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BLESSED ARE

Jason Martinez

An Abstract Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate
School of Lindenwood College in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
Degree of Master of Fine Arts

2006

ABSTRACT

On the surface this particular novel is a fairly simple one to explain. On the surface this novel is more or less a romance novel. After all, Book One is essentially about a man named Thomas Woods who meets and fall in love with a woman named Rosemary. At first his love is returned in kind, but by the end he has lost his lover to another man, a man unworthy of her tenderness. And Book Two is about more or less the same thing except in this Book the woman's name is Violet, and there is a slight question as to whether she has been true or not. Book Three is a little different, but again he falls for and then loses the woman from the Book. The only true difference between a prototypical love story and this one is that in mine the main character does not win the affections of the women by stories end. It is true that he does win something on the last pages, but what it is the reader will probably not find in any other "romance" novel in which he or she reads.

However, there is something deeper hidden underneath, which I, the author, will attempt to explain. What is hidden underneath is a poem, which I have played with on numerous occasions since I first read it,

but never before I feel, with as much success as I did here. The poem is a Zen poem, a three word Zen poem to be exact. And it reads, "Snow/ Moon/ Flower". The poem is about the cycle of life with each word representing a part of the cycle. Snow is symbolic of the season of death or decline, while moon is symbolic of fertility or the cycles of a woman. And finally there is flower, which is symbolic of spring, or rebirth. And each of my books is intended to be each of the three words, with the whole of the novel to make up the poem, and be representative of the cycle of life. For example, Book One is the death. It is the death of love, the death of Thomas, etc. While Book Two is the point in the story where Thomas is impregnated with a new idea about what it is he is searching for. And in Book Three Thomas is reborn and blooms like a flower in a garden of love.

And so as you can see, even though this story looks on the surface to be a rather simple one, underneath there is much more going on.

COMMITTEE IN CHARGE OF JURY

BLESSED ARE

Professor Michael Gorman
Chairman and Advisor

Associate Professor Bob Mott

Jason Martinez

A Culminating Project Presented to the Faculty of the
Graduate School of Lindenwood College in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
Degree of Master of Fine Arts

2006

COMMITTEE IN CHARGE OF CANDIDACY:

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Chairperson and Advisor

Assistant Professor Beth Mead

For Thursday's
(may they always be good)

INTRODUCTION

Any discussion about this novel must begin with a single individual. An individual whom I have never met, and who unfortunately there is no chance of me ever meeting. The individual's name is Leo Tolstoy, and his writings were the inspiration behind this novel. In particular, it was his novel "Resurrection" that inspired me more so than any of the others he has written, although I find all of his writings to be inspirational. After I first read "Resurrection", something inside me changed. It was as if I had heard the voice of God, and I knew that if I did nothing else as a writer, I knew I must attempt to emulate his style of writing. And so I did, and this novel is my feeble attempt at emulation. I say feeble because I am not so bold as to believe that I could ever truly emulate the voice of God Himself, but I tried, and although I know it is not equal to Him, I do believe it to have a pretty voice all its own.

And although I feel Leo Tolstoy to be the most inspirational of all the writers who helped influence my writing during this period, there are others whose names are worthy of mention; Fyodor Dostoevsky and Ivan S. Turgenev being two others of high importance. Indeed, I do

not think that truer words were ever spoken then when Hemingway was quoted as saying, "At first there were the Russians, and then there was everyone else. But for a long time there were the Russians." And so seeing as the Russians have always been my favorite when it comes to writers, I like to think that their influence can be seen here, as I attempted to not only write in a voice similar to Tolstoy's, but in a style similar to that of all the early Russian writers.

But I would be amiss if I were to say that the Russians alone were influential to me. Indeed, there are several writers and novels that are mentioned in the contents of my little story that each had an impact on it. There is D.H. Lawrence and his "destinies of splendor", and then there is Herman Hesse, and his renunciation. Would you be startled if I told you that I read "Demian" no less than three times during the writing of this novel? And how could I fail to mention Thomas Hardy and his poem, "God's Funeral". And of course there is Papa Hemingway, and his character Lady Brett. And Fitzgerald's (it seems they are more often than not mentioned together and so I will mention them together here also) Gatsby and Daisy. And then there is Kerouac's jazz and Ginsberg's howl. The list goes on and on, and perhaps now that you know some of the names you will look for their influences within my humble pages.

But it was not just people of fame who helped influence this story, but others as well, including my wife Christy who is an everyday inspiration and who has more than a little in common with one of the female characters from the story. Indeed, several of our kisses and first dates are recorded in this novel. And there is also a girl who sat across from me in an Irish Literature class (before I met and married my wife) whose name I do not recall if ever I knew it whose image appears in this book. In short, there are several moments from my life, which I molded in order to fit into this novel. But by no means is this novel meant to be autobiographical. And the main character, Thomas, was not written to be an extension of myself. Although there are parts, his better parts I like to believe, that mirror many of my own.

I suppose I should list some of the similarities here, in order to clear up any confusion. Like Thomas, I too served in the military. And like Thomas, I too am obviously a writer. And like Thomas I went to Catholic schools, but it is pretty much there, where the major similarities end. I say major because there are some minor similarities that my close friends will be able to see.

But as I have stated, this story was not meant to be autobiographical, but was meant to do something else, four major things to be exact. The first one I have already made note of, which was to emulate the style of Tolstoy and his fellow comrades, although the other goals I equally

attempted to accomplish. Another one of them was to capture that feeling when you first begin to like another. But then I tried to carry that feeling onward to the point where you first fall in love, and then finally, when said love ceases to be. I found this to be much more difficult than I first imagined, and I think at times it comes across as being long winded, but I think that's part of the feeling, at least in my experiences with it. The third task of mine was to write a poetic novel. I wanted the words to read less like your typical prose and more like poetry. I believe I was most successful in this, as there are numerous sentences and whole paragraphs that to me are poetic. Lastly, I tried to write a novel about a quest. Not just any quest, but the ultimate quest. Man's quest for God. I hope that I succeeded in this endeavor, as at times it appears it is more a story of a man's search for love. But are they not in a way one in the same? I thought so, and so I decided to use the women in the story as a type of representation of God.

In conclusion, there were many people and events that helped influence this story, and many things that I attempted to do in writing it, but above all I attempted to write a story that the reader would enjoy. And I hope that at least in this, if in no other, I succeeded.

CHAPTER ONE

Slow, sad, and with a seemingly dying light the morning sun entered the young man's apartment. The apartment was small, consisting of three dusty rooms, and was modestly furnished with a few miscellaneous pieces of second hand furniture. On the walls, which badly needed painting, hung a portrait of the Virgin Mary holding her infant Son. The young man stood looking out of a window directly across from the entrance and appeared to be in deep thought. He was a handsome young man in his mid twenties, but on this particular day he did not look well, for it was obvious to the eye that his thoughts were a burden to him. His shoulders drooped as he stood, as if the weight of his thoughts were resting on them. His eyes looked tired and sad and seemed to be looking at someone or something that must have once before been within their view. His face, which was normally full of passion and youth, was now looking weary and almost old. It was not just his face that told about him however, but also his style of dress, which showed that he did not follow the fashion of the day, but was more independent in his thinking. You could tell that nothing he had on was new, which revealed that like so many others of his age, who only wore second or third hand clothes and hardly ever anything new, he too showed in an often overlooked way that he did not look kindly on the world around him and that the things they cherished he thought little if nothing of. He was one of those who no longer gives credence to his father's dreams and ideas, and so has begun to create some of his own.

His own dreams and ideas had started to take shape around the time he had dropped out of a local Catholic high school early in his senior year. Afterward, he began reading frequently and working at low paying jobs. He had attempted to go back to college a few times, but was now convinced it was a hindrance to him and the life he wanted to lead. He had watched it all too often negatively affect his writing and his own self schooling, and so he decided to let it go like so many of the other things that had been handed down to him. I would not like to confuse the reader in regards to this man, so I should also add that he was not the least bit political, but on the contrary, loathed politics and everything associated with it. It would be safe to say that his hatred arose from his feelings towards his own capitalist government which came to him inevitably as he looked unfavorably on two of the main features of all capitalist societies, the power of money and the belief in doing anything for it. On the night I speak of, however, our young friend reflected not on such issues, but on much loftier ones, when he was suddenly interrupted by a loud waking knock at the front door. He startled, as if being awakened from a deep and somber sleep, and upon collecting himself said without emotion, "It is open."

A stout man entered the room, taking everything in as he approached the young man. He was clean cut and well dressed, but gave an impression of a man who was not use to being so. "Mr. Woods" he started to say with a voice announcing its own importance when he noticed the young man was paying no attention to him. "Mr. Woods", he began again with some sternness as the

young man looked at him astonished, as if he had just appeared out of nowhere. "Yes, yes, that is me" came his reply. The stout man continued with a gruff voice that hid traces of authority, "Mr. Woods, I have come to you at the request of a gentleman named Mr. Knight. Perhaps you know him?" The young man gave no response and so the gentleman continued. "Mr. Knight would like to request your presence at an annual dinner he is to have the fifteenth of this month, and would appreciate a response to this invitation at your earliest possible convenience." Again, Mr. Woods said nothing. "He has written you numerous letters which have all gone unanswered. He has also tried contacting you through your school, but they informed him that you were no longer attending. It is actually through your school that he first heard of you." The stout man was flustered as the younger man merely continued to look at him, or rather through him, and so he was rambling. A nervous trait of his he had picked up as a very small boy. "Apparently he was given one of the stories you had written for a class, and found it to be quite good. That is what the dinner is for, for young aspiring writers. You are to be a guest of honor." He then handed the young man a piece of paper that looked like an invitation of some sort. The latter put it into the pocket of his wrinkled trousers without looking at it, and proceeded to escort the gentleman to the door. The stout man exited the room while in the back of his mind he kept wondering why Mr. Knight would want a man like this, no matter how good a writer he was, to attend his gathering. You see, he was fond of his boss, and so the lack of manners of this young man had made him

angry, as if he were insulting not only he himself, but Mr. Knight as well. He was thinking something like, "Does this man not realize how great an honor has befallen him? Mr. Knight has invited him to be a guest, and he just stands there?" Mr. Woods, although he had no opinions of this man's boss at all, having never met him, did not feel honored or even obligated to attend. As a matter of fact, he wished this rich stranger had never read anything at all that he had written.

His thoughts would quickly change however, as the silence of the room would once again remind him of the young lady from earlier in the afternoon. He thought of her tan skin, her thin lips that spoke softly, her blonde hair that lay on her shoulder as you hoped your hand one day would, and finally of her timid and shy eyes that seemed to call to him. He then remembered her trying to calm the angry man with the balding head and fashionable attire. He remembered how the man struck her a blow across the face, and how she absorbed it like Christ. He could see the blow still, as if it were happening all over again before his eyes. He could feel his blood begin to pump hard, his face redden, as the hatred for the unknown man grew to the point of madness. He began to imagine his fists pounding away at the man's face, the blood, the cries for mercy, and then once again to the angel of a woman, her smile of gratitude as he checked her injuries with the care and compassion of a saint. Then, suddenly, the images of what really happened took over his mind. The woman laying there, all eyes including his own, forced down, the angry drunken words of the well-dressed man, "You

dumb bitch! Get up!" the tears, the trembling of her soft lips, the feeling of the room for the moment to end, and finally the woman rising to her feet, and with sunken head and heart and spirit following the man out of the bar. The sound of another knock at the door quickly ceased this unwanted recollection.

"Come in, it's open" he said with some agitation as the image of the woman still lingered somewhere in him. When the door opened he was pleased to see his friend Elijah standing before him. Eli was a tall man with a flat top, and long bushy sideburns. He worked in a factory in the city, and despite his knowledge and style of dress, was rather poor. He was still in school, but had acquired most of his knowledge from many nights at the library reading books about the persecution of the many by the few in power. Indeed, he loved to talk about the different revolutions of histories past, and why he thought each had failed, and was considered by his friends to be something of an expert on such subjects. He was also a very kind and decent man, and one whom our young friend trusted very much. "Eli, my friend" he said extending his arm as the two shook hands as one is wont to do with a very close and dear friend.

"I've been worried about you Thomas" the man said to his friend with a look in his dark eyes that confirmed his sincerity. "What for? I am fine, as you can see." Elijah looked his friend over and asked simply, "Have you eaten?" The young man for the first time in a few days felt the hunger of his stomach, and answered that no he had not. Elijah then pulled out a twenty-dollar bill from the inside pocket of his coat, which was a size too small, and

said, "Why don't we go to the pub for a beer and burger?" Thomas' stomach answered yes. It had been a few weeks since they had seen each other, and so they were talking about different things that had happened to them since their last encounter until they arrived at the bar and were seated.

"Two beers and a couple of steak burgers well done please," Elijah asked of the tired eyed waitress as he pulled out two cigarettes and handed one to his friend. "I've been reading a lot Nick, mostly the bible," Thomas said as he took a drink from his beer and looked around the bar as if he were searching for someone in the crowd around him. "What on Earth for?" Eli answered with a laugh, as he did not believe in such things, and found others beliefs in them to be slightly amusing. "It helps. Besides, if you look at it merely as a work of fiction, it is still a very good book. I know you don't believe any of it, and I don't even believe all of it, but you should try reading it some day. You'd be surprised at what you can get out of it." "Perhaps," Elijah responded politely, not wanting to get in a discussion with Thomas about religion, knowing from past arguments that they would never agree on the subject. Thomas also felt this, but he wanted to talk about what he had been reading, so he went on, but carefully. "Ecclesiastes is incredible. You've got to read that even if it's the only thing from the bible that you read." "I'm serious," he added after he saw his friend's disinterested look.

"I'm sorry Tom," Eli answered knowing he had been rude, and then added, "I've read parts of it before for some class I was taking. It wasn't too

bad."

They would finish their small meal and continue talking of Ecclesiastes and what happens under the sun until the bar closed and they had to leave. They would then go out onto the streets, drinking in the night air as they did so. They would feel buzzed by its amiable stillness, and its tranquil breezes that penetrated, but never disturbed this stillness. They walked the streets drunk and in good humor, and with the restlessness of those of their age, the restlessness of the young and carefree. The sky was adorned with stars and planets and the hope of dreamers, and it did not go unfelt by these young souls. They continued talking of man and his place in all this, and out of their conversation sprouted the hope of youth with all its ambitions and goals and simple philosophy, "I am young and alive, and can thus conquer anything." Thomas would leave Elijah, quoting from D.H. Lawrence as he did so, "There are destinies of splendor, after all our doom of littleness and meanness and pain." And he believed the words, as truly as he believed the sun would rise in the morning, for the sun must rise, the destiny of man depends upon it.

The next morning our young friend would wake on his worn bed, covered with sweat and smelling of smoke and stale beer. He was still in his clothes from the previous night, and he fumbled through the pockets of his trousers, looking for a cigarette and match, but instead found a small piece of paper. He quickly remembered the visitor from the day before, and then by what seemed some outside force, to the woman. And not wanting to think of her, he

focused his attention on the small piece of paper. It was the invitation to the dinner, and not wanting to go, but also knowing a reply was necessary, he read it over looking for an address. Upon finding one, he discovered that this Mr. Knight did not live far from him at all, about six blocks. Of course, it was on the other side of the park where all the expensive houses were, and was blocked off all around by a black iron fence about ten feet high, but for his purposes he was glad it was so close. He petitioned the son of his downstairs neighbor to deliver a message to this Mr. Knight, a note, which read simply, "Mr. Woods will not be able to accept your invitation." Having seen the boy off, he checked his ashtray for a cigarette, found one, and began smoking. The first drag was rough going down, but the rest was soothing to him. Feeling groggy and beat and in need of repair, he made a cup of coffee, adding a shot of Bailey's to help ease the mornings aches and pains. The daily paper came with the return of the boy, and giving the lad a dollar coin that had belonged to his father's coin collection, he asked him if he had delivered the message. The boy assured him he had given the note to some "old man" who had answered the door, and as Thomas knew that the neighborhood kids had long since figured out how to gain entry into the fenced off streets where this particular home was located, he smiled to himself as he imagined with what ease this small boy maneuvered around all of the expensive devices that were in place to keep him out, and sent him on his way. He read in the paper about another attack by some Israeli's on some Palestinian's, or else about some Palestinian's on some Israeli's, it's hard to remember which,

and instantly sank into a dull delirium. "Is there nothing left to give us hope?" he thought to himself as he threw the paper in the trash and went out. He found himself at the public library reading Guy de Maupassant's "Une Vie", and then at a local bar.

His friend Elijah would show up shortly after his arrival at the bar, and the two would sit together drinking and talking. Almost instantly Elijah could see that something was the wrong with his friend, and so he inquired thusly, "Is something the matter? You have not been yourself these past few days, is it about school?"

"Oh no, that is not what's bothering me at all. I know it was the right decision."

"What is it then?" Eli asked of his friend with much sincerity.

Thomas, seeing this sincerity and not wishing him to worry for his sake, responded, "Do not be worried by my troubles, for they are ones you cannot help me with."

"Is it the woman?"

Thomas was absolutely overcome with several different emotions upon hearing his friend's question, having no idea his dear friend knew anything of the woman he was beginning to believe existed only in his mind. He quickly gathered his wits together however, perceiving the possibility of his friend knowing this mysterious woman, and inquired of him, "The woman? What woman? Do you know her?"

"I do not know her, but I know what happened. My friend from work was there and told me the whole story. He told me how you looked at her, and about your frustration at seeing her get hit. But do not worry over such things." And then after a pause, "There was nothing you could have done. It was not your affair."

Taking his friend's consoling words like small daggers to his heart, not being able to forgive himself for his cowardice before so helpless a creature as she, he swore at that moment that he would not let her down again, and that he would save her from that wretch of a man. This oath he took to himself that day, it was not to stop the pain he felt at not helping her then, although it did help that cause too, but it was because when he first looked into her eyes, he knew that something had changed forever inside him. He could not tell what the change was, only that she had caused it, and that he would never again be the same. Eli, mistaking the pain in Tom's eyes for anger, thought his friend was upset with him for bringing the woman up, and so apologized. Thomas assured him this was not the case.

"I am not angered, on the contrary, I am glad, for you have put my mind at ease. I was beginning to believe myself insane, but now I know the woman is real."

"You are not insane Thomas, only smitten."

"No, it is more than that. I cannot describe my feelings for her, not even to myself."

Eli, realizing the enormity of his friend's grief, but still wanting to help him, said to Thomas, "I am afraid you were right when you said I cannot help you, but I do know one way to help ease your pain." As he said this, he ordered another round of drinks, and Thomas was thankful to him. The drinks came, and Elijah quoted from "Une Vie", not knowing that Thomas had just read it.

"The heart has mysteries that no arguments can solve."

Thomas smiled again, only this time it was the smile of a man who is in much pain, but who got caught off guard. They continued talking of trivial matters as you do with a stranger or to a close friend when you have something heavy weighing on your mind and you just want some company, until our young friend departed from Elijah feeling unable to be without her another moment.

He went to the only place he knew to look for her, and that was the place of both of their despairs, the bar where she was hit, and where he showed himself a coward. He made his way through the smoke and cheer to a dark corner that because it was elevated a few feet above the rest of the room by three or four steps meant he could see her clearly if she came. After several beers and a short chat with the waiter, the woman and the man came into the bar. Immediately recognizing the woman, Thomas followed them with his eyes to a small table at the far end of the room. The bar was packed with people celebrating the end of the work week, and so he had to stand in order to see them better. As he did this, he was seized from behind by his friend Elijah, who had followed him in order to prevent him from doing anything foolish which he ought not to be doing.

"What do you plan on doing here?" he said as he glanced in the direction of the woman.

Thomas answered with the simplicity of a child, "Only what is necessary."

Thomas saw the man yelling at her and so quickly made his way toward her so as to be near her in case she needed him. As he was about halfway to her, he was grabbed again from behind by his friend, and seeing the balding man stop cursing her he let himself be stopped for a moment.

Elijah was now shouting at him, "What the hell do you think you're going to do?"

"Stop her from ever feeling pain again," he answered calmly, as that was all that he wanted. Bewildered, his friend could only comment, "You are such a peaceful man, yet what rages burn in you this night."

Thomas, trying to explain things to his friend, began to show his passion. "The rage of a man trying to fulfill his destiny drives me my friend, for she is my destiny of splendor and I am hers. It is the fate of time to bring our souls together, and it cannot be stopped. We are meant to be as one." And he pointed to the woman at the table, and his friend withdrew his grip, and turning, he saw the wretched man strike the woman a blow, and he ran to her in order to protect her.

And when he arrived by her side, and threw the man off of her, he saw a scar on her head where she had been hit, and the scar on her head was weeping, and he saw it, and he reached a hand to stop the tears, and in him was much pain for

her. But before he could heal her, the man got up from where he had thrown him and hit him hard in the back of the head with a glass bottle. He felt his head open up from the blow, and could feel the blood running down his neck and onto his back, but he did not falter in his assisting of this angelic woman, for he knew it was he who must save her. And so he turned around quickly, stumbling only slightly from the effects of the blow to the back of his skull, and he delivered himself several hard and swift blows to the face of this wretched man until the man had fallen and lay still, his face dripping blood slowly from his nose, lip, and eyebrow. He turned from the unconscious man and walked towards the angel who lay paralyzed with fear where the man's blows had sent her. As he bent downward to check on her with the kindness and care of a saint the outside world ceased to exist to him. His life, his soul, his entire self was absorbed in only the woman before him. He wanted only to please her and for her to look kindly on him. Indeed, he did not even notice the reactions of the other patrons of the establishment as they shouted and pointed, but focused instead all his attentions on her.

But when he extended his hands to her, hands both strong and saintly, fragile and fearless, which wanted only to console and to comfort, she pulled back from him. The terror in her eyes as she looked at the hands that reached out to her, our young friend would forget not. The fears of a lifetime shone through those angelic eyes, those eyes that now saw a beast before them. But was he a beast? Those eyes, those pale and frail blue eyes of hers screamed yes, and he could not

help but believe them. He would have believed anything that they said to him. And so thinking himself a beast, for what man would bring such terror to such an innocent and lovely creature as she, he let his feelings overwhelm him as he turned and let her be, believing that that was what she wanted.

And so he turned and walked away from her, slowly and not without much grief. It was a death walk out onto the lonely streets, which were now empty but for one or two persons. But he saw them not, but only the darkness of the night, the hollow darkness, which penetrated him from all sides. And he wept the tears of a lonely and wretched man, alone and empty on this sorry Earth of ours. And he was haunted by those eyes, by the pain he saw inside them. "What a wretch I am. What a miserable wretch of a man," he mumbled aloud to the uncaring night. "How I have caused her such suffering."

He found himself moments later on the old McCloud Bridge looking down at the Mississippi River so calm and peaceful beneath him. He wanted to embrace it, to feel its serenity, but more so he wanted it to embrace him. Looking up now, drawn by some force to do so, a bright moon met his gaze, and smiled at him. He smiled back, and it pointed to a shooting star, and so he made a wish, not to himself, but aloud, so the moon, the stars, the sky, but also her, could hear.

"Let her be safe, and let her be happy. That's all, safe and happy."

And as he spoke these words he no longer saw the darkness of the night, but the brightness and the beauty. And what made everything more beautiful to him was that he saw her in the moon and in the stars and felt her even in the air that he

breathed. And he drank her up like wine, and was intoxicated by her powers over him as he reached his apartment fresh and anew. Once there he lay on his couch, letting his mind wander and his soul rejoice. He was like a child laying there, with all the feelings that come from said innocence of adolescence. And he thought of her, like he would do so often in the days to come, and he fell asleep to the sweet dreams of peace, happiness, and above all love, for he was in love with her.

CHAPTER TWO

When he reached his hands to her, Rosemary wanted to take them, to let her self be pulled up from her spot on the floor, but she was unable. She had suffered much at the hands of men, especially the one who was now lying across from her. She had been in love with him at one time, but her love had been extinguished gradually over time by his blows upon her spirit, and his attitude towards her. He was wealthy, and she wasn't, and he used his wealth against her. To him she was just another one of his possessions, to be treated and handled as he willed. Not at first however, but only gradually as she became more and more dependent upon him. At first he was the dream of every young girl come to life, a somewhat handsome man, wealthy, and seemingly in love with her. She was poor, and one of those types of woman who believe they need a man in order to survive life's many obstacles. When she met him she was in dire straits, having just returned to her small town after a failed attempt at escape. She had left with the same intention any caged animal has when their door is left open, simply to run as fast and as far away as possible.

Her window of opportunity came in the guise of a scholarship she had received for tennis at a distant university for women. She was not an exceptional athlete, her younger sister was the athlete of the family, but for some reason tennis came easy to her. The day the letter came in the mail she was ecstatic. She danced around her room with her two younger sisters with

a joy she had never known before. She thought of all the things she would finally get to see outside her small town that up until that point had seemed to exist in only the books that she read. She also thought of the boys who she would meet, and of the boy, the boy who would sweep her off of her feet, also like from her books. It was truly a picture perfect family scene, the three beautiful sisters laughing and dancing and talking of all the things her future might bring her.

I would not like to give the reader a false impression of this complicated woman, however, so I will attempt to correct any mistakes I might have made in describing her so far. Even though she had received this scholarship for tennis, she was not at all like your typical female athlete. She was not muscular or even strong looking, but looked dainty and fragile. Her physical body was not weakly mind you, she had a beautiful womanly shape, but it was just that, womanly. She was very feminine, not only in appearance, but in her likes and dislikes as well. In fact, it was many a boy who upon seeing her, felt compelled to offer her his assistance, whether it be in carrying her books, helping her off with her coat, or simply blocking the wind from blowing too strongly against her feminine frame. In short, she had the physical makeup of a woman who could make even the boldest and strongest of men become soft spoken and gentle around her lest they break her with their rugged ways. As for her likes and dislikes, she was the kind of girl most fathers dream of their daughters being. As a youth she loved dressing

up in her mother's clothes, playing with dolls, and all the other such things that small boys make fun of until they reach that age where girls cease to be ignored and start to be noticed. And she was noticed early and often. As she grew older, she started to notice the boys also, and she began to do things in order to be noticed back, although she was so pretty that she could have done nothing and would have been noticed no less. But like many young woman, she could not believe this latter statement, and so she began among other things, to go to tanning, shop for clothes with her sisters and friends, and wear perfumes and lotions that overwhelmed the senses of the different young men with desire for her.

She was picky when it came to the young gentleman who came calling, dismissing many of them until one finally caught her eye. He was rough, but she saw in him a timid side that fascinated her, as it appeared she was the only one who could bring it out in him. He got into trouble often around the small town, and was known by many to be corrupt. She thought the same as many women like her that she could change him, make him better than he was before he had met her. After many such attempts however, she finally had to give up, as he would always return to his old ways. She hated to leave him as to her it was a sort of failure, as she believed that if she would only have done something differently than maybe she could have saved him. Her mistake lay in the fact that men like him cannot be changed, and trying only makes things worse. Of course the men always make an attempt, and even

succeed temporarily, but only because they become so transfixed by the beauty of the woman who would dare to see beauty in them, and who would dare believe in them, that they want with all their might to justify her faith in them. But they can never believe in themselves as the other does. In fact, after trying and failing so often, they feel worse than they did before they ever met the beautiful woman, as if their failure proves to them they are unworthy of her kindness, and somehow in their failure she is made less beautiful, somehow flawed by her mistake in their character. And this they do not want, for they want her to stay in the elevated spot where they first viewed her, and not be cast down to the place where they are, so they do the only thing they feel they can, give up completely until she does the same. This particular man gave up by being intimate with another woman whom Rosemary knew. It was the wrong way for him to end things, but so was she in her views of him. And so this is what caused the end of her first relationship, and which happened mere months before she received her scholarship. And although this was not completely devastating to her, it did cause much sadness and ill feeling, but the excitement of her new life to be was what really weighed on her mind during this time.

I have stated earlier that her attempt at flight from the cage of this small town was a failure, and her return to it was the condition in which she met the abusive man, but I will wait to reveal the specifics of this until later on in this story, as it plays a major part in what is to happen to our young friend.

Instead, I will jump ahead to the weeks prior to Thomas seeing her at the bar for the first time, and what led to him meeting her again, just days after he had failed to rescue her with his outstretched hand. Rosemary had been living with the man in a house owned by his father, a wealthy lawyer from the city. Her mother had fallen ill, and her help was needed back home in Farmington. She did not want to leave the city, but especially the man, as she felt it would hurt their relationship even more than his recent abuse of her, which up until this point had been merely verbal. But for some strange reason unknown to her, he encouraged her departure, and said it would be good for her to be back home with her family which he knew she dearly missed. Despite his reasoning, with which she partially agreed, she feared the real reason why he wanted her to leave. She thought about how he did not act at all like he would miss her, not even a little, but on the contrary kept asking her of her plans about leaving. She became confused, and wanted to stay to figure out why he was acting so, but her mother needed her, and so she finally left to be by her side, although inwardly she ached at the man's lack of emotion that should have accompanied her departure.

She called him often, whenever she had a moment to herself, but she soon discovered that he was rarely home. When she did finally get a hold of him he told her that he had been working late or was out with friends, a reasonable enough excuse, but somehow seemingly less so by the way in which he told her. He always seemed to hesitate before answering her, and when she would inquire

as to what he did with his friends, not so much because she didn't trust him, but because she was curious about his life, as anyone who is in love is, he would hurriedly change the subject or else not answer her at all. She began to become worried that she was losing him, and as I have stated already she was the kind of woman who felt she needed a man, and so this was especially troubling to her. You see, despite the fact that men desired her wherever she went, she did not believe that she was beautiful. Maybe it was because in her small town almost all of her friends were already married and had kids, and she was not, and so she felt there must be something wrong with her. She had thought once, a few years back, that she was going to marry this very man when she had become with child, but he had refused to do the honorable thing. She could not in her innocence understand why he would demand that she get an abortion since he not only had more than enough money through his family and their connections, but also because he was older than she, thirty-one to be exact. She figured that he was at that age where he would want to settle down and wed, but he was vehement in his decision that she not keep the child. And so she did what he desired, as he had already controlled most if not all of her decisions. It hurt her greatly, but she figured they would one day marry, and that her being only twenty-two she would have plenty of time to have children. And now, what was to happen to her if he abandoned her, and where was she to go? She decided that she had better return to the city for a visit, as her mother was doing much better. It would be a surprise, and they would get to spend the weekend together. She planned the

whole thing out, from what dress she would wear to what they would do. It seemed at the time like a good enough idea, as she knew from their previous conversation that he was off of work all weekend and that he had no plans of his own.

She made sure he would be home at the time of her arrival by telling him that she would call him at exactly seven-thirty, and to make sure he was there as she wouldn't be able to talk to him again until perhaps Sunday. He agreed that he would wait by the phone, and so she began making all the minor arrangements. She got her nails done, and afterwards went to the store with her sister for some new makeup and shoes. She had thought also about getting her hair done, but knowing the shoes would be expensive decided against this last luxury. The whole day she imagined the surprised look on his face when he would see her, and how he would grab her and hold her closely as he kissed her forehead like he did whenever he was excited.

The following morning, the day she was to leave, she received a strange phone call that would change forever the romantic picture that she had painted for herself. It was a call from one of her girlfriends who had asked if Daman, the man whom she was going to see, had gotten a new car. She told her friend that he had not, and then inquired, "Why do you ask?"

Her friend answered, "Because the last few nights when I was coming home from work I saw a black Ford in the driveway and I just assumed it must be his." Rosemary was quiet for a while, trying to figure out which of Daman's friends

drove a black Ford, but knew of none. She tried to remember what he had told her he was doing all week, and she remembered that he had told her he was working overtime. "Are you sure it was his house?" she asked believing her friend must be mistaken.

"I'm positive. As a matter of fact it looked like Daisy's car." Upon hearing these last words from her friend, Rosemary began to shake. Daisy was one of her close friends, and the idea of her and Daman being together made her physically ill. She had to call him and find out if it was true.

"Well I don't know. He hasn't bought any car as far as I know," she put in quickly so as to make it sound to her friend as if she was not worried, and then she made up an excuse about how she had to leave. Hanging up, she wondered to herself if this girl knew already that it was Daisy's car and was secretly laughing at her. Her mind then wandered to the tragic thought of what if it was true.

She tried to call Daman after she had gotten off of the phone with her friend, but he was not at home. She paced the floor of the room frantically, thinking of why Daisy might have been there, or whom else the car might have belong to, while in the back of her mind she wondered what she would do if indeed her worst fears proved true. She couldn't or wouldn't believe that he had been cheating on her, especially with her good friend, and so she decided to carry on with her trip back to the city as if nothing had happened, telling herself that the girl was mistaken and that no car was parked outside.

As she was turning the corner to where his house was after her long journey,

she looked quickly at the driveway to see if the car was there, and not seeing it, she smiled to herself, as it was to her a confirmation of his innocence. She entered the house without knocking, and when he saw her he looked scared for a moment, but only briefly so that she soon forgot it, and then he grabbed her and kissed her forehead just like she had imagined he would.

She felt relief at this, and so waited to ask him about the car lest she be wrong and he get angered with her.

"What on earth are you doing here? I thought you were going to be staying another week?"

She smiled, and told him that she could not spend another night without him, and so had come for the weekend to be with him. She went on to explain all of her plans about how long she would be in the city and how she would probably be coming back from her parents a day or two early as her mother was doing much better. Being in his arms made her forget about the car as she felt the comfort of his body pressed against hers. He too would become moved by their closeness, and in so being, take her into the bedroom. After they had revealed their passions each to the other, she decided to ask him about the car as she was sure he couldn't possibly be mad at her after the intimacy they had just shared. She was also sure that there was a logical explanation for it, and she just wanted to hear it so that they could laugh at her silliness when afterward she would tell him what she had thought when she first heard.

He did not answer her however at all like she had expected, but on the

contrary became defensive at once. "What! Who told you that? This is exactly the kind of thing you do that irritates me to no end." As he said these last words he got up from his place on the bed and began to put on his pants. Rosemary held her hands out to him as she begged him not be angry with her, while she also tried to explain to him that she was only asking. He would not take her outstretched hands or listen to her, but grabbed his shirt and walked into the bathroom, slamming the door behind him. Rosemary forgot entirely that he had never answered her question as to whose car it was or why it was in his driveway and began to weep. She felt as if she had done something wrong, and was trying to figure out how to make it better.

