, turning once again to look out the aircraft’s window. Below them, under the cover of cloud was the area of pollution caused by the Global subsidiary that he was protecting, “Make that hiding,” he corrected his thought, from the proper regulators.

“Some difference,” he whispered under his breath, lightly biting his lower lip.

Carol sensed George tensing, “Something wrong sweetheart?”

“No,” shaking his head, “nothing. Nothing’s wrong. Let’s just cross our fingers in hope that whatever we find in the bank, settles the question of Iris Middleton once and for all.”

“You know, if we do find something, anything that confirms what I’ve seen—do you know what that means?”

Before he could answer, “It means that past life regression has merit. That it’s real. That it’s a valid treatment. It’s that important.”

She paused, her words hanging in the air.

“A medical breakthrough” she beamed. “It’s that significant.”

George stared at her in silence, his mind forming the thought, “Wow, what implications would such a finding have on the legal system? This could turn jurisprudence up-side-down; guilt, innocence, property rights, inheritance law, all up for grabs.”

His eyes clouded, the thought chilled him to the bone, “Maybe, in the short term, things looked unfair, but in the long term, over many lifetimes, what defines the meaning of justice?”

His inner voice screamed, “Shut this crap down, boy, shut it down!”

Before long, the aircraft was gliding back through the clouds until the winding waters of the Saint Lawrence River and the outskirts of Montreal came into view. The plane landed smoothly at the private Mirabel airstrip. Slowly coming to a complete stop, the aircraft’s engines were turned off, the sound of silence a surprise. George and Carol unsnapped their seat belts.

Throughout the flight they had never taken them off.

CHAPTER THIRTY FOUR

At the deepest level, there is no giver, no gift, no recipient...only the Universe rearranging itself.

-Henry David Thoreau

A short taxi ride brought George and Carol to the towering Bank of Montréal, a granite edifice befitting the royal French heritage. Upon crossing through the iron gated entrance, they were greeted by a middle-aged man wearing a conservatively tailored three-piece suit, grey with a subtle pattern of vertical stripes, slightly darker, perfectly appropriate for his profession.

“Bon Jour Monsieur Mansbridge, Mademoiselle,” he greeted with a perfect French accent, “I am Henri Décolleté, with the Private Client International Trust Department, Banque de Montreal at your service. Welcome to our country.”

Taking Décolleté’s hand, George made it a point to squeeze it with a show of strength, not really knowing why.

“Nice to meet you, Monsieur,” George answered, “this is Doctor Carol Klein, my client.” Smiling with a little too much effort, Carol extended her hand which the bank representative lightly squeezed her fingers, bowing slightly from his upper body.

“Come now, would you care for some café?” he asked, extending the bank’s international hospitality.

“No thanks,” George quickly replied. “We’ve very little time today, Thanksgiving and all.”

“Ah,” Décolleté nodded, “yes, your Thanksgiving. You hold it a month after it should be, the Canadian way, no?”

George and Carol said nothing, staring blankly at the Frenchman, who continued, “But since you represent the deceased and have the combination. Then, let us be off to it.”

“Si,” George nodded. “Uh, oui, yes.” Décolleté discreetly rolled his eyes.

Décolleté led them towards a small vault-like room, protected by a locked door of steel bars, in which safety deposit boxes of varying sizes lined two walls. A large velvet-covered shelf, divided into three cubicles filled the back of the vault room.

“This is a strange one,” the French banker disclosed. “Pre-paid for a century, yet no one has inquired since the deposit nearly sixty years ago. Are you certain this is the one?”

“Yes, oui,” George anxiously replied, nodding his head for emphasis.

“Yes, that one,” Carol gasped.

Décolleté looked her in the eyes, “With your permission, due to the unusual nature of this deposit, I have been instructed to stand with you upon the opening to see that nothing is removed. *Je fais confiance que c’est acceptable?*”

“Uh,” George mumbled. “Yes,” Carol acquiesced. “Of course, fully acceptable. We just want to know what’s being held here.”

“Mais oui,” Décolleté satisfied with the arrangement, “then, we shall begin.”

He led them to an oversize deposit box on the floor level of the room, inserted a key and pulled open a door covering the box itself. On the front of the box was a round combination lock-face dial.

Décolleté pulled the box out from its compartment, lifted it to the velvet-covered shelf, bowed and stepped back, allowing Carol to approach the now freestanding box.

Carol’s heartbeat increased rapidly as she placed her fingers on the dial that had not moved in six decades, testing it with a turn to the right, then to the left. Her mind was clouding, her face flushing with color.

