



Shiloh Mist Rising

NULL STILLNESS

Land of Spirit for a Barren Soul

NULL IS NOT EMPTY – SILENCE IS NOT STILL

“Karen Grace, having absorbed so many lives, will you avoid the mistakes, the bad experiences in your own life?” Her reply was a smile, silence, and a wrinkled nose. Eventually, she spoke “In business I have many solid supports and analysis. We will fail at times, but I am not stressing over the business. ... I will have my love of a lifetime. Someone who can sense the Spirits of the land.” “What insight have you learned on your night meditations?” “Life at the eternal core is unchanging. Each age adapting to bring love into its soul, a love as infinite as the stars in the sky.”

Steve Davis

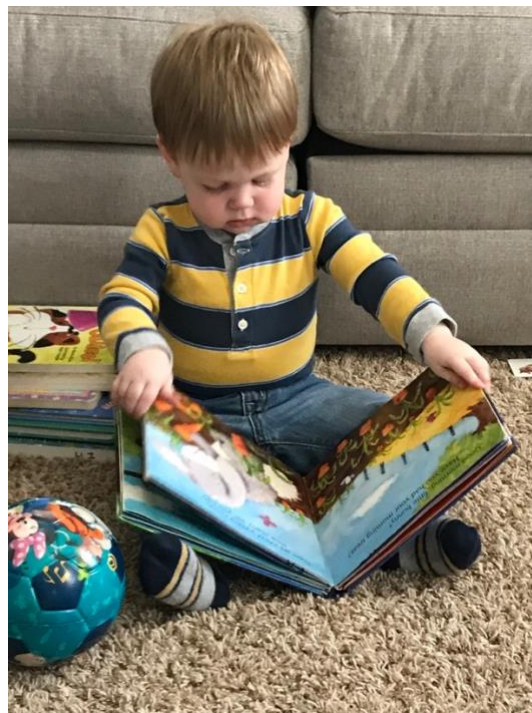
Begin	Chapter Title	Associated Song	Era
Prologue	Null Silence	Sounds of Silence	2022
Chapter 1	Paying Respects	I Beat the Devil	1973
Chapter 2	Warm Embrace	Heart of America	2022
Chapter 3	Unpleasant Duty	Fortunate Son	1970
Chapter 4	Not the expected Biography	Rhubarb Pie	2022
Chapter 5	Get off of My Lawn	For What It's Worth	1975
Chapter 6	Staying Grounded	San Francisco	1974
Chapter 7	Produce Promotions	Seven Bridges Road	1979
Chapter 8	Bucolic is Dangerous	Good Ole Boys	1970
Chapter 9	Boots are better on a farm	California Cottonfields	2022
Chapter 10	All Boots Carry History in the Mud	White Boots Marching	1972
Chapter 11	Bales don't buck themselves	To Know Know Him	1971
Chapter 12	Used to be a farm now it's damn zoo	Real Thang	2022
Chapter 13	Hello trouble	Hello Trouble	1976
Chapter 14	Academia finds the Earth	Wooden Ships	1979
Chapter 15	Gathered in my name, I am here	Wildflowers	1980
Chapter 16	What do you think it is?	Silver Bells	1980
Chapter 17	Lesser Evil	The Masquerade	1977
Chapter 18	Healer Heal Thyself	Love Hurts	1976
Chapter 19	Best Foot Forward	Everybody Knows	1987
Chapter 20	Sunshine and Sweetness	Lovey Dovey	1979
Chapter 21	Downtown Detour	Lady	1980
Chapter 22	Inevitability	Red Headed Stranger	1977
Chapter 23	Stunning	Take a Picture of This	1980
Chapter 24	8 track Memories	Maggie's Farm	1976
Chapter 25	Sweet Voiced Emmy Lou	Someday Soon	2021
Chapter 26	Reunion Revelation	Hotel California	1976
Chapter 27	Deeper Connection	Boulder to Birmingham	2021
Chapter 28	Ridin Reality	Hard Rains a Gonna Fall	1980
Chapter 29	Night's Radiance	Time Passages	2021
Chapter 30	Ruth, just Ruth	Willin	1977
Chapter 31	Thunder Struck	Why Me Lord	1977
Chapter 32	Alliance of Friends	All Along the Watchtower	2008
Chapter 33	Different Dreams	Camelot	1979
Chapter 34	Blessed Here and in Heaven	Wedding Song	1977
Chapter 35	Warmth in the Hearth	Cherry Tree Carol	1987
Chapter 36	Where there is Love	Puff the Magic Dragon	1985

Chapter 37	Real Farming	Woodstock	1983
Chapter 38	Night of the Nativity	Will the Circle be Unbroken	2021
Chapter 39	Doctor Feelgood	Used to Rule the World	1981
Chapter 40	Midwest Comfort	Texas Cookin	2021
Chapter 41	Cartoon Mafia	Lawyers, Guns & Money	1981
Chapter 42	Scars Remain	Beat of a Different Drummer	1976
Chapter 43	It will change the world	Gentrification	1999
Chapter 44	Helen Loomis and Bill Forrester	Who knows where time goes	2021
Chapter 45	Brandy a fine girl	Hit me with your best shot	1981
Chapter 46	Sudden Sadness	Where've you Been	1995
Chapter 47	Stars in their Courses	Night they Drove Dixie Down	1981
Chapter 48	People in the Tubes	Sam Stone	1999
Chapter 49	Elusive Justice	Pancho and Lefty	1981
Chapter 50	Cowboy Diplomacy without a pickup	Lives in the Balance	2018
Chapter 51	Land Memories	Ghost towns along highway	2021
Chapter 52	East Bound West Bound	Ghostbusters	1991
Chapter 53	Rivalries and Lawyers	White Rabbit	2021
Chapter 54	Northern Aggression	Gone to Shiloh	1981
Chapter 55	No Justice in Ignorance	Freedom	2020
Chapter 56	Spirits in the Mist	Mansions of the Lord	1981
Chapter 57	Love is Love	Pass me Not o Gentle Savior	1969
Chapter 58	It's not over -- No, it's never too late	Do Something	2022
Chapter 59	Empty is not Nothing	Hasten Down the Wind	2021
Epilogue	Epilogue	Act Naturally	2024
Appendix	Appendix		

Dedicated to the good people of my middle of nowhere home - not perfect people but good people once you get to know them.

A special thank you to my son Erik. Live Long and Prosper

I express my gratitude to all my family and friends, and that special small church -- you know who you are.



My grandson at sixteen months may this story help him better understand his origins and may he always walk, in sync with the spirits of the land.

The location of this novel is my creation. It is in Western Illinois or Southeastern Iowa. There is an actual Franklin in both states, but I did not try to use the real communities as a model. I did know someone from Franklin IL a college friend of my high school classmate. He like many my age did not survive to live in our current time where the novel ends. I will offer a moment of remembrance to all the Boomers who didn't live to see today being anchored by health and family as I and my fictional Carol Parker are.

Having their say:

“Hi, I’m Karen Grace Parker. I spoke with the characters in this novel. Some felt the stories may not always present them accurately. I had an applecart of stories on my desk. I wrote or edited many of them. Carol Parker says she tried her best to convey the true essence of the story and the people she wrote about. I felt they ought to be allowed to have their say. Carol asked me to listen to her playlist as I read the stories; I asked each character to pick a song. This perplexed some of them.”

Junior – “I’m Junior Williams. I would like you to know it is hard not to be a good ole boy, when you are one. I’m from Eastern Tennessee. I suppose I am part of the culture you all are trying to cancel. My wife Lizzie is from back home, but she seems almost like a San Francisco Democrat at times. I loved them Dukes of Hazzard, but I am not a racist. Well, I might be a little prejudiced, but like I said I am a good ole boy. I know many fans of them Duke Boys right here in Midwestern Franklin. Don Williams “Good Ole Boys Like Me” is my favorite song on the playlist and “The Night They Drove ole Dixie Down.”

Lizzie – “I want to thank Karen Grace for giving me my own voice. I don’t chatter on like the stories might lead a reader to believe. Junior is a bigot, but I love him. He is a mighty good husband. I was lucky to come to Franklin and build a business with Carol and Ruth. We even put a big rock at the end of the drive engraved with Hillbilly Paradise on it. Junior is mighty kind and is slowly moving beyond his prejudices. My song is by Dolly Parton, but I can’t choose between “I Will Always Love You” and “Wildflowers.” I know everyone would enjoy singing along with me on either one.”

Young Tom – “I am a silent partner, for the most part I do not need a voice. I am no longer young. Being the grandson of Thomas Parker, Young Tom was inevitable. I am a proud father of Karen Grace. My innovations did set Parker Produce and Fruit on a solid financial path in a chaotic modern world. I do suppose I could have been more sensible in some respects. This more sensible thing was the part of this book I most objected to. I started into tech as a teenager and the companies kept giving me stock, besides Audis are solid little cars. Karen Grace has proved most sensible. I do love her and Aunt Carol, even Franklin for short visits. My song pick is the Santana version of “Imagine,” also I do like “The Real Thing” by Hot Sauce Universe.”

Tom & Helen Parker – “I will speak for Helen and me. We were very proud of our daughter Carol and very hurt when she ran away. I may have spoken too roughly, but I knew rough times. If the Hippies had a case to make, they should have been more presentable when making it. Carol and her boys became a warmth and pride that overcame all the past. My son Lawrence and I in our Chicago law firm follow procedure and rule, but Carol found our family’s roots and created a new world. Our lives were lived well; we worked and overcame. We could have been less rigid and harsh. Carol would carry less guilt and my folks less loss. Those songs on the list aren’t our music, but Perry Como with “Catch a Falling Star” or “Silver Bells” are the best.”

Eldon Parker – “Grace and I lived a farm life. We were lucky and had good hard work to do. The times were tough in the 20’s and 30’s, then our boys all got pulled into the wars. We were proud of all of them, and lucky Tom and Leon weren’t killed or wounded in the big war. Kenny who chose to be called Lance was the kindest of our boys. He was not in Korea during the toughest time. Grace gave them church and I gave them hard work. We always had food. I lost my man and friend Jim Donaldson after I lost Grace, then all I had was church and an empty house. When Tom came with Carol, I felt Grace give a sigh of relief. Most of this is after our time it does seem the modern world got all confused. I wasn’t planning to pick a song; I wasn’t strong on music. Most musicians were poor workers. “Hello Trouble” by Buck Owens I had heard that song. It is kind of how it is, just getting along and then trouble. That “Heart of America” song by Margo Price rings true.”

Lee from Walnut Ridge – “I suppose everyone from Parkers Produce will always call me Lee from Walnut Ridge. Madison will call me, Lee the world’s greatest guitarist. I do love my guitar and Madison. I also love Karen Grace’s singing and when singing with Lizzie and her daughter Elly. They are a fabulous vocal group. The final tour date back home at Parker’s Zoo, as Carol calls it, changed many lives for the better. I love the food at Parkers Zoo and especially meals at Carol’s house. My song is Guy Clark’s fabulous ‘Texas Cooking’ also Carol should have added a Mark Knopfler song with her boomer music I love his playing.”

Madison – “I had never heard of Franklin or Walnut Ridge. Nor could I imagine a world like the one Karen Grace shanghaied me to for our report. I am not complaining, but I thought being mocked by Karen for being a groupie was borderline. The list has no Orange Buffoons’ songs and way too many Boomer Tunes. But if you heard Karen Grace’s cover of “Landslide” or “White Rabbit,” then your soul might be left rocked. Now Lee has me considering a house near Walnut Ridge and honestly, I have yet to understand why it even has a name – it just looks like cornfields to me.”

Julie Ileo Greene – “I agree with Madison. I could not imagine a place like Franklin. Carol seems so grounded on her farm; it is hard to see her growing up a Chicago girl like Madison did. Maybe Karen Grace should have included the Green Alices theme song for me. I do like my hometown of New York and am far more at ease with any delegation at the U.N. than here. I came into this rural wasteland by my marriage to Mark Greene. I am treated fairly, with expected insensitivity. I have come to appreciate its quiet beauty; it seems Mark carries it within him. I will choose “Everybody Knows” I do like Leonard Cohen. I will also mention “I Will Always Love You” by Whitney Houston that was the version I knew.”

Mark Greene – “I am Max and Margaret Greene’s son. We were neighbors and members of the same Franklin church with the Parkers. I worked at Parkers back in square bales days. My Dad partnered with Eldon on the cows, then became the tenant for Tom Parker. I suppose I can’t complain about my characterization. I think I am portrayed too favorably, but in contrast to Carol’s other romances I didn’t need to try too hard. I am told Carol and Karen Grace had tried to make my travel narrations concise. Karen Grace said the editor

began whacking paragraphs with a cleaver. Carol had always quizzed me and asked for more of my lectures. Lectures, I suppose is the best term. She would stop me when her cup was overflowing. I can be boring, but my dialogs are needed history. My song is "Gone to Shiloh" Leon Russell and Elton John – I never leave the nineteenth century and neither does America. I love "Lives in the Balance" Jackson Browne the common people often suffer when the national powers roll in, as I have learned in the foreign service."

Stephen – "I have much to complain about. I mean who else was compared to a maggot filled corpse. Look at how much my books did to promote Carol's farm and of course our time together was sensational. We each profited from the moments we shared. I think life worked out best for everyone. I always loved Carol and the farm, in spite of the fact it was so dangerous and dull. An abundance of good things and a few mistakes. I try to see it from Carol, Ruth, and Lizzie's point of view, but there are two sides. I will choose "Camelot" Richard Burton and "Woodstock" Joni Mitchell people need to believe."

JB Donaldson – "I can't say everything weren't mostly true. I am sorry especially for all the cussing. I was awful foul back in my drinkin and fightin days after I was back from Nam. I thank God for Ruth every day. I also have to give a shout to the Franklin United Methodist Church as well as Mr. Eldon Parker and Carol 'thoughts in the clouds' Parker. My life was a train wreck every weekend; it became filled with joy because of Ruth. Carol, Ruth, and all the kids went to New Harmony with me to see "We Were Soldiers." It was tough and somewhat true. I will pick – "Mansions of the Lord" and "Why Me" Kris Kristofferson. Please play that James Brown song for Jerome he did expand my understanding and saved my life."

Ruth just Ruth – "Carol always liked my ideas and the horses more than she lets on. We were a fine family. It just proves God's love will flow through everything if you let it. It took an overwhelming flood to carry us through and it has. I hope that editor doesn't ruin the stories. We have a wonderful world of God's creation and unconditional love to share. Renewed health in this land and the easing of the bigotry is all found in love. God gave me the best life with Carol and JB – I am going with "My Heroes Have Always Been Cowboys" Waylon Jennings; it did play on JB's 8 track on my first ride in the Orange Beast. The song "The Circle Will Be Unbroken" is mighty fine, as well."

Carol Parker – "I can't complain I wrote most of the stories. Karen Grace wants to capture our link to and existence with all these generations. Karen Grace is bringing a message of renewal to humanity, she's a social media messiah. Her goal is to save a planet now. When Parker Produce and Fruit began to grow, we just worked and tried to make profits. We wanted healthy foods, a healthy earth, and a loving home for our families. We didn't have other aspirations. Ruth will say I set her on the best life, but the truth is Eldon and Grace, Tom and Helen, and JB did as well. Many pasts allowed Ruth, Lizzie, and I to have a wonderful family and rewards beyond price. Karen Grace listened to my playlist, and I love so many, hard to pick one song. This one is true "Love Hurts" Gram Parsons and Emmy Lou Harris."

Karen Grace Parker – “I used to be just Karen but after the memes I needed Grace. My Great Great Grandparents were Eldon and Grace Parker. I somehow feel connected with them even though they both died thirty years before I was born. Carol’s writings have brought people to life as well as the spirits of the land. It is clear to see our planet can be saved if humanity renews a connection with the land. I am putting all my experience and resources to push forward. We need to pull our planet out of the existential crisis it is plummeting towards. Much to learn and much to do – Carol introduced me to many songs the original “Seven Bridges Road” Steve Young – Carol taught me to quiet my soul and hear “The Sounds of Silence” – Paul Simon and I like “Do Something” by the Eagles but it may be getting too late.”

Grace Hayes Parker – “Times were never bad with Eldon as a husband. The times were hard, but we were grateful and had a wonderful family. I always knew Carol would come home. I knew the house would be hers. It has held a hundred years of love and family from my time, and now with Carol. I am so thankful for Ruth and Lizzie and all the community of Franklin. They were holding Carol up even when she didn’t know it – at least most folks. I am so glad Kenny is recognized as the creative person he is. He’s my fine Kenny, even as Lancelot. When the family joins in prayer at meals life flows, I would choose “Pass Me Not O Gentle Savior” Fanny Crosby and those boys playing the “Ghostbusters” tune was rather catchy – “

Karen Grace Parker - “Having their say is fine, but our goal is to move the world forward by recapturing our humanity. We must let the Earth breathe and live. I didn’t understand what the stillness, quietness, and emptiness could reveal until Carol allowed me to experience it on the original Parker homestead. Ours is a story of family connections in a one-hundred-year slice of life on the Parker family farm.”

Prologue



Feel motion, driving, the road seems dark, still goes on. ‘Yes, a grand trip, Elly, no we’re in Montana it never ends’ - here at college can’t park car in hall - I open the door my friends are here Madison, LaTisha, but no one sees me. Am I not here? Am I invisible? - I open the other door. At the farm, yes, we were going to the farm. Who’s rocking the baby and talking to me. ‘Come here see sweet Carol such a smile.’ Baby Carol no, too long ago. I am young. Not here I can’t be here. ‘Karen Grace you’re home see the sweet smile. Feel the welcome and love.’ I turn into a hug. ‘Glad you’re here, I first spent a summer on the farm when I was your age. We’ll have fun even work on the farm can be fun.’ No, I’m not twelve. What? Dream, a dream, ‘Learn the stories Karen Grace they need to be heard. I’m glad you share my name. Who? Learn the stories, Karen Grace.’ I’m dreaming. I must wake up, I smell coffee and something’s baking, At Aunt Carol’s I can’t see, open eyes. Now finally awake yes dreams so odd yet feel real. I should get up then head to the kitchen. I can’t shake the feelings of the dream. I am glad to be here.

Karen Grace sat up – yes should get going. The aroma drifting up. Aunt Carol had made coffee, and did she smell biscuits?

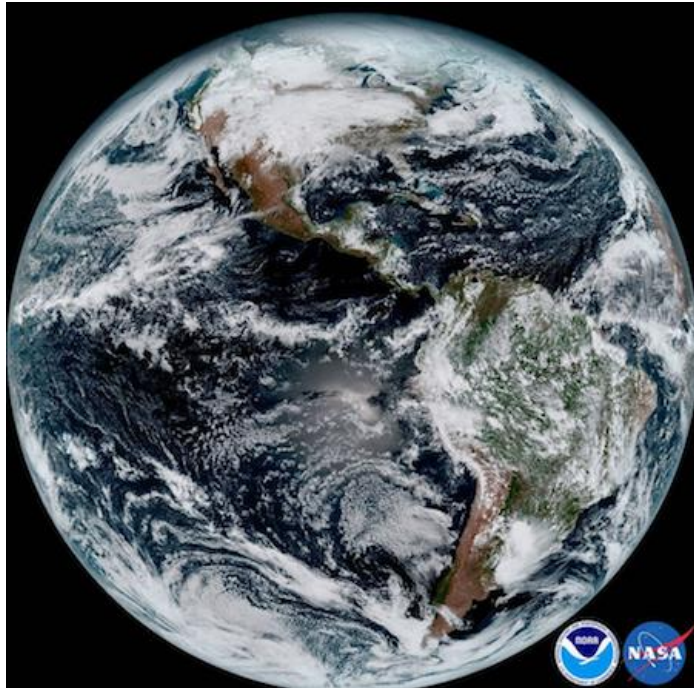
It was a wonderful homecoming. It brought joy home. Karen Grace in three days found an anchor, new revelations, and purpose. Before she returned to what had once been her world, Karen Grace would find herself gazing into the same mirror so many others had. Many lives or spirits began to meld into her own sense of being. Now she feels connection and responsibility to many generations as we all have here. We live in her.

Karen slipped into Carol's room. How long had it appeared when the closet door opened to catch the light of a bright morning sun? Serving as an impassive spectator an unbiased critic of the image it reflected. Old, now catching a new image of a young Parker, ghosting a hint of a long line of wistfully inquiring viewers preparing for a new day. Images debating, speculating, finding a self, less than certain. They were leaving this morning, but her image captured a present self along with all previous reflections. She had come for a feeling of home, a fun diversion, and a good grade. She stood feeling tied, a part of a long connection. Now, having slipped into a unity outside time, beyond a gravity of place. Was she paused before returning to school? Or paused before another Spring morning with coffee on the porch? Many reflections had looked here, asking who am I? What of me? Now an image of Karen Grace awakening to a life she would always share, awakening to a true self. As she turned to leave the echo of a faint voice, 'you are loved here.'

Null Stillness

Hello, darkness, my old friend
I've come to talk with you again
Because a vision softly creeping
Still remains
Within the sounds of silence ...

Paul Simon The Sounds of Silence
Apple Playlist -- Null Stillness -- Pentatonix



Blue Marble

Carol was wonderful with Karen Grace becoming both mother and wise friend. Karen Grace had spent very little time on the Parker family farm. Not unlike Carol herself when she had come back to the farm. Carol made a home, a business, and a life for herself and others. I pray Karen Grace will find her path.

I have observed Karen Grace craft the stories. She tells Carol they revealed lessons, lessons now grafted into her very being. The stories seem jumbled. The intertwined dialogs scattered over many generations are how she came to discover her sense of being. The interconnecting lives cluttering the desk have come together to retell a truth, each true in its own sense of truth. I will let the others guide. I will stay hidden behind the veil.

Chapter 1

Here is the puzzle box of tales. I appreciate editors who take my chaos then add a semblance of order. They have tried to be trail guides, but the lives

came at me suddenly like a prairie storm. The lives I discovered, and the spirits of the land, gave me insights into what life is at its core. My voice must take a pause now; I am but a character. I did insist on this being the first story. Eldon Parker who is my great great grandfather, and JB Donaldson in 1973 rely on the trust of a long family history. JB is a young man with great mechanical skills, who excelled at drunken brawls accompanied by a running stream of profanity laced insults.

My thirsty wanted whiskey
But my hunger needed beans
But it had been a month of paydays
Since I'd heard that eagle scream
So with a stomach full of empty
And a pocket full of dreams
I left my pride and stepped inside ...
Kris Kristofferson – I Beat the Devil
Apple Playlist -- Null Stillness -- Kristofferson

Paying Respects

“Hey JB, sorry about your Grandma Dell”

“Yeah, she was ready, praying, and after the reverend came by, peaceful. I come about the house, I know my folks and granddad lived there and I wanted to know about my staying, now that they’re all gone?”

“Well JB, I got no use for the house and your family worked for me for a long time. I reckon you can stay. Don’t let it look trashy!”

“No sir; I mow the yard. I don’t need no junk.”

“Now JB, I am not much younger than your Grandma Dell. When I die family will get everything including your house. None of them have lived here and I suppose there will be a big sale. They couldn’t farm, wouldn’t know a plow from a turnip. Think they’d starve – You might save up, then offer to buy it from them.”

“Well, Mr. Parker I ain’t never saved much money. Even in ‘Nam when there was nothing to buy, always came up short.”

"JB you're your own man, not my way to tell a man his business. But maybe find another hobby, one to replace bars and fights. Your booze bill and fines would take a bigger wad than I got."

"I know I know, but those hippie pussies just never know when to shut up. Then I show them, they need to learn a little respect."

"Country been fighting long enough. Government didn't do you boys any favors, but hurting those punks isn't going to heal yourself. Must be costly paying for other people's hospital bills."

"But when they get me going – yeah I know, I been fixing those tractors for nothing with the judge garnishing all my wages."

"OK JB, just keep the place up and try to take care yourself, how old are you now?"

"I am 23, sir."

"Still young, a lot of time left, if you slow down to live it"

"Thank you, Mr. Parker don't feel young, feel used up."

"Maybe go fishing at the pond, take that fight to a bass – fishing rights go with the house, as long as there is no drinkin."

"Do you need that IH hydrostat maintained? I had a lesson on one the other day. I know it is handy around the farm, but many don't watch the fluids and filters."

"Yes, it is handy here. I'd appreciate your help. I bought it at a sale; it didn't come with a book. Ever since your Dad was killed, I have been working more with Max Greene. I use that 656 more often than any other tractor. His bigger rig does most of the plowing."

"I'll stop Friday after work and check it out."

"I do miss your Dad; I will never forget that day. I had the best man to work with here any farmer ever had."

"Wish I had been back then. It was tough on my mama. Grandma Dell pulled everyone through it. "

"Your Grandma Dell was one tough lady, and kind to everyone. Try to take care of yourself, JB."

"I'll do that Mr. Parker. See you after work on Friday. I have cut back on drinkin, I've been too broke after paying my fine. Enough gas to get to work, some meat for a sandwich, and a case of Busch at home on the weekend. I know you'd leave off the case of beer, Mr. Parker."

"I would JB, I would advise you of that. Look around at the old geezers here. It may surprise you how young some of them are. A man's body stops healing up fast. Look at old Pete there in Franklin."

"Pete's older than the hills, living a tough life."

"Pete is younger than me; I was out of school before he started. Like I said take care of yourself, I like you Donaldsons want you to be around awhile."

"Thank you, Mr. Parker. I'll keep the place up just like Dad did."

"After your Dad died Dell was up on the roof fixing her own TV antenna, I saw her one day from the field. Told me she liked the view up there. Dang she was a punky old gal."

"She was Mr. Parker, she was. See you Friday."

Chapter 2

A concurrence of serendipitous events may best describe Karen Grace. A spur of the moment trip led to her finding an identity in the middle of nowhere. Coincidence and providence seem to run like the two banks of a river in her life, separate, different, but conjoined.

The assignment

Write a biography of a woman still living. One who defined herself before and during the cultural shift empowering women. Select a woman in business, sports, politics, advocacy, social services, or religion. Interview and record her memories of the cultural upheaval of the second half of the twentieth century. If your report includes additional media other than a written report, you may work with a partner.

Madison didn't like research papers and didn't understand why an old white dude was teaching this class on Identity and American Culture. But I knew she would love a road trip in my cool car. I wouldn't drive my sports car unless leaving campus. I hadn't been to the farm since I was thirteen. A class assignment to profile a woman who lived the cultural upheaval of the late 20th Century gave me a reason to drive to Parkers Produce and Fruit. Of course, my classmate, roommate, and friend Madison is coming along.

No one moves away with no money
They just do what they can
To live in the heart of America
Getting by on their own two hands –
Margo Price -- Heart of America
Apple Playlist -- Null Stillness – All American Made



Country road old farmstead

Warm Embrace

Madison was a great artist at sketches, illustrations, and video production, but she didn't like research. As we left class, she was drenched in drama over such a ridiculous demand. "How can he say no woman ever was liberated unless she liberated her own mind? He's a privileged CIS male."

"Madison, I need your help, and I know who we should pick. We can be a team as long as it includes media as well as a written report."

"Women were chattel without a right to vote, objectified, even raped. I cannot imagine why they let someone so unqualified teach this class."

"Slow down you're going to love this. While we were in class I searched, and we can hear a good band in the process of our road trip."

"Road trip to the library and music in the plaza, or a ride in that phantom sports car of yours?"

"No, a real road trip, pack your bag we will leave tonight."

"At least the drive will be fun, even if the report will be boring."

"We will get done this weekend and turn it in early. It will be good times all Spring."

"OK, I am gif-fing on this." Madison began acting out gifs of having a good time, being very amusing and annoying simultaneously, as she always was.

"Pack one pair of practical shoes, and your normal stuff for three days. I need to make a couple of calls."

I called my great-aunt. She agreed to us writing a paper about her farm. I knew enough not to say it was about her. We could work that in when we were there in person.

“We will arrive around midnight.”

“Midnight if you speed, two AM after you are stopped for the ticket.”

“I’ll be safe.”

We threw our bags in and got on the road about 6. Madison loved my impractical going to college gift from Dad. I liked it, but I already carried enough spoiled rich girl vibe. I would not drive it, unless I was leaving town.

Madison said, “It’s sad you don’t drive this all the time; you could drive around being everyone’s fantasy eye candy. You would be just like the blonde in the white Thunderbird in American Graffiti.”

“American Graffiti?”

“American Graffiti it is one of George Lucas’s first films, haven’t you ever taken a film class? It was Harrison Ford’s first role where he was noticed – just a great film. “

“I thought you disapproved of the sexualization and objectification in our male culture?”

“Didn’t say you’d be just men’s eye candy, and it would be so dreamlike.”

I outlined our trip, “I know where to stop where we are safe. We’ll need gas. Let’s try not to be eye candy for the creeps.”

Arrival

We pulled in at 12:30 without a ticket. Aunt Carol hugged us.

Carol had baked oatmeal cookies with an apple filling in the center, almost like eating a miniature apple pie. She had set out apple cider to accompany them.

"I have cookies and cider."

"These are fantastic, soft chewy sweet. It is so dark and empty out here. I had no idea where Karen was dragging me, nothing like home in Chicago."

"Fresh baked cookies to make us feel at home. Aunt Carol made these tonight, it stills smells like cinnamon. Makes the whole house feel sweet. Thank you, they are wonderful. I am glad to be back."

"I keep cinnamon apple filling and cider in the freezer. I had several hours warning. I want to greet you with welcome home treats. The last time was before Brent was married, he had just finished his bar exam. I can calculate that was eight years ago. I still can't believe my youngest is a lawyer and married with children. Makes me sound old, you two came to awaken my youthful spirit, I hope."

"We do have to produce a paper. Madison will be the media part. She is good with a camera and does wonderful sketches."

"You're an artist do you visit the Art Institute?"

"I love the Art Institute and being Downtown. It was so sad when they cancelled Lollapalooza last summer. I worked all summer mostly making deliveries to people staying home after they kicked us out of school."

"I have seen 'The Bean' but it has been a long time since I lived in the Chicago area. My father was a lawyer in a firm near Michigan and Jackson. I loved slipping over to the Art Institute when I visited Downtown. I don't know much about Lollapalooza."

"It's a great music festival, fortunately some good groups stopped at our campus once we got back. College in the era of masks and tracing. "

"It caused a disruption for everyone, but we've really tried to keep everyone safe at Parker's Produce. We never had a case contracted at work. I am glad you came. I am proud of Parker's Produce and Fruit, but it is not just my effort. Many wonderful people make it happen. The business is

nothing like it was when I started. It was barely a business at all just me scraping by."

"You didn't have employees when you started?"

"I couldn't afford help. I could barely afford to keep the dog the neighbors gave me. He gave me the saddest looks when I would get mad over something going wrong. I would laugh, scratch his ears, and get back to fixing it. He was rather useless but strong on companionship."

"It sounds adventurous to start something all on your own."

"I'll give the grand tour tomorrow. It's late, we should go to bed. Karen the same room you had before, put Madison in the room next to yours. Do you need help with anything?"

"I don't think so Aunt Carol we have what we need for tonight."

"Good night then, I am not used to young people hours."

"Did you live here Karen?"

"I never actually lived here. I spent a couple of summers when I was in junior high. It always felt like home. "

"It is desolate, there is nothing here. What did you do? I bet you can't even get a pizza delivered."

"No deliveries here Madison. If you want a pizza, I think you have to go to New Harmony. I helped Carol with the farm, her garden mostly. Ruth taught me to ride horses. I enjoyed riding. At the market I put stickers on sale items. I got to drive a tractor."

"Karen is a farm girl?"

"I hardly know anything about living here. I did find it more fun than being with my Mom the next four summers. Being with Mom was more

being in music camps or children's theater than with her. She often was gone, and I would also be away."

"You sing well, I guess you gained that from the experience."

"I sing. Time to sleep, it was a long drive."

Chapter 3

Trauma is sent to some people early in their lives. Why do we mark our culture and our history as a chronology of antebellum or postbellum? JB Donaldson enlisted in 1967 too young to have graduated high school. He played his part in the era when America's cultural fabric was torn asunder. Enlisting was the last decision JB controlled as the course of his life tangled and tied itself without his permission.

Ooh, they point the cannon at you, Lord
It ain't me, it ain't me, I ain't no senator's son, son
It ain't me, it ain't me, I ain't no fortunate one, no -
John C Fogerty - Fortunate Son
Apple Playlist -- Null Stillness – Credence Clearwater Revival Chronicle



photo is of Spc. Jim McCloughan

Unpleasant Duty

"Soldier, I am looking for Jamison Brenton Donaldson"

“Who the fuck, oh sorry Lieutenant. Jamison, must be JB. He’s in a game, why don’t I go get him. Think someone all dress uniform, might shake them more than a Charlie showing up. “

A rather haggard looking figure ambled up, one who looked much older than the 19 on his orders. “Are you Jamison Brenton Donaldson? “

“Who the fuck are you? All clean & trim, newly minted, Lieutenant.”

“I am Lt. Evans and we are going to talk to command, no you do not need to salute.”

“Thank you soldier, JB and I are going for a walk”

Lt. Evans moved towards the HQ. JB slouched along till they got inside.

“My man in trouble Lieutenant?”

“No Captain. Soldier I am sorry to inform you that your father was in an accident and was killed. I have a three-day pass for you to return with me to allow you to make a phone call home.”

“My dad, killed, I mean, here I am with Gooks trying to spill my guts, but Dad, how?”

“I was told it involved a farm tractor. I don’t know more. You are to return with me.”

The Captain waved at an orderly, “get Sergeant Kelly. You are Kelly’s?”

“Yes sir”

Kelly pitched his smoke as he stepped in. “Sergeant, Donaldson’s father was killed; he is going to the rear for three days to contact his family. Bag his personal stuff and we will keep It here.”

“JB is this some jag-off move to get you out of my sight?”

"No sir, it's the real fuck I guess."

"Well Donaldson, I will have to find someone else for all the shit assignments for three days. Maybe we should let Charlie know probably call a three-day truce. I am sorry about your father" - Kelly slapped his shoulder and left.

"OK Captain, I have the papers to sign and then we'll go. I do not want to keep my ride waiting, he might not wait too long. The pilot seemed queasy in this hot spot. You have your helmet and rifle, let's get on the chopper. We'll make sure you're issued what you need and send you back all clean and newly minted."

"Ah yes sir, I should watch my mouth, sir."

Captain signed, and then said, "yes you should JB."

"Schmidt, file these. Here's your copy Lieutenant. Donaldson I am sorry, but this war and the world these days it's all Hell. See you in three days all clean and newly minted. I would truly like to see that Lt. Evans; Donaldson here is the least spit and polish man I have ever seen. As a Captain I should never have seen him, but idleness and JB are as explosive as napalm and dynamite. JB sometimes it doesn't make any sense, sorry about your father."

Chapter 4

When you grow things, it is always the food. Food for a family, many families, the animals, or the needs of the world, it is a complex reality. The visions of gardens and quiet walks are the falsity of romantic novels. Real life is sweat, stress, fatigue, and speculation. All in the hope of accomplishment, but never assured. Merit is a concept for a heroic tale, effort is all that is controlled during a lifetime. Madison and Karen Grace discover how the farm became Parker Produce and Fruit.

Rhubarb Pie
Rhubarb Pie
It might rain tomorrow
Better get some before I die -
Rhubarb Pie John C Fogerty



Rhubarb pie K Johnson

Not the expected Biography

Madison and I came wandering down to the kitchen. Aunt Carol had been up awhile; she had baked biscuits. "I remembered how much Karen loved biscuits when she was here. We had fun during the summers when you came here. Want eggs or something to go with them?"

"Do you have jelly?"

"We're a fruit and produce operation. I have all sorts of jams and jellies. I made coffee; I could heat water for tea?"

"Coffee would be great, Madison would you like tea?"

"Yes tea, thank you. You made these this morning, really? I thought we were getting up rather early."

"Getting going is habit on a produce farm, and it seems to get easier with age. I will tour you around the farm. You'll have to ride in my run-down pick-up truck. That hot ride you're driving barely has enough clearance to get up my lane."

"Oh, it is fun, but Dad should have been more sensible."

"Your Dad could have always been more sensible, but I guess he can afford it."

"You know, I would look really great in your car. You should let me drive it around campus since you won't."

Aunt Carol looked at me, "You don't drive it, Karen?"

"We don't need it unless we are leaving town. We walk and have plenty of transportation, it is best to consider the planet."

"I respect that, I always knew you were one of the most sensible members of this family."

"These are great, you made them this morning?" - Madison may have felt like she had dropped into another planet or a time warp.

"Lizzie says biscuits are as easy as toast in the morning. Lizzie may exaggerate."

"I like this jam, what is it?"

"It's strawberry-rhubarb."

"Does rhubarb grow on trees like an apple?"

"No, it's a plant, rhubarb is the stalk." Aunt Carol had set out the best applesauce in the world.

"Try some of the applesauce it was one of the best parts of being here. I helped Aunt Carol make some when I was here."

"When transparent apples have just the right tartness they make great sauce, nothing is much better. I set out yogurt and the cookies."

"My most vivid memory from being here was all the foods were the best."

"Grown here and picked in season makes the best diet. Do you see your mother, often?"

"We meet for lunch occasionally; she is making a series to be streamed now. I hope it's a hit she's desperate for celebrity."

"We'll start the tour here. I can explain where I started Parkers Produce and Fruit. It is a small family held corporation, now. I hope you enjoy your visit, Madison. Karen knows how far away from city things we are."

"Excellent so far, I love this applesauce and the biscuits. Has the climate changed, does it affect your farm?"

"Our more extreme weather swings are a challenge. Early warmups and then a return to frost play havoc with fruit trees."

Madison asked, "what's your solution for climate change?"

"Castrate all the greedy bastards" - Carol replied in a complete deadpan. I went catatonic, but Madison was going with it.

"How about the women climate deniers?"

"Tie them to trees ahead of the forest fires." Carol chuckled then added, "We should get going. I will show you how this place runs. I suppose you brought shorts, but jeans would be better. Barb wire and briars should at least have to break denim before skin. Go get dressed, I'll clean up."

Madison was all in on this trip now, Aunt Carol had won her over. I had brought jeans and rather old Nikes. I slipped on my Dunder-Mifflin tee shirt and headed downstairs. I glanced at Madison getting ready, decided to be silent. No use to tell her style wouldn't matter here. Madison was busy perfecting her country look. I came back down to help in the kitchen. "What can I help you with?"

"I'm so glad you came for a visit"-Aunt Carol said as she gave me a motherly hug. "Why not dry and put the dishes away. You still remember where they go?"

"Everything looks the same, I think it is coming back to me. You haven't remodeled?"

"I did a major one after I had the boys. Put in the garbage disposal composter and a dishwasher. Some things are still where my Grandma Grace placed them, some of the utensils and dishes are hers. No use to change what works, but it was good to make it a more modern kitchen. It was long before you came here for the summer; nothing much has changed since your visits."

"Madison had her doubts about coming out here. You have won her over. She's up perfecting her look. We've been roommates since Freshman year. Her casual look takes time. "

"She's obviously fun to be around, and very cute. Are you and I the same height now?"

"I think we are; I am glad to model after you."

"All long and gangly, but I am comfortable with me, now. I think you will make me realize how much I've aged. I don't believe in being old. I believe in being fit and active. One of the best things about the business succeeding as it has, is I can concentrate on what's important, family and health. I want to listen to you, get to know you, I love the isolation here, but I need stirred up by those more aware of the current times."

"I felt a great sense of welcome as soon as we came in. I am glad we had this assignment. I think I hear someone coming down." I realized this was a time when we could meet as adults. I wasn't a little kid anymore. Maybe I could meet the authentic Carol Parker if I remained laid back and listened.

Chapter 5

Sometimes very good people can be a little troubled. JB and Carol were both cracked vessels when they met in 1975. Everyone has their flaws, but neighbors are required in the country. Neighbors share talents, knowledge, and sometimes failings, but it all is a part of the fabric. -- A good dog always helps when he is not causing a mess.

Something happening here
What is isn't exactly clear
Young People Speaking their Minds
Hooray for our Side
- For What It's Worth Stephen Stills
Apple Playlist -- Null Stillness – Buffalo Springfield



Redbone hound pup Vickie

Get off of my lawn

"Hey Miss, what are doing on my place in that rice-eater covered with peace-nik stickers?"

"I think actually this is my place. I'm Carol Parker. You're not some redneck insulting my pick-up, are you?"

"Sorry miss, I only seen you at the funeral, you were all dressed up then. Mr. Parker was a fine man we been neighbors a long time. Down at the shop it's what everyone calls them foreign jobs. You going to boot me from my house?"

“I have learned you don’t pay rent, and I have bills to pay. The lawyer said you inherited the no rent deal because of your family having worked for the Parkers forever. He also said he would call you a worthless SOB, but your family was fine folks. Mr. James did say you were a good mechanic and could likely amount to something if you didn’t spend half your time drinking and fighting. I could use some one with mechanical skills I am going to start a produce farm. “

“You’re going to garden?”

“More than that if you would come fix up some of my equipment, then I could pay you in free rent. You do, keep the place up, quite nicely for a roustabout.”

“What’d you call me – I’m used to the worthless drunk part – that last, a rustybutt?”

“Sorry, have you ever seen the musical Carousel? not meaning to call you names.”

“Ma’am, my only music is Merle Haggard and Buck Owens, well in Nam Jerome got me listening to James Brown. Jerome told me I was his cultural outreach project, but I ain’t much on culture and prefer folks mind their own business. I guess this is your business, not just poking your nose where it don’t belong. I reckon I could work on stuff after work if you pay me a fair rate and don’t gouge me on the rent.”

“I will make up a formal contract, so we are clear, and it is fair. You seem quite adequate not the old drunk I envisioned. Do not make fun of my truck and I’ll stop calling you names. What is your name?”