As he came out from the bathroom fully dressed Rosemary was standing before him, naked. She was trying to talk to him, to calm him down so they could talk, but he walked by her without hearing and left through the front door. She would dress quickly, and then follow him in her car to a bar down the street. The scene which was to follow was the one in which our young friend first saw her, where the man struck her a blow across the face that shattered her plans of a happy visit. Afterward, when the horrible scene was over, and Thomas and the couple were each at their respective homes, our young friend was lying still in his bed, completely lost in the soft light that he saw come forth from behind the eyes of the woman, while the giver of the light was lying awake next to the sleeping man who would have extinguished the flame with his fist were it not for the strength of the thousand suns which gave it its power. Daman had apologized for

hitting her, and gave her some such reason that he believed excused his actions, and she had believed him, not because it was true, but because she had to, lest the light grow dimmer.

The man would treat her kindly the whole of the next day, while she, doing her part to smooth things over between them would not bring up the car again. Whether it was because he was thirsty or because he needed the drink to help ease his conscience, the man suggested the next evening that the two go back to the same bar where he had hit her. Rosemary did not want to go as she was embarrassed about what had happened and did not want to face anyone who might have seen the incident, but seeing that he wanted to go, she submitted. As they were walking out the door the phone rang, and she went to answer it in case it was news from home about her mother. "Just let it ring," he told her roughly, as if he was afraid of who it might be, but when she told him that it might be her mother and looked at him with her eyes that were shining brightly, he could not resist them, and as if to spite this lack of restraint in himself that he saw as a weakness, he said coldly to her, "Fine, answer it."

"It will only take a minute," she said over her shoulder as she ran to the phone. She answered the phone with the gentlest of voices in that special way that she had, as if she were singing hello to the caller, when the person on the other end answered her hello with a hesitant, "Is Daman home?"

"Who is calling?" she asked as the female voice sounded vaguely familiar but was unmemorable. There was a short silence and then the phone went dead. As

soon as the caller hung up she recognized the voice as belonging to her friend Daisy, but did not mention it to Daman who perhaps sensed who it was and so said in a sweet voice so as to make himself appear less guilty, "Hurry up honey, I want to stop on the way and buy you a present." She closed her eyes for a moment before turning around to face him, in an attempt to stop the tears and keep the light inside her lit, and then turned to him with a smile that did well to reveal her inner feelings and said laughingly, "They hung up. I guess it was a wrong number."

As they drove slowly along the busy street he kept looking at her from out of the corner of his eye in the hopes of discovering from her manner if it had been whom he thought, but her emotions were hidden deep inside herself and so were not revealed to him. He stopped by a jewelry store on the way to the bar and bought her a present as he had promised, and afterward felt that he had fairly compensated for his indiscretions. He thought she was admiring the watch when they had gotten to the bar as she kept looking down at it, but the whole time she was thinking of the phone call, and the car parked in his drive. After one drink, which she drank rather quickly, and which startled him, as she was not much of a drinker, she brought up the phone call. She would probably not have mentioned it till later when she had more time to go over in her head all the different evidence for and against his being a cheater, but she had begun to feel the effects of the liquor and so mentioned it now. What followed her questioning of the man about the separate incidents the reader is well aware, as that was when our young

friend extended his hand toward her and she was scared to take it, recalling the violence that only moments before they had inflicted.

But that was not the last time our young friend and this woman were to see each other, as the next Saturday was to bring them together again. As for what Thomas had been doing from the time he had left the bridge until the day I am to speak of, his life was really rather uneventful and so not worth mentioning. I will say that he thought of Rosemary often, and believed deep inside himself that the day would come when he would see her again. That was one of the things that the moon showed him that evening when it smiled down upon him, that it was the destiny of time to unite him with his one true love, and that it could not be stopped. As for her, Rosemary had gathered enough strength the following day to leave his house and return home. She had told him that she had talked to her mother and that she was needed at home as her father was helpless in such matters. He let her go not because he felt compassion for her, but because he had planned on seeing Daisy that night, and didn't want to cancel his date with her. The next few days leading up to that Saturday they talked on the phone several times. He finally admitted once it became apparent that he could deceive her no longer that he had indeed been dating her friend Daisy, but when she implored him to end the relationship he refused. He told her that if she wanted, he would see her also, and he believed in his mind he was making a concession to her. Arrogantly, he thought that she would accept his offer, as he felt like she could not survive without him, and would get eaten alive by the cruel world without

him to act as shield for her. He also knew that she needed money, and that she had none, and so he believed that with this financial hold on her there would be nothing she could do but to agree. In other words he was a shrewd businessman, and felt he was proposing a fair deal that would benefit them both, him more so of course. What she did surprised not only him, but her also, as neither believed that she had the strength in her. She told him the following, "You must be kidding me? Do you truly believe I would accept your offer? That says more about what you think of me than the deed itself." She fiercely continued on, telling him to go to hell, and that she never wanted to see him again.

CHAPTER THREE

As fate would have it our young friend was walking home from a friend's house when he saw Rosemary approaching him from the corner of the block. She appeared to him not to be walking, but rather floating in the air like a leaf in the wind, as her dress fluttered all around her with each step that she took. Her hair, shining golden under the light of the sun, repeatedly fell from around her ear where she had placed it and in front of her face where it covered her eyes like a pyramid covers a tomb. Thomas stopped walking as soon as he recognized her, which was instantly, and admired the image before him. She had moved out of Daman's home and into an apartment not too far from the one where Thomas lived as soon as her mother had recovered from her illness. Her thoughts were on the cruelty of man as regards woman, and especially the man Daman to this woman Rosemary. She was thinking of how badly he had treated her, but also of what she was going to do now. She was scared and alone, and did not know if she could survive life in this state of utter abandonment and despair.

Thomas was thinking only of her, and her image was inside him, as much a part of his being as was his blood which was racing through his body as she approached the spot where he was. She did not seem to notice nor recognize him as she came within a few steps of his motionless body. Just as she was right next to him so that he could smell her female fragrance like a rose and could have touched her petals with his outstretched hand he said to her, "Are

you alright?" She turned, faced him, looked around her to make certain that he was addressing her, and not recognizing him said in an almost whisper, "Pardon me?"

He answered her, "I just want to know if you are alright. I've been worried about you."

As he said this to her, his arm raised instinctively to feel the softness of her petals, but he caught himself before he touched her. She now knew him, and instantly became embarrassed for reasons unbeknownst to her. Perhaps it was because she saw in his eyes his favor of her, and was feeling the embarrassment that always comes when one knows that they are loved by another before they are ever told with words. Whatever the reason, she was embarrassed, and looking down shyly, said to him, "I am fine, thank you," and then added as her eyes were brought back up to his, "I've left him." He was also embarrassed, but not as she, for his embarrassment lie in her eyes which were cast upon him, and which he felt were too sweet and lovely to be viewing him. "I'm glad" he heard himself say before he could prevent the words from coming out. She smiled softly at his embarrassment that she could see in his face and manners, and said, "So am I," so as to help take some of it away. He looked up from the ground and back into her eyes, and his look was one of thanks. She liked his timidity as it seemed to her to give her power over him, and she could not remember a time when she had had power over a man, for it was Daman and her father who had had power over

her.

"Would you care to go and get something to eat?" he asked her bluntly, adding shyly, "If you're not too busy of course." He asked this of her because he mistook her fondness at her role reversal for a fondness of him. She answered yes, but it should be noted that it was not simply the strength she suddenly felt over him that made her answer in the affirmative, but that there was also an attraction to him, which was physical, and which also helped his cause. They would spend the next several hours talking and eating at a restaurant located just across the street, each one wondering all the while if the moment were real, and they were truly sitting across from the other. As the minutes passed our young friend started to become more comfortable with her, so that by the time the food had arrived they were talking like old friends. They had discovered early something they both shared, and that something was their sense of humor. After discovering this, a bond between them seemed to form, and they each joked with the other until Rosemary had to leave him lest she be late for a previous engagement. Before she was to leave however, another date was set for the following night.

As she waved goodbye to him at the door to her apartment after he had walked her home she noticed that she no longer felt the loneliness that she had felt earlier inside her. She had even decided as she walked the stairs to her second floor apartment that she could see her self with this man. This was a very important realization to her as she was afraid of being alone and wanted to marry soon so as

to ensure she would never be. It also made her feel good to think that Daman would be aggravated to know that she had found someone else so quickly, and that the someone was the very man from the bar.

As Thomas waved goodbye to her, he thought that of all the woman he had ever known, he liked her best. He thought this because not only was she physically beautiful beyond words, there was no mistaking that, but because she was also funny and sweet and intelligent. As a matter of fact, he could not think of one thing that he did not like about her. This did not prevent, however, an eerie feeling from arising in him as he thought that no one could be as perfect as she appeared to be. And so he wondered if perhaps there was not something that she was hiding from him, something that was ugly and black and twisted. He wondered what it could possibly be, but as he tried to imagine all of the different possibilities he kept seeing her as she was at the table during their meal, and he could not imagine anything but beauty and light residing in her. As soon as he dismissed this doubt of her as coming from a kind of shadow inside himself that was playing tricks on him, he began to give himself up to her completely. "She's the one. She's the one," he kept repeating to himself, and he imagined himself spending the rest of his life with her.

He imagined a day in the future when they would have a child, a daughter that would look just like her. He imagined the three of them getting ready in the morning, husband and wife for work, the little girl for school. He imagined himself saying to them, "Why don't we all skip today and go to the zoo instead!"

He imagined the two girls looks of astonishment at his suggestion, and their reply, "We can't do that." And then his reply to theirs, "Why not? It'll be fun! Let's do it!" And he'd go on to explain to them all of the fun they would be sure to have in such a way that they'd have no choice but to agree with him, and they would. He imagined all the excitement that would follow in the house as they made all the necessary calls and arrangements. He imagined his daughter running into her bedroom to change out of her school uniform and into her play clothes and the look he'd give Rosemary as the little girl left, as well as the one she'd return to him. He imagined how he'd get up from the kitchen table and make his way to her. How he'd embrace her in his hungry arms as he whispered into her ear that he loved her. How she'd respond playfully, "You're crazy, you know that?" And he'd respond, "Crazy in love with you." And she'd smile, and he'd smile, and then they'd kiss. "Every day will be like that with her" he thought as he had now reached his home and was lying in his bed. And as his eyes closed slowly, and he slipped off into sleep, his mouth was seen to be mouthing the words, "She's the one. She's the one." And his former doubts of her were gone from him forever.

The place they had arranged to meet was some distance from either of their homes as Rosemary had lied to him when he asked her where she lived. She had done this because even though he was treating her so kindly and sincerely, she felt that for her own safety she should be careful around him. This was hard for her to do, as he was a true gentleman, and put himself completely at her disposal.

Indeed, there was not one door that did not get opened for her, and when she had commented at the restaurant on a dish that she had always wanted to try, he had ordered it for them while she was using the restroom. Yet nothing he did, no matter how sincere, could cause her to drop her guard, for the other man had also been kind to her at first. And besides, had she not seen this very man become violent before her, even if it was in order "to save her" as he had said. So, he was deceived into believing that she lived on the other side of the city, and in so believing had arranged for them to meet in that part in order to make things easier on her. When he inquired as to whose apartment he had walked her the day before, she had told him a friends, and her lies to him had begun to mount. In his kindness, he had suggested picking her up at her apartment, but seeing as she did not live in that area, this was an impossibility and so she made up an excuse as to why it would be better to just meet at the restaurant. Our young friend was simply excited about getting to be with her again, and so he did not notice when she told these lies to him. In her defense, she did feel badly for doing this, but it was something that she was used to as her sisters and her mother often lied to her father. They did this because he was a man with a temper, and they were trying to prevent him from getting angry, for when he did he usually did things that he regretted. Of course his rage never was directed at his dear daughters or his wife, but more often than not at other men. He had been known once or twice to stop talking to one of his daughters for months on end when he did not approve of something they did, usually involving some boy they were dating or something of

that sort, but the mother usually got him to come around after a while and stop his stubborn ways. So you see, the four women would only lie to him when they knew his reaction would be one of rage, and only when the punishment would not have met the crime. For his part, he more times than not suspected something was the matter with all their whispers and secret glances, but sometimes a man would rather play ignorant than hear the truth when he knows the latter is something he does not want to hear. And besides that, he trusted and admired his wife in her handling of such affairs, and knew her advice to be not only sound, but also usually correct. He was glad he had married her, and was proud of each of his daughters, although sometimes they became too much for him to bear, and he wished that he had had a son. But then one of them would look up at him with her blue eyes, and he would become glad that he had not. Again, I tell the reader about this part of Rosemary's family life to show that her lies to Thomas were not something that she gave much thought to, as she felt it natural for a woman to keep secrets from a man.

The next day found our young friend as happy as he had ever remembered being as he awoke to thoughts of her. "Rosemary", he kept repeating to himself as he had finally found out her name and liked the way it sounded on his lips. After a few minutes the phone would ring, and answering it, he would discover that it was the woman of his desires. He would talk shyly to her, even though they had gotten along so well the day before, because he knew he liked her so much and he feared that he might say or do something of which she disapproved,

and so lose his destiny forever. Indeed, he had started to re-evaluate his life according to the approval he received from her. If she had told him that she disapproved of something that he formerly had approved of, he would always change his opinion of it so that, if it did not entirely meet her own, his attitude was much closer to hers than it had been before. She also talked shyly to Thomas, but it was because of the way the other man had treated her, and the way it subsequently destroyed her view of herself as having any worth, that made her do so. You see it was because of this that no matter what Thomas did or said to her she could not believe him fully, always feeling that he could not possibly love her as much as his eyes showed her they did.

Rosemary had called him to ask if it was alright if she brought her friend on their date as she was in town and had nothing to do. This was not entirely untrue, as her friend had just arrived that morning, but the reason she gave him was false. Rosemary had asked her friend to come with her because she was uncomfortable being around anyone new, and had not yet begun to truly trust our young friend. Thomas did not care who went along, so long as she was there, and so he told her it would not be a problem at all with him, and asked her if he should not bring one of his friends also. Rosemary simply loved this idea as she was one of those woman who loves playing match maker, and the idea of her friend getting set up with one of Thomas' friends especially appealed to her. You see, if she could set these two up, then whenever her and Thomas went out they could go with these other two so that she would never feel uncomfortable while

they were getting to know each other. Thomas could tell by her voice that she was pleased with his suggestion, and the next few minutes would be a discussion of whom he should bring. Rosemary wanted a perfect match, and so she was telling Thomas about her friends likes and dislikes, as well as her basic physical features so that Thomas could pick the friend of his who was the most like her. Thomas was not nearly as excited as Rosemary, in fact he hated setting people up, for if anything went wrong between the couple, even years down the line, he felt he would be partially to blame. It was the same reason he had never voted. He felt that if he voted for a candidate, and that person afterward did something ghastly, he was inevitably to blame because he had helped put them in office. It was not the most optimistic of views, but when it came to politics especially, he had not the most favorable of outlooks. As for love, his general rule was to let Cupid be Cupid, especially since he had such a hard time finding someone for himself. But since Rosemary was so excited, Thomas could not help being a little as well. As she went on to explain all about her friend, Thomas decided upon bringing his friend Elijah. This was not necessarily because of all of his friends he would have been the best match, but more so because of all of his friends he would have wanted him to be there most, although there were a few things she told him about her friend that made Thomas think they might just end up liking each other. "I'm pretty sure he's not doing anything this evening, but I'll have to call to make sure. As soon as I find out one way or the other I'll let you know," he said to her, and then added, "I'm really looking forward to seeing

you again." Rosemary smiled upon hearing these last words and responded faintly with a shy voice, "Me too." Afterward, they would each begin preparing for the date.

The two friends, Elijah and Thomas, would arrive at the bar before the two women, and would order two beers for their wait. Elijah was excited for Thomas, as he knew from their previous conversations about the woman the extent of Thomas' feelings for her. Thomas was less uncomfortable because of the presence of his dear friend, and was trying to make Elijah so as well.

"Don't worry, this isn't a date. Her friend just happens to be in town, and so she asked if it was alright if she brought her."

His friend responded, "It's comments like that that scare me even more. It's the kind of thing you always hear before you're led to the slaughter. I'll be cordial, but if the two of you start making subtle comments as to how good of a couple we'd make I swear I'll leave."

Thomas laughed as he knew how much Elijah hated situations like the one he now found himself a part of, and he again tried to comfort his friend, only this time with something he knew would work better than words. "I tell you what, if at the end of the date, er, night," Elijah gave his friend a startled glance not without a little vexation, and Thomas hurriedly went on, "you haven't had a good time, I'll take you to the bars, on me, to make up for it." His friend smiled, and added humorously, "And dinner too." They both laughed at this latter comment, and so the deal was agreed upon.

Our young friend had placed himself facing the door so as to see Rosemary as soon as she arrived, which she now did. He got up from the bar and walked towards her with a smile on his face that said, "Your presence makes me happy, but at the same time extremely nervous." Rosemary smiled back as if she heard what he said and was thinking the same thing. Introductions were made, and then Thomas ordered drinks for the two women. The initial conversation was between Rosemary and Thomas alone, as their two friends were a little uneasy as is expected between two strangers. Thomas, noticing this at once, and wanting everyone to get along, quickly brought the two into the conversation. He did this naturally as he was the kind of man who doesn't like to see someone feel an outsider, but also because he knew by making her friend happy he would also be making Rosemary happy, and this was especially important to him. After a few drinks everyone was more comfortable around one another so that there was little awkwardness between any of them. One of the woman, it is hard to remember which, suggested going to hear some live music. Seeing as the two women were unfamiliar with the city, Thomas suggested a bar downtown that always had good blues or jazz music, and shortly thereafter it was agreed upon that they should go.

They arrived at the bar, and as expected a band was playing within. There was a woman on stage singing a Billie Holiday song, and the four of them made their way to one of the only vacant tables toward the back of the room. Thomas and Elijah left the two ladies for a moment to talk amongst themselves as they

ordered drinks at the bar, while the women were grateful for the opportunity to talk privately about the evening so far. They both agreed that they were having a pleasant time, and Rosemary inevitably asked her friend if she liked Elijah. Her friend blushed, and said he seemed to be a nice man, and that she found him to be both intelligent and funny, but that she was "kind of dating someone" at present. Rosemary responded, "Well, just see what happens. You might find that you like this one better. And besides, how would he ever know." The women laughed at this latter comment as the two men arrived unaware of what had been said and feeling uneasy as they couldn't help but feel they were somehow involved in the joke. "What did we miss?" Thomas asked as he handed the women their drinks. "Oh nothing," Rosemary answered as she smiled at her friend, "we were just talking." Thomas began talking to Rosemary about literature, while Elijah and the other talked about music. The whole time our young friend kept thinking to himself how beautiful she was, and how much he desired to kiss her. Indeed, he had wanted to kiss her from the moment he first saw her, and as he had gotten to know her more this impulse of his increased.

After a short while he desired to be near her, to feel the softness of her body pressed against his, to smell of her fragrance as her entire being penetrated his flesh and made its way into his soul. But how was he to make this possible? By now the woman were engaged in conversation about old friends while Thomas talked to his friend about his desires for this fantastic woman. He asked Eli if he should ask her to dance, hoping in his heart that Elijah would agree it was a good

idea, but also knowing that he himself was not the best of dancers, and usually only danced after he had had a few beers to give him courage. He did not so much want to know of his friend's opinion on the matter, but more so just wanted him to agree with him. In other words, he had already made up his mind he was going to ask her, and merely wanted to hear someone else confirm the idea to be a good one. His friend sensed this, and smiling, gave him what he was wanting by agreeing that he should do so.

He now glanced nervously at the woman of his desires, hoping that she would let him know with one of those looks of hers that the moment was now, and that he should ask her. She did not give him the look he was waiting for, however, as she could not discern from his expression what it was he was wanting of her. Instead, the look in his eyes confused her, as she could not hear what it was they were asking. And so there was a moment of awkwardness as both Rosemary and Thomas looked into each other's eyes, each trying to understand the other. Then, as Rosemary could not see, she began to wonder if the reason for this lay in herself, another consequence of the mistreatment of her by her past boyfriend. And so she began to do something she often did when confronted with what she considered her own inadequacies, she began to try to cover them up, to disguise them, to make them less noticeable. She did this by going through her purse with the intent of applying more makeup. As I have stated earlier, Rosemary was a most beautiful woman, and so did not have to wear any makeup at all and would have still been lovelier than all the rest, but she could not see this in

herself, and always felt she needed to rely on artificial means to make her so. Indeed, a few weeks before when one of her co-workers who was jealous of her beauty had asked her why she wore so much makeup at work, she answered passively that it was because unlike most woman, she needed to. And she believed her words to be true.

But Thomas did not believe them, and so when she was going through her purse he stood up from the table where they were and he took the purse from her hands, and she looked up at him bewildered. And he saw that look in her that she could not see in herself, that look of beauty, and he handed her purse to her friend asking her if she would mind holding it. But he did not await a reply, but grabbed Rosemary by the hand, and not looking back at her he walked her to the dance floor, nervous, but knowing that he was about to be nearer to her. And they began to dance together, Rosemary shyly whispering to him that she was not much of a dancer. But Thomas could have cared less if she could dance or not, he only cared that he was beside her, and that he could feel her radiance deep within himself. But because of their mutual nervousness, they each avoided making eye contact with the other, but danced with their heads bent downward as if each was paying homage to the other. But Thomas could feel the rays of her womanhood shooting forth from within her female frame, could feel them deep inside himself, igniting his body with the celestial light from whence they had years upon years ago come. And he was drawn even closer to her by the beams of her heavenly body, and so he moved closer still to her.

And watching them dance from the other end of the bar, Elijah and the other could almost see the rays of light guiding their bodies as they moved rhythmically to the beats of the music. But Thomas and Rosemary could not see it, they could only feel it, as they let themselves go completely to the moment, and it was almost to them as if they were no longer in their bodies at all, but were merely observers like their two friends. And then, as if the gods themselves had seen, and had felt a desire that the two might become even closer to the place where they were, and where the two had long ago come, the song ended and a slower one began, entangling the couple even more, one inside the other.

Thomas' nervousness had since vanished, having lost itself somewhere in the look that she now gave. It was a look of innocence and purity, and it made her even more beautiful to him than she had previously been. As they danced he looked deep into her eyes, trying to see inside her soul, to know everything that they had ever desired and feared, so that he could better serve her. She on the other hand had not lost her nervousness, for it had been so long since she had been so close to another man that she could not help but feel uneasy by the closeness that they now shared. But also, there was a desire similar to his, to be nearer to him, to let her self go to her fear with wide opened arms, and let whatever was to come to her come without a struggle. And there was also a feeling of safety as he held her in his arms, his hands resting gently around her waist. He was leading her along to the rhythm of the music, and she was letting herself be led by him, and hoping he would lead her far away from her present

reality, where men were not to be trusted, and would inevitably harm you along the way. And he did indeed lead her far away as their bodies pressed against each other, swaying to the music as if it were the wind and they were leaves, blowing gracefully in the air by forces greater than themselves. And she looked up at him, as if to make sure she was not imagining the whole thing, and just when her eyes met his he could not help but to kiss her. He saw her look up at him with that special way she had, and gently pulling her by the waist closer to him he leaned forward into her and pressed his lips ever so gently against hers. And still the wind carried them, only now higher and higher to a place where they had never been, to the summits of heaven and beyond, a place that had before been reserved for the gods alone.

After a while the music had ceased, the band had stopped playing, and the dance floor had been cleared by all except the two leaves that were still blowing in another world, another world where nothing else mattered but the beating of hearts, the beating of hearts one pressed against the other. And Thomas felt deep inside himself that had he but one moment to live out forever, that it would be that moment, his lips pressed against the woman he loved, their bodies woven together. And in a way his wish was proven true, as the moment was without time, without space, without any and all known laws of science. But as what happens at all such moments, they cannot last forever, for man was not made to reach such heights, and so must inevitably return to the land of the living, where the flaws of man prevents perfection from residing. And so they returned to the

Earth where they noticed for the first time that the music had ceased, that the band had stopped playing, and that the dance floor had been cleared. And yet they were too much in awe at where they had been led by the other to be embarrassed, and so merely held hands and looked at each other, their eyes smiling back and forth.

At last they were approached by their two friends who reluctantly made their way to them, as they were afraid of disturbing the moment. But Thomas and Rosemary were too happy to be upset with anyone, and so joyfully met their friend's intrusion. They were told that it was now 3 A.M., and that the bar was closing. They now looked at each other sadly, for they knew they must now separate from each other for the remainder of the evening, but Thomas did not mind as much as Rosemary, for he knew that sleep would bring her back to him, and that he would be dancing with his Rose the rest of the night and well into the morrow. And separating from each other with a soft but meaningful kiss he proved himself correct as he dreamed of nothing but her the entire time he slept.

Upon awaking, Thomas' first thoughts were of the woman, and of the beauty that resides within her. He noticed that his lips were mouthing her name as if it were a song that he could not help but to sing, as if it was the refrain of the song he heard the birds singing outside his open window. He liked the way her name sounded as it came forth from behind his lips and into the air around him, the air that smelled of the scent of her perfume. At first he could not discover why he could smell her still, and he looked around the room anxiously, wondering if he

were not still dreaming and she would appear before him like a vision of the Madonna. But after a short while, when he had fully waked, he knew that she could not be there still with him, and that she was at home in her bed, asleep. He thought of what she must look like now, at that moment, her eyes closed peacefully, dreaming.

He wondered if he were in her dreams like she was in his, and he imagined himself in her room with her now, and what he would do if indeed he could be there. He imagined how he would walk ever so quietly to the edge of her bed so as not to wake her. How he would look down on her as she slept, and how she would look so peaceful lying there, like a napping child. He imagined her hair partially covering her face, and how he would bend over her, wiping the hair from her face and behind her ears so that he could see her clearer. He imagined how it would feel, how it must be like a man feels when he has searched and searched and finally found the treasure that he has spent his lifetime in finding, and how the exact moment when he pulls back the lid that is withholding the contents within, and it is finally and forever removed, he breathes a sigh of relief that his journey has ended. And he felt in himself that sigh of relief, and wondered to where did it go.

"To heaven of course," came his response.

And he imagined again the treasure that he had unearthed, and as if caressing each individual jewel, he imagined himself touching her, but gently, so as not to disturb her sleep. He would touch first her ears as he placed her hair behind them

and ran his fingers down her lobes and onto her neck. Ah, her neck, a treasure in itself. Next he would caress her cheeks with the back of his fingers, feeling himself unworthy to touch such a delicate and highly prized thing with his opened hand. He imagined the sensation he would feel as he raised his other hand to her face and held her head in his hands, his fingertips touching the back of her head, just behind her ears. How he would hold her head there for a long time, studying each and every feature of her face as if he were painting her portrait. How only after he could close his eyes and still recall each and every feature of her face would he let it go, and even then, only after he had kissed her soft and sumptuous lips. Ah, her lips, he would spend such a long time studying her lips, would hold his own close to hers, but not touching, only close enough so that he could breathe the air that came from within her and make it his own. Taking slow and deep breathes, bringing each and every one deep down into his soul.

And as he imagined this he smelled again her perfume in the air around him and looking about the room to see from where it was coming, he saw the shirt he was wearing the night before and he got up from his bed and made his way across the room and to the place where it lay on the floor where he had placed it. And had someone been watching him at that instant, they would have sworn that he was not a waking man, but was walking in his sleep, such was the intoxicating effect her scent had upon him. And when he finally got to where his shirt lay, he picked it up ever so gently, as if it were she herself, and bringing it to his face, he smelled of her female scent for a long while, his eyes closed, and his soul

rejoicing.

He would call her afterward, and try to explain to her the sensations he had had upon rising, but he was unable to give his feelings a voice. As he tried however, she seemed to understand him, and she smiled to herself upon hearing his attempts at explanation. She thought it "cute" as she liked to say, and was beginning to give way to her previous concerns regarding him. She still felt deep within that perhaps he was like the other, but yet there was something about him that made her feel that he was indeed different. What it was about him she could still not say, only that she felt it, and was beginning to listen. They scheduled another date for the following day, just the two of them, and from the time the conversation was ended until the time they met, Thomas thought of nothing but the date that was to be.

However, for Rosemary, there was to be a moment some two or three hours after their conversation together that would draw her mind away from our young friend. It was a call that was to come from the other man. She had not heard from him since she had told him it was over and that she no longer was interested in seeing him, but she had heard from mutual friends back home that he had been left by Daisy. There were rumors that he had been harassing the girl at work with phone calls and flowers, but that she wanted nothing whatever to do with him. She knew that he was only calling her now because Daisy would no longer talk to him, but she felt that they had been through so much of which the reader is aware of only a little, that she owed it to him to at least hear what it was that he had to

say. At first he seemed sincere as he explained to her that he had made a mistake, and that it was really she that he had loved all along. But after he had spoken these words, and she had told him that she had already met someone whom she liked, his mood quickly changed. He began to call her names, and tell her that she owed him. She listened to his insulting words and wanted to hang up on him, but she couldn't, for she felt somehow that his words were true, and that she did somehow owe him. The longer she listened to him, he began to realize that she was beginning to believe him, and so he continued on less gruffly. He began to tell her of all the things he had done for her in the past, and to tell her of the things he missed about her. He told her that the thing he missed most about her was taking care of her. This last statement of his was true, but it was not true in the sense that Rosemary thought it was. She thought that this was a confirmation of his love for her, as he had previously rarely been there for her when she needed him, unless what she needed was something that could be paid for by him. Indeed, when she had had a flat tire early on in their relationship and she had called him to ask if he could come and meet her to help her fix it, he had told her that he was busy and that she should call her father. But now, he was saying that it was things like that that he missed, and that he was now ready "to take care of her." She could not help but believe him, as she wanted to believe him. However, his meaning behind these words was not exactly as Rosemary had taken them as I have already stated. What he meant was that he missed having someone dependent upon him, someone that he could own like one of his

many other possessions. Had he felt otherwise he would never have made her feel that she owed him, for if you love someone and you do something for them because you love them you do not expect repayment in return. The fact that he made her feel as if she did means that she meant nothing more to him than any other of the things that he owned. She was merely a piece of jewelry to him that he could treat and handle as he willed. But Rosemary could not see this, and so she agreed to meet him that night so that they could talk.

CHAPTER FOUR

I previously told the reader that I would wait to tell the specifics of Rosemary's return from college until a later time in the story where it would be more appropriate, and that time is now. The reason I place it here is because I don't want the reader to draw false conclusions about this woman who had captured our young friend's heart. Instead, I want the reader to have a better understanding of why Rosemary, a most beautiful woman both body as well as spirit, would not have simply refused to listen to the words of the abusive man, and never have set up a time in which to meet him. I must admit that the circumstances surrounding the events I am to speak of are shrouded in mystery as they say, and that even I, the author of this tale, am not sure as to all that happened in those two and one half years Rosemary spent away from the small town of Farmington. Indeed, if one were to ask around the small town what it was exactly that brought her home so prematurely, one would probably hear as many explanations as people asked. And considering that I have never been one to believe in rumors and heresay, I will not pass on any of the stories I have heard. Instead, I will begin with what we already know, which is that Rosemary had received a scholarship for tennis, and with that scholarship her dreams of getting out of that small town in which she grew up in seemed ready to be fulfilled. I will also like to note again that Rosemary's dream of "getting out" also included a man, but not just any man, but "the man", the one who she would spend the rest of her life with. But I

fear my reader is saying that they already knew that, and would like to know what it is that they do not. But as much as I would like to tell them, there are probably only six or seven people who actually know what happened at the end of those two and one half years, and four of those are members of her immediate family, and they aren't telling. And so I will have to ask the reader to allow me to explain the events that happened after she had returned home, so that even if we will never know exactly what happened while she was gone, we will know the great effects it had upon her life and ultimately Thomas'.

I will begin by saying that upon her arrival home, or I should say back in Farmington, for she was not allowed to return to her home because her father would not allow it, her life was seemingly to her completely and utterly in disorder. Yes, that's right, whatever the event or events that had transpired while she was away had caused her father to refuse to speak to her, and to throw her out of his home. Her mother and sisters on the contrary, talked to her quite often, but seeing as the latter had little if no control over the former whenever he had committed himself to things of such magnitude, this meant little, for they had to sneak around him in order to speak to their beloved Rosemary. The mother would help out as best she could, meeting her daughter at odd locations with a few dollars here or there, but she could not do for Rosemary what was truly needed, which was persuading the father to forgive his eldest daughter. And after a week or two, when Rosemary had

exhausted all her means and could no longer rely on her friends for places to stay she seemed even more in dismay. Indeed, she had even begun talking to her ex-boyfriend whom she had broken up with months before she had originally left because she knew that if need be she could stay with him. This would not have been good for her as not only were they not compatible, but he had begun to become even more corrupt than when she had previously known him.

But suddenly just as things looked their darkest, things began to turn around for Rosemary as her friend Daisy told her of an older man whom she knew who owned a bar and who might give her a job. She called the man up that very day and explained that she was looking for work without going into all the details of her dilemma. He told her to stop by the bar so he could interview her, but in reality he knew that he did not need any more help, but only wanted to see what she looked like. You see, he had heard the desperateness in her voice, and recognizing the name she gave (It was a small town and so he had heard of her) he wondered if she might be easy prey for his lusts. She arrived at the scheduled time, and after they talked for a brief while and when he told her he might need someone in a week or two (He was lying, for he knew he wouldn't hire her, but seeing as he was attracted to her, he wanted her to believe he would), she broke down. It's unclear why it was at that moment that she lost control of her emotions and told him all, perhaps it was because she was vulnerable and he seemed so sincere to her, but she did. And there she was, beautiful Rosemary

crying uncontrollably, and what man could see her thus, and not do everything within his power to stop the tears from flowing. Not even this man, who if the reader has not already guessed, was the abusive one from earlier in our story. He still did not give her the job, however, for even though he was of the species of man, he was not our best specimen. Instead, he offered her a room in his home, which had been given to him by his father. He offered this to her for two reasons, only one being because he felt for this young soul, the other being a far less noble intention. Poor Rosemary never realized this latter reason, but believed him to be a purely noble man, similar to the one's from the books she had read, the Prince Charming type who sweeps in and rescues the damsel just when she is at her lowest. It would only be a matter of weeks before the two would be dating.

I want the reader to realize that this is only a glimpse into why Rosemary had decided to meet this man after he had called her, and that there were many other things which happened that will be explained in due time which also influenced her decision. Another part of this, which I have touched on briefly, but that I want to reemphasize is that he told her constantly of all the things he did for her, whether it be allowing her to move into his home, or using his money to buy things for her which she desperately needed. And again I will say that he told her this because like many an abusive man, he wanted her to think that she was helpless without him, and that he had made her what she was. Indeed, these were some of the exact words which he would use when talking to her at the bar where they were to meet, the meeting of which our young friend Thomas was

completely unaware. In fact, he was unaware of all that we have just spoken of.