“Carol?” George urged.

“I’m okay,” she trembled. “Just, give me a minute.” She bowed her head, saying something undecipherable under her breath, raised her eyes. Took a deep breath and began to turn the dial, first to the left, then to the right, as if by instinct. Sweat beads broke out on her forehead as she turned to each number in sequence; 5 Right, 29 left, 19 right, 7 left, 8 right, 20 left.

Carol squeezed her eyes shut tightly, opened them. Nothing had happened. She had felt no tumblers click. Nothing.

“Perhaps, Madam” Décolleté’s voiced laced with skepticism, “your numbers? Incorrect?”

“No,” Carol said with a note of desperation, “I’ll try again. Please.”

“Relax, Carol,” George instructed. “Try again. It’s all right.”

Carol, felt the air became unbreathably thick with tension. She felt like time was standing still. She shook her head forcing her mind to focus.

“Think, Carol, think!” she commanded herself into concentration. She spun the antiquated dial all the way left, then all the way right, letting her fingertips get better acquainted with the grooves on the dial.

“Okay,” she sighed with all her resolve, “this time, this is it!”

She turned the dial, ever so slowly to the left until hitting the number five. The dial stopped. “Did I just feel something?” she thought, “was it?”

With her free hand, she wiped her eyes, then, began turning the dial to the right, stopping at number twenty-nine. She felt nothing. Sweat beads formed

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again, bathing her forehead. “Come on,” she urged, “come on!” She turned the dial to the left, back ten spaces, landing on number nineteen. Without hesitation, she turned the dial rightward to the number seven, then left, slowly, all the way back to the number eight.

Now, she had but one more number to reach. Every ounce of her attention peaked. Her breath shallow and fast like sucking for air in a vacuum, her eyes darted to George. He was standing stiffly, also holding his breath. She heard Décolleté clear his throat, a nervous rumble. She turned the dial again; to the right, to the number twenty.

She felt it, a click, a strong click.

The top of the box loosened. It lifted slightly. It had opened!

“*Voilà,*” announced Décolleté, a smile in his voice.

Carol’s shoulders began shaking. It was open! Tears flooded from her eyes uncontrollably. George reached for her, pulling her in, holding her in a close hug, grinning at their host.

“This means a lot to her,” George covering his tracks, “a whole lot.”

Décolleté smiled, “*Évidemment,*” he agreed, grinning at the hugging couple, adding, “and now, to open the lid, no?”

Carol turned to face him, slipping out of George’s arms, wiping her eyes and cheeks. She smiled at the banker, saying, “*Merci, Monsieur. Oui.*”

Décolleté reached for the lid, lifted it gently, setting it upon the floor.

All three of them peered into the box.

George’s piercing whistle hung in the air.

CHAPTER THIRTY FIVE

There is no security on this earth; there is only opportunity.

-Douglas MacArthur

They stared into the box in silence.

Bars of gold bullion, a half-dozen, took up half the box, the other half, a mixture of Treasury notes, stock certificates and bonds of the Chicago Mercantile Exchange. George lifted them up and out of their dormant resting place, having not seen the light of day for over sixty years. His first instinct was to thumb through them, quickly categorizing the contents and calculating their current market value. And then, he saw it. Stopping him cold. Atop the bullion lay a sealed envelope upon which, in cursive handwriting, was written:

DISTRIBUTION INSTRUCTIONS:
ALL ASSETS HEREIN ARE INTENDED FOR
MRS. IRIS MIDDELTON PAULSON ONLY.

Carol gasped, eyes widening as the words on the envelope soaked into her mind, “For Iris Middleton Paulson. It’s true!”

She looked up at George, unable to speak, eyes pleading.

“Holy Mother,” he croaked.

“It appears to be a small fortune,” Décolleté’s voice floated in the air like a vapor. “A gift from a very generous man.”

George’s eyes turned to the banker as he gathered his thoughts. The enormity of the contents had knocked the wind from his sails. He felt compelled to say something lawyerly, something profound.

But, he said nothing. His eyes returned to the revealed contents. He reached in, lifted the sealed envelope up and out of the box, higher, until he could view it against the light from an overhead lamp.

“There’s a letter or something inside,” he whispered.

Carol leaned in to see the outline against the lamplight.

“Should....,” she gasped, “should we open it?”

“No,” George gently cautioned, “best to wait.”

PRELUDE

He turned to Décolleté. “Monsieur?” he asked.