“JB ma’am and I understand how a man feels about his truck guess girls do too.”

“In the contract I’m putting in, do not call me a girl.”

“Man, you Hippie Chicks are something else.”

"I think I like Hippie Chick, stay with that." Carol drove home fuming and a little amused. What a hillbilly even if it was flat as a table where he lived. She needed a mechanic. The lawyer had said, "That Donaldson boy works at the implement dealer, and everyone says he is a very good mechanic when at work. Also, everyone adds, he is drunk most of the time he isn't at work."

She could draw up a simple contract, having a lawyer father and brother must give her some legal sense. It didn't appear JB was a legal scholar, fair and straightforward ought to work. Mr. James had explained what average rent might be on a country house. He also said, "renting a house in the country is a nuisance, finding a good renter is worth more than the rent. With Donaldson my advice is keep him busy. He could afford a higher rent if he wasn't in so many fights."

I asked, "Did he get hurt and miss work?"

Mr. James laughed for almost five minutes. "Donaldson is too much of a knot head to get hurt. No, he is broke from all the fines and restitution. I suppose he won't fight with a girl. "

"Mr. James, I prefer not to be called a girl. I'm an adult woman."

He chuckled, "Donaldson might fight with an adult woman, but I would run. You look like you could outrun him. He's a Vet who came home with more demons than mechanic skills. Donaldson's a real-life Charles Bronson a man best left alone."

Get to Work

Carol went armed with an Extension guide for fruit trees. She began measuring where new trees could go. She had found a hundred-foot tape in Eldon's shop. Her Dad said, "Grandpa Eldon never liked people picking over dead people's stuff at auctions, wanted him to let Max Greene have what he needed." Tom Parker and Max Greene worked out an arrangement; Max bought some of the bigger equipment. Thomas knew

Carol was coming to the farm, they left her with a couple small tractors and a lifetime of old tools. She was walking back to the shop to put the tape where she had found it. Eldon had taught her that in her summers here. It goes where it belongs, or it won't belong to you for long. Carol had just gotten to the lane when an old pickup truck drove in. Carol was not yet the pickup truck expert she was to become. However, she knew it wasn't rounded enough to be a 50's truck. It must be an early 60's model, and it was a Ford.

"Evening Carol, this is my wife Shirley."

"Nice to meet you, I assume I should thank you for the cookies, Gene brought over after I moved here."

"Yes, Carol I hope you liked them. I just thought someone should welcome you back. You are one of the closest neighbors not much more than a mile as the crow flies."

"Hard not to feel welcome with those chocolate brownie cookies. I remember them from bible school."

"You'd be welcome at church anytime. We came to give you this pup. Gene said I shouldn't just go giving you a pup, but I insisted you needed a good loyal dog. We brought food and a box for him to sleep in. Gene says you ought to keep him on your mud porch at night, but he'll tag along with you during the day. A young girl like you shouldn't be out here alone. Sam will be a great companion and protector when he grows up."

"He is cute. What type of dog is he?"

"Sam's a redbone hound. He'll be a great pet, but they do love to hunt. He might wander off at night, so best keep him inside at night. He will keep you safe that way."

"I haven't had any problems. I rarely see a car; an owl gave me quite a shock one night. He was sitting in the big tree by the house as I walked past it."

"It has always been safe here, but the country's changing. No prayers in school now. As you know in big cities like Chicago, they are all full of troubles. Never know when someone might come wandering looking for trouble, even here. I got to thinking about you all alone and praying over you. It came to me you ought to have a dog. Sam here is a little small and he wasn't wanted as much as the others. He'll grow and may be a better tracker than the other pups. I figured you weren't interested in coon hunting. Sammy here will be the perfect dog for you. I made Gene drive us over. "

"I don't plan on doing much hunting. I don't even own a gun."

"See Gene all the more reason for Carol to have a good dog. Carol honey maybe you should consider getting a small pistol or something. There must be a shooting every night on the local TV from the Cities. "

"I think a nice dog, will be enough protection."

"We'll drive up by the porch and let you and Sam get acquainted."

"I'll put this tape back, be right up."

"I put Sam's box on the back porch or mud room as Grace called it. I put his food up on top of the chest freezer. Now his food is more for puppies, but he will soon be ready for regular dog food. I can bring you by a new bag in a couple of weeks, I get them at the Mill."

"OK, I can pay you back then "- Carol began to pet the puppy while sitting on the porch step.

"You could pay me back in rhubarb, Grace always had good rhubarb patches. She would let me pick some for Shirley every year. Shirley makes a rhubarb sauce, and a strawberry rhubarb jam, well and a pie. They are all the best."

"That sounds fair I don't know much about rhubarb, yet. I ate it when I was visiting in the summer "-Sammy continued to relish the attention as Carol answered.

"Did you have a dog growing up, Carol?"

"No, we didn't have pets. Mom felt a dog, or a cat would be messy. Pets are more inconvenient in the city. I did have goldfish for a while."

"I remember Helen when she lived here. Helen was always neat as a pin. We live on the farm I grew up on. Gene is a transplant. He even went to a different school. All consolidated now Gene and I would have been in the same class. I have known the Parkers and the Hayes all my life. What were you measuring?"

"I was marking where I could add more fruit trees west of the old trees."

"You're planning on being an orchard then?"

"I am and I am adding raised beds for strawberries. I want to try to be as good at raising vegetables and fruit as Grandma Grace. "

"Grace was such a fine lady; we sure lost a saint when cancer took her. She and Eldon are happy together in heaven, both fine people. I've read the jet planes disturb the whole air, and everyone sprays so many stinky chemicals. Rather a wonder we all don't get it. Here are a few treats, you should give Sammy one."

"He is an adorable dog. Here little puppy you want one of these? I think treats are a hit."

"Vets say not to give dogs bones and table scraps like we used to, but it seems like a dog should have a bone. No chicken bones they splinter."

"I think I like him; how big will he get?"

"He's got some feet to grow into, but he is the smaller pup. He still should weight sixty-five pounds I would guess. He'll be a big enough dog to back up his bark. You'll have to get him a rabies shot, or you could get fined. He's not old enough just yet. The vets handle shots and a dog tag. Nobody is going to look if he has a tag out here, but the county keeps a record."

"He is a nice-looking dog."

"Looks like he's found a home. You'll be safer now and I'll sleep better. Too many strange people I'm afraid they will start roaming through the country. Gene and I will be going now."

"I'll stop by in couple of weeks. Check on how you and Sam are getting along."

"Thank you, Gene and Shirley, he sure seems to like me."

-

"OK, pup I don't seem to feel safer, but maybe you'll grow into the role. You do have huge feet and big floppy ears. You are rather adorable. A coon hound, I've seen raccoons here maybe you can chase them off. Mom always said a dog needed room to run and the city wasn't a place for a dog. We do have room to run, I have lots of that. You better not cost too much to keep, things are running close this year. Maybe you could eat frozen corn, I seem to have a barrellful of frozen corn in the chest freezer."

Chapter 6

There are gras of disruption when the currents of history are scattered like dandelion seeds in the wind. The seeds sprouting in chaotic patterns cause both renewal and destruction. In 1974 Tom Parker holds on to what is real. It becomes the landing where his daughter Carol takes root. A man of obligation and duty creates a space for innovation and renewal. Tom and his brother Leon meet in Tom's law office to finalize the Eldon Parker estate 1974. - Life can get all shook up, but we can't run from the realities of life

and death. I must say I am proud of my family. I will try to stop commenting on the editor's notes.

All across the nation
Such a strange vibration
People in motion
There's a whole generation
With a new explanation --
San Francisco John Phillips -
Apple Playlist -- Null Stillness – Scott McKenzie



flatland

Staying Grounded

"Tom, I didn't think you had any interest in going back home or owning the old farm."

"I didn't feel I would until the last couple of years. After Mom was gone and he began having his own health issues I came back more often. I was the one of us who could. I would help organize the legal and business things with Dad. I'd leave after work and get in late. I'd have Saturday to do what seemed important. I could take him to church before heading home in time to be ready for Monday. Of course, my being here meant something to Dad. I was taken back by the welcome of the people in the community; it seemed important to them as well. Eventually, I decided why not keep a trust with those who came here in 1836."

"Crop prices not too hot and land has been in a slump. With the war coming to an end and this stagflation I've heard the boys out West can't afford the fuel to pump the irrigation water. Might be easier to take your third and get a nice big boat for that lake of yours."

"Leon, you know boats give a man the two happiest days of his life. Farms aren't quick turn deals, but if I keep it together my kids can buy that fancy boat. "

"You get Kenny worked out on his part?"

"Oh, you mean Lance, yes he liked my offer. He knows it will keep him in a warm Mediterranean climate. He also likes that it will still be the Parker place, at least that's what he said."

"Suppose he would have come back for the funeral if we promised to call him Lance?"

"No, he came to see Mom when she was sick, but left before her funeral. He has stayed at our house a few times when our airport was his connection, maybe ten or twelve days over the past twenty years. He fits in with his artist crowd, not back home. Don't think the name matters, he should be glad they didn't name him Eldon. "

"I was already working in Colorado when he came home after Korea. We all got together on the farm. I drove into Denver one time when he had stopped there. I picked him up. We had lunch then walked around. He pointed out the sculptures I had been ignoring, then I took him back to the airport. That day in Denver is the only other time I've seen him. Three boys and not one wanted to farm. I suppose we were all a disappointment to the folks."

"No, they were very proud of us, even kept that abstract sculpture Kenny made for them. Had placed it very prominently, where it always drew comments and questions. Many of the questions were a little awkward and insensitive as folks can be. I started military training in college then after

the war government paid for finishing and law school. I couldn't come back to the farm. The worst day in traffic or with the worst client can't match an hour on that damnable poke and tie baler."

"Yes, that was one dirty bitch. These kids today have it easy, automatic ties keep them out of the dust. You took Dad to church? He didn't go when we were kids that was Ma's thing."

"He began to go with her and then after she died, he continued. He fit in with the no drinking crowd. He viewed many of the fellow churchgoers around Franklin with a serious attitude of contempt. I would not want to categorize his school of theology. Work hard, mind your own business, and don't drink. All without a lot of love for your fellow man that was Eldon Parker."

"I hope things don't go bust like they did for Grandpa Hayes after the Great War."

"I'm not too leveraged and you should remember Grandpa Hayes missed out after our War because he was so burnt in the 20's. You know what the old Irishman said after winning the Irish Sweepstakes, guessed he'd keep on farming until it was gone. Everything is approved and the estate is done, you should get your check next month"

"Are you going to live in the house?"

"The house, as nice as it is, is worth practically nothing out there. I can't see when I would actually live in it. I've been thinking about all the finances, not given the house much thought."

"Both kids ok now? Carol looked good at the funeral; I know you had been worried for a while."

"Yes, she was lost chasing the cosmic boyfriend, drugs, and that damnable noise. Carol got in a big fight with her mother, told me I was part of the problem. She wanted me to attend one of those Yippie Hippie radical protests said as WWII vet I could make a difference. She lost it when she

heard me say most of those mouthy punks downtown deserved getting their heads beat in. We never heard from her for almost two years. Carol is good now. She is still super smart and has her degree. She never used needles and didn't come home with a chocolate baby in tow. I guess we're lucky. She was sure Mr. Psychedelic was some kind of prophet, he was a bum. The flower children were just a bunch of dirty hippies, and she seems to know that now. Could have learned that without causing so much heartache and worry."

"Carol certainly is beautiful and seems very well spoken. Acted very professional at the funeral she should do well now. Is Carol going to law school next?"

"Carol is home got back on her feet, but she's not ready to live a life like mine. Before she ran away, she told us we lived plastic lives, whatever that meant. Just like Vietnam we have a pacification agreement we keep a DMZ on some topics. Going to law school might require sending her to one of those communist re-orientation camps, the capitalist version."

"A generation as independent as hogs on ice. That's what Dad would say. The drugs nearly ruined the whole generation, maybe Carol is over it. All the big bands are gone. Squalling screeching louder than a jet or that plinky-plank monotone on an old guitar is all that's left. At least, those old cowboys could yodel."

"Yeah, it's the Vietnam thing, the government lying, military with their heads up their ass, and that fucking Nixon. He turned us all against one another to win the presidency and now what's he going to do? He's lost all credibility; he will surely resign. Never found time to pull his secret plan to end the war out of his ass, maybe he hid it in those tapes."

"Sounds like you're still a Democrat."

"I'm an American this country has gone to shit; you're a Democrat, too."

"I don't do official party stuff. Out West there are many who wanted Reagan over Nixon. You know, Goldwater wasn't as crazy as they made him sound."

"I'm not sure who would ever trust a politician or a general again. The farm seemed more lasting, something I can still believe in. Carol said she thought it was good to stay connected to the land. One way of me not being as plastic, I guess."

"Come out to the mountains sometime, they are beautiful. Maybe, your skyscrapers are Midwestern mountains. "

"We will, we would like to go to Durango. My wife wants to ride that train. I would like to see those cliff houses. Maybe next summer; our wives could work out a time. Carol is our only child at home, and she is making plans to move on."

Chapter 7

Farmers Markets create a space for many encounters. Carol has to rely on them for revenues sufficient to survive. By 1979 it is an established pattern of life. She benefits by partners in the labor and the vision, surviving long enough to learn what works in growing and selling.

There are stars in the southern sky.
And if ever you decide you should go,
There is a taste of time sweet and honey
Down the Seven Bridges Road --
Stephen T. Young Seven Bridges Road
Apple Playlist -- Null Stillness – Rock Salt and Nails



Rhubarb LoraLeeBiz

Produce Promotions

“Hey Carol, how’s it going?”

“I am getting by, starting to turn the corner on production. The new trees I planted should produce a crop this year. The raised beds of strawberries look good. I like your town’s market. “

“What do you have today?”

“I have some early crop produce: onions, radishes, lettuce, mustard greens, stuff like that. I still have some jellies and jams to get rid of from last season.”

“Planning on coming in all season?”

“This is the only organized farmer’s market I can just come in by myself with my old truck. I really need another person to do the New Harmony market. In the Fall I get good traffic at the farm; I’ll see how the season goes.”

“You’re a remarkable woman maybe you should find a husband.”

"Maybe, I should just keep my eyes on the ground and meet my bills."

"Hope you can be here throughout the season."

-

"Ok, thank you – cook some bacon and onions then stir in the greens. After they sauté you will love them. What? Yes, cook them until the greens are soft."

"You run your own farm?"

"Yes, Parker Produce and Fruit, I'm Carol Parker."

"Our professor brought us out to the market today. It is one of the earliest to get going. Our semester will end soon. We're taking an organic farming class in the horticultural curriculum. I think it simply fantastic you are running your own farm. You don't seem to have much to sell?"

"First lesson in running your own farm. If it is near the end of the day having little or nothing left to sell is the goal."

"I'm going to bring the group over we'll help load up. I get tired of hearing girls can't do this or girls shouldn't do that."

"Second lesson don't let anyone call you a girl when you're an adult woman."

-

"Here she is, meet Carol Parker, operator of Parker Produce and Fruit."

"Hi, are you all in the class?"

"Yes"

"What do you raise?"

"I mostly concentrate on apples; I am expanding the orchards. Strawberries are our big early season fruit. I try any vegetable I can grow and sell."

"Are you organic? I don't see a sign that you are."

"No one here asks about being organic. I try to use as few chemicals as possible. It makes my business more profitable if I contain costs. Some applications are necessary to maintain production. Apples require some spray if you expect people to buy them."

"Can I take some photos Ms. Parker?"

"Sure, as few of me as possible, I'm rather bedraggled."

"I love radishes and green onions, looks like that's about the only produce left. I'll buy those."

"What are you going to do with them at school?"

"I have a small kitchen; they will improve my salad."

"We'll help you load up."

"Thank you I'll fold these signs. It's a small truck they need to go in first."

"Where do you want this box?"

"It has jams and is the heaviest up towards the front. Hope you enjoy your salad. I appreciate the help. It is all loaded now. I will soon have all my canned jams and jellies sold at the next couple of markets. They are my heaviest lift, thank you again."

"We're glad to help this has been a fun day."

"How is your business going?"

"I am gaining, getting a good reputation and growing more to sell. It takes patience and there is so much to learn. I used to like birds, rabbits, and other cute furry animals. I think of them as varmints when I find them in my gardens."

Carol shut the tailgate catching sight of Stephen Capuano. He came walking up with one of his students engaging her in lengthy explanations of the market as they approached. He made a quick count and found everyone was here. Stephen Capuano then saw Carol the tall blonde woman about his age. He immediately became charming and deeply interested in Carol. "Have you read my book 'The Bountiful Earth'?"

"No, I haven't."

"We are in a new age of food production; you are really in step with the times."

"I try to watch my step and let the times take care of themselves."

"A philosopher born of the good Earth. He looked at the card one the students had handed him. Where is Franklin?"

"It is about 20 miles from here, maybe 45 from your college."

"You are having an event next Saturday. I may try to come out. I see you have directions all printed even a former city boy like me shouldn't get lost."

"We and some other vendors will be selling bedding plants, flowers, early produce, jams and jellies, honey, a few craft items. A couple of people asked if they could come sell what they call primitive art. Honestly, I think it is just junk, but it appeals to some folks. Nice drive on a Saturday if the weather holds."

"I will check my schedule when I'm back. My students may forgive me a day's delay on grading their reports on the field trip. Due next Thursday as a reminder."

A soft groan from the students, Stephen shook Carol's hand. "Next Saturday I am most intrigued; I can't wait to see your farm."

Carol turned to the students, "Any of you are welcome as well."

Chapter 8

What people do every day, or every summer becomes routine. Random changes are occurrences that unravel lives, divert the course of history. Even in a world that seems unchanging day after day, season after season, the lightning strike of tragedy can interject itself. It did in 1970 for Eldon Parker and the Donaldson family.

Then daddy came in to kiss his little man
With gin on his breath and a Bible in his hand
He talked about honor and things I should know
Then he'd stagger a little as he went out the door
- Bob McDill Good Ole Boys Like Me
Apple Playlist -- Null Stillness -- Don Williams Portrait



Stacking in haymow - eah2009

Bucolic is Dangerous

"Jim sure was dependable, it's just a shame."

"What you going do, now?"

"Have you thought about renting the farm out?"

"Jim sure was quiet, not a man for much gabbing."

"He was a church-going man that must be a comfort."

"Kids just never think, people these days forget about us farmers. "

"Such a tragedy that young girl killed too. Anyone who knew anything knew there was a driveway."

"Don't know how that Carder kid ever afforded any car especially that hot rod."

"The Carder boy will have to live with it the rest of his life."

"I talked to the deputy he said it wasn't a pretty sight. He knew you were doing what you could but even a doctor couldn't have done more."

"They said you heard the crash and went running out, I guess an old man can still run when he needs to."

"Deputy said the girl in the back seat ended up in the ditch without a top. He gave her his jacket."

"We got the tractor at the shop, insurance called. When you got time come in and we'll talk about fixing it."

"Can't see behind a loaded rack, Jim probably never knew they were there."

"Eldon how you holding up? Had to be a shock for you as well as Jim's family."

"I heard the Carder boy may not walk again."

“Deputy told me Max Greene’s boy kept that Carder kid from bleeding to death.”

“Jim sure was a quiet man. “

Eldon had come in the back and spoke with everyone as he moved along. Actually, Eldon hadn’t spoken a word just nodded and shook hands. He would speak with the family before they left. He had never cared much for visitation lines would rather greet people on their way out. By the time he made it up to the Donaldson family the time was up, and everyone was starting to clear out. Dell hugged him and they just cried awhile. Jim’s wife, widow now, thanked him for paying for the funeral, Eldon just shrugged.

She said, “We have to be home for a phone call with JB from Vietnam. The Army said it would be daytime there, actually 9 o’clock tomorrow morning when it was 9 PM here, isn’t that odd?”

“Yes, truly halfway around the world. Your daughter said you are going to go live with her?”

“She needs help with the kids, and I love them munchkins so much.”

“Dell you alright, you will be living by yourself?”

“Eldon when have I not been able to take care of myself?”

“You are the most self-sufficient woman I know. But call if you need a little help. Maybe next time the wind blows your TV antenna down, let me get someone to put it up instead of getting on the roof yourself.”

“I had a good solid ladder. Kind of nice to look around on a sunny day from that high up.”

“OK, just know when to call, and do call.” Then Eldon and the Donaldsons hugged each other’s shoulders and had a group prayer. Dell ended with, “The Lord is good. Watch over us and give Jim a good farm job in your garden.”

The Donaldson family left. The funeral director shook Eldon's hand, "You OK Eldon?"

"It is tough, worse thing is I keep thinking of my wife. It wasn't that long ago. The Franklin girl's visitation is tomorrow?"

"Yes, we will have people in line all the way back to the square. Always is like that when tragedy happens to a young person. She would have been a junior this Fall."

"Here I wrote a check for what you said for Jim, and I added a thousand. Put it in the memorial scholarship fund they are starting."

"Eldon that is generous of you want me to put your name on it?"

"No put it down as from the Donaldson family; encourage the appearance of forgiveness."

"I thought you were an old tightwad; you are getting to be a soft touch."

"I scrimped all my life because that is how you survive as a farmer, but I can weather a storm or two now. Kids are all OK. I wouldn't be happy anywhere but on my farm. I got what I need; money isn't my problem. My life has gotten so lonely and money can't help. Time to help the Donaldson's a little and the kids at the school."

"Wish the Carder kid had been less reckless, so many people hurting, now."

"I feel for him. We all, were a little foolish as a teenager. A new car, at least to him, with some girls to impress. Yes, it is horrible, no-one ever sees the risk upfront. I will probably not be at the funeral, I'll go out to the cemetery, too many raw feelings."

Chapter 9

A modern farm takes old principles and adapts to the methods of the times. Carol teaches her college guests how her operation is now a real corporation, but still a family farm.

When I was just a child in momma's arms
My daddy plowed the ground and promised someday we would leave
A change of luck was just four days away
But the only change that I remember seeing in my daddy
Was when his dark hair turned to silver grey -
Frazier / Montgomery California Cottonfields
Apple Playlist -- Null Stillness – Gram Parsons Live



Hiking boots Sujo7

Boots are better on a farm

Madison came down; she had on shorts and a flannel shirt over a tight-fitting top. It was her pink shoes Aunt Carol objected to. “Those cute canvas jobs will never survive the day” - she began rummaging through a closet. “My friend Shelly left a pair of hiking boots; she is cute and petite like you are. She is not all tall and gangly like we Parkers.”

She gave Madison a pair of clunky but practical boots. Madison agreed they were her size as Aunt Carol went off to get her real socks. Madison began explaining without me saying a word, “Hey they weren’t heels or something, I thought they were practical.”

“They will get dirty and ruined. You look really cute in the petite boots.”

“Yes, I am not all tall and gangly like a Parker.” The boots now with the thick white socks fit well. Madison rolled down the tall tops after she had

her boots on. Madison's make-up and hair were always perfect. She got up an hour before I did just to go to class all natural and casual, as she would tell me. I decided she looked ready for auditions of a Dukes of Hazzard remake.

"We should get going, do you have a coat Karen?"

"I have a hoodie in the car?"

"Time to get truckin as some people said back in my day."

Carol Parker's truck was not rundown; it was a fairly new full-sized extended cab. I grabbed the camera and sketch pad; I opened the door for the small back seats. "Madison you get the back since you are not all tall and gangly like a Parker" – as I handed her the camera and sketch pad.

I got in and took out my spiral notebook and a pen. "When did you come back and start the farm?"

"Paper and ink not some fancy iPad or something?"

"I learn better when I write as I listen. A computer or iPad would be too much to wrangle in a pickup. What year did you come back here and start Parker Produce?"

"Let me think Grandpa Parker died in 1974. I moved here gradually in the late Fall of 1974 really 1975. I knew it would be work, I wasn't some back to the land hippie with visions of a Garden of Eden utopia. I had spent three summers helping Grandma weed and pick in the garden. I had learned to can and freeze fruits and vegetables. I studied the health regulations, local markets, and worked out a profit and loss projection."

"Why did Grandpa Tom decide to keep the farm. Was it because you wanted to come start a business here?"

“He was trying to manage buying the whole farm from his brothers. It was more a good asset for him a way to pay an obligation to his father and mother. I impressed Dad with my attention to detail and a practical plan.”

“Was he you partner when you started?”

“Dad was my landlord, not my partner. He said I would be operating a separate business from the farm, itself. We established a legal entity and a name. He and my brother were both lawyers, as you know. I had good legal advice in surplus.”

“You incorporated your business?”

“No, I had a separate business name. I was a sole proprietorship. I had thought of several names Sweet Baby Jams, White Rabbit Produce, or Moonshadow Farms, but Dad told me not to use any of those damn hippie names. He had searched trademarks and Parker Produce and Fruit was a good name. It would make me sound like a real business, not a free love commune. I had learned to let more things pass, not get in a fight about his less enlightened comments and asides. We began a business arrangement I was the tenant and he was the landlord. He said as long as I was a sole proprietor, I could just be a DBA as Parker Produce and Fruit. Of course, eventually it became just Parker Produce to the locals around here.”

“What’s a DBA?”

“Doing Business As, I don’t think Dad ever expected I could make a real business requiring terms of incorporation or anything like that. Now that I look back, it was unlikely. I don’t think I would have predicted I would have survived and grown. I worked hard, I was smart, and I was lucky, the three best traits for any farmer to have.”

“Your Grandpa Parker is my great great grandfather? Did he sell fruits and produce?”

“Yes, Eldon Parker was my grandfather and he operated the farm until he died. We had a lot of fruit trees mostly apples, but it was never a

commercial orchard. Most of the trees were here just west of the lane, a few over on the south 20. I'll stop over there. The south twenty was part of the original 160-acre Parker homestead. When they were dividing an estate another branch of the family became owners. I think my great grandfather bought the 20 back. It was really where the Parker Produce and Fruit Farm started. Eldon Parker operated a real farm as the locals would say, not a truck garden."

Madison came bouncing out after we stopped and began taking photos of the lane to the house, the country road. I am not sure what she was capturing. She was busy. After a while she came back and grabbed her sketch pad. Aunt Carol had gone on with the history of farm showing me the raised beds and explaining the different varieties of fruit trees. Madison had a question, "your grandfather was really named Eldon?"

"Yes, he was." Madison found a cart to sit on and began sketching the old barn. We walked to the end of the drive where we had entered the south 20. "The farm from the house to the north east is a 160-acres, it is level and a good soil for row crop. Starting down there at that big post to the northwest is the Hayes 160. The creek runs through it and the fields are smaller and not as square. The pasture is over there and that is why he had a cowherd. Grandma Parker was a Hayes and Grandpa started farming the west 160 after they were married and eventually bought it from her siblings. This 340-acres was Grandpa Eldon's farm for many years. He rented another 80 what we call the East Place and he bought it in the 50's. It was a decent size farm back in that time. When I came here Dad had worked out a cash rent on everything except the ten acres around the house and this twenty. He used the revenue to pay for the two thirds of the farm he had bought from his brothers. Dad said each generation of farmer just got it all paid for and then he passed it on and the loans and scraping by started all over again. "

"The house and this field around the old barn became the start of Parker Produce and Fruit."

"I think Sweet Baby Jams was a cute name. I like White Rabbit produce, not sure about Moonshadow. I went to a James Taylor - Bonnie Raitt concert. I

had a friend whose mother wanted to go. See I know something about Boomer culture.”

“Sweet Baby James was a very popular album. I don’t think my father found James Taylor a selling point. On our Parker farm I had two barns, lots for holding a few head, a machine shed, and an old crib. Some established fruit trees and several garden plots. It was enough to get started. I had a plan. I worked the numbers. My landlord was pretty much in favor of me doing anything. He felt like I couldn’t get into too much trouble back here. I think he hoped I might get married lead a normal life. He certainly hoped I was done vagabonding across the country from concert to concert with a worthless hippie boyfriend.”

“You were like a Deadhead?”

“We didn’t just go to Grateful Dead concerts. Deciding we should go to a concert and heading there was the only time our life had any direction.”

“Was your boyfriend a worthless hippie?”

“Yes, he was worthless. We all thought we were hippies, however we defined that. Let’s get on with the tour, your friend has been busy.”

“She’s the illustration and media part of this project, I’m the writer.” We walked back to where Madison had been working. Madison showed us a very nice sketch of the barn.

Chapter 10

Everyone’s war ends in some manner. The ending is never a fixed date, never the same for all involved. JB comes home, but in 1968 he left as a kid. Now in 1972 a man comes home, who has never lived as a man in his home. The survival skills he learned will not help him. Eldon and JB share Franklin and a long history, it is a start.

Train them well, the men who will be fighting by your side
And never turn your back if the battle turns the tide

For the colours of a civil war are louder than commands
When your white boots marching in a yellow land -
Phil Ochs White Boots Marching a Yellow Land



Vietnam Memorial Rob

All Boots Carry History in the Mud

“Thank you for coming to pick me up, Mr. Parker.”

“Glad to do it. Dell drives into Franklin not the big city as she calls it.”

“This was the nearest stop on the train from California. No one in the Army thought anywhere here was a city. If it wasn’t New York or LA, everywhere else was farm country.”

“Welcome back to farm country. I could have been here yesterday when the train came in.”

“Trains from the coast are often late and I had to sign up for diesel class at the junior college. They teach it down at the old school in the ag shop. I finished my last six months in the motor pool back in the States, I think I should be able to get certification. The school picked me up and got the GI thing signed. A guy at the school gave me a card. The VFW left a card for all us new Vets. It was good for a free drink and of course they want people to join. Not those of us from Franklin more the ones in town. I stayed near the VFW and I walked over there. I was surprised some old guys who had been there awhile, were giving me a little shit about us losing the war. I had been warned about the yellow-bellied peace punks heckling Vets. Thought guys who had been there would be different.”

"Old guys drinking at those halls often weren't there in the sense of seeing the tough action. I knew many who came home when my boys did. The ones in the tough spots were usually quiet. The story tellers often never heard an enemy shell. I wouldn't pay them much thought after all you weren't the general or the president. I don't imagine you had much say in what they did."

"Hell, I didn't even have much say about what I did. Were you in the army?"

"I was called for WWI, the Great War they called it. I went down to the armory, and they started some orientation classes on weekends. After three weeks they called off the whole thing. The war was almost over and the flu was so bad it ended my military career. One of my friends already at a base for basic came home too. He said there were sick soldiers everywhere. He emptied bedpans for four weeks that was his army career."

"Flu was that bad?"

"Yes, many people died in 1918 and 1919. Both my boys were in the war, one in Europe the other ended up in the Pacific. Then Kenny got drafted for Korea in Fall of '51, but he was there just before the armistice. He was transferred and served out his time in Germany. All my sons went to school with GI aid after their time and it was a good thing for them. Tom was a pilot he made it sound easy not sleeping in the mud. I ran into an airplane mechanic who had been in England, he told me how many they lost in the bombers and fighters. I guess Tom didn't want to worry his folks."

"Well Mr. Parker, Nam is all FUBAR. I was eager to get out of school, kinda finished high school in Army really. "

"What's FUBAR?"

JB answered softly and apologetically, "oh, 'Fucked Up Beyond All Recognition' Now, they got that lottery thing, I looked up my birthday. You know if I had just hung in like most in my class, I would have had a

high number and never would have gone. I could have been one of those lazy hippies with all the girls and free love. I don't know; I did learn stuff. Now, I want to forget the whole thing."

"Can you forget JB?"

"No not at night sometimes."

"Tom couldn't either at first, we would hear him at night sometimes. He'd shout out never even woke up, but his dreams weren't good we guessed."

"Yeah, did it go away?"

"We were afraid to bring it up. I asked his wife once. She said it became rare, but often in the first few years she would hear him."

"I hope so, it still seems odd. I been living in California for six months. California didn't seem like home. Being home maybe it will go away. Thank you for helping take care of my folks. Dad dying was a shock, I did try to sober up my life after that. Something about your Dad being gone it changes things."

"It does not matter how old your father is, it just changes things. Hopefully for the better for you. JB your language is a little rough for your Grandmother."

"Yeah, I will try to keep a lid on it at home. She is the most wonderful lady in the world."

"Yes, JB they talk about saints in church, she is one."

"Looks the same, sure looks like home. Doesn't feel the same. Thank you for the ride home, Mr. Parker. After I finish diesel school, I will come over to tune up that tractor for you."

“We’ll see, hopefully it won’t need tuned up for a while. They are all expensive and that green paint must be gold plated. Well here we are, Dell is going to be so happy to see you.”

“Yeah, we’re going to meet Mom and my sister’s family on Sunday. Thank you, again.”

-

Eldon drove up his lane and parked. In the kitchen there was still coffee in the pot. He heated up the coffee on the stove and poured a cup. He then spent a long time in the kitchen staring at the coffee cup. A cup that was one of his folks or maybe was a wedding gift. Still it had been here most all his life. The same cups he had used with Grace for over fifty years. He sat remembering the first time Miss Hayes came for dinner with his folks. Then after marriage and kids the Parker boys so eager for supper. Later the grandkids who had come in the summer. Drifting thinking. Reminded of all the times just he and Grace were sitting here saying nothing, with nothing needed to be said.

As he sat, he took another sip, then laid his head on the table and cried. He cried for all that had been lost, for all that was good in life, all that was about to end, and all that he had wished could be. He mostly cried for others because he knew looking back over his life, he had nothing to cry about.

He got up went to the living room and turned on the TV. It was the anniversary of the Lt. Calley conviction for the My Lai Massacre and a 'Special Report' was on. He sat in his chair and pulled out his bible. He thought how he always made fun of the bible thumpers, but tomorrow night was a bible study group he attended. He liked the new minister; the previous guy had been a cold fish. He knew they would read the passage tomorrow; he didn’t finish it. He put the bible aside. The report ended and 'Gunsmoke' came on, he watched the opening gunfight. He thought how many times had, Marshall Dillon faced that gunman down. He soon fell asleep, then woke during the 10 o’clock news. He watched the weather and went to bed.

Chapter 11

There are those who grew up learning to do a job and not be a slacker. Mark Greene grew into being a working man. Now, he is building a life away from the farm. Eldon and Mark
1970

Everyone says there'll come a day
When I'll walk alongside of him
Yes, just to know him
Is to love love love him –
Phil Spector To Know Him is To Love Him
Trio – Parton, Ronstadt, Harris



Grabau Heritage Farm

Bales don't buck themselves

"Water is working. Cows should be good."

"Glad you could come back now that you are a college man, Mark"

"Yes, Mr. Parker, a college man for a week. It's not a long drive glad to help round them up."

"Your dad and I are discussing a partnership on our cowherds. Jim's gone I'm a little old to fight through another bad winter every morning. Max helped me last winter. If we do, we will combine the baling operation next summer. Will you be back to run it? "

"Our semester ends the first part of May; I should be here before the first cutting."

"Jim said you always bust your tail on the rack or in the barn. I told him to put fewer bales in the big barn that last year. You stacked it so tight I saw a beam crack."

"I just try to do a good job."

"You work very hard and the crew always does a good job when you're here. You must be a good ramrod."

"Ah, Mr. Parker I really don't like being in charge. I just try to work harder than everyone else and figure they can't complain when I tell them what to do. Might as well stack it right."

"Are you playing football in college?"

"The university plays big time football; I would have to be a lot bigger or a lot faster maybe both. "

"Maybe you are too busy with protests. Can they draft you?"

"I have a 2-S student deferment; I can finish college. I will get assigned a lottery number next summer. I don't think it can be lower than this year, which was 24. I think everyone knows we should leave, 'the love it or leave it' folks just don't want to admit we were wrong. I am not sure protests accomplish much. Those shootings in Ohio and Mississippi maybe they shocked everyone. I know I was amazed how one of our teachers was so shaken by Kent State, he was my least favorite coach in football. He was very saddened by it. No, I'm a student until my four years are done."

"Jim's son is over there now. Dell doesn't say much, but from what I can tell it is a tough place. America is so split and the kids some of them are so out of control. Can't tell the boys from the girls with their hair down to their, well their behinds. I know you Greene's keep your words clean."

"I did not grow out my flattop until the last year of high school. I might never get the hay dust out, if my hair was that long."

"Why did you grow it out?"

"Time to stop being stubborn it's the 70's now. Even if it was hippie long, I don't suppose anyone would think I am a girl. I know how divided some parents and their kids are over everything. They often can't get past trying to prove each other wrong. I have a friend he and his folks argue. Hair, how he dresses, music, the war, all of it. They're very much like each other really, if not in hair styles and music choices."

"I hope we get out of it, haven't solved anything I can tell. My son doesn't say much, but I don't think they've heard from my granddaughter in a long time. I think they had big fights like your friend and his folks. I don't ask because I don't want to butt in. I've always enjoyed talking with you, even when you first started helping. How old were you when you first started bucking bales?"

"The first year I helped I was thirteen, but I wasn't much force then."

"I read you are a state scholar or something, must be pretty smart."

"I got good test scores, not always the best student. Now Terry Hall, he is the top student in our class, got all A's still did work beyond what was asked for. State scholar is just your name recognized for doing well on the standardized test, there's no money awarded. I've earned the year's tuition baling hay, my folks are going to pay dorm fees. Otherwise it's just loans even my folks own too much to qualify for grants. A private school would cost more."

"Good luck this year, maybe we'll stop falling apart as a country. Can't believe you are not big enough to play football."

"If I was much much faster, I could be a running back or a linebacker, but I never had much speed. In every other position the players are taller and bigger than me. I wish I could play more, I liked it. I had a good final game, evened up some scores. I never got hurt. I'll be happy watching from now on. "

"I enjoy your singing at church"

"Never sure about singing, I am best in a choir not really a solo voice. I do like singing hymns."

"We think we'll call the cow operation Parker and Greene or Greene and Parker, what do you think?"

"Parker and Greene sounds right. I guess we're not out West, no Lonesome Bar Ranch or some more cowboy movie name."

"You need a ride Mark?"

"No, the truck is just down at the gate. I left it, and Dad dropped me off on the back side. I made sure we didn't leave any cows or calves in the pasture. I'll see you when I'm home on break maybe."

"Thank you, Mark and for the day of the accident. You were a cool head until the ambulance got here."

"I don't know, wish we could have done something more. OK bye."

Chapter 12

To be a regional attraction a market needs attractions, Carol continues to believe in quality foods. The Parker Homestead has become a success even if it isn't the Parker homestead. Madison and Karen each come to love the zoo or maybe the attractions.

We got the Real Thang
Join the Celebration
That's the Real Thang
- Hot Sauce Universe – Real Thang



Llama – Liz West

Used to be a farm now it's a damn zoo

"Let's go over to what most people call Parker's these days. I'm going to stop and point out the Hayes place."

"It's a different farm?"

"No Madison, it was my grandmother's family farm. It has been part of the Parker family for a hundred years. No one ever calls a place by the current owner. It is always the 'Old Smith Place' or whatever. The family called it the Hayes Place, so I do too. I always refer to the Hayes Pond, even though everyone else calls it Parker Lake."

"There's a lake, do you fish?"

"I wouldn't want to catch a fish; I prefer to leave them alone."

"Did these orchards used to be corn and soybeans?"

"I approached Max and Dad rather carefully for the first field. It was only three acres. It was more a nuisance to farm than a profit. I convinced them to convert to an orchard. We had trouble with deer, but after a couple of years it was producing revenues, which was always questionable when in row crop. "

“What harms orchards besides deer?”

“Frost is always a threat. There are various insects and diseases. I try to balance chemical control with natural approaches. New genetics can help. We sometimes can have chemical drift from a neighboring farm. It is a big investment and the returns are slow, but over time I have converted all the odd shaped fields to orchards and vegetables.”

“Are there still cows? I remember seeing cows when I was a kid.”

“We still have cows in the pasture. Two of the larger fields we rotate between, oats, hay, and sweet corn. We actually have a market for small square bales of hay and straw at Parker’s Pioneer Homestead. Ruth thinks we should obtain an old mill and do steel cut oats, since that is popular. I’ve asked her, what would her horses eat, if we sold oats to humans?” Aunt Carol backed the pickup onto the road, and we headed down to Parker Pioneer Homestead.

Madison asked, “Wasn’t where I sketched the barn the Parker pioneer homestead?”

“Yes, it was. Our main attraction was the Davidson Homestead. The family lived reclusively and had been here since the first settlers. They hadn’t changed much, then the last heir died. The real farm families were eager to buy it and bulldoze the old buildings and trees. It was quaint. Parker Produce and Fruit decided to buy it and make it our main on the farm market center. We were incorporated then, which came with purchasing a canning and freezing plant. Those expansions had paid off and we were in a position to buy the Davidson place. It has a historic preservation feel and is actually closer to the main highway.”

“You have a canning and freezing operation?”

“Yes Madison, it is a major part of the business. I started canning jam and making freezer jam at home. I used the summer kitchen for canning just as Grace did. It got me through the Winter and Spring. Health department

regulations are strict when you sell to the public. I was using the freezer storage at the local butcher plant when they wanted to sell it. They closed the grade school in Franklin. It had a health department approved kitchen. It was a good start on meeting the commercial food safety standards and getting our brand into a few good restaurants and a grocery chain. Eventually we outgrew our Franklin locations and now have facilities in New Harmony. We still have operations in Franklin, part of a more personalized Farm-to-Table service with direct online connections."

"Now the Parker Homestead is not actually the Parker Homestead?"

"I have to deal with a board of sorts now. We are not a public company, but we do meet incorporation regulations. I was against calling it Parker's Pioneer Homestead, but the others felt it would be too confusing not to promote the name we were already known by. History gives way to legend, I guess. Are you familiar with Liberty Valance? "

Madison and I both answered with lost expressions.