Thomas had called Rosemary again later in the day, just an hour or so before her scheduled date with this other man, because he wanted to tell her again of how good a time he had had, but also because he simply wanted to hear again the song her voice sang to him. Rosemary had not been thinking at all about our young friend, but had been thinking only about the other, and what he might say to her, and so when Thomas called her she became confused. At first she did not recognize his voice, and then when she finally did, she began to feel guilty. And this feeling of guilt she blamed on Thomas, for in her mind it was he who had caused it, and besides, she reasoned to herself, "I have done nothing." Thomas could sense from the sound of her singing that she was not pleased with him for calling, and he began to regret having called, thinking that perhaps he was being too aggressive with her. And so he apologized to her, but his apology only made her angrier, for it made her feel even more like she was wrong for deceiving him. And so in order to stop the loathsome feeling from rising within her, she made up an excuse as to why she had to end the conversation with him. The excuse was to be that she was going to dinner with some of her friends from Farmington who happened to be in town. Thomas asked her innocently why she had not mentioned it before now, merely making small talk with her, and again she lied to him. He sensed that she was not being truthful with him, but when a man loves a woman he often times will not believe anything, not even his own inner voice, unless it is talking highly of that which he adores. And such

was the case with our dear young friend.

The conversation having ended, Rosemary began preparing for the date as she tried not to think of Thomas, but only of the other and what he might have to say to her. She imagined all kinds of scenarios, from him groveling on his knees before her as he begged her forgiveness, to him wooing her with all the softness that women sometimes like to see in their men. She did not know what she would say to him, but knew only that she would listen, for she reasoned, "we had been together for two years, and I always thought that I would marry him." Inevitably she also thought of how she had become pregnant during their time together, and how badly she had wanted to keep the child, but how he had refused to let her. How he had demanded that she abort the baby, and how that made her feel. But this latter thought was too much for her to bear, as any woman who has ever had to get an abortion can attest, and so she forced herself to think of other things. And so she began to think of all the "good" times they had had during their two years together. Of all the kind words that he had uttered to her, and then as every abused woman does, she began to wonder if it was not she who had caused the abuse by him. As she did this she thought of all the things she had done wrong throughout their relationship and began to wonder if he wasn't justified in his treatment of her. And it was to be to these thoughts that she prepared herself for their meeting, putting on the outfit that was his favorite.

They met at the designated place, a seafood restaurant that was one of her

favorites, and the man instantly began to apologize to her, saying that he had made a mistake but that he was now prepared to be with her forever. As he said "forever", Rosemary could not help hearing her inner voice say to her, "he is only saying this because he is getting older and is afraid of being alone." But just as Thomas had not listened to his inner voice, Rosemary did not do so either, and so he went on, sensing that she was wanting to believe him. He began to tell her how his first mistake was not marrying her when she had become pregnant, but quickly seeing the pain in her eyes when he mentioned her pregnancy, he quickly went on, telling her what he knew she had wanted to hear for years. He began to tell her how he was ready at last to be married, and how he wanted to settle down with her and raise a family, and how there was no one in the world he wanted to be with more than her. And when she asked him about Daisy, whom she knew he would still be with if her friend had not broken up with him, he told her that that too was a mistake, and that he knew after a few days that he could never love her as he did Rosemary. The words were well rehearsed, but seeing as he was a good actor, Rosemary believed in their sincerity. I doubt if deep down she really believed them, as a matter of fact I know she didn't, but she had wanted to believe them for so long that she let herself believe them. At this point she would have believed anything he said to her, and so she did.

The end of the evening would find them back at his apartment, as he had told her he had something there that he wanted to give to her. As she sat there

on the couch waiting for him to return from his bedroom with the gift, she thought about our young friend Thomas for the first time since their conversation earlier in the day. She thought of how Daman had only said that he would treat her kindly, and how Thomas had actually done so. She thought about all of the things the latter had done for her since they had first met, and how he did so naturally, as if he could not have acted any differently, and she began to regret not only having come to this man's home, but even meeting him at all.

"Perhaps Thomas is my true destiny?" she thought, and then the horror of the idea penetrated her being, "My God, what am I doing?"

She became completely confused as she tried to answer this question that her mind posed, and getting up from the couch she decided it best if she left so that she could think this all through alone. But just at that instant the man returned with the present, and sensing from her facial expression, which revealed the inner torment of her soul, he approached her slowly. He knew from the look that resided on her face that he had better act quickly, and so he taking one last step so that he was now standing directly in front of her, he knelt down on the floor before her and opened the box which held a ring inside.

"This engagement ring belonged to my grandmother" he said to her, "it was given to her by my grandfather, and has been in my family ever since. Before my grandmother died two years ago she gave it to me and made me promise that I would give it to the woman I was to marry. They were married for forty two

years, and I remember her saying 'I hope it brings to you as much happiness as it brought to me all these years.'"

And then seeing Rosemary's facial expression change he added, "As soon as she gave it to me I knew that it would be you who would wear it for the next forty two years."

Upon hearing these words Rosemary became even more confused, but seeing the beauty of the ring, and hearing the words that she had never before heard coming from this man, she allowed herself to take the ring. There was still a part of her that said, "Do not take this ring, for if you do, your fate will be decided, and you are still unsure of his sincerity." And then it said to her, "And what about Thomas?" But as her mind posed this last question Daman stood up so that his face was inches away from hers, and he leaned forward to kiss her. And closing her eyes so that the voices, but also this entire scene that now presented itself to her, this scene that would forever decide her future, would stop if only for a moment. But only the voices stopped while the scene continued, continued with her kissing him back.

She would awake the next day knowing that she and Thomas were to do something that night, and wondering to herself whatever was she to do. Daman would grab her hand and stare at the ring that adorned her finger, and say to her, "This rings looks so pretty on you", and she would answer him with downcast eyes that never once looked up from the ring, "Yes, it is a very pretty ring." They would lay there for a few minutes looking at the ring and then the man would

again lean forward, kissing her. Afterward he would tell her that he had to get ready to go to the bar to take care of some business, and Rosemary would be happy for the time to be away from him so that she could work things out in her head. As he drove her to her car neither talked much, him because he was thinking about the work he had to do that day, and her because she was thinking about Thomas.

As Rosemary arrived home Thomas was just then arriving at the store. He had decided to cook her dinner, and was buying the necessary ingredients. He had remembered how she had told him she liked seafood, and so he was preparing to make her a meal of shrimp linguini. He had never made it before, but he had gotten the recipe from his friend Elijah who was a chef for a time at an Italian restaurant in the city. He also bought some Amaretto and mix as she had tried an Amaretto Sour the other day with him and had told him how much she liked it. He knew from their previous conversations with her that she was quite particular when it came to food and drink, and so whenever she told him of something she liked he was quick to remember it so that he could make her happier by serving her the right things. He also did something that Rosemary was to find remarkable, something that the other had never done, nor would have ever thought of doing. It was not a gift of high monetary value like the ring that was given to her, but it was to her just as valuable, for it was one of those "little things" which mean so much to the receiver for they show the thoughtfulness of the giver. It was a brush. But what was the significance of this particular item, and

why was Rosemary to value it so highly? The reason was because the last night Rosemary had spent the night at Thomas' apartment she had forgotten hers, and so had to use his comb. She had complained that she couldn't brush her hair with a comb, and was upset with herself for forgetting, since she would have to go out in public with her hair all knotted. When she had complained about it she did so almost as if she were talking out loud to herself, and so hardly thought that our young friend would even have noticed, let alone do something about it. Our young friend did notice, however, and since he had also noticed that she often forgot things, he knew there would come a day that she would forget her brush again, and seeing that it meant so much to her to have her hair properly brushed before she went out in public, he wanted to make sure that she should never suffer even this minor inconvenience if he could help it. The ironic thing about this whole business with the brush is that it was because of her low self esteem, which partially was due to the treatment of this other man, that Rosemary felt she had to look just right whenever she was to go out in public. You see, this other man always wanted her to look just right, so that when they were seen together in public others would notice the beauty of the woman on his arm, as if she were an expensive watch he wore on his wrist. And after a time it got to be that even when he was not around she felt this desire to look her best.

But let us not get to into this rather unfortunate obsession that afflicts many such woman today, but instead return to our young friend Thomas and his evening he was to spend with this woman Rosemary. Thomas had bought the

above mentioned items, and had returned to his apartment where he was preparing the meal for his Rose. She would arrive a few minutes late, but before he had finished cooking the meal. He would fix her a drink, the Amoretto Sour he had bought for her, and she would smile out loud at his gesture, as she was both surprised as well as pleased that he had done such a thing for her.

Eventually the food would be set out on the table, along with candles, while Frank Sinatra could be heard playing on the record player in the background. They would talk of all kinds of things, as Thomas tried to get the woman to open up before him so that he could know even more about this most amazing woman. Rosemary would not mention however anything about the other man whom she had seen, and who had proposed to her. After the meal Rosemary had wanted to go for a drive, and so Thomas took her out in his car, showing her his old neighborhood.

He drove her to the Catholic school where he had gone as a small boy, and by the railroad tracks where he and his friends used to hang out, and to countless other places of his past as he told her all kinds of stories of his childhood. As he drove her through one of the richer neighborhoods he pointed out all the houses where he and his friends used to pool hop, and the paths they would take when inevitably the owners would chase them away. He told her about the creeks they would walk through which ran all through the county blocks, and how his older brothers friend had gotten paid for mowing one particular lawn with bottle rockets, and how they would all then buy some from him and walk the streets

and creeks shooting them off at houses and such until the cops would come and chase them away. He shared with her his fond memories of these events, and even tried explaining to her the thrill that would accompany the encounters with the police. How they were no match for him and his comrades, as they knew every possible route escape through every backyard and parking lot. He drove her by the grocery store where years later they would ask the local college students to buy them beer and then to the spots where they would go to drink and carouse.

As he shared these experiences with her, Rosemary looked into his eyes and could see in them the youth who had done all these things, and it was as if he was that boy at this very moment, and she was living all these experiences all over again with him. She smiled to herself as she saw that boy sitting beside her, and she could not help but feel attracted to him. He asked her about how her childhood was, and what she did as a young girl. She laughed and said that she was not so nearly as "wild" as he, and that since she grew up in a small town there was not a whole lot to do. He asked her if one day she could take him to her town and show him all the places where she had hung out, and tell him of all the things she had done. She agreed, but warned him that they would not be as interesting as his. As she said this to him he only smiled, and when she asked him why he was smiling he said to her, "Rosemary, of course they'll be interesting, as they are the places where you grew up. They are a part of you, and so I want to see them so that I can better

see you. And I am certain that they will be some of the most beautiful places that I will ever see." Upon hearing this Rosemary lowered her head as Thomas' words had made their way into her soul and made it blush. The evening would now be getting late and so Thomas would take her back to his apartment, where the two of them would spend the night together. The next morning Thomas would show her the brush he had bought for her and ask if it was the "right one" as they had had several different styles. She smiled, and said, "It's perfect. Thank You." And she knew then that she must not marry the other man, but must continue on with this one, to see wherever it was the path with him was to lead.

When she arrived home she called the other man whom she knew would not be there to answer her call, but would be at the bar working. But that's exactly how she wanted it, for she did not trust herself to go through with it if he was there to plead with her not to. For she knew he still held a strong hold on her, and that she was not yet strong enough to pull away from him without the help of another like Thomas. And so she left a message on his answering machine telling him that it was over, and that she wished to never see him again. It was a difficult thing for her to do, made only slightly easier by the fact that he was not able to bully her into changing her decision. After she left the message she would call her sister to talk to her about her predicament, and to get her advice. She liked to talk to her sister as they had a lot in common, and also because she knew her sister would understand her. It was

something she had been doing for a long time, and something that would always help in making her feel better. As a matter of fact, the author could not even begin to count the number of times that the two had shared such difficult moments in their young lives together, and how the familiar voice of a dear relative had helped in making life's obstacles less difficult for them.

CHAPTER FIVE

The following evening would find our young friend with Rosemary again, as they had decided to spend the night together watching a movie. The movie was one of Tom's favorites, and as it was one that Rosemary had never seen before he was adamant that the two should watch it together. "I cannot believe you have never seen 'Casablanca'" he would say to her, adding, "It has to be one of the most romantic movies ever made." He would go on to tell her about how good an actor he thought Humphrey Bogart was, and how he had remembered watching old black and white movies on late night television when he was a teenager. She would admit that she had seen very few if any of these "classics" as Thomas loved to refer to these movies, but that she had heard a lot of good things about this particular one. She would arrive at his house and he would open a bottle of wine, but not before he kissed her warmly, and told her, "You look absolutely beautiful this evening." She would smile shyly upon hearing these words, but would not believe him, for she had not spent very much time in getting ready as she had been out with her sister most of the day shopping and discussing what she was to do about the other if he called her back. And it was because she had not spent this extra time in fixing herself up that she did not believe our young friend, for as I have stated several times, she thought she needed this extra time in order to make herself beautiful. Thomas became a little frustrated upon seeing in her expression that she did not believe him, because he knew that he

was telling her the truth. Also, because he could not understand why she could not believe him, as every man is frustrated when he tells a woman how beautiful she is and she looks at him with distrusting eyes, and so he think to himself, "If she cannot trust me when I tell her so simple a thing as how beautiful I find her, then how can I get her to trust me when I tell her of things of much more importance?" You see, Thomas had no idea the extent of the mental abuse that this most beautiful woman had endured at the hands of men, and so he did not understand that what she needed most from him was time and patience in order to heal and become again in her eyes the woman that our young friend saw whenever he looked upon her. But the frustration would quickly vanish as Rosemary, being thankful for the comment anyway, even if she did not believe it, touched him on his thigh and smiled. Perhaps she did this because she saw his frustration and was trying to soothe him, or perhaps she did it subconsciously, as the woman inside her who he saw, had wanted to thank him.

They would spend an enjoyable evening together drinking wine and lying in each other's warm embrace throughout the duration of the movie. In the end Rosemary had stated that she liked the film, and this pleased Thomas, not because he wanted her to like it for his sake, but because he wanted her to always enjoy herself in his presence. And so when she said that he had "made a good choice" it made him glad. They would spend the next few hours sitting on the sofa talking about all kinds of things until their passions

for each other would overflow, and end up spilling all around them. After a time the phone would ring, and Rosemary would ask why he was not answering it. He would say to her, "Because I am with you, and so whoever it is can wait." She would not understand this, as she was the type of person who would always answer the phone no matter what time it was, or what she was doing, and so the fact that the phone kept ringing was beginning to unnerve her. Thomas on the other hand, was the type of person who frequently would let the machine pick up if he was not in the mood for talking, and so he found her excitement more than mildly amusing.

Suddenly she would jump up and shout, "Oh my God!" which would completely startle our young friend.

"What's the matter?" he would ask her alarmed.

"It's Daman. I heard his voice on the answering machine."

Thomas would get up to answer, but Rosemary would beg of him, "Please don't answer it. Please don't answer it."

He would relent only after he saw her face imploring him not to, and ask of her, "What would he be calling here for?"

"I don't know," she would say almost shaking.

Thomas would search for answers in her eyes, but they were revealing nothing to him. "Have you talked to him lately?" he would ask her, and although she wanted to tell him the truth about everything, how she had seen him and been with him, but had afterward decided that she loved Thomas and so broke it off

with this other, she couldn't bring herself to do it, and so she lied.

"No, I haven't talked to him since I told him it was over after I had found out he was cheating on me." Instead of asking her more questions, which is what our young friend was wanting to do, he would simply hold her, for he could tell by her expression that that was what she needed from him.

"Everything's going to be alright. I promise", he would say to her, and she would squeeze him harder, as the strength of his embrace seemed to her to confirm his words. But everything was not to be alright, as the next week would prove to be a very difficult one for both Rosemary as well as Thomas.

The following afternoon, after Rosemary had left Thomas' apartment in the morning, he would get a phone call from her. She would be in hysterics, and he would begin to try to calm her, for he could not make out what it was she was trying to say to him. He would eventually succeed in doing so however, and she would proceed to tell him what had happened once she had arrived home. She would tell him how just a minute or so after she had walked into her apartment there was a knock at the door, and a man she knew to be one of Daman's acquaintances was standing there. She told him how this man had told her he had a message from Daman. She told him how this message was a warning to stop seeing Thomas, or else, in the man's words, "You and your boyfriend will be sorry." She told him how she answered this threat with the question, "What do you mean by that?" And the response was, "I'm a lawyer, and I represent a lot of people who have done bad things. If I see you in the next couple of days with

this guy then I'm supposed to send one of them to pay a visit to the two of you."

She went on to tell him how this guy had then told her all kinds of things about Thomas, from the fact that he had only recently moved into his apartment, to how he had recently dropped out of school, to what time he usually came and went. Thomas was as bewildered by all this as Rosemary, but he knew that he must calm her, "Don't worry about it, they're not going to do anything. Everything's going to be alright. I promise."

But Rosemary would not believe him, "They're going to kill us! Don't you understand! I don't want to be killed!" And again, Thomas would try to calm her, but Rosemary would continue on with her hysterics, "He's having me followed. He knew when I had came over to your apartment, and when I had left, and I had just gotten home when he knocked on the door. He had probably followed me the whole way. And he said he had taken pictures of you and given them to Daman."

Thomas could not believe the extent of this man's depravity, and how someone could do all of this in the name of love, as that was the reason Daman had given her, that it was because he loved her that he did all of this. What was truly sad, however, was that there was a part of Rosemary that thought perhaps he really did love her, for why else would he do all this she thought. But if my dear reader had seen the look of terror on poor Rosemary's face, had held her in their arms why she cried at the absolute cruelty of it all, then they would know that this man couldn't possibly have loved her, for a man in love could never have

even contemplated causing such harm to such a lovely creature as she.

But he did cause her harm, caused her harm throughout the rest of the week and beyond, and so this man Daman didn't love this woman Rosemary, for if he did he would never have done what he did to her. And it did not stop, but gradually got worse, as her mom would call her the next day telling her how Daman had called the house the last few nights at a very late hour saying, among other things, "Do you know your daughter is at that guys house right now, and do you know what they're doing?" He would then go on to explain to her in detail sexual acts that he believed she was performing on him.

The poor mother was beside herself as she tried to keep these calls from her husband, lest he do something drastic, and end up getting himself into serious trouble as a result. When Thomas heard these things he too wanted to do something drastic, but Rosemary pleaded with him not to, for she knew that nothing good could come out of such actions. It was hard for Thomas to not do anything, and he even considered contacting the police, for he could sense things were getting absurdly bizarre. Also, he could see how it was upsetting the woman he loved, and so he wanted to defend her against this man, to stop her from feeling pain as a result of these actions. But when he saw her face, which pleaded with him to do nothing but hold her in his comforting arms, he could not help but relent to her gaze, and so would do only what she desired of him. Rosemary would end up getting a call from Daman later in the week, and when she asked him in tears why he was doing these things to her, he told her again that

it was because he loved her, and then he would tell her that he must see her. She did not want to see him, yet she could not find the strength inside herself to refuse him, for he kept mentioning all the things he had done for her. He would tell her how she would be homeless if it was not for him, and how she owed him. Indeed, he would list all the things he had ever done for her as if he were reading them from a list that he carried around in his pocket; the tires he had bought for her car, the payments he had made on said car, each and every thing he had ever done, big and small was mentioned until Rosemary could not help but start to believe, despite everyone's objections, that maybe she did owe this horrid man.

And so despite what she knew to be the right thing to do, she would meet him at his home, and he would be gentle towards her, and this gentleness would confuse her. And sensing her confusion, he would bring up all the good times they had had in their relationship together, and conclude by telling her again how the thing he missed most about her was taking care of her. This last comment would really affect her as she suddenly began to realize the extent of her financial difficulties, and how much she needed assistance in taking care of them. She thought about Thomas, but knew that he was not rich like Daman, and so would not be able to support her. She thought about supporting herself through this difficult time, but felt that this too would be impossible, for there was just too much money needed. You see, dear reader, I forgot to inform you of a very important matter as regards Rosemary. Rosemary had gotten two speeding tickets in the last couple of weeks, and she was scared that she would get her

license taken away as a result, as this had made five in just over four months. She also knew that Thomas did not have the money nor the connections to help her in this matter, and that if she did get her license taken she would not be able to visit her family in Farmington, which she did at least twice a week, and which was very important to her. Also, her car had been acting up, and so she knew it would have to get fixed, which would not be cheap. And so all of these things began to enter her mind as she stood there listening to this man, and seeing as he was aware of these things as she had previously mentioned them to him, he began to bring them up as he explained to her how he would help her through each of them. And so at the end, when he had told her how he would solve all of her problems, and had leaned forward to kiss her forehead like he used to before, she allowed herself to be kissed by him, first on the forehead and then on the lips.

CHAPTER SIX

Thomas would not understand when his phone calls to Rosemary would go unanswered, as they had previously spoken every day, and now, it had been two whole days since he had last heard from her. He would leave messages for her, and when those would not be returned, he would write her letters, but those too, would elicit no response. And so a whole week and a half went by in which our dear young friend would not hear a word from his beloved Rosemary. He knew that this other man was somehow behind it all, and not knowing if she were safe, he decided he must track her down in order to ensure she was. He left a message on her recorder that he would be stopping by her home on the following day at an hour he knew she was usually there. But he also did something else, for he decided if this other man Daman, knew so much about him, then why should he not try to find something out about this man. And so he called his friend Elijah in order to seek his help. When his friend answered the phone, he told him all, and in telling him, his heart ached. It was difficult to repeat to his friend all that had happened, and he found himself constantly defending her actions, even though that little voice inside his head was beginning to warn him that his worst fears might be coming true, and that he was losing, if had not already lost forever, his one true love to date.

Evening came, and yet he still knew nothing, and had not heard so much as a word from Rosemary. But as he sat there on his worn couch with the one squeaky cushion, he held a piece of paper in his hand. He was drunk on

Guinness, and his thoughts were on the woman, the same as they had been since he first saw her seemingly so long ago.

"But was it not yesterday that I held her in my arms and told her that everything was going to be alright", he thought, and then, "But who is going to say such consoling words to me?"

And just as his thoughts were about to betray her, and he was starting to believe that she had run off with this other and had been unfaithful to him, he began to defend her.

"No, it is not true! She would never do such a thing!" he yelled at himself. "She is my destiny of splendor, and I am hers. We are meant to be as one", he continued on with what little hope remained inside himself.

And just then he looked down at the tiny piece of paper he had been clutching in his hand since he opened his first beer some eleven or twelve beers ago. It was the number to Daman's home, and he had been debating whether or not to call this other man in order to confront him in hopes of winning her back. Indeed, he had picked up the phone and dialed the first few digits some five times already, but always hung up before he dialed all seven as he felt that somehow by calling this man he was betraying Rosemary through his doubt, for he did not know for sure if she had abandoned him for this other. The sixth time he tried however, he succeeded, and to his absolute horror Rosemary answered the phone. He tried to speak, but was unable for some time, until he finally heard her name come forth from behind his lips, "Rosemary". He could sense the confusion and panic on the

other end of the line that his voice had brought, but just when he was about to say more to her, the line went dead. Anyone who would have happened to see him at that moment would have sworn that it was not a living man they were viewing, for all the life inside him had vanished at that instant. Indeed, the whole room seemed without life, all but for the echo that could be heard faintly bouncing off the walls of his heart and soul, "Rosemary" it said.

Devastation. What other word could I write that would more accurately describe our young friends feelings at that moment. Had he not been living for her ever since he had first encountered his destiny? Had he not been true? Had he not dreamt about her not only in slumber, but also in his waking hours? Had he not given himself completely to this woman as no man had ever given himself to another since the beginning of time? Devastation. Oh, with what cruelty did the god's mock this now withering soul. Oh, with what great cruelty did our young friend now suffer. And suffer he did, throughout the remainder of the evening and beyond.

The next afternoon as he lay in his bed dying of sorrow, he received a call from his friend Elijah. "Thomas, I have discovered some interesting news regarding Daman," his friend would say to him as Thomas would be aroused back into the land of the living not unlike what happens when a man has been sleeping for a long time, and he is quietly awakened by subtle whisperings into his ear.

"Wake up," the voice would say, "it is time."

"What? Who is this?" he would respond to the voice.

"It is I. Elijah" would come the response, "I have found something important out about Daman."

Awakened, Thomas would reply to his friend's words with enthusiasm, proving that even in dying he had not abandoned hope in his destiny, "What is it? What is it you have found out?" His friend would go on to tell him how Daman was the son of Mr. Knight, the man who had invited Thomas to his home for dinner in order to honor several young writers. He would tell him how not only Daman was supposed to be present at this affair, but also how his beloved Rose was to be there also. Thomas would quickly realize the significance of the words he had just heard, and also that if he were ever to win her back, this was to be how.

"I must go. When is the dinner?"

Worried by the emotion in his friend's voice, Elijah would respond to his question thusly, "But you can't go. You've already sent the invitation back saying you wouldn't be attending."

"It doesn't matter, I'm going," Thomas would say almost in a rage, after which Elijah could not but help tell his friend all.

"It is to be this very evening, at eight o' clock. The boy downstairs will remember which house it was." Thomas would have a thousand thoughts race across his mind at that moment, and quickly saying goodbye to his friend, would begin to address each in turn.

Our young friend had gotten the call from Elijah at approximately four o'clock, and by six he had already found out which house the dinner was to be at, informed Mr. Knight that he would be attending after all (an event that caused more than a little confusion in the Knight household, but which was ultimately accounted for by his being "one of those artist types"), borrowed a suit from his friend Eli, showered and shaved, and was sitting in his living room drinking a glass of Jamieson and trying to decide what he would say to her as he made sure not to spill anything on his friends suit.

Thomas would play over in his mind numerous different conversations and scenarios with Rosemary, all of which ended in his being reunited with her. In one, she would see him, and without his uttering a single word to her, she would run from her position beside the other man and embrace Thomas before all and everyone. Another would involve his confronting this other man, where the latter would be sent tumbling to the floor. After which he and Rosemary would exit together, hand in hand throughout eternity and forever. Still another would involve his telling her in a far off corner of the house how he forgave her all without her ever having to ask, and how he would always forgive her all. In this particular scenario, his words would so accurately detail each and every feeling in his soul that Rosemary could not help but to see him as he was standing there naked before her, and love him for his nakedness. And she would then strip naked for him, and he in turn would love her nakedness. And as he saw the two of them standing there loving each other, the church bells across the street began

to ring, signaling to him that it was now eight o'clock and was time for him to leave.

He would arrive at the party, and be greeted by the host, Mr. Knight. He would look at this man rather intently, searching his eyes for traces of his son, whom he had grown to despise. The latter would feel uncomfortable by the gaze of our young friend, but knowing nothing about Thomas' ties to his son, would be unable to decipher the look. Therefore the look only made him uncomfortable, and he thought to himself, "I want to get away from this man". And so he quickly introduced him to some of the other writers, and excused himself, saying, "Pardon me, but I must check on the refreshments. Such is the life of a host, never having time to enjoy one's own party." All of the young gentleman would laugh politely at this remark, except for Thomas, who appeared not to have heard him. The others would then begin to ask Thomas several questions about himself and his writing, and be answered by our young friend with several short and dim witted replies that led them all to believe that he couldn't possibly belong there as much as they, and so each of them stopped asking him questions altogether. This suited Thomas just fine as the reason for his aloofness was that he had been searching the room for Rosemary ever since he first walked into the main room in which everyone was gathered. As he stood amongst them looking around the room almost frantically, they began to exchange looks amongst themselves which said, "Here's a strange fellow, I hope I'm not seated next to him at dinner." Suddenly he saw her walk into the room laughing with another woman, who by

the looks of her must have been the hostess. He happened to be offered a drink at the very moment he saw her, and accepting it without looking at who was offering it to him, he made his way to the two ladies.

As he approached the two, Rosemary saw him first, and a look of panic swept across her face. The hostess, having noticed this look, searched for the cause of it, and saw our young friend approaching.

"Ah, you must be Mr. Woods. I must tell you that you caused quite a bit of commotion around here today as we were only told you'd be attending a few hours ago."

Thomas did not look at her, but kept his eyes on Rosemary, and the hostess suddenly felt that perhaps her comments had offended him, and so she added, "But we are very glad you decided to come. I've read a few of your stories, and I must say that they are superb. I especially liked the one about the two brothers."

Again, Thomas did not take his eyes from Rosemary, and so she added, "What may I ask was the inspiration behind it?"

Thomas' senses finally told him that he was being addressed by this woman, and so he reluctantly took his gaze from his beloved, and answered, "Did you say something madam?"

The hostess laughed at his rudeness, as she understood that it was the result of her beautiful companion.

"Ah, I see you have noticed our lovely Rose. I am all to happy to say that she is to be my daughter-in-law in another week."

Thomas threw such a quick and sharp look at his hostess after this latter comment that she nearly spilled her drink. But as quickly as he looked at her, he looked back at Rosemary who confirmed this woman's remarks by taking her eyes away from Thomas' view. The older woman sensed something between these two, and so took action. She took Rosemary gently by the arm and said, "If you will excuse us Mr. Woods, I see someone I would like to introduce my future daughter-in-law to." Thomas could not speak, but simply stood dumbfounded and watched the two women walk across the room, the elder looking back over her shoulder as she whispered something in Rosemary's ear.

Our young friend was absolutely devastated by the news he had just heard, so much so that he was unable to move for some time, but simply stood motionless in the exact spot where he had been told of the future wedding between the one woman he had ever loved and the deceitful man. But as he stood there repeating to himself, "It cannot be", the other man, Daman, noticed him for the first time and approached him. The latter had a look of rage on his face that was assuredly made bolder by the fact that this was his father's home, and he was surrounded by friends and family.

"What the hell do you think you're doing here," were the words that he greeted our young friend with.

Thomas looked up upon hearing the force behind these words, and seeing the man approaching him with a threatening gesture, did something quite out of his character. He began to beat the man unmercifully. The author can only guess at

what took hold of our young friend at that exact moment, I am certain it had much to do with his beloved Rosemary and the news he had just heard. Perhaps it was the result of a man discovering that his one chance at happiness is gone from him forever, and coming face to face with the cause of its failure, he becomes overwhelmed. Perhaps it was because the troubling news he had just heard made him feel as if he were losing his very life, and he was attempting to defend it with all the vigor that one does at such moments. Whatever the reason, Thomas was atop the man beating him uncontrollably with his fists as several in attendance tried to pull him away from destroying forever the man beneath him. Thomas did not hear the shouts and screams of the gentleman and ladies around him, but for two, one of which was Rosemary's.

"Stop it! Stop It!" Rosemary yelled at him as she grabbed at his fists.

What he heard next would change his life forever. They were the words of the hostess, and they were "Rosemary, be careful! The Baby!" As he heard the words spoken aloud it was as if he had just been dealt a heavy and near fatal blow.

"The baby!" What did those words mean? He stood up from atop the man, and looking at Rosemary face to face, he asked her if it were true without words, but with his eyes. Rosemary answered him also without words, but with her eyes, saying that yes it was.

He then looked around the room in a panic, as if he were looking for something or someone at which to keep himself from falling, and not seeing anything but angry faces screaming at him, he made his way for the door,

stumbling and holding out his hands as if he had been blinded by the news and were feeling his way along. As he arrived outside, he tripped down the stairs and landed on his back on the circle drive. Looking up, his eyes met the eternal eye of the moon, but before he could hear what it was it was trying to say to him, it vanished behind a long line of clouds that were blowing across the sky at a soldier's pace. But even though he could no longer see the eye, he kept looking upward as he knew it was still there, and that no matter how hard the clouds tried to curtain it from him, they would be unable to do so forever. He could see off to the right of where he knew the moon to be, a space in the clouds that was not covered, but which shown black before him. He knew also that that black stain up there in the sky was blowing in the direction of the moon's eye, and that in a few minutes of the clouds march, the moon would once again open her eye to him where once the stain had been, revealing to him all he would ever need to know. Before it did so, however, the police arrived, and he was taken away. He would sit quietly in the back of the squad car, as he knew that like the clouds, they too could not prevent the moon from speaking to him what it would, and that if it was not revealed to him this evening, than it would be tomorrow or the next, and that there was nothing anyone could do to prevent it.

CHAPTER SEVEN

But when months had passed, and he had heard neither a word from the woman nor the moon, melancholy began to sink in, and so he too began to sink. He lay in the warm water of the tub, his blank mind and eyes transfixed on the white mountains that adorned the can of beer he had just drank. He kept repeating to himself "Busch, Busch, Busch?" until he suddenly came out of his trance and began to think to himself, "What the hell does Busch mean?" His eyes scrambled frantically to try and put something with this word, to make some sort of sense of it; the shower curtain, the soap, the Thomas Wolfe book he was reading, the mirror, his face. Nothing. And then he saw it, the can of Busch he had just finished. He closed his eyes and shook his head in a show of self-hate and disgust, as he knew he was drunk again. At that moment he began to do something he hadn't done in a long time, he began to pray. In his haste he had forgotten to make the sign of the cross before he started his prayer, but even after he had remembered, he didn't correct his mistake, for he knew it didn't matter if he skipped such a minor detail, he knew God would hear his prayer regardless. He prayed to God to help him out of the dark hole he was being buried alive in, to guide him through it. He remembered the "Footsteps" parable and how the man asked God why he had abandoned him every time he was at his lowest, seeing only one set of prints on the sand at these moments instead of the usual two. God answered the man by saying that at those moments in the man's life He was carrying him. He looked around the bathroom anxiously, he

wondered if God was carrying him now. He sat there quietly thinking it over, looking around for some sign of God, and after seeing none, decided he was acting foolish. "If God was ever carrying me," he thought, "he aen't carrying me no more."

He quickly finished his bath and as he was drying himself off in front of the mirror he began to think of how long it had been since he had been to church. It had been long enough that he would feel like a stranger in the house if he were to return. He tried to remember what priest was at the church now, but his mind was a blank, for he hadn't been there since before Father Bartholomew had left a few years back. He tried to remember if any of the little kids who went to school there when he graduated were still there; Allison Buck, Pete's little brother Scottie, the Kelly boy, but he knew the last of them were long gone. He began to feel old and tired, and he began to look hard at his life. Where was he going? How was he to get there? He couldn't answer these questions because he didn't know. He only knew that he needed some kind of help to keep him going. He began to think about going to church and maybe saying a prayer or two, thinking that it might help or at least make him feel better, even if it were only from revisiting a place from his childhood. He was undecided because it had been so long. He wondered if he was even still welcome.