Décolleté nodded his agreement, “Oui,” he replied, “you wanted to see what the box held, now you know. This is enough?”

Firmly, he exerted his position of power, “As you know, we cannot release anything without the proper authority, who in this case may be this Mademoiselle Paulson. You know of her?”

Carol stared at him, dumbstruck, eyes darting, unable to answer.

“Yes,” George broke in, “we do.” Carol’s neck nearly snapped as she shot him a wide-eyed glance, one dripping with bewilderment.

“Well then,” the banker continued, “perhaps you should inform her of this discovery, no?”

Thunderstruck, George stared back at Carol. “Yes. That’s what we will do,” placing the envelope back in the open box.

Punting under the weight of this proof, George blurted, “I’ve a request. I’ll need to provide some evidence to support our claim that the contents of this box are exclusively intended for the benefit of Iris Paulson. I trust you understand.”

George continued on despite the skeptical expression on Decollete's face, “Perhaps, a copy of this envelope and letter with a certificate of authenticity.”

Decollete's expression softened knowing that the contents would continue to be safe in accordance with the bank's regulations.

“Given what is at stake here,” George re-emphasized, “I don’t think this is too much to ask. You agree?”

“I understand. This can be done,” Décolleté concluded. “For now, I must return your finding to its pre-paid home and I will be glad to oblige your request. You may trust it will be secured well by the Banque de Montreal.”

He lowered the lid, lifted the heavy box awkwardly, placing it back in its slot with George’s assistance.

The men stepped back. “I will contact you within a day or two with your request satisfied. Please let me know if I may be of further service,” Décolleté said, offering his hand to George.

“Of course,” George reciprocated, shaking the man’s hand. “We will be in touch. And thank you again.”

“Au revoir, monsieur, mademoiselle.”

Within minutes, George and Carol walked down the granite steps of the towering building, wordless until they reached the street. George stopped, looked deep into Carol’s eyes.

“Unbelievable,” he whistled. “Unbefuckinglievable.”

“What now?” her voice shaking, her eyes still moist and reddened.

George looked skyward, took a deep breath, exhaled, glanced back, “Right now?” he directed, “catch a cab.”

Carol, still reeling, nodded in agreement to his logic.

George turned, waved his arm as a taxi approached, slowed and stopped.

“Bon jour,” George tried his best to match the local dialect, fearing that, in fact, he was butchering it. “Le Mirabella? Aero-poor-o-tea-o?”

The cab driver grinned at him, “Nice try Mac,” he laughed, “I’m from Brooklyn. Hop in.”

The two of them spoke little during the short ride to the airport where the chartered Beech Jet awaited. George turned away from Carol to look out the cab’s window. His mind was racing as he watched the cityscape flow past them. Carol stared straight ahead, every now and then looking down at her shoes.

As the airport neared, she turned to George, “I’m sorry.”

He looked at her, “For what?”

“For,” she stuttered, “I don’t know. I’ve pulled you into this, and now...” she stifled a sob, “now, I don’t know what to do.”

He nodded in understanding. He was in complete agreement. He didn’t understand either, but he wouldn’t let on, “No sense both of us drowning.”

The taxi pulled to a stop just as the sun drifted over the horizon.

As they strode towards the waiting airplane, the eerie glow of a late October afternoon was just beginning to take dominion.

Once strapped into the BeechJet, Carol leaned back deep into her seat, stifling a snuffle. George placed his hand lightly over her forearm. Patted it reassuringly.

“Don’t let all this upset you sweetheart, I just might know what we should do; aren’t lawyers known for buying time and coming up with angles at the eleventh hour.” He’d pulled legal magic out so many times before, that he couldn’t imagine that this situation should be any different.

She looked into his eyes with hope, her eyes big as saucers.

“You do?”

“Maybe, give me time to think it through. You need to relax now. It’ll be alright.”

Carol leaned into George’s shoulder, closed her eyes, whispered, “Okay darling, Thank you.”

“Takin’ off folks,” the co-pilot hollered, “been cleared.”

“Bon voyage,” George shouted back as the jet engines’ howl filled the cockpit. The plane roared down the runway, smoothly lifting, striking a sharp upward angle into the evening sky. Below, lights of the city were coming on, broken only by the blackness of the curving river bisecting the scene.

Within a minute after liftoff, Carol fell fast asleep, her head lolling falling onto George’s shoulder. He looked down at her lovingly as she slept. “How vulnerable she looks,” he thought.