"It was an old Western movie, the main programming for late night or Saturday afternoon when I was growing up back in the dark ages. Its most famous line is 'When the legend becomes fact, print the legend'"

"I like that line; I really haven't seen many Westerns. We streamed 'True Grit' which was OK until the pony died. Didn't you have horses when I was here on our visits?"

"Karen yes and no, they were Ruth Donaldson's. After they bought a house with a small pasture, she has them over there and sometimes at the Homestead. The big draft horses, the Shires, became a trademark of Parker Produce. We have teams at the Homestead. Ruth got those started, as well. Horses require too much care and I was too busy weeding to have a personal horse. People love gardens, but not the weeding." Aunt Carol pulled into a drive to an orchard and stopped.

"I can open the gate." -as Karen hopped out. Carol pulled through. Karen shut it and got back in the cab.

"I see you still remember some lessons from your stays. We'll come across the farm bridge and up to the Homestead to avoid the congestion. Late morning on a Saturday it gets rather crowded." Aunt Carol stopped at a gate to the public area. "We will walk from here. Madison if you are going to take photos, I'll carry your sketch pad over to the office. I wanted to start Karen's tour over there. You can come find us when you are ready for it, if that fits your plan."

"Yes, it does, that will be great. This is a busy place. I'll come over eventually."

"At least when you are hungry, I don't want you to pass out from lack of food."

We walked into the office, "I want you to meet Mr. Navarro. He is the man who promises me we will make money from this spectacle. He may be unaware that 'Bread and Circuses' was a boondoggle to keep the masses happy, not make money for the shareholders."

Mr. Navarro came over to shake hands, "Pete, this my great niece Karen Parker."

"Carol, didn't you see all the people out here today. We're ahead of projections on revenues."

"We came over the bridge through the orchard to avoid the people. This is my last big risk. It does seem to be working out, as you assured me it would. I'm an old hag, now. I don't want to die in poverty eating cat food."

He shook both our hands one with his left and the other with his right, "Karen your aunt is one of the most beautiful women I know. Hardly an old hag, besides we are making money, but if disaster hits, maybe she'll enjoy cat food."

"I agree my aunt does not look like an old hag, but I doubt she'll like to eat cat food. The food at her house has always been amazing."

“Yes, it is. I love sharing a meal with her. Carol, Karen must look just like you did at her age. I don’t see much change.”

“Pete you are my truth teller, not my flatterer. “

“I think you need not worry about beauty as you age, Karen. Carol’s white hair is just a platinum blonde. I can assure you even if the Homestead Pavilion failed, Carol will be comfortable in retirement. Ms. Parker has spent a life worrying over the details and deadlines, an unbreakable habit. Now, she needs to cautiously chill.”

“Pete is correct, not that I am willing to concede or stop worrying. Could we go in the conference room? I would like to have you lay out the organization of Parker Produce and Fruit. Karen is doing a paper for college. If you have time?”

“Come on everything is going OK, it is tonight I’m more worried about. The first concert of the season and apparently this group is more of a draw than I knew. Most everyone will come in shuttles from the church and school parking lots. Have a seat Karen. Carol are you going to sit or pace?”

“I’ll sit.”

Karen took out her notebook and Pete began. “Parker Produce and Fruit started with your aunt working her tail off. Starting the farm market over by her house and going to farmer’s markets in the area. Her market was growing, and new trees were coming into peak production, when she learned the locker in town was closing. She purchased the operation for the freezing capacity. This spread revenue throughout the year and helped offset the seasonal nature. A year later she purchased the closed grade school and it became the canning center. Did you have to pay a dollar for the grade school?”

“Well a \$100 and all the transfer costs, but it was basically free.”

"The health department approved kitchen was a good start. Ms. Parker put Ruth Donaldson in charge of overseeing production at these two plants. Ruth was an excellent choice; she is a stickler for quality. This was the beginning of Parker Pantry Products. Eventually we added facilities more designed for our purposes. Parker Pantry Products has partnering arrangements with other orchards and food preparations operations. Alex Greene has been the manager of Parker Pantry Products for twelve years now. It is an independent business in many ways. We are a supplier and Ms. Parker's corporation has controlling ownership. We now use the school and locker exclusively for products sold here at the Homestead or the Farm-to-Table effort. Both facilities have had major upgrades from the original operation. We market here and to restaurants. We do not usually go to farmers markets, but we do have a program for school groups to sell our products as a fundraiser. The greenhouses here have added to our seasons lapping the frost dates. Another major division is the online sale of our products. It's your father who was largely responsible for getting us into web-based sales. We were early adapters. Carol has often credited her geeky nephew."

"Dad is a Geek but he knows his stuff."

"Now our latest division is the Homestead Attractions Center or Pavilion. The concert venue was a major construction project designed to comfortably host a sizable number of people, especially for this region of the country. This is the piece that worries your aunt the most. It is our newest venture and the riskiest. We already had a hugely popular attraction with the pioneer village exhibit, petting zoo, and horse drawn rides. Sales here have been very good. We are becoming a regional attraction."

"I was impressed to see you have the Orange Buffoons here. They are very popular, they played at our college."

"We have a special Walnut Ridge connection. One of the band members used to work for us. Parker Produce and Fruit is several interconnecting rings tied together. I started here bringing in and managing workers. Ms. Parker offered me a full-time job over twenty years ago. I manage the

operation here and prepare all the financial reports for each of our activities. I also am a small share owner and get a few votes. Carol has the big foot she is the primary share holder along with your father, Ruth Donaldson, Lizzie Williams, and Carol's sons. It is still definitely the Parker family farm. "

Karen had made diagrams along with notes. Pointing to the diagram she asked, "Each of these entities operates as a separate business?"

Pete said, "yes we track each as a separate profit and loss center, but we do know we're all interconnected. The IRS does not view each of them separately, we're considered one family corporation and that is an accurate description."

There was a knock at the door, "Hey Dad can we crash your meeting?"

"Yes, come in what is it?"

"This is Madison the Parkers' guest, and this is Lee, he is the lead guitarist for our group tonight. Lee says his folks remembered getting apples and cider at the old market."

Carol Parker stood, "Thank you for appearing here tonight and kicking off our season. I have been told you are in a band whose popularity is on the rise."

"We had a good tour, and this is the final stop. I am from Walnut Ridge since they had come back to the University where the band formed, they were near. I joined them as a tryout I wasn't a student, just a local kid with a guitar. They did it as a homecoming for me. We hope to have a great relaxed time out here in the country."

"Welcome home, not so many remember the old fruit market anymore."

"Yes, Ms. Parker your cider is great, I love it out here."

"We used to be a real fruit and produce farm before we became a damn zoo."

"Hey Dad, is it alright to give a press pass to Madison we only have a couple of requests from the local papers? Lee said she could take photos and do sketches. Madison is doing a report with Karen Parker for college. Madison is a fan. Otherwise, it will be way in the back."

Pete said, "I think it would alright, is it, alright Ms. Parker?"

"Yes, she is too cute to say no to."

Lee grinned, "Thank you, Ms. Parker it is nice to be back. I used to work for Ruth at the freezer plant when I was in high school. I remember seeing you a few times. Is Karen your daughter?"

"No Lee, my great niece."

"I have to go meet the equipment truck and guide them; they think we're in the boondocks. Karen sure looks like you anyway. Nice to be working for the Parker's again so to speak. It won't be as cold as when I worked at the freezer plant."

"Thank you, for remembering us, Lee."

"Can't wait to see your sketches Madison, see you tonight then"-the lead guitar for the Orange Buffoons waved and left.

"Dad, I need to get back, but everything is smooth so far."

"Now I am nervous, and to think a band named the Orange Buffoons is such a big deal, I am going to walk around with you."

"Thank you so much, Mr. Navarro for all the detailed explanation of Parker Produce. You are managing a real empire."

"Well Karen, it only seems that large when everything starts falling apart, which can happen at any time, nice to have met you."

As the Navarro's left Madison came over and started playfully beating on Karen, "You knew the Orange Buffoons were here didn't you. You never said a word and Lee he is like the world's greatest guitarist."

"Yes, it was on the website. I told you we would be able to hear a good band."

"You never said it was the Buffoons, they were so good in January."

"I thought we would get to listen in the back or something, I didn't know you'd have the opportunity to be a little groupie."

"Hey, I wasn't being a groupie. I was taking photos. I was asking Jaime Navarro about the concert after seeing the posters and Lee came up about the truck. He was so nice. Lee allowed me to take photos as we walked around getting directions. He didn't even make fun of my boots. He asked if Jaime could get me a press pass."

"I doubt Lee even noticed her boots, do you think he did, Aunt Carol?"

Aunt Carol silently, nodded no. "OK kids let's get some lunch. It should be less crowded now. The stew and split pea soup they serve here are both wonderful. Some people don't like green soup, but when cooked with onions, carrots, and ham I find it delicious."

"Madison is sometimes a vegetarian. I came to love the split pea soup when I was here. I think you would like it."

"I still like McDonald's chicken nuggets in spite of the fact no one knows what's in a nugget. We have a small BBQ place in our neighborhood, their pulled pork is hard to resist. I will try to pretend I'm in a foreign land wouldn't want to offend the natives by refusing food."

"I am sure the natives won't be offended if you choose a salad."

“We will walk over to the café. Karen will get to see some of the zoo and then I think we should get home. We must allow Madison to lose the ugly boots. I am sure Lee might see how cute she is without them.”

Chapter 13

JB becomes indispensable to Carol Parker on the farm – but he is still as explosive as napalm and dynamite. Fireworks are appropriate for the bicentennial in 1976.

Hello trouble come on in
Well you talk about heartaches where the world you have been
I ain't had the mis'ry since you've been gone
Hello trouble trouble trouble welcome home --
Eddie McDuff / Orville Couch - Hello Trouble
Buck Owens - Buck'em! The Music of Buck Owens



Bear – Lynne Jensen

Hello Trouble

“I got that pump working and I should be able to get water runs along all the raised beds. It will save a lot of time. I made them easy to drain out when the season is over.”

“Thank you JB, your mechanical skills are so valuable to the farm. That old Ford seems to run as smoothly as a Singer sewing machine. I think that was Grandpa Parker’s phrase.”

"Old tractors are easy to keep running if you keep up with the small stuff."

"You have put in so many hours you are well beyond rent. As the season gets going, I should be able to cut you a check and get us back to even."

"Not worried you never cheated me on hours, your word is as good as any contract. I've been working here so much I haven't had time to throw away my money on booze and fast women."

"You look better without that constantly hungover look you used to have."

"Well sometimes when you're a young fool you think a case of beer is nothing. But drinking like I was, caused me some health issues. Mr. Parker had encouraged me to fish as long as there was 'no drink'n'. I rarely went; I couldn't imagine even an hour without a beer in my hand. I feel much better now up there on a quiet morning or afternoon. Sober can be a good thing."

"I suppose I'm the local bitch now that I filed a complaint against all those kids. We have a liability issue, and they were leaving a mess. Also, I knew my grandparents wishes ought to be respected."

"The big shots didn't want their kids' names in paper, but it seems to have stopped the trespassing. Keeps it quieter and I am liking quiet more now."

"Also thank you for agreeing to help get us to the New Harmony Farmer's Market. We'll have several crates of berries this year. We'll take everything else we can get ready to go, usually sell it all out."

"Can't pull a trailer with those rice eater trucks the hippie chicks drive."

"Oh, and thank you for not calling me a girl, I don't think I've ever heard a slip up."

"No, I usually go with bra burning hairy pitted man-eater because I know calling you a girl ticks you off."

"JB when you're all sober, you can charm a woman right out of her steel panties. Either those fast women are track stars or you're awful slow, I haven't seen you catch too many."

"I tell you truth Ms. Parker, most everyone around here thinks I'm one of those Viet Vet timebombs. I can't blame them all the fights and being drunk more hours of a day than sober. I can see why folks are leery. I am better now. Working here has helped."

"I haven't been much of a counselor; I think my Dad thought I was something of a timebomb myself."

"I have seen how hard you work to make a go growing vegetables and apples. I feel like a Donaldson helping a Parker is continuing an old friendship, keeping faith with your grandfather. "

"JB you can call me Carol I guess or Hippie Chick. I've been working with you for a year now."

"Ah don't know Ms. Parker, I didn't call your grandfather Eldon, but I think Hippie Chick fits."

"Did anyone call grandpa, Eldon?"

"My Dad didn't, but I suppose your grandma Grace did."

Chapter 14

By 1979 Carol, Ruth, and Lizzie are making Parker Produce and Fruit a going concern and many people are coming out to the market, even stylish hippie academics.

I can see by your coat, my friend
You're from the other side
There's just one thing I got to know
Can you tell me please, who won?

-- David Crosby Wooden Ships
Crosby, Stills, and Nash



Shire horse -- Peter Goodair

Academia finds the Earth

"Aren't they beauties?"

"Ruth, they are so large."

"Yes, Shire horses"

"I thought everything in the Shire was smaller."

"What no, they are a one of the largest draft breeds from Leicestershire in England."

"Ruth, have you heard of the Hobbit, Bilbo or Frodo?"

"Are they in some rock band you used to see in California?"

"No, characters in a popular fantasy novel, aren't you afraid they will step on someone?"

"No, Carol they are very gentle. We will have them hitched to a trailer for moving people. They will be useful for pulling our trailers for produce. Customers will love to come here to see them."

"JB keeps our tractors running smooth. Tractors don't eat much in the winter when we don't have people or apples."

"Wait and see, Miss Carol."

"I am walking over to the market, yes we'll see."

"Hey Ms. Parker"

"Oh, hi you're from the horticulture class. I have to help during our busiest time, but after it calms down a bit, I will walk you through a tour."

"That would be great, oh hey look at that!"

Ruth came driving down the lane with the team of monstrosities; the Shires came to a very controlled stop. The team was pulling an old apple cart now refitted with seats for people. "You kids want a ride? best way to see the farm."

"Oh, that would be cool."

"I will leave your lives in Ruth's capable hands, did your Prof come out?"

"We stopped for breakfast out at that Crossroads Café. He left just after we did; he should be here. Maybe he got lost or is off looking for edible fungus."

"His odd little car may only drive on the wrong side of the road"- they all laughed as the image of his Fiat 500 appeared in their minds.

"OK see you later, Ruth assures me these big black beasts are as gentle as lambs."

"Oh Carol, they are noble steeds and will behave with great chivalry."

"Have fun, I need to get to work."

Chapter 15

In 1980 with Mark Greene home waiting out a legal issue, Ruth draws Carol to church and to Mark Greene. Over the months a friendship begins and makes being in the church not an earthquake or lightning struck experience for Carol. – Carol should have been going with Ruth and JB.

So, I uprooted myself from home ground and left
Took my dreams and I took to the road
When a flower grows wild it can always survive
Wildflowers don't care where they grow. –

Dolly Parton Wildflowers

Parton Ronstadt Harris The Complete Trio Collection



Flowers at New Salem

Gathered in my name, I am there

“Miss Carol, I would like to ask you to play at church. I really appreciated that you played at our wedding.”

“Thankfully it was a small wedding I don’t like to inflict my playing on too many ears.”

“You do very well, Mark Greene is home now. You likely have heard people talk about him.”

“Max didn’t mention it, I didn’t know Mark was home.”

“Mark used to sing in the church when he grew up. I heard him at Christmas two years ago; he has a nice voice. He needs the support; his mother tells me he’s embarrassed over being back. He was at graduate school and got arrested for pot. His mother tells me he didn’t actually sell anything, but he had driven his friends to a party. He was arrested for delivery. Until he can get the courts to clear him, he can’t get the government job he had been offered. He’s come home to help on the farm while the legal stuff gets resolved. “

“I met Mark Greene once. JB had just got his Roadrunner fixed and wanted me to go to the reunion party. He seemed very smart not the type to be into pot selling. I should call my father; I am sure he could sort out this mess.”

“I think you could play more something he wants to sing, than Mildred, bless her soul. Maybe even offer a little advice like you have with JB and me.”

“One troubled youth to another so to speak, I believe my advice to you was to buy a train ticket and never see JB again.”

“Yes, you said that about JB. Then you told me you felt he had changed and was a really good man now.”

“Mark was polite, intelligent, and I must admit rather cute. A local who tended towards being introverted.”

“JB told me how you helped him keep a lid on his drinking and he had a good time. No fights a first step on becoming himself.”

“JB was a little rough around the edges when I first came here.”

“JB and I have done alright together. We’ve worked out his rough edges. So, what do you say Lizzie can do Sunday morning without you being here?”

"Yes, your Tennessee cousin can sell 30% more than I can. She is such a chatterbox people nod and she throws in another melon or dozen ears of corn. Is your family from Tennessee?"

"Dad and Mom were born in Kentucky, but only ten miles from Lizzie's family. Well ten miles as the crow flies which means twenty miles for those of us who aren't crows. My folks came up here when they were teens, but I've been back a couple of times. People in the church said you came when you visited your grandparents as a kid."

"Yes, Grandma had me in Sunday school and bible school during those summers. I do remember the wonderful cookies and that horrible orange Kool Aid, if not many bible verses. I suppose I can practice with him at the church and see what we can work up."

"Great, he should be available any time they are not in the field. He may enjoy talking to someone not as down-home. He may need his rough edges fitted a little like JB."

"Yes, another lost soul from the outside, possibly someone who was once a pot smoking hippie?"

"Now, Miss Carol I really respect you. Mark seems mighty nice. Making those rough edges fit better can be a lot of fun."

"Ruth I am married. Some edges I can't make fit better."

"Yes, it seems someone said that. I'm here every day. I don't believe I've met this husband. There was this city guy around, but I don't think I ever met a real husband. "

"Stop, he's off selling books, being a back to nature guru, and yes he's not here. A church woman like you ought to praise marriage."

"I grew up in a very fundamentalist church, but now I'm a Methodist. We learn a woman is to be respected and listened to. I don't see you being

listened to and you're the one doing the work and making the Earth bloom. We do get a dollar on every book we sell; can't say he's not contributing."

"Marriage isn't always fifty-fifty. Since we are discussing church, what is going on with this Phyllis Schlafly group fighting equal rights for women? Seems simple enough I ought to be able to expect equal treatment as any man or woman."

"Our UMW has come out in support of ERA. The more conservative fundamentalists are afraid of change. They feel the country has gone too far from traditional families. Many of my family think we are a bunch of liberal communists. They call everyone a communist who is different. You may not be the most traditional woman, but you run a good business certainly you are not a communist. "

"No, we are free market capitalists, here"

"They want to keep a woman in her place, but Jesus accorded women great respect. He rebelled against traditions at the time. I grew up with the holier than thou folks, I believe Jesus would like to have a chat with them."

"ERA just seems logical to me. If they are so worried about women going to war, maybe stop picking fights we can't win."

"Have you ever been in a fundamentalist church?"

"Your church is the only one I've ever been to; I was thirteen the last time I was at a church service."

"Fundamental preachers don't put a lot of stock in studying theology, they believe in scaring the Jesus right out of Jesus. The old women then get so hurtful. They want to take every slight they ever felt out on the young girls. They just can't love and forgive, maybe they never forgave themselves. They are nice neighbors and community folk, if they don't get all fired up by those radio preachers."

"Maybe we'd be a lot better off without any religion, like John Lennon and 'Imagine'."

"There is so much need in coming to together, so much comfort and support in life. Some religion can be bogus, but true faith working together. Now that is powerful, honestly, it has transformed JB."

"I think you transformed JB, he goes there for you."

"When the power of love works, it all works together. He should stop listening to that one radio preacher on Moody; he gets more nutty ideas from him. I have to explain the end of the world has been coming for almost two thousand years, many times folks have gone into a cave to come back out with nothing changed but spoilt milk. "

"OK I won't let Greene pick any Armageddon songs."

"Thank you Carol I love working with you and teaching you what wonderful animals, horses are."

"I'm not sure you've converted me into the horse faith either. I do have a guitar, maybe I'll try more cowboy songs."

Chapter 16

In 1980 Mark Greene and Carol Parker both need the skills of lawyers. Art must be appreciated for art's sake even in a rural cultural wasteland.

City sidewalks, busy sidewalks
Dressed in holiday style --
Ray Evans / Jay Livingston Silver Bells
Perry Como The Classic Christmas Album



Sculpture Oregon Illinois

What do you think it is?

“Glad things are going well with Parker Produce and Fruit. We need to go over some legal changes anyway. Why don’t you bring all the documents I sent with you? The kid did sign everything didn’t he?”

“Yes, all signed and initialed.”

“I can represent him then and get this appellate case heard. This local prosecutor and judge are just being jack asses. They never had a real case from what I can determine. They are trying to win elections, maybe want to be governor. This kid has a job with the foreign service if he has a clean record. He was never in any other trouble. They’re just being jackasses and you know it is for their own personal gain. I talked to the kid’s attorney; he is out of his league here. He needs to stay with traffic tickets and simple wills.”

“Mark will have you now.”

“Yes, we are going push them hard. Actually, the first jury found him not guilty. They went after him again with a slightly different statute. The local police and prosecutor went into great dramatic detail about the evil of drugs and how even a small crack in the dike could lead to a flood. Urged the jury to be ever vigilant in the war on drugs. This War on Drugs has

become more of a blight than the drugs. Dad says the Greene's are long time neighbors. This kid was there tossing bales the day of the big accident. He says the law firm should do what we can."

"I'm sure Mark and his family appreciate it."

"Also, we need to discuss some future legal structure for the farm and your business. Dad is discussing some things with Uncle Lance or Kenny as Dad insists on calling him. "

"What's up with Uncle Lance?"

"The main thing I need to discuss with you is the sculpture, he wants to donate one to the school or the community. I think you are going to have to be our on-ground liaison on this."

"What does this look like? Is it really weird and abstract?"

"I have photos; I think you will have to judge for yourself. Honestly, I think it is really good. I have shown the photos to a couple of our resident art fans and they were very complimentary. I don't care much for modern art."

"That Picasso gift was a real political football even in the big urban center. I don't know, most folks around here still don't see why anyone cares about the American Gothic painting."

"Thanks for sending Uncle Lance a letter and photos once in a while, he really appreciates it. He is also very impressed with you making a go of it."

"He sends a card occasionally with a nice scene, and a short wish you well note, not much else."

"That is more contact than anyone else has. He got in touch a month ago discussing the contract on the farm and this gift back to his hometown. I think something's up I don't know what. Christmas time is pretty in the downtown. A good time for a visit."

"I can take a train all the way downtown and stay in one of your big-city rip off hotels. We had a good year I can afford a weekend."

"I don't suppose your husband is coming?"

"No, he was coming back after semester, but he cancelled."

"That's what Dad told me; it is part of what we should discuss."

"Lawrence, I didn't know you had taken on marriage counseling. I am not sure you have the right skill set. I seem to remember you as low on emotional IQ, not strong on empathy and compassion."

"There are legal ramifications to emotional consequences. It takes less emotional IQ, if you are legally prepared. I only do letter of the law counseling. You can share your feelings with those horses."

"The horses only listen to Ruth. Yes, Big Brother, it is time to discuss the future and look at options. It will have to be just after Christmas. I'm playing for the Christmas Eve service and Mark Greene is singing. I will make arrangements for it after that."

"You're going to church, now. I haven't been since I stayed with Grandpa and Grandma Parker as a kid. You're not one of these Born-Again zealots I am hearing more about, are you?"

"I hadn't been since I was a kid either. I go and play on occasion. I have come to appreciate the true love these people have for each other. In a small community they are like one big family having a reunion every Sunday. Without the church I don't know what would be left in Franklin."

"You should have taken that husband of yours to church, then maybe he would love the community like you do."

"Enough with the marital advice I will discuss everything when I'm with you in your office. I have to make some plans; I will let you know."

“We will see you in two or three weeks, then. I will set up an appointment with Mr. Finn so you can review, while you are here in person.”

“Mark is only a couple of years younger than me. He’s not a Kid, he has a master’s degree.”

“You’re my Kid sister and he’s younger than you. Also, his legal issue is childish at least on the prosecutor’s side. He’s a kid.”

“Bye Big Brother.”

Chapter 17

Sometimes a bad experience will haunt memories, the present is made worse when bad karma appears in the flesh. 1976

We tried to talk it over,
but the words got in the way
- Leon Russel The Masquerade
Carpenters Now and Then



James Martin Phelps – comet

The Lesser Evil

“Hey Gene, you live out toward the Parker place, don’t you?”

“Yeah, the orchard is just a mile from home.”

"This little gal needs a ride out there."

"Sure, once I get my fuel cans filled; I'll be heading back."

"My old truck may not be the best taxi, but taxis are little rare out here." Gene threw her pack in the back, he thought it was bigger than she was.

They drove most of the way in silence. "I guess you are a friend of Carol's, she sure has worked hard out there. She got a lot of visitors this fall. She must have inherited some work ethic from her grandparents."

"Do they only sell stuff in the fall?"

"No, Parker's Produce is getting more things all the time, but apples and cider are the biggest thing for them this year."

"Thank you, ten miles would have been a long way to walk."

"Especially, with that pack I don't know how you can lug it."

"I've been hitching rides; I usually don't carry it too far."

"Hitchhiking is rather dangerous for anyone, especially a girl. I bet your folks would wish you weren't doing that."

"They don't know, but I am heading back home, now."

"You know Carol when you were in college?"

"I wasn't. Carol was working at the college and taking classes at the same time. A group of us were sharing a place. Some of us were trying to grow garden things. Flowers seemed to be easiest to sell. -- I found out Carol was out here and wanted to stop by on my way home."

"I'll drop you off up by the house. The Parker Place has a long lane."

Gene got out and took the pack out for her, "Have a nice visit."

"Thank you, Gene I appreciate it."

"Easy enough, say hi to Carol."

She knocked but no one seemed to be home, she opened the unlocked door and called out, but no one answered and then returned to the porch and sat down. She hoped Carol would at least let her sleep in a barn or something there seemed to be several buildings. She dozed off leaning against her pack. Carol came driving in from pruning raspberry and blackberry briars. She had decided to try to grow and keep them in some semblance of rows in the draws. She was hot, dirty, tired, and scratched. She approached the sleeping form on her porch. Sam went over gave a sniff showing little interest then went off to get water. Carol recognized her about the time the sleeper awoke and looked at her. Bliss was not the last person Carol ever wanted to see again; she was the second to last. "Bliss, you are one damn lucky bitch. If I owned a gun this county would be investigating its first murder in twenty years. As I am deciding if I want to kill with my bare hands or some type of farm tool, maybe you should start explaining, why you are here, how you got here, and what do you want?"

"Carol, I came to say I'm sorry, I know I was so wrong and I'm sorry. I'm hitching back home. Beth at the Tomato Ranch knew you were running a farm here. I don't want anything other than to say I'm sorry and maybe sleep in a barn or something tonight."

"Where's home Bliss?"

"New York"

"A long way to hitchhike, you're going get raped or killed. I suppose I can save myself the guilt and let some serial killer knock you off."

"Yeah the rape thing already happened. A guy picked me up drove out to nowhere. He had pulled off my baggy shorts. I keep a small knife in my vest, I had my hand on it. When he was ready to force it into me, I sliced the knife across his neck. He grabbed his neck and I jumped up grabbed

my shorts and ran. He had this diesel and had just left it running. I peeled out of there. I drove back up to the truck stop where he had turned out into the back country. I grabbed my pack asked the kindest looking trucker for a ride. I think my desperation and maybe the blood won him over. He threw my pack and me in his truck and we left. He told not to say anything. He didn't want to know my name or whatever fight I had been in. I dozed as he drove for most of the night. "

"Well Bliss I am sorry that happened, but have you killed a man now?"

"I don't know, maybe; I didn't look back."

"OK, why don't you come in. I need a shower. After that you can take one while I fix something to eat, then you can go back to the I'm sorry part of this conversation."

"These potatoes and peppers are good, thank you. I am sorry; I know we robbed you. Cosmo had me convinced you owed it to him. I was with him for three years then he dumped me. Actually, he just abandoned me in some park in Oregon. "

"On his way to a Zappa concert I suppose."

"Cosmo had been following Lowell George and he got to load stuff at concerts. I think he had some new scheme, but I wasn't included obviously"

"When I ran off with him, he wasn't Cosmo just David. It was fun for nearly a year. At the ranch I got the job at the college and began to earn a degree. I earned enough at the college administration office to pay the cash part of the trade on his new van. He began banging you after that and he didn't care if I left. I moved in with a friend I worked with at the college. I was making a new life on my own. I felt abandoned by Cosmo, as well."

"He liked being called Cosmo, calling him David really pissed him off."

"You went to the bank, impersonated me, and drained my account. I was really devastated. I filed a police report, but you two were long gone. I think the police and bank thought I was just another Hippie and not worth much effort. I never expected or wanted to see you again. Now five years later you're here."

"I just hoped I could tell you in person before I get back home. Not sure anyone at home wants to see me, but they should know I am still alive. I will have to try to find a job, maybe some family will let me stay in their basement. I don't suppose rolling doobies is a marketable skill, I am good at it. You are not going to call the police on me, are you?"

"No, you are having a lot tougher time than I am. If you are getting on with your trek you will need some clean clothes You can use my washer and dryer to get them clean again."

"Thank you, can I help you tomorrow? Gene said you work very hard, maybe I can do a little payback for the food and clean clothes."

"Gene my neighbor?"

"He said he lived about a mile away."

"Glad you didn't kill him and steal that beater truck of his."

"He didn't try to rape me."

"No, he would never do anything like that, he is a very kind man. He never treated me like some three-eyed alien. He just treated me like any other neighbor. You see, I was the city girl, who probably was starting a Hippie Commune. Girls didn't belong in this man's world. It was the way some people treated me when I first came. Of course, my family has been here a long time, most people accept me, now as simply eccentric. You can work with me tomorrow and I will help you get a plan. Bring your pack and I'll show you the washing machine. Put those in this bucket, we'll soak them in this enzyme stuff. It cleans stuff even when dirty beyond recognition."

Carol decided the clothes Bliss had on, should be in the bucket. She threw her a sweater and shorts she had folded in the laundry room. "May as well soak what you're wearing. Put these on and let's take a walk outside. I should show you the real beauty of being here."

"The stars, so many of them. I haven't seen such skies in a long time. A couple of times in a park in the mountains. Hey, a shooting star it was green."

"Yes, I am always thrilled. When I came here as a kid, we would take an old blanket and lay out and watch the skies."

"You grew up here?"

"No, this was just a summer visit to my grandparents. I am very much a city cousin as any of the locals will point out."

"Carol, I didn't think about having to stay here. I guess I envisioned just saying sorry and moving on. This place is so far away from an Interstate."

"Bliss that makes it even better. I love the isolation. We share the same great mistake in common, let's try to not make others. Tomorrow while you're helping maybe we can plan a better way to get you home."

"Hey there's another one, very bright."

"If only you could put them in your pocket."

"My mother used to sing that song."

They simply experienced the sky silently for a long spell lost in their own thoughts. The beauty of the earth and heavens was a common connection, their only human connection. Any words had ended with I am sorry, I was wrong. Carol thought on Bliss, as she enjoyed the night sky. She didn't have much time for Bliss and very few thoughts.

"I am going back in it is getting cool. I need to sleep. You can sleep on the couch there are blankets folded over the arms."

"Far better than most of my nights, lately. I am going to stay outside a while, maybe I can get one for my pocket."

"Meteorites are very hot and rare. See you in the morning then."

Carol came in; she put all the keys and her billfold in her bedroom. Sam followed her in and took his place on the floor. She also put a hall tree in front of the door. If Bliss did enter her bedroom in the night, she would have time to react. Sam had never proved to be much of a watch dog. Bliss you were very wrong, that is a fact. Sorry is the only communication we will ever have. Maybe, she was on a road to recovery, and maybe she was still a thief, con artist, and slut like she had been when Carol knew her.

-

Bliss was still soundly sleeping when Carol and Sam came downstairs. Sam was more interested in going outside and breakfast than Bliss. Carol fed Sam: she kept his food bowl outside the door to the mud porch. In sleep Bliss appeared frail and vulnerable. Carol harbored much resentment but observing the sleeping form, the lump within her melted slightly. Bliss was making up for many hours of missed or interrupted sleep.

Carol went out to the garden there hadn't been a hard frost. Some plants were still growing mostly cool weather produce she had planted late in the summer. She cut some chrysanthemums. Grace had always kept spaces for flowering plants of many varieties and seasons. Carol put them in a vase on the kitchen table. She checked the washing machine and dryer. Emptying the dryer, she moved the wet load to it. Carol quickly folded the dry clothes; they were going in the pack anyway. She decided vegetarian omelets would be good. Bliss came into the kitchen rubbing her eyes. "Thank you for letting me sleep on the couch, I slept better than I have in weeks. Can I help with something today?"

"Yes, I have a delivery of apples today. I could use help moving and sorting them."

"I thought you grew apples?"

"I sold out. With the apples I can sell more cider. I also could use more for canning apple jelly and apple butter. An orchard sold me seconds, the less than perfect apples. They had more than they could use. Many of my trees are not producing yet. Grandpa Eldon had a cider press. He hadn't messed with it after JB's father died. JB put it back together. It has made me money this fall."

"Who's JB?"

"JB is my neighbor, and he builds and fixes things for me. He is coming over tonight because of the apples. JB has mentioned a friend who drives a truck to the East Coast. He hauls a refrigerated trailer with hanging beef carcasses from the slaughter plant to a meat processing plant. I think JB says it is in New York state. Maybe, I can get you a long-haul ride back home."

"Great a good hitch."

-

"Bliss, I appreciated your help the last couple of days. It was a lot of apples to get all at once."

"The little tractor made it much easier to take apples up to your house. It is rather cute maybe you should name it like a burro. You've helped me so much. You were right, you should have killed me."

"I am trying to build good karma. There's Kyle's truck. JB said if we met him at this truck stop, he could load you in and no one would know. Kyle always stops here it is only an hour from the plant. JB says he stops to check lights and connections before his long drive, then he'll drive straight through."

A lanky twenty-something came ambling over from the café. “Hi, it will be a long ride not many stops, is Middleton close to your home?”

“Far closer than here, gets me close enough my cousin will come pick me up.”

“JB probably told you I only stop here to run my line of bull before the long drive.”

“No, he said you made sure everything checked out before the rest of the drive.”

“Yes, I do. It makes me feel safer if I have a chance to make sure it is riding OK. I do like to run my line of bull with the good ole boys. You may find listening to my yammering on, a rather expensive ticket. What is your name?”

“I’m Bliss. I won’t care, long drives cause me to sleep, anyways.”

“JB said you weren’t a bad looking hippie chick, probably best not to call you a girl?”

“You can call me a girl; I think that’s Carol’s hang up.”

“OK your pack is stowed, hop in and we will roll on down the road.”

Carol pulled out away from the trucks and headed home. A sixty-mile drive maybe an hour and a half. She should still be home before ten. Bliss had been a decent person while she was there. Carol did need an extra hand with all the apples they delivered. Bliss worked enough to earn her food, clean clothes, and a long-distance call home. Sam had even come to accept her, mostly for an extra hand out or ear rubbing. Bliss was the very definition of a space queen. Her visit brought back many painful and a few good memories. Carol did awaken to the meaningful life she was building, the wonder of growth and renewal on the land. She felt assurance she was on the path.

Bliss might fit back into her family. Carol was done with Bliss and drudging up the old feelings. She would sleep better tonight with her door open and no hall tree in front of it.

Chapter 18

Summer 1976 was unique, some in the nation tried to heal, a few succeeded.

I know a thing or two,
I learned from you --
Kevin Raleigh – Love Hurts
Parson, Harris Grievous Angel



Pond Katie Nixon

Healer Heal Thyself

It takes a while before summer can build to a Sunday afternoon like this. Everything pushing peak in its growth cycle storing the energy. As the sun moves towards a resting place the heat radiates in a sensuous warmth not the stultifying sultriness of a 90/90 afternoon. Ninety degrees and ninety percent humidity or one hundred percent muggy. Today was a hot, that slowly simmered. The dusk coming gradually. The season still not noticing the shorter days that are coming. Summer yet verdant expansive reaching higher, aspirations without limit. Humanity and the world not knowing or pretending not to know, the waning time about to begin. A limit that ascension will soon yield to recession, birth and growth to wither and die.

I had decided to park up on the north end, off the road in the pasture. This would allow me to come to the Lake/Pond following the small stream that flowed from the spring. This area was fenced from cattle and other domestic animals. It always seemed much closer to the primeval land. Yet, a person born of the land would know it wasn't completely unadulterated. I popped up into the grassy area mowed usually once a year. What was a lake or what was a pond? Grandpa Eldon had built a dam making an entrapment the locals often called Parker's lake, Grandma and Grandpa always called it the Hayes pond. It was not some livestock pond; it was constantly fed by a spring that diminished but had never dried up during the droughts. The overflow piped to follow down the draw for the cattle. A good fence always kept the herd away from the pond and spring itself.

Max Greene who rented the pasture kept it posted and monitored to keep people out. He had reported the big party, but I rubbed a few noses a kilter when I pressed the charges. Not allowing people in may be viewed as selfish, but people trample the fence, leave trash, and are a liability. After all, none of them are paying off the loans or paying the property taxes. I always suspected that Max had made Carol Parker sound like a real bitch or maybe a kooky environmentalist former member of the Monkey Wrench Gang. Either way no one asked about fishing anymore and it made it private up here.

I came up and walked over the area where Grandpa had added smooth rocks and sand. It was shallow for several yards out from the makeshift beach. I liked to wade into the lake from here. As I laid down my pack, I saw JB. He was fishing up closer to the dam. He was casting into the pond; I would stay with family on that pond definition. His back was to me and he would not know I was here. I sat and watched. Almost two years ago JB had insulted my truck and was about to kick me out of his yard. He had really become an indispensable part of the farm. He definitely had mechanical skills, also he had not gotten drunk or in a fight all year as far as I knew. JB seemed to have become more in control.

Possibly the time I came to drive him home, had changed him somehow. The bar had called, "There's a new deputy, who is one of the people JB beat

up a couple years ago. He is going to stop JB if he drives home. I got a call to warn JB. It won't be his first arrest, also, he would fight back. I think JB may spend a year in jail if they arrest him. Two old friends are making him stay put. He's talking of doing something at your place in the morning and needing to leave. You will have no help for some time if you don't come get him."

"I will be there in about twenty minutes." - I put on my boots, grabbed my leather fringe jacket, and fired up my truck.

I walked in; I must have been a rare sight. A tall blonde in a small-town bar. I caused a few stunned expressions. JB wasn't too happy I was there to pick him up, but his two friends insisted with their powerful and more sober muscles. Once he was in the truck, he began insulting my rice-eater. Then cussing all of the draft dodging flag burning communists. He had crawled through mud, dodged booby traps, all while the card burning homos were home stoned out their minds getting free pussy. He lost good friends, and protestors did nothing but give comfort to our enemies. JB had learned to swear and demean women, maybe it was part of the training in the Army. He was so wound up the insults fell like a soft rain having little effect. I could hear the abandonment and disillusion in his string of hate. He had run out of steam as we got to his house. "JB we weren't protesting you the soldiers, we were protesting the war, we were trying to get you home." He stumbled on out towards his house, while screaming about a nosy higher than thou hippie cunt.

When I got home, I stood and watched the stars for a long time. My leather jacket shielding some of the cold. The beauty was crystal and too awe inspiring not to endure a little cold. I should have been furious to be called such demeaning names when I was just keeping him out of trouble. Still I had heard the deep hurt, the wounds of rage and fear. A confused man thrown into a hell with no redemption. JB felt discarded like an empty whiskey bottle.

JB rather sheepishly called about the middle of the afternoon. He said he figured out his truck was in town and I had driven him home. He said he

didn't remember much but he knew he had called me names. Cussing like he always did when drunk. "Sorry, I shouldn't have. "

"I have your keys I'll come take you back to your truck. Forget last night. While you are working for me, we are going to take some breaks, and talk about the war and the protests. We need to hear each other's story. "

JB was a rather chastised man as I drove him back to the bar, Bill was there cleaning up the outside. He always picked up or mowed on Sunday when the bar couldn't be open. Bill told JB about the Deputy looking for him, and why he called. Drunk driving was rather common on these rural roads. Most people keep it under control but were often over the legal limit. Normally the County didn't make stops without obvious impairment. JB thanked Bill.

JB said, "Ms. Parker I'll be over after work to finish that new raised bed."

I drove home. After that day we paused to talk over the war, the protests, and the upheaval in the country on a regular basis. We learned we often agreed on facts but were looking from different worlds. JB knew little of the history of Vietnam, the colonial period, the cancelled elections, and I learned about daily life for the soldiers. JB came to realize most protestors were just trying to do the moral thing, and I came to appreciate how the soldiers had to rely on each other.

I had come here to swim and didn't feel like changing my plans. I decided to invite JB to join me. I would chide him that the turtles might bite his dangly parts, but men were supposed to be brave. I decided to walk over to a time-bomb and see if I could defuse it. I walked over for my talk with JB.

Chapter 19

Lawyers, guns, and money – just lawyers, no guns, but it is always about money. Sometimes you only learn they care when they are gone – Uncle Lance's bequest 1985

Everybody knows

you've been discreet
But there were so many people
you just had to meet --
Leonard Cohen Everybody Knows
I'm your man



Restored Orpheum Theater -- Onasill~Bill - 72.3M

Best Foot Forward

"Is this your first time back to the city since we changed the legal structure of the business after Christmas, what was that five years ago?"

"Almost that long, now with two boys, life is hectic enough without the hassles of coming here."

"The divorce is finalized September 1st. I do not think there will be any problem. He's done OK from the agreement. He relies on an image of utopia on the farm so I doubt he will rock the boat. Legally any attorney will tell him he would be laughed out of court to try and break the agreement. Have you spoken to him?"

"No not for over a year."