In the next couple of weeks he would continue his existence as normal; lonely, sad, and hollow. He would think about and would try to remember some of the passages from the Bible he had studied as a young Catholic boy learning

his religion, but he could only remember bits and pieces and nothing substantial that fed his grumbling soul. He began to make plans to visit the church, but any opportunity he had to cancel on himself, would. A few months passed before he finally got up his nerve to go, but he eventually did. He didn't really expect much, actually nothing at all, he mainly figured it couldn't hurt, although there was a part of him that secretly hoped that sitting in a pew praying to God, he would be saved from his dark existence by being reborn again for the first time in what seemed a long while.

He pulled his sweater over his head and combed his hair with his hands, as he anxiously got ready to leave. It had been a long time since he first thought about it, but he had finally decided to go. He drank his coffee slowly as his mind tried desperately to imagine what the outcome of his visit would be. "Would it even still look the same?" he thought to himself as he stared at the ring on the table his coffee had made. He stared at it for some time, thinking, until he got a rag from the sink and wiped the stain away. As he walked out of his back door he gently reached into his coat pocket and pulled out a cigarette. He shuffled through his pockets for a match, found one, raised his hands, and with one he protected the flame while the other he lit the end of his cigarette. He shook the match out with one quick movement, touched his forehead softly, then his stomach just above his belly button, and finally his left and then right shoulder. Anyone walking on the street that day probably never noticed, but his lips started to move, and he started to glance up every so often as if he were expecting to see something in the sky

above him. "Dear God", he said, "I know it has been a long time since I've talked to you, and every time I do it's usually to ask for something, but I really need your help right now. I'm falling fast Lord, please help me to do the right thing." He wiped his eyes and looked around quickly, embarrassed, he made sure no one had saw him.

As he walked the same path he had walked every day on his way to and from school he felt like a boy again. He always enjoyed the walk, and as his mind slowly brought memories from his past to his consciousness he began to call off names to himself; The Schmidt's, The Cullian's, The Verzino's... Each house he passed had a name to it, the name of a family that had lived there when he was a child. Some still did, some didn't, but that didn't matter. He looked into the windows and could see the little kids he used to play with, trapped in time by his mind he saw what could have been any of a number of days from his past. The front yards were full of activity as little girls skipped rope, fathers raked leaves, and brothers played ball. With each name he recited he began to feel peaceful, and he looked up at the sky as he had done before except he seemed to stand taller, and he said aloud to himself, "Wherever she is, please let her be safe, and let her be happy." He smiled sadly to himself upon hearing these words, and when he got to the Dryden house he glanced up at the sky again, "Please Lord," he repeated, only this time he spoke as if he were pleading. His stride looked to be a little faster after he passed the Dryden house, so that for the first time since he left his home he seemed hurried. So much so that he almost forgot to tip his

hat to an elderly woman who was walking on the far side of the street, but he remembered his manners in time, and was answered with a friendly smile and slight curtsy.

BOOK TWO

It has now been several years since we have heard from our young friend, and I am sad to say that it has taken him that long to recover from the wounds he suffered during the time of which I have just told. You see, our young friend is of a special breed that has a different sort of heart. It is one that is both pure and everlasting in its love, traits that can more often than not be a burden to those who possess them. It is called the "poet's heart", a heart which is seldom understood until it has ceased beating on this sorry Earth of ours. Thomas wandered the streets this whole time tired and beat, and hoping for a story book ending or just an ending. He was not unlike a dog that has been beaten so often and for so long that he begins to fear all hands and not just the one that has done the beating. You see, he would shrink from any woman's touch during this grueling time lest they hurt him as the other had. It was a truly hard thing to witness, yet an even harder thing to endure. He was a walking corpse, dead to the world, passionless in all he did. There were a couple of women during the years that he would start to bloom before, but alas he always wilted under the first hint of gray skies. He was a man cursed by his own heart like no other. It was to him six long years spent in a type of hell in which there appeared no escape.

Indeed, he had almost come to expect that it was his fate to spend the rest of his years in this misery of an almost forced loneliness, a loneliness forced by her or himself, or by something or someone, perhaps even from above. Over the course of the years he had started to get used to it, as a cripple learns to live

without legs. He had said so often that he wanted to marry his first love so as to never know what it was like to have loved another, but he had never thought about what was to happen if the woman he loved one day stopped loving him back. I must reiterate the fact that this man was not unintelligent, and so he knew that not all women were bad, it was just that he could not escape the evils of days long gone. As they say, there are some things that affect a man so much that only time or another woman can heal or make right what has been broken or wronged. This was such an instance that it would take both.

Had he met Violet years before would she have had the same affect upon him? Perhaps. One will never truly know for certain, but I must tell the reader now that if one could have made an impact on him she would have been the one. Such were the powers that she possessed. She had all the qualities a man wants in a woman, including those that he never knew he wanted until he saw them in her. She was the type of woman who walks the Earth perhaps once every thousand years, God's gift to the millennium. As close to Him as one could ever get. It is hard to put into words how Thomas felt when he first glimpsed her magnificence. It was obvious to any and all that she had made an impression upon him. At first it was her smile, which anyone who has ever seen it has surely fallen victim to, but then it was the rest of her. Her sheer beauty as a potent woman that has the power to both captivate and enthrall. And he drank her in like wine, becoming intoxicated by the softness of her gaze, her flesh, and her soul. And forever more he would carry that softness of hers in his

heart, like a protector.

Here I must tell something of this woman for fear the reader will not believe such a creature could exist among us, the living. For she was very much alive, and had even suffered not unlike our young friend as this short history will indeed attest. Her name was Violet as I have already stated, and she had been in love once also. She had fallen in love when she was young, and the beginning of the courtship had gone quite well for her. She had met a man whom she had believed in, who she thought she would spend the rest of her waking days beside. It was one of those relationships where two lovers meet quite by chance and even more surprising to both they begin to bond as one. He was a brutish type of man, but the type that most young women like, showing signs of tenderness when the two were alone with each other, closed off from the outside world. In other words, he was "different" when they were together in each other's warm embrace. Things went slowly at first without much pressure from either, as neither he nor she wanted anything but something casual. Then, as a few years went by they became closer, and within that closeness, inevitably they began to depend on each other more, and so the seeds of something serious began to sprout from what had once been so little. They were both adventurous types, and it was to be that very adventurousness that was to send them to New Orleans together, leaving behind friends and family in Saint Louis. It was a difficult journey, but they had each other so it was made easier by their love for one another. They

lived poorly, and had to struggle to stay where they felt they belonged, where their spirits had brought them. The bills were always paid late, and the refrigerator always empty, but when you are young and in love these minor inconveniences have a way of strengthening what it is that binds you to one another. They would always find time to go out exploring the old city and its many haunts, getting drunk on their youth and freedom as they did so. In fact, it was not uncommon to see the two lovers singing praises to Dionysus as they danced through the streets of downtown high and in good spirits.

Inevitably however, bills have to be paid and one has to eat, and so Violet took a job as an exotic dancer to assure they could do both. You see, they did not want to have to call on their parents for support, as they were too engrossed in their independence to give it up so quickly and easily. The brutish man did not object to Violet's choice of careers for two reasons, one, no man has ever told Violet what she could or couldn't do, and second, he knew the money would be good and was much needed. At first Violet did not mind the job, for it was another adventure and she liked the friendships she developed with the other dancers. You see, dancers have a special closeness that is not seen in other professions. It is a bond that I will not try to explain here, but only state that Violet felt it and was thankful for it. The girls who had been there for some time helped her along and would often take her out after work for they were all young and beautiful and had money,

a combination that has an enchantment all its own. But alas, for every good there is an equal and opposite bad, and Violet was to discover that side as well. It came in the disguise of foul smelling men whose uncaring stares and grappling grubby hands could not help one from feeling shameful and without worth. But that was part of the job that could be overlooked, or at least endured in most instances, as the dancers would support each other backstage by lowering communally those that had attempted to be the superiors. It was to be the reaction of the brute that was to cause the greatest strife to her and her newfound income.

At first he was supportive, enjoying the spoils of her wars, even finding it erotic to know that he had what so many others wanted and desired night after night, but it finally became too much for him to bear as the old green eyed monster, jealousy, reared its ugly head to him with the victim being poor Violet who had only done what she did for the two of them. It happened when they were both drunk and he accused her of misdeeds with the monster hands and when even after she had told him truthfully there was nothing to fear he relented not but became more abusive, even striking her a blow for which he quickly apologized, blaming the booze, her job, anything but himself. This also her fellow coworkers helped her with. From that day onward the bond between them had become bent but was still unbroken. She forgave him and quit her job so as to keep him happy, which is all she had really wanted all along, since she first discovered that it was he of all men whom she

loved. Things went better for a while as he got a better job himself in order to make up for the decline of income her quitting had caused. It was a job in construction, but seeing as he was not the type of man who could do this type of work for long, he began to begrudge her even this as it got harder and harder for him to wake each morning. They began to argue more than ever, and he slowly beat away at her self-esteem until she was demoralized without even realizing it had happened. There was to be a final blow he delivered that was to forever change her outlook on herself and men in general, which our young friend Thomas was going to desperately try to mend. It was a black stain on her self, that he carried too, which he would try to wash off of her. It happened on what should have been a glorious occasion for the two of them, but would end up being just for her, and even then, not without much pain of which I have just spoken. She became with child, a daughter to be named Ivy. It scared them both, but it was inside her, living, a part of them, and so she welcomed the baby with that special way reserved to women alone, the closest thing to Him, the creator of worlds. The brutish man was not so godlike in his attitude towards the unborn child and in fact did the unthinkable. He abandoned both mother and child in a city not of her birth, alone and in despair with this now heavy burden. She wept for days, this journey having ended, and returned to father and mother betrayed by her beloved in a most horrible way. It was to be the turning point for this remarkable woman whose spirit was forever scarred, but would not die. She would return to Saint Louis where she would have the child, a beautiful

healthy baby girl.

Her daughter would become the center of her life from the moment of the child's birth, but she would meet another man, an old friend, and the two would start a relationship together. Unfortunately for Violet, this relationship would not be much better than the previous one. What would make it even harder for her, was the fact that when she had decided after a couple of years it wasn't good for her nor her child, her child had already become attached to this new man, even going so far as to consider him her "daddy". Violet would stay with the man perhaps longer than she should have because of this bond between her daughter and this man, but eventually would know that the relationship must be ended. Whether or not her initial choice of him had anything to do with her condition after the horrific ending of her previous suitor the author knows not. I can say that the new man was similar to the former in that he was not worthy of her, but perhaps she did not think she herself was worthy of anything more. Whatever the reason she welcomed him into her heart, and again was left in the end with nothing but her own strength as a potent and powerful woman. What had really decided her mind about the separation was his drinking and gambling of which he was good at neither, often passing out on the couch after losing his money to his bets. She had known deep inside that she deserved better, but that part of herself was hidden so far down inside she couldn't hear it or if she did, believe it. She could even remember a time when she asked herself in amazement what had become of her when the only men who would approach her as potential

suitors all resembled the grubby handed filth of the stages of which she had danced upon. "Do they really think they have a chance?" she would ask herself, "and if so, than what does that say of me, and what I have become." This was her mindset, and perhaps the reason why an angel would date a demon, but I have begun to go too far in my history already and so will state simply that this is where she was in her life when Thomas would stumble upon his destiny behind the bar, smiling, and making him question everything he had come to think as truth as it pertained to that noble creation of God known to man as woman.

CHAPTER TWO

And oh what a glorious day it was to be for Thomas, the day of his awakening. It would start off however, as all the days that he had had since his misery had first started, full of littleness, and meanness, and pain. He would awake late, take a cigarette from on top of his bed stand and light it begrudgingly, upset with God for making him suffer another day. But he was used to this feeling, and so it would only take a few drags until he was out of bed and preparing to meet the day. It was a Saturday, and he was thankful for being off of work, but not so thankful for the gnawing sensation inside his stomach, which was telling him he had drank too much the night before. It had told him that often lately, and so he was used to that too. He went into the bathroom, which was located down a long hallway just across from a portrait of the Virgin Mary holding her infant Son, and he filled the enamel sink with cold water as shaven hair and used toothpaste floated to the surface. He looked reluctantly into the mirror and his gaze met two bloodshot eyes that despite him having seen so often, were hardly recognizable to him. In disgust, he splashed water at the face that held the eyes, trying to wash both away but without success, for as he looked back up, they were both still there to mock him. Next, he would try the tub, lying in the warm water for hours hoping to wash the filth away. This trick he had learned some time ago, and he relied on it often. It never quite cleansed the soul, but made him feel better nonetheless. He would be spotted next in the kitchen drinking water from a large plastic souvenir cup from some

unmemorable gas stop or fast food chain while in the background could be heard the sounds of Miles Davis introducing the Birth of the Cool. He'd take his cup back down the hallway and into the living room where he would be greeted by remnants of the night before in the guise of empty Busch cans scattered all about. Remembering the feelings that had caused the scene he now stumbled upon, he picked up a copy of "Demian" by Hermann Hesse under a half empty can of beer with several cigarette butts floating inside and began to read. "It's my renunciation that destroys me" he'd learn from its pages as he'd read for hours until it was time to repeat the cycle.

He'd call his friend Lily, whom he remembered was going to the bar around the corner from her apartment with her boyfriend and some of their other friends. It would be enjoyable he thought, as nights out with Lily always are. She was a good friend he had known for some time, and she knew how to have fun, always doing things which revolved around drinking lots. She'd confirm the plans, and so after a short conversation about times and such he'd go to the kitchen once again to see if there was anything to eat. Cold pizza, peanut butter and jelly but no bread, Macaroni and Cheese but no butter or milk, and a can of beef stew were all that remained of his last trip to the grocers. "Cold pizza it is" he said aloud to himself as he prepared his feast. He'd grab the remaining slices, leaving the box in the fridge and walk back down the hallway past the before mentioned portrait and back into the living room. Miles was still heard playing his smooth, cool, jazz beats as he ate quickly and cleaned even quicker, leaving

only one can which he used as his ash tray as he finished the chapter and prepared to depart. If only he'd known how his life would change after he left his small apartment that evening he would hardly have believed it, but it was true, for she was there now, at the bar, serving drinks at her new job.

He walked into the double doors of the bar and was noticed by his friends immediately as they were seated around several tables just inside the entrance. They greeted him with hellos and an offering of a Busch, which they knew to be his favorite. He accepted graciously, and began to talk to Lily about something or other when he noticed her out of the corner of his eye. She had her hair in pigtails, and was wearing black jeans and a white t-shirt with a wooden Celtic cross hanging round her neck. She was talking to a customer as she cleared his table of bottles and laughed at something that was said to her. He tried to pay attention to what it was that Lily was saying to him, but he couldn't get his mind or eyes off of this Venus that had just appeared to him. She was like a woman from a dream, and so he took as much of her in as he could, lest he awaken and she be gone from him forever. Every chance he got he looked her way, and wished that only he was still whole, so he could worship at her altar. But alas he knew himself, and so he knew he would never dare approach her for fear she'd run in terror, blinded by his ugliness. And so he was content to worship his goddess from afar, with just an occasional glimpse from the corner in which he sat. He watched her all the night, taking her in like a dying man his last breath, yet he was alive. Alive with her smile that filled his soul with joy,

and with her laugh that sung hymns to him which were usually reserved for the gods alone, but how could it be? Was his heart not dead? "What wonders she does possess" he thought as he felt his heart beating heavy to the rhythm of her being. And still he knew he'd never approach her, accepting it as his fate to be dark and empty in the sea, when suddenly he was smiled upon from above.

The conversation at the table turned to what each of the men seated was looking for in a woman, when his brother's girlfriend asked Thomas about his perfect woman with the intention of setting him up with someone. She named names of women they both knew, hoping for a match, as she knew Thomas had been in much despair. In a moment completely free of doubt to him, he simply pointed to Violet, and spoke these words of her, "the one there behind the bar is the woman of my dreams." The whole table turned and looked at Violet, and seeing in his eyes his sincerity they too longed that his dream might be fulfilled. Sunny, his brother's girlfriend, asked why he didn't talk to her, and he replied that it was because he was too shy, not wanting to tell the long sad tale of his past which the reader now knows. She graciously offered to approach her for Thomas, and a flicker of something resembling hope shone in him but was quickly extinguished by his reasoning. But she insisted, and so he relented, expecting nothing to come of it but reproach, which he was used to by now.

Now the reader knows of the road that led Violet to this night, so they are aware that she did not see herself in this celestial light that Thomas saw her in. She was herself flattered that someone had noticed and admired her and so she

smiled that smile of hers and replied that Thomas should come back on Monday when they were less busy and the two could talk. Sunny and Violet then spoke of the shyness of men, and how it could be at times attractive, and our young friend's destiny had begun. Amazingly, Thomas would not return that next Monday nor the one after that, for such was the feeling of unworthiness that filled his entire being. He doubted himself, especially before such a lovely creature as she, and so he thought he'd save himself the pain and just relish in the idea of what could be if he was not so tormented by his demons. It was his renunciation that was destroying him

The two weeks that Thomas spent wrestling with himself over whether or not to go to her were tormenting, but it was to be the book that he had read, "Demian", that was to decide his fate. It was the following lines by the author that was to prove to be the deciding factor, "Just then I found a strange refuge-'by chance,' as they say-though I believe there is no such thing. If you need something desperately and find it, this is not an accident; your own craving and compulsion leads you to it." He believed like the author that their meeting was no accident, but something more, something beyond him and her and the Earth that they both dwelled upon. It was to be however, fourteen long days and nights, not unlike the forty spent by another half man that came along long before Thomas was to side with the book. Once he did decide he must see her however, he was a different man, almost unrecognizable to all that knew him. He began to dress better, shave daily, keep a cleaner house, but it was internally

where the greatest changes took place.

He looked upon the world differently, and that which had been dead to him began to have life. He noticed first the songs of a family of birds that had made their nest in an old oak tree beside his bedroom window. It was the morning after he had decided, and he had woken to their song as if they were singing to him. But he in turn offered it to the woman, the first of many gifts he was to attempt to give to her. He also noticed the brightness of the morning sun as it made its way through his windowpane and fell all about him as if urging him to bloom like the flowers outside which his neighbor had planted in her tiny garden some months ago. And he bloomed before them, mistaking the rays for the brightness of the woman's beams which shown just as bright to him. He quickly went out of doors, and was almost overwhelmed with joy by all the magnificence of nature as it revealed itself to the once unseeing man. The sky was a bright blue and the air a refreshing smell of the perfume of Mother Earth that poured forth from the grass and the trees and from everywhere about him. He bowed before a rose in the garden and smelled of its fragrance, imagining it was the smell of her, whom he adored. He began to hum to himself, a song he couldn't remember which, until he was joined by the birds above, and he suddenly remembered it, as they had taught it to him. Oh what a feeling it was for our dear young friend, as if he was discovering all of this for the first time. He walked down to the park just a few blocks from his apartment, laughing at three small children playing games in front of one of the houses. He walked

past a statue of a man on horseback, and felt himself as if he was riding something also, but more like the wind that blew ever so faint against the nape of his neck as if it were trying to speak to him of that which he was just beginning to understand. He smelled every flower, and admired every tree under the sun, and sat down to rest beside a pond where a family of ducks was seen in the furthestmost corner swimming in line and causing the slightest ripples of waves to go forth from them and toward the place where he sat. He saw all of this and thought the entire time of her, as if she had given it all to him, which of course in a way she had. And he was thankful to her.

He sat there all the day admiring, until he remembered a prior dinner engagement with his friend Elijah, and so got up to go. And even this dinner was not obtrusive to his mood, for he saw it in this new found light and looked forward to it so he could share with his friend this delightful feeling which now possessed him. In a naive way, like that of a child, he thought he had discovered something new in nature, and so couldn't wait to share it with his close companion of whom he looked upon like a brother. He hurriedly made his way homeward, wanting nothing more than to express his emotions to someone close who might be able to understand them. And there was also the woman, who he wanted to talk about even more, for talking about her would be like seeing her all over again, and he couldn't wait to see her again, even though he had seen her all day in everything that inspired him.

He would head straight for the restaurant, not bothering to stop by his home to change, for he wanted nothing more than to talk of her. He had been saying her name aloud since he had first heard it from Sunny, and all during his walk to the restaurant he kept repeating it, "Violet, Violet, Violet..." The name itself was enchanting to him, and he thought to himself that in some long lost language many years gone it must have meant that which inspires, for his entire being was lifted up to the heavens every time he heard it spoken. He would say her name to passersby as if he expected them to understand and be lifted up to the place where he was, but they would only look at him in bewilderment, unable to comprehend the beauty behind the name he spoke. A slight breeze was felt blowing in from the west and he spoke her name unto the wind, that it might carry it across the land, spreading joy wherever it blew.

He arrived at the restaurant early, and so he ordered a cocktail, but it was to have no effect upon him, for he was already drunk on the idea of her. He would sit at his table impatiently, as if his idleness was an offence to this woman, his time being better spent praising her to all the world. He would try smoking a cigarette to calm him down, but the thought of her was just too powerful and so he ordered another drink, not remembering having drunk the first. It would seem like days before his friend would arrive, but he eventually would, and instantly Elijah would see that something great had happened to Thomas.

"What is the matter with you, you look mad?"

"My friend, I am mad. I did not know that one could feel such ways."

He would then tell Elijah all about Violet and how he hoped that he was a lucky man and she a generous woman so that he could at least have one more evening of which to remember her by. He told his friend of her smile and of her laugh, and about her pigtails that must be symbolic of her innocence within in what seemed to be a single breath. He talked about all the different types of women she might be, dismissing them all as being less than what he knew already she was. It was a long conversation disrupted only by the drinking and eating, of which there was plenty, for Thomas treated the meal as if it were a celebration of her glory. Indeed, it was often when the toast "to Violet" could be heard coming from the table in which the two young men sat. Our young friend liked to talk to Eli about such matters for he was not only a good listener, but more often than not shared the same opinions as Thomas as they pertained to women. They were two youths who were both romantic in their ideas of love, and could talk to each other openly about such matters. Theirs had been a special friendship from the beginning as it is hard to find someone in one's life that one has so much in common with about such rare feelings. So for Thomas, it was a godsend that they had had their dinner planned for this of all days, and he let his friend know of his feelings. Elijah, for his part, assured his friend that he was glad also, and that he couldn't have been happier if it had been himself, and he raised his glass in one last toast, "May she be everything you desire her to be." To which Thomas in turn nodded in thanks and said to himself, "She already is. She already is." They would then depart from each other, each man

returning to his home where Thomas would be left alone to his thoughts of her, and another day closer to his destiny of splendor.

He'd awake the next afternoon to the sound of the phone ringing from on top of the dresser where it sat. His mind would instantly go back to the conversation with his friend Elijah, and so he was happy having been given the chance to express his expectations about Violet and their meeting he was so eagerly anticipating. It was Monday, and he knew he would be seeing her, so this day was even more pleasant to him than the previous one had been. He answered the phone and his friend Lily was on the other end to greet him. She knew that he had decided to go to the bar that evening to see Violet, and as a good friend she wanted to be there to help if she could. They talked only briefly about the woman because Thomas did not feel quite like talking about her, wanting instead to save his thoughts this special day for a later time when he would be alone, as if with her. So instead they talked about other things, but not without Lily sensing that he was excited about the night that was to be. Lily knew Violet a little, having gone to the bar quite a bit on account of it being just doors from her apartment, and so she was excited to see if things would work out between the two. She liked the woman, and thought that she would be good for Thomas, whom she wanted to be happy, having been dear friends with him for well over ten years. She would keep trying to get him to talk of Violet, but he relented not, determined to wait till a later time when he would be alone with his thoughts. And so she finally gave in, decided upon a time to meet him, which turned out to be eight-thirty, and said goodbye. It was at this point where Thomas would decide to

start reading another book, which he hadn't done in some time because of his mental state. The book that he was to begin was to be "For Whom The Bell Tolls" by Ernest Hemingway, which was one of his favorites. He would go into his living room, lay on the tattered couch that was comfortable despite its outward appearance, and read in it the quotation from John Donne: "No man is an Iland, intire of it selfe; every man is a peece of the Continent, a part of the maine;...". And he himself was no longer an island unto himself, but was part of the continent that was she, having been reborn by her powers like Phoenix out of the flame, alive in his desire for her.

The moment of his destiny came quicker than he could have imagined as the time for his departure arrived in what seemed to him to be but a heartbeat. He walked through the same double doors that he had walked through a few weeks before, except this time it was different, for this time he knew she was there and that he was going to her. What was odd was that he was not as nervous as might have been expected, which was a result of the fact that he was not expecting too much from the meeting but was intoxicated by the prospect of another chance to see her again. Lily smiled to herself as he walked into the bar, seeing that he was dressed up for the occasion. She had known him for a long time and so she knew he rarely dressed the way he now did, but on the contrary, usually dressed more comfortably. She also found it funny that he was so calm and reserved outwardly, as she knew too that he could be "a wild one" at times when he was out with friends with whom he was comfortable with, but always acted the opposite when he was wooing a woman who he liked and feared, and who he might scare away by his wildness. It was because

of this that she could always tell when he liked someone, his demeanor always giving himself away to her. She would always tease him about this, making casual references about things that he had done in his past in front of the one who he was being on his best behavior for, or by saying things that only the two would get the subtle references of. Tonight was to be no different as she said to him "you look nice tonight" with a voice that said to him and her, "I see you really like her". She would then point to the bar where Violet was, and he would blush while he shook his head in defeat, as she knew him so well. She would laugh at his shyness and tell him, "Why don't you go get another bucket-of-beer." He'd take the empty bucket and go to the bar still afraid to look at the woman who he knew was there.

Violet would recognize him as she approached the corner where he stood, and know he was there to see her. She would ask casually if she could help him with a smile on her face that said she knew who he was and why he was there, and her smile would instantly make Thomas dumbfounded as he would respond to her question by handing her the empty bucket and asking for a pitcher. She would smile wider and answer him even more casually than before, "I'm sorry but we don't have pitchers, do you want a bucket?"

"Oh, I'm sorry, yeah can I get another bucket," he would answer her, as he was overwhelmed by the beautiful smile on her beautiful face.

The author should probably note something here about Violet lest the reader misunderstand things about this woman based on the account of her history of which I have given only little. Violet, despite anything that had happen to her or

could happen to her, was not a shy woman, but was strong and opinionated, and carried herself in a manner that reflected this quality of hers. It was an attitude that Thomas was attracted to, but which nonetheless did not make it any easier on him as he tried to get her to like him as he liked her. She would bring the bucket back full of beers and he would pay her, avoiding her eyes as he was scared of the look which they now gave, of what he knew they could make him do. He had known from the first time he looked into them that he would follow those eyes, for better or for worse, wherever it was that they would lead him. Having paid for the beer he would walk back to Lily's table without saying anything further, unsure of what it was he was doing, and with the desire to momentarily get away from his possessor.

Lily would ask Thomas what happened, if he had talked to her, and he would answer no, that he had not, and change the subject. Lily would become confused, knowing for certain that he liked her, and being unable to figure out why then he had left the bar without saying anything. She decided to let it be for now, and so allowed the subject to be changed. Violet was fairly busy at this time with her customers of which there were many. They consisted mostly of older working class people who had come in after work to relieve some of their misery and who would be leaving shortly, having relieved as much of it as they could. They would then go back to their wives or their empty homes where they would prepare to relive the same day again tomorrow. But they are another tale, and except to mention that they were whom she was waiting on, they do not

belong in this one. It is uncertain what Violet was thinking about Thomas, or even if at this point she had an opinion of him at all, for she appeared to him to be too engrossed in her job to care one way or another, and he hadn't really given her much up to this point to form one. It was not entirely his fault for this, for as I have mentioned already, her powers were intimidating to him as he felt in his soul their strength.

It was to be his friend who was going to break the ice and get the two talking, but not without a brief struggle by Thomas who was still afraid of the eyes and where they might lead him. After a few beers, some of Thomas' other friends would show up, about two or three of them, along with their friends, and they would all sit around the table drinking and talking until Lily would drag Thomas to the bar for a shot with the attention of getting him to talk to Violet. She was getting tired of his shyness and so she was determined to do something about it, for if he would not go to her on his own, than she was going to bring him to her. Lily was a lot like Violet in this regard, she was not afraid of anything, and she couldn't understand why people like Thomas would get intimidated, especially when she knew him not to be this way about anything else but women. She found it funny, but when it went on too long, like it had this night, she would put a stop to it even if it meant embarrassing Thomas like she had done on more than one occasion. Thomas was glad of her determination in his affairs this evening, and so he followed Lily to the bar, as he knew she would help him to start a conversation, and that he could deal with the eyes easier if she were there

beside him to be a distraction of sorts.

"Hey Violet how's it going?" she would say as Violet approached the two friends at the bar. Thomas wished at that time that he could talk to her the way Lily did, but thought to himself "but she doesn't see the woman before her that I see." He would relax after a moment, as the two women talked nonchalantly about what each of them had been up to, and what might be a good shot to do in celebration. In fact Lily asked Violet to join them, offering to buy her a shot of her choice, which Violet graciously accepted, and two tequilas and a jagermeister were poured. They toasted to what Thomas would remember not, being instead transfixed on the woman before him who was even more beautiful than he had remembered from just those few minutes ago. Indeed, every time he saw her she was more beautiful to him than he had remembered. The bar had become less busy so Violet had a chance to talk to the two friends, but Lily, having accomplished what she had set out to do, made up an excuse to leave them alone, and walked back to the table smiling at her friend's timidity.

The conversation had been turned to literature, Lily knowing that Thomas loved to read and was also a writer, and that it would be a good way to bring him out of his shell. It was her last gift to him of the night, leaving the rest to Thomas who she knew to be a good man despite his present awkwardness. If he did not succeed after all of her work for him, then at least it was not her fault, for she had done all she could for him. Violet and Thomas would talk about different novels and authors as Thomas would learn that Violet was also a

reader. It would be the first thing that he would get to know about her as a person, and it was to have a great affect upon him as each subsequent thing he would learn about her would. It was rare for him to find a woman who enjoyed reading and he found it pleasing to know that they shared this in common. Whenever she would say anything to him about herself he would pay attention with the utmost care, as he wanted to learn as much about her as he could. He would listen to her as if each word she spoke was a key that unlocked a secret door inside herself that he desperately wanted entry to. He was wise in this regard, as the words she spoke revealed the mystery of her as every woman's words do. She would leave him temporarily as a customer from the other end of the bar wanted another drink, and he would spend the time away from her repeating all that she had said to him in hopes of learning something more which he did not get the first time he had heard it from her. This was to become a common practice of his whenever he spoke to her, whether he did it like he now did or when he was at home in his bed waiting for slumber as he replayed the entire evening over again in his mind so as not to miss anything about her of which he could adore.

She would return and they would continue talking, him having lost his nervousness through their conversation together, and then she would do what was unthinkable to him just hours before. She would offer him her telephone number, saying that she would like to talk to him more, which made Thomas thank the heavens for their gift to him as he accepted as a dying man might

accept life if it were offered to him. "Violet" he would say almost aloud as he was left momentarily to his reflections of this glorious woman who was no longer a dream to him, but a living, breathing woman. He had learned only a little about her during their brief conversation, but she had proved to be even more than he could have imagined. He had known all along that there was something special about her, but to what extent he knew not even now, for her star was always shining brighter and more radiant every time he gazed upon it. Seeing that Thomas was alone now, Lily would seize the opportunity to find out what had happened, having spied from her table the two getting along seemingly well. She sat herself down at the stool beside his, and inquired about how the conversation had gone. She seemed almost as excited as Thomas as she asked the question, her face alive with anticipation to her inquiry. "Lily, she reads," are the words he spoke which said to her and him "I am hers, to do with me what she will", as he too knew the game at which Lily often played.

The remainder of the evening was spent by him stealing glimpses of Violet as she worked, the bar having filled yet again. But it mattered not to him, for he had already accomplished more than he had thought possible. He was alive in his desire for her, and his previous melancholy had all but diminished. But there was to be one more moment worth mentioning, as it had a great effect upon Thomas, as well as tells something about him and his feelings toward her. It happened while he and his friend were talking to Violet and the latter was telling them of her past in New Orleans. Lily had started a conversation with

Violet about the city when she discovered that she had lived there. Lily had frequently gone to New Orleans for different festivals, and had acquired a love for the place not uncommon to those who have visited. The two women shared tales of wild nights spent carousing the different watering holes of Bourbon Street as veterans share war stories. As I have stated earlier, the two were a lot alike, and their mutual love of drink was no exception. Thomas enjoyed listening to the women talk, and found Violet's excitement at her adventuresome ways attractive. (He hoped silently that they would one day have such tales to tell.) And there was something in her face as she reminisced that drew him to her, that made him want to lean forward and kiss her. It was as if he no longer was in control of his body, but was lead by the beauty of the face, which drew him to it like something all-powerful. But before he succumbed to the sensation, as if reentering his body at the last possible moment, he pulled back from its hold on him, and sat eyes wide open, in complete astonishment at what had just happen to him, which he could not explain. He would never have dared kiss her, for fear she would not desire him to, so if they were to kiss it would have to be she who kissed him. And it was for this reason that he could not explain the matter, but neither could he forget.

He would look from woman to woman, thinking that they must have known for how could it have gone unseen, what had enveloped him. But neither gave any impression of having witnessed the event, so he relaxed and continued listening, but with an even greater question as to the mystery of her. What he

was to hear now was of equal importance, for afterward he knew that she had been harmed. What was astonishing was that she did not show any signs of being pained from it, which made him want to kiss her again, but this time as one kisses the wound of a child, to show both affection as well as one's desire to take the pain away. In their conversation together, Lily had asked her why she had left New Orleans, and she told them how she had become pregnant and how the father had left her but in a way that asked for neither sympathy nor consolation. The reactions of the two friends were both of surprise and regret that such a disservice could befall a woman so undeserving of such heartache. They would differ in their subsequent feelings however, as Lily would curse all men for the deeds of the one, while Thomas would want to protect Violet from any further harm, and in so doing show her that he could not offer her much according to her worth to him, but that he could offer her his devotion like a knight to his lady. But Violet needed nothing from the caring friends, as she looked upon the events as past, and was more concerned with the present, to which belonged a beautiful daughter Ivy. Meanwhile, Thomas sensed that Violet did not wish to discuss the matter further, and so he changed the subject as well as the mood to lighter topics of discussion. He would begin by saying something humorous, which caused all three to laugh. It was something he had learned to do when he was young and confronted with an awkward moment, and he had used it often during such circumstances. He would then order another round of shots to some such toast similar to "Here's to the bee/which

stung the bull/which started the bull a buckin'/here's to Adam/ who stuck it to Eve/and started the world a fuckin.'" It was a toast he enjoyed making, and the two women also found it amusing as the three drank the shots down in cheers. The night would end a short time later, closing time having come, and they would say goodbyes all around, but not before Thomas was called forth by the woman. He would go to her as his destiny foretold, and she would lean gently over the bar with a tender smile warming her angelic face as she asked softly of him, "So, you are going to call me?" And he would answer her simply as the question was simple to him, "Of course."