As the plane leveled off and began to shoot through the night sky, George leaned into her, lightly brushed a lock of her hair away from her face. He kissed her hair, then whispered, “Sleep well, my darling.”

“Dammit,” he muttered, “you were right.”

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT FOR CAROL & GEORGE?

Now that you've finished reading the first 35 chapters of *Prelude*, we think you'll be excited to read the final 50 riveting chapters, leading to the spellbinding and unexpected crescendo that redefines our understanding of life and death.

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS AND THEIR JOURNEY WITH PRELUDE

Cheryl Malakoff, Ph.D.

The day I completed my Ph.D. in psychology was the most conflicted day of my life. While my mind had been crammed with theories, my heart cried out for wisdom. I wanted to be a healer, not a repository of ideas about the human psyche.

My education was like reading about ‘love’—the physiology, chemistry, biology, and brain waves were all very interesting, but paled by comparison to the actual experience of ‘falling in love’. Until you can embody the true meaning of love, as personal knowledge, you have no way to convey that understanding to others. This formidable challenge was my professional dilemma.

I had studied the models and methods of the great psychologists like Carl Jung and Eric Erickson, but this did not make me one of them. These great healers embodied attributes and abilities that enabled them to convey deeper truths. Healers can only convey what they embody. I knew this to be an immutable truth.

My heart relentlessly gnawed at my soul and thrust me forward. In abject despair, I cried out to the Universe, not as a beggar, but rather as the rightful child demanding my lawful inheritance of wisdom. My quest for the secrets of the human condition would not be quenched by anything less than the ultimate truth.

Shortly after this heartfelt demand, a life altering event occurred. I awoke on a leisurely Saturday morning and in a flash, a shift in conscious perception occurred, as if my inner vision had fully opened. I cannot say whether what occurred next was a brief moment or an extended period of time. All accounting

was eclipsed by the direct experience. I ‘saw’ the entire story of *Prelude*, frame by frame, page by page. The story was told to me in vivid, exquisite detail. It was an indescribable experience to see the characters—George, Carol, Iris, Doctor Lee—and hear their stories, revealing all the details of their compelling journey in its entirety. The story was vividly alive. I was mesmerized and awestruck. When the story was complete, I heard an inner voice say, ‘*not now*’.

Not now! My unbridled enthusiasm wanted to shout this story from the rooftops. However, I felt so humble and privileged to be witness to this account that I obediently honored the source that had shared this story with me. The question I asked year in and year out for decades was, “why would you give me this narrative and have me just be its guardian?”

Year after year I wondered why I had been chosen to be the keeper of this saga and why it was to be sequestered for a quarter of a century.

It was only in the 20-20 vision of hindsight that I came to understand the twenty-five year gap. This story was both the answer to my quest and a gift beyond measure for my personal transformation.

I was in search of the truth to understand the root cause of human suffering and the source of happiness. Initially, as a young and inexperienced doctor, I was like a ship adrift on an uncharted sea. Why were so many people suffering and challenged in every aspect of life? I knew that until I could comprehend the core organizing principles of life, I would be unable to answer this question. Without the correct answers, I’d be unable to be of any guidance to help my clients and students. I had seen so many short-term cures that didn’t last. My gold standard was endurance—the healings had to stand the test of time.

Meanwhile, throughout all the intervening years *Prelude* reverberated through my heart and soul. It was given to me for a specific reason. It was my teacher. I had to learn the lessons that were *Prelude’s* underpinnings—disseminating the higher truths of life through a story that shatters the myth of death.

The old cliché of, ‘be careful what you ask for,’ was never truer than in my sincere, though naïveté request. My personal development unfolded through the fires of purification and spiritual testing. It was as if the Universe replied, “Okay, you want to be a healer, here's the curriculum. Let’s see if you have what it takes to master the lessons.”

Consequently, as a psychologist in private practice and as teacher, I’ve

specialized in the science of transformation and the art of healing—dedicated to the restoration of soul, mind, body health by activating our inherent core-level abilities.

I'm also a co-founder of KnoU Profiles—a powerful tool for self-discovery which empowers individuals through self-knowledge, and is based on the science of numerology. Through greater self-awareness we gain the ability to more fully manifest our true potential and embrace our real purpose in life. To learn more, please visit:

www.KnoUProfiles.com

If you would like to see a free video from the author, leave an e-mail address for future announcements, or contact the author please visit:

www.readprelude.com

OTHER BOOKS BY THE AUTHOR:

Opening The Mind, Igniting The Heart.