"I have heard of an arranged marriage which happens before the marriage. Yours is the only arranged marriage after the wedding, I know of. "

"He wasn't ever going to live on the farm. Stephen needed the photos, the appearance of a successful organic farm, even though I only do organic when it makes market sense. I was willing to let it be a marriage on paper

for a time, not forever. I wasn't going to allow him access to the assets. I'm the one busting butt to make a profit. I am risking my money on new ventures to attain more growth. I have two boys to support and educate now."

"The boys are both going by Parker?"

"It is their legal and given name, a far better name to carry back home."

"Stephen was OK with that?"

"He cares about book sales, his radio show, his B list celebrity. Being a husband and a father are just not part of his life. He is free to follow his talents, also he has the added bonus of molesting young women. Maybe I am too harsh."

"Odd clause in your arranged divorce about your offspring totally your responsibility. Known as Parkers and no one else involved. Did Dad write that? It seems very sound, and unchallengeable in court. It also references a sealed document."

"Yes, he said being a Parker and only a Parker was a good thing. Speaking of being a Parker how are my nephew and niece doing?"

"Tom is working with little computers, micro computing he calls it. Seems like playing with Heathkits to me. He obsesses for hours with whatever he is doing. Katie has a John Travolta poster on her wall. She and her friends were devastated when they found out 13-year-olds were not allowed in clubs; I think she is forming a girl band. Now, our business. "

"Yes, we should finish this, I guess. You called about Uncle Lance's will is there a problem?"

"No, I am executor of his estate. Everything is in order. I need your signatures and they must be witnessed. It is easier to do it here. Also, you need to know some of the details."

“He developed an ongoing relationship with that arts and civic center where you arranged his gift sculpture to be put on display. They really have an art and civic complex or something?”

“It is an old movie theater; you remember the Rivoli?”

“Once we went to a movie there when I was little; it had balcony seats.”

“It was built to be a stage for vaudeville and movies, it is restored. They were glad to get the sculpture.”

“Uncle Lance developed a correspondence with them. He helped them purchase an empty nearby storefront to turn into an exhibition and art sales location. There are several works of his being sent to them you’ll have to arrange the transportation once we get them in the U.S. I think there is going to be a ceremony when they go on display. Uncle Lance promised a family member, you, who would attend it. Do you own a formal dress?”

“I can get one, we do have stores within driving distance, big brother.”

“You need to know he told them he had a heart condition and respiratory problems from breathing dust while working with sculpture. This is partly true, he didn’t want them to know he died of the homo disease, it is called AIDS, I guess. He never said much to anyone, but he started to work on the details of his will with Dad. He had several friends die; he knew he was at risk. Dad, me, and now you, are the only ones who know. The report is he had pneumonia. It was complicated by his heart condition and previous particle inhalation. Our Uncle spent a life away and not letting people know much at home. It doesn’t need to change, now.”

“OK I will just let the details rest quietly.”

“Uncle Lance didn’t have title to the farm, but his contract specified payments. He would also benefit from any appreciation in value of the land. Our Colorado cousins will get the final payment. Lance got royalties on sales of some licensed products he left those to them as well. They are

all signed off on the settlement. Uncle Leon didn't tell them much about the family, they barely knew they had an Uncle Kenny."

"I barely knew Uncle Leon. I think the last time I saw him was after Grandpa died. He was at the funeral and Dad sent me out to the farm to help him load a couple things from the house. It was that visit when I decided I wanted to live there. I felt I needed to renew myself by capturing the past."

"Leon loved the mountains, but everyone can get caught sometimes. A slide can happen and sometimes a man can't get away. Leon's kids were never back to the farm; the money is a surprise and a small windfall. Uncle Lance changed his name, so Lancelot is legal if a little pretentious. Lancelot Parker left the land appreciation to you; it is a significant gift. Dad told me to work out a new ownership arrangement. There are some options, I am going to send you several documents; look them over call me at home tomorrow if you have questions. Come out to the house on Sunday everyone will be there. Dad and Mom sold their house and live in a condo now."

"I knew they moved for less responsibility in keeping up a property."

"They are not too far away from us. You can take a train out and I'll send Tom to meet you. Maybe you can understand what he is doing, you're younger than I am. We can discuss everything Sunday. If we are all in agreement, you can sign everything on Monday. You can then get back to your farm and kids. You should have brought the boys; everyone would love to see them."

"They are small; Ruth Donaldson and her kids are at the house. They love being with each other. It is best to be alone this time. I will see everyone on Sunday."

On Sunday after they had agreed on everything. Carol, her Dad, and Young Tom were the only ones sitting on the patio. Her Dad had asked about the Donaldson boy, he meant JB. "He seemed rather troubled when I

was seeing your grandfather before he died. Is he still living in that house?"

I told him JB's wife was keeping the kids, "the Donaldson's have become real partners in the produce and fruit operation. JB hasn't had a fight or a drink in several years not since he was married. The right woman can shape a man up."

"You couldn't shape up Stephen I guess, but you seem to manage a good business."

"Stephen lives in an illusion of life; he spins a good tale. He really couldn't stand the reality of living on the farm he romanticizes in his books. He is always in pursuit of another woman. He prefers his conquests to be young, usually legal. He's charming enough to avoid too sticky a situation. He is often violating the policy of the college where he works."

"It seems you could have seen that in him before marrying him."

"He had so much scientific knowledge of plants and vegetables. He seemed to have found his lifelong dream. He needs an audience. He found out the farm was about doing, not dazzling lectures. He was handsome, cultured, and educated. I was so hungry for someone like that I ignored the flashing red lights of a charlatan."

"Well Carol you are success in business, you're a good mother, you're beautiful, but you are a train wreck in picking out men."

"I wish I could get angry and argue with you, but I have to agree. Mr. Finn was an excellent negotiator in our divorce contract."

"Finn said it was the most unusual divorce he had ever handled."

"At least in this agreement to end a relationship Stephen and I had very common interests."

“It is good they will grow up being Parkers in a community where there have always been Parkers. I consulted with Finn we agreed we had never dealt with anyone less fit to be a husband and a father.”

“Actually, he had a lifetime of charm, it was just a short lifetime. The lifespan of a grasshopper I guess.”

“We have decided we will come out on the train this Christmas. It won’t be the sun and sand, but our grandsons should make it warm inside. I’m going to get another drink. I am very proud; we have made a go of buying our farm and you are doing so well in a new venture. Send more photos of the boys we love to see them.”

After Dad left Tom spoke up, I had forgotten he was there. “Aunt Carol there is a convention of computer and software developers. I want to go I would not be far from the farm. I’ve never been there. It would end the week before Christmas, could I come this year?”

“Yes, but won’t your folks want you here?”

“I’ll be back before New Year’s, and I would like to be there when my grandparents are. I enjoy the stories.”

“Your father and I are becoming co-owners of the farm, you ought to at least see it. At this rate I may run out of rooms.”

Carol sat reflecting. The train is easy, just sit and watch the farmland roll by. She was glad to not be bouncing along all the way to the coast. The boys would have loved the train for 30 minutes. The rest of the ride would have been more challenging. The boys were much safer with Ruth on the farm than in a big city. Now she was an owner of twenty percent of the farm. The family had decided to share an interest in the farm as a whole as opposed to separating out parcels. Her father was gifting a portion of his ownership to her brother and her each year. He said with a 20 percent start; she would always have a controlling interest. Her parents agreed to come for Christmas. Nostalgia was catching up with everyone and loss. Thomas had now lost both parents and both his younger brothers. One to the

mountains and one to a virus, possibly both were lost to a lifestyle in some sense. They had decided this train thing would avoid winter driving. Carol had thought her parents would never come to see what she had done with the place, but grandchildren do encourage and motivate. They had usually gone to some sand and sun location but were now willing to risk their comfortable lifestyle. Carol Parker was now twenty per cent her own landlord but one hundred percent the tenant of orchards and produce.

Chapter 20

Sweet fruit is its own reward, even after wandering lost in the country. Stephen is impressed with Parker Produce and Fruit and with Carol Parker. 1979

I really love your peaches
wanna shake your tree -
The Clovers Lovey Dovey
Devil or Angel



Saownictwo Peaches

Sunshine and Sweetness

It was a busy day at the farm. Carol was working with Ruth's cousin Lizzie at the Market. After the wedding, Ruth had convinced Carol to have Lizzie help during apple season and live with her. Lizzie became Ruth's replacement housemate. Lizzie was working on a similar agreement to the

one Ruth had with Carol. Ruth and JB lived at his house. Lizzie had grown up in Tennessee and thought the winter exceptionally brutal. Carol told her she didn't need to rush around the house doing dishes and laundry, it was OK to relax sometimes. Lizzie said if she slowed down, she was sure she would freeze in place. Lizzie was just as energetic as Ruth and twice as talkative. Everyone busted tail to prepare for opening day at the Parker Market. They had a good supply of early season produce lettuce, greens, radishes, green onions, rhubarb, and asparagus. They were selling flowering plants and garden plants like tomatoes and peppers. Now that it was slowing down Carol knew it had been a good day.

Carol had seen the Shires as Ruth worked with them. Having the team come clopping up near her was still a shock because they were so big. Ruth's Shire horses were a huge hit; she had many in line waiting for the next ride. After selling her prize-winning quarter horse Ruth had purchased a team of Shire horses. Ruth was right, people did love them. Carol hoped they were as gentle as Ruth claimed. In a few weeks, they would be at their busiest, challenged to be in two places at once. JB would use the trailer and haul Carol and the pallets of strawberries to the same festival where Ruth adopted herself to Carol. Meeting new challenges is the cost and stress of growth. Ruth had a nephew coming to help next week as she and Lizzie ran the market. Carol decided Ruth likely had enough shirt tail relations to offer an endless supply of part time help.

Stephen Capuano came driving into Parker Produce and Fruit about an hour and a half after Carol had left the students in Ruth's capable hands. He had taken a roundabout route turning on the wrong road initially. He had asked for directions and must have missed the jog in the road at Anderson's old crib when trying to get back. He rechecked the little hand out from last Saturday. His circuitous route did get him back on the road to Parkers; he arrived from the opposite direction he originally intended but here he was. He parked his Fiat 500 off the lane going to the house. He took his camera and began looking at the raised beds, the new fruit trees starting to get some height. Several photos of the house and the elaborate garden behind it. The light was good today, he was shooting on black and white. He was impressed by all the traditional homestead plants: peonies, trumpet vines, lilacs, tiger lilies, and red bud. The catalpa trees were in

bloom, he saw healthy rhubarb patches and asparagus beds. He knew these were not just recent additions. These beds had been here for many years. Every growing thing seemed to be well tended. Walking over to the market area he crossed the road and toured the gardens growing there. The market was still busy with people, he avoided it. Many people came and went but leavers were beginning to outnumber the comers. Carol had looked up and saw him walking across the road. His long dark hair was tied back into a ponytail and he was wearing a gray fedora with a feather in the band. He appeared to be a very well-dressed hippie. She had to answer a customer and looked away. Stephen walked looking at the garden spots and beds in back of the market. There were briars growing near the back that would produce blackberries and raspberries later. Stephen was sure Carol must have planted them. They didn't look to have been here for more than three years. He wondered how much help Carol had to do the work. He thought she is one hard working woman if she is maintaining all of these. He was heading back up towards the market when his students spied him. They were having a great time but were about to leave. "Professor Capuano what to do you think about Parker's farm?"

"It is obvious they are planning on growth. New trees and more raised beds are under construction. It all looks to be doing very well. The strawberry crop looks to be abundant and will be ripe soon."

"Ruth is back; you should let her show some of the rest of the farm." They guided their professor over to where Ruth had unloaded the last of her passengers.

A family, who were gathering their things together, thanked her profusely, "It is so wonderful to see the team work together. Thank you, Ruth."

"Come back out, it should get better as the season continues."

The kids gathered around Ruth, "Ruth this is Professor Capuano."

"Simply Stephen, it is nice to meet you Ruth. You seem so small to handle such large horses."

"Horses don't respond to strength professor; they respond to trust."

"They are impressive, a little intimidating."

"They are a wonderful team, time to take them back for water. It was our first day they seemed to enjoy it."

"Professor, Ruth was a barrel racer. She sold her quarter horse and bought this team."

"It must have been quite a horse to buy two such large horses in its place."

"I got a heap more than this pair of Shires, I had just won a national event, but barrel racing doesn't quite fit motherhood. Ruth rubbed her tummy which had a small rounding protrusion. I better take these big boys up to the barn, nice to have met you all" – Ruth lead the team across the road and up to the barn.

Carol walked out to the group. "Goodbye, Ms. Parker we had a great day. Ruth and those huge horses are amazing. Professor Capuano has been taking photos I expect they will be a part of a future class."

"I am very impressed Carol; you have accomplished so much here."

"We have much more to accomplish. Ruth and JB have become partners, and no one out works Lizzie or out talks her either."

"I am so pleased I came out. I never went on a ride with Ruth, I will have to come back."

"Would you like to see our conversion of the barn into our market?"

"Yes, I haven't been in yet. I have seen apple orchards and I suppose you have zucchini. Parker Produce and Fruit must have a plan for everything from A to Z."

"We want to offer variety. We are still learning what we can grow best and what is the most profitable. "

"We'll see you in class professor." – the students went back to their car.

"Think Professor Steve is going to pursue Carol?"

"I would, she seems everything he would want. A woman doing what he is teaching and one who has a commanding presence."

"You mean she's hot?"

"I was trying to stay appropriate not mention those long legs all the way to her fine ass."

"Joe has graduated from Neanderthal to caveman."

"If Professor Steve starts banging Carol how will poor Renee ever pass his class. She seems to require in depth instruction" – all laughing as they drove away.

-

"We had this old barn and felt it would make a great site for a market here on the farm."

"It looks very old."

"It is, those are pegs and you can see the beams were hewn with an axe."

Some of the outside vendors were loading up.

"Thank you, Carol we had a good day. Hope you do this again next year."

"I will try to organize another opening day next year. I may not be able to organize today's perfect weather."

"Yes, I think everyone was pleased, maybe not Dutch John. One of the young people thought his sculpture was Mork from TV. It was supposed to be Neil Armstrong. "

"I caught a glimpse of it; I thought it was a scarecrow. Thank you for coming."

"Lizzie this is Professor Capuano, the students out here today were from his class."

"Those kids had a great time, they were everywhere."

"Yes, they were excited to come out. They met Ms. Parker at the farmers market last Saturday. I am very impressed myself. You have done tremendous work out here."

"Ruth and Lizzie are great help. Many things I began are just starting to produce. Everything looks good at this point."

"I see you have a vending machine could I buy you two a soda?"

"Soda? Oh yes ready for a break Lizzie. "

"It would be good. I could use a coke. Let me try that new strawberry. We ought to have moonpies. Folks love moonpies."

"Not up here Lizzie no one knows what they are. We'll just keep selling the peanuts. Chocolate melts."

"I thought she wanted a coke."

"Everything's a coke in Tennessee."

"How is the strawberry?"

"This is a good one. Kids will love it."

"I hate to impose, but I was very lost getting here. Could you show me the way back to the highway?"

"It is just down the road, but I know it seems confusing out here. It is time to shut the stand up. You help us put things away and we'll get you headed home."

"I really appreciate it. I have a lot of grading to do; we are almost done with the semester. I need to get back not drive around in circles."

"That should do, we will open tomorrow. It will be slower."

"Lizzie if you want to get the pickup. I will ride down to the highway with Stephen. Let Sam out he's had a miserable day in the basement. He can ride with you, make up for his boring day."

"Sam?"

"He's my dog. The giant beasts are new to Sam and with a ton of people out here we decided to keep Sam locked up. At least it was cool in the basement."

"This is your car?"

"Yes, it is, Lizzie."

"Funny looking little car what is it?"

"It is a Fiat. They are made in Italy."

"If you got an American car, you might get a whole car."

"Lizzie don't make fun of his car."

"OK I'll get Carol's foreign truck. It isn't a grown-up truck either, but it does run well."

-

"It is a straight road to the highway. I will try not to miss my turn the next time. I hope it would be agreeable with you if I came out and visited after school is out."

"I would enjoy your visit. Maybe you can offer advice on some of the problems we have at times."

"I would be glad to offer whatever advice I might have."

"We are here every weekday. Some of us have to go to the farmers market on Saturdays. We'll be taking strawberries to New Harmony. It is a big day. Weekdays are calm a good time to come by and see what we do. Lizzie is here."

"Thank you very much Carol. I will be back in a couple of weeks during a weekday. My that is a big dog."

"Sam is not too huge, not as big as Ruth's horses anyway. See you in a couple weeks."

"I enjoyed today and look forward to coming back."

-

"How could he be lost; all you have to do is drive down the road?"

"He missed this road and circled all over getting here, he was just disoriented."

"Not a bad looking hippie type."

"I agree a dapper hippie. I hope you can see with Sam hanging out the window."

"Sam was pouting when I let him out. He found your track and was happy to get in the truck. I think he knew you were in the car ahead of us. Sam may not of had a great day, but we did."

"Ruth is right about those big horses; people did love them. Stephen is coming back again in couple weeks after school is out. If he doesn't get lost again."

"He must have found Ms. Carol Parker rather dapper."

"He teaches horticulture and promotes operations like ours. I'm sure he'll have advice we could use."

"We could use two more hands picking and weeding. Maybe he could run his advice-giving mouth while using his hands for something useful. He seemed to be admiring you rather closely. You be careful about his advice and his hands."

Chapter 21

Mark Greene and Carol Parker enjoy working together for music at church. Now that Carol has learned hard truths; they are moving past being simply good neighbors. They both have a need to visit the law firm in Chicago. 1980

I'll always want you near me
I've waited for you for so long –
Lionel B., Jr. Richie -- Lady
Tuskegee (featuring Kenny Rogers)



Water Tower Chicago

Downtown Detour

“They said we could turn up the thermostat if we needed to; I didn’t think it was too bad.”

“You may make a farmer yet, Mark. I think I can get by and no not that cold. I also think it is warm enough, guess that is a sign I am a farmer. I know many believe I’m not a real farmer. I consider myself a farmer. I don’t have a new tractor with one of those fancy cabs like the Greene operation does.”

“Your tractors are great for the work you do, also you have all those fine horses. The Shires are very impressive. “

“Ruth has all the fine horses. She was right it brings people out to the market. They make for excellent advertising props; they appear on all the jam and jelly labels.”

“We ride in those cabs for hours in the Spring and Fall, they make us more productive and cleaner. Clean enough to pop out and come to church for practice if pressed for time. I went to the school you’ve turned into your canning operation. How is it working out?”

“We are doing alright, like all new ventures most of the revenues are paying off the loans. We have met my projections on production and sales, nothing too unexpected has come to light. Ruth is a marvel at managing the operation. We should move past the simple truck garden enterprise, if sales continue to stay strong. Anecdotally, I am told the customers become loyal and repeat choosing our brand. I don’t want to believe it simply because it sounds good.”

“Your brother called speaking of things, easy to believe. He says they should be able to get my case heard. He believes I have a strong case. I try not to worry about it. I’ve been in limbo for so long.”

“I talked with him the other day. His firm has some questions you could clear up, if you had time to come in for an appointment. “

“A major trip not like I can meet and be back to feed the cattle.”

“You’re not the only one capable of feeding the cattle for day or two. I have a plan you might like. I have to go meet with my brother at his office. I would tour you around the big city for a long weekend, it is my old haunts.”

“It would be noticed if we both left together. I think my mother would question it. I am supposed to stay out of trouble during this appeal. You are talking about setting off all the gossips.”

“I have a plan for that, as well. “

“Oh, and here we are in church, makes this plan sound extra sinful.”

“We are already viewed with suspicion. We listen to NPR, we are book readers, just the kind of people not to be trusted by proper flag wavers. Just listen, not a whisper of gossip will ensue, no more than there already is. That friend of yours, Matt, who came here when you went to Spring training or something.”

“Matt and I went to preseason camp; it was football and in the summer after the corn was laid by and hay in the barn.”

“OK the point is you have this friend Matt who lives not far from a train station. If he would agree to take you to the train depot near where he lives. We could take two separate trips but simply run into each other.”

“This seems less than serendipitous and a somewhat immodest plan to be plotted in my home church.”

“Now, Mr. Greene I have offered to give you a tour of my former big city. Have you been to the Art Institute, Sears Tower, the Lyric Opera, no? Nothing immodest or impure about it, unless you have other plans?”

“Carol you are a temptress.”

“After Christmas it would be fun to spend a few days, everything would be OK here. You ask your friend and I will start buying tickets and making reservations.”

“Thank you for plans nearly foolproof, I hope your brother is correct. He says the charges were an entire misreading of the law. He also says the jury instructions were prejudicial. Maybe being stalled kept me from being an Iranian hostage. I really want to move forward, although I enjoy being here and doing music with you. Should we get started, they asked for ‘Silver Bells’ then two traditional carols from the hymnal. Do you think we could do, ‘Away in a Manager’ and ‘Angels We Have Heard on High’?”

“I have this book of Christmas favorites for guitar, let’s try and see how it goes on ‘Silver Bells’.”

“I will call Matt, spending time together free from our roles here would be fun. Thank you.”

“Yes, the City Sidewalks will be fun. It is always good to leave them behind after a visit. I get back home and find why I love to be here. Let’s try to get that ‘Sliver Bells’ song down, you do your best Perry Como imitation.”

Chapter 22

Ruth finds her escape plan; Carol doesn't want her to be a runaway. 1977

Don't cross him don't boss him
he's wild in his sorrow
he's ridin' and hidin' his pain -

Carl Stutz / Edith L Calisch Red Headed Stranger

Willie Nelson – Red Headed Stranger



Horse and woman -- GUI

Inevitability

"I'm going to walk around for a while."

"OK Baby Ruthie – should be ready to load up in about an hour."

-

"Hi, I'm Ruth, I've been watching you when you come over here to New Harmony. I think you are doing a great job marketing looks like you've had a good day."

"The weather was good. New Harmony is usually good for us."

"You sold all the produce you brought; I didn't think you would ever sell all I saw your boyfriend unload."

"JB, he's not my boyfriend."

"Husband?"

"JB is my neighbor. He fixes things at the farm. It was especially nice he came today. We have become friends, but we disagree a lot. This is the second year he has helped get me over here for this festival."

"I like these little handouts you have. All the information needed to get back in touch. You sell Christmas gifts?"

"Yes, I rent the freezer part of a locker and freeze excess fruit. I then make jams and jellies. I package them after the canning for Christmas baskets. It keeps income coming in after the growing season is over."

"If that man isn't your husband or boyfriend, then do you run your farm by yourself?"

"I do have some kids to help part time, like Cindy is today. JB has filled many mechanical and construction needs at the farm, but I am the main labor force."

"You do all the canning, too?"

"I am afraid it's just me. It helps me turn a profit."

"Do you have a nice house?"

"It is, certainly nice enough for me."

"I'm a good worker and I really need to leave now that I'm out of school. I think my folks will marry me off if I don't get out on my own."

"I'm not sure I could afford a full-time employee."

"I would work for you just for a place to stay and meals. I need to get out and try to find out what I might do. I know I could help you with all the work you're doing. I'm not getting paid now."

"I've seen you at the market. I can tell you're a good worker, but I can only offer a share in profits that may not happen. I think your parents may want to see you get a paying job."

"They don't think women should work outside, they should be wives and mothers. I need to get away. I don't want to just run off, but I may have to."

That hit Carol, she knew this hard-working young woman was serious-
"OK you can come stay at my place, but won't your parents say no."

"If you will just come over and tell them you need help for the summer and have offered me a job. They will agree. You won't regret it."

"Cindy I'll be back. OK let's go"

"Hi, I'm Carol Parker of Parker Produce and Fruit."

"Yes, we've seen you before. Looks like you're spreading out, more stuff than I thought a small truck could hold."

"We brought a trailer with my neighbor's truck. I need a good worker the rest of the summer and I want to hire your daughter Ruth."

"Oh, Baby Ruthie works hard alright, but I don't know."

"Wouldn't be different than me being home except I'd make some money."

"You'd pay her and keep her for the summer?"

"We've agreed on terms, I treat my employees fairly."

“You live in the old Parker place, I’ve been by, reckon you’d have the room for her. Ruthie will be good help. We’ll come by Sunday afternoon and talk about it.”

“Pa, Ruthie needs to get out and this would keep her close. Mrs. Parker, we’ll bring her things on Sunday. She can start helping on Monday. Glad your business is getting along.”

“See you all tomorrow afternoon.” Carol walked away pondering, I have a helper. I guess the details will work out.

Chapter 23

Success is blooming like the fruit trees, but an early frost foreshadows a bitter harvest.
1980

Take a picture of this,
this is me leaving
Take a picture of this,
this is me walking away –
Don Henley Take a Picture of This
Don Henley – Cass County



Blossoms -- Bakawi

Stunning

“Good Morning Carol, it is nice to be here again. Even nicer to be working with a real budget we should end up with some great photos. “

“Good morning, Zeph. How did you get your name?”

“My father loved trains, I’m Zephyr actually.”

“Better choice than the El Capitan or the Super Chief.”

“Yes, I have come to love Zeph. We will be doing some video; the new cameras are easy to carry. The re-issued book “The Bountiful Earth in Photos” is doing well. Stephen got an advance for a second book and we are contracted to document your farm in photos, videos, and interviews. The new book will have many photos but there may be a documentary. Are you ready to tolerate us imposing on your bucolic lifestyle again?”

“I don’t know if the book itself has helped our sales, but we got some local press coverage. The articles appeared just before our Fall season; Lizzie was busier than a fissicked woodpecker. I have been trying to add some colloquialisms. I can tolerate some inconvenience for the increased sales.”

“Pam is my assistant and she will be out here soon. She is the best to develop the right light, framing, and she has gotten the hang of these new video cameras. She says tripods, tripods, and proper light. I hope her being here is fine.”

“Sounds like she has the talents you need. We may get a feature in one of the national farm magazines. I will give them your name when they call next week. Ruth says Lizzie already believes she’s a model now that her photo went into the illustrated book and was in the paper. Maybe they can buy and run your photos and I won’t have to put up with another group interrupting work. “

“Speaking of models, Carol you are the one selling this book. You are tall, have a natural unadorned beauty. The cover photo of you just being yourself carrying that basket of apples makes everyone pick it up. “

“Zeph, it was a basket of peaches. I use my strength and body to work hard here, I use my mind to crunch the numbers and calculate the risks, and if my long gangly frame and blonde hair are in style... I am unsure, but if it makes the work of my mind and body a success, OK. “

“The weather is supposed to be great; we should be able to make Parker Produce look like the Garden of Eden.”

“Photos don’t show the thorns, bugs, or snakes. You create the illusion and we will try to come as close as possible in the real world. Being in the farm magazine will twist old man Grisham’s balls.”

“Carol! I have to ask?”

“Grisham is this old grouchy snot, who is almost as big a deal in the county, as he thinks he is. Grandpa Parker was on the Soil and Water Conservation Board for several years. The board had a vacancy, and someone suggested me. Grisham laid into a diatribe. Women should know their place. It wasn’t proper for me to be here working like a man. He wasn’t going to allow any feminist Hanoi Jane on a farm committee, he was sure my big-time lawyer Daddy would grow tired of throwing money away on me, and I would run back to a commune with my lesbo sisters. He had lost his son because of those Yippie/Hippie filth. He wouldn’t have the likes of me on anything. I would be gone before next Spring, anyway.”

“Not a supporter of the ERA, I would guess?”

“He said it all in open meeting on the record. They amended the official record, but it’s a rural community, everyone heard about it. As gossip went around some heard even wilder speculation. Max Greene is friends with the board’s secretary, he was taking it all down. He gave Max a copy unofficially. Max thought I would want to know the actual from the rumored version.”

“Don’t know what to say about these bumpkins.”

"They are good people and very ingenious. There are always a few bigots some of them very prominent in the community. The odd thing Grisham's son wasn't actually killed in Vietnam. He was stationed in Germany. He was killed at a club or on the way to the base. Max said he doesn't know for sure, but it involved something off base that no one talked about. Yes, I hope I'm in that big farm magazine. I want Grisham to feel it right where my boot would be if he were standing here."

"Miss Carol, I believe I will get to work. Lizzie has got me calling you that now."

"She's from Tennessee, it sounds natural to her, just not me."

"I should move, I somehow feel less safe standing here. I think that is Pam's station wagon. We'll make you and Parker Produce dazzle for that farm magazine and the book of course."

"Thank you, Zeph, I can control myself. Just because you got them doesn't mean I'm going to kick them." Carol got in her truck and headed out to the new orchard. They had taken another small field out of crop for apples and a row of peaches. Max had joked maybe Carol could do better keeping the deer away from the apples than he did from the corn and beans.

-

"Hey Lizzie, I brought you lunch. Zeph said they would be here at the market until one or so."

"Thank you, Ruthie, I feel like an actress, they told me how to stand and move, it was fun. Miss Pam is one sharp cookie. She said she was glad to get to see the farm. It was obvious that Stephen would fall for Miss Carol. Pam said once she saw the photos of the farm and Carol she understood. She had picked the photos for the first book. She wanted to make this next book as successful as possible, as she would get half the royalties on this one, but not another."

"Lizzie why is Pam getting half the royalties on the second book?"

"It was part of the divorce agreement when her first marriage broke up. Seems folks just quit these days too easy. Why Mabel Cotton: she finally laid out her husband with a good ole Griswold skillet, he had beat her so many times. He straightened up after that and they was married still when I left the hills. "

"Lizzie who did Pam divorce? Lizzie."

"Oh Pam, Pam was Stephen's first wife. She said she was young and foolish; she was glad Miss Carol had let her come do this shoot. She said she was talented and the whole project would do better for her being here. But some women wouldn't want her here anyway. Zeph had told her Miss Carol was a special woman and I couldn't agree more. I had so much fun helping make those artistic shots of the arrangements around here. "

"Lizzie, Pam is Stephen's first wife?"

"Yes, and Zeph said so, they wouldn't be making it up. Miss Carol is real sharp I figured she wanted the good advertising and could overlook an old left behind bundle of soiled britches. "

"Lizzie I was going ask you to not say a word, but I want you to take Della home in my truck. Watch her and start supper for us. JB said he'd be home after six. He had to finish that tractor for the Coopers today. I will be home by then. "

"Cousin Ruthie, Miss Carol knows all about Miss Pam, doesn't she?"

"I don't know, but this would not be the time to find out from some blabber mouth."

"Ruthie I can keep a secret."

"Take Della and go home, I'll tell you more tonight."

"How you gettin home?"

"I'll ride Jimbo, now go home." Ruth flipped the sign over to 'gone for a while'. She walked to the barn and saddled up Jimbo. She found Zeph and Pam in the West orchard. They had taken some extreme close ups of leaves and beginning fruit and a blooming tree. Now they were set up taking longshots back to the house and buildings. They loved that Ruth had ridden to them and they had several shots of her on horseback. They asked her to pose with Jimbo and come riding back at them again. They wanted to go up by the house and barn and take various shots of Ruth on her horse.

"Before we go up to the house, I need to ask you something."

"Sure, Cousin Ruthie" as they both laughed.

"Yes, Lizzie is a chatterbox. I learned about your divorce settlement from her."

Pam grimaced, "Yes I wouldn't have said anything, but she was just jabbering on and the next thing I knew I was explaining why I would do such a good job on this project. I shouldn't ramble on about it."

"I want you both not to say anything about a divorce, first marriage, or a settlement. I do not know what Carol knows about any of your past with Stephen, but I know she doesn't know you are sharing this advance and royalties."

"Stephen does not enjoy the unpleasant realities of life, and he imagines them away. It would be best just to never get into the topic. Carol is probably not wanting to know details or more then she does "- Pam speculated.

"I'm going to ask Lizzie to fill in for me tomorrow. I'll get the team out in morning. I'm sure you will want some photos of them. They are very impressive aren't they Zeph?"

"Yes impressive, as in frightening, impressed to immobility."

“If Zeph could take photos of Carol at the market tomorrow, JB and I can take you to the lake, to a covered bridge, and a couple of those old iron truss bridges. People often are wanting to paint or photograph them. We can hook the trailer to the truck and take Jimbo. I think he’d look perfect coming out of the covered bridge. “

“Yes, that would be great and help in expanding the beauty and history of this place. I like that idea. Zeph believes Stephen will be out tomorrow. I’d be just as happy if Zeph finishes shots at the market and house. I could slip on home without seeing Stephen, it would be better for both of us. “

“OK good we can go up to the house. You want me to carry some of your stuff?”

“No, we can pack it, see you at the house.” Ruth mounted and rode up to the house hearing camera clicks. A few shots of a woman riding home if not into the sunset.

-

Carol came driving in, she had agreed with Zeph to do an interview on the porch. Ruth helped Carol get some iced tea and lemonade out. Carol had some molasses cookies to add as well. She did a quick clean up and came out wearing the black western style blouse Ruth had bought for her at the rodeo. Carol looked very cowgirl in her jeans and long boots. Sam decided to park himself at her feet once he sniffed both Zeph and Pam. He seemed uninterested in the camera and audio recording device they had set up.

Pam said “I’m going to take some stills while Zeph does the interview. Please just ignore me. Ruth said she would meet me at the barn in the morning and hitch the team up. Then she and JB are going to take me to some scenic bridges. Zeph will be at the market in the morning to finish the shoot. Oh, Ruth after I get in my car I’m going to drive over to the market. Could you ride Jimbo down the lane and over to the market I would like to take a series of photos. “

"I'll be glad to ride over; I need to close everything up tonight anyway."

"After that I'll leave and see everyone again in the morning."

Carol added, "Yes, Gotham has a bat mobile and we have a beast mobile. "

Zeph spoke up, "yours is far scarier."

"Ruth are you riding Jimbo home? I didn't see your truck."

"Yes, I sent Lizzie home with Della. Danny is coming to drive the team tomorrow."

"Is he wearing that god-awful cowboy outfit, again?"

"Danny idolizes Porter Waggoner."

"OK but it looks ridiculous out here."

"I am going to take Jimbo over to water. When you get down to the market Pam, I'll start ridin him down the lane. Good night everyone."

Pam very stealthily got some great shots of Carol as Zeph got her to talk about coming here as a girl and what it was like to start a business on the family farm. She walked to her car and waved at Ruth and drove to the market. Ruth closed everything up. She walked over to Pam who still had her camera.

"You take a lot of photos."

"Never know which one captures the best story until you start developing them."

"JB and I will meet you up by the barn in the morning, is 8 o'clock OK?"

"I'm just going to that little motel loading film and getting ready for tomorrow, eight will be fine."

“I’m surprised you would come even with your half interest; it must make you feel uneasy.”

“I’m the best at this. If the documentary is made, it could lead to a good connection on other projects. I am all in this for me. Portraying a great story about Carol and her farm is what will make me known as a woman with her own talents.”

“Morning then, I’ll pack a picnic lunch and we’ll enjoy some of my favorites spots here.” Ruth rode home, it was to the East, but the afternoon sun cast some great shadows which were very popular in the book. One won Pam a first at a competition.

Chapter 24

Sometimes rebuilding a car can be an indication of rebuilding a life – JB and Carol 1976

I wake up in the morning
Fold my hands and pray for rain
I got a head full of ideas
That are drivin' me insane –
Bob Dylan Maggie's Farm
Bob Dylan The Essential Bob Dylan



Roadrunner Plymouth

8 Track Memories

JB came driving, possibly sliding into the drive of the South 20. He parked near the old barn that both he and Carol had been converting into a produce and fruit market. A strange beep, beep like from the coyote and roadrunner cartoons went off. It was near the end of the second summer Carol had been trying to make a go here on the old family farm. The apple harvest looked like it would be good. The newest trees were too young to produce much fruit but were healthy. JB had built raised beds according Carol's specifications mostly for strawberries. Strawberries were making money and although JB had questioned raised beds in his inimitable style of colorful metaphors. He now saw how much easier it made strawberries. He even offered suggestions to make them more productive or easier to maintain. It had been eight months since Carol had gone to Bill's bar to keep him out of trouble. He had definitely changed since then. Many discussions about the war, the changes in the country, had transpired, neither argued just made their point of view heard. Both realized how little they had in common when not working on the farm. Both learned from each other, and both enjoyed Hayes Pond. They had each needed something and healed each other. They didn't bond with each other; they accepted each other's needs. They were now like friends in school who are thrown together and appreciate each other even if not together by choice. Carol came out to see what had made the funny little beeps.

JB began, "It is really a beauty don't you think. A 1970 Plymouth Road Runner. It needed an engine overhaul, but they gave me a space at the dealership. I appreciate you paid me beyond rent and I've cut back on the booze. I had the money to get this running."

"You earned the money; you've put in almost every night after work this summer. It is orange."

"I really like it, some like that lime green, but I really like the orange and the way the trim looks. Did you hear the horn?"

"Yes, I did, oh I see the decal it is the Road Runner. Is this a hot rod?"

"They call them muscle cars. After them OPECKers jacked us around some said the muscle car was over, but I am only driving it for fun. I got the

truck for work. This doesn't get much worse mileage than the truck if you stay out of the six barrel. I'm still working on the radio I think the antenna cable is broke but the 8-track works. Hearing it fire up after we had worked so hard to get it back together, it was one of the best things I ever heard. You have to let me take you for a ride so you can hear it run."

"Once I decide it's safe, possibly."

"We've checked it out. It has low miles considering it is six years old; they blew the engine and it sat in a shed for two years."

"Are you sure you are a safe driver?"

"Hey hey, I can handle this. Besides out here in the country all you have to do is keep it between the fence posts."

Carol looked inside: bucket seats, manual shift, and a small back seat, not very useful looking. "It does look to be in good shape. I'm glad you are having fun."

"I haven't filled up since we got it running. I need to run down to the station at the highway. Would you like to ride along?"

"OK JB, but if you kill me in this deathtrap, I will never speak to you again."

"Oh, that's a joke isn't it?"

"Yes, JB it was."

"I got this Credence tape, and I bought one from the Outlaws. I really like the song 'Good Hearted Woman.' I found two absolute crap tapes in the trunk. One was Zappa Money something and other was another piece of trash from The Fugs. Not hard to guess why they were left."

I had to laugh while hearing his opinion of my ex-boyfriend's music. Cosmo or David, the worthless Hippie, had loved Zappa. It was hard to

listen to Zappa and not remember the crappy boyfriend. Zappa music had lost its appeal. When we got back to my place, I had to agree it was more exciting than my pickup.

Then JB asked if I would like to go to this party reunion event. "I didn't actually graduate; I was in Vietnam the year I would have graduated. They are having a whole hog roast and a band. They invite people who have been out of school four years whose class graduated after 65. I kind of want to go. I'm trying to be more normal not the wild man I was. They asked me to invite you, some would like to meet you. They thought you might enjoy meeting others who were your age. Several of those who don't live here come back for this reunion. It has become a tradition. I would like you to go because I need you to keep me out of trouble."

"Lord JB talk about asking for an impossible task."

"Yeah, but I won't get drunk if you're there."

"I am not doing a farmer's market on Saturday and the apple season hasn't started yet. I can afford a Friday night to meet the locals."

"Thank you, I have a couple of old friends who will be there. It is time to be just one of the guys not the wild-eyed vet."

Chapter 25

Carol helps Karen catch a retro look as she accompanies Madison to the Orange Buffoons concert.

There's a young man that I know,
his age is twenty-one
So, blow you ol' blue northern,
blow my love to me —
Ian Tyson Someday Soon
Judy Collins The Very Best of Judy Collins



Emmy Lou Harris

Sweet Voiced Emmy Lou

“Carol, where is Walnut Ridge?”

“Walnut Ridge is even less of a place than Franklin. It’s just west of the highway. Lee would have gone to the same school my sons did.”

“You have been very kind, and all the food here has been beyond exceptional, thank you. Spilt pea soup is good in spite of the fact it looks like green goo.”

“You are joy, Madison. A trip back home to the farm has to be accompanied by good food.”

“I’m going to get dressed for tonight. I feel like I’m working for the ‘Rolling Stone’. You are going to drive us down aren’t you Karen, they’ve got concrete, and Mr. Navarro has given us a parking space. We can come in, ninety minutes before the gates open.”

“Yes Madison, I will not deny you a moment ‘ – giving a little wave as Madison bounced upstairs.

“Aunt Carol would you come down and then we could come back here, maybe leave Madison the truck?”

“You don’t want to listen to the most fabulous guitar player ever?”

"I do, but I want to talk to you more, without Madison. I feel like I need to hear more of your life. You are not just a woman who made a successful business on the family farm. I feel like you are the mother I should have known."

"I can drive down. They always leave my space by the office. I could leave Madison the truck, Pete won't let her drive drunk. Of course, if she runs off with Lee, she won't need a truck. Try to get her to make sure she texts you, wouldn't want to have to put up missing posters. She shouldn't simply drop out and run away for two years like I did."

"You were a runaway for two years?"

"I thought I was just living my life, but I was out of touch for a little over two years."

"How old were you Aunt Carol?"

"I was far older than I am now, I was sixteen, barely."

"Was this with the worthless hippie boyfriend?"

"Yes, it was. The experience did teach me hard lessons. I've used them here on the farm. I couldn't tell Madison not to run off, without being a hypocrite like so many old people become. She should stay in touch, nevertheless. I do regret the anguish I must have caused. Also, with your damn smart phones you only have to touch a screen."

We both had expected Madison to take even longer to get ready; she was back with looks to kill at any concert. "Karen get ready while I upload my photos and store today's sketches."

"Aunt Carol what would you have worn to a concert when you first lived here."

"Jeans with a proper well-worn look, long boots, a peasant blouse of some kind, and my leather fringe jacket. I loved those jackets I've had several I still have one. You want the retro look?"

"Yes, I would."