Our young friend would be seen next walking towards his apartment in shadows as the light that lit the street at the corner where he was had broken from use and so was unable to guide him. He passed under it without pause, and continued onward where the stars above could be seen shining brightly upon his path. Around him could be heard nothing but the sound of aged trees as the wind played their branches like a masterfully subtle musician or an old familiar lover. And in the air the scent of flowers from a garden, planted with the utmost love and care, filled his nostrils with delight, as flowers always can. And onto the stairs leading to his home he ascended, until from afar his back was all to be seen, walking out of the darkness and into a light, where comfort was promised within.

CHAPTER THREE

It seems that the author has gotten so carried away in describing Thomas' feelings for Violet that he has neglected to tell the reader about where our young friend was in his life at the present moment, it being six long years unaccounted for. The most dramatic change being that he was now in the military. It is hard to believe that Thomas would have joined considering his feelings in his younger years, but he did. He had decided to return to school in order to teach, and they had offered to pay for it, they being the Air National Guard. It was "one weekend a month, two weeks a year," he thought, "how hard can it be." There was also the chance to travel which appeals to all enlisting soldiers, and our young friend was no exception. He would get to see Thailand and Okinawa among other places. He had always wanted to travel, but could never afford it, and now he could see the world for free, and this appealed to him more than a little. It wasn't an easy decision for him to make for several reasons, one being his disagreement with the government of the United States and their use or abuse of its sons and daughters in past official and not so official wars. He could not agree with many of the reasons for past wars of the U.S., many of them being monetary he thought, which in these instances were not good enough reasons. There was also Capitalism, which he despised. It went against everything a democratic society stands for he believed, and even destroyed for him what is known as "The American Dream". His reasoning was as follows, "How can you promise that any individual can achieve personal success if he

works hard, when in order for Capitalism to work you have to have people on bottom. In its very design many must fail in order for a few to profit. The people on top stay there by assuring those below them stay below them. There must always be those who will stay right where they are no matter how hard they work, which is something capitalist don't want the lower classes to realize. They want people to buy into "The American Dream" so they won't revolt against their oppressors, and the people do buy what they are selling, which is why the hardest working people in America are the blue collar and not the white." So, he thought, not without incredulousness, "How can I give my life to a Capitalist country?" "But you love your father despite his flaws, because he is your father" was to be his retort. "It is still a great country, even if there are things that need changing," he concluded. But also there was Democracy. Ah sweet Democracy, the mother of all that is good in this country, and of all that could be the basis, if it were purified, of making it better. Democracy he would surely die for, and feel honor at having done so.

There was also to be another thing that made the choice difficult for him, and that was his religious convictions, for how could he believe in "Thou shall not kill," when he might be asked to do just that he would reason. It was to be this question that he could never quite answer satisfactorily on his own, and which would continuously haunt him. He knew that he had taken an oath, and so he would do what was ordered of him, but whether God would accept the argument of "I was only following orders" was beyond him. He hoped as all men do, that

he would never have to use the excuse, which, ultimately, struck him as feeble and lame.

Despite all doubts, our young friend had decided his mind, and so enlisted, it having only a few weeks before he was to meet Violet that he had gotten back from boot camp. What was most ironic was that he had sensed something life changing approaching days before his departure, but in his near sightedness he had thought that it was simply the camp itself that was going to change his life, and not a series of events of which that was but one. This feeling had started about a week or two before he left, this odd feeling that hinted at something catastrophic, after which he would be forever changed, and would climax in front of his fireplace two nights before he was to leave.

The evening of which I now speak was to prove to be a sort of spiritual cleansing for him as he did what he had attempted to do on two separate occasions in the past four years. What he had attempted to do was to burn all his early writings in order to give his soul and mind the opportunity to be reborn like Phoenix out of the flame. As was written, "Who would be born must first destroy a world." It was a practice that was not uncommon, many writers before Thomas having done so, but until now, he could never quite find the strength that was needed. For he knew that the fire would sear him, leaving its mark on him as what was burning had come from his very soul. He knew deep within that this was the evening it was to be done, and so he followed what was inside him, pushing him forward to its desired end. He gathered all his early works,

mostly poetry of which he had all but ceased writing, along with some short stories, and sat down before the fire. Sunset was approaching, and the air around him smelt of the moment. He was drunk and high from the evening, but even now, with glass of wine in hand, he was aware of the magnitude of the moment, and it did not go unnoticed by him. He began to read a few of the old poems, laying them gently on the burning logs when he had finished, and a feeling of sadness came over him. (Elusive youth was fleeing in the rising flames.) He tossed more in without reading them, and the shape of a woman's face appeared on one of the smaller logs, burning red in the heat of the flames. He watched her until she left him, consumed in ash. All the while he fed the fire with more writings, placing whole notebooks in that instantly turned to dancing flames that raced to heaven the words of his soul. He saw a bear, a wolf, a bird, in the logs lighted from his early life's work, and he tried to understand what they might be trying to tell him, but they would be gone before the message got across. He would sit watching the different shapes as they appeared to him, his entire being transfixed on the burning fire that was not an end but a beginning. Slowly the sadness he had originally felt turned to something else, a sort of contentment. A part of himself was dying in the leaping flames, but it was as if it had to be, as if in order for him to go on living a part of him had to be destroyed. In short, he was cleansing his soul of the filth it had acquired and so the experience was pleasant to him in that he knew he would be better for having endured it. The sun would greet him in the morning

through the window to his immediate right as the last of the fire burned itself out leaving only scattered embers which flickered flashed and then ceased to be as he closed his eyes and slept the sleep of a new born babe.

Two days later, upon his arrival to Lackland Air Force Base, he would forget all this momentarily as he was forced to live in the moment, from meal to meal, and then day to day, and finally Sunday to Sunday. It was the only way to survive the ordeal, for otherwise one would be consumed like the works of his early youth, and there were one or two who were unable to make the adjustment. It is hard to explain what it was like those first few weeks at boot camp to someone who has not gone through it, but the author will try to the best of his abilities.

There was a constant fear in each of the recruits as their former lives were far away, beyond the walls which enclosed them, and they each in their own way had to come to the conclusion that in order to get back, if not entirely as they were, but back regardless, they had to accept their present condition and move forward together as one being, free of their former individuality which here proved only to be a burden to them. It was not entirely abandoned mind you, but one had to be extremely careful in letting it be seen, as evil lurked in every corner in the guise of training instructors, the very sound of the taps from their boots causing panic to all who heard them. At first he fought this idea they tried instilling in him, finding the very notion revolting, but it being the only way out, he followed. Looking back, he would remember it fondly, the togetherness, the

conquering of what seemed unconquerable, the ending of first youth, but these were all formed in hindsight, for there were no such noble notions while one was living them. There were moments however which inspired passion, like when on more than one occasion he would find himself laying in his bed exhausted just before lights out, writing a letter or just relaxing (there was little time for either as your entire waking life was planned out for you) when four or five of the black members of his bay could be heard singing in the far corner, their voices being one of the only bits of beauty seen or heard since his arrival. I have mentioned living Sunday to Sunday, which is important, for the only time you had to yourself those first few weeks, (the singing coming in the last two when "they" released their grip on you only slightly), occurred during church on Sundays. If you were not religious upon arrival, you quickly became so, as your only momentary escape came during the hours of mass on Sunday and the bible study you attended afterwards, which all did so as to have an extra hour away. Our young friend will always remember hearing "Amazing Grace" that first Sunday, and the emotion it brought out of him, as more than one tear was shed from those around him who were also affected. "Reveille" is another song he will always remember, but less fondly. In a way, church seemed to have no place there, as they were being trained to be "highly motivated, truly dedicated, blood thirsty, kill crazy, romping, stomping, Air Force recruits", but in reality it was needed more there than in the cities, suburbs, or countries where they had come from. Needless to say, our young friend made it through with only minor

instances of trouble, which I will tell of perhaps in another tale, or "over beers" as they say, but not here.

As I have stated earlier, he had decided to go back to school in order to get certified to teach, having decided to become a high school English teacher. First and foremost he wanted to be an author, but he knew that he would have to pay the bills somehow as the chances were he would not be able to support himself through writing alone. He also knew that if he continued with his present course, he would lose himself to the machine of labor. He had been working in a factory for the last three years and had learned that this type of job, which he had because he was qualified for no other, would only smother his creativity, and he would end up one of those men who falls into the working class cycle of despair. Spending your days working hard at the factory so that when you get off you're too tired to do anything but drink yourself to sleep so as to relieve the pain of knowing that this is your future until you are no longer productive to your company at which time you are let go of your job, old and alcoholic. His decision to get a job at the factory was an easy one for him at the time, however, as our young friend had decided to quit school because it had become too much of a hindrance to his goal of being a writer. He had spent too much time he thought, on reading bad or outdated authors, and writing papers for teachers who weren't talented enough to do what they really wanted, which was to write. And so they would become second-rate critics, criticizing their students for the originality that they themselves lacked, and forcing their

grammatical rules that made writing a science and no longer an art. And so, with this in mind, he applied for work at the factory with the intention of taking two years off in order to write a novel. Instead, he would spend two years drunk, having misjudged the strength of the machine of modern industry. In the end he was left with only a handful of pages and the knowledge of which I have just told, that this work not only leads to nowhere, but also destroys you in the process. He now had to devise a new plan in order to achieve his goal of being a writer, and so chose school, as it was the lesser of the two evils. The author would like to make note here that joining the military because they were going to pay for his school had an unforeseen effect upon him as a writer. For not only did it give him new experiences from which to draw, but it also gave him a work ethic that is much needed to become a writer, as the quote "writing is one percent inspiration and ninety-nine percent perspiration" attests.

It should be mentioned that the factory alone was not the cause of Thomas' lack of writing, but also a kind of emotional turbulence was very much alive inside him at the time. It came from a feeling of hopelessness and was a kind of revolt that manifested itself outwardly in the form of wild drunken nights spent with close friends who also felt the repulsion towards their world, and who knew no other way to express it but with rage. They would rebel against society by refusing to take part in it, instead living on its outskirts in a world of their own creation, a world where the only criteria for entering was a hatred for the one that had been abandoned.

CHAPTER FOUR

Now that the reader is for the most part up to date concerning what had brought Thomas to the place he now was, I will continue the tale from where I left off. He would find himself in his bed thinking about Violet, and of the strange sensation he had experienced in looking into her face. He was desperate to discover what it was that had drawn him to it, and would be up most of the evening wondering about the look which left him so utterly helpless. It was to be on more than one occasion when he would try to look into it again in hopes of seeing once more what he had seen the first time, but unfortunately he could never quite seem to see the face as it appeared to him that evening. What had made it so hard to see again was that the look was more than just physical features; her smiling brown eyes with their ever so soft glow, her delicate thin lips that spoke of salvation upon the slightest touch, her smooth dark brown hair worn in pigtailed which hinted of the woman's innocence, but something spiritual was to be seen as well. It was as if her entire physical face was consumed in a flame of fire that was the pureness of her soul. Entreating you to enter into its consumption where you would be united with your god in enlightenment. And this face, this face of a goddess, was the one who looked down upon him as he drifted off to sleep below its heavens.

The next morning was an uneventful one except for his continuing thoughts about the face, the image of which was now inside his flesh, as alive in him as his own heart. He would call on her in the afternoon, giving her time to rise and

to shine, as he knew she had been working late, and would need the time to collect herself. When he called, he half expected her not to remember him, and so he was prepared to give a thorough description of himself, but she amazed him as she often did by instantly saying hello and talking to him as if his calling her was a natural occurrence. She spoke so easily that he could not imagine a time when they would not have anything to say to each other. She would ask him if he would like to come over that evening to watch a movie, and he would graciously accept, unable to believe in the moment. To him it was like a dream, for his waking life had not been so kind to him in years. The conversation would be short, as she was very busy, and would end with her asking, "So I'll see you tonight?" with a smile that came through the phone and into his vision. He would want to answer her "Yes! Yes! My God Yes!" But would settle for "Yeah I'll see you tonight."

The following moments would have been quite humorous to an onlooker, but were rather taxing for our young friend. He would be seen running from room to room with different clothes on, trying to find something to wear that would be appealing to her. He'd try on a pair of tan shorts, but would quickly toss them away in disgust as he noticed a pizza stain on one of the pockets. He'd try on several shirts, finding flaws with each, one being too big, the other too small, and the last too black. He'd shave not close enough, then too close, then think that his sideburns were uneven, the right being longer then shorter then longer yet again. In short, he was a madman running about his apartment in utter chaos

trying to get himself dressed. This was to go on for almost an hour before the scene was over, Thomas standing before the mirror with almost his entire wardrobe scattered about the floor all around him. "It'll have to do" is all he said to his reflection.

The time had now come for him to leave, and he did so as if high. He would stop by a small market on his way to her home, one of those in and out places, and buy two bottles of wine and a six-pack of Guinness. If you had asked him why he had bought so much liquor he would not have been able to answer you, for he was like a man out on his first date, completely unaware of what he was doing, but trying desperately to do everything just right. He would eventually arrive at her door, ringing the bell with apprehension as he still wondered to himself what such a beautiful woman as she would want with a wretch of a man like himself. He felt wretched indeed, and so he could not fathom in his now heavily beating heart anyone feeling any differently about him. This feeling of his became intensely magnified whenever it was confronted by a beautiful and intelligent woman who appeared to be interested in him, or just appeared. He would not have been surprised if no one had answered the door, so ending his dream as well as his wonder. He remembered tenderly the last time he had seen her, just in case these thoughts of his proved true and he were never to see her again. He placed each moment of that night before him as if he were laying his most precious possessions on a table to view. He viewed first her smile, which she wore as casual as one does a worn and faded garment. It was not worn and

faded however, but as alive and vibrant as if it were the first time she had worn it. It also proved contagious as he smiled to himself having remembered it. He would view next her laugh, which was deep and jovial and not dainty and fake. He liked her laugh almost as much as her smile and he wondered again why she would have invited him to her home when he heard someone on the other side of the door beginning to open it.

His eyes met hers as she greeted him and invited him in. She gave no appearance of reluctance or shyness, as he was sure his appearance gave. That was another thing he liked about her, what he explained to himself as her Irish attitude that seemed to care not if you cared, yet still cared. It was to be your job to discover what it was that she cared about. And it was a job you gladly took and would keep as long as she would allow, which you hoped was some time. What happened next surprised our young friend to no end. He became comfortable. It was not at all his doing, but hers, as she used her female charms to calm him. Whether or not she was aware of what she was doing he cared not, he cared only that it had happened and that he was near her. They would drink the wine that he had brought and talk. They talked about all kinds of things as he became as comfortable with her as if he had known her his entire life. With each new thing she revealed to him about herself he grew to like her more. He had never met a woman he had liked so much so quickly. He hoped he would not say something stupid of which she disapproved. It would not be long before he longed to kiss her, having succumbed to her womanhood somewhere early in

their conversation together. He dare not act on this desire however, for fear she did not feel the same. And he would now never do anything of which she might disapprove. As they continued to talk and drink he noticed that they were now seated closer together on the couch and that her hand would touch him every so often with a delicate touch that seemed to him to be electric. He wished with each touch of hers that he could answer by touching her back.

He would start by touching her softly on the shoulder, a touch that would almost go unnoticed. He would then brush her hair away from her face so he could see it clearer. He longed to see her clearer, all of her, clearer. She would then smile that smile of hers and he would instantly be rewarded. Next, he would take her hand in his, holding it softly to show his sincerity. Their eyes would meet and he would try desperately to hear what it was that they were saying, to answer anything and everything they wanted to know, to see her clearer, all of her clearer. The outside world would fade away around them as they stared into each other's eyes, each trying to understand the other. They would get closer, closer, closer still, until when they were almost touching they would shut softly as if becoming one in the darkness. It would be at that moment that their lips would touch, with the delicate feel that each was made to kiss the other. And again he would wipe her hair from her face and eyes, as he wanted to see again the face of the woman who was stealing his heart with such ease. Whether a heart was stolen or given that night the author knows not. But the two would end up kissing well into the night, causing our young friend to

awake the next day at his home happier than he had been in some time.

He would rise early that next morning to her name, which was spoken softly on his lips. It was his first thought upon waking, the name of this woman. "Violet", he would hear himself saying, and he would smile to himself as the rest of her made its way into his mind. It had been a long time since he had woken to the name of a woman on his lips, and he was thankful to her for this more than mild enjoyment. He felt at peace with his world, and through this calm he possessed a sensation of a sort of strength. Through "her tender desire for him, so soft and still, like sunshine" he felt a sense of power. It was a power that was given by her, and it was not a power over her, but for her. Having kissed, he knew she liked him in that way, which was akin to being offered a chance to be an apostle of Christ. But there was no cock's crow that would signal his denial of her, as he would be crucified for her if need be. It was in the sureness of this thought that was the source of his strength.

He thought again of her kiss. How she had led up to it, for it was she who kissed him. As I have already stated, he would never have kissed her first, and perhaps she sensed this, or maybe it was just her way, not being the kind to wait for something she wanted. Whatever the cause, she acted on her desire. It had started innocently when he was sitting beside her, his left leg crossed over his right. She had already tried showing him her feelings by moving herself closer to him on the couch and by touching him every now and again on the leg or shoulder, but he seemed to her not to have noticed either hint she gave. Next

she would push his crossed leg off the other, resting hers in its place. It was reminiscent of her youth, when she would push the little boys whom she liked. As he looked to her she smiled and so he bowed his eyes before her, offering her his legs for her use. She found his reaction of surrender mildly amusing, and she wondered who he was. She had never met a man like him, and she thought it might be nice to be with someone so different than the others whom she normally dated. She could not figure him out, and she took her legs from off of his and leaned forward having decided they would kiss. When she first took her legs down, he felt regret at not being able to serve her longer, but when he saw her lean into him a new sensation of an anticipated ecstasy took over and he leaned forward also, so as to accept her gift. Their passions would lead them once interlocked, and they would stay forged until, sweating, they would separate from each other. He thought of every detail of this embrace, and he relived each one in turn, cherishing them equally. He remembered how in between kisses he would stare into her, and how all he could think about was how beautiful she was. How he would tell her "you are so beautiful" as he wiped her hair away from her face as she looked down on him from above. And she was beautiful to him, more beautiful than any woman who had ever or would ever live. But there were other moments that were more fire than softness, as she was a woman full of both. He remembered her head thrown backwards in delight, her long brown hair falling like rain about her neck and shoulders as she was raised upward by him to whence she had come. How she

moaned slow and hard, her eyes closed in pleasure, her womanhood flowing out from within her and spilling over onto his kisses. But there was more softness, like when she would look away from his gaze as he told her "you are so beautiful", as if she were unworthy of his praises. Or when she answered his kisses with "It's been a while", but in a way that was an apology. It was this softness that attracted him most, and what he was thinking about as he got out of bed in anticipation of seeing her again.

As he walked onto his balcony he thought about their conversations together on the red couch inside of her living room. He had gone to her home to watch a movie, but they had never really watched it, spending the time talking instead throughout its entirety. He would think a lot about their conversations on that couch, and today he thought about one in particular. She told him how her friends would tease her by saying that she was going to end up being one of those old women who live by themselves except for the dozen or so cats who have the run of the house. And he could see in her eyes even this next morning that she was scared. Scared the omen would prove to be true. She did not want to become that woman, but perhaps believed it was her destiny of doom for all her failures of life. And as she told him about the joking prediction he said to her, "You will not be that woman." And she looked up at him with that face that he had loved his entire life, even before he had ever seen it, and he loved it now. He also felt a desire to continue on so that she would not believe in the old woman at all, but would believe in the woman that he saw before him, the

woman on the red couch. The woman whose face he dreamt about even before he knew the difference between man and woman, good and evil. "You could never become that old woman", he said gently to her. "I don't know, I might" she answered, condemning herself for sins he knew nothing of, but only that they did not matter any longer. She could have been the murderer of Christ and it would not have mattered, for he saw into her, deeper than she could see, and he knew that she was closer to Christ than to his executioners. He also knew that words could not persuade her to see, and so he touched her. He placed his hands on top of hers and looked deeply into her eyes, seeing her, and hoping that through his eyes she could see her reflection the way that he saw her. He looked long and deep, hoping that she could see, but she did not believe any longer that such a woman existed, and so she could not see herself. She could only see the old woman that was already condemned. He saw this too, and kissed her as one kisses a child who is weeping, and he too wept. He wept for the woman inside her who could not get out, but who he saw and whom he loved.

"Why can't she see? Why can't I help her to see?" he wailed to himself.

And seeing something stirring inside him, but not knowing what, she kissed him back. But it was not as a child, rather as a woman. It was a kiss that would instantly make him desire to have her, but he would continue to be gentle with her, for he knew that other woman, the woman he could see but she couldn't, was still somewhere inside and he was trying to appeal to her. She groped him, and he succumbed entirely to her, except when they kissed. The remainder of

the evening he would kiss the woman that was lost, softly and tenderly, and with the knowledge and feeling that he was kissing her. He remembered all this as if it were happening all over again to him, and it was because whenever he was with her he would attempt to become one with the night, through the power of all his senses, so that he could turn that one night with her into a thousand. He would try to remember every sound, every smell, and especially every kiss of her moist lips upon his warm body that was now forever scented by her woman smell. For it was as Lawrence said of his Isis, "I carry her perfume in my flesh." He would hope in so doing, that tomorrow, or a year from tomorrow, they would again be in that moment, arm in arm, in the lover's embrace.

His thoughts of her would overwhelm him, and he would desperately desire to talk to her again. He would call her and little Ivy, her daughter, would answer, "Hello?" His voice would instantly change to the voice of his childhood as he answered her back, "May I please speak to Violet." He could hear the girl talking to her mother, and then to him again, "Who's calling?" "This is Thomas," he would answer her. "It's Thomas," she would tell her mother who would greet him on the phone with a voice that was as alive and vibrant as its speaker. He was glad at having gotten past such tight security, and that he would get a chance to converse with her more.

The author would like to point out to the reader that this woman had a way about her that made our young friend feel like the luckiest man on the face of the Earth whenever he was talking to her. She always had something to say, and said it in a

way that made him feel like there was no other person in the world she'd rather be talking to than him at that moment. The conversation would turn to the little girl who was acting "fussy", perhaps because she knew she was being talked about. Apparently the little one wanted some gum, which was her favorite candy, and was being told to wait until after supper. As Violet related the incident to Thomas, they both laughed, at which point he could hear Ivy cry to her mother, "Stop laughing at me." Violet laughed again, and then answered in her mother's voice, "Honey we're not laughing at you, we're laughing with you. You're funny." Thomas could hear the child reply hotly, "I'm not funny." He found this scene of family life amusing, and could not help imagining the girl, as he had not seen her, but only glimpsed a picture of her from above the fireplace. In picturing Ivy, he was also picturing Violet, as he was imagining what she must have been like when she was young. It also did not go unnoticed by him that little Ivy had some of her mother's fiery spirit. He wanted to meet the girl, as she was a part of Violet's life, and as I have stated earlier in this reading, he wanted to know all of her. He had never dated a woman who had a child, but this did not bother him. If he were younger, or if this was a different woman, maybe he would have been a little reluctant, but in this instance he did not even give it a second thought. Indeed, it was another quality of hers he liked, her motherhood.

It should be noted that this side of Violet would always be a mystery to him as he always was to glimpse it from afar, as she kept this side of herself secret, for hers or the child's sake the author cannot say, but only that Thomas was wanting to be a

part of it. The reader has been told of a certain portrait that hangs on a wall in our young friends apartment, and to this day, whenever he sees it he thinks of Violet. It is of Mother Mary holding infant Jesus, two angels circling around them, but to him it is a portrait of Violet with her daughter Ivy, and is the most beautiful portrait ever painted of a woman. For it is a portrait of a woman in her most godlike state, motherhood. He would next do something of which was somewhat of a shock to him, for he had only done it once before. He had imagined himself a father, and what he would be like. He imagined himself there with the two of them, Ivy's father. He thought of all the ways he would get her to like him, and how it would be once she did. He imagined them reading together like Atticus and Scout, and playing games on the living room floor as Violet looked on smiling. How he would teach her everything he knew, so she could be better than him, like a nobler second self. How they'd race out the front door together when the ringing of the ice cream truck could be heard coming from around the corner, "Hurry! Hurry!" they'd shout, and to Violet who would be laughing at their excitement, "What do you want? What do you want?" He thought about how Ivy would fall asleep on the couch as they read or watched a movie, and how her mother and him would try to wake her for bed, but how she'd pretend to be asleep so that he would carry her upstairs. And how he'd know she was faking, but would carry her regardless, because she was his daughter and because he loved her. He thought about all these things as he was staring at the portrait in the hallway while Violet told her daughter in the background, "No you cannot have any gum." These musings were ended abruptly however by Violet's

saying to him, "Sorry about that", but not before he made quick note to himself little Ivy's preference of candies.

He would try to tell Violet of his feelings for her, but they were such that words cannot explain. He also thought that perhaps she would not be able to understand them, as he himself could not. So instead he decided to just let her talk about whatever she pleased, which turned out well, as the two talked like old friends. She confided many things to him about her past, of which the reader is already well aware, but for Thomas they were each cherished as something beautiful as they had each helped make her the woman whom she was today, the woman whom he utterly adored. She also asked him questions about himself, as she too wanted to know about the other. But Thomas felt unworthy before her, and so he was not totally truthful in his answers to her. He did not altogether lie, but he did make himself out to be more than he was. The reason for this being the confusion he had felt about himself these past few years. He had not only learned to believe over this period of time that he was physically unattractive, but also that he had nothing to offer a potential beau in the way of materialistic possessions. He had never before cared what others thought about him, instead living for what he himself believed, but he had somewhere forgotten along the way what he had cherished in his rebellious youth, and instead had measured his life by society's standards, standards he once ridiculed. He probably only did this because it reinforced his inner feelings of worthlessness, but that is only a guess, for he had also been getting older as well, and when that happens, it becomes harder to continue fighting with the same

recklessness of one's younger years, but he eventually would, only not without the help of Violet.

He had had a plan for his future life, but his present one he deemed unfit for her. If only he had known that she did not care about such things, but was like him, except she had never doubted herself as he now did. She lived exactly as he had, for herself, and damn the rest if they found fault. In other words, had he told her the truth she probably would have liked him more, for he would have been more of an individual, more of a freethinker. But alas, such was not the case. He had lied to her by making his plans out to be his reality. For instance, he had been jobless the last four weeks since his return from boot camp, and was preparing to get a job for the summer working with children so as to get experience for his teaching career, but he told her this was already his job. He also did not have a car, having sold his old one before he left, and waiting to purchase another until after he got work, but he told her he already had one. This latter deceit leading to another, as he would borrow a friend's car, which she would believe to be his. He had not intended to make this car seem his own, but it had happened accidentally as she walked him outside and watched him drive away the night of their first date. This might have done more harm than good however, as it was a newer car, and made her think that perhaps he was a man living too much in a world she wanted no part of, as she too was one of those who lived on the outskirts of the world. And so now the reader knows that at least one of these two are made of clay, proven true by his deceit of her, but for reasons if not altogether just, are at least pardonable. Did he regret having deceived

her? Of course he did, he cared for her, but he was desperate to know her more, and in his desperation he reasoned to himself that at least the lies would be true in only a matter of weeks. He did not think that he was harming her, otherwise he would never have done it.

The conversation would come to an end, and Thomas could be seen on his balcony lighting a cigarette with a book of matches from a nearby bar. The sun was enchanting as it revealed to him the vast potential that the day offered. Far away, the sounds of little children could be heard in play, so faint they could have been the sound of the day itself playing with the sun, or Earth, or both. And he looked around at his surroundings, his mind suddenly clear of all burdensome thought, and he felt himself at peace. He felt at peace because he believed in the woman, believed that she was true. He was happy in his life because she had become a part of it. To him, it was as if his entire life could not have gone any differently, but this way, that led to this moment, this meeting, with her. She had become more than a mere woman, had become transformed into something else, by him or for him is hard to tell, and I can only say that the transformation had taken place. She was all around him and in him, and had been since his birth, and would be till his death, and beyond. He had discovered his destiny, and it was she, where she was to lead him was the only remaining question for him. And it was with this knowledge that he stood there smoking solemnly, content to follow his destiny to its conclusion, his life forever changed by the look in her eye.

CHAPTER FIVE

He would arrive at her door with his arms full, as he had brought both the pizza he had promised as well as two bottles of wine. He had asked her previously for a second date, hoping to take her out to dinner, but she had had to decline, as she would be unable to find a babysitter on such short notice. She added graciously however, "You could come over around nine if you'd like. Ivy should be in bed by then." He would accept her kindness, and then ask her if she would perhaps like it if he brought over dinner, to which she agreed, Violet being a woman who enjoyed both feast as well as festival. They'd talk not long about different possibilities, when he would think of a corner pub next door to his old apartment, which had "the best pizza in the history of the world", as he was fond of saying. He would tell her about it, sharing a story with her about him and his friend Elijah, who had been his roommate at the old apartment with him. He began the story by first telling her how the place had taken checks, and so how he and his friend would frequently take advantage of this whenever they were low on cash. And with most food delivery services not accepting checks in this area of the city this was a godsend on more than one occasion, "not to mention the fact that they sold Guinness by the pint." The story was about the two going in there when they were both "half cocked" on Black and Tan's and the subsequent commotion that ensued as they played a game of billiards. One has to know the competitiveness between the two when it came to this game to truly understand that what happened was not an everyday

occurrence, but simply the "heat of the moment" as they say. They had gotten in a big argument about a game winning shot, and in their excitement they had gotten thrown out of the pub, "before we got our pizza," he added, as that was what had bothered both of them most as they stumbled home arm in arm singing and shouting, and not the fact that only moments earlier they had almost come to blows over which ball was hit first, and whether or not it was called if it had indeed hit the other ball beforehand. Violet and Thomas both laughed at the story as it was told, and still feeling cheated out of a pizza, he offered to stop by and pick one up on his way over that night. She agreed, as it had been a while since she had had any, and also because of his boasting of it being the best ever. And so it was decided, and the second date was set.

He had come to her home with the secret intention of showing her that he was not there because they had been physical their prior meeting, but that he was there because he liked her. He enjoyed their conversations on the couch, and he was wanting to have more of them. He had decided that he would succeed in this endeavor by refraining from the call that came to him from behind her red lips. He reasoned that by not attempting to kiss her, but spending the entire evening listening and talking to her, he would show her his respect toward her and their relationship together. He had also written a few words for her describing to her his feelings in a story, which he intended on giving her as he left. He would have liked to have been present when she read it, to see her reaction to his writing, but he was still unsure of her liking of him, and would

not have been able to handle her rejection if she gave it to him in person as he would have been doubly exposed, mind and body. This latter decision of waiting until he left being burdensome, as he would anticipate her response the entire evening they were together. It was important for him that she knew how deeply he cared for her, and so there was nothing he would not have done so as to make her see, for he wanted to be naked before her, and he wanted her to see his nakedness.

She would greet him at the door with a smile that was at once gratifying to him, and then proceed to help him carry the two bottles into the kitchen. He would explain to her that he was unsure of whether or not one of the two was any good as he had gotten it only because of their conversation from the couch. It was during their first night together, and she had been telling him how she liked to use odd shaped bottles to put flowers from her garden in, and seeing that this particular brand had a peculiar look, he purchased it for her that she might use it as she willed. She enjoyed spending time in her garden, and had taken him out to see it, as well as so he could smoke, and there she shared her plans with him of building a rose garden around the walkway leading to the far eastern side of her home. He remembered how she would rub some of the spices between her fingers and then have him smell of their fragrance, making splashing motions in the air towards his nostrils that he might smell of them. To him, it was as if she had power over the plants, and was giving him an offering of their smell of which she held at her fingertips. And for that brief moment in time she became a portrait of nature, bent over like a mother

cuddling her young, and their names were Basil and Parsley. She would smile again upon hearing the reason behind his purchase, as it was a confirmation of his having paid attention to their earlier discussions. She was surprised at his having listened so attentively to her, and then remembering what was to her such a minor thing, as she hardly remembered having told him. Next he would pull from his pockets three books, also an offering to her based upon their earlier conversations alone together on the couch. This latter one coming after she had showed him her extensive library and then told him of how she had intended to get more of the classics so her daughter might have them at her disposal when she matured. The books she had were many, some being left behind by the previous owner of the house, an elderly woman who had passed on to the other world, no one left in this one to claim her belongings. Others she had purchased herself, while still others were left to her by a since departed friend, mostly darker books about mystical things. The books our young friend gave her were by Maya Angelo, Flannery O'Connor, and William Faulkner. He had purchased them at a thrift store he frequented as they sometimes had books he enjoyed, and in good condition. He liked the idea of Ivy reading female authors, thinking it would help her realize as an intelligent woman that there was nothing she could not achieve if she set her mind to it. He only regretted that there was none by Dickinson, whom he had fallen in love with in his youth, when he had first read her letters. Violet would accept this second offering with the words, "This is the most personal gift anyone has ever given me. Thank You." After which he would try to defer her thanks, not being comfortable accepting praise from

someone whom he felt he should be praising. "Well, it shows me that you were thinking about me," she would add, "which is nice." And he would bow his head to her yet again, accepting. She would turn to open one of the bottles and think that no man had ever treated her so kindly. It was not the gifts themselves, although she appreciated each and all, but it was what was behind the gifts that she valued most. "Is he a man worthy of my love?" she would have begun to ask herself. Thomas would have his third gift to her in another pocket, the story that he wrote for her, but he would not make this final offering until he was ready to go because of reasons I have already given. It should be noted that he was very much glad that she was thankful for the two gifts which he gave her, but it was how she was to receive the third that was haunting him at present. For she could react to his words in one of two ways, and both were frightful to him. In short, Judgement Day had come to him at last, and he was awaiting its reply.