10 Winning Strategies for Loving, Successful Relationships.

Prelude—The Screenplay, co-authored with Robert Clampett.

Robert Clampett

My journey with Doctor Malakoff, Cheryl that is, began with a phone call from a dear friend and colleague asking if I might be available to assist a locally based psychologist in writing a book. Having recently been relieved of duties as Editor of a national magazine and just wrapping up a collaborated screenplay with a Hollywood writer, I welcomed the opportunity. Little did I know what lay in store.

After a pleasant interview session with Cheryl and her husband in her elegant Woodinville, Washington home, I felt I'd done pretty good job of selling my skills, having presented copies of two of my previous books and about a dozen magazine articles; only to learn later that the primary reason for my being selected was based more on my numerology chart than my credentials.

The first step for my research required attending Cheryl's two-weekend-long seminars to experience first-hand the mechanics of the self-improvement course she taught, titled "The Transformation Lessons," a somatic and spiritual-based regimen designed to provide embodiment of body-mind-soul balance. This seemed a bit of a stretch to me, having been a trained skeptic; as are most journalists.

One month later, I found myself employing the Lesson's techniques on a regular basis with positive results. She and I would meet weekly for two-hour interview sessions, each conducted and tape-recorded for accuracy. During each visit, she would graciously provide snacks, ranging from sushi to chocolate-covered Biscotti. What's not to like?

Over the months that followed, the task of tracing her life's journey leading to the Transformation Lessons proved more difficult than either of us realized at the start. Problems of intellectual property rights were raised, stalling the project as we were nearing completion. Long story short, we mutually ended the endeavor.

Several months after quitting the Lessons project, Cheryl called, inviting my wife and me to dinner at an upscale Kirkland restaurant. At the meal's end, she asked if I would be interested in working with her again, this time a collaborative screenplay based on a story she claimed she was "given" many years earlier. Over the next hour, she laid out the elements of what was to become "Prelude"—a story I found too powerful to refuse.

The screenplay took years to complete. When finished, we shopped it around, gaining the interest of a reader at William Morris Agency in Los Angeles. While he liked the story, he advised us that it would be unlikely to gain financing required for a film, suggesting we consider recasting it as a book.

After several months of teeth-gnashing, we agreed that the story must be told, and if it required our tearing it apart and re-writing it as a full-fledged novel, so be it. The effort was immense, requiring years to complete. However, by turning it into a novel, we were free to add new elements, which have greatly enhanced the story. From Cheryl's perspective, the Universe had a reason for the delays we had encountered; waiting for the right time for the tale to be told.

Over these years working with Cheryl, I have evolved on a personal level to totally embrace the concept of one's soul journey from one life to the next. I now see the wisdom in the tenets of reincarnation that mirror science's First Law of Thermodynamics, which states that energy can neither be created nor destroyed, only transformed. While the body breaks down, the energy of the soul must live on; a belief I found most comforting when my wife Julie Lynn Valentine left her body at the young age of 54. As I see it today, she did not just die, she graduated; with honors, I may add.

So, as you can see dear readers, I have gained immeasurably from my journey in producing the book you now hold in your hand, thanks to the patience, the persistence and the vision of my co-author Cheryl Malakoff, Ph.D. Hope you enjoyed the read and received the comfort it has given me.

OTHER BOOKS BY THE AUTHOR

Prelude—the Screenplay

Other Women—the Screenplay

The Motorcycle Handbook (Fawcett Gold Metal)

The Moped Book (Simon & Schuster Pocket Books)

Everyone Plays: The Story of AYSO

Multiple Short stories

Articles (Saturday Evening Post, Essence, Playgirl, Sports Digest, Tennis Illustrated, Popular Mechanics, Pro Football West, and Multiple In-Flight magazines)

Editor: Costco Connection; Vacationer; Pasadena Business

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many times a day I realize how much my own outer and inner life is built upon the labors of my fellow men, both living and dead, and how earnestly I must exert myself in order to give in return as much as I have received.

–Albert Einstein

Cheryl Malakoff

First and foremost, with deepest gratitude to ‘my friends in high places,’ who entrusted me with this task long before I was competent to complete the assignment. Countless bow downs for the privilege and honor to steward this project.

To my beloved Guru, the sentinel of my soul’s journey, Paramahansa Yogananda, who’s love found me again.

The most precious endowment of this lifetime has been the extraordinary enlightened masters that have quickened my evolution. To my beloved Dr. and Master Zhi Gang Sha and Dr. and Master Hai. The only way I can ever repay even just a fraction of your generosity and love is to serve, serve, and serve more, all the days of my life.