"The jacket will fit of course. I have long boots; I still wear when Ruth coerces me to ride one of her cantankerous beasts. I'm sure I still have a peasant blouse. I also have a special pair of jeans that might fit you. We'll be back Madison, maybe fifty years back."

"See if the boots fit first, yes same size' - Carol took down a box from a shelf in the closet. "I wore these jeans when I got married and then boxed them. Try them on."

"Wow I love the stitching and embroidery."

"I would say they fit well, snugly to highlight the gangly frame." Carol sorted through another closet, "here this blouse is almost like the one I wore the day I wore those jeans."

Karen began to slip it on, "Karen I never wore a bra with it. You're young you won't need it. There was a reason they called us bra-burning man-haters."

"Did you hate men?"

"No, and most us didn't. We hated the hateful things many men did, not men as a whole."

"Ah perfect, brush your hair out and we'll add the jacket. It's in the closet downstairs."

"Did you use make up?"

"No not much, nothing bright and gaudy, we were all natural then."

Karen slipped on the jacket; Carol thought, was I ever this attractive? “I thought fringe jackets were so cool, and I loved boots. Here look in the mirror and check out your whole retro capture. My sons gave me this fancy standing mirror, possibly in the hope that I would take a moment to look at myself before rushing out into the world. “

“I like it, the fringe is cool.”

“You two go make an impressive entrance; I will come down after a while in the truck. No one will even notice me they will still be dazzled by my young guests.”

Karen looked at herself in Carol’s clothes becoming her, sensing experiences long forgotten. Karen wanted to listen and find this remarkable woman, more than a relative, a new mother. A feeling of security, a feeling of at home more than any time in her life. Karen came back to the present. Carol called her a young guest. She didn’t want to be a guest, she wanted to be family.

Karen told me, “I had now found a focal point for my life. I knew I wanted to learn and tell her story. A life more complicated than I imagined, but one I was now determined to uncover. This was the moment the college paper about a rural businesswoman became a secondary thing. As I looked at myself, I knew I had just begun to unravel the yarn ball of our intertwined lives. I would become her, and then let a world hear her pure heart.”

They all walked out together. Madison popped out her phone. She took photos of Carol and Karen beside the car, then Carol took some of Madison and Karen posing. Madison then did a video selfie that transitioned to her beside the car telling about how she was going to see the Orange Buffoons.

Carol said, “I’ll be down a little later. Seeing you drive off in this hot rod reminds me of the time JB convinced me to ride in that Orange deathtrap he rebuilt. It did have a cute horn. It was very orange, but we had to be the buffoons.”

Chapter 26

JB and Carol go to a local party of young adult boomers. Carol meets Mark for the first time. JB doesn't beat anyone up. 1976

He said, "We haven't had that spirit here since 1969"
And still those voices are calling from far away –
Glenn Frey / Don Felder / Donald Henley Hotel California
The Eagles Hotel California



Party 1970s

Reunion Revelation

Carol came in and uncorked a bottle of wine. She liked this red blend, also glad to leave winemaking to the West Coast. She took her glass out onto the porch. The sun would soon be setting. Seeing Karen in her retro costume, was Carol seeing herself in her favorite style.

She thought maybe that is why I liked JB calling me the hippie chick. Hippie Chick was much better than Commie Loving Cunt which he had popped off on a couple occasions. His most abusive language was always preceded by several beers; JB had carried home many demons not just the mud on his boots. They had needed each other that year of the bicentennial.

JB came to see that the flag burners and the flag wavers were both American. Each capable of being patriotic each capable of being traitors. JB had signed up for the Army at sixteen, ready to leave school behind. He had parental permission and began basic at seventeen. A short decade or

endless one depending on viewing it in reflection or in living it as present. His dramatic ride from eighth grade civics to this July 4th celebrating the bicentennial had changed JB's perspective on many things. The phrase all men are created equal had changed for him, he now understood that all men meant all humankind. He had learned all women were included; Carol had earned his respect. He had learned all peoples were included. He had grown up in the all-white farm community, but a black man named Jerome had saved his life and he had saved Jerome's three months later. He even spoke of how trapped the Vietnamese were living in a pastoral village between two forces intent on reigning hell on them. If you could wash away JB's resentment, hurt, and loneliness there was simply a lost kid. One-time JB said after a tough fire fight he felt like a puppy who just wanted to be petted and couldn't understand the meanness of the warped human who beat him.

They had helped salve each other's scars and wounds that summer. She supposed that is why she agreed to get in that rattling orange deathtrap. They had gone rumbling off to a reunion party of yokels she had never known. Like many life choices sometimes doing the least likely of things you want to do allows a new thing to be unlocked. They arrived in the orange bomb accompanied by John Fogerty's "Fortunate Son." JB's gearhead friends were all out opening the hood and talking numbers like 383, 440, 6, and 4.

Carol said, "I'll be back." JB had bought the tickets which included the food, beer, and band. It was at an unused quarry. A machine shed held the food and a bar. Mixed drinks in solo cups were a dollar. Carol got a screwdriver and took a ginger ale to JB. She whispered to JB it was ginger ale, but everyone would think it was whiskey. He said thank you, as Cathy came up and introduced herself. She had been the one who asked JB to invite her.

Cathy said, "I grew up neighbors to your folks. I wanted to come over and be nosey but didn't want to appear nosey. It is nice to meet you Ms. Parker."

"I'm Carol or Hippie Chick as JB calls me when he is being nice."

“Why don’t you come over to where we have chairs and benches. I’ll introduce you to some people; we can leave the greaser crowd to their wrenches and stuck nuts.”

Carol giggled and didn’t quite choke on her drink. Everyone she met explained their connection to the Parkers. A couple of guys had worked for Eldon. Many said their parents were in school with her Dad or uncles. A few of them had been out to the farm and others had seen her at the local farmers markets. The party began separating itself into groups. There was the group who never left high school who were recounting their mild hell raising as if it was a series of merit badges. There seemed to be a group of Vets many in their green jackets with names above the pocket. Carol became aware most in this group were people who had come back home for the reunion. They had gone to school and now lived in cities away from their small hometown. They all knew her father from the WWII memorial in the trophy case, his picture was there and a model replica of the bomber he flew. This group was discussing the country its divisions, all wondering what it meant for their futures. Occasionally they asked about their old classmates or neighbors.

After Carol came back home it took her about two years to finish her degree at a local private college. She had studied and stayed at home making up for her being gone. She was now involved in conversations much like if she were with her own college classmates. As she listened to people who all shared this special connection of being from here, Carol became aware of how well they knew each other. Almost everyone had been in the same classes with each other for twelve or thirteen years. If they hadn’t been in the same class, then their brother or sister had. These small-town people were a close-knit extended family. Carol was meeting and talking with the good students, now lawyers or doctors, accountants and teachers, engineers and scientists. Carol fell into informed conversations. She hadn’t discussed Watergate, Nixon, pardons, Carter, Ford, stagflation, the war, the draft, or any serious news topic in a long time. She had listened to the radio and had long dialogs with herself and then there was JB. Those dialogs were often between two people speaking separate languages. She decided to go get another drink. She bought JB another

ginger ale. She took it over as his gearhead group was about to head for food. She told JB she had enjoyed the pork and especially the coleslaw. Carol pointed over by the benches. The benches were near where someone had just started a fire. Carol said, "I'm enjoying meeting these people."

JB looked over as they walked back towards the shed. "Yeah, those are the bookworms. If you grew up here, they would have been your crowd. Be careful of that Cathy she can be quite the gossip."

"I am just listening JB and not adding anything to the gossip circle."

"I'm probably going to go say hi to Tom and some of those guys over there" - JB pointed to a group Carol had thought were the Vets.

"Good I'll just stay where you can find me."

Carol walked back over and sat on a log next to Cathy. Cathy asked, "Are you and JB a thing?"

"No, I need JB on the farm, he's got great mechanical skills. He needs me to keep him busy enough to stay out of trouble."

"I didn't think you could keep him that busy, but I haven't heard of him beating anyone's head in lately."

"Did you know JB in school?"

"Yes, I was three classes behind his. We rode the same bus."

"He liked tractors but wasn't much for other subjects. Someone convinced him the Army would be good for him."

"Vietnam only got worse the longer we stayed. JB respected my Grandfather. Once he saw I was serious about making money on produce and fruit he tried to help. He feels he needs to keep me from screwing up too badly."

"I heard you drove your truck in on a cold winter night and hauled his drunk ass home. Dad says he's been much less trouble since then."

"JB realized Bill was looking out for him and his friends were trying to keep him out of trouble. I think he was embarrassed over the cussing he gave me. I made him promise that after he fixed stuff we had to talk. He needed someone to listen. He brought home wounds no one can see. He slowed down his drinking. I haven't heard of any fights. JB bought that Orange beast. I think he is beginning to want to live instead of killing himself. He says the farm gives him purpose like it did for his Dad and Grandad. He overhauled the engine on that Roadrunner down at the implement dealer. He had to dedicate some time and money to it; he must see some future in his life now."

"Yes, his Dad was buried while he was in Vietnam. He missed out on all the grieving. JB was always his worst enemy. Even as a kid he couldn't just walk away. Glad you are keeping him busy. You know Carol, he's not such a bad looking man when he's sober."

"Cathy I've noticed that, but from my past experiences I'm not looking for a man drunk or sober."

Some people had been there with small children and a few had babies in those kangaroo pouches people were carrying their kids in these days. They were beginning to leave as those who had been to the football game arrived. It was the first game of the season. Some said the football game had been the original focus of the reunion, but people liked it so much they had it every year whether the game was at home or away. I was enjoying fitting into my community and not feeling like I was from the planet Klingon.

A well-built young man carrying a beer cup in his hand was walking over. People kept hollering little insults as he got close, I have learned that kidding or lighthearted insults are engrained in the community. They all know who to jibe and just when to stop. You know they have a special bond as you hear them chuckle.

"Hey Greene when you are going stop going to school, you know the draft is over."

"Maybe he's going to invent himself a new plow" -a comment that the group found inexplicably funny.

"How's the team look? Ben said they were losing."

This man I now knew was Greene said," they played a pretty good team, but yeah we lost."

"Maybe you should have suited up."

"I was too slow when I played. I wouldn't be walking if I had been out there. I'd be all stoved up."

"You going to be an ambassador or something?"

"Foreign service has many positions beyond ambassador. I have been scheduled for a second interview. It looks promising so far. "

"You know Mark, you could bore them to death with those history reports, you used to do. I think they would sign anything. I would have signed anything to get out of class."

"Maybe you should have negotiated a deal outside of class to get him to give shorter reports."

"Hey, are you suggesting I would bargain my considerable assets in a somewhat tawdry way?"

"No accusations but you did have something to bargain with."

"Now you are embarrassing Mark. How long you stayin Mark."

"Leave Sunday, flight out at 6 PM."

"If Carter wins will you have to apply again?"

"No foreign service serves the country not a party. The ambassadors are often people who have party connections, but not the working staff."

He had finished joking with the group, and Cathy grabbed his arm and brought him over. "Mark this is Carol Parker. Mark is Max Greene's son."

"Nice to meet you, I talk with your Dad occasionally."

Mark said, "you are Mr. Parker's granddaughter. I hear you are really working hard trying get an orchard and gardens going."

"I do work hard. I think it will work out. I enjoy living here. I believe your father has his doubts about me."

"You are quite a change from Mr. Parker. He's somewhat skeptical."

"Carol, Mark was there the day JB's dad was killed. Deputy told everyone Tim Carder would likely be dead if not for Mark."

"Your Grandfather got the ambulance coming, I tried to slow down his blood loss. The medical people saved him."

"Mark the modest, he won't likely tell you he was all conference in football, or about being an elite state scholar, and didn't you win some foreign scholarship. What country did you go to?"

"It was an Asian trip, it was fascinating. I got to go as an assistant to a professor. Our graduate school has several foreign policy experts. It was an honor, but I think Cathy is trying to make it a bigger deal than it was."

"I rode the school bus with you for 12 years. I think I know you well enough. Allow me to inform your new neighbor what an accomplished man Max's son is. Also, I bet you will never hear him swear. He can speak more words but never cusses. Unless you've changed."

"Thank you, Cathy. No, I guess I don't swear much. My folks don't and I just feel silly throwing in a cuss word. Carol, I wish I was your neighbor. I would like to judge your plans for myself. I know Dad doesn't trust outsiders with new ideas."

"If I can get production up by next year then I have found there are adequate markets. Apples take a long time to get to full production, but I am producing more revenues on my part of the home place than it ever did. My father is monitoring my returns, he is my landlord."

"He is also one of Dad's landlords. I hope it all works out for everyone. You are certainly breaking some barriers. I worked at your place many times with hay, cattle, and sometimes crops. It is a lovely farm. I need to go say hi to some of my old classmates; I don't get home often."

"Nice to meet you, I'm going to prove to your Dad and all the real farmers I can make it."

"I will try to come back and check on your progress"-Mark nodded and left with maybe a bow expression acquired on his Asia trip.

Cathy said, "A real hunk, isn't he?"

"Yeah"

"He doesn't think he is; always tends to undersell himself. Everyone liked him in school. He never had a big ego not in football or schoolwork just did his job. Too bad you weren't here a few years ago, he might be pursuing a more domestic service."

"I like his father, but I can tell Max thinks I'm a misguided, crazy hippie. I think, I will go grab a drink. JB seems to be enjoying himself, no fights yet."

"I am going stop by your farm sometime, now that I can do so and not appear to be nosey."

"See you then Cathy."

Carol got another screwdriver and a ginger ale. "I brought you another ginger ale."

"Good I had one with Jim Beam, but I shouldn't have another. You see the guy wearing the cavalry hat; he flew choppers. His girlfriend is dancing with another guy. I like the band, but she's a flirt. She likes to see her boyfriend John come over and defend her. We'll leave in about thirty minutes. If I stay late, then John's going take a punch to defend his little cutie. I wouldn't let a flyboy get away with a sucker punch. I would end up ruining his nice hat and his face too."

"OK I'll be over by the fire."

I came back up. One of the guys I had met named Joe, I had forgotten his last name called out, "Miss Parker don't you agree that the politicians screwed up Vietnam. They should have listened to the generals. My brother always said we should have shit or got off the pot. I am sure you will help me explain this to your neighbor."

I looked up to see Mark Greene standing there, "Well Joe," I decided to play into the neighbor thing, "Vietnam was a civil war. It was always more about colonialism than communism. "

"We were stopping communism; there'll be no stopping them now." - Joe countered.

"That may be the problem now, Joe. We nixed the democratic referendum during Eisenhower and General Westmorland was the one who requested the troop increases, then LBJ agreed. We did escalate bombing and troop levels; North Vietnam got more help from the Soviet Union. It is hard to win the hearts and minds of the people while dropping napalm on them. We should have realized we were fighting the wrong war much sooner. Possibly Nixon could have revealed his secret plan after he was elected in 1968."

Mark smiled, "Joe, Carol is right. We built one miscalculation upon another. We didn't want more Chinese or Soviet intervention. We shouldn't have stepped in after the colonialist French had their hats handed to them. "

Joe replied, with less certainty, "I am just saying all those boys fought for something, it's wrong to say they died for nothing. Those people out in those boats prove Commies are brutal killers."

Mark in a most modulated voice, "We preserved American honor, we proved we try to honor our commitments. You're right it is a horrible situation for many South Vietnamese. Unified Vietnam is now in control of a powerful military. It's a mess but we can't go back in time, we need to go forward. What do you think Carol?"

"I think our hope to not be where we are, ended when RFK was shot. I think he would have walked us out. We wouldn't be the divided nation we are today."

Another guy, Carol didn't know jumped in, "Nixon used our divisions to divide us. He saw Wallace's strength and pitted us against each other."

Mark came back with, "I like Carter and I like Ford, maybe we can find our way without pitting ourselves against each other."

Joe not quite done but running low of facts, "I work with Turbo; he says we were winning when he left, he's not sure who fucked it up after that."

"Joe we all did because no one listened to anyone. I was watching a war without end or purpose holding a 1A, away we go lottery number. I didn't know what the moral choice was. It was not simple or easy to know where duty lay. I was in school, but I was going to graduate in a couple years. Nixon Vietnamized the war and then there was no draft. We need to learn and try to not make those mistakes again. "

"OK Greene you were always the brain on politics. I hope you can straighten things out in that government job."

"I don't have it yet, but I hope I can help avoid some of our errors."

JB came ambling up. There was a general chorus of 'Hey JB'. One guy said, "I like that Roadrunner, they are so cool."

"Yeah, seems to be running good, now that I got it put back together."

"You ready to go JB?"

"Yes, it's time, Carol. That little flirt was over trying to get me to dance with her. I saw flyboy looking steamed."

"Hey, you're Greene, aren't you?"

"Yes, JB it's been a long time."

"Golldamn you've grown up, I think you were thirteen dragging bales around in the barn at Parkers."

"Yes, JB it was the first year I helped or at least tried to."

"You were doing good for thirteen."

"I was in the Army soon after that and I guess you've not been home much after going to school."

"I come at holidays but have not stayed home for long. It is nice to see you again. I love Roadrunners."

Mark smiled a nod almost a bow, "Nice to have met you Carol Parker. I hope you continue to prove the old guys wrong."

-

We got back to the Orange Beast and climbed in. "You want to listen to this Outlaws tape on the way back?"

"Sure JB, let the country music roll. I was proud of you tonight. I hope you had a good time."

"I did. I would have tied into that keg, but I knew I couldn't stay out of it if I did. It was nice to see some of the guys and walk away clear headed."

"And unbloodied"

"Yeah, most of the blood isn't usually mine, still have to clean off my shirt."

Carol found herself singing along "My heroes have always been cowboys and they still are, it seems ..."

-

Carol looked at her Apple watch, another gift from her sons. It was about time to head down to this Orangemen concert. She folded the blanket back. She kept it on the porch unless a storm was coming. She found she was covered in it at sunset without noticing. Her body seeking warmth and her mind not paying attention.

She went inside and put on a designer label barn coat. Grandpa Eldon had a barn coat his label was Oshkosh B'gosh.

Chapter 27

Karen begins a lifetime of learning from Carol and the spirits of the land. She becomes the Orange Buffoons' Emmy Lou.

I would rock my soul in the bosom of Abraham
I would hold my life in his saving grace –
Bill Danoff / Emmylou Harris Boulder to Birmingham
Emmy Lou Harris Pieces of the Sky



Audi TT

Deeper Connection

Karen and Madison driving the wonderful sports car parked in the reserved area. Her father seemed to think it wasn't extravagant because it wasn't a Maserati or Lamborghini. Karen at twenty was driving many people's life long and never attained dream. They drove into the reserved area, but parking was easy tonight because most of the concert ticket holders were being shuttled in. When the two attractive young women got out of the very sharp if not completely ridiculous sports car, everyone noticed. The Orange Buffoons and a small entourage were hanging out in an area behind the stage. They had finished the sound check. Madison walked into the press area and left her sketch pad. Then she and Karen went to talk to the band and crew.

Lee came over to meet them. "The band is fine with any still photos and sketches; I am the junior member of the group and younger than the others. I try to not rock the boat. We seem to be gaining attention I want to keep my job."

"Karen that is a nice car, it must corner well."

"Yes, it is fun on a curvy road."

"Do you know how fast it will go?"

“The speedometer stops at a 160, but I don’t know. I would be afraid to find out. Even my grandfather’s firm might not be able to get me out of a ticket at 160.”

“I will introduce you and Madison to the band” - Lee led them into the picnic area that allowed groups to enjoy the outdoors. Lee started with the lead singer and his wife. They had written the song Orange Buffoonery which had first gained the group attention. His wife Sheryl played keyboard and did harmonies. Ray sang but played some funky autoharp thing during instrumental breaks. Lee wasn’t sure it was even on a channel going out to the board.

Ray and Sheryl, this is Madison who will take photos and may do sketches tonight. This is her friend ...”

Ray interjected, “Emmy Lou Harris, Lee this must be the sweet voiced Emmy Lou, don’t disappoint my imagination.”

“OK when she is not being the Emmy Lou of your imagination, she is Karen Parker. One of the Parker family who are our hosts tonight.”

Ray guided Karen over to where everyone else was lounging, “This is Emmy Lou whose family owns this zoo, I do love the Llamas.”

Everyone sipped wine and chatted with Karen, who now was called Emmy Lou by everyone. Sheryl sat with Madison and asked her about her sketches. Madison was thrilled and loved every minute of being backstage. She was fascinated with Sheryl’s stories. Lee hung back sinking into his own world. Ray came over by Lee and also settled into a quiet moment.

Everyone was asking Emmy Lou questions about Parker’s Produce, and Karen the recently christened business expert was answering them. The shuttles were arriving. The crowd energy was going up with people enjoying a beautiful evening.

Carol had thought a seating of 500 would have been max, but the slope offered more capacity. Tonight’s audience would be at the upper limit of

1700. Carol came in just as the stage crew was heading out. Only the band was left.

Lee said, "Thank you, Ms. Parker it nice to have this venue to acknowledge my hometown."

"Thank you, Lee the band is really kicking off our season with a great night."

Ray came over, "oh Emmy Lou's mother, a great venue to finish the tour. Sheryl and I are going on a trip for a couple of months. We will get together with the band and lay down another album when we are back. Lee could help you pick berries or whatever he did here."

"I was cold storage, and no I have other plans."

"Have a great night."-Madison gave Lee a hug as they all headed to the stage.

"Madison, we left the truck keys with Pete Navarro. Karen and I are going home to catch up. I have to play at church in the morning for a young man. If no one is home when you get up, we'll be back soon."

"I can't believe you aren't staying. Front row; it is awesome!"

"I would but I feel like I need to catch up on a lifetime with Carol. Monday morning will come too soon."

Madison gave them both hugs, "Ms. Parker I thought Karen was getting me into another of her seriously boring, but we do good work projects. I never imagined this dream come true, thank you."

"Madison when I was sweating and not swatting the biting bugs because it took too much time, I never imagined this dream come true, either. Your Buffoons draw an oddly dressed crowd, I have to wonder what Grandpa Eldon would have thought. I suppose not any different than if Jefferson

Airplane had come here in 1969. Have a good time, but not too good.
Ruth's advice to all her kids."

Karen and Carol stood and watched the opening song then walked to the sports car and left.

Chapter 28

Ruth, JB, and Della help create a wonderful picture book as Carol's life is blurred. 1980

I met a young woman whose body was burning
I met a young girl, she gave me a rainbow
I met one man who was wounded in love
I met another man who was wounded with hatred
And it's a hard, it's a hard, it's a hard, it's a hard
It's a hard rain's a-gonna fall —

Bob Dylan Hard Rain is Gonna Fall

Leon Russell - Leon Russell and the Shelter People

Ridin Reality



Barrel rider FishBum55

Ruth got the team out and hitched them up. Pam had been there early capturing shots of the black beauties. She was on Ruth's side they were marvels. Cowboy Danny came, who Pam loved through her lens. Ruth loaded Jimbo and JB drove over to the covered bridge. Ruth and Della got in with Pam and followed.

"I came out early, the sun was great. I have some nice shots of you caring for the horses and for Della."

"Della is such a good girl, seems to be happy wherever we go."

"How old is Della?"

"She is 10 months."

"Is Della a family name?"

"She's named after JB's grandmother."

"Carol doesn't seem to have the same affection for horses you do."

"Well Carol grew up in the big city, she doesn't know what wonderful creatures they are. The Shire team is a huge draw to our market, and she has come to appreciate that."

"Carol didn't grow up here."

"Her father and brother are part of a large law firm in Chicago. This was her grandparents' farm."

"She seems as natural here as the oldest tree."

"Carol became Carol here; she's is as tied to the land as any farmer in the county. JB is going to turn left at the next corner. The road will bend back to the right in another half mile, but then it will be straight to a very nice parking area by the covered bridge."

When they parked JB came and took Della to a shady area with a picnic table. He began playing with her, and Ruth unloaded Jimbo. Pam thought it was a lovely setting and was off taking photos. "Yes, this is wonderful, perfect. Can you take Jimbo through the bridge and then come back towards me?"

"Yes, Jimbo is a showoff."

"Wonderful, these should be great. Does JB ride?"

"Yes, JB does ride sometimes. He doesn't love it, but he loves me."

"He's got that cowboy hat and I think he would make a nice set of photos with the horse."

"Let's go see, I can watch Della."

"JB, Pam wants to make you a model. Would you go pose with Jimbo?"

"I suppose, but I'm no cowboy. I'm a mechanic."

"You got that straw cowboy hat at the rodeo; I think that makes you a cowboy."

JB followed her instructions for a set of photos that became very popular in the book. They loaded up and went over to the iron truss bridge. "This is one of our favorite spots. We thought we could have our picnic here. Lizzie and I got up some sandwiches and cookies. These flimsy styrofoam coolers sure help keep cold things, got to pack them right or the lids blow off."

"Where is Lizzie?"

"She's up overseeing the garden today. I usually do that but I'm here. We have some high school kids out on Saturday. Someone has to keep'em from weeding the onions and potatoes instead of the real weeds."

"You two pack an excellent picnic. Your daughter is so cute, can I take some photos of her with you and JB on the bridge?"

"Yes, we are here to make the best show possible."

"Della makes me want to find the right man and do kids and family like you guys are. I suppose Carol is so back to earth she doesn't want children, either."

"Stephen doesn't want kids?"

"No, he says humans must stop creating more human parasites. He can quote some fact about how much each American uses of the world resources. That is the reason he gives for getting himself fixed."

"Fixed?"

"Stephen got a, you know,, a vasectomy. He claims he is helping make a better world. I think he knows they can never nail him with a paternity test."

"Stephen is a womanizer, you're telling me."

"He reminds me of the cartoon skunk, you know Pepe Le Pew. Carol has gotten his head turned though. She would turn anyone's head. Her farm and the photos of her and the stuff she is growing is making him a success. She is the special sauce on his Big Mac. Maybe he is stuck to only her."

"Carol tried some of his ideas, if they seemed practical at all. I knew those weeder geese were a mistake."

"Yeah all those damn birds did was shit everywhere, on the tractors, everywhere."

"JB watch your language Della will be cussing in church, if you are not more careful. "

"Glad Joe had that smoker; they did make decent jerky and summer sausage."

"Yes, that is why we hire kids on Saturdays, far more productive."

-

"Pam would you like to ride up to the lake? JB could then take Della home for a nap."

"I haven't been on a horse often."

"I've got a real gentle mare; Jimbo and I will lead you. It will be fun. "

"You are quite the cowgirl; how did you get into horses?"

"The neighbors had horses; we couldn't afford horses. I was over there all the time. I helped train their horses and practice race them."

"Race them like in the Kentucky Derby?"

"No not thoroughbreds, barrel racing, tight turns, exciting rides on quarter horses."

"Not full horses?"

"Quarter horses are a breed meant for tight turns and quick sprints. All the barrel racers ride them."

"It sounds exciting."

"Oh, it is. I trained the neighbor's horses but couldn't race them for real. After Carol gave me a job. I earned enough to get a quarter horse. He was one the owner thought too spooky and spirited to race. I knew I could gentle him a little. Carol was kind enough to let me use her barn. The machine shed her grandfather had was mostly empty. The Greene's have all the big equipment. It became my indoor training facility. "

"You train them to run?"

"A horse will run; you train them to turn with you. A good racer isn't a rider, they move as one with the horse. JB got a trailer and we started going

to some fairs and small rodeos. My horse was named Seven Up, he was a tremendous horse. We were winning at the small venues. An organizer said he could get us in to the Western in January. It would let people see Seven Up against the big names. It is a haul, but we wanted to try a top tier race. Seven Up won and we got the big purse. One of the well-heeled outfits offered to buy Seven Up. They offered a small fortune for folks like JB and me. I sold Seven Up and gave up barrel racing."

"It sounds like you were good and had a good horse. Why did you give it up?"

"JB didn't know yet, but I knew I was pregnant with Della. I had proved myself to myself; we couldn't be chasing rodeos. I used some of the money to buy that team of Shires."

"I will ride up with you, but no racing. Let me get some family shots and then we can go. These have been great places to shoot. I want to see the lake."

JB drove back to the barn. "I'll ride home JB." JB waved as he took Della and the trailer home. Ruth saddled up the mare she called June, while Jimbo rested and got a drink. She stored Pam's cameras and helped her get on June.

Pam looked over to the market, "That is Stephen's Fiat isn't it?"

"Looks like it, why you want to ride over and chat?"

"By no means, riding to the Lake sounds even better, now"

"Yeah, I don't feel like chatting either."

Chapter 29

Silence is not silent; null is not empty. Carol and Karen

Drifting into time passages
Years go falling in the fading light
Time passages –

Eric Stewart / Wilfred Collins / Jim Falcone / Paul Nieser - Time Passages
Al Stewart Time Passages



Prairie night -- Jake_Rogers

Night's Radiance

"This is a spaceship compared to JB's Roadrunner. There are lights everywhere, very cool car. How are you getting along with your Dad?"

"I never didn't get along, but Mom made it difficult to see him. He continued to work obsessively on his tech projects. It hasn't been not getting along as much as simple absence. He invited me to join him on what he calls his boat during the summer."

"What would you call it?"

"A yacht, maybe a small yacht by yacht standards, he doesn't sail it, there is a crew on board."

"Are you going to join him?"

"I haven't said I would, I am thinking about it. I doubt he will be there the whole time. He is throwing himself into a new project on climate; it's a nonprofit."

“And your mother?”

“I think we should take a break from each other, establish a little space. I’m not a teen anymore. I know barely, but still true.”

“Let’s go inside. I opened a bottle of wine before I came out to join your groupie party would you like a glass, now that you’re not a teen anymore?”

“Yes, on wine, Groupie?”

“You were digging on your friend Madison, earlier. I came up to the venue and find I’m the aunt of Emmy Lou.”

“I enjoyed that. I would love to have stayed, but I wanted to talk with you. You have done amazing things on the farm here.”

“I had an opportunity and I worked at it. I called Ruth, she told me Lee was a very reliable worker. He had worked with us for about three years. His father worked for a tiling outfit and now he drives a truck. His mother worked for us until she got an LPN license.” Carol gave a glass to Karen and sat down in her favorite chair.

Karen sniffed and looked at the wine, “I am told you should sniff and look at it in the light, but it seems, I don’t know why.”

“I have a wine subscription; bottles arrive every month. I avoid selecting or knowing much about wine. I can rate the ones I get, allowing the bot to better know my tastes. Modern times even wine preferences are digitally stored.”

Karen laughed, “I see why. I searched for Emmy Lou Harris 1970’s and look at these images. Your clothes are very similar. I don’t have the long dark hair or pretty face, but I have her clothes.”

“Yes, I loved her albums. I must admit, I enjoyed hearing them call you Emmy Lou. I would remind you how pretty you are with blond hair, but

everyone keeps saying you look like my daughter. As Spock said in the reboot movie it would sound 'oddly self-serving.'"

"You're a Trekkie?"

"The original shows were reruns when I first came here. They ran them late at night. I became a fan; my options were limited back in those days. I've seen all the movies and many of the other shows."

"Do you go to movies?"

"No, not often, when my boys come home for Christmas and New Year's. We sometimes go as a family outing. Our rural telephone coop brought us fiber optic and now I can stream movies, documentaries, and more weird video than I could ever watch."

"I like the wine."

"I always feel a little guilty drinking in the house, Grandma and Grandpa Parker never allowed any alcohol on the farm. I am not sure what they would think of the concert venue, wine tasting events, and the wedding receptions we now host at the zoo. At least it was not part of the original home place."

"How well did you know them?"

"I came here to visit with the family for the holidays when I was small. I spent three summers here starting when I was about ten. I really enjoyed it. I helped alongside Grandma and got to see some of the farm with Grandpa. I learned something about gardening and farming while I was here. I learned to can and freeze fruit and vegetables from Grandma. She put away enough food to feed two large families every summer. She gave away about half of it to people at church every year. Grandma Parker died while I was in my flower child era. I didn't find out until I was back home. I came with Dad to see Grandpa Parker a couple times before he died and came to his funeral. It rekindled my idea of starting a business here."

"Did you know your other grandparents?"

"My mother was from Kansas and the youngest in her family. Her parents had died before I ever knew them. It was here that I felt I had family. It was here I identified as my place, my real home."

"I haven't been here too often, but you've always made it feel like home to me. I was here most when my parents were heading towards a split; I needed the security I felt from you."

"I've always enjoyed having you here, I have two sons. Grandpa and Grandma had three sons. We Parker women are a little outnumbered and need to stick together."

"What was it like to come here and start a produce and fruit farm? How many other women were doing that?"

"No woman on her own was operating a farm around here when I started. Now women are part of the family operations and no one finds it odd. Not many women operate on their own even now."

"Were you shunned by the community when you first came?"

"Shunned, no. You must be part of the community to be shunned. This was a modern close-knit community, not a religious sect from a gothic novel. I wasn't seeking to fit in, I was trying to get produce growing. I needed more producing fruit trees and strawberry beds. Trees and strawberries take more than a season to start peak production. I didn't buy much in the first year. Uncle Leon had asked for a couple pieces of furniture and Uncle Lance really just wanted some of his toys and other childhood things from here. Everything else just stayed. I still had food in the freezer and canned stuff stored in the pantry, the sheets and towels, the old TV, even their clothes. I became the only family going through and putting Grandma and Grandpa's stuff to rest. It may seem odd, but I didn't find it odd. It was comforting. I felt assured. If I worked hard, I would find the joy living here they had. I didn't bring in much money the first year, but I wasn't spending much either. JB was working for his rent and not here often

enough to be building up surplus hours. JB was the more out of control version of himself then. He was polite, if he wasn't drunk. "

"As I remember JB is Ruth's husband, he was your renter?"

"JB was not paying any rent on the house where he lived because his family had always worked for Grandpa Parker. Ruth didn't come here until my third year here and they were married in the Fall. JB agreed to work enough to pay for a fair rent. I operated with very little cash outlay that first year."

"Simplicity was bliss, then?"

"Simple times because it was necessary. I made progress on building for a profitable second year. I was alone much of the time, except for that pup my neighbors had given me. People did not come here to buy things; I was going to farmers markets, festivals with vendors. "

"How did people treat you in the first years you were here?"

"People were suspicious I think that was the most common reaction. They were worried I was here to organize a Woodstock, a hippie commune, or I was growing pot. No colony of hippies appeared or out of control music festival. Pot wasn't found with my produce sales; county police did look around a couple of times. I became accepted as an eccentric. Small communities are good with eccentrics as long as they are one of their own. A few people assumed the worse and tried to act rude, but when you don't care it doesn't have much effect. Their behavior made them look bad to the others in the community who believe in politeness. Around July 4th some kids came by and tossed a large firecracker on a couple nights. They did it again around the 4th my second summer here, but JB recognized their car when they went past his place. He told me not to worry it wouldn't happen again. I didn't ask, but I assume they knew better than to pick a fight with him. It never happened again, which was good once Ruth started keeping horses here."

"You have a music venue, now, if not a Woodstock."

"I could have never had a ticketed controlled music event then. It would have brought drugs. It would have made everyone here feel unsafe. I would have been arrested. I could not risk all the liability. I was not looking for a repeat of the commune experience. The Hippie era had died by then. I was here to build a new life. Keeping to myself, working hard, and making some money I began to turn the locals to viewing me as another Parker not some radical."

"It sounds lonely at least at first. How did you feel?"

"I did have my dog Sam. I was not lonely not for the first year or so. Have you ever watched a video of an animal released back into the wild?"

"Were you a wild animal?"

"I felt so free of all that I had been burying inside. My life on the road had been a disaster. I had to come back home. I had to fight myself, not to fight over comments, attitudes, and even the lack of trust in me. I proved myself a daughter again, but I wanted to prove myself independent and successful. It drove me, I worked from dawn to dusk every day. I was too tired to be lonely. I was young; I felt good every morning. I kept doing the next piece of my plan. I was learning what worked, how I could survive. I prepared for production that would yield significant revenues. My father was beginning to see I was following a good business strategy. He was using the rent from the traditional farming to pay off the loan on the farm and I was demonstrating the ability to produce revenue on the part of the farm not suitable for row crop."

"Did you consider yourself a feminist trail blazer?"

"I considered myself a capable woman I was not proving what a woman could do; I was proving what I could do. I fully believed in women's equality, I thought it was beyond debate. I assumed my generation would all accept a Friedan, Steinem view of equality. I guess I hadn't heard of Phyllis Schlafly. I didn't seek to be an activist, nor did I want to be part of a movement. I didn't get upset when old men called me a girl, but I wouldn't

allow it from colleagues and my own generation. I was only proving I could make a living on the old family farm. I couldn't farm like the Greene's did. They farm our farm, their own, and several others. They have a huge investment in equipment. Large equipment has made it impossible to make profits on a small-scale traditional farm. I had to make it by alternative means taking small crops and fruit and creating markets. I became convinced I could be successful, I only needed to keep working. I found satisfaction in watching things grow, the fruits of my labor were my early companions. Also, the old memories of the land."

"Memories of the land? What are those?"

"Subtle touches to your spirit when you work and live in a land like this one. A memory connected to a place but not a time. I have sensed when being on the land not just a jog of memory but a feeling existent from a different time. As if that self was still active here. I have also encountered impressions of feelings not from memory. Sometimes a place holds some thread of another. These are lightly traveled lands. These fields and these woods were focal points of exertion, joy, sorrow, loss, pain, heartbreak, pride, all focused on the land itself. Sometimes they drift into your present being. There exists a great spirit and soul in a land as this. Urban places have driven out any residue, too little concern for the land. The spirit has been lost for too long a time. After my husband Stephen had betrayed me, my father and brother asked why not leave? I told them I would not return to their soulless suburbs. I said my life was here. I had focused on this land and it held my soul. I could not leave and have any self, left. My whole being was planted and rooted in this land. I have joined many past generations fixed in a life on a bountiful earth. I think that was only good phrase I adopted from Stephen."

"Are there ghosts here?"

"No not ghosts, nothing is haunted. People men and women who are part of your DNA were immersed here. The land carries the effects of the cultivation, sometimes it holds a residue of themselves. Sometimes you can sense it. I have something in my room you may want to look through, and I will show you my mirror."

Carol lead me to her room. "This was my room when I spent those three summers here. It has two east windows and one on the south wall it is a very bright morning room. I felt like I was moving into my old room. "

She pulled a book out of her dresser drawer. "This book is a diary, an ancestry record, and a work of historical fiction. Here hold the book."

Carol then extracted a wooden box. It had latches to keep it closed. "This is something of a scrap book to accompany the diary you are holding. we will take them down to the desk. If you are really curious about me, you will want to look through these. The office desk is a good space to study them. I want to show you the mirror. "

Carol opened her closet door. On the back of the door was a very old mirror. The overhead light cast a bright glare on the mirror our reflections were almost not visible. "In the morning when the sunlight hits the mirror, I often feel like I am viewing myself and many others. My reflection and hints of other reflections, those who have also stood and wondered what the reflection told. I have sought to learn something of those who were here before. We should have another glass of wine and talk; you can look through these tomorrow."

We went back downstairs and left the book and box on the desk. "If we wear jackets, we could sit on the porch and listen to the night."

I slipped on Aunt Carol's leather jacket and she her barn coat. We sat on the porch silently listening.

After a while I said. "it's quiet but there are many sounds."

"Yes, we blare away missing the sounds of life, they used to be all around us. People in houses without air conditioning heard the night through their open windows. Have you heard them say you can hear the corn grow?"

"No"

“On hot humid nights when the corn is streaking from knee high to above your head to form a tassel the slip as the stalk grows out of the leaf joint can be heard. Only on certain nights and only when it is quiet. I don’t allow any night lights here. Any lighting has to be switched. I want to walk out in the yard or over to the market in natural light. The night sky is amazingly bright even without a moon. People have tried to sell me security lights. I think they are atrocities not providing any security. Now that people call me old, I might be more of a target. People exaggerate threats and allow their fears to steal all their lives, waste all the joy. Your eyes should be adjusted let’s walk out to the barn.”

I was surprised I could easily see the porch steps the yard and flower beds. I looked up, “Oh my, the stars are beautiful.”

“They are, and all those concert goers will speak of the beautiful night in the country. It is, but none of them will see the real beauty we are now experiencing.”

I stood staring fascinated. A dark silent night had created in me an appreciation of the real world. We stood absorbing time. I heard a distant noise.

Carol spoke the first words between us for an immeasurable span of time, “That is a car or truck coming, it just went through the dip. They will be here soon if they are turning in our lane. Let’s go up on the porch, I’ll turn the light on, so we don’t frighten them.”

The porch lights did seem blinding and did obliterate the beauty, the not silent beauty of a pleasant Spring night.

Chapter 30

Ruth lands on her feet running 1977.

I've been from Tucson to Tucumcari
Tehachapi to Tonapah –



Sunset church – Sam F

Ruth, just Ruth

“You got a nice place plenty of room for Ruthie. She’s a good worker when she is not off mooning over them horses.”

“I don’t have horses to moon over.”

“Have a good summer Baby Ruthie” Ruth hugged her parents and they drove off.

This bit of string, who was barely a woman, had arrived with a few clothes on hangers, a couple of jackets, several things in grocery sacks, and some boots. Carol watched the old car drive away wondering what had, she agreed to.

“First off, do not call me Ruthie and I am not a baby anymore.”

“OK is it Ruth then?”

“Ruth yes, I will work right beside you, and learn what I can help you with. You’ll sell a bunch more with me a’helpin, Miss Parker”

"You can call me Carol. I will keep track of your hours and calculate a share of the profits. This is my third summer some things are starting to be established, but there is much to do. I am glad you are here" -thinking I hope I am glad. Ruth amused me; she contained an energy too big for a little gal.

"I promised my folks I'd go to church on Sundays. Do you go to church?"