It was to be some time however before the end of the evening would come, and so he tried to endure all the pains that came from his anticipation as best he could. She would begin to get plates from the cabinet for the food, while he opened the wine and poured two glasses full. He would entreat her to stop for a moment while he offered to her a toast, which she would accept with childlike anticipation at trying the wine with the odd shaped bottle. He would attempt to make the toast a jest, as he was more than a little abashed at the gift he was going to bestow upon her, and also was wanting already to kiss her, the beauty who would dare to dine with the beast. And so he made his toast "to the greatest pizza in the history of ever", which would

make her laugh, and so him also. Then after everything was properly prepared and they had had their full, she poured his glass with more wine and invited him to the couch to drink and talk more. It was to be here, on the couch, where she was to tell him a little more of her past. She told him about the grubby hands of the stages on which she danced, and the more recent ones of the bars that although subtler in comparison, were just as filthy to her. And seeing her face react to these memories, he could not help but to share in her disgust.

He felt again that feeling men sometimes have when they are seeking the reciprocated affections of another, a feeling at once barbaric and knightly, as its origins are grounded in both. He wanted to defend her, but alas, the lady needed no saving, as she dealt with these unkind memories stoically, as a soldier deals with a war. She also had a sort of fire in her woman soul that roared upon her command, like a Ginsberg howl. And so she sung a song of herself, and triumphed before him, the memories having been conquered. And he took delight in her glory, and was happy for her, as her happiness had become his own.

The evening was to turn out well for both our young friend as well as Violet as they each had learned more about the other through their conversations together. It had become apparent by watching them converse on the couch, their bodies being drawn closer to one another by the powers of their passion, that something beyond them had begun to take shape. It took over whenever one of them looked too long into the eyes of the other, and was a type of possession. And it owned them body and spirit. But as the reader may recall, Thomas had promised himself he would not

give in to his desire for the softness of her lips, and so had to fight the compulsion with all his strength, which was almost not enough. But poor Violet was unaware of why her looks went unanswered by his kisses, having never before been in the presence of a man who could withdraw from her female flirtations. And so when Thomas got up to go, sweat on his brow revealing his struggle within, she was a bit alarmed that perhaps she had read him wrongly. She would become flustered, dropping the story he had just given her in her confusion, and he would bend over before her picking it up. She would notice his legs, and comment on them, "You have nice legs." As she was partially bowed as well, having attempted to pick up the paper before he had gotten to it, she reached out and touched one of his legs. He instantly leapt to his feet as her touch surprised him, but more so because he was scared of losing what strength remained in him to her touch. And had he kissed her now, all would have been for naught. And misinterpreting his reaction to her touch, she apologized to him, saying ironically, "Oh my God, I hope I'm not being like those old men?" And she looked at her hand to see if it resembled those of the others, and he felt remorse that his noble intentions were being misinterpreted, but more so, he felt pain lest he be hurting her. He did not want her to think of hers as being even remotely like the others, as he knew hers had the power to heal. "No, no!" he would say, trying to awaken her so she could see, but she could not see his nakedness. And so she would answer his exclaim with a smile that was intended to say, "I'm sorry, I guess we're still each learning the other", but to him would only confuse him by its beauty. And he would become

overwhelmed by its glow, and so genuflect to her on his way to the door instead of responding as he ought. And now they would both be confused, and the date ended.

He would drive home upset with himself for leaving without a proper explanation, while she would read his story which he left her, hoping an answer lay within. Upon reading it, she would hear the psalms he sung her with his choir, and in doing glimpse some of his nakedness. And when he arrived home there was a message from her on his answering machine. It thanked him for the gift he gave, and ended with, "I'm still smiling." And hearing it, he saw her smile, and was filled with joy. They would spend the next week talking on the phone, as their schedules did not allow another meeting during this time.

The seventh day fell on a Mexican holiday, and our young friend had plans to meet up with Lily and some of the others. The two had gotten together on this day every year since either could remember, Lily always making a cooler of Sangria. He loved the way she made the wine, and always looked forward to the consumption of it. They would drink the whole day, ending up at one of the local chain restaurants with a Spanish name, but not before they'd get drunk well before dark at a traditional Mexican bar. It was a beautiful holiday well worthy of celebration, and so Thomas would wear his "El Matador" jersey for the occasion, while Lily her sombrero, and in that attire they'd dance and sing in honor of the day. At the bar, the band playing the beats and rhythms of the land, Thomas would jump up on stage and lead a chant. It was a soccer chant

that he loved to make during festive times, and shortly thereafter everyone was joining in. He followed the chant by dancing a silly dance he'd learned in his youth, but one the entire party enjoyed. "Viva la Mexico!" was heard in the background as they finally made their way to their cars and to the restaurant. They'd eat heartily, the lesser drinkers leaving shortly afterwards, while Thomas, Lily, and her boyfriend Johnny, would head to the bar by the latter two's home, where Violet was working. It was Thomas' idea, as he was in good spirits, and wanted to share them with the woman. They'd enter this new bar in the same mood they'd left the first, drawing attention to themselves as most of the persons there were unaware of the special occasion. Violet would recognize the three as they entered, and become excited, as the mood they brought with them was contagious. The four would drink tequilas to the holiday, alive in the celebration of the festival. Lily would share stories of their night, while Violet would give regrets at being unable to attend. Then, in a gesture of good will, Lily would give her hat to Violet who would graciously accept, putting it on at once. She would model it for the bar, wearing it as if it had belonged to her always, and she was attractive to all. Watching her, Thomas longed to hold her, but one cannot hold what must be free. And he watched her like he had that first time, as often as he could, and when later on in the night, when she leaned over the bar to say something to him, he saw again that look which drew him to her, only this time he could not escape its hold as he leaned forward and kissed her to the surprise of both. She glanced quickly to the opposite end of the bar, and then

smiled again that smile of hers which captivated his soul.

He was as surprised as she by the kiss, hardly aware of having kissed her, yet desiring to kiss her again, and then to be alone with her. Subconsciously that was why he had suggested to Lily to go to this bar, in hopes of going home with the woman at the end of the night so as to show her physically his mental love of her. His feelings for her were overwhelming him, and he wanted them to spill over onto her, that she might see with what fullness he desired her. And he stood there before her, longingly, and she was beautiful before him. But not aware of his intentions she walked towards two customers at the other end of the bar who were calling her, and she had a slightly embarrassed yet pleased look on her face, a look that she wore uncomfortably as she wore it seldom, which only made her look that much more desirable to him. And he remembered the same expression on her face when he had told her on their first date how beautiful she was, and he whispered it again now quietly to himself, but with the hope that she might hear and know. "You are so beautiful." And he turned to Lily in his excitement and asked her to dance as Violet was busy with the two customers and he felt the need to get his feelings out somehow, being unable to contain them any longer.

And so the two danced, Thomas leading her gracefully across the room as they had danced often together and so knew the movements of the other as they responded to the rhythms of the music. They laughed aloud as they danced, as both enjoyed thoroughly the song as well as the moment. And as others watched, and saw the fun being had, they too joined in, until three or four other couples were dancing along

side them. Then, that song having ended, a new one began, slower, and they danced to that one as well. And in the middle of the song, the two dancing close together, Lily whispered to Thomas if perhaps they should not be dancing as they were, lest Violet get jealous, not realizing the dearness of their friendship. Thomas, not being able to fathom there being anything to get jealous of, told her she was being ridiculous and refused to let her go until the song was over. And so the two friends continued dancing and having a good time until the music stopped and they decided to get another round. Johnny in the meantime had gotten into a game of darts with a couple of regulars from the bar who he had played with before in a tournament which was played there on Thursdays, and so it was just Lily and Thomas who ordered another round of beers and two more shots.

As they ordered the drinks from Violet, the latter took the time to introduce them to the two men from the end of the bar, saying they were old friends of hers from the neighborhood. The two were both slightly drunk and seemed to have a cockiness about them that was unappealing, but seeing as they were friends of Violet, Thomas was cordial to them. Lily would excuse herself to go see if Johnny needed another beer, as well as to make sure he hadn't gotten jealous of their dancing, even though he was used to it by now and understood their bond. Violet also left to fix another drink and so our young friend was left to the company of these two strangers. He asked them how long they had known Violet, not being able to think of anything else to say and also liking to talk of her, and was answered by the shorter one with the words, "Since high school." Thomas followed this question by asking them if

they knew her well, as he knew from their short response they would not continue the conversation themselves, and did not want to be rude to her friends by sitting there beside them not saying anything. They glanced at each other while the shorter one answered again for them both, "We've known her for a while, although Billy knows her better." After he said this he looked at his friend and they smirked at each other as if sharing a secret that his response concealed. Thomas' feeling at the look they gave one another was one of repulsion not because he felt somehow that it implied an intimacy between this man and Violet, but was because he felt it was insulting to her. As if the man did not respect her as the woman he knew her to be, and was being vulgar in his acknowledgement of his friends bragging bravado of said intimacy. Thomas would say nothing further to the two, refusing to speak to them both for fear of what he might do if they insulted her further, as well as because he could not help but feel they were on the prowl again, and perhaps she was making herself involuntarily or otherwise, their prey. This latter feeling arose as he remembered her looking in the direction of these two men after he had kissed her, and how this look could be interpreted as not one of embarrassment like a little girl's first kiss might bring, but rather one of a fear at being caught doing something one ought not to be doing. He could not help this latter feeling as it arose from deep within his wounded heart, which as yet had not healed completely, and which still renounced at first chance anything that it perceived might try to destroy it once and for all.

After a few more beers had been drunk, and a few more laughs had, Lily and

Johnny would leave the bar just moments before it was to close, so as Lily would tell him, "I can be alone with my man." And Thomas would wish even more so to be alone with the woman, to no longer go home alone as he had done all too often these last few years, but to go home with someone he loved, and who loved him, to be a part of another human being. But he now was so confused by the answers of the two cocky young men that he began to doubt asking her to go home with him at all. He was not angry with her if indeed she had chosen another to be her partner, either for life or just the night, for he only wanted her happiness. If that happiness came in the arms of another, than so be it, at least she was happy, and he knew that she was deserving of that and so much more. In other words, he was confused because he did not want to be a burden to her, and simply wondered what she wanted of him. Whether he should leave her be this night, or stand beside her like a guardian he knew not, and so was wondering to himself as the bar emptied but for himself, the two men, the owner, and an older woman who was very much intoxicated and who had flirted with him in this very room on a couple of separate occasions. And she flirted with him now, and he wanted only to send her away, but being a gentleman, he conversed with her cordially, but ever careful lest she perceive his kindness as an acceptance of her advances. And Violet smiled as she saw and understood his situation, having encountered the same sort of thing at her old job in New Orleans. And after a few moments time, being able to escape gracefully from the older woman momentarily, he talked again to the woman of his desire. And she asked him what he was doing afterwards, and not knowing, as it depended entirely on her

wishes, he answered simply that he was unsure and asked her the same question. She told him that she was going around the corner to a three o'clock bar with her friends, whom she had not seen in some time. He had been invited earlier, but not by her, but some others who were also in her group, and had declined, still hoping to go home alone with her as Lily had her lover. Then, seeing the late hour, and desiring to close the place so she could go drink herself, she told the remaining stragglers, another man coming at this time from out of the restroom, "Anyone not fucking the bartender has to go now!" She said this with that smile of hers which made our young friend melt and the others laugh. At this point the drunken woman accosted him again, asking if she might walk him to his car. He still was unsure if he should stay or go, not knowing whether Violet's exclamation pertained to him or not, and not as of yet being invited to join her in her plans, so he did something he has regretted ever since, wishing instead he had simply asked his beloved if he should stay along there beside her. But other factors beyond him were also in play, like a woman having to stoop to ask a man if he wanted someone to walk him to his car, so his old world upbringing took over and he told the woman, "No thank you, but if you want I will walk you to your car." He looked over his shoulder as he held the door open for this other woman, his brown eyes meeting those of Violet's which were smiling at him, and had he done what he was wanting, he would have ran to her, showering her with kisses like April skies rain upon Mother Earth. But alas, he bowed his head yet again to his Isis, and left the confines of her temple, whose rays were still shining in his bosom, enlightening his heart with their soft glow.

And as he walked this woman to her car, he kept wishing that he had told Violet what it was he had wanted, but also just to be near her a little while longer, for every moment she was within his gaze was precious to him, and the thought of not seeing her again for another day was painful to him. So was his mood when the older drunken woman repeatedly invited him to the three o'clock bar that he knew to be the destination of Violet, and so explains why he finally succumbed to her countless invitations, and agreed to follow her to the bar for a drink. The old woman smiled, her crooked teeth revealed in her devilish grin, as she mistakingly took his acceptance for the possibility of an encounter with this handsome young man. They walked into the bar and he immediately scanned the room for Violet even though he knew she could not possibly have arrived before him. The crooked toothed woman grabbed his arm as he was looking passionately for his future, haunted now for a moment in his present, and led him to a bar stool where she began eyeing him like a prize. He immediately regretted having come, but he could not leave now, his fate already having been decided. She ordered them two beers, refusing to allow him to pay, saying instead that she would buy him a round. The beers came, and handing him his, he accepted, taking the beer from the hand of this devilish woman who was hovering around him now like a black cloud. She talked to him in gibberish that only another demon could possibly have understood, when suddenly, his ray of light shined through the opened door and across the bar, resting at another stool at the opposite end of the room. But he went unnoticed in his corner despite the brightness of the beams, having instead been hidden in the shadow of this unholy darkness that

surrounded him. He tried to reach out a hand to touch the light, but his reach ended in his fingertips, which at this point were still blanketed by the blackness of the night.

And in this blackness he saw his light fading, growing dimmer with each moment he sat and watched, and again he regretted not only having come, but his entire life, which for six long years now had been dark and empty in the sea. But like all stranded men in the ocean who have seen the light of the watchtower, he did not give up the hope that this light was there for him, to guide him safely to shore from out of the ruin of the eternal waves which beat incessantly upon one's vessel like the knock of death upon mortality's door. And so watching the light, an ever so faint hope nestled in his bosom, and he thought to himself, "If only I can escape this dark cloud of a woman beside me, and leave this place forever behind, then this whole moment would not have happened, and it will be like I had never come here to die." And so he gathered all the strength in his wilting body, and rose up from his spot at the bar, slowly managing to leave the unholy place by sheer will alone, but not without a dread that he had just had a foreshadowing of what was inevitably to come, the destruction of his soul at this god awful place.

The following morning brought a light drizzle of rain that could be heard by our young friend outside his opened window as the gloom of the previous night had all but vanished, having been replaced instead by the glow of Violet's rosy cheeks that appeared before him as he opened his eyes to the image of her face, not unlike what sometimes happens when one opens a shade and is met by the

image of the sun as it penetrates the glass of the window and shines bright upon ones countenance. And listening to the drizzle, he remembered having read once before how the natives of this land believed that when it rained the sky was making love to the Earth, and he felt himself privileged at being present at such a moment. And he felt as he listened to their lovemaking that it was also a sort of cleansing, a relinquishing on her behalf of his previous doubt, which was proof to him of her purity, and which caused him more than a little grief at having so easily denied her like the apostle Peter had his Christ before the cock had crowed for the third and final time. And he swore to himself at that moment, that he would never doubt her again, lest like Peter, he lose his Savior to the ignobility of man. But unlike that other apostle, his teacher was still alive, and so he called upon her, to beg her forgiveness.

But when she answered his call, and told him of how she had seen him depart the bar from the company of the drunken woman, and inquired of him what he had done thereafter, he could not help but to lie to her for reasons unknown to his conscious mind. Maybe it was because at some level hidden from his conscious mind he felt that he cared for her too much, and that his only repayment from said love was to be the usual gift given to him in such situations, inevitable pain. This embedded pessimism was a forlorn state that he knew all too well, yet one that was not a friend, but a type of captor. And his captor was also a torturer, a dark and sinister one of amoral character, from whom one can only hope to escape by dying. And he would have gladly chosen death if it were not for her

smile, and his cursed eyes which could not erase the portrait of her smile that had now been forever painted on his inner eye lids, and which included her eyes, and her entire beauty, which cannot be fully understood by the breaking down of individual pieces, pretty though each are, but must instead be viewed as intended by her maker, as a culmination, with no one part being better or worse than the previous one, but each and all adding to the magnificence of her, like any grand design of noble intent. And so even though deep down he felt this present path led to more pain and punishment, he was without resistance, as it also led to the look in her eyes when she smiled, which all but made up for the impending doom which he felt forever present in all around him. And although this does not explain in full why he lied to her, it does help explain the lie itself, which was not told with harmful intent, but with aspirations of arousing stirrings of jealousy. For he thought, if he could make her jealous than it must mean that she covets him somewhat, and if she had even the smallest feelings, he could nurture them until they grew into a forest of feeling like his own, and then, and then he could be happy and she true. And so he told her that he had met up with a bunch of his friends who had wanted him to go to the strip clubs with them, thinking that the idea that he could have gone might just be enough to spark something in her, and that afterward, when he explained to her why he did not go with them, the spark could be ignited by his delicate desires of her, and he would be one step closer to his destiny of splendor, which was her.

"So did you go to the strip clubs with them?" she asked, believing in her

mind from past impressions that all men go to the strip clubs, and that those who deny going are merely lying, either to themselves or the ones they are speaking to, for she had as of yet never met a man like our dear friend, who had gone before, but without the same passion which brings other men to such places. The author should make note here that more likely than not, this lie which he told, had an effect on Violet which brought him back down to the same footing as all the others, as she too had elevated him if ever so slightly, above the rest. Whether it was his unusual manners or his intelligence I know not, but only that she had thought somewhere deep within her woman's heart that he was different, better than the others, until this seemingly harmless lie made her catch herself, lest she be hurt again. For as I have informed the reader earlier in this book, she was not without sadness and sorrow herself, much of it associated with her time working in clubs. And it was almost a relief to her to see him differently now, for she was not yet ready to love this man fully, and the belief that he was not unusual and therefore no more special than any other made her feel not unlike one who starts to stumble, but catches themselves before falling, thus assuring herself from any bodily injury. And to a woman who suddenly has seen the side of a man's face not lighted by the sun, this was no minor realization. For falling and stumbling over a man who was not truthful to you was considered a great sin by women of her former profession, as once wounded they had taken a kind of silent oath that if ever someone was to be deceived again it would not be them, but the other. And they mastered the devices at their disposal daily to

assure this of never happening, becoming mistresses of deception, for after all, what are strip clubs themselves but a kind of masked deception, even though the masks are made of satin and smell of the softness of a woman. So, the lie that he told carried with it ramifications of which he was unaware, pushing her away further than he intended, but this did not stop him from trying to show her what kind of man he truly was, and thus winning her love. Whether she was to see his nakedness or not was now not within his power, but was entirely dependent on her.

"No, I didn't go. They're too lonely. I've gone for bachelor parties, but that's about it. If a woman is going to be dancing naked for me I want her to be my wife or lover and I want to be naked too. Afterwards I'd dance for her and then we'd lay in each other's arms; drinking wine, smoking cigarettes, talking, and making love. Then we'd do it again but in a different order. There's no loneliness in that."

Violet was silent for a moment, reflecting. "So what did you do?"

"I drank by myself and was lonely. Only a different kind of lonely."

"I'm sorry, but I didn't know you were coming and my friends were there."

"I know. I know. It's funny how things work out, or in some cases, don't work out. I had hoped to go home with you after you closed the bar, and to make love to you till early in the morning, but sometimes things have a way of not going as one intended."

"Why didn't you say something?"

"I tried to a couple of times, but..." he paused, thinking of the night and how he would change it if he could, then added passively "No matter."

"You should have said something," she said with a voice that showed its sincerity.

"I just did."

"No, I mean that night. You should have said something that night."

"Yeah, I guess I should have." They both then became silent, each wondering how and if things could have gone differently if he had indeed said something that night. "I better let you go, you've got to get ready for work."

"Yeah, I better go. I'll call you tomorrow after work."

"That would be nice."

"I'll call you tomorrow."

"Goodbye."

"Goodbye Thomas."

He had an uncomfortable feeling that she would not call, but if she did, "it would be a nice surprise" he tried to tell himself bravely. He walked dejectedly from his apartment to the corner bar and ordered a drink. The bartender poured it for him, and he asked him to send a beer and a menu to the corner table, and he turned toward the table, his head lowered in contemplation.

"You wanna run a tab?" the bartender bellowed.

Thomas turned round again and saw for the first time the man's face. It was still in its first youth, but looked distorted as its eyebrows were raised above

normal and the eyes were sticking out as if attacking. And there were patches of hair above and below the lips that were not quite filled in as if the man was trying to grow something there but either couldn't or hadn't tried long enough. Thomas' head jerked back as he saw this stranger, and it took him a second to remember where he was, and once he remembered he realized that this was the new guy, and so didn't know this weekly routine.

"Oh yes, yes. A tab, of course."

The bartender turned to an old man who had been sitting at a bar stool since the place opened and shook his head disapprovingly as if saying to him, "Do you believe that guy, trying to get away without paying." The old man only looked down at his drink, to fixated in his own routine to care one way or the other. Thomas would sit down at his table and finish his drink off in one healthy gulp, tasting at once that there was more soda than whiskey. He'd pull out a book from his back pocket, "Open Me Carefully", a collection of Dickinson letters, and began to read as he waited for the waitress. Halfway through the first letter she came with a beer and a shot. "Did I order both?" he said not having remembered.

"No sir, from the gentleman in the corner."

As she said this she pointed to a well dressed man who was making his way toward them from where he had sat, having gone previously unnoticed by our young friend. He recognized him at once as an acquaintance from his old school, and was thankful for the shot if not for the company.

"Hello Thomas" the man said extending his hand in greeting.

"Hello," Our young friend did not remember the man's name.

"John. John Mann . From High School."

"Oh yes, John Mann. It's been awhile, how have you been."

"Just Great, I work down at..." Thomas always hated hearing about what people were doing now, especially those he didn't even give a damn about back then. And so as the man began to tell him about his handsomely paying job and beautiful fiancé with the blonde hair and big bust he was thinking about the shot and wondering what it was. He smiled politely as John told a joke about his work which he must have told numerous times already, for he told it in a premeditated manner as if it had been often rehearsed, perhaps even in front of a mirror. As he smiled he brought the shot up close to his nose and smelled with the hopes of breathing the powerful fragrance of tequila, and he was rewarded. He downed the shot with a quick flick of the wrist and thanked the man for his kindness as he thought how much he loathed seeing these old high school classmates of his. They were always the rich one's who back then thought they were so much better than everyone else because of their parents money, and who now found it amusing to pretend to know someone intimately who was a writer or a waiter or a wanderer with tattoos or body piercings, and who dressed according to his own taste and not those of the fall fashion. And so Thomas would just keep nodding to himself as this man talked, finding that this usually worked with these types of people for they didn't really care if you were paying

attention or not, they just wanted to say it loud enough so that others around could hear, or even they themselves. If they heard it enough times they might even begin to believe that they weren't lonely themselves like the rest of the world.

After John was sure that he had given a proper tale of his successes, he asked Thomas about his. Thomas didn't like to hear about his own successes or failures any more than he cared about hearing other peoples, so he said something like, "I've just been up to the same ole same ole." And when this didn't seem to appease the man's curiosity, he added, "How about another shot? I'll buy." The man's eyes got wide. He had already said what it was that he was up to, and so it didn't really matter to him now if our young friend got his turn. Apparently he didn't care any more than Thomas what the other did, he just wanted Thomas to know what he did, and so they were in agreement, another shot.

The two would sit there for a moment without much to discuss, for even though they had not seen each other in years, they still had nothing in common of which to talk about. As a matter of fact, two people could not have been any more different as John and Thomas, as the former was a conservative republican, and the latter, as previously mentioned, was if anything, a democratic socialist. And it was not just these political differences that made them separate, but every facet of their lives contributed to the two distinct sides of their personalities. At first glance it

was evident in the way the two men chose to dress, wear their hair, and even sit at the table. Upon closer view, it was evident in their choice of cigarettes, beer, and even food. John smoked Marlboro's and drank Bud Light with a salad for an appetizer while our young friend chose Camel's, Busch, and chicken wings respectively.

But these mere minor observances are not going to change the scope of sociological study, as they can be observed on any given day in any given city across the world. The only reason the author even makes note of such differences is because that it makes what happened next that much more extraordinary as two completely opposite individuals were able to sit for hours talking and having fun when in all reality they should have and perhaps did, despise one another.

Their conversation turned quickly to sports as often happens when two men have nothing in common of which to talk about. It is the old bond that men share, so simple, yet so deep and lasting. It is the bond which women will never be able to understand because men will never be able to explain it to them. It is something they are born with as men and which partly defines them. And these two men had an even closer bond than usual as they had grown up from small boys in the eighties in Saint Louis, and so the names of their childhood were names like Ozzie and Willie, Tommy and Bruce, and of course, Whitey. Ah yes, the Old White Rat. It is a name that will be heard wherever men talk of the Cardinals and of the great game. It can be heard in every bar corner where

men talk like boys and dream of great times and great men, but especially of the great game. And in some of those bars are a generation unto themselves, who learned the game from the master himself, from "The Skipper", Whitey Herzog. And these students of his are all mostly still residing in or near Saint Louis where they first learned, and they were spoiled by what they witnessed when they were young. You see, they saw the game in its purest form, as it was meant to be. They saw the suicide squeeze, the double steal, the hit and run, and the sacrifice fly. They knew these things better than their schoolwork, for these things mattered more. These were the words of summer days spent playing stick ball and listening to Jack Buck coo about the Redbirds. "The running Redbirds" of yesteryear, when every kid in town wanted to play shortstop and make diving catches like "The Wizard". The days when you planned your whole life around a game, and the men who played it, when you did your schoolwork and chores early or late, depending on the game. The days when you knew stats that you still know today, but for the life of you, you couldn't remember what Mrs. Mooney taught in any of her Science classes. The game was your life, as you spent hours mimicking Tony Pena's crazy catching position behind home plate, "Jack The Ripper's" batting stance, and Jack Buck's famous calls, the days when the most important things were pitching match ups and batting lineups. I said before that they were spoiled, but it was also a type of curse, for they thought that it had always been and would always be, just that way. They thought they would grow old watching the Cardinals win World

Series. After all, they had witnessed victory, their parents and grandparents had too, telling them of the days of "Stan the Man" and of Dizzy Dean, and these two men could also remember Brock, but just barely. They remembered "Brock-a-pop" creme soda perhaps better than the man himself, but they knew the stories. It simply always was and would forever be. But as we all know, they had won their last World Series against the Brewers with two questionable losses coming afterwards. We will not discuss the two losses, although we could, and our young friends could, and all in Saint Louis could, and did, sometimes, when provoked by people who knew not of the game, and its sometimes cruelties. They talked now of the skills of Molina and Edmonds, of Carpenter's arm and Mulder's too, and of the feats of the Mighty Dominican. They talked long and they talked late, having found the common bond that binds man, the game, and those that play it. And they did so well into the night. And so it was late, and they drank one more time from their bottles, "to the game", and separated once again, each man going his separate way in the darkness, to meet again no more forever. But each man was content as he walked home that night, as the thoughts of the great game's past, present, and future were in their thoughts like stars are in the sky, bright and shining, and foretelling of a magnificent future, and most importantly, beyond man's capabilities of destroying.

CHAPTER SIX

When he arrived home he noticed that there was a message on his answering machine, and checking it, found that it was his friend Elijah saying that he and Thomas' brother would be out drinking and that Thomas should call Peter's cell phone. Our young friend heard the message with excitement, as he had wanted to stay out but had known that he had exhausted the conversation with his old classmate, and had wandered home reluctantly. He also knew that if he went home he was guaranteed of not seeing Violet, but that if he went out, he could persuade his friends to go to "The Wall", where he knew she would be after she got off of work. It was a difficult decision to make after what had happened the last time he was there, but he believed in his heart that it was his destiny of splendor to be with this woman, and that no work of the devil could prevent it from happening. In other words, he believed in the woman of the red couch, and in so believing gave up his life to her, that she might make him complete, and he enable her to see herself as she was. So, he called his brother, Peter, and was pleased to hear that they were getting ready to leave the bar they were at, and wanted to know where they could meet for more beer. Apparently they had been out watching the Cardinals game, and were still excited about the performance of the players. Thomas suggested the bar that was becoming his church, as it was lately the only place he could worship his beloved in person, and see the fires that raged in her womanly bosom. The two kindly agreed, doing so out of friendship, as they both knew with what passion he desired his

destiny. So, the time for arrival at "The Wall" being set for forty five minutes from the present time, Thomas grabbed a beer from the nearly broken down refrigerator and headed back outside, a cool summer breeze blowing against his cheek as if kissing it, as he locked the door and headed for the metro link station. The night was unusually cool for Saint Louis at that time of year, and so our young friend enjoyed the short walk to the station, stopping once or twice to look up at the sky which was not well lit, but which still gave the dreamer something of which to dream. The second time he stopped his walk and looked upward, he thought to himself that she belonged up there with them, belonged to the stars and planets even more so than the streets and sidewalks where he now tread, and he had a strange feeling that like the moon which came to you every night but was gone each morning, so too would she be. This thought having come to him, he quickly took a drink of his beer and viewed something else, lest the thought linger, and become another scar or cross to bear.

He boarded the train, sneaking his half empty beer with him, and finished it just as his stop appeared from out of the window. Upon exiting, he saw Elijah and Peter waiting for him at the top of the stairs that led out of the station and onto the streets. From the bottom Thomas could hear them arguing about one of Pope John Paul's remarks about capitalism, and how he had predicted its fall, not unlike Marx. They were trying to say that one of the downfalls of communism was the absence of God, and how had Marx included religion in his vision, it would truly have prospered. Thomas reached the top of the stairs and

said aloud to them both, "And communism preaches the same things as the religions. It's beyond me how Marx could not have seen their connection and their dependence upon each other." His two friends turned and saw him, "Thomas", they shouted handing him a beer they were sharing and greeting him as if he were a lost sheep. He took a drink from the thirty -ounce can and handed it back to be passed around as he asked if anyone needed a cigarette. "No thank you, no thank you" they said in unison and hugged as drunken men often and sober men rarely do.

They made their way around the corner, entering through the front as Thomas made his way to the bar and ordered a beer and a shot for each. His friends came up behind him talking about the game, as they were excited about the victory still, and so were eager to talk about it. They asked him if he had seen it, and when he told them that no he had not, they began explaining one of the great diving catches of Edmonds. But all the while, surrounding the talk, something was in the air around them, almost visible. It was like a cloud of smoke, but it was pleasant and not at all offensive. It was coming from Thomas as he was thinking of Violet, and of her happiness. He was remembering one of the conversations they had had together while talking on the couch, and he was wondering if he could give her all of the fortunes he deemed her right to possess. The conversation had been about our country's obsession with wealth, and whether it was all necessary, and she had condemned the excesses in such a way, declaring man would be inevitably happier without all the unneeded

accessories, that it had a unexpected effect upon our young friend. He had agreed with her conclusions, especially considering that he knew that her love of him alone was all the wealth he needed, but something else occurred within him. As she spoke these words to him, he wanted to give gifts to her, to give her every treasure man had ever bestowed upon a woman, and then to add another still, and to even then be cheating her of all that she deserved. For such was her power upon his heart, magnified all the more by the way in which it revealed her tenderness. And man, of course, knows of no other way to praise such seldom seen beauty than by offering it gifts, and so helps explain Thomas' feelings at her words.

He did not think about his last visit to the bar, and the woman with the haggard face, for his thoughts were heavy laden with the image of Violet, and could not be penetrated by anything which might cast a shadow over her majesty. And the light which radiated from her, the "suns beyond suns" in which she had been dipped in, which kept the darkness out, and which she placed in his heart, and lit his soul afire, was now consuming him as he had passed out of the stage where love is no longer dependent upon her happiness with you but solely on her happiness, and into an even rarer state where love of her and oneself are the same. And so it was her light which was emanating from within him and which the people saw. And he waited for the source of this flame to enter the bar, at which time they could ignite together, consuming the night itself and to make it day. But the night was getting long, and his friends tired. His brother, after a

discussion about the possibility of multiple lives, and their effects upon the present one, decided to leave. He had talked about feeling that he had lived before, and had been beheaded on the guillotine. He gave examples supporting his beliefs, only two of which I can remember and which were, that the singing of the French national anthem always brought tears to his eyes every time he heard it, and that as a kid he used to manipulate his head under his hand so as to make it look unattached. It all seemed plausible enough, and Thomas wondered about it. Had he lived before, and had he known her then were the questions he asked himself. He liked to think that they had been lovers in every life they had ever known, and that it was the destiny of time to make it so again and again no matter how many times death tried to separate them. It was a romantic notion Thomas found favor in, and was both glad of the discussion and of his brother for starting it.

The brother would leave after saying his goodbyes and begin to take the long walk back to his car. After he had gotten some distance from the bar he saw Violet approaching from the opposite side of the street, walking with a man who he did not know. As she saw him, she drew back, as she mistook him in the darkness of the moonless night for Thomas. Peter said hello cordially and passed on, too tired to stop and talk and too intoxicated to pass judgment. The woman responded to his greeting in kind, and also passed on, still slightly stunned by the idea that it could have been our young friend and more than a little hesitant to trod on lest he be near. Elijah was at this point also tired and

wanting to go home.

Thomas knew that he had kept him longer than his friend had wanted, and even though he wanted desperately to see the woman, he knew that it would be unjust to detain his friend any longer. So, they finished their drinks and headed out the door. As they turned the corner outside to go back to the station Thomas turned his head over his shoulder by chance or else drawn by her presence, and glimpsed for a moment her coming from behind, arm in arm with this other man, singing and carrying on like merry romancers. He stopped for a moment, shielded by the wall that now separated them, and wondered if what he saw was real, and wanting it not to be. He told his friend what he thought he saw, and how he must know if it were true. His friend immediately thought that there might be a scene and even a fight with the man, and so tried to persuade him against going back in. "But I must know" is all Thomas could respond. And then he looked up and saw her in the window, reaffirming what he had seen, her entering the bar with this other man, arm in arm. "But who is he and does she love him?" he thought, and then said to his friend, "I am going in." Elijah reluctantly followed and Thomas suddenly saw the man she had been with.