To all the other exceptional healers, teachers and friends, too numerous to list, who have so significantly contributed to my growth and development. And, especially to Robert Raleigh and The Transformation Lessons, thank you for everything you taught me.

To my dearly loved mother Pearl, who just a few months before her graduation into the soul world read *Prelude*, twice. Her enthusiasm and passion for the story will forever be amongst my greatest acknowledgements. My father

Stanley's boundless encouragement and support are precious treasures. To my cherished brother Lance and adored sister Beth, both fellow spiritual warriors who have 'gone the distance' and 'done the work.' And to the radiant souls of David, Andrew, Isabel and Elizah, who light up countless hearts.

In Divine friendship to Richie Goldman, thank you for the privilege of going with you on your soul's journey. To Jay Goldinger, who's embodiment of unconditional compassion and selfless service has illuminated 'the path' to countless souls. And who stewarded *Prelude*, the screenplay, to the William Morris Agency, deepest gratitude.

To all my students, I am eternally grateful for teaching me about the many faces of love.

To Larry, my beloved husband, who's disciplined journey to Self-Realization and sincere desire to contribute to serve humanity is a daily inspiration. Thank you for your enduring love and support; they were the essential spirit that unified this project.

To Bob Clampett—words can never adequately express my heartfelt appreciation and gratitude for your great instinct and skill in transforming this dream into *Prelude*.

And to our publisher Reagan Rothe and the team at Black Rose Writing, thank you, thank you, thank you. And especially to Dave King, who's stellar artistic creativity and loving, patient support has contributed beyond measure.

Robert Clampett

As with anything significant in life, there are many people to thank; whether for assistance, actual support or pure encouragement. I begin with Chris Barnett, my longtime Cancer-pal and cohort who was solely responsible for connecting me with my co-author Dr. Cheryl Malakoff.

To my partner in life and beyond, Julie Lynn Valentine, who's patience and love will inspire me always as she begins her next journey.

Special thanks to longtime friends, mentors and editors Al Drew, Richard & Patti Pietschmann, David & Cheri Frei; Gaylen Brule, April Rhodes James, Tom Shess, John Johns, Michael Nortness, Cliff & Nancy Hollenbeck, Fern & Ken Valentine, Helen Gurley Brown, Art Garcia, Barbara Creaturo, Julie Nixon

Eisenhower, Jane Offers, Harry Miller, Michele Mongrain-Uplinger and, of course, my children JoEllen O'Reilly, Robin Ludlam and Scott Clampett—who always have been there for me. A shout-out to writers Dennis O'Reilly and Will Ludlam, as well as my ultra-talented grandchildren: Ethan, Tatum & Eliza Ludlam and Maddie & Declan O'Reilly.

And I cannot share enough of my gratitude for the friendship, patience, perseverance and vision of my co-author Dr. Cheryl Malakoff; along with the support she and I received from her husband, Larry. Thanks a bunch, you two.

FURTHER READING AND ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

The ideas touched upon in *Prelude* are diverse and thought-provoking. Here are some resource suggestions that may be helpful in providing additional information on this important subject.

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—A true story of a psychiatrist and patient exploring past life therapy.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Cheryl A. Malakoff Ph.D. - www.DrCherylMalakoff.com. The authors website, *Wellness Through Awareness: Aligning Soul, Heart, Mind and Body*, offers a revolutionary approach that can transform blockages at the soul, heart, mind and body levels to achieve optimum health, relationships and financial success.

KnoU Profiles - www.KnoUProfiles.com. This enlightening site offers personality style reports based on the science of numerology. Extremely insightful and life-inspiring, these reports can help you to realize your true purpose, real strengths and untapped potential to shape your life in more positive ways than you thought possible. It's like reading a blueprint from your soul, allowing you to more fully understand how special and unique a person you are.

Self-Realization Fellowship - www.yogananda.org. Founded in 1920 by Paramahansa Yogananda, SRF is a worldwide fellowship devoted to the discovery of peace, joy and prosperity in everyday life through communion with God, and is devoted to healing of the body, mind and soul.

Soul Healing Institute - www.drsha.com. Teaches the power of soul, including soul secrets, wisdom, knowledge and practices to empower you to transform every aspect of your life—and to bring love, peace and harmony to yourself and the world.

Prelude - www.readprelude.com. Content includes blog by the authors, additional resources, author contact information and e-mail sign-up for future communications.