"No, I haven't. My grandparents went to the Methodist church in Franklin."

"That will do, can you get me there? I don't want to walk, but I will."

"Yes, I can get you there. Did you have horses?"

"The neighbors did, and I worked with them, as much I could. Pa worked at the lumber yard. We raised stuff for the family and took some to sell at the markets. We couldn't afford a horse. I saw you last year and I asked about you. People knew you were new here and working by yourself. I decided you could use me, and I just had to get away from home. I was not going to marry that awful Billie Joe from church. You will never regret I came."

"There is always more to do. Hopefully, it will be a good year and I can make it worth your time."

"It will be worth my time to spend a summer not being called Baby Ruthie."

Ruth had never been anywhere other than two trips to Kentucky and Tennessee. One summer she and her mother had stayed and helped her grandmother. Her father picked them up just before school started.

Ruth said. "My Kentucky and Tennessee family thought I was a Yankee, but up here we are considered hillbillies."

“Many folks don’t think I belong here, either. Others just accept me as a Parker.”

“It is easier to be from an established family; outsiders are not trusted here. My folks are too new to be established.”

Ruth was a help at any task. She thought I had been everywhere. I came to understand sometimes one plus one equals four in results around the farm. Many times, it takes two to lift something, or one to hold while the other ties, nails, or digs. She had good ideas to improve my growing crops. She offered marketing ideas on what to grow. Ruth had many ideas about what to sell especially in seasons when we did not have strawberries or apples. One day Ruth said, “Miss Carol” She always used Miss Carol when she wanted me to pay attention.

“We need to pick some of those squash blossoms and take them to the farmers market tomorrow. We will still grow more squash than we can use or sell.”

“Why would we take squash blossoms to the farmers market?”

“Same reason we take anything else, people will buy them.”

“What would they do with them?”

“Batter and fry them like mushrooms, people love anything battered and fried.”

We did pick and box squash blossoms and they did sell. Many people were thrilled we had them. No extra cost and revenue that I hadn’t expected. Ruth was a clever marketer. She was right I never regretted Ruth becoming my assistant. Ruth quickly became a business partner and I never called her Ruthie.

Ruth and I worked all week, she helped with meals; I enjoyed listening to her. We went to a farmer’s market on Saturday and I took her to church on

Sunday. "I'll go down to the supermarket, and be back to pick you up, Ruth."

-

One lady told me, "You come too Carol Parker, you know your grandma would want you to. You were such a nice little girl in bible school."

"They were so friendly I loved being there. They all remembered your folks, and a few knew you. You will have to start attending, it is a joyous thing."

We went on home and fixed dinner. During the week Ruth looked over the plans for converting the old barn on the South 20 into our market. She finished a set of shelves that JB had started.

On Saturday while we were at the farmers market JB came back which was his habit, now. If not every weekend then every other JB came fixed, built, or installed something. Sam just automatically came in and laid down watching as if he were a work supervisor. I had been inviting JB to supper and we talked. JB had been drinking less. He had some beers after he went home on Saturday night, and while friends came over on Sundays to work on cars, trucks, lawnmowers, or motorcycles. He would buy a 12 pack at Bill's on the way from the implement dealer and drink at home. A much more moderate lifestyle than before the winter night I had hauled him home.

We found space to be honest with each other and listen to each other during our many talks.

JB said, "I didn't think a hippie could know much about anything. Honestly when I seen that Jap truck with peace stickers all over it. I thought what does some lazy ass pot smoker want to mooch from me."

"I used to smoke pot, but it would just get me in trouble here. I was suspicious enough; I had too much to do for pot smoking. There was only

one peace sticker on my practical little truck, a cartoon Keep on Trucking guy and a Grateful Dead decal. They had all come with the truck.”

“I smoked some joints when I was drunk. I didn’t notice anything. I don’t understand why someone would sit around smoking a joint instead of grabbing a cold beer.”

Mulling over the past couple of years, JB began to work by himself. We had both learned perspective from each other, we knew we had a very different perspective from each other. JB had come to find out there was far more to know than any one person could know. I had decided many people knew far less than they believed. We worked together with respect for each other’s different set of skills. I was book smart and business came naturally. Still I knew nothing about tractors and a thousand other things farm kids took for granted. I appreciated JB’s help. I tried to be polite and express gratitude for his help. I had become a counselor after the cussing he gave me on the ride home. JB stayed sober for two or three weeks after that. I didn’t let his harsh insults change me. JB began to think about things. He could scream insults at me, but he realized that just came from inside his own hurt. JB pondered many questions about himself. He was devastating in hand to hand fights but who was he fighting? wasn’t it himself? JB had some vague understanding of himself, I was able to express words. Words that he would think about during the week. JB liked fixing tractors it made him feel good; he knew he had accomplished something. He had come to understand my vision and he enjoyed accomplishing measurable things on the farm. The raised beds, the piping and plumbing for water, the stand for a farmer’s market, the redesign turning an old barn into a market, were all things he could see what he had done. JB came to conclusions which he could almost share. I think he felt the Parkers had been good folks and he felt right helping their granddaughter. He and I discussed politics. He generally voiced just attitudes and feelings. I added a sense of history to the discussion. I knew details of people and events, had an understanding of law, and a depth on the politics of what was happening. He told me life might be better if more of the educated hippies were deciding things in government. Of course, he figured I, being a Parker, and part of the Franklin community meant I was different.

Once JB explained this to me. Carol you are nothing like those filthy loud-mouthed protest leaders who were tried in Chicago. We heard about them while I served in that rifle company. I was facing life and death and that was some kind of circus. I suppose, JB might have called it performance art or street theater, but the only theater he knew showed movies. If it was Clint Eastwood in Dirty Harry or High Plains Drifter it was worth seeing. If it wasn't Clint Eastwood, it was probably just some pussy trash.

I had come to appreciate JB's perspectives, I would simply agree with him. They were correct in his own sense of things. JB knew he and I were good for each other but not husband and wife good for each other. I was a special woman and we had a special understanding. He thought of some of those Western movies he had watched. He had been the unruly wild stallion and I had ridden the wildness out. Now, he was fit to be around others. Many had been giving him a wide berth, but old friends had begun to invite him to parties. A few of the local gals had begun to act like they might enjoy riding in his Roadrunner. At least, they seemed to feel he wasn't going to grab an M 16 and shoot up the place. JB was working in the old barn when he heard us return from the farmers market. After unloading some boxes, I introduced JB to Ruth.

He asked Ruth, "did you finish those shelves?"

"Yes, Pa worked at Hardy lumber yard. I can measure and cut."

"Well they look good. I got a lot of barn left to work on before apple season. You want to help me, for a while?"

"If Carol doesn't want something."

"No, I will water and then I'll start fixing supper, are you staying JB?"

"Yes, I like your meals, but you know it cuts into my drinking."

"You two come up about six" - as I walked away, I heard, JB ask Ruth if she went to school in Jefferson?

We were having dinner in the kitchen. My quick single meals had become normal and lonely. I was enjoying Ruth being there. Tonight, I enjoyed listening to JB and Ruth as we ate. They were discussing the barn project as JB called it.

Ruth said, "No JB we need to call it the market. The business will be much more profitable when people drive out here. Carol already has a better barn up here; it just needs a couple of horses."

I smiled while nodding no.

Then Ruth calmly added, "JB is going to take me to church tomorrow morning. He likes the minister who was a comfort to his Grandma Dell."

Trying not to act like lightening had just struck the kitchen I asked, "Is he taking you in the Orange deathtrap?"

"His Roadrunner must be so cool; it's got an 8 track. I am very excited to ride in it."

"I have ridden in it and survived, some of his music is enjoyable. Buck Owens is a little much for me."

"I love Buck Owens."

"I will fix dinner for when you get back. It will remind me of being here with Grandma Parker. Sunday dinner was an event."

We started to clean up, "JB is going to drive me around, I know very little about Franklin."

"You go then, JB knows everything about Franklin" I wanted to add don't let him drink but I felt with Ruth it wasn't a concern.

On Sunday morning I heard the rumbling roar of the Plymouth Roadrunner. JB pulled up by the house and did the 'beep beep' horn; Ruth came running out bible in hand and hopped in the car. I waved from my

weeding as they pulled out. Two things had just happened for first time ever to my knowledge JB was sober on a Sunday morning and going to church.

I hoped JB's 8 track was playing that cowboy song.

Chapter 31

JB was saved the moment he met Ruth - 1977

Lord help me Jesus
I've wasted it so
Why me Lord –

Kris Kristofferson – Why Me
Kris Kristofferson The Essential Kris Kristofferson



Thunder Rock Campground TN

Thunder Struck

The morning Ruth and JB came into the Franklin United Methodist Church a few jaws dropped. The minister knew JB and welcomed him and many of the good-hearted people made him feel at home. They had known his family. They shared history with Mr. and Mrs. Eldon Parker. Some churchgoers have a Christian Spirit and it radiates from their being. JB was surprised to find himself there. He was finding Ruth could have you in a new place before you remembered ever leaving. He enjoyed it. The minister made sense. Memorial Day was approaching, and at that point in his life the remembrance theme was what JB needed to hear. Soon every

Sunday JB and Ruth came driving up in the Roadrunner. The church had an annual fellowship ice cream social not a fund raiser, just the church family. Ruth said there would be plenty of strawberries she would bring in a flat that morning. The women said they would come back in time to stem them and setup for the six o'clock gathering. Thank Carol and tell her she'd be welcome.

JB and Ruth came back to what is one of the largest dessert eruptions ever conceived. Each woman brought two desserts, even though they were single or just a couple. The kids were having a great time playing in the church yard and spilling over into the little park across the street. After everyone had consumed six weeks' worth of sugar, they sang hymns. Singing and ice cream are never the best companions. When congregations all sing it always sounds better than one would expect. A man came up to JB before the hymn sing and spoke to JB, they then walked off into the church. Ruth was busy helping clean up and saw him walk away. She thought maybe the church had a mechanical problem. They came back as everyone was leaving. Ruth was taking home enough dessert for a family of six at least Carol would have a wide selection to choose from.

On the way home Ruth asked, "did you and that man fix something at the church."

"No, we talked is all. When we get to Carol's we can sit on the porch and I will tell you about it."

Even though they had each had more dessert than one could fathom JB took a cookie. Carol gave them glasses of iced tea and took a piece of cake.

"I remember those brownie cookies they were the best thing about bible school. I've never seen them anywhere else chewy with walnuts in the center. I liked baseball too. We all played at the end before going home."

JB and Ruth sat in the porch swing and Carol sat across from them.

"JB what did you talk about?"

"Mr. Albertson was in Korea, he asked if he could tell me about it. Do you know the Albertson's, Carol?"

"I'm not sure, I might recognize them if I saw them."

"Mr. Albertson is a thin man he works over at the elevator weighing trucks and doing moisture tests. He got out of high school after the world war was over. He decided to enlist in the Marines. He was sent to Korea. He was part of MacArthur's Landing at Inchon and then push to the North. MacArthur didn't think China would intervene, but they flooded over the Yalu River. He said it was a nightmare. Each man could kill ten Chinese and twenty more would still attack. He said it was a miserable retreat, he was lucky not to be captured. He thought he might be better off killed, but then someone would lose their life dragging him out. He won't talk about it with anyone, never says a word to his wife or kids. He doesn't belong to the legion or the VFW never attends a Memorial Day event. He doesn't want to hear the guns fired in salute. He said coming to church with the wife and kids is how he found peace. He said if I wanted to talk about Vietnam with him, he would be willing to listen."

Ruth noticed everyone's glass was empty, "JB you want more tea? Maybe another cookie?" JB nodded.

Ruth asked, "Carol more tea?"

"Thank you, Ruth. What did you say JB?"

"I told him how much I appreciated his talking to me. I said I didn't like to be a part of the parade stuff, either. We both sat there kinda sad eyed for a moment till we pulled it together. I said it had been hard to leave it. As we stood ready to open the door back to the yard he said, 'Yes, I know, but I try not to ruin what is so good here.' He pointed out the little toddler trying to sing, 'that's my granddaughter.' I thanked him. Well then, we came back here. We both know church helps. I think we should be there every Sunday, Ruth."

"I am so glad; it lifts me, and I hope it helps you."

"It is one of those things a man fights, but it helps. Working here, pointing out how ignorant that Carol Parker can be and not letting Ruth Cullens change my carpentry or get me to go to church. That's what I say, but it feels so much better as I look back. It is good not to be drunk and fighting mad all the time."

Ruth hugged JB in an embrace that would melt a lifetime of hurt.

"Sometimes I was ignorant. I want to thank you JB. Your working here has allowed us to let each other know how we felt about our past. It was best for both of us. Without you here building and fixing things, neither Ruth nor I would have done as well this year." They just sat awhile, "I think I'll turn in and not eat a piece of pie, maybe for breakfast. "

"Good Night"

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JB had taken Ruth to a bluff. It was good spot where they could watch big fireworks show over the river. The small city made a big deal of fireworks. They had multiple barges to launch from. Near the riverfront it looked like a flotilla of small craft resembling the evacuation at Dunkirk. Up on the bluff they could avoid all that and still see the display. Ruth had brought lemonade, cookies, and popcorn. As they sat there JB said, "I know we haven't known each other very long, but you seem to have loved me so hard and I am hard to love. I feel like you were meant to be my wife. Would you want that?"

"I feel the same way. You have treated me real tender. We can get through the rough patches; we were meant for each other."

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"Carol, JB and I are getting married."

"You know I warned you about JB, but he seems to be everything for you."

"We are going to get married in the church, but could we have a reception here?"

"Ruth I am amazed at what you have done here, yes when is this wedding?"

"Sunday of Labor Day Weekend it should be before we are head over heels in apple season. "

"Yes, how many people are coming?"

"Not many mostly just family, I want the reception to start at 4 on Sunday afternoon."

"OK I will try to make this special for you. I have come to love you so much. I also can see how good you are for JB, everyone knows that. You aren't planning on moving on and leaving me, are you?"

"Oh no, I am just moving down to JB's house. I know how much you need me to be your partner in building a business."

"You are right Ruth. I had no idea how I would come to need you just a few months ago. I am glad for you. It seems like last night, but from the time you came in and told me JB was taking you to church, I knew there was some unexplainable special connection. I have to ask what about alcohol? Have you and JB talked about it?"

"Yes, we have. JB said he was giving it up. He has talked with Mr. Albertson. He said he tried drinking when he was first back, but it made his nerves worst. Mr. Albertson calls the bad memories nerves. JB says he has been relying on alcohol a long time, but he sees what Mr. Albertson means by nerves. He won't have a drink unless I'm with him. I told him I think that will work."

"Are you planning the wedding, or is your mother?"

“Some of my family are old line Baptists and are dry as Ezekiel’s bones, and others are not moonshiners but have a cousin who can get you some. The minister and the Albertsons are helping organize a punch and cake reception with my mother. JB’s brother in law and sister will help organize a reception here where the not dry as Ezekiel’s bones portion of my family will show up.”

“What about a dress Ruth?”

“Oh, you mean a wedding dress. I can’t spend a bunch of money of something only worn once.”

“I will look around; I might be able to find a nice dress.”

“Miss Carol don’t go spending money; we have so many things to buy here on the farm. “

“I may not have to spend money to come up with a dress to make you the perfect bride, the envy of everyone in the Franklin Methodist Church.”

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Carol called her friend Shelly - “Carol god do they have phones in Bumpkinville?”

“We even have private lines, no rubbernecking neighbors.”

“Good you can tell me all your scandals, have you found Harrison Ford driving that dragster or spaceship, whichever I’d ride with him on anything.”

“No not the right man yet, or even the wrong man. I may have met the wrong man but I’m marrying him off.”

“What about Mr. Wrong?”

“He’s my renter on the farmhouse down the road. It turns out when he is sober, he’s not such a bad looking guy. He fixes things and builds stuff for me. He is a real gearhead hick. He has fallen for this little bit of constant motion called Ruth who works with me.”

“No cowboys for you?”

“We have more farm boys than cowboys. I am starting to make money my attention is on my business.”

“You were more fun when you were the wild rebel of a hippie.”

“But that didn’t work out, I am now trying businesswoman.”

“My marriage didn’t work out either. Now I am considering trying mistress.”

“Talk about scandalous.”

“I do get many married men showing me attention, but I have plenty of single guys to date.”

“I wondered if you still had your wedding dress?”

“I keep it in a nice zipped bag and occasionally I tell it how stupid it made me, why?”

“Ruth is about your size and doesn’t have the money for a nice wedding dress. I’m still putting most of my money into expanding the business. I didn’t know how you’d feel about loaning it to her.”

“If she wouldn’t think it was bad luck, no I would give it to her. When I get married again, I will be more careful selecting a groom and new grooms need new dresses.”

“Thank you, I know she would appreciate it. I might leave out your current marital status. I am sorry about John. He was a handsome guy.”

"Unfortunately, he found handsome guys more attractive than me. He was appeasing the parents. I won't get fooled again as The Who would say."

"I really identified with their Summertime Blues song; I was facing a very blue summer that year."

"I need to fly out to Hooterville; we have a commercial real estate client looking for a location in the city. How far are you from Des Moines?"

"I could drive there; it is a few hours away."

"How about next Wednesday? I could turn this into a two-day thing, a presentation and then follow up on the deal the next day. We could have dinner and a night catching up. I am tired of talking to the dress, it has yet to give me any good advice."

"Our sales are mostly on weekends, I will be leaving Ruth with extra work, but I think she will think it is worth it after seeing the dress."

"I will call you tomorrow night and give you an address for us to meet. We should talk more often, but I do like your Christmas letter it is a hilarious highlight of the season, good night."

Chapter 32

Max Greene lived life as a real farmer. Margaret and he were lifetime members of the Franklin UMC, now come together to celebrate Max's life. A funeral meal is an exuberant family reunion. Mark and his wife Julie are at the funeral. Mark is back home, and Julie is out of place. Carol and Julie who share a love, also share friendship and their lives -- 2006

But you and I have been through that
and this is not our fate
so let us not talk falsely
the hour is getting late –
Bob Dylan – All Along the Watchtower
Jimi Hendrix Experience -- Electric Ladyland



Cornfield Sunset – Lynne Jensen

Alliance of Friends

"Carol let me give you a hug, I was so glad the boys could make it home to see Max before he passed. They have been so precious to us."

"Shiloh and Brent wanted to be here, they got here as quickly as they could. They came together and will be leaving soon; Brent has to get back to school and Shiloh has a job but is still taking classes. They will both be back at Christmas; we will have you over then to hear about their lives."

"Shiloh and his computer stuff, I never have any idea what he is talking about, but I enjoy his trying to explain it to me."

"I'll be over, Margaret if you need anything call me."

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"My two grown boys, so tall so strong. Come back home when you can."

"I'll drop Brent off at school and then leave the car at the airport. We will both be back at Christmas. I think Tiff will come."

"Tiff?"

"Tiffany but she prefers Tiff, we've talked of getting married. We wanted to tell you about it at Christmas."

"I am surprised, you haven't mentioned Tiff. There was Kelsey, Kathy, and Kasie, did you grow tired of K's?"

"That was just coincidence. Tiff and I haven't been together a long time, but we feel we have a special relationship."

"I will be pleased to meet her. Thank you for coming."

"Max and Margaret were always our grandparents here in Franklin."

"Lawrence tells me you've interviewed with the firm."

"I've done well at law school; I have the family tradition. They like UChicago grads. I can work there if I choose to. I think I will."

"You've both made me very proud, I do miss you. I understand how Max and Margaret felt, proud but sad."

"Mom we miss home, but we must go, a family hug."

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"Hello Julie, a long tough week."

"Yes Carol, I am Julie, but here I am Mark's wife. I most often am greeted as, 'Oh you're Mark's wife.' I am easy to pick out here. I feel like an Andorian at a convention of pink skins."

"Star Trek?"

"Yes, Mark loves it. He has watched all of them I believe. He told me you were a Star Trek fan."

"When I first came, I watched the original series as reruns late at night. I enjoyed the Kirk Spock McCoy interaction."

"Everyone here is a close friend it seems."

"Everyone has known each other all of their lives."

"Not me of course I've only been here once, Mark and I came back at Christmas it was in 96. We had been in Asia for an extended period. We were granted a long leave."

"Yes, I remember you came back. It was one of the few times we went to Chicago for a Christmas there. I am so glad we took the one trip together. "

"It started us on a path of friendship. This seems like a great reunion. How long will we be here?"

"A long time I'd guess, would you like to come with me? We could talk and Mark can come over when they are done reliving the old days. They were good days."

"Please I would like that."

"Be right back"

"Ruth, you have enough help to clean up? I was going take Mark's wife back to my house where we could talk."

"Yes, there are too many people, go ahead."

"Excuse me, I need to interrupt. Mark, I am taking Julie over to my house so she can relax. It has been a hectic few days. I don't think she has any old Franklin stories to share. Come over when you're done here."

"I'll drop by later, Carol."

"We can go now. Mark will come pick you up later."

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"This is a lovely house. "

"Come in would you like something to drink. I can offer water and wine. I could make coffee or tea."

"Water and then wine would be nice."

"Why don't we go sit on the porch and enjoy this beautiful fall day. Max would be embarrassed he died during harvest time. All his friends and neighbors having to take a break from harvest to pay their respects."

"Did you know Max well?"

"I did; he farms part of the farm and managed the Parker and Greene cowherd. He looked upon me with skepticism when I came. Max was too polite to say anything, but I always felt as he drove away, he was shaking his head. I worked hard and started earning revenue on fruits and vegetables; he began to see I wasn't living in some opium dream from Alice in Wonderland. He began defending me when someone would bemoan the hippie commune that that Parker girl was starting. He would say I was making a living on my own, because I was smart and worked hard. He was a fair man; he was faithful and a regular in church. He and Margaret were neighbors and grandparents to my sons. He was a real farmer stayed close to the farm."

"He was fair to me. Mark had sent a letter and some photos. Max and Margaret weren't caught by surprise; they came for the wedding. They tried very hard not treat me as any different. Of course, I am black as midnight. I know we all felt awkward at times. It was easier when they visited in DC and New York; we were all blended there. Mark said they had asked about children, they thought it would be hard on the kids. They had a very 50's attitude. I suppose maybe it was better for them there would be no children. Our careers meant children wouldn't have had much parenting even if I had been able to have them. I am glad they got to enjoy your sons."

"I didn't know you couldn't have children. I thought it was a choice. The boys put pins on a map at the Greene's; they would read about the countries you and Mark were in. It was a demanding life I'm sure."

"I have learned travel isn't necessary to have a demanding life, you have accomplished a full life here. I'm going to tell you what only Mark and my mother know. The reason I can't have children. I want to tell you because you understand the world where Mark became Mark."

"You don't need to if you want to stay private."

"No, we need to build a no secrets held back relationship. My father was from the Congo, now Democratic Republic of the Congo. He worked for a large mining company when he came to the U.S., then he joined an international bank. He was assigned to go work out a contract when Mobutu was in power. I was fifteen. He wanted me to accompany him back to see his homeland. I was already fluent in languages; I was eager to put my skills to use. My mother didn't want me to go. My father said it was as safe as when I was in New York. The Congo is about the same size as the area contained in the Louisiana Purchase. My father had to take a long trip out away from the city we were in. He hired security to guard me and left. There was much corruption then. My team left and was replaced by another. These men raped me; they threatened to kill my father and me if I ever complained. They told me it was simple to fake a robbery by bandits or an attack by communist rebels on the way to the airport. I was traumatized and frightened, my language skills only meant I fully understood their intentions and their threats. I was quiet and we got home. At home I hid away. I ignored my symptoms even though I had an ectopic pregnancy. I nearly died in my bedroom. My mother found me and accompanied me to the hospital. I survived. I could never get pregnant. I was sure I would never let a man be near me, ever touch or befriend me. Mark and I worked together in Southeast Asia for four years. Technically he was my supervisor, but we were often on separate projects. He was dedicated, kind and gentle. I grew to appreciate that very much when we were back working out of the same office. One day I asked him to walk through a park and grab lunch at a stand I liked. We sat and talked. I said I had avoided men for many years, I was still traumatized. I wanted him to

invite me to do things together. He said isn't that a violation of policy. I told him, it was OK, I was the one asking. I warned him; I wanted companionship. I wasn't sure if anything else. He said it would be nice not to be alone. I could call the shots on how a relationship progressed. He is amazingly powerful, a very handsome man for a white man. I came to trust him. I desired and loved him. I told him of my terrible experience of rape. My mother and I never told my father. Mark became even more precious to me. He told me of his detour back home and this wonderful woman. I told him I understood his love for you, and I would flourish in his present love. He need not hide or pretend he didn't still love you. I haven't discouraged him from coming home. We both thought our work was important. It was. You completed Mark. You were a perfect couple, but you sent him to save our world. A most unselfish act. I love you for that."

"If he had stayed, it would have always been a life of regrets. He would have found a full life here, but it would always be tinged by what he might have done. I have a full and complete life. I have no regrets, but I do miss Mark."

"It is lovely here on your porch on a day like this."

"It is so lovely here I often come and sit, even on days not as lovely. I will refill our glasses if you would like?"

"Thank you both water and wine if possible."

"I think there is more happening here than you can hear and observe in your city. Listen to it as I keep us from dying of thirst."

"Thank you, Carol, it is calm and peaceful here. One could easily slip into a serenity. A moment like this can heal souls. I understand Mark better, how calm he is. He must be able to live in moments like this. He never swears. It is most unusual in some of the hectic times we experienced."

"No, he doesn't but there are plenty of people here who are very good at it. He surprised me, and I felt a little guilty when I did pop off a swear. His folks and my grandparents were very careful with words. I felt it was as if

his emotions were too deep for swearing. Swearing would be a cartoonish mockery of his deep and silent thoughts.”

“He is a deep and silent river, still but in motion.”

“You are filled with proverbs, and you never lived in Africa. I am sorry you had such trauma when you were there.”

“My father was correct; it could have happened in New York. When corruption becomes rampant the weak suffer. I pretend my past experience doesn’t exist, but it is something I wanted to share with my friend.”

“We have become friends. One thing I have learned from Ruth and the people at church like Mark’s parents is prayer. I do pray the ghosts and demons of my failures are corralled and do not ruin my present moments. I turn them over to Jesus when at a church service. Also, I add a little prayer not to slip up and swear in church.”

“My mother was very religious. When I have been in Franklin, I feel most at home in the United Methodist Church. The church gave my mother the opportunity to attend medical school. The reason she came to New York as a young woman. It is difficult to feel Franklin is home for me.”

“You are welcome here in this house just enjoy the moment.”

“I sense the welcome of a true homecoming, calm, peaceful, and loving, thank you.”

Chapter 33

The educated hippie Carol nee'd 1979

Don't let it be forgot,
that for one brief,
shining moment
there was Camelot ---

Jackie Kennedy (creating the Camelot myth)



Trail into Woods – Walter Lesus

Different Dreams

Ruth saw the Fiat come rolling in the driveway. A really weird little car in her opinion. Professor Capuano had become a frequent visitor over the past couple of months. He had much to offer in advice but was little help in weeding. He kept sweat and dirt away from his stylishness. Carol was loving his visits. He was charming and funny. He had that education background to discuss topics on Carol's level. She and JB were happy being married. The best life for two years and an additional blessing would happen soon. If the college man made Carol happy, she wouldn't insult his silly little car. Ruth finished with the horses and headed over to a sweet corn patch. The coons always knew when it was ready to pick. Those furry bandits could destroy a crop. God must have put masks on them to let everyone know what clever little thieves they were. Tall varieties and planting in large fields seemed a better insurance than fences and electric wires which they often evaded.

"Hello, Ruth how are you this morning, and how is the baby doing?"

"Morning Professor Steve, doctor says everything is normal."

"Where is Carol, the publisher wants to release my book as an illustrated version with photos from the farm. I think it would be good publicity for Parkers."

"Could be, could help get our story out. Carol and Lizzie are picking berries behind the market before the birds and coons get too many of them."

"Have you tried scarecrows?"

"They work for a day then the birds perch on them as they eat the berries."

"We need to design animatronic guardians."

"What?"

"Robots, mechanical men"

"I wouldn't trust them most likely squash things. Have enough trouble with the teenagers."

"Ruth you are bound to traditionalism."

"Professor Steve I am in favor of what works, and we can afford to do."

"See you later, Ruth"

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"My Carol what a fine morning, you look lovely even in the midst of your war with the roses so to speak. Those thorns look nasty."

"You develop a skill for not getting scratched too often. Lizzie is remarkably nimble at this."

"I done heaps of berrying back in Tennessee. Uncle Ned turned some into wine. He also sold a berry flavored moonshine."

“Was that legal?”

“Weren’t nobody saying it was wrong, if you was careful about it.”

“Fascinating, Carol I need to talk with you about a wonderful opportunity we have. Can you come up to the market where we can discuss it?”

“Lizzie and I will be done here in less than an hour. We can then, but why not lay out the opportunity while picking. There’s a bucket by the hand cart just be careful.”

Stephen Capuano began picking slowly he saw thorns everywhere and the berries could be back in very thick briars, plus they stained his hands. “OK the publisher of my book wants to release a new illustrated edition with photos from your farm. They will send a professional out to do a photo shoot and then feature Parker Produce and Fruit in the new edition of the Bountiful Earth.”

“This could be good is it costing me anything?”

“No, they are paying for everything and offering you the use of any photos for you own promotions and brochures.”

“Sounds like a benefit to our farm and cost the inconvenience of a photographer. How long and when would this invasion happen?”

“Zeph would come next week. He would like to stay at your house for three nights, be here part of four or five days. He said he wants to get into the rhythm of your life and allow for a day with off weather. He would like to come here Thursday and leave on Sunday.”

“Ok Lizzie sounds like we will have company next week. I think we are done here for now. Ruth can help you arrange things at the market. I’ll go get dinner together, then you and Ruth can trade coming up for dinner. I will read through the proposal after dinner; I won’t be helping you for a while.”

When they finished Carol pulled the cart to the Market while she spoke with Stephen, "The rhythm of our life, huh. We get up early because it is cooler, we eat dinner because that's how it is done here, then we water in the evening because it is the most effective. Our rhythms are dictated by what needs doing. Stephen, are you partaking of our peasant food? I am making cornbread and we are having beans."

"I am completely aligned with the proletariat. I do love cornbread."

"Lizzie, if it is slow, come to dinner together. People leave their money in the box."

"They do, but they buy more if Ruth or I are here to chat them up."

"You two decide, it should be ready about 12:30."

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"There's cornbread and beans left if you want to take them home. I know JB seems to love my cornbread. It is just out of those little boxes. I will put them in the refrigerator. If I agree with the terms, I will talk to you about the photo shoot. See you later."

"OK Stephen, now I am going to read through this, I will ask when I have questions. Don't be like Lizzie, don't chat me up."

"I will have a glass of wine and contemplate a vow of silence."

"Good you do just that."

"I've finished it seems good. It clearly states my farm and your book were independently created and separate. The photos do not represent practices advocated in the book. The activities photographed are taken at Parker Produce and Fruit a farmer owned operation, it gives location and date. We have the right to reprint any photograph, but not manipulate it without permission. It seems we may gain some promotion from it. I am clearly

designated not to have a financial liability beyond cooperating with the photographer. Is Zeph? A decent guy to work with?"

"He is good and tries to stay invisible."

"He won't be invisible, but I do think it is beneficial for us. I will sign the agreement."

"There are several copies if you will sign and date them, you can keep yours and I will return the others."

"OK I should get back to work, if we are going to be props for a photographer next week."

"We could seal our agreement with an intimate kiss, I don't think Ruth and Lizzie will miss you for maybe another thirty minutes. "

"Thirty minutes is a long kiss; I believe you are suggesting something more intimate than that. The farm can afford to lose thirty minutes today, follow me upstairs. Not loud enough to scare the horses please."

Chapter 34

The people of the Franklin church organize Ruth's wedding – Carol wrangles a dress 1977

Well a man shall leave his mother, and a woman leave her home
They shall travel on to where the two shall be as one
As it was in the beginning is now until the end
A woman draws her life from man and gives it back again
And there is love, there is love. ---

Noel Paul Stookey – The Wedding Song

Peter Paul and Mary The Very Best of Peter Paul and Mary



Carriage House – R B Hunt

Blessed here and in Heaven

Pastor Harris' wife said, "It is so good to be here let us pause for a silent moment as we pray for the blessing this wedding will be and the young couple's future."

"OK for those who don't know this lady is Ruth's mother Bernice, and we welcome back Mrs. Donaldson and her daughter Debra. Mrs. Donaldson people still ask if there are any gooseberry pies at our annual Fall pie sale. It seemed you and Dell were famous for it."

"Grandma Dell taught me. It is great to see you again. We are so thrilled for JB and Ruth."

"The fellowship committee will organize a reception; Mrs. Chapman makes wonderful cakes. Mildred will play the prelude and recessional, do you have special music Ruth?"

"My cousin Lizzie wants to sing; she has a beautiful voice. I want Carol to accompany her on guitar, but I hadn't asked her yet."

"Ruth I am not that good, but I will try. What song?"

"It is lovely song from Dolly Parton. You will know it."

"Possibly we can work it out once she is here. When is Lizzie coming?"

"She and her family will be here several days before the wedding at my folks. Lizzie can stay with us and you can practice with her. You will do a great job."

Mrs. Harris continued, "I am a little tired of the wedding song, although I loved Peter, Paul, and Mary. It gets monotonous sometimes. Ruth why don't you step behind this partition put on the dress Carol brought and then Edna can see what adjustments will need to be made."

Carol helped Ruth into the dress, it was a close size match. An elegant dress it had a long train, hat, veil, and even slippers. Ruth stepped out to a chorus of aahs. "My what a dress"

"It must have cost a small fortune."

"Did you buy this Carol?"

"It was my friend's dress I was in her wedding."

"Bride and dress are absolutely stunning."

Edna went to work, tucking and tugging, looking it over - "I need to have Ruth and the dress at my shop and get some exact measurements, but I can make it fit her like a glove. "

"OK we'll come over before we go home. I just want to thank you all, you have loved me from the moment I came to church here. JB was very uneasy, but you have won him over. You are all blessings to me."

Debra spoke up, "My husband has organized a whole hog roast, and everyone is invited to Parker's Market after the reception. Ruth has relatives who are coming from Kentucky and Tennessee and some play so there will be music."

"Thank you for coming. Carol needs to take Ruth to Edna's; the fellowship committee can work out details with the family. Please join me in a closing prayer.' We join our hearts to bless this marriage, A wedding is a

celebration, but a marriage is a lifetime an eternal union. A marriage takes two separate beings and makes a better unity. May JB and Ruth grow together and grow in this church supported by a loving church family. May God's Spirit carry you home and sustain you through this week."

Ruth gave every woman in the room a hug and then changed back out of her wedding dress.

Edna had a dress shop in a converted carriage house. They came in and Edna carefully measured Ruth. "That is a lovely dress when was your friend's wedding?"

"Oh, three years ago."

"It is kind of her to give it to Ruth."

"She isn't one to keep things. She is a long-time friend and she wanted to help. It cost me a trip to Des Moines and left Ruth with more work for two days."

"It was a very expensive dress. I have seen this design in magazines. The very height of fashion and Ruth is simply beautiful in it. I have what I need, I will do some work, and then have Ruth back in for a final fitting."

"Miss Edna, I'll pay you when we finish our season and get some money to settle up."

"Oh no, Ruth this is all a joy. You will not pay me. You are the brightest little candle to join our church in a long time. We talked at UMW and making your wedding day a nice ceremony was something we are all thrilled to do."

We pulled away from the cute little dress shop and started home.

"Have you been to a doctor?"

"I'm not sick, why?"

“For birth control you want to choose when you have a baby”

“Yes, I’m worried about that and I am a little nervous about being with a man, anyway. I don’t know if JB will be happy with me.”

“I would stop worrying. A couple ladies from Planned Parenthood come to the New Harmony market. It will be a good place to answer questions put you in control. I don’t think having a child immediately would be best for a marriage.”

“I was afraid of being alone with a man. I know nothing and Billie Joe was a pawing and reaching under my skirt if he ever got me alone. JB’s been kind and I want him so bad, but I’m waiting until the wedding.”

“Billie Joe sounds more like attempted rape. No, two people learning how to please each other because you love and appreciate them is a whole different thing. I have heard you describe training horses. Aren’t horses a lot bigger and stronger and faster than you? Why do they let a lit bit of fluff like you tell them where to go?”

“Horses need to trust you, then they just run and turn mostly because they like to.”

“Learn about your man, let him know he can trust you, and just let him run. You’ll still be able to turn him, JB needs trust, he holds his fears deep. Until he had time to work out at the farm for a year or so, I thought he was full of anger. I have listened and learned; he is full of hurt. Mount your stallion and ride his hurt out”

“I like the thought of that. JB is fine stallion he needs me to assure him he can trust me.”

“Another thing I learned from your going on about training horses is they need to be exercised regularly. It is the same with men.”

Ruth grinned, “Carol exercise is good for the rider and the horse, or stallion”- Ruth let out the cutest giggle.

Chapter 35

Tom and Helen Parker come to Franklin, memories at Christmas are special and so is a young girl's horse 1986

Joseph and Mary walked through an orchard green
There were cherries and berries, as thick as might be seen
There were cherries and berries, as thick as might be seen ---
Martha Sobaje- Cherry Tree Carol
Emmy Lou Harris Light of the Stable



Girl with horse – eah2009

Warmth in the Hearth

“Lizzie - such a great voice, Christmas Eve back in the old church. It does take me back. When Tom and I were first married we lived here. Carol, many of these are the same dishes, I know that roaster was old when we lived here. Lawrence was born while we were here.”

“Lawrence is your brother, Carol?”

“and young Tom's father.”

"I don't see any kids, where did they go?"

"Tom set up one of those little computers in his room and my boys have been in there the entire time, he has been here. Now, Ruth's kids are in there too."

"I thought they would be mooning over the tree and presents."

"Tom's been a novelty and now they want a computer. Tom says I should get a Macintosh even little kids can do stuff with it and it has an apple on it perfect for Parker Produce and Fruit. "

"The roaster is large and will hold a lot of stew. I rarely have so many here. Although it is not like the first two years when I was eating alone. Even now the two boys make it seem like a big family meal, often some of Ruth's family and Lizzie are here. Maybe Lizzie's family will grow now they are moved and settled over at Hillbilly Paradise. I don't mean to make fun."

"Oh, not at'all, Junior and I are proud Hillbillies. Junior likes it so much over there. I am so glad you bought it Carol."

"You bought another farm?"

"No Mom, it is only 25 acres mostly good for hunting and a little fishing. It is a few miles from here further down on the creek. I thought Lizzie and her husband would like to live there. I didn't want to lose Lizzie, and Junior was missing Tennessee. I paid 14,000 and it came with a cabin. Junior has been working on making it a home."

"He is happier than a cat at milking time. I wouldn't have left Carol; Junior would have just had to learn to live in Franklin. They are nice folks, but out in the country with huntin and fishin well Junior says that is the real livin."

"Junior drives a truck for us in his spare time when he is not hunting, fishing, or working on the cabin. Old man Coon didn't have power back

there, but it had a good well. Making a home is almost like starting from scratch."

"Coon?"

"He lived as a hermit for over thirty years, they called him Coon Parker. Pastor Harris asked me to play and sing at his graveside service. I guess he would have been a very distant relative. I saw his place and thought it would fit Lizzie and Junior. Those biscuits should be done in three minutes I will start corralling everyone. Let's set the kids up in here and everyone else in the dining room. Lizzie you watch the biscuits. "

"You have Carol and then a son, Mrs. Parker?"

"Yes Lizzie, Lawrence is our son he's young Tom's father and he has a daughter Katie."

"You all could've come; Carol seems to keep finding rooms."

"Lawrence went to a beach resort. Katie and a friend went along. Lawrence doesn't remember the farm and his wife has never been here. I think Katie has come out once with her grandfather. This is not only Tom's home; it reminds me so much of my home. I grew up on a farm in Kansas. I was the youngest, my folks died not many years after we were married. They did get to see Lawrence, but Mom only held Carol that one Christmas. We lived here with Eldon and Grace. We were newlyweds and it was right after the war. Lawrence was born while we were here. This is worth being a little cold; this is home."

"How did you meet Mr. Parker?"

"He was a flight instructor in Liberal, and I had gotten a job there as a clerk. He had already flown his quota of bombing missions in Europe and was likely to soon be out when we met. The war was beginning to look like it would end. Everyone was anticipating them invading Japan, and then he might have gone to the Pacific. We lived here while he went to law school. He got a job in Chicago and we moved there."

"Was Carol born while you were here?"

"No Carol came along soon after we moved to Chicago."

Lizzie turned the timer off, "These biscuits could stand another minute. Don't let me yak and forget them. I came when Ruth got married. She said Carol could use a partner like she had been. I lived here and then shared in the profits at the end of the season. Now we have a canning operation and a frozen foods market. Carol is super sharp and as fair a person to work for as anyone I've ever known. That should be about a minute. Perfect looking."

"I am glad for Carol. When she came, we had no idea there was any possibility for a business like this. We couldn't believe she wanted to live like our parents and grandparents did. I am realizing she has made something special here."

"OK Kids in the kitchen and I will sit in here with you."

"No, No Uncle Tom - Uncle Tom we want him to sit with us."

"Tom is your cousin not your uncle and he may not want to eat in here with you."

"Ah Carol I would like to be in the kitchen with them, they said Della was a cousin, I would have to be an uncle."

"Well Uncle Tom you don't even have a cabin. Call me when you are finished."

"Aunt Lizzie has a cabin. You should go see it, maybe you could build a cabin Uncle Tom."

"Maybe, or I could build one in my game."

--

"All of you sit down and we'll start. Ruth would you say a prayer."