And seeing him, Thomas stopped walking, and was frozen, his face pale like death as he and the man recognized each other almost simultaneously, the man saying to him, "Thomas, how are you?" He knew this man to be the brother of an acquaintance and had even drank with him on more than a few occasions. He liked the man better than the brother, and had a lot in common with him. You

see, the man was a poet, and so it was the written word that they would inevitably come to in their discussions together. He was also a few years younger than our friend and Thomas recognized the passion of this subject in this man as being the same as he had had in his youth. It was impossible for him to be angered with this man as he was not only the younger brother of someone he knew, thus being considered still like a kid no matter his age, but because he saw in him something of himself. It was a most difficult situation our young friend found himself a part, made the more difficult because he felt that this man, as a poet, could see her beauty as he did, and that being known to him as a man of honor, he could possibly be worthy of her by being able to make her happy. He thought all of this while at the same time he wondered if he was not denying her again and that she was without guilt. After all, had not the same mistake been made of him and Lily on occasion? At that moment he again felt the flames of Violet's fire light his heart and looking to his left he knew that she was there. She was sitting at the bar playing one of those computer trivia games and did not notice him looking at her. He decided that he could find out about their relationship from this man, and just in case he loved her, and she him, he would not tell him of his own relationship with her so as not to damage theirs. It would be better yet he thought, to keep him here with questions until I can get a look from her, learning everything then from the look in her eyes as well as the answers he gives.

And so he asked all kinds of subtle questions, learning all about the man's

relationship with Violet and revealing none of his own. As the man spoke he decided that he was sincere in his feelings for her and that from her actions outside she must be likewise. He now wanted only a look from her to confirm everything and he would leave her forever to her happiness, unobstructed by him. He had been looking in her direction in hopes of meeting her eyes with his own, but she was too enthralled in her game to notice. Finally, the man having been gone so long, she looked up to see what could possibly be keeping him from her all this time, and she met the quiet gaze of our young friend upon her being. But her eyes revealed nothing of what he had hoped, but just stared at him with a curious expression, as if they were waiting for him to speak first. There were to be many times later in the days to follow when he would look back upon this night and remember that look in her eyes and try to decipher it, but always to no avail, for it was as elusive to him as she proved to be. As he looked into her eyes, which were still beautiful to him, he happened to glance back at the man who he knew was at this time awaiting a response to the question he had just asked, and by the time he had looked back to Violet her eyes were gone, having gone back instead to the game which had previously so attracted them. He answered the man's question, shook his hand, and exited the bar, each step as painful to him as if it were treaded with a wooden cross and crown of thorns as it led him farther and farther away from her, and thus his true destiny.

"I've been with woman and I've been without woman, mostly without. Today

is just another day," Thomas thought to himself as he woke to thoughts of her.

He rolled over carefully on his bed for his body still ached from last night's drinking. He started to try to remember what exactly had happened, then decided against it. It would come with time, why rush it, he was thinking. He lit a cigarette. "They're all whores," he thought, hoping the words would console him, but knowing they would not. He then went back to bed having not liked what the morning had brought him. The afternoon was not much kinder to him, but it brought with the sadness a hunger in his stomach, which helped take some of the other hurt away. "What shall I eat?" he said aloud to the empty and uncaring room. "Nothing to eat" was the reply he got in return. He lit another cigarette. The second one was smoother to him, and shortly thereafter he found himself in the shower cleaning off the past two nights drinking. He felt lighter having come out of the bathroom and mistook the feeling for better spirits. The phone rang and instantly he thought it could be her. Instead, it was Elijah who had known Thomas would be upset and who was inviting him out to the game later that night, thinking that if he could not alleviate the pain, maybe he could at least make him forget it for a while.

Thomas thought the same thing, and after a short conversation turned on the television to see who was going to be pitching. He sat on the couch and watched the previous days highlights, and seeing the catch by Edmonds, he agreed with his two friends, the man was amazing. He liked sports a lot, and it was the competition that he liked most. It was the way in which you tested yourself

against another man, and how there was not only physical strength involved in the dual, but mental strength as well. After all, if the man was bigger or quicker than you it didn't matter, for you could overcome all that by using your mind. He loved everything about it, the sweat, the blood, the pain, and especially the feeling of succeeding, of victory. Whether it was merely one battle in the entire war, or the war itself it didn't matter, for it was a victory, although you always did what you could to ensure the war. And there was also the bonds formed, both with those who played with you and those who played against you, and how there are times when a man can feel as much honor in defeat as he can in victory, like when the man or men who defeat you played well and deserved the victory, so long as the competition was there, and the battle close. Like the old quote says, "The strength of my enemy brings me honor." Our young friend was blessed with being good at athletics, and a good game was better to him than a lot of things were. A good game brought him nothing but goodness, whereas other things that were not so good or appeared good but ended badly, brought him nothing but that feeling he had now in his stomach, black death. It was an emptiness that couldn't seem to fill, but only get emptier.

The announcer would come on the television and tell him the Cardinals had won last night, along with the Cubs, Astros, Nationals, and a lot of other teams he didn't care for because they were in that other league. That other league that played the game entirely wrong and not as it was intended. He then watched Eckstein pull a double play, Bonds hit a homer, and Vladimir drive in the

winning run. It would not be long before he would think about her, and when he did he turned the television off in disgust, ashamed of himself. "I need a beer" he said, "Yes, a beer would be nice." "Better make it two." He was going mad. He opened the bottle of beer and began to read. He always read more when trying to get over a woman, because it was a kind of escape that took him away from the pain, and didn't give him a hangover the next day. And moments without pain are a precious few on this sorry Earth of ours. "Perhaps she will call." "Perhaps another beer will help." "Ah yes, another beer." He was reading "The Sun Also Rises", and was feeling Jake and Cohn's pain, and Mike's too. He even felt Brett's and wondered how much Violet was like her, and how much she had suffered. "She's suffered a lot" he told himself, "as all women have." And he remembered how she had told him things about herself that he knew had affected her. She was a strong woman, but he had been around strong woman before and knew that they were just better at disguising their hurt than others, and if you opened them up carefully, you'd see the flower within. It was all a facade, as everything was a facade, as John Mann gloating about his successes was a facade, and how the whole god damn world was a facade. No one really happy, but all pretending to be. Some of us were just better actors than others. "I never was one for acting," he said as he chased the statement down with a long pull from his beer.

He quickly jumped up from his seat, having decided to eat a little something early so he wouldn't be too hungry at the game. He had learned long ago that if

you went to the game on an empty stomach you'd spend ten to fifteen dollars extra easily on food that could be better spent on beer. Although with that being said, you did have to get something while you were there, and he decided on nachos. In that case, he'd need to eat only a little, a sandwich or soup. He decided on tuna, and while he was eating he looked out of his window and saw two small boys trying to get something out of a tree by throwing rocks at it. One boy, the shorter one, had almost gotten it a couple of times, but didn't quite have the arm strength. The older boy had the arm strength, but didn't quite have the accuracy. He watched them for a while and then got bored, and so checked the time to see how long before the game started. He decided to use another trick he had learned which was to drink a couple of beers before you left so that you save a few more dollars for the bar after the game. It was a good idea for he knew from going to games with Elijah that they would end up at some corner bar afterwards and talk about the game and all the wonderful plays, and so every dollar would be needed.

They would meet where they always met, at the "Stan the Man" statue. And after having met, the two would wander into the brand new stadium like children, looking all around them as if lost amid all the red shirts and shorts and smell of hot dogs and roasted peanuts. It would take them a while to decide in which direction their seats were in, Elijah judging by the section numbers posted on the wall, Thomas by looking at the field, each system working, and adding to the overall excitement of the two. Thomas would wonder to himself as he

walked around the stadium amid the thirty something thousand Cardinal fans if it was anything like this during the reign of the Romans when they had their games, and for a moment he felt himself drift back in time until Elijah proclaimed, "Here we are", and the half formed vision had passed and was over, filled now by the scattered teammates playing catch on the otherwise empty field which gave onlookers the feeling that anything was possible, and that the feats of yesterday would be replayed today, but better, and that each of those in attendance would be witness to it. In other words, it was summer in Saint Louis.

As the game started, Thomas noticed a kid in front of him wearing a Willie McGee jersey and he remembered the last time he had seen him play in Willie's last year for the Redbirds. He could remember Willie stroll to the plate, his head down as always, revealing in a fitting gesture both his humility as well as his respect, and not only for the game but also for the fans that cheered him. And from watching him, one got the feeling that they were watching something that was true, and because so few things are today, one also knew that what they were seeing was also something rare and beautiful. And the fans knew, and cheered the louder, and as he got to the plate, what had started in deep right field, and had moved to center and then to left, then down the first and third base lines, had finally reached a crescendo, as the whole stadium was filled with the chant ""Wil-lie! Wil-lie! Wil-lie!" And exactly when the stadium had reached a point where it could get no louder under the walls which tried to constrain it, but had began to fill the streets and alleyways outside, Willie hit an RBI single

down the third base line. And strangers hugged, and grown men high fived, because Willie McGee had done it again. "Thank God he's come home" one man was overheard saying to another. (Willie McGee had left the Cardinals for a few seasons, but had finally returned). And Thomas thought to himself how beautiful this great game truly is having remembered the spectacle. There was something romantic and wonderful about the game, and about the stadium, and about the team. It is one of a few things that man has discovered, that is brilliant and beautiful, and that he hasn't destroyed. And it was a part of the city like toasted ravioli and people asking, "What high school did you go to?" And that could also never be taken away by any strike or lockout which man might try selfishly to do, unwittingly or not. This particular game in which our two young friends went to on this night ended with the Cardinals winning three to two on a steal of second followed by a single to right in the bottom of the ninth, and caused much celebration for all who saw.

Three Weeks, Five Days Later

Thomas would walk in the double doors of "The Wall" not wanting to see her, not because he was angry with her, but because he was not. He feared that seeing her again would bring him more pain, and he felt that he had suffered already all that he could endure. He noticed first those that he was there to meet and so walked over to them and said his hellos, feeling the woman's presence

behind him at the bar. "How's it going Lily?" he said to his friend while his heart ached that it was so near to what it had always desired. "Splendid. Have a beer," she answered him, and looking around she noticed the table was without. "Here, I'll get another bucket," he said as he picked up the empty one and made his way to where Violet was. He walked to the part of the bar where there were the least amount of people and stood there with the empty bucket before him. It was strange to him to be back at the same place where he had first seen his vision of God like Moses had on the mountaintop, except this burning bush did not blind him but on the contrary, helped him to see clearer, all of her clearer. And she too burned like the God of Moses, but she burned with the fire of a potent woman, a potent woman with the power to create and to destroy. And in a way he was being destroyed as he stood there before her, as he was no longer allowed to worship at her altar. And nervously he fetched out a cigarette from his pants pocket and lit it quickly, hoping it would help soothe him and in so doing make things just a little bit easier on him than they were at present. She looked over at him at his place at the bar and she coolly walked to where it was that he was standing. She smiled reluctantly, perhaps instinctively, and said, "Hello Thomas." He looked down at his shoes, as if bowing again before her, and he mumbled to his feet, "Hello Violet, how are you?" He asked this simple question with complete sincerity, for he really did care about her still, even if she did not belong to him, and could never belong to him.

"Just fine. You need a bucket?"

"Yes, yes, a bucket would be nice." She turned from him, filling the bucket with ice and beer. He took a drag from his cigarette and looked to where she was. She looked as beautiful to him as always. He wanted to explain to her, to tell her that with all the things that had happened, he still looked upon her with the same eyes he had always and would always look at her with. To tell her that he saw something holy in her, something greater than this world, something belonging to the heavens above and not to these hell's below.

He collected himself, and decided to make it simple so that she did not feel uncomfortable before him. You see dear reader, the young man had always defended her even after their last encounter, to himself, his friends, to all that dare speak badly of her in his presence, even the woman herself, and so there was nothing she could do which might upset him in the slightest way. He had even blamed everything on his rotten luck, and had pardoned her of any blame in the whole sordid affair. "Violet, can I buy you a shot? Jagermeister, no?" He asked this knowing that it was indeed her favorite shot.

"Yeah, you're right, but you don't have to buy me a shot."

"But I want to. Allow me this one pleasure."

She must have seen the sincerity in his eyes for she suddenly felt compassion for him in her bosom.

"Please," he would add, and then, "I don't really want to join that party over there, and I figure a shot might help make it bearable. And you know I hate doing shots alone." Looking at him questioningly, she would relent.

"O.K. Thomas, one shot." She poured the two shots as he went on now without hesitation, for he felt that this would be their final time speaking before their eternal departure from one another, and he longed that she might understand him if just only slightly more than she did at present.

"Violet I just want you to know a couple of things, so if you will, just hear me out. First of all I want you to know that I was not trying to spy on you that night at 'The Wall'. I must admit that I secretly hoped that you would be there, but just so I could see you, as that is all I ever wanted from you, to be near you. Just know that I never would have gone if you did not want me to, and that goes for the other night I saw you there as well. I knew it probably wasn't a good idea, and that you might think I was smothering you, and had I to do it all over I would not have gone, not because of what I saw, but because I know now that you did not desire it. I also want you to know that I did not tell Aaron anything about us, so you don't have to worry about that. I simply found out from him that you two had been dating about as long as we had and that was all."

"And I wasn't mad," he added anxiously, and then continued on lest something take her from him again before he had time to finish, before he had the chance to tell her everything he needed her to know. "I know that in reality we hadn't known each other all that long, and that neither of us had said we would date only each other, but you must understand why I never called you again. I have always been a 'one woman man' as they say, and believed in giving all my attention to only that one. I am not the type to date numerous

women, for I have enough trouble trying to satisfy one without adding more to the equation. And I am not judging you, for I told you before I would never do that, and I am not doing that now. It's just that I knew him. He's Paul's little brother. And he's a good man. I like him. It's just I have never competed with another man for a woman's love before, but for your affections I would have. I would have fought Lucifer himself if I thought my defeating him would bring you closer to me. For some reason however, I couldn't compete with Aaron, it just wouldn't have been right. He's Paul's little brother. I thought it was the honorable thing to do, to step aside."

He looked at her having said this, searching her eyes to see if she understood, but they gave no hints at what was going on inside, so he went on, quickly, as she had finished pouring the shots and was holding them in her hands.

"More than anything Violet, I just want you to be happy, and you seemed so with him. And like I said before, I like him, he's a good man. I don't think he would hurt you, so I . . .," and there he paused as he took his shot from her and raised his glass to toast. She raised hers also, and they toasted, "To your happiness Violet, may it be both long and lasting." They drank the shots down to her happiness, he with the utmost sincerity, and she, with confused wonder. "Can he possibly be for real?" she thought. She couldn't understand that someone could care for her in such a way, and in such a seemingly short period of time. "And I was seeing both Aaron and him, and he caught me, and he doesn't blame me, and he doesn't judge me, and he toasts to my happiness?" she

questioned as the shot burned her throat.

"Well, I better get over there with the others," he said feeling better having talked with her, "I don't want to, but a man must do what a man must do." And then, looking deeply into her eyes lest it be his last opportunity to do so, "Thank you Violet." And with that he grabbed the bucket and walked to where his friends were. He did not feel greatly changed having told her all this, for he still knew within that he was no longer a part of her, but the pain was less than before he had spoken. Violet, on the other hand, was left standing behind the bar, wondering, and watching him walk silently away from her, his head still bowed. And she was standing there in a quiet stillness that made her look like an ancient redwood which had a woman's face carved into its bark, like some old lost Druid shrine in the middle of a thickly deserted forest. And this tree was wondering if he were real, if there really could be men like that, like she had read about in books, for no man had ever treated her more like a lady and with such a deep respect. She wondered if maybe he was crazy. She hoped he was real, but for many reasons could not believe it, and thought he was crazy.

"Can I get another beer please", was heard from the opposite end of the bar, and coming back from the place inside herself where she was, from the forest of her woman's mind she answered, "Yeah, sure." She would not think about it again that night, whether he was real or not, but a day would come when she would once more. He would leave the bar after a couple of beers, never getting up to leave the table until he made his exit. She did not see him go, as he left

quietly and quickly, and without notice, for he was good at departures, having become accustomed to them. He would make his way homeward, but the walk would prove nothing like the one when he had first met her, when the world was alive before him, and his destiny seemed at hand.

Thomas would wake up late that next day, around noon. He'd lay there on his bed, naked, his clothes scattered about the floor where he had thrown them. A ray of light could be seen making its way through a tiny tear in an aged shade and landing on the young man's chest, revealing in its warmth his softly beating heart. Awake now, he'd put his hand over it and watch as it now shone bright on his palm. He thought of D.H. Lawrence, "... but best of all was her tender desire for him, so soft and still, like sunshine." He turned his hand over under the light, playing with it as he might have when he was young. His heart was filled with wonder and his soul ached that Lawrence might be right. He remembered the first time they had been intimate, and of her telling him how it had "been a while" almost apologetically, and how this did not go with her rugged demeanor but revealed her tender side. And upon seeing it, how he knew he was glimpsing something special, something that few had seen and fewer noticed. He noticed, and it made him long for her now, to see it again and again, like a sunrise. He wanted to bring it out and place it before her that she might see it as he did. It would be an offering to her, "See, it will not hurt you," he would say to her, "I will not hurt you." And they would touch her tenderness together, holding it as one does a child, with the utmost love and care.

He could tell that no man had ever been tender towards her, and this knowledge made him long to be more so. He had written that short story for her because he had wanted to thank her, but also because he simply wanted to. When he wrote he thought about her, and he liked to think about her. He had liked her very much from the first time he had talked to her, and he liked her even more each subsequent time thereafter. He remembered again their first encounter together and how she looked down on him with the full glow of her womanhood at her power. How she looked at him with illumination, as if she were showering him with her glory. He remembered feeling helpless before her until he would tell her what he saw, how beautiful she was. He remembered how her smile turned to shyness, and how her head turned downward as if she did not believe she truly was, as if she thought the praise false. He was amazed at this discovery and quickly inquired about it. She responded by saying that no man had ever called her beautiful except maybe some guy yelling from across the street, "Hey beautiful," and added, "but not like you say it." He held her closer as she exposed this part of herself to him, and he wished madly that she could see herself as he saw her. She was so beautiful to him that he could hardly fathom that she could not see it. Every time he saw her he thought how beautiful she was, and wished to tell her so, to exalt her in praises to the heavens, for a strand of her hair was worth more to him than any body or blood of any carpenter's son from Nazareth. He only hoped that she would believe him.

He felt this all honestly through his entire being, and he desired to be near her

again, to look at her radiance as he now looked at the sun's, for he was still playing with its ray of light as he thought these tender thoughts of her. Ah, to be near her again. How sweet those words sounded to him now, for that's all in the world he really wanted, to be near her again.

Four Days Later

As he lay in his bed and waited for sleep he kept wondering if all the things she had told him when they were sitting on the couch together were true. He wanted to know if he had fallen in love with a real woman, or was it someone she had made up just to appease him. If she were real, that woman from the couch, then he was convinced that they should be together. That fate had played a part in bringing them there at that moment in time, and that it would be their destiny to meet again when both were truly ready to give themselves to the other. He wanted to believe her, and did believe her, and in her, and not for himself, but for her. He wanted her to be everything that is admirable in a woman. He wanted her to be one of the women of poetry. One whom verses had been written about, one whom men want and women envy.

He believed in the woman of the couch, and in so believing wanted her happiness. He had heard she wasn't truly happy now, and he was thinking she probably never had been since her return from New Orleans. In fact, he

doubted whether or not she believed she deserved to be. He wanted to give her a gift of happiness, to prove to her that she was deserving of so much more than she felt herself worthy of. He thought of things he would say to her so she could see what he saw. It would be a difficult task indeed, but one that was worth more to him than all the world, for he wanted to live, to live with her and for her and by her, forever and for always. And he believed in her more so than she believed in herself, for he saw what was inside her that she had forgotten was there. He saw beauty and light and goodness. He saw the sun in her smile and tasted the heavens on her lips. Her only flaw was her lack of faith in herself, but he had faith enough in her for two, and would go on believing and hoping and praying for the day when fate would look kindly on him again, and he would get to be near his beloved once more, the woman from the couch, whom he adored.

Unfortunately for our young friend, melancholy set in as he began to renounce himself before this image of her that he held up before him, this image of a goddess, more fair than any other that has ever walked this ancient Earth of ours. And it was this image of a one more beautiful than all the others that made him feel unworthy of her, of what she could become, of what she was, of what he knew her to be. And he was like her in that he felt himself undeserving of true happiness, and so undeserving of her. And just then, as he was thinking about her, he remembered her telling him on the red couch how she was going to grow red roses in her back yard garden, not knowing that

she was one herself. "Will she ever know?" he thought to himself as he closed his eyes to slumber and dreamt he was rain.

The author would like to make mention to the dear reader that this time spent without Violet was extremely hard on our young friend, as he suffered a great deal by not being near his ultimate desire. He would lay down on his pillow each and every night and envision she were there beside him, his arm around her waist and his leg wrapped over both of hers. He could even almost smell of her subtle fragrance as if she were there in the bedroom with him, perhaps sitting on the edge of the bed preparing for sleep as he kissed first her lower back, and then slowly working upward, making his way to her shoulders, neck, ears and then finally as she turned around and greeted his advances with a smile, he would bend forward and kiss her lips as he ran his hands ever so faintly through her hair. His fingers would graze her ear lobes as they delicately came to rest on her cheeks, his eyes telling hers how beautiful they found the image before them, all the while her perfume heightening his senses as it seemingly penetrated his flesh and placed her deeper inside him than she could have felt to him with just his touch upon her cheeks, her eyes invading his soul. And these thoughts of her were the same ones which greeted him upon rising each morning, and which were present in his dreams each night, and which prevented him from dying due to her absence. And yet he received more sorrow than joy from these images of this woman, not unlike what happens to any man who is haunted by his

destiny, having come so close to its attainment as to have seen it, and touched it, and held it, only to lose it at last by powers that are beyond him. And so too like those other men who have come ever so close, our young friend had reached a point where he would feel forced to try once more to recapture his destiny, or else be driven mad by the remembrance of having held it, and then lost it.

And so we come to a point in our story where Thomas has decided his mind, and will try to win the woman's favor again. This was less a decision like whether or not to wear a blue shirt or a red one, but more like when a dying man decides he wants to live, and does so by the sheer determination of will which defines him as a man. And Thomas had decided that he wanted to live, but how? His chance would come one Wednesday morning as he looked at the daily paper and recognized the date as being the day of her birth. She had only mentioned the day to him once, during their second or third conversation together, but he remembered it the same as he remembered everything that she ever told him. He knew instantly that he would present her with a gift, and even knew what that gift would be, he had only to decide how he was to go about making sure of her receiving it. As for the gift itself, that was not difficult, as he knew he would give her the book that so closely mirrored his own feelings for her, that book being "Resurrection" by Leo Tolstoy. He would do this with the hopes of her being better able to see him and thus understand him, and which was the very

least he wanted to come from it, her presence before him being what he wanted most. But as I have stated earlier, the difficulty lay in how he was going to give this gift to her. He finally decided to deliver it in person, but not personally give it into her hands, but merely drop it off in her mailbox with a note. So, his decision being made, he hurriedly wrote a note wishing her a happy birthday, and headed to the bookstore.

Having succeeded in obtaining her present, he found himself outside her door, standing on the threshold of regaining his destiny, but not being able to knock as he truly wanted, for he wondered how she would respond, and whether it was appropriate considering the length of time that had elapsed since he had seen her last. If only he could have stopped thinking about what he should or should not do and merely did what he wanted, I think he would have found life less hard to endure, but his past prevented this from happening, as he continually doubted that which could bring him happiness. So, he knocked not on her door, but left the package as he had first planned, afterwards going back to his apartment where he would spend the rest of the day and night wondering what she thought of the gift he had given her.

The next three days were spent by our young friend in a state of anticipation, of wondering what Violet was thinking of his gift and the fact that he had given it. Was Lily right when she told him that if it were she who had received the gift, she would have thought that she had chosen the

wrong man? As pretty as that sounded to him, he could not believe it to be true. The real question he wanted answered however, was whether or not the book was able to make her see how he felt about her. After all, he had tried using his own words and actions, but was unable to get her to see, hopefully, he thought, Tolstoy's words would do better in explaining him. During this time, our young friend did not share his mood with any of his friends, except of course Lily, whom he asked whether or not he should send her the book. When he asked her however, his mind was already made up, and no matter what response she gave him, he was going to give it regardless, the fact that she agreed with him only made him feel slightly less foolish, and slightly more hopeful. And what was he hopeful of? Of love of course. How this gift of his was to bring about this love was a rather complicated thing, as it involved the weaving of a whole web of events that would end with her in his arms, his destiny secure. The author will not go into detail, this plan of his, but will merely record what happened next.

On the third day after the gift was bestowed upon the woman Thomas called her on the telephone. His voice was timid and shy as he told her he was merely calling to make sure she had gotten the present. She responded that yes she had, and that she was thankful for having received it. She went on to tell him how she was running late for work, and was hurrying out the door when she saw the book on the ground, and how it was the first birthday present she had received that day. She told him how excited she became, and her

enthusiasm in retelling this tale made our young friend even more so, as not only had his gift made a favorable impression upon the woman he adored, but the way she told it brought out again that innocence which he had seen first while talking to her on the couch, and which forever after he longed to see in any form she made it visible to him. In her description of the event, he was reminded of how she must have been like when she was a little girl, tearing open her birthday presents with such reckless abandon that the gift itself became less important than the opening up of it, and he smiled to himself as this image of her in her youth appeared before him. Then, more joy was showered upon him as she told him she had already read the book, having been unable to put it down until she had finished. "It was one of the best books I've ever read", she told him, which was to him as good as if she had read his very soul and told him she approved of its contents.

The conversation was going so well, better than he had ever anticipated, that he forgot himself and became carried away in the moment. He asked her what she was doing that night, a question that normally, considering his tendency to renounce anything that might bring him happiness, was completely out of his character. But, she struck not at the opening the lowering of his protective shield revealed, but rewarded his making himself vulnerable to her by accepting his proposal, and agreeing to go out with him that evening.

The date was to be as their first, taking place at her home, and would consist of him bringing over a bottle or two of wine, and a movie. I do not

believe that either one of them could tell the reader what movie was taken there that evening, as, like the first date they had had, it was interrupted repeatedly by their discussions together on the couch. At one such interruption, they found themselves in the back yard as she was clipping different flowers from her garden to decorate the inside of her home, and he was following her around with a basket which she placed the flowers in. The whole of this scene was memorable to any and all who saw, as she was busily trying to pick the very best budding flowers, and he was looking down on her, hunched over her daisies and daffodils, looking like one of those paintings which so captures the moment, that one feels like he would give up his very existence if only he could be also in the painting forever and for always. And there was one moment in particular, in which having clipped a bright yellow daisy and placed it in the basket, she looked up from her kneeling position and smiled at the image of him holding out the basket to her to place the flower in, herself surrounded by all the beautiful flowers of her garden, in which she looked like she belonged to the garden itself, and which to him is still the best painting he has ever seen, even if the only canvas it was ever painted upon was the one upon which he carries all of his memories of her.

The next scene of the two is of him overlooking her as she scurries about her house placing the different flowers about her home, creating a garden there within. And as he watches her, he feels as if she were decorating his very tomb, for having experienced the greatest joy which he could ever feel, her

presence all around him, he could die knowing that he could never be more alive than at that moment, alone with his one true destiny. But greater joys were to follow, as she led him upstairs to check on her daughter. As they reached the top of the stairs, he walking on tiptoes lest he wake the sleeping elf, and elf she must have been to have a mother who held nature so much within her subtle powers, her womanhood seeming to be pouring forth from every part of her. And stopping at the doorway as she walked in to check on her daughter, she bowing down and kissing her child's forehead upon the confirming of her safety, he desired her more than he ever had, as she could not have been more of a woman to him than at that moment, the precise moment in which a mother's love is revealed in all its splendor and delight. And had he done then what he was wanting, he would have taken her as soon as she made her way back to him, and created in her another child, to be cared for as much as the first. But alas, he kept his desires of her buried deep inside, as it seemed equally important to the moment not to wake the sleeping child, but to descend the stairs with the mother, the elfin girl undisturbed.

Having returned to the living room, the two realized that the wine had all been drunk, and that they were in need of more. And so, being a gentleman, our young friend offered to go and get more. As he walked to the grocers, the images of her from the evening still fresh on his mind, he noticed some flowers growing on a fence which kept the store's borders, and decided to

pick them, making a gift to her of their beauty which fell far short of hers, but which nevertheless reminded him of her, and which he knew would look good inside of her home. Also, he hoped that if she were so kind as to place his flowers beside hers, inside of her home, that she would think of him every time that she saw them, and so he would be with her even at those moments when life's duties prevented them from being together, arm in arm in the lover's embrace.

The entire evening was to our young friend, a tiny taste a heaven, as he was able by the end of the evening to see her clearer than before. The next day however was not so good to him as she informed him that she had been dating for the last few weeks the man who she had been with after her return from New Orleans. She went on to tell him that she was sorry, but that she could not see herself dating the two of them as that is what had gotten her into trouble before, and seeing as she had already had such a long relationship with this other man, and that her daughter loved him as her father, she had decided to keep seeing him and so would have to end the relationship once and for all with Thomas. Our young friend heard these words not without great sadness, but since he loved her dearly, he wished her all the best, and said goodbye to her. As he sat on the edge of his bed after this brief conversation with her, he felt that the ending was inevitable as it was his destiny of doom come back to haunt him with all its "littleness, and meanness, and pain."

As fate would have it, he was sent a month later to Biloxi Mississippi by

the National Guard for training, and so was within an hour of the city she had lived, New Orleans. Being so close to where she had once been made him think often of her, and he decided to visit the city so as to just maybe stumble upon the final key that would unlock the puzzle of her being. He felt in his heart that she was gone from him forever, but this did not prevent him from wanting to go, to finally be able to see her, all of her, clearer. He thought about calling her, and simply asking her which places she might recommend to him, but he did not want to disturb her present happiness, if happiness it was, so he refrained from making the call and decided to head there blindly, content at letting the wind be his guide.

But the wind turned into a mighty storm, and left him in Biloxi, unable to travel anywhere, as the weekend he was to leave came just days after a devastating hurricane. He would spend the remaining week and a half in a state of confusion and disbelief as he wondered how God could allow such destruction. And so for some time, Thomas did not think any longer of Violet, or of his own happiness, but only of the misfortune of his fellow countrymen, and what step(s) should be taken to help. It was truly a sad time for the United States, and our young friend returned home amidst this melancholy mood. He felt as if he had been absent from his country during this time as the base he was living on was locked down and so he was unable to leave it, thus only knowing what the country was thinking and feeling by what the others on the base were saying as well as what he saw on the

television and in the papers.

As he was driving home from the airport he witnessed first hand all the patriotism of his fellow Americans as people were arriving at the airport on their way to Mississippi. It made him feel that he was truly home, among his fellow countrymen, who had finally woken up to see what a wonderful place they dwelled in, as they put aside all their minor differences and rallied around the stars and stripes together. He was seeing the good that had come from out of the bad, and he shed a tear for his beloved homeland, proud to be among them, and to be a part of them, an American. The author could go on and on about these feelings of our young friend, but let us get back to the story at hand.

Having come home, he took a job at Jefferson Barracks, and the months passed. Finally, one evening he wandered into a bar in University City with his good friend Elijah. As he looked across the room he noticed Violet sitting at a table talking with two or three others. Their eyes met, and he looked into them, unable for a moment to recognize her by their gaze. It was the strangest of feelings, as if he were looking at the eyes of a stranger, but he knew it was she, for every feature except the eyes were those of the woman. He looked a long time at her, and she him, and yet he could not recognize her by her eyes. At last he looked away, lest it not be she, and he were staring at someone else. But the temptation to look again was unbearable to him, so he kept looking again in her direction, and every

time he did so the eyes would look back, but to whom did they belong, and why did they seem to recognize him? It almost appeared as if they were trying to say something to him, but he could not hear what it was they were saying no matter how hard he tried. And for a time the outside world ceased to exist, and he was in her and she him, yet still, he could not decipher the meaning of their look. This went on for some time until he was convinced it could not possibly be her. He sat there with his head down drinking his beer, and thinking of Violet, until he finally looked up again to see if maybe he could not hear them if he tried harder, but they were gone, the whole table where she had been being deserted. He would hear later from his friend Lily that she had broken up again with the man, and was at the bar due to the insistence of her friends, who were trying to help her forget him.

" Wer darf ihn nennen

Und wer bekennen:

Ich glaub Ihn!

Wer empfinden

Und sich unterwinden

Zu sagen: Ich glaub Ihn nicht!"

(Who can presume to name him, and to declare

'I believe in him'?

And who can feel and dare to say, 'I do not believe
in him'?)

-Goethe

BOOK THREE

Thomas came forth from behind the doors of the church in a state of confusion, unsure of what had happened there within. He had remembered walking to the church, past the homes of his childhood, and entering the building where he had hoped he would be reborn, or at least feel somewhat better than he had since Rosemary had left him for the wealthy man from the party. He remembered walking to the place where the candles were, making his donation, and lighting one of them as he prayed to God to show him the path that would lead him out of his present state and to a place where he would be happy like he was when he had attended this very place as a small boy many years ago. He remembered the church being empty, and how it seemed different than when he was there last, some three or four years before. He could not tell what the difference was, only that he felt like he belonged there, as if his path through life could not have led to any other place than there, at that moment. It was an odd sensation, and Thomas was more than a little terrified by it. As the candle was lit, and his prayer complete, he made the sign of the cross and started to walk to one of the pews in the back of the church to pray some more, and to wait and see if anything was going to happen. He had not planned on staying long, but he felt a sense of peace as soon as he had entered, and so he did not want to leave, lest this tranquility be gone from him forever once he walked back outside to his life which had been nothing but miserable to him ever since he had discovered that she was leaving him for this other man whom he despised, and who he knew she

was only going to because of his wealth.

But before he could fully complete this thought, he saw something burning in one of the side rooms where the weekday masses are held. It was the very one where he had remembered being a server at when he was twelve, before they had gotten rid of the six thirty mass on account of low attendance. He remembered how he hated that early mass because it meant getting up at five thirty, an hour and a half earlier than normal. As he was remembering all of this the light in the room seemed to be getting brighter, and he thought that perhaps the server had forgotten to extinguish the candles because of his tiredness, and that consequently a fire had started. As he hurriedly made his way to the room to check, the light began to get brighter, but no longer like that of a fire, but like something else he could not explain. He got to the door that was made of glass, and flinging it open, saw that there was no fire at all, but that the light was coming from a painting of the Virgin Mary holding her infant Son. He was unable to discover how the light was coming from out of this painting, and as he stepped forward to examine it closer he suddenly knelt down before it, unaware of why he had done so. As he looked up at the eyes of the Virgin Mother the light became brighter and brighter until he closed his eyes instinctly, no longer able to look without much pain and effort. The next thing he remembered was opening them again in what seemed mere seconds, but which he knew had been longer. Having reopened his eyes, the light was gone along with the painting, and he wondered what had become of it. He looked all around the room for the

Woman and her Son, but they were no longer in the room with him, and he wondered to himself if they had ever been. "This is it," he said aloud to himself, "I'm losing my mind." He looked around nervously to see if anyone had witnessed his momentary loss of reason, and was glad when he discovered that he was still alone. He quickly walked out of the room and made his way toward the exit, no longer feeling the peace that he had felt earlier, that tender feeling having been replaced instead by one of uneasiness. "How can this be happening to me?" he kept repeating to himself, as he was sure he had imagined the whole thing.