"Yes, Lord thank you for this wonderful gift of family. We praise you on this holy night and all those here to share it. We sincerely thank you for your gift of Jesus. A special night to gather and rejoice, thank you. Amen"

"The kids won't be too long, I'm afraid. We will give them a Christmas Eve gift and then they are going to bed. "

"We can finish supper and have dessert."

"Biscuits look great, these bowls are nice."

"They were Grandma Parkers best dishes."

"Mom saved them for the most important occasions, and almost never used them. She did use them for a reception when we first came home after the war. We were married in Kansas, but it was our homecoming here. Many things I had forgotten come to me while being here. It is good to visit."

The dining room filled with an explosion of energy from the kitchen "We are full up Mommy."

"I see I suppose it is time for the Christmas Eve present?" A gleeful chorus of yes was the response.

Carol and Ruth brought each child a small present and they opened it. All the boys got an action figure, and the girls got little Smurf figures, which they all proudly showed to parents and grandparents.

"Time for bed, the girls are sleeping in the bunks and all three of you boys are in sleeping bags on the floor. If I see any of you, downstairs in the morning before seven o'clock, there will be no presents. Am I understood?"

They all nodded in the most sincerest of agreement.

"You have a clock; we will open presents at 7 and then work into breakfast. Ruth and I will get you ready for bed."

As quiet returned, Lizzie slipped in the kitchen where she and 'Uncle' Tom cleared up the kids' dishes.

After Lizzie left for the kitchen Tom asked Junior, "Carol said you had been in the army."

"I was one of the first in the new volunteer army. I was thinking of staying in, when Lizzie drove that Roadrunner to Tennessee. I decided if I could find a job up here, maybe they could run the Army without me."

"Lizzie had a Roadrunner, a muscle car?"

JB answered, "No, Mr. Parker actually I had the Roadrunner. I had rebuilt the engine before I met Ruth. We decided it was time to sell it with a third kid on the way. There was a collector in Tennessee who wanted one just like mine. He was willing to pay a good price. Lizzie drove it down for us, and she planned on riding the bus back after a family visit. Junior here, purely out of the goodness of his heart, gave her a ride in that Ford piece of crap he seems to like. He never went home, Ruth had to give him a job."

"JB putters around in that Chevy, never know when it will be on its side in the ditch like a dead deer. But Parker's Produce is lucky I came. I am one fine truck driver; I can back a trailer like no one's business."

"That is true. He is also good at fish frying, so I guess we are glad the Army got on without him. Mr. Parker was in the Army Air Corps every kid in school remembers his plaque and the model airplane. It was the model airplane that we all marveled at when we were little. It was in the trophy case. We lined up beside it on the way to lunch every day."

"Army Air Corps I didn't know there was one."

"It's the Air Force now, that happened after World War Two. A history teacher here made that plane; he tried to make it just like the B-24s I flew."

"Did they drop the bomb with one of those?"

"No Junior, that was a B-29, the 29s were a fine airplane. They were produced just before the end of the war. The B-24 was earlier along with the B-17s. The old liberators of life were the most common bomber in Europe. Some called them flying coffins, but with a good co-pilot they were effective. I flew 28 missions and then ended up in Liberal, Kansas. Worse duty than another raid into Germany."

"Now Tom, you seemed to find much to do in Kansas. At least, I remember him wanting to do something all the time. The base movies were about all there was to do, that is where he met me."

"Wasn't that a lot of missions?"

"If you survived enough missions to get sent back to the States, you were lucky, many didn't. George McGovern flew 35 missions."

"I thought he was a peace-nik."

"McGovern never let them use his war record. I encouraged his people to tell his story. He served in one of the most dangerous duties, but they never said a word about it. Now everyone is hanging on Reagan and he was only an actor. He does make people feel good, I guess he was meant for the role of President."

"Reagan rebuilt and made us strong."

"Yes Junior, we have spent a great deal of money, a huge naval increase. They refitted the Iowa and those big old battleships from my war. Not sure how strong it made us. All those marines got killed in Lebanon and we began lobbing shells from the sea. I thought it made us look foolish. Reagan promised three things, he would cut taxes, increase defense spending, and balance the budget. I said at the time he could do any two of

the three, but not all three. He did the first two, never submitted a balanced budget. Reagan is not such a bad man to be president, but this whole class of young Reaganites, they are nothing but grifters. I have never seen a group so absent of public service. It is all personal advancement. We have a client whose business was completely getting screwed by greedy contractors with political connections in the administration, but I should stop spoiling the wonderful festive spirit of joy and peace we are having."

"Tom another time, let's enjoy this time. Doesn't it bring back many memories? Your mother treated me well, and we worked together. It was a special time. We didn't really appreciate it then. Now enjoy Christmas on the farm. We can put that Walton Christmas to shame."

Young Tom came back and took his originally intended place added more stew to his bowl and grabbed another biscuit. "I really like these biscuits crumbled in the stew. The beef is so tender. I think I need a second biscuit to hold the apple jelly. Was the food this good when you lived here?"

"The food has always been good. Simple and plain was Grace's advice to me as the young bride."

Carol and Ruth returned, then with Lizzie they brought out puddings with a meringue top. "Oh, they look lovely."

"Grandma, I'm hoping they are good not pretty. I still got stew to finish, and maybe another biscuit."

Carol opened the china cupboard and retrieved a wrapped package obviously a bottle. "Here Dad probably a good time to open this."

Tom unwrapped a bottle of bourbon, "Thank you it still seems a little wrong to open bourbon in this house."

"We have all those Kentucky and Tennessee connections now. Junior knew a small distiller and I asked him to bring it back. We are delivering to a gift shop down by the Smokey's now. Need to find something profitable to haul on the return. I traded for a bunch of country themed junk for our

market. We'll see if we can make this a worthwhile venture. I have a sparkling wine for those who would like one."

"If Grandfather is opening that bottle, I'll try a little of it."

"No, I'll keep it sealed. I think I can abide by Eldon's way until we get home."

"Yep, Mr. Parker held a firm temperance policy, no use for alcohol. I see the good in that more than I used to."

"JB it seems your life is a good one. A wonderful family you are raising. Everything I ask about, the answer is JB built it, or fixed it, or had some part of it. It has always been good to have the Donaldson family here. I've seen the evidence of the evils of alcohol, but my folks were extreme on it. Tommie, I believe we can consider a sparkling wine a fruit punch. You will have to put the bourbon tasting on hold. Now, I'll concentrate on this great looking desert. "

"Yeah I done a lot of drinkin when I first got home. I thought it made me feel good, my life is much better now."

"JB needed the alcohol to kill the bad things in the food he was cooking. My, his kitchen skills were a sight to see. He wouldn't have lived another a year without me."

"Prohibition was a failure and so is this war on drugs. I thought cannabis would be legalized but that seems even less likely now. At least folks like the Hayes family thought eliminating alcohol would make family lives better, they weren't out skinning folk's pocketbooks. What is going on with this Moral Majority bunch. Have all you churchgoers gone crazy? "

"Mr. Parker, I think they are just the noisy ones. They love being on television and radio. They keep bringing on more anger; there is no TV at our loving little community church. Didn't you enjoy being there tonight, no one asked for money?"

"I did and it was warm and loving. These noisy Christians as you say, seem very hateful. I've seen awful situations. They think they should rule on abortion with iron fists and then they are against birth control. It seems nuts."

"It is why so many of them homeschool, they are afraid their kids will learn how nuts they are."

"Public schools have always been the backbone of American society I don't know why they are trying to ruin it. God came into the schools because people brought God with them. The God teaching was for Sunday School. You thanked God if you had enough to eat back in the 30's."

"Mr. Parker, private schools ain't about God, they're about Negros, and that is not the word they would use back home."

"Lizzie it's just a name like calling yu'all Yankees. Grandpa used to say Ni -"
Junior paused seeing Lizzie's glare then continued, "Negroes were just like anyone else, if using that word keeps you happy. It weren't racist it was just a word."

"No, Junior, I got to know Jerome Robinson in Vietnam. He saved my life. We were together most of my time there and we talked. He was from Los Angeles and we talked about the riots. We are all white people here, rarely see anyone else. I listened to Jerome and I began to understand. No Junior it is never alright, not for us, those on the outside, it's always racist. It's a hurtful word, we should never use it. We just go about being ourself, but a black man he is always black in this country. I began to see it too, how different it was for black GIs, even in Vietnam. "

"The Black units were all segregated in World War Two. There were many jokes about Black airmen, they used the neegro words to diminish their ability. I've met a couple of those guys; they flew the same planes and the same missions."

"Jerome's father had been in World War Two; they were segregated and very mistreated. It was so dangerous the way they were loading ammo

with black laborers, they refused. His Dad ended up in the stockade, but they improved things. I never understood all the fuss over names, but it is plain to see if you pay attention. Being white in our white world lets us ignore it. I always say Black, African American is a little too long. Jerome was in the hospital the last I saw him. They were hoping to save his leg. I got discharged early. I don't know where he is."

"Yes JB, men you worked with every day and were close to, but then got different assignments. Never knew what became of them, not even sure they survived. I run into to people from time to time who were in the same places in Europe sometimes hear an update. Truman integrated the armed forces, after I was out. I'm sure it rankled some of the old-school boys. Chicago survived our African American mayor, lawyers like lots of words JB. Unfortunately, he didn't survive us. Washington did well no more corrupt than the old machine and fortunate not to have another huge snowstorm. Some say Daley's son will be the next mayor, too bad Washington didn't get two terms. What do Negros have to do with God in schools, Lizzie?"

"They don't want private schools for Christian values, they want white schools with white values. You don't have to listen long or close to learn that. They accept lower standards, and they are teaching Bible instead of science. The more their schools withdraw from modern times the more rigid they are on issues. They believe women shouldn't speak in their churches and they don't believe women should have careers. They see the world changing and they are afraid of it. I see it with Carol and the business. Every once in a while, you can tell someone doesn't approve of her running Parker Produce. She handles them all courteous, but she very firmly reminds them she is boss. They soon learn her mind and pencil are sharper than theirs. You should be real proud of her."

"We are. Carol seems to have understood what's important in life better than Helen and I did."

"Yes, I am proud of my daughter. Her brother and his family should have come too. All the family together. It would have been a nice thing first time in a long time. Tom and I are glad to relive some of the memories."

"Grandma, I like that they are not here. You know, Katie and Angie are having the best time in that Turkey and Cakes place preening around like pampered peacocks. Mom might not survive here, no restaurants, no taxis, no theaters, and you have horses."

"The horses aren't entirely my idea; we all have Ruth to thank for that."

"Aren't you lucky I did, you know those horse rides are hugely popular."

"Yes, now we have two teams of those goliaths."

"Now Tommy, it is a Club Med at Turks and Caicos, which is near the Bahamas. Katie doesn't preen more than any other teenage girl. Carol do you and Ruth's family always celebrate Christmas together?"

"No mother, we have made coming back after Christmas Eve a tradition, but usually the kids aren't together on Christmas Day. They have a gathering with her family and JB's sister. We told the kids it was because we had special guests this Christmas, but there's another reason. A special gift for Della in the morning. I'll just say it is likely to be found in the barn. When you're done, move into the living room, too bad it so cold it seems like we should all be on the porch."

"JB and Junior checked out the fireplace for Carol when she said you would be here at Christmas. We put a fire in it. My Junior has his skills. You folks go enjoy it while I help Carol and Ruth."

"I'll help carry dishes. Is there another one of those puddings? They are exceptional, dang that topping is sweet all stiff and fluffy. Are you making all these things?"

"Meringue puddings are better than bourbon don't you agree Tommy?"

"Grandpa decided against bourbon so for tonight yes."

"Uncle Tommy can finish another pudding then start drying dishes."

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"I have the fireplace going. Are the kids coming down?"

"Ruth has them in check for the moment. "

"I hope they didn't keep your folks up too late last night."

"JB after you went home we stayed up and chatted for a long time. The kids were run down by that time. My folks slept in peace. The kids didn't start moving until about 6:30."

"Ruth is going to give Della the horse after all the presents are given; we expect she will be with her horse much of the day. A horse for Della will beat out your computers, Tom."

"What's the name of the horse?"

"Ruth is going to let Della name him; Ruth says he is young and may as well have Della's choice."

-

"Della took gifts to everyone. Tom was helping the boys play with their Turbo Hoppers, Brenda was playing with her Pound Puppies, but Della knew she hadn't had a big gift. Usually the special one at Christmas. Mr. and Mrs. Parker were having coffee watching the children in the living room when Lizzie and Junior came.

Lizzie took Della and said "I think you should come out with me. I saw reindeer tracks and sleigh runners out here."

Della started to say, "I don't" But Lizzie shooshed her, "just come and look."

Lizzie and Della followed by Junior, JB, Ruth and Carol headed to the barn.

"I think the tracks headed into the barn" Lizzie guided Della right to a stall holding a small sorrel horse. On the stall were cutout letters arranged to say Merry Christmas Della. Ruth stepped beside Della and she gave her a tight hug.

"This is my horse?"

"Yes Della, he's a young horse, but he will not be a tall horse. I thought he would be perfect for my little girl."

"He's beautiful. What's his name?"

"You can name him; he'll get used to a name you give him."

"He's not all sad like Eeyore, I think he's more like Tigger. I want to call him Tigger."

"Let's go introduce Tigger to you and our exercise building."

Della approached her new horse as a girl who had grown up around horses. A young girl trained by a mother with a special gift with them. Della was soon rubbing his nose. He seemed to be bonding with her. Ruth clipped a lead on Tigger, and they began to go over to the old machine shed.

Lizzie asked, "What about Santa Claus now?"

"Tigger is the perfect gift there must be a Santa Claus."

"Ruth, Lizzie and I are going to get dinner going. We will let you know when it's done."

"Thank you, Carol we may be out here for a while."

Ruth and Della ate late in the afternoon. Della was still beaming. Early in the evening everyone went home except Jimmie Donaldson who somehow

had convinced Carol and Ruth it was important for him to spend another night. Carol, her parents, and nephew Tom had an evening discussing the future. It seemed promising for all of them.

Chapter 36

A sad passing leads to reflection and discovery -- Carol Parker and Pastor Harris -- 1985

His head was bent in sorrow,
green scales fell like rain
Puff no longer went to play
along the cherry lane
Without his lifelong friend,
Puff could not be brave ---

Peter Yarrow Leonard Lipton -- Puff the Magic Dragon
Peter Paul and Mary The Very Best of Peter Paul and Mary



Misty creek – James Keefe

Where there is Love

"Thank you, Carol, for coming in and playing at our bible school"

"Who can turn down Ruth, and my boys love that I'm here. My playing and singing songs have become one of our home activities. They sing with enthusiasm."

"You are a great addition to our VBS."

“Rev. Harris, you’ve been the minister here a long time. JB said you did his grandmother’s funeral and I know you were here when my grandfather died.”

“I have, especially for a United Methodist pastor, but we joined into a larger charge. I have an assistant who does the other smaller church and we are a team in the larger congregation. I arranged to be in Franklin; I love these people.”

“I know I haven’t been very active, but they always make me feel welcome.”

“I have a favor to ask. I am conducting a small graveside service. I hoped you might bring your guitar and add some music to a rather somber service.”

“I’ve mostly been playing Puff the Magic Dragon and Jesus Loves Me.”

“I love Puff the Magic Dragon, but I suppose not for this. Do you think Amazing Grace and Jesus Loves Me are possible?”

“Yes, I could do those. When is it?”

“Thursday at 12:30 in Willow Bend Cemetery. Do you know where it is?”

“I’ve never heard of it.”

“It’s not too far from your house, but it is not used much. Why don’t I stop and pick you up? It isn’t actually on the road, there is a quarter mile lane. I’ll come by about 11:30”

“OK whose funeral is it?”

“Everyone called him Coon Parker, I have learned his actual name was Robert James Parker. He’s a 25th cousin if he’s any relation to you. A minister refused because it is a suicide. He’d lived as a hermit for thirty years. He was avoiding being a burden and an invalid, I believe.”

"A sad and lonely occasion."

"Yes, sometimes here in Franklin the funeral of a church member is sad, but it becomes a family reunion a great celebration of a life. This will be a service filled with melancholy."

"See you then, should I wear something funeral like?"

"No, just as you are."

-

"We come to remember a man who lived a quiet life. A man who stayed out of people's way. Some of us find joy in people, but Mr. Parker found them best kept at a distance. He did live a long life, he must have found joy in his woods, God's woods. His joy came from God's creation and shouldn't we all more appreciate God's creation. The delight of a bird of a butterfly, watching the winter come and the Spring renew. He watched the birth of fawns listened to the loud croaking of the bullfrogs, a life full of wonder and insight. We should acknowledge a long life, a full life, Robert Parker's life, Coon Parker's life. This beautiful quiet place is very appropriate final spot for a man of a quiet life. Please join Carol as she sings, then I will close in another prayer."

-

Ron Johnson, the man who asked Pastor Harris, came over to shake hands.

"Reverend a fine service, thank you. I know it is hard when someone ends like this. Would you come down to his place. You will understand Coon better. I'm taking his nephew who come back and never been here."

"I'm curious. I always try to learn about the lives of the people I am asked to serve in rites and passages. Would you mind Carol?"

"No, I am curious, as well."

When they pulled into the clearing Carol saw where the small cabin was sitting. It was surrounded by large trees, bird songs, a nice place to be.

"Well Coon weren't a hermit all his life. He was married and had a kid. His wife drove cross a railroad in front of a train. They were all dead and Coon ended up here. He got along. I dropped in and we'd go back and fish in the crick. Sometimes he'd find me there and set a spell. He almost died from shingles, really never got over it. Coon wouldn't leave, wouldn't see a doctor. His old hound was in as bad a state as him, and I suppose he felt it was best for both of them. I followed the warsh looking and found them down by the crick. It's a nice place to set and look at the water ripple. I liked talking to Coon, we lived neighbors when I grew up. I still come back to drop in once and a while."

"Thank you for the service, I'm John Driscoll. I have learned I was a nephew. My mother left here before the war and never came back. We were in California and she didn't talk much about being here or about any family. I was surprised when I was called. Are you a relative Mrs. Parker?"

"I've learned we had a common ancestor back in the 1800's when the Parker family first settled here. I guess yes and no."

"I'm going to sell and go back home. The realtor says it's rough mostly suited for hunting and being a hermit. No power, it would cost to bring it in. Most folks like running water. "

Carol pulled out a little card, "Why not come by and talk to me about selling. I find this place has a certain feeling. I know someone who would love it. We can work it out and I'll send you home with a check."

"I got a good idea of its value and might as well save time and a realtor's fee. "

"Thank you for getting us to come down here, I hope I'm not stepping between you and Mr. Driscoll in buying this place."

"Ron Johnson has got more needs than trying to hold on to this place. I got kids and a mortgage. I couldn't take on this piece. Do you see apples here?"

"No not now, I still have many more areas on the old Hayes place to add orchards. I have an employee who will make use of it. I will keep it in the family so to speak."

Pastor Harris and Carol returned to his car. "I thought I was conducting a man's soul to eternal rest. I didn't know I was enabling a real estate deal."

"It had just a right feel. I can buy it for ten thousand less than fifteen."

"Would this employee be Lizzie?"

"Yes, Pastor Harris, her husband would love it, and I have come to need her in the business. Why did that other minister refuse? Someone told me he knew him."

"Some men let their rules, rule them and not love. I do not think that is how to follow Jesus, but I try to love them anyway."

"I remember bible school when I was a kid staying at Grandma Parker's and now my boys are going. I don't know what I believe about some of the stories. I always liked going playing games and the great cookies."

"Stories like Noah's Ark?"

"Yes, it seems implausible."

"It likely is impossible. I have been to seminary, studied theology, and I respect faith, but I am not a literal truth person. The Bible has an oral tradition eventually written down. It has been translated from many languages and there are no original documents. When we have the oldest known document, it is usually a fragment. There are often variations in the translations. Not everything about the Bible is meant to be taken as literally true. "

"It is taught as true."

"Yes but look at the literal words of the Bible. The resurrection is the key belief of any Christian, but it is not the same narrative in the different Gospels. This is understandable knowing the Gospels were written well after the resurrection, maybe forty, sixty, or seventy years later. Witness stories must have been at odds by then. Bible colleges do not trust more academic seminaries, because too many scholar theologians contest their fundamentalist beliefs. I think skepticism is the key to any knowledge, science or religion. The thumpers, bible thumpers, as I call them want to keep it simple. They do not seriously want to engage in aligning faith with the world around us. They say their eyes are fixed on heaven, but their hands and feet seem very rooted in the worldly not the Spiritual realm. If questioning troubles them, they condemn it as people being the devil's advocates. I have experienced the power of Spirit when people connect in prayer, in worship, and in presence. There is more to the universe than what we see, there is a special Spirit that people can connect to that heals souls. It is important to come together as a congregation a church family."

"I have never studied theology. I guess I don't trust church people, at least some of them."

"I warn people it is human to question. All study brings knowledge and more questions. We do fail generation after generation by teaching children simple truths. As they grow in experience and schooling, we then build no place to examine belief in a critical but non-judgmental way. Our churches demand a leap of faith when bridges do exist. There is no need for pretend beliefs. I realize we all understand very little of the world seen or unseen."

"Ruth seems to have a faith unshaken, well just faith."

"Ruth is a wonder. She like many who are living in the Spirit become the Spirit, no one has greater love for people than Ruth."

"Ruth draws you in with her overflowing energy and love which has me helping at bible school."

“Many of the fundamentalists want to scare the hell out of people. Scared people live in fear that is hell. People like Ruth live in love, live life abundantly, they are pathfinders to Heaven. Here we are I will let you get back to the business world, you can leave behind the abstract realm for a while. Whatever you believe and no matter how you participate in our church in Franklin, Ruth and I and all those like us will always love you. Love is all we have to offer. I cannot layout ten simple rules to faith. It does work in mysterious ways. I was ready to say no to this service. A small service, a sad end, and no one had any connection to our church. The congregation pays me to help their families. Instead I said yes, and it has led to opportunities for each of us. I have learned to humble my pride and the self-importance of my time. I have learned to respond as love leads, it is always a more rewarding path. Thank you once again.”

“I too would have said no too easily, but it was very meaningful. Standing there by that cabin afterwards I had a sense I should help see that it would stay like it was for someone who needed that peace. I thank you for this day.”

When she entered the house her boys, that now always included JB and Ruth’s son, gave big hugs with flour covered hands. Ann was baking bread and the boys were using the flour covered kitchen table as a chalk board. Ann was a teenager, another of Ruth’s endless cousins, who lived with her and watched the boys as she worked. “You’re getting your Momma all covered in dirt, be more careful.”

“Ann it’s alright, I’m changing to go work in the real dirt. I believe this flour dusting is just being covered with love. “

Chapter 37

Real farming has a different perspective -- Carol Parker 1983

We are stardust
We are golden
And we've got to get ourselves
Back to the garden --
Joni Mitchell – Woodstock
Joni Mitchell Ladies of the Canyon



Shire Team -- Bainebiker

Real Farming

"Hello Ms. Parker"

"Hello, I don't think I've met you."

"I've been out to your farm; you are doing a great job out there. I've been the extension agent here for 20 years."

"I heard there may be an apple disease some kind of scab. I am seeking to find out more about it."

"I heard that too, there was a public radio report. I have a pamphlet, but it is not current."

"Who can I ask?"

"Our small crop specialist retired, forced out really. No one has actually replaced them."

"Not a promising beginning, why isn't there a new small crops advisor?"

"We're being cut back; the current administration believes in private business and smaller government."

"I am a business this is information for a back-yard apple tree."

"Our state doesn't have many fruit growers, we're not Michigan or Washington."

"I don't deal with the USDA often, but I could suggest many reforms. I've done better per acre than our traditional farmers. There is no PIK program for a producer like me."

"That is true. The assistant or intern for the small crop advisor is still in place. At least until the end of the fiscal year. I've heard he is very good. I can give you his phone number."

"Is he a doctoral candidate?"

"I think he is working on a master's degree."

"A grad student, OK. I'll call him. Do you have any other suggestions?"

"I would contact Michigan extension; they may have been better funded in your specialty."

"I would think considering the price of corn more diversity of crops would be encouraged."

"Our farmers are independent producers, but corporations are the suppliers. They wield the political power and diversity is not as profitable for them. I did not tell you that if anyone asks. I intend to retire in this job."

"OK thank you for your time. Did you enjoy coming out to the farm?"

"Yes, it is marvelous. You sell very high-quality products. Also, those big horses are a charming touch. I see you put them on your labels. How are your canning and freezing operations working out?"

“There are many obstacles to overcome. Learning proper and approved handling is important. Also, finding the right markets is difficult. Being a small independent, limits selling to large corporations. We do well in small markets regionally. When we get a market then we have to supply it. I have purchased apples and other vegetables to make our supply adequate, but that cuts the profit. We seem to be overcoming the initial problems.”

“I knew your grandfather. I always appreciated talking with him. He was a man of integrity. It seems your business is keeping the tradition. I know the young man isn’t a PhD, but I have found he is very sharp.”

“Hope to talk to you the next time you come out. I will tell Ruth you loved the Shire team. I shouldn’t, it will encourage more of her marketing schemes. She’s the one that brought the horses to Parkers.”

Chapter 38

Have a voice? Learn to use it – have a little fun along the way – Karen, Madison, Lee

Will the circle be unbroken
By and by, Lord, by and by
There's a better home a-waiting
In the sky, Lord, in the sky --?
Roy Acuff—Will the Circle be Unbroken
Nitty Gritty Dirt Band Will the Circle Be Unbroken



Barn lane -- Dave Linscheid

Night of the Nativity

We were sitting on the porch sipping the last of the wine. Carol had divided the last of the bottle between us when we had returned from the immersion into night. The porch light did seem an intrusion glaring starting to attract insects. Carol's pickup turned into the lane and headed up to the house. It was followed by one of the ubiquitous crossover vehicles everyone seemed to drive these days. Carol's truck stopped and out popped Madison and Lee.

"Hello Ms. Parker"

"Carol, Lee and some of his friends are a having party, a welcome home event, may I go with him?"

"Madison did you ask your parents before you hopped into the eye magnet with Karen to come here?"

"No but it seemed I should ask."

"Thank you, are you going to ride with his friends?" Carol pointed to the couple looking over Karen's car at the moment.

"Yes, that is why they followed us."

The couple had stopped looking at the sports car and were now on the steps of the porch. Lee said, "I should introduce you to Ms. Parker's niece Emmy Lou"-as Madison and Lee laughed softly.

Lee added "and Ms. Parker, who is the owner of Parker Produce and Fruit."

"It is nice to meet you; did you enjoy the concert?"

"It was wonderful, I love going out there. Never had a band as good as Lee's before, but an awesome place. I love those big horses, too."

"I work for you during summers Ms. Parker. I started with Lee, but I work in the office doing tech support and data entry. I am fast at a keyboard. I'm Bill Garland."

"Are you coming back this summer?"

"Once college is out."

"Maybe I have met you before, but in the dark, I don't recognize you."

"No this is the first time I have spoken to you."

Lee asked, "Karen, better known as Emmy Lou, Madison says you are a good singer. Would you come sing backup with me at the party, I've promised everyone a few songs."

"Come on Karen all those summer camps can be put to good use"-
Madison allowing no false protests.

"You should go. I need to go to bed soon, church will come early. You can take the truck that way Lee's kind friends won't have to double back"

Karen couldn't refuse Madison's imploring look, "Thank you, Carol it will be fun. We will have a good time, but not too good." Madison and Karen laughed as Carol smiled.

Lee asked, "You going to the church in Franklin?"

"Yes"

"I've been there, a big outdoor youth event. All the workers were invited, they had great cookies. I enjoyed the music although I made fun of some of the songs."

"Ruth told me how reliable Lee was when he worked for her. Now I find Bill is also a valued employee. It seems I am entrusting my young weekend wards to good hands. I have always been so grateful for the people who work with us. The local people all consider themselves neighbors and are incredibly responsible. I feel it will be OK, have a nice time."

Bill's girlfriend spoke, "Ms. Parker, Karen alias Emmy Lou, could be your twin. I am pleased to have met you."

"Karen only appears to be my twin on this very dark night."

Bill said, "too bad we can't all fit in that Audi."

Carol walked out as they headed to their car, "I think that may be the most redeeming feature of this road terror. You guys have a good time, don't do anything that causes me to call my legal expert son or brother."

Carol walked back inside, thinking I hope they are OK. There was a general level of small community caring for each other she could rely on. Carol thought they were both four maybe five years older than when she left home. She was only Karen's surrogate mother, showing a little trust was a good thing. After all, she had been a vagabonding hippie.

A soft prayer before sleep might be appropriate, couldn't hurt.

Chapter 39

Life's detours are often painful as well as unavoidable – Carol Parker 1981

Everything that you were counting on
Was nothing but a pack of lies
Now you're mystified,
Standing with the rest of us
Who used to rule the world
Randall Bramblett – Used to Rule the World
Bonnie Raitt Slipstream



Dodge Monaco -- Roger Meisenbach

Doctor Feelgood

“Your meeting will be in this conference room. Mr. Finn called, and he has landed, and he is on his way. When he gets here Bob will be joining you. Can I get you coffee or something while you wait?”

“No thank you, I am fine.”

The door closed and Carol was left alone with her thoughts. A swirling whirlwind of thought and detritus as she waited. Here she was rescuing a man who had wounded her deeply. It would be an agreement on her terms protecting her farm and her reputation locally. Those were the two non-negotiables those were the two things she had to preserve to continue to build a future. Five years in and the business was going well, but her personal life had become the crumbling tower. Thinking back on how all this was revealed to her Carol thought Ruth had so delicately probed. Until she learned what Carol knew, which turned out to be astoundingly little. Ruth didn't disrupt Carol's life when Pam Capuano's (she had kept the

name) photos came. Ruth had probed with care, careful not to collapse the house of cards. The photos were spectacular, and they selected ones for brochures and a catalog.

“Carol these are great did you know about Pam before she came out?”

“Zeph said she was the best and had edited the ones in the illustrated book. Looks like Zeph was correct.”

“Do you know how Zeph and Stephen had known about her?”

“No, I suppose she was someone Zeph knew. He and Stephen seem to be friends. -- are your questions leading somewhere?”

“No, Pam hopes that this second book and especially a documentary will connect her to a big production firm. I was just curious about her background.”

“I suppose she hopes it will get noticed and others connected with the publishing house hire her.” Ruth let it lie then, she was sure I didn’t know Pam was Stephen’s first wife. Also, it seemed likely I didn’t know of any first marriage, not only that Stephen was once married to Pam.

At Della’s first birthday party, Ruth began to unfold another layer of unknown. We were watching happy Della smoosh birthday cake. “Kids sure are messy sometimes. They require so much care and losing sleep I suppose I could understand people not wanting kids in their marriage.”

“Della is so delightful I couldn’t imagine your marriage without her.”

“I couldn’t either. JB and I talked about another child and we think we should as long as we space them out a little.”

“Probably best give each child a little space.”

“I suppose a businesswoman like you are might want to focus on the business and not want kids of her own.”

“Some women might want that, but I see this farm as a place to grow things. Della has been so sweet I think we should have a child soon. It seems a great life for a child to grow in.”

Ruth then decided I didn't know Stephen had planned on never being a father, but she didn't tip her hand. After the apple season at the market was done, we had Thanksgiving and it was wonderful JB, Ruth, Della, Lizzie and a local guy Lizzie had dated a few times. I no longer knew where Lizzie actually lived. She was so often with Della at JB's and then back here at my house. It was Stephen and I's last perfect moment. Stephen had taken a new position. The college was far away, but it was a good fit for him. His illustrated version was still selling. Our farm had benefited from the publicity. We had appeared in the major farm magazine, and they had purchased Zeph and Pam's photos. I also had an amusing image of an old grouch with sore balls. There was much to be thankful for, Stephen was now being scheduled for book promotions of his upcoming book with Zeph and Pam's new photos. Stephen had begun a radio show on gardens that was distributed around the state's public radio network. Life that Thanksgiving was as beautiful as an ice skater on a placid lake. I didn't know I was about to skate over the thin ice and would soon be fighting to survive hypothermia.

Ruth did talk with Stephen after dinner on Thanksgiving, but it didn't seem too unusual. Stephen had gone back to his college after the weekend. Ruth invited herself over for dinner. JB, Della, and Lizzie also came. They prepared everything served everything, then JB took Della into the living room and Lizzie began to clean up. Ruth told me to stay seated, we had something to talk about. Lizzie returned with a glass of wine and set it down at my place, then Ruth began. “How much do you know about Stephen's past?”

I replied with what I knew, where he grew up, where he went to school, his graduate school, and where he had begun work on a PhD. I knew about his student deferments and then catching luck with a large draft number in the first lottery. I knew how he had fallen for the idea of a growing Earth. This

became part of the return to nature movement, but with scientific approaches. I noticed her intent but blank stare; I asked, "Why?"

"What do you know about his past marriages?"

"What past marriages, I am sure he had relationships, what marriages?"

"Stephen was married to that photographer Pam."

I choked on air and then realized why Lizzie had brought the wine. I took a sip. "Really, how do you know?"

"She told us when she was here. She thought Stephen and Zeph had told you. She decided you were adulting it, being a professional because she was so good. I have also done some checking and it's true. She signs her work PamCy, but her legal name is Pam Capuano."

"That is a big splash of cold water, but you don't seem done. "

"Nope, Pam gets half the royalties from this second book. It was part of her divorce agreement."

"OK, I guess that doesn't matter to the farm what else have you learned?"

"Stephen does not want kids, in fact Pam says he has had a vasectomy and can't impregnate anyone now."

I took another drink and swallowed slowly and hard, I stared. I think Ruth realized how many lies she had undone. She was right Stephen had told me nothing. He let me go on with any dream, agreed how cute Della was, how wonderful a child could be.

"You've known since the photographers were here?"

"I knew what she said, but she seemed like a flakey artist type. I checked it out. Also, I didn't know what you knew. You may have known everything and didn't see it was our business. I learned as you talked with me since

then, you must not know. Stephen was all the same at Thanksgiving. I did ask him a little of his past and confirmed the places he was at and when. It all matches with what Pam said and what I had found out. We decided you had to know now that we were sure."

Lizzie had come back. She sat on my other side and put the bottle on the table. I got up and hugged Ruth, I hugged Lizzie then I sat down. We held hands as we all cried. I drank another glass of wine.

"I have to think through this, it destroys so many dreams. False ideas of mine, but I knew he had been a rogue. I thought we were on a solid base. I don't know what I will do. Parker Produce and Fruit will continue and prosper, we don't need Stephen Capuano. I am glad I didn't change my name. The real gut punch is the kids. He let me spin dreams of our future and never once stopped me or told me he wasn't in complete agreement. It makes everything a lie between us. It is hard to take. I like him, I respect his talents, I forgave his foibles, I did fall in love. He just let me believe my dream, even if it was not reality."

"JB and I are going home, but Lizzie is staying here with you. We can talk about it later. We were all sorry but wanted to be sure. You are right, our business doesn't need him, but I know you did."

After Lizzie and Ruth revealed Stephen's deceptions, I had talked to Zeph. He was thrilled that he had sold the photos to a national farm magazine. Now he and Pam had turned this into a contract for a documentary. It would require many location shoots around the nation. He had hoped Stephen had found a permanent relationship. He said, "Stephen is charming but has always been an incorrigible womanizer."

I tempted Mark to an after Christmas trip to Chicago. We had a glorious time. He had never been to Chicago except at the airport. Downtown is fun, if you have some money to waste. We had both escaped to a magical surreal land. It was an escape we both needed. We went to my brother and father's law firm on different days. I met with Finn and he met with my brother. We left and arrived in Franklin on different days. We caused no scandalous gossip. Many in Franklin thought I should have waited for

Mark Greene. He would have a reason to stay on the Franklin farm, and I would have a better Franklin certified husband. We seemed such a perfect match singing and playing at Christmas Eve. Mark was not destined for farming in Franklin. It was only through an unfortunate circumstance he was there. One my brother was pushing back against. My brother was often a jerk, but he was a good lawyer. If he thought a case was winnable, he won it. Mark and I had a rendezvous in Chicago. We both had a few cobs to blow out, and for a few days we did.

Ruth and Lizzie revealing the truth was only the first stage of this rocket ride I was now on. A rocket that had lost its direction and was about to explode. I had met with Mr. Finn after Christmas and he began advising on a divorce settlement. I suspected Stephen had called off Christmas to avoid more questions from Ruth or maybe he thought I knew about his deceptions. It seems now his real motivation was his pursuit of a new intense dalliance.

I had been home about a week when Stephen called. He had put himself into a crisis and he wanted my help. He pitched it as our dreams would be dashed and it would mean ruin for us. I listened to him; I told him, I had learned about Pam. He started an explanatory lie, but I stopped him. I said I would come help; I did have interests to protect. I informed him, our was over and now it was his and mine. I suggested he drop out of sight for a couple of days, until I got there with a legal team.

"Stephen, I don't think you are hiding from arrest, you are not a fugitive; head over to a beach. Please just avoid being around for questions. No more book promotions until we resolve this."

I then did probably the most un-Franklin like and not a Parker thing; I drove over to Max Greene's.

"Carol how are you?" - seeing and sensing a little distress in my face.

"I'm OK Max, I need to talk to you and Margaret."

"I thought maybe you were here to see Mark."

"Later I need to speak with you now."

Margaret got me coffee and we sat down at the kitchen table. I began to tell them about Stephen. "Now he is in a messy situation over an affair. It will harm me and the farm if it isn't handled well."

"I never trusted him, just too in the clouds. I like down to earth people."

"You're right Max, I should have not allowed myself to live in his fantasies."

"Oh Carol, I am so sorry. It hurts me, I understand."

"Ruth, JB, and Lizzie know all about this, they found out and told me after Thanksgiving. Now they all know not to tell anyone anything at the moment. This is an extreme sacrifice for Lizzie."

"Lord yes that girl works faster and spits out more words than anyone I've ever known."

"How can we help, Carol?"

"I thought Stephen didn't come for Christmas because he suspected I knew about his past and was avoiding me. He actually had pursued a torrid affair that may cost him his career."

"Serves him right I would say."

"It does, but it will harm me and the farm if I don't put a lid on this."

"I visited a Mr. Finn at my father and brother's law firm. He began preparing a divorce agreement, but now there is this new complication. I need to go out there and work with a lawyer there. Mr. Finn will fly out when we are ready for a negotiation. Stephen has someone trying to blackmail him. They are students and it is scandalous and messy, but it

isn't mafia or anything like that. I want to ask if Mark could drive me out there. I need the additional driver, someone who I can trust."

"It's January Mark could get away."

"He can go visit Civil War battlefields while I work this out. He told me how much he loves doing that. I know it might look bad and I am not wanting to stop Mark from getting his life back on track. My brother says they will win and completely clear up his trumped-up arrest. My Dad said justice is slow, doesn't always come from a courtroom, but justice is the best hope. Also, when I meet with these students, I need to be there without a lawyer or a policeman. I don't want Stephen along, and Mark has that strong hard body that will be more intimidating than I am."

"Oh my, what do you think, Max?"

"First that Capaswano guy was never any good. Fancy talker no work. It sounds like you're not going to be married much longer, and you're better off for it. We've loved having Mark back and I think nobody will notice if he goes back east for a week or so. It won't affect his legal case. We are mighty grateful to your family for your help. Lawrence is sharp, and your father said not to worry about legal bills. He has only billed for filing fees. We're very grateful on that."

"Will it be dangerous for Mark?"

"No Margaret, these are students with false accusations. Mostly false who think since Stephen is an author there is money. JB once told me about bar fights. He said most big guys are quiet not looking for trouble, but having a formidable guy standing behind you, calms the waters tremendously is how JB put it."

"JB ought to know, it is a miracle that he has Ruth. I've not seen anyone change like JB. He is wonderful help at the church and that little girl is adorable. Named after a mighty kind woman. No, you take Mark straighten out Stephen's mess. Mark can drive you in the new Dodge Diplomat. They wouldn't give nothing on the old Monaco, so I kept it."

Mark's been driving it, it's a long drive you take the new car. If a single Carol Parker turned a young Greene's head enough to stay part of Greene Farms and Parkers Produce and Fruit. Well it would not displease us. You two stay safe, does Mark know?"

"I wanted permission first, I did not expect you to offer your car. I was going to take the truck. "

"Your truck may be new to you and better than that little toy you first came in. It's still a little foreign job; Mark could barely fit in it. You take the Diplomat. You could sleep in the backseat while Mark drove, if you're planning on driving straight through like I think you are."

"Yes, I thought we would."

"You go tell Mark it is alright he's going. He won't refuse you, will he?"

"I don't believe so, no."

"I didn't reckon he would. You got enough money for this?"

"Max when I first came, I had no money and my problems were weeds and bugs. Now I have adequate money, but problems by number, and troubles by the score. Amazing what songs you hear when down at the garage, or Lizzie gets hold of the radio dial."

"Mark's down at the shop. We're putting on new more aggressive coulters on the planter. It can wait; it won't be planting time for three months. I'll have Mark come to your place and pick you up. I imagine he'll be over about three o'clock. You two stay safe. We'll not say a word. If Lizzie can keep a secret surely Margaret and I can. "

"Thank you, I don't how to say more"

Margaret hugged Carol, "Honey, Max and I will pray for you."

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Now I am here waiting to hear a legal strategy before meeting with the extortionists. Mel Brooks maybe could find a new movie out of this farce. A knock and then the door opened.

"Hello Ms. Parker. I assume you know Mr. Finn and I am Bob Simmons."

"You don't go by Mrs. Capuano?"

"No"

"Just as well it seems."

"I am going to brief everyone on local laws and the school policies that apply. Mr. Capuano is fortunate our state has old fashioned laws on age of consent. We've confirmed the person I call Female One is currently seventeen. She will be eighteen in three months. Male One who seems to be the mastermind is twenty-two. You are sure Mr. Capuano cannot be the father Mr. Finn?"

"I called the clinic from your office before we came in. I am assured by the doctor that he has no possibility of being the father."

"Fraud and misrepresentation are strongly indicated then by Female One and Male One's actions. On the possibility of criminal liability, I believe Mr. Capuano is in the clear. Mr. Capuano's other problem is university policy. This is where he exists in a precarious state. In an effort to answer complaints of professors having affairs with students the university has a policy for persons over twenty-five. They are forbidden to have any relationship with anyone other than a person aged twenty-two or older. This doesn't prohibit a middle-aged professor from having an affair with a grad student but was designed to protect undergraduates. Technically Female One was not a student, but Capuano was under the impression she was. If all of this is brought before a disciplinary hearing at the University, there is high probability he would be dismissed and lose his, I must add very popular, radio show. Mr. Finn, I am reminded of Alexander Hamilton and the Reynolds affair. Are you familiar with it?"

“I do not recall clearly it was a sex scandal, I believe?”

“Yes, it was. Hamilton was our first Secretary of the Treasury; he was accused of mishandling government money. In his defense he revealed it was all his money and he was being blackmailed by the husband of a woman he had an affair with. It does seem the affair was a scheme in which the husband and his wife were both plotters. In proving his innocence of embezzlement, he revealed adultery, maybe his wife would have preferred a less public admission as his defense. Male One and Female One have a scheme, they apparently thought a pregnancy would be a clincher. It has revealed the scheme. Now, we have to determine a course of action, can you negotiate a confidential admission, or will it become public? I will leave. I have updated you on the law and the policy that ends my part. You and Mr. Finn will have to design an agreement. I would say I have heard Mr. Capuano on the radio he has an excellent personality and a very useful show for gardeners. I do doubt his judgment. Why he would risk his career and marriage with a lovely woman as yourself I do not understand. He should stay with advice on tomato growing; he is lacking in life lessons. Let Jane know when you’re finished use the room for as long as you need. Good luck Ms. Parker.”

“Carol glad to be here, as Laurel and Hardy might say this is another fine mess. Let’s work on an agreement for Female One and Male One as Mr. Simmons described. You are going to get them to agree to a contract. If Mr. Simmons or I are not involved it is an agreement between parties without certain ethical constraints. First, we are throwing the pregnancy back at them as proof of an extortion scheme. I have written the maximum and minimum sentences for such extortion practices in this state you should be familiar with them. They do face significant criminal liability. You can say you do not care if Stephen never works again and would gladly see them grow old in jail. This type of negotiation is purely psychological, you will have to read their reactions and rely on your instincts. They are captured by a vision of fortune. They will not give up easily on what avarice has dazzled them with. Fear can control greed they will fear arrest and jail. That is your stick. I understand Mr. Greene is with you and going to the meeting. “

"Yes, he went to DC today to meet with a friend, but he will be with me in the morning. "

"Your brother introduced me to him in the office. He is fine young man. The local prosecutor is on a vendetta against well-educated intellectuals. In my opinion the government needs people like Mark Greene, it is a travesty. Mr. Greene looks like someone who can handle an unexpected situation. In the Air Guard where your brother served, I doubt that plans went awry. I was in Vietnam on the ground; I went in 1965. Our plans often went awry. Be observant, be aware of where to move if you have to and be willing to adapt. Where are you meeting?"

"In a park Stephen arranged it; he has called and told them I will be there. He said I controlled the money. He had been stalling using his second book not being published yet, as an excuse. I plan to ask them to move to seating outside a café."

"Outside seating in January?"

"This is not Chicago. It is near a bus stop and people often have coffee and hot chocolate there even now. It should give us a table to sign on. I expect to complete this deal, tomorrow."

"It is good to move. As long as it is a more public space. I think it is only this boyfriend and girlfriend; I don't believe anyone else is involved. Let them adapt because they are going to have to adapt. I have discussed on the phone your proposals with Mr. Capuano. He did not object to any of the terms we discussed. If we can get this resolved and buried so to speak, he will be amicable on your divorce arrangements. I sent documents via fax and Stephen signed them all this morning and people here witnessed them. His test results will be attached, and your new beneficiaries can come to this office tomorrow afternoon. They should ask for Mr. Simmons. They will receive packets with copies of everything and a cashier's check. We are recommending a separate check for each and a separate packet. Honestly the boyfriend has suffered very little in this other than his scheme imploding. If they pursue the exposure route at the university, we will

challenge standing. The policy is clearly intended for professors and students. Female one is not a student. It will stall the process enough to allow for their arrest. They are pleading guilty to several felonies in these documents, but their threat of ruining Stephen is rather empty for them. There is no money for them just harm to Stephen Capuano. The doctor's report is being faxed over and copies made. I take it they do not know Stephen cannot be the father, yet?"

"No, I didn't want them to have time to plot a new strategy."

"I think they will take the money and run, and then you can pick through the aftermath. Tom has made sure we will have cashier's checks for them. It would be best to get them gone. I know it seems like money wasted. In truth you were inevitably getting a divorce, and this has made Mr. Capuano much more conciliatory; financially it may be a wash. Come to an agreement, get them to sign and date. The signing at this office and the cashing of their checks is the final agreement on their part."

"Thank you, Mr. Finn, what is your first name I think I will be back in your office again before we are done."

"Carol, my first name is Sean. Sean Finn and all my ancestors are Irish Americans, as one would expect. Good luck tomorrow. Stay with facts, stay with the business at hand, that is how I control my emotions. Lawrence told me we have some good news for Mr. Greene. The appellate court has rejected the prosecutor's objections on our appeal. The panel has requested further support for their contentions. It indicates they are ready to rule in our favor. "

"Lawrence knew Mark Greene was here, I thought you lawyers practiced confidentiality."

"Carol they are your father and brother."

"I just didn't want to imperil Mark's future career prospects."

“No, he will be one of our leading diplomats someday. I am going out and tour Monticello tomorrow, then I will be back here tomorrow afternoon to seal everything up. I expect we will move on to your rather unusual divorce agreement next week. I will send them in with your document packets, check to make sure that the doctor’s report is in each one. Mr. Capuano may not be able to get you pregnant, and according to this report he hasn’t given you a disease, either”

“Knowing the nature of confidentiality with family in your firm, I won’t comment on that.”

“We had to include it in the testing. It clears Mr. Capuano of any other liability. I will call at your motel if I need you. I will ask you to take the train into Chicago again when we are ready with your divorce agreement.”

“Thanks Sean Finn”

“Thank you, Carol Parker, I always wanted see Monticello, but in the military, it seemed too far from DC. Make sure your packets are in order and good luck.”

Now all she had to do was convince blackmailers with an outrageous plan to accept a reasonable if disappointing settlement. Maybe she should have brought JB, he used to be far more of a threat than Mark.

Chapter 40

Lee loves biscuits and white gravy, all downhome food. Why not a great Sunday dinner at the Parker farm? Karen, Madison, Carol, Ruth, Lizzie, Junior, Elly – and Lee

Get them steaks chicken fried
Sho' do make a man feel happy
To see white gravy on the side
Guy Clark – Texas Cookin'
Guy Clark The Essential Guy Clark



Biscuits Kristen

Midwest Comfort

“What time is it Karen?”

“It's about 9, Carol is in Franklin at church. She left a note. She will be home about 11:00. We can put dinner together when she's back.”

“Speaking of dinner Lee is coming over I said we would eat about 1.”

“Good to know. What we are fixing for Lee?”

“I said we would make biscuits and white gravy.”

“How many biscuit and white gravy dishes have you made Madison?”

“I've never made them. I thought a farm girl like you would know how?”

“I spent parts of four summers here when I wasn't at those music camps. I am not a farm girl.”

“Oh, you sounded great last night. You do sing very well. How do you make biscuits and white gravy?”

“Aunt Carol undoubtedly has the ingredients for biscuits. You can't have white gravy unless you fry something. “

“Fry what?”

"Let's go look in Carol's freezer. If we don't find something there, we are heading over to the HyVee."

"Look frozen chicken breasts. One summer when I was here Brent came home and persuaded Carol to make fried chicken nuggets like when he was a kid. It looks like we could try that. Junior explained the art of frying stuff to me the last summer I was here, at one of his fish fries. Green beans a big stockpile, grab two or three packages of green beans, applesauce bring that container, Aunt Carol's applesauce is to die for. I've got some corn. Back to the kitchen great potatoes and onions we cannot have white gravy without mashed potatoes. What possessed you to promise him biscuits and white gravy. We could have offered to take him to that wonderful family restaurant not that far from Walnut Ridge. Are you trying to convince Lee, you're a Southern chef or something?"

"I was talking about how great the food was here. How you said Sunday dinner was always special at Aunt Carol's, then Lee said I bet they have biscuits and white gravy and that he would gladly come over for some of that. And I don't know I just said Carol might having biscuits and white gray. And then he was coming at 1."

"We're courting disaster in the kitchen. Have you never watched those stupid cooking shows this isn't easy when you have no experience? Start searching the kitchen, look for a big iron skillet with deep sides. Also look for vegetable oil or Crisco. I'm going to text Carol."

Madison has managed to invite Lee to dinner. I am working on pulling together one of those great Sunday dinners Parkers are famous for. Would Ruth like to come over I would love to see her again. Invite Lizzie and Junior if you want. I am going to try to live up to Madison's promises. We had a great time last night. I enjoyed singing with Lee, thank you for letting us have the truck. Madison told Lee 1 PM

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"Thank you, Carol, he was nervous but a good place to start for a young boy."

"I got a text from Karen. Do you have dinner plans Ruth?"

"No, are you inviting me over?"

"Yes, I am, but this will be an adventure. Here read my text."

"Who's Madison?"

"Madison is Karen's friend from college who is hugely crushing on Lee. Who seemed just as fascinated with Madison."

"Is this Lee from Walnut Ridge who worked for me at the freezer plant?"

"No, this is Lee from Walnut Ridge the world's greatest guitarist who plays for the Orange Buffoons."

"Maybe we should go help them then. Any Lee from Walnut Ridge would be worth a good Parker family meal. I'll come out to your place."

"I am going to catch Lizzie and Junior."

"Lizzie apparently my niece Karen is putting together a big family dinner for Lee from Walnut Ridge. Would you and Junior like to come over?"

"Is this the boy who was in last night's band?"

"Yes, it is?"

"Elly says he is good she heard him play a couple of times before he joined the band. We were just going over to meet her and eat some place."

"Why not invite her over, Elly plays well herself. We can have a porch session."

"She will get up about noon after her shift at the hospital, but she is off until Wednesday night. She will I'm sure."

"I have to get home. I think Madison has got Karen in over her head."

"Who's Madison?"

"Karen's friend from college she and Lee seem to have a mutual attraction."

"I would enjoy catching up with Karen. We'll be along."

Carol came into a kitchen with two young women trying desperately to remember what they had seen others do. "What's your menu?"

"Madison promised Lee biscuits and white gravy. I said we had to fry something. I found you had frozen chicken. I remembered once Brent came home and wanted chicken nuggets. I'm trying to duplicate that meal."

"OK good choice. Looks like you are about done massacring those potatoes. I will put them in water and set them on the counter. Let's get started on cutting the chicken. I did nuggets mostly because they were easier than frying whole breasts. You ever fry anything before?"

"I was trying to remember what Junior told me."

"He is good, but that was some time ago. I will instruct you in making a nice batter and we will get the grease very hot. Cast iron skillets are great for holding heat. Actually, that is the secret to frying anything, getting the grease super-hot."

"We'll get them ready and maybe Junior will be here to give you another lesson. Madison get in that cabinet and get out the big pressure cooker. We'll fry bacon and onions in it and then add the green beans. We need to use the microwave to soften the chicken, so that we can cube it. We'll use it to start the corn. I don't know how we got along without microwaves."

Ruth came into the kitchen "Hi Karen, I haven't seen you since you were fifteen."

"Probably fourteen" - as Karen hugged Ruth.

"Gracious, if I'd come in here when you were alone. I would've thought I'd stepped back in time. I would have seen this beautiful kind woman who took in a skinny little mouse and started her on the best life ever."

"Ruth don't you continue with this beautiful young Karen looks just her old aunt Carol."

"No Carol she looks exactly like the beautiful young Carol and truthfully not so different from her old aunt Carol."

"Karen you would think a good church woman wouldn't make up such flattering lies. Ruth please help Karen set the table, for eight if my current count is correct. Use Grandma Parker's good dishes, we are hosting guitar royalty."

"Her Grandma's dishes are in here. Karen your aunt was always knocking and playing down her attractiveness are you like that?"

"I guess I am, I was self-consciousness about my height. I felt awkward and plain. It is still hard to get past how I felt at fourteen and fifteen. After all a modern woman is supposed to be judged on her talents not her beauty or lack of it."

"Look a picture of JB. It was taken when Della was about one."

"JB was really handsome, cowboy handsome with that hat and horse."

"He sure was, now do you think JB got by on his looks?"

"I heard he was good at fixing things."

"People notice each other's looks but they don't define them entirely. "

"Tall women like you and Carol grow into being striking and noticed, just accept it. Carol's business savvy and get it done attitude was what folks noticed once they worked with her."

"I am sorry about JB."

"He just came to the end of his run a little sooner and tougher than we hoped. The VA didn't think his Leukemia was related to Vietnam, but it likely was. Then he was exposed to Covid before folks was paying attention to prevent it. We couldn't be with him; it hurt. The hurt just heaped on. Lizzie organized the whole family and we recorded a bunch of songs and they played them for him. They sent out a note he had scratched out to them – the music was carrying him to heaven, and he'd be waiting. Karen I'm going to meet my young cowboy again someday. I bet we'll hop in that old Roadrunner drive out to a big corral where Seven Up will be waiting to race those barrels again."

"I enjoyed the horses being here, when I was a girl."

"You'd like to have a nice horse to saddle and ride around the place, wouldn't you?"

"It would be nice."

The table was set in down home, yet elegant style. They went back to the kitchen. Dinner preparation seemed to be on track and the cooked bacon and onion gave the kitchen great aroma.

"What do you know Carol Parker your younger self here has more horse sense than you do. She thinks having a nice saddle horse to ride around the place would be great."

"Ruth you have more horses than you can ride now, up at your place."

"A nice exercise for Carol Parker."

"Ruth I'm getting old."

"Keep you young."

"I've got a biscuit recipe on my phone."

"OK Madison you can use the table to mix them up. We'll get them mixed and baked. I want to bake a frozen pie; I've been saving it for when Junior was here. Karen, the coffee pot and hot water heater are in the anteroom make a pot and start the hot water for tea. Ruth will help you find pretty little dishes to hold all the different jams and jellies. They are in the refrigerator; we'll set them on the table along with the applesauce."

Junior and Lizzie came. "Elly is coming over; she will get here about 1."

Madison was taking her biscuits out they looked odd. Lizzie poked at one. "Lordy these biscuits are flat as flitters. They are hard; good thing Carol don't have hawks. We would feed these to them, and it would kill them. Here Miss Madison we're going out on back porch and use the canning stove. Aunt Lizzie going teach you how to make biscuits."

"Lizzie you know you can't trust the temperature setting on that oven."

"Carol, I got a hand; I can tell a hot oven. You let pretty Miss Madison and I make you up some fine Tennessee biscuits. You concentrate on the gravy."

Carol heard a car turn into the drive "Karen go see who's coming in and make them feel comfortable. We are close to finished here."

Karen went out as Elly came driving in her Ford. "Welcome glad you could come. I hear you are a nurse now."

"Yes I am. I remember you being here when you were, I don't know thirteen?"

"I was " - a pick up came in the lane. It was Lee in an older Chevy.

Lee popped out and looked her car over in the daylight. "Are you going give me a ride in this sports car before you head back?"

"Karen, Elly would like one too" - Elly giving Karen a little tug on her sleeve.

"We can try and work it in. Lee this is Elly Williams."

"Pleased to meet you. I hope I'm not imposing on your family."

"Carol said to make you feel comfortable No one thinks you're imposing."

"Lee when Carol, Ruth, and my Mom can get everyone together as a family, it is the best time for them. I saw you at the New Harmony fair and at a place called the Dirt Track."

"Yeah the Dirt Track is quite a place."

"Why don't we go in."

Madison and Lizzie brought in biscuits, Madison with a small trace of flour on her nose. Everything was ready and Carol assigned people places. Lizzie said a prayer and dinner began.

"It hasn't been like this in a while, not since the kids have all grown. What were you watching Junior?"

"NASCAR but the race is out west, it was just highlights until start time."

"It sounds like the Covid season."

"Yep dern Chinese ruined us. Democrats will ruin things now. Folks just never let Trump be, then all the voter fraud."

"OK everyone who voted Fall 2020 hold up your hand" - Lizzie held up her hand.

"OK that's unanimous, everyone down hands. I appreciate seeing all you young folks voting. Now everyone who voted for Trump hold up your hand. Seems Junior you're the only one, but you go on about the voter fraud."

"Covid-19 disrupted everything. We weren't sure about coming back to school. We're getting back to normal."

"Out here we are isolated, and I prefer staying home anyway. For someone like me it wasn't such a change. As soon as we got everyone tested our company was able to get back to normal. We had very few positives in Franklin."

"Hopefully vaccines will get us back to normal. At least people are still eating if you can get the food distributed to them. What were they discussing today at church, Ruth? I heard something about a schism."

"Not in our local church, but it is tearing us apart."

"What's tearing us apart?"

"The Bible! folks can't take simple plain biblical truth and abide by it. Everyone has got to be so politically correct. I don't know why we need to split for a bunch of weirdos and queers."

"Junior, but God created weirdos and queers. Your Bible also says not to eat shellfish, and you were chowing down on that Cajun crawdad feed the relatives on the Gulf put on."

"But now there's the New Testament and the New Covenant. Bible must have not known about that crawdad boil they put on. Man, those boys know how to cook some good eat'n."

"Lizzie has a good point. Junior, the Bible has not got one word about LGBTQ that Jesus said."

“That doesn’t seem to slow them down Ruth. Some of the traditionalists, that would be Junior’s camp, acknowledge some people are born gay. But they want to deny them any part in God’s grace. Much like a company where women are employees who make coffee but do not have any power over decisions. Ruth knows more people in the larger church.”

“I have gone to the meetings and there is so much bitterness, it makes you heartsick. It is a byproduct of the partisanship and separate realities in our political culture. It has spilled over into the church. Many folks have family members who are part of the LBGTQ community. They often see things from a different point of view. The traditionalists are following some pied piper and my heart tells me it is not the voice of God. We used to be about working hard, doing good, and reaching out in love. I still pray not much else I can do.”

“Uncle Lance was gay. He was quiet about it; he never came home always lived in Europe.”

“Now they are not quiet about it; they are proud, flaunting their weirdness, it doesn’t seem right.”

“Junior it puts me off too sometimes. I bet our younger folk here don’t see why we’re having a fuss.”

“My shift supervisor at the hospital is married to another woman, and one of my best friends at work who is an RN is gay. I’ve met his partner, but they haven’t gotten married yet. “

“There is a LBGTQ group, no one wants to throw them off campus. We just don’t think it should matter to people. What do think Lee?”

“Our drummer is gay, and several on our set up crew would be part of an LBGTQ identity. We all think people should be treated equally. My folks don’t go to church, but it sounds like another era from some time in the past.”

“Madison and I have suggested readings for our class. There was a woman who died at 37 Rachel Held Evans; she was considered a woman pushing for change in Christianity. She was making strides in church communities for more justice. I thought about the fights going on after writing my paper. Jesus said to seek God, surely seeking truth must go hand in hand with that commandment to first seek God. The second commandment was to love others. How can anyone obey that commandment without loving all of God’s creation?”

“Karen that is very thoughtful; I understand Junior. A same sex wedding still seems wrong to us who grew up in a traditional world. Lizzie and I have come to see it from other perspectives.”

“It seems everyone should accept people. All our world should be loved. Letting it burn up seems to be defying God. Denying climate change is holding up a middle finger with a big FU to God’s face.”

“Carol, I agree with everything you said, but I don’t think I can carry that last part back to my conference meetings. I might like to. Our churches should welcome everyone and be saving our planet’s climate. “

“I have told Ruth we need a lot less preaching and bible thumping and far more connecting with prayers and singing. Covid was really hard on me. I love to sing and hug people. Now Junior is not big on people hugging other than me. He likes hugging me, and my singing, too.”

“Yes Lizzie, I loved your singing since the day I first heard you back home.”

“Karen you should come back this summer and stay with me. You could have these theological debates with Ruth and Lizzie on a regular basis.”

“Karen why not come back this summer. I’ll bring over a couple horses and you can go for a ride.”

“Ruth don’t be using Karen as a backdoor. I swear you are like those scam emails Karen’s Dad warned us about.”

"I think coming back does sound good. I would come horses or no horses. I want Carol to find me a blessing not a burden. "

"Your visit has truly been a blessing. I love these meals especially on Sunday after church."

"Thank you for having me over these biscuits are so fluffy. Nothing beats chicken gravy; you cook green beans just like my mother does. Madison said the food was great here, thank you."

"Glad you came, you do seem to enjoy the biscuits. What does your summer look like Lee? I heard you tell your bandmates you weren't going to pick peas or whatever they said you had done for us when working here."

"I thought I might arrange some solo gigs locally. I am ready to rest a little."

"Did you bring your guitar. Maybe you could set up on the porch later. I would like to hear Karen sing with you. Elly has an excellent voice. It would be fun after the food settles; the pie should be cooled by then. Karen why don't you pass around cookies, see if anyone wants more coffee or tea. We could open a bottle of wine, if the partiers are recovered from last night."

"I'm getting cookies. I sang and Lee played we didn't have much time to drink. It was fun. "

"Ms. Parker, Karen does sing well I'm afraid everyone called her Emmy Lou all night. Madison you could show people your sketches, they are excellent."

"I'll run up and get them."

"Do you play an instrument Elly?"

"Guitar and mandolin."

"Oh, mandolin now we can be off into bluegrass."

"I know some old classics; they can be fun."

Karen had refilled coffee and tea then placed cookies on the table. "Carol loaned me her 70's retro-look last night. I think it was the leather jacket with fringe that got them started on the Emmy Lou thing. Madison you stand where I sat, use the back of the chair. Everyone should be able to see the sketches that way. I'll start clearing up the table."

"Those are wonderful, but I'll help Karen. You are not leaving until tomorrow. I will look through them tonight."

-

"Thank you for pulling all this together; Madison and I were in over our heads."

"It brings joy to sit around a family table, do you really want to come back this summer?"

"I do, would it be all right with you?"

"I would enjoy it, but you will miss the yacht."

"That would be an added bonus. I'm thinking there's a strong possibility Madison will tag along. Would it be OK?"

"Yes, plenty of room. If she needs a summer job, we can find one for her at the zoo or somewhere working for Ruth or Lizzie. Maybe do sketches for the visitors she is good and works quickly. I know not every sophomore in college has an Audi sports car to drive. If she needs to earn money, we always need a good young worker. "

"I think she was hoping to work at the park district where she grew up. She missed one summer because of the Covid-19 pandemic. You may be correct. You will have two incompetent young women back this summer."

"I've seen potential, I can fix the incompetence. We've put everything away. Let's do the dishes; I always wash Grandma Parker's dishes by hand. I know this is odd, it gives me a feeling of peace and serenity."

-

"Madison, I bet they enjoyed your sketches."

"You've got everything cleaned up. I am sorry I made such a mess of things, but it turned out great. I know much more about biscuits now. Elly asked if you would still offer wine? They've set up for the porch concert. Elly says you have some excellent wines."

"Everything is done for now. I will pull out a couple of bottles. I am looking forward to this."

-

"Thank you again Aunt Carol, I or I and Madison will try to be good help around here."

"Sometimes you've just called me Carol not Aunt Carol. Stay with Carol lets be good friends. "

"OK we will be."

"I better open a couple bottles of wine, then we can enjoy this special day. Tell Junior I have beer in the fridge on the back porch. I keep it for workers on a break."

"Hey Emmy Lou, set those wines on the table over there. Let's get a song in first. We're going to do Dolly's 'I Will Always Love You' like we did last night but now with Lizzie and Elly singing. They are the best vocal duet I

have ever heard. OK Ms. Parker sit down and enjoy; these folks can flat out sing. Madison what are you doing? “

“I’m getting the video camera; this project is going to be so good I won’t have to go to another class this year.”

Chapter 41

Painful and costly leads to wisdom and joy – 1981 Carol, Mark, Sean Finn

I went home with a waitress the way I always do
How was I to know she was with the Russians, too?
Send lawyers, guns, and money
Send lawyers, guns, and money –
Warren Zevon – Lawyers Guns and Money
Warren Zevon Excitable Boy



Outdoor seating—Nancy Davis

Cartoon Mafia

Two young looking people approached me on the bench rather cautiously. I suppose they had wild imaginations of paranoia over this fraud of theirs.

“I am Mrs. Stephen Capuano, but I didn’t change my name. I am Carol Parker. Are you two the ones I am meeting here?”

They acknowledged they were.

“I brought my neighbor from back home. It is a long drive. I was emotional and didn’t trust myself alone. We are to work out an agreement. Let us go

sit down where we can discuss it. Mark has ordered coffees for us. Let's go work this out."

"Could I have hot chocolate?" -the soft innocence in her voice brought me a feeling of compassion.

"Yes, when we sit down. I will order you a hot chocolate."

The boyfriend looked a little perturbed, but he went along.

"This is Mark he lives on the neighboring farm to mine. He was kind enough to drive me out here. Mark the young lady would prefer a hot chocolate would you get her one."

"Where's Capuano?" -the boyfriend trying to capture a tough serious attitude.

"Stephen has signed complete authority to me. Whatever I agree to will be the deal. You may assume he and I are making some adjustments to our previous marriage arrangements. We are negotiating a legal agreement. I have documents prepared and we will agree on terms. I will write the terms in and then you will sign. Thank you, Mark," - Mark had returned with hot chocolate and sat down.

His presence seemed to still some of the boyfriend's aggressiveness. He began forcefully to make his demands "Your husband left this teenager with a baby."

"You mean she is pregnant there is no baby."

"We have the positive report from the clinic here, she will have Capuano's baby"-as he produced a document with the pregnancy test.

"Is that the original or a copy?"

"It's a copy I'm not stupid."

"Good then I can keep it. Here is a biography on each of you. You are Reginald Birch Schoenfeld age 22 graduated in the class of 1976 from Stateline High School. Currently a junior in rank at the university. Here is your most current address and others in your past. You are Tara Rose Withers age 17 currently enrolled in Stateline High School; my note says graduation this Spring is unlikely."

They stared, stilled by being identified so completely.

"I have a copy of a document as well"- Carol placed it on the table.

"The baby, currently fetus, is not Stephen Capuano's. Stephen had a vasectomy many years ago. It is documented in the attached records. This week's test proves he is unable to impregnate a woman or young lady. This also demonstrates this is completely an extortion plot upon your part. This may seem unfair, but Stephen is not culpable for any crime. You both have extensive criminal liability for a number of felonies. My brother and father are both very good lawyers. Even though you could cause Stephen Capuano embarrassment and damage his career. He would survive and you two would be in jail. Reginald would likely get twenty to thirty years. Because of your age you would undoubtedly get a lesser sentence. You would stand a fair chance of convincing a jury Reginald here coerced you into his scheme. I suspect he caused your pregnancy. "

Carol paused observed the paleness of Tara Rose and somewhat confounded look on Reggie boy.

"We all can walk away from this without harm and with a benefit to you. I have contracts that are agreements on each of our parts to not reveal any aspect of the rather unscrupulous behavior by all of you. These are legal and binding with enforcement provisions if either party breaks the agreement. You seem to have a very exaggerated opinion of Stephen Capuano's wealth. We, or should I say I, will pay each of you a sum of money for signing and recording our agreement. You get money, we have a legal binding contract that is sealed. No one knows any of this, and we are all agreeing not to reveal anything. Therefore, we all go about a normal life. You do not go to jail; Stephen continues life with adjustments to our

marriage. People who behave foolishly rarely have much wealth; this is certainly true with Stephen."

Carol took the legal packets out of a briefcase. It was Mark's he had thrown it in the trunk in his hurried packing. Carol saw it and realized it looked more professional than her shoulder tote.

"He is an author. He has another book coming out surely he is making bucks."

"Stephen Capuano has a first wife. I discovered this after our marriage. She has kept the book money for the most part. If Stephen was wealthy would he still be driving that ugly little Fiat?"

Reginald was slowly realizing his plan had flaws and potential jail time was looming.

"What are you offering us?"

"I would give you a thousand dollars and Tara Rose fifteen hundred."

"No! It is nothing. No, we will cause all kinds of stink."

"What would you pay to avoid thirty years in a state prison with all those real tough criminals? Because you are both foolish and Tara Rose is so young. I will double my offer. I will cut a cashier's check to you for two thousand and Tara for twenty-five hundred. Tara will undoubtedly seek an abortion. I have a card for the local planned parenthood office, they can give you good advice. It seems a nice chunk of change. No one believes jail is an attractive proposition."

"OK, we will not be in any trouble. All we do is move on and say nothing."

"Exactly, these will be sealed documents. None of us will be in any trouble and I will then deal with Stephen. He is not free of my retribution. You go to the law office here in town tomorrow afternoon. Mr. Simmons will have packets for you with a cashier's check in each of your names. It may be

deposited at any bank. You sign the releases and the money is yours. Everyone moves on a little wiser I believe."

"I'll sign; two-thousand is a nice stereo. The music should be sweet."

"I didn't think it would be so scary. I was just having fun. Stephen is great in the sack or anywhere with a spare moment. He knows how to touch a woman. I will take that planned parenthood card; I should talk to them."

Carol put the signed agreements back in the briefcase.

"Here is a card to the law office for each of you. You come after two in the afternoon the checks will be there. Here is the local Planned Parenthood address and a card from the farm."

"Your name and address are on the back?"

"You may want to talk sometime; you can write if you do."

"Thank you, Carol Parker of Parker Produce and Fruit."

Mark drove back to the law office. They met with Mr. Finn in the conference room.

"How did it go?"

"They signed dated and initialed. We now owe Reggie two-thousand and Tara Rose twenty-five hundred. I encouraged her to get an abortion."

"It is worth the cost in the long run. It will all be over soon. Now, go have some fun."

"We are meeting Stephen for dinner. I will bring him up to date and talk about a divorce agreement. Mark has convinced me we should stop at Antietam and Gettysburg on the way home. He wants to spend a day at each one. I think that is fun. How was Monticello?"

"Fascinating house, 'all men are created equal' and all those slaves. Maybe, if there were presidential pensions in his time he would have freed more of his slaves. I also love history; Mark did she tell you the good news?"

"Sorry I was so wrapped up about today. He got back late, and I forgot. Mr. Finn says there is good news with the appeal."

"Lawrence told me as I left; the appellate court dismissed the prosecutor's objections. The ruling called them merit-less and encouraged them to have relevant and substantive arguments in the presentation of the case. A real slap in the face for your tormentors. Did you learn anything in DC?"

"My friend has kept in contact with my prospects. He says if I am cleared, I will be offered a position as an Asian specialist."

"Do you speak Chinese?"

"A little, also some Japanese."

"Good luck then, Lawrence outlined your case a real miscarriage of justice. Carol a hell of week but it is resolving."

"Thank you, Sean, unfortunately we will meet again."

"At least once. Mark, keep her calm at dinner. I am afraid my wife would throw bottles and pull a knife."

"Mark was fantastic at the meeting. He never said a word, but he kept a lid on them by being there. I cried the whole month of December, but now is the time to chart new courses."

"I may run down to Appomattox Courthouse in the morning. Carol said you did when you got here."

"It is not far, well worth a visit."

"You men are having much entertainment at my expense, I believe."

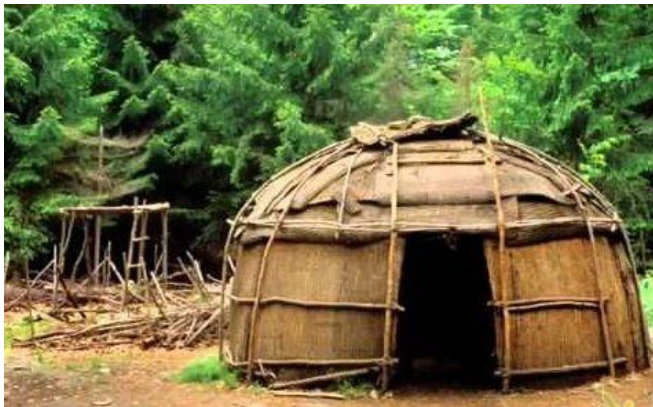
“A sad tale but true, it is a lawyer’s lot and our living.”

A parting handshake and we left the law office. Mark never complained when I said we would have dinner with Stephen tonight. He had never met Stephen maybe he was curious. I doubt he thought this a great idea. He was caring, patient, kind, and here to protect me.

Chapter 42

1976 Summer tries to hang on – Carol and JB

You and I travel to the beat of a diff'rent drum
Oh, can't you tell by the way I run
Yes, and I ain't sayin' you ain't pretty
All I'm sayin's I'm not ready for any person
Place or thing to try and pull the reins in on me –
Michael Nesmith – The Beat of a Different Drummer
The Stone Ponies Evergreen



Pottawatomie dwelling -- Michael Nassaney

Scars Remain

“Lucky for this late Indian Summer or we couldn’t possibly be up here for a swim. I enjoy laying here watching clouds after.”

“Yes, JB it does feel good. I’m not going to think about how unusual it is.”

It felt so good, but summer was ending. In fact, this was an unusual Fall where summer had lingered, weather patterns casting a defense against the coming winter blasts. JB had said we were lucky for a late occurrence of Indian Summer. Is that a racist phrase? Carol had a curiosity for the etymology of the strange phrases people used. Sometimes usage had become so common the racist underpinning was long past being recognized by the speaker. It was just something people said. The Tribune had long run a cartoon Injun Summer. It was so endearing. It had become an expected mark of the passage of time. It wasn’t really Fall until the cartoon was printed. It now was challenged as insensitive. Was the whole use of the term Indian Summer racist? Carol couldn’t help but wonder. The last fleeting moment one not guaranteed, one possibly not even hoped for. A moment simply to luxuriate in while you were in it.

“JB yes it always ends or becomes, a moment never stays the same.”

“You’ve gone all dreamy and far off again haven’t you.”

“Dreams are the first step before something becomes real. We should not put down dreams, but we can’t live in them.”

“Honestly I do not like dreams. I like it best when I pass out and then wake up.”

“I have healed a few wounds on our swims. I did feel a hippie chick maybe owed you. Isn’t that what you said when you were over bleeding and dying; the draft dodgers were banging those free love hippie chicks?”

“Maybe when we cleaned up the language.”

“Do you feel more healed now?”

“Working here, seeing where I was headed, talking things out with you, and our swims I’ve healed. My Dad said scars remind us of our mistakes, healed but not gone. I will keep a few scars.”

"We've had a summer we both needed. I needed and enjoyed these Sunday afternoon swims especially the after sessions. You are likely headed to husband material, but not with me. I don't love you as a wife would a husband. I don't feel a bond like Eldon and Grace must have had. The lust part has been exceptional, but I don't think we want to see each other at the kitchen table every morning for a lifetime. How do you feel?"

"Right now, I feel real good. I've never had a gir...woman make me feel as good as you have. I know we're are not alike. At the high school reunion when Cathy took you over to the bookworm crowd you instantly fit in that's not my crowd."

"You've learned to make this woman feel as good as she's ever felt. Odd how during the Bi-centennial Summer two people have together both lost old hurts. A reset summer, a renewal summer, we've had a very good summer on the farm. Late Sunday afternoons will always spark a different memory now, a good one."

"Sunday afternoons still happen in winter."

"It is time to wrap up a good memory and move on. The farm is looking up, your life seems more fun, it is best not to unravel it. Now that people begin to decide you're not a time bomb; you can find a more normal relationship. One that involves going to movies, hanging at parties with gearheads, picnics, going to demo derbies and tractor pulls at county fairs. Stuff I hear some of the kids who work here talk about. Stuff I do not want to do, maybe a picnic here at the pond. Did you go to a movie this year?"

"No, I wouldn't by myself."

"I wouldn't either. If you had a girlfriend to take what would you have wanted to see?"

"Rocky and Clint Eastwood had another Dirty Harry movie and a western Josey Wales."

"My choices would have been A Star is Born, All the Presidents Men, and Taxi Driver."

"Now that people are not afraid you are about to beat someone to a pulp; you will find a girlfriend who would love to do all the things you enjoy. You are a rather good-looking guy when I see you all sober and cleaned up. Don't let that go to your head."

"I've found a tall skinny gal can be fun, if she stops talking about politics and philosophy. Don't let that go to your head."

"I think we could have one last round of therapy sessions. I bet I could motivate you."

"You can motivate me. Who knows maybe next summer you will want to start therapy sessions again? "

"Oh, JB we will always have Paris."

"What?"

"Forget it - we have more urgent matters, right here."

Chapter 43

Early adapters 1998 – Young Tom Parker, Carol, Shiloh, Ruth, JB, Lizzie, and Junior --

I live in the heart of the city,
ain't no coffee shops around
I heard them Google-men drink so much coffee,
I declare, I think they might drown
Ry Cooder – Gentrification
Ry Cooder -- The Prodigal Son



Google screen

It Will Change the World

"You must suffer from boredom here in the no man's land of Franklin"

"No Aunt Carol I enjoy being here, but it is a real pain in the butt to get here. Fly into Chicago then puddle jump down to rent a car. I get to drive past mile after mile of scenic cornfields, but once I'm here it's great."

"Some of those fields have soybeans to relieve the monotony."

"TMI I do not want to break my level of ignorance about all things yokel."

"What's TMI?"

"Too Much Information, JB, people usually use it when someone starts into revealing personal intimate details. I am here to help the business like any other business. I do not need to know anything about apples, strawberries, canning jellies and jams, or freezing sweet corn and green beans. If I know too much, I may accidentally reveal it and I will lose my image as a techno nerd. I might end up being accused of being a hick."

"No one ever accuses us of being a hick do they JB?"

"Of course, not Junior, we got hick printed in big letters across our foreheads."

"I didn't mean to insult anyone."

"Oh, we're not insulted we got deep hillbilly roots and dern proud of it."

"Junior has even got that Tennessee thing going. They don't celebrate Martin Luther King's Birthday; they celebrate Robert E. Lee's birthday. Junior does know many fine bourbon and whiskey makers of small batches. We're offering them out at the Homestead."

"My kin think it only fair, King fought for his folk and Lee fought for ours."

"Junior, I wish you were around when Mark Greene was working on that dissertation for his PhD. I am sure you would have been a case study."

"I remember Dad complaining about how unfairly Greene was being treated. He got that straightened out, where is Mark now?"

"He's in Asia. He worked in Vietnam and Southeast Asia for the foreign service after his charges were cleared. He is now assigned to our embassy in Beijing."

"I never wanted to be a lawyer. I know Dad and Grandfather thought it would have been a good choice for me. I do respect what they do. Sometimes lawyers really make a difference in lives."

"Your nerd skills have made a difference for Parker's."

"I am here because of our incorporation. This is our annual meeting of Parker Produce and Fruit. Also, I am going to get our website set for online payments."

"We take credit cards, now?"

"We do Ruth, but this is better we will not have any responsibility for holding credit card information. It will deposit directly into our bank accounts. You even still take checks which no one would believe in New York or California."

"We're careful about it."

"I've been working with a company called Confinity; there are big changes coming. We need to be prepared. The company has mergers pending, but our core will still be compatible. I'll get that done while I'm here."

"Carol says you are married now Tom. You didn't mention it last year."

"My wife is careful about the publicity. We've been married a couple of years rather quietly. She has to be gone and I am away. We get together when we can and that is good for both of us."

"Your wife is an actress?"

"Yes, she's had several smaller parts. This new project may be a break for her. She still makes good money from that AOL commercial. We met because of her being in it. Code nerds don't meet actresses too often."

"Dinner should be ready after we conclude the meeting."

"Let's get on to the business, if it is holding up dinner. I've eaten in so many places, but I look forward to our meals here all year. Carol if you can call us to order."

"The annual meeting of Parker Produce and Fruit is called to order. All shareholders are present, Carol Parker, Tom Parker, Ruth and JB Donaldson, Lizzie and Junior Williams. You've all seen the financial reports. We weathered many challenges over the years, but we are steadily gaining revenues. You were also given minutes of our last meeting. What would you like to discuss?"

"Ruth"

"Our orders continue to increase. We have been able to add orchards on the new acquired homestead and other produce. It has given us adequate production areas under our control for now. We do not have to rely on

other producers. The online sales have greatly increased. We are getting better at the shipping and handling process. I never expected much from it when Tom got us on the web, didn't you call it the web?"

"Probably"

"Anyway, if our orders continue to rise our facilities in Franklin are going to be inadequate. We need to consider expansion. I've been thinking and done some looking around. We should consider a facility other than in Franklin. Most of our workers don't live in Franklin now. There are several buildings either closed manufacturing or others not being used in nearby communities. I think we need to research and be prepared to choose next year."

"Thank you, Ruth that is probably necessary. It will require a reinvestment in buildings and equipment. We will be unprofitable for a year or two. Our full-time employees get retirement and bonuses based on profit sharing we will have to involve them in this decision. Tom are you sure this whole online thing is not going to go poof like our farm did in your game?"

"It didn't go poof it was crushed by the giant foot of a monster. People loved that scene in our game you find screen grabs all over the Internet. No, we are just beginning; the Internet will change everything especially for businesses. Some of these Internet startups are impractical and will fail. The