As he walked outside, the light from the sun struck him, and he was reminded of the event inside, and could even see the eyes of the woman looking at him from behind the sky above him. He held his arm above his head in an attempt to block the light and see closer the eyes, as he was scared to close his own lest he lose any more of his retreating sanity which he felt had happened to him the last time he had closed them. Also, he could not help but feel the eyes of this woman were trying to tell him something, and he desperately wanted to hear what it was they were trying to say to him. The light did not get dimmer however, but brighter, and he was forced to close them once again. As he reopened them, the eyes were gone, but he could vaguely remember seeing something else, something that made no sense to him, pigtails and a wooden Celtic cross. "My God," he thought again, "I'm losing my mind."

He walked homeward feeling that his mission had failed, and that if anything he was in a worse state than before. He felt also himself foolish for believing that by going to church he would be saved from his present condition, as if the walls of a church could give him what he was missing, which was Rosemary. "The only thing that could bring her back to me is money," he reasoned, "and do I really want a woman who is so concerned with that which I so despise." He did not answer himself, for he knew already the answer, and he did not like hearing it, especially since he knew he would never have more than the other man did.

The fact that a woman could leave the man she truly loved for one whom she knew to be a fiend, and for no other reason than that the latter had more money to support her our young friend could not understand. It is not at all strange that he should feel this way, for Thomas had the heart of a poet, and so he believed that nothing in the world was as important as love, and that so long as you had that, nothing else mattered. He felt as if the most important thing in one's life was to find their other half, and once found, they would each never suffer again, but would be eternally rewarded, their love of each other conquering all obstacles that dare stand in their wake. Rosemary however had a different opinion of such matters, as many women do, and needed the guaranteed security that accompanies wealth. If Thomas had even a small fortune, she would have chosen him without another thought, but since he did not, she had to consider how her future family was to be

supported. Whether this belief is instilled upon woman by society when they are little, and reinforced as they grow older, the author will leave to others to determine, and merely state that it is one of the sadder events of life. For how many women are ultimately less happy in life, having abandoned the lover they know to be true, for one they hope will one day be, but who seldom if ever is? It would be different if we had multiple lives in which to live, and so they could just wait until the next one when things might be different, but even then, if you have the chance to spend even one minute longer with your ultimate companion, how could you turn it down?

Our young friend had just read "Far From the Madding Crowd", a book about a man who finds himself in a similar situation, and so he knew that this was not only not uncommon, but had been going on for quite some time. In a strange sort of way it is slightly romantic, the woman giving up her own happiness for what society deems a necessity, but unless her true love acquires the wealth eventually, and wins her back, as is what happened to the character in the before mentioned book, it is only tragic. Tragic in that she has destroyed not only the life of her other half, but everything which might have come out of the life they would have led together. She has given up in the only life we are guaranteed of living, the one thing which money cannot buy, true love. But I fear the author is getting carried away in trying to convince the reader of the faults in Rosemary's decision, and is perhaps being biased in his reasons for doing so, so I will continue the story without further

mention of it.

Thomas kept walking home, past the same houses he had passed on his way to the church, but he no longer felt the enthusiasm as when he had passed them just hours before, that feeling having been replaced instead by one of utter hopelessness and despair. He walked with his head down, looking at nothing in particular, and did not notice either the nest of birds that sung to him from high above in an old oak tree, nor the sun, which was trying with all its radiance to light the path before him. What he did keep seeing was the wooden Celtic cross that he figured he must have seen somewhere at the church, and the pigtails that he could not place, and which subsequently bothered him most. He tried not to think about his experience inside the room, but the more he tried not to think about it, the more he did. "I know it was there," he thought, thinking of the painting, "Yet it couldn't have been." He also thought of the eyes of the woman, which were the most beautiful that he had ever seen. No matter how hard he tried however, the look of the eyes kept appearing to him.

He finally arrived home, and looking at the calendar that hung on the closet door, he saw that school started the following day. He had decided some weeks prior to go back to school as he felt he had accomplished nothing of what he had set out to do since he had dropped out. Noticing this was his last day of summer, he repeated a part of a poem he had written in his younger days, "Worthless evenings/days slept/once again/the summer

has/escaped me." But now he was pleased with the intrusion of school upon his summer as it brought with it the possibility of a diversion from his present condition. He knew that in the state he was in, to do nothing would surely bring forth the sound of madness' wing upon his ear. He also wanted to graduate as soon as possible, and so was looking forward to getting the chance to accomplish this goal. But he was ill prepared for the coming day, and so he left his home once again to buy the notebooks and such that he knew he needed, having used up the others from the previous semester on the story he was working on, but which was getting nowhere as he could focus only on the events of the last few months, and not on the characters and setting of the story in his mind.

As he entered the store, which was located just a few blocks from his home, he saw a little girl standing in the candy aisle, debating between buying some taffy or some gum. She looked vaguely familiar to him, but he thought nothing more of her until he heard her mother calling her from the next aisle over, "Ivy, hurry up child!" He turned frantically around upon hearing the name, as if his own had been called, and he thought to himself, "She'll choose the gum." He looked back just in time to see that he was right, as the little girl grabbed her candy and made her way quickly to where her mother was. "How did I know that?" he asked himself, and then found himself running down the aisle after the girl to get a better look of her as well as the mother who was calling her. As he reached the end of the aisle and was about to

enter the next, where he knew them to be, he saw again the eyes from the church and he half expected to see the painting standing in place of the mother and daughter, but also just as he had thought the girl would choose the gum, he thought he would see the mother wearing her hair in pigtails. But as he made his way into the aisle where they were, he saw that the mother was not wearing her hair that way, as he was so sure she would be. As a matter of fact, he saw that neither of the two looked like he had imagined, but were complete strangers to him. He could not figure out why he had thought they would be familiar to him, or why he had thought the girl would choose the gum, or why he thought the mother would be wearing her hair in pigtails, and he shook his head in the false belief that doing so would help him see things clearer, everything clearer. This did not work however as after he had done so the mother of the girl was looking at him as if he were crazy, and the look was to him as if a confirmation of what he himself was beginning to believe, which was that he was mad.

As he left the store with his supplies he kept wondering about what had just happened to him, and why it was he was having these images coming forth from behind his clouded mind. He hoped despairingly that his luck would change, and these unwanted visions would go away like so many things in his life already had, which were not like this, but which were pleasant, and which he did not want to go, but had anyway. But alas, he could not get them to leave him as he kept seeing the eyes of the woman all around

him, as if they were trying to tell him something, trying to get him to see something, something that perhaps he had lost or forgotten. Whatever it was that he was now without, he knew that he must regain it somehow, for to do otherwise would be the death of him.

He arrived home, and not feeling himself able to concentrate on a book, he turned on the television. The station was playing a series of commercials, and not really caring what was on, just so long as something was, he lay the remote down and stared at the screen. The commercials ended after a minute or so, and the program resumed. He could not have told you what the show was, as even though he was looking at it, his mind was seeing something else. It was seeing a small backyard garden, and a woman, a most beautiful woman, bending over some flowers. She was rubbing the pedals of one of the roses and then smelling her fingers that because of her touching of them, now carried the same scent as that of the flower. The image had come to him from somewhere deep inside himself, and yet he had the sensation that it had also come from somewhere beyond himself. As if nature, or some such law greater than that of science, had intervened in his life, and was attempting to alter it for his betterment, and would succeed, if only he could be made to see and to understand. And as these thoughts floated through his head the image of the woman became nearer to him, or rather it felt like he was approaching nearer their image. He was getting closer to her, but she did not notice or seem to mind his intrusion upon her. Just as she was close enough to him so

that he could have reached out and touched her shoulder, she seemed to notice him for the first time. She turned slowly, softly, and with a smile, as if the wind had blown her, and the image of her stirred in him the physical desire to have this woman, but also the more feminine desire to be loved by her. She was lovelier than he had ever thought a woman capable of being, and no mere language of man could ever begin to describe her, or the feelings she aroused in this young man. And so it would be with these thoughts that he would find himself in his bed trying to get some sleep before the semester officially began the next morning, and the summer was officially at an end.

CHAPTER TWO

The next day as he was sitting at his desk waiting for the teacher to arrive and class to begin, he noticed a woman come in wearing a necklace. But it was not just any necklace, but the necklace, the wooden Celtic cross. But even more remarkable to him was that this woman was no stranger to him, but was someone that he knew. He could not say exactly how he knew her, for he was sure that he had never met her before, yet somehow he had seen the face before, seen the body before, had caressed them both with his now trembling hands. But how, and where, were the questions that plagued him as he stared at her with an intensity he had not felt in some time. The woman noticed his stares and smiled uncomfortably at him, and her smile also he knew, as it was the exact one that he had dreamed about the previous night. And suddenly he was aware of how he knew her, for it was the woman from the garden. As soon as he became aware of who she was, a thousand images flooded his mind, images that up until that point had been hidden from him. He suddenly recalled nights spent with this woman at her home, conversations they had had on her red couch in front of the television. He could remember the taste of her soft lips upon his own, the feel of her smooth skin pressed against his rougher flesh, and the feeling he got when her hair fell upon his chest as she rested her head upon him. He was overwhelmed at these sensations as it was as if he were experiencing them all together at that exact moment.

As he felt all of this in his inner being, he had to look away, for even though it was more than pleasing to him, it was too much for him to bear. And as he stared down at his book, pretending to read it, he began to wonder if she would still be there when he looked back up, or if like a vision, she would be gone from him. He wanted desperately to look back up at her, to view her magnificence again, but he couldn't, for he felt that if she was indeed a vision, and would therefore not be there to meet his gaze, than he would be unable to endure losing her like he had lost Rosemary. And so he prevented himself from looking in her direction even after the teacher had arrived and class had begun. But neither did he pay attention to the instructor, even after he had begun teaching, but instead let his mind recall each and every detail of his time spent with this woman, cherishing each and every moment as if they were the most precious things in the world to him, which of course they were. And in what seemed to him like mere seconds, for he was in another world in which time moves quite differently than our own, his fellow classmates began to move about, and the sounds of zippers zipping and desks moving brought him back from the place where he had been and to the far less heavenly place of room 108. And realizing he was no longer in that other world, but belonged again to this one, he quickly threw his books in his bag, and hurriedly exited the classroom, still afraid to look in her direction.

As he walked down the hallway he was thinking to himself how he could have possibly recalled all of the before mentioned things when he knew he

had not really experienced them. At least not in the way he was used to experiencing things. Not like the way he was experiencing walking down the hallway right now, his hands in his pockets, viewing the different faces of the students as they walked by him and beside him on their way to and from class. The guy on his right with the Cardinal hat and oversized T-shirt, the girl approaching him now with the Adidas sweat pants and flip flops, the group of foreign exchange students up ahead laughing and talking in a language he did not understand. It was not unlike what sometimes happens when you wake in the morning after a night of dreaming, and for an instant you can't determine if your memories are reality or a part of your dream. But this was different, for those moments only last an instant before your able to determine which is which, but in this case he was still uncertain.

The entire rest of the day and throughout the evening, our young friend would be in deep thought as he struggled with whether or not the memories he had of him and this woman were real, or whether they were simply the beginning stages of madness. He could not believe the latter was true however, as the images were so real to him, and brought him such happiness, that he was certain they must be more than simply the byproduct of a mind losing touch with reality. He also knew that it was vital to his future that he solve this riddle of this woman and the feelings she inspired within him, and so he decided that in order for him to know for sure one way or the other, he must see the woman again in order to see if she brought forth from within him the same responses as from earlier in the day, and

that if she did, then he must somehow get himself into a conversation with her.

And so the following day he arrived at class some thirty minutes early in order to make sure he did not miss her as she walked in, but also to give himself time to prepare for his newfound destiny.

He would sit in his desk patiently waiting, and thinking about all of the images that had raced through his mind the previous day, when he would hear the sound of footsteps approaching from outside the door. It was to him as if all sound had been erased except for the sound of the approaching steps, which he knew to be the woman's. As they came nearer to him, he could not help but feel a sense of anticipation, but even more so, he could not help but feel a sense of relief, a relief that in a matter of seconds he would know his future, a future that this woman would reveal to him. As he had this thought his mind was brought back to a moment he had not thought about in some time, a moment several months prior. It was the night of the party, when right as his life seemed at an end, he had seen the moon, and it had promised him that it would erase the black stain that scarred his soul by revealing to him what his future held. And just then the woman came into the room, and instantly he knew that the moon had not lied to him, but had kept her promise, and that his future was this very woman, and she was beautiful. And looking at her, he could not help but see the moon in her eyes, as if this woman carried the essence of that celestial body in her inner being. And in looking at her, he could not help but remember the moon as it was that very night many months ago, surrounded by clouds so that it appeared to be the very eye of

the night sky looking down at him, smiling upon him, as if saying, "Do not be so wounded my friend, for your future is not earth bound, but in the sky above, up here with me." And looking at the woman who had just entered, he was no longer earth bound, but had risen to new heights by her presence. And so his question had been answered, he was not mad, but was fulfilled.

As class had begun, and the teacher had started teaching, something else happened that amazed our young friend to no end. It started out as something fairly common, but ended up being something quite extraordinary. It began with a cell phone that was heard ringing from somewhere in the back of the classroom, and which made almost the entire class look back to see from whence the noise was coming. But not everyone looked back, which is what turned this otherwise minor annoyance into something special, something that would be the beginning of everything for our young friend. You see, of all the people in the room, there were only two who did not turn round, but instead turned to each other, drawn by some outside force to do so. And those two were Thomas and the woman.

He would look in her direction as if something were calling him to do so, and she in turn would do likewise, so that their eyes would meet at precisely the same moment, each coming to a rest upon the other. And as their eyes met, they communicated to each other in a language usually only spoken between two long and lasting lovers. A language that changes from couple to couple, moment to moment, so that it is never the same, and therefore only

known to the two speakers. And as they spoke to each other with their eyes, the phone could still be heard ringing, causing the two to smile to themselves as if they were the only two in the room who had heard, and who knew of its humor. And as they smiled to each other they suddenly became aware of this otherworldly communication between the two of them, and of its importance, and so they were made awkward, and therefore looked away from each other, as it was too much for them to understand at that moment. But the moment had happened, and could not be ignored, at least not for long, at least not by Thomas. And so our young friend would spend the remainder of the class thinking about what had just happened between the two of them, but would not dare to look again, lest the moment repeat itself, or worse yet, not repeat itself. And closing his eyes and replaying the moment over again in his mind's eye, he was reassured that his knowledge of this woman, and the time they had spent together, was real and not imagined.

As soon as class was over Thomas hurriedly exited the room so that he could be alone, far away from anyone who might disturb his thoughts. But as he made his way down the stairs and outside of the building, he could hear footsteps walking behind him, the very same that he had heard hers make earlier, and he knew that it was she who was behind him. He could not however bring himself to turn round and look at her, but instead took comfort in knowing that she was walking along with him, like God Himself had done in the "Footsteps" parable. And he was comforted in knowing that he had

not been abandoned, that God had not left him.

The following day would bring the two of them together again, and just like the previous day, they again would speak the language of two long and lasting lovers. It happened quite differently on this occasion however, as it was both longer and more deeply felt by both. It started out when the instructor had asked a question about the book they were reading for class, "The Butcher Boy", and the two of them again looked in the direction of the other. The reason for this particular look was different however as it was more a type of courtesy each was extending to the other. You see, it was usually one or the other of these two who answered most of the questions asked by the teacher, and so when he asked his first question of the day about one of the chapters of the book, they each waited to answer, so as to give the other the opportunity. They would look a long time into each other's eyes, waiting to see if the other would answer, until Thomas would gesture to her to go ahead, at which time she did. Her answer was both intelligent as well as elegant, and Thomas was glad he had let her answer, as it allowed him to see further into her inner workings. The next question asked produced the same response by the two, only this time Thomas was told by her to answer, and so he did. After he had answered he could tell by her look that his response was pleasing to her, and so he too was pleased. This would go on the remainder of the class with less and less subtlety, so that after a few minutes everyone in the room had noticed the connection between the two of them.

However, he would not wait around after class on this day either, as the afternoon's events had brought back the same haunting question to his mind, how he knew so much about this woman whom he had only met days before. But there was a new question that had arisen that was equally puzzling to him, which was how she was able to understand him with such ease, as was apparent through their communication together. Our young friend had thought about simply asking her after class if they had met somewhere before, but had decided that this would not be a very good thing to do for two reasons. The first reason being that it may have sounded to her as if he were using a line in order to pick her up, and he did not want to be known as a man who used lines to meet women. The other reason he did not want to simply ask her was because he wondered what he would have said to her as to why he believed he had met her. For surely he could not have said that he knew all about her from his dreams, which provided him images of the two of them together. And so my dear reader, it was for these reasons that our young friend once again left this woman without attempting to converse with her.

When he arrived home he would again see images of this woman in his head. They were of her inside a bedroom bent over a sleeping child, kissing her gently on the forehead as he viewed it all from the hallway just outside the door. And as this image appeared to him, he could not help but feel the strongest desire he had had as of yet for this woman, as if this image of her in her most godlike state, motherhood, brought forth from within him hidden

desires to be a part of this family scene, to be a father to this child, and a husband to this woman. These feelings that stirred in him surprised him, as he had never before gave much thought to a family life. It is not that he was opposed to such a life, just that he had always assumed it would come with time, naturally, of its own accord, but at a much later time than at present. But now, as he viewed the image of this woman and her daughter, he could not help but feel that he had been mistaken, and that there was no greater joy in life than the one that now presented itself to him. And he sat there for some time enjoying this image as many fathers before him have done, he was more at peace than he had ever been in his entire life.

But alas, the image would fade, and he would be left alone in his apartment, confronted once again with the question of from where had it come. And the difference in moods from just moments earlier to now was vast, and caused more than a little grief for our young friend. And the feeling of despair that now confronted him, as well as the image of the woman and her daughter, made him think of Rosemary, and the child that she would soon be having. He wondered how his life would be different if the baby were his and not the others, but also of how he would have gladly raised that baby as his own if only she had loved him. But these thoughts did not help him out of his melancholy, but only reopened old wounds that were more than painful to him, and so he closed his eyes and tried not to think of anything, not even the woman from his dreams, as even the thought of her brought no comfort to

him, as no matter how hard he tried, she would not be there in the flesh.

CHAPTER THREE

The next day Thomas awoke rather lazily and with much effort, as he had been up late trying to sleep, but without success. He had thought about all kinds of different things as he lay there, from moments of his childhood to moments yet to be, and not a single one of his thoughts freed him from his gloom. As a matter of fact, he felt more depressed upon waking than he had for some time. Luckily for our young friend, however, his depression would not last the afternoon. What brought him out of his darkness the reader may have already guessed. It was the woman, but more specifically, the feelings the woman aroused in him. It happened as he was seated in his chair, his head buried in his arms, his arms resting on his desk. He once again heard her footsteps approaching from outside the room, but as he was cast in such a dark shadow that day not even his knowledge of her approaching was able to revive him. He would listen however, as even a man on the guillotine would listen to the conversations around him, hoping beyond hope that from one of the voices would come his pardon. And Thomas' pardon did indeed come, come in the most unusual and unforeseen way. As he sat with his head down, listening to her footsteps, they did not take the usual path past him and to the far side of the room, but instead stopped in front of him and then turning, made their way toward him, stopping right beside his very seat. His eyes opened wide when he realized what had happened, that she had seated herself next to him, but he would not let his eyes confirm what his ears had heard for he was in shock, her actions taking him totally by surprise.

But he could not keep his head down forever, and so he looked up, and what he saw was equally shocking to him. What he saw was the woman seated beside him, her hair in pigtails, and the wooden Celtic cross hanging round her neck. She smiled at him when he looked at her, and he returned her smile. It was absolutely amazing to him to behold this woman, and seeing her up close for the first time he saw just how much she resembled the woman from his visions. And for a split second he thought he had fallen asleep at his desk, and was dreaming again. And the desire to reach out and touch her so as to determine if this was indeed so was overwhelming to him, so much so that he could feel his hand begin to move toward her as if he were no longer in control of himself, but was being guided by his desires for her. It was as if someone else were moving his hand without his consent, and he wondered if it were she who was doing it, as he knew that she had a mysterious power over him. But luckily for our young friend, he did not touch her, for who knows what she would have thought of him if he had done so. Instead, the teacher walked in at that exact moment, and asked a question of the woman. And as the woman answered his question our young friend regained control of his hand and pulled it back in time, so that no one but him noticed what had happened.

The rest of the class period he watched her out of the corner of his eye, noting every single thing about her and placing it deep inside himself. As he did this he could not help but feel that this was not the first time he had done so, but that he had watched her just as he was watching her now at some other time, but when?

As he had this thought it appeared to our young friend that the desks in the classroom had turned to tables, and that his friends were seated at one of the tables. They were all drinking and making merry, and he was seated with them, but he was not listening to their talk, but instead was watching the woman from out of the corner of his eye. She was talking to another table and laughing, and he noted how her laugh made him feel free, as if it were a key that was unlocking a cage he had up until that time been trapped inside. And then he saw a bar in place of where the teacher's desk had been, and he saw himself along with his friend Lily, talking to this woman. Next, Lily would be gone, and he would be leaning over said bar, kissing the woman. A hundred different such images came into his mind, all involving himself and this woman. He closed his eyes and let the images pass before him, and hoped that at the end he would know from where did they come.

The last image that appeared to him was of the woman, yet somehow she was different. It was in her eyes where the difference lay, and he felt that this difference was meaningful, yet he could not determine why. He tried to figure out what this last image meant, but could not, for there was something still missing. What was missing was the certainty of her love for him, and his belief in that love. When he finally realized this, he became aware of everything. He became aware of the fact that the images had started after he had gone to the church, and that it was in that very church which he had attended as a small boy where he experienced all of these things with her. "So they are not images of the

past, but of the future," he said to himself, as he finally understood. "But this answer raises yet another question," he went on, "do I believe in the woman of the red couch, that she exists as I knew her on that couch, or was the other, with something lacking in the eyes, the real woman. Until I can answer that question I cannot determine where my path in life leads." He was torn between this newfound dilemma, for to believe in her would involve no factual data, but only faith, whereas to deny her as many of the facts pointed to, would involve abandoning all hope of a future happiness beyond the life he now knew, a life of continuous pain and agony. His poet's heart told him to believe, to take this woman's hand and follow her wherever she might choose to lead him, but his reason, which he had equally relied upon throughout his life, told him that it would not be worth the feeling of disappointment if she proved false, and abandoned him forever in the desert of despair. "I must search the eyes," he finally thought, "for I am certain that the answer lay there." As he said this he turned once again to the woman, to search her eyes for an answer, but she was talking to the girl on the other side of her, and he could not see in order to search.

He would finally get his opportunity at the end of class when they would meet by chance at the door on their way out. It happened as a woman who sat in front of him was bent over picking up her books, and he was waiting for her before he proceeded forward. She would apologize to him for being in his way, and he would assure her it was no trouble and that he could wait, but she insisted that he go around her, and made room for him to do so. And so he stepped by her,

keeping his eyes downward so as not to accidentally step on her feet, and when he had gotten round to the other side and looked up, he found himself at the door standing directly in front of the woman who held the secret to his fate, her eyes looking right into his own. His initial reaction was one of nervousness as this encounter was quite unexpected, but he quickly recovered himself and greeted the woman, "Hello, how are you?" As the words came out they sounded funny to him in that they were not the first words he would have thought would have been spoken between them. The reason being that they sounded so formal, and lacked considerably the emotion with which he felt. He wished he could have taken them back, but seeing as he could not, he awaited a response from her. She did not speak, but merely smiled, which again caught him off guard and made him feel nervous. It shouldn't have however, for in her smile she was communicating more than what he had communicated with his greeting. And besides, it could also have been interpreted as an acknowledgement of the impropriety of his words, and that she was trying to show him that she understood everything, including that they knew each other far too well for him to speak to her in such a manner. But alas, our young friend could not decipher the meaning behind her smile, but was made dumbfounded by it. And so still he stood, and still she smiled, until he could think of nothing else to do or say but hastily exit the room.

After our young friend had left the woman behind him with her smile still on her face, he made his way homeward. He was so frustrated by her smile, and the

fact that he could not determine its meaning, was so frustrated by everything that had happened in his life up until that point, by Rosemary and by Violet, and by the moon that had promised to show him everything, but which had showed him nothing, that he began to lose control of himself. And because he could no longer handle the uncertainty of his life, and the waiting patiently for an answer, and because he could not understand anything, could not see clearly anything, he began to feel more alone than ever, as if he were no longer a part of the human race, but was a stranger to the world. So much so that not even walking past a pond that was located near his home, and where could be seen a family of ducks swimming in its waters, could pull him out of this darkness and restore him to his former self.

And so, as he looked at the family of ducks he found himself wanting to yell at them, "Hey ducks, Fuck Off!" And as he continued to walk, he saw a family of four walking on the other side of the street, a father and mother and their two sons, and seeing this he was reminded of the family he had dreamt about, but which he did not have, and he found himself wanting to yell at them, "Hey you there, family of four, Fuck Off!" And as he continued to walk he passed by one of the same houses he had passed on his way to the church that day which now seemed so long ago, that day in which he had put his hope in the walls of a building from his youth, and the remembrance was embarrassing to him. "How stupid I was then, to believe that there were any answers there," he thought, and looked up at the sky as he had done then, only this time with quite a different

look on his face. And looking skyward, to the place where heaven was said by the ancients to be located, he found himself wanting to say to the heavens, "Hey heaven, Fuck Off!" He felt alone and abandoned, and he thought to himself, "If I am destined to be by myself, then fine, let me be by myself, I can handle that, but why keep fucking with me. Why does He keep trying to give me hope when there is no hope to be had."

And when he heard the word hope, he thought about the hope he had been living with since that night outside the party, the hope that the moon had promised him, but also he thought about what happened inside, and the pain it had caused him. And he could feel the pain again in his heart, as thinking about it had reopened the wound that had never healed, but was still fresh. And he said, "Quit fucking with me moon! Moon who is now hidden from me behind the day, too scared to face me and admit to me that you lied. Fuck Off moon! There is no future, but only a past and a present, a past and a present full of loneliness and despair. Fuck Off future! Fuck Off past and present! Fuck Off everything and everybody!" And as he said this he decided that he would no longer put his faith in that which could not be proven, but would follow his reason. And his reason told him that there were no answers in the woman's smile, that there were no answers in the woman's eyes, that they were just a pretty smile, and pretty eyes, and nothing more. And that to continue to chase them and to look to them was foolish. And so he decided that he would end all this nonsense once and for all, and thinking this he asked of himself, "I have been searching

for answers my entire life and where has it lead me?" And he answered himself, "To nowhere but the black bottom of my soul." And he punched at the sky, wishing his arms were longer so that he could reach God, and strike Him, as he had been stricken. "Hey God" he shouted, "Fuck Off." And as he said this, a man walking near him turned round to look at him, and he said to the man, "And you can Fuck Off too!" And the man became startled and walked faster so as to get away from our young friend, who turned his eyes once again to the sky, his eyes full of tears, tears of rage or sorrow the author can only guess, and he said one last time, "Fuck Off!" He then turned and walked into his apartment, as he had reached it at last. Once inside, he called the admissions office of his school and informed them that he would be dropping all of his classes. This was done with the intention of never having to see the woman again. After he had hung up the phone he felt a sense of calm, as if somehow in giving up on his future he had discovered a newfound peace with his present. And as he sat there he could not help but remember a couple of verses from the poem "God's Funeral", by Thomas Hardy, and he quoted the verses, "And tricked by our own early dream/And need of solace, we grew self-deceived/Our making soon our maker did we deem,/And what we had imagined we believed." "Till, in Time's stayless stealthy swing,/Uncompromising rude reality/Mangled the Monarch of our fashioning/Who quavered, sank; and now has ceased to be..." And he closed his eyes and went to sleep that night, having like Hardy, buried his God.

But he did not realize how prophetic his words would be until the next morning when he was drinking a cup of coffee and reading the local paper, and he read that there had been a terrible car accident involving two local college students. And as he looked at the photo's that accompanied the article, he saw her, the woman, and she was looking at him. And on her face was the very smile that she had showered upon him the day before when he had left her behind him in his forlorn state. And looking at her, his heart stopped, and his hands trembled, and he cried out, "No!" And he cried out that it cannot be, that she cannot be dead, but she was. And he read the article again, hoping beyond hope that he had misread it and that she lived, but he had not been mistaken, and so he read again how she had been killed by a drunk driver in a head on collision on highway 44 at approximately four o'clock in the afternoon. When he saw the time, four o'clock in the afternoon, his heart sank, for it was at that very hour when he had recited the Hardy poem, and had pronounced her dead. And realizing that the two things had happened at precisely the same time, he threw the paper on the floor, and grabbed his head with his hands, and he began to rock back and forth. And tears could be seen flowing down his cheeks and onto the paper that had landed at his feet. Each drop landing with precision on the photo of the woman, her smile gone, having been replaced instead by tears that flowed from her eyes, her beautiful eyes that had held the key to his destiny, his destiny of splendor after all his doom of littleness and meanness and pain.

But he did not see her tears, nor hear her cry, not above his own, and so he was not comforted in knowing that they were each weeping for the other.

And as he continued to rock back and forth he could not help but feel that he was somehow responsible for her death, that somehow, in his giving up on her as well as himself, he had helped cause her death.

"What if I had only said something more to her that day, what if I had only heard what her smile was saying to me, had only seen what her eyes were trying to show me. What if I had only..."

He did not finish his thought, but just kept repeating the words, "No, it cannot be. No, it cannot be." And he said this as if he were saying the rosary, with the hope that if he said it enough times, he would be absolved of his sin, and she would be alive again, her smile there to greet him when he reopened his eyes.

"No, it cannot be. No it cannot be."

He would repeat the words for hours, not moving from his spot on the chair, until he would collapse in exhaustion and despair, his right hand landing on the photograph of the woman, the tips of his fingers resting on her lips.

As he slept he dreamt of the woman again, of her beautiful eyes and smile that had never ceased in captivating his soul, not even when he had attempted to abandon them forever. And during his dream, he saw her two most striking features not as he had always seen them before, her looking up or down at him from some picturesque position, but on the feminine form of the night sky, for she had become the sky, the illuminator of heavens, and she was revealing to him as

had been promised, his future. And he looked first at her smile, which had taken the form of a shooting star, and he smiled after having viewed it, thankful for having gotten the opportunity to see such rare beauty yet again. And next he looked at her eyes, which were the eyes of the sky, the sun and the moon, and again he smiled having viewed them, thankful to the moon for having fulfilled her promise, and revealing to him his destiny. And his destiny was she, the woman of the red couch, the woman who was now in the midnight sky above him and who was beckoning him to her, calling him forth from out of the doom of littleness and meanness and pain which was his Earthly life, and promising him a life of splendor, a life of heavenly existence. And he heard her call, and knew that he must follow, for he knew it was his destiny to be with this woman, to be with her forever and for always and forevermore, arm in arm, throughout eternity.

And so he awoke the next day, knowing what he must do, and he was contented, for he knew that he would be going home to her that evening, and that she was watching him now, the same as she had done his entire life, and he was warmed by her gaze. And as he lay there for a moment, holding his hand out into the light that came from her look upon him, the sun's beams, he remembered having lived that moment before, and he was happy, for he knew that he would live that moment again, and that every moment with her would be equally as wonderful. And he could have laid there all day in the warmth of her, but he knew that this was his last on this old Earth of ours, and so even though he was glad in knowing that he was leaving it forever to be with her, there were people

here he wanted to say goodbye to. And so he sat up, and walked to his table that was held sturdy by a book about philosophy, and seeing the book at his feet as he sat down he remembered the Shakespeare quote that had always been one of his favorites, and he quoted it aloud, "There are more things between heaven and Earth, Horatio, than are written about in your philosophy books." And having said this, he wondered if people saw the world as he now did, or if they had simply stopped looking. "No," he finally said after some time, "there will always be those who look, and so long as there are those who continue to look, there will be those who will see. Those who will see everything clearer than before, everything clearer."

And so he wrote several letters to his family and friends, to his mother and father, to his brother, to his friend Elijah and his friend Lily, to all of those people in his life who had been close to him. And for a moment he was slightly saddened, as he knew that he would miss them all, but he also knew that they were all good people, each and every one, and so he knew that a day would come in the future when he would see them again. And so he looked forward to that day, and in thinking about it, would be made happy again, and thus enable him to relish in his day, that had finally come.

Having written the letters, he walked out of his apartment for the last time, making his way Eastward toward the old McCloud Bridge, and dropped the letters off in a mailbox along the way. As he dropped the last of the letters in the box, the sun could be seen setting over his shoulder behind him. The setting of the

sun illuminated the sky, and bright colors of orange and red and yellow could be seen quite clearly, and made it look as if God were painting a picture of the moment. Our young friend did not look back to see, however, but was instead looking forward, his eyes searching for the appearance of the moon, which he knew to be the sign that the moment had finally come. And just as he reached the bridge, he could see the moon above him, and through it, her promise of all the splendors of a new life. And looking up at her, he smiled, and he told her that he loved her, and that he had always loved her, and that he would always love her.

And the moon smiled back, and then she told him that what he was looking for he would not find in the arms of a woman, but only in the arms of Him, the creator of worlds. But alas, poor Thomas began to doubt even the moon, and he said thus to her, "But how can I know for certain if He exists?" And the moon responded to his question with the words, "You can only know for certain Thomas by dying." And so Thomas died.

And in death he was raised up to heaven where he found himself standing face to face with his Lord God. And Thomas instantly dropped to his knees, kneeling before Him, and there were tears in his eyes. And his creator said to him, "Blessed are you my son who has been poor in spirit, for now and forevermore yours is the kingdom of heaven." And having said these words He opened his arms to Thomas and revealed to him all of His heavens. And Thomas saw them all clearly, and felt himself truly blessed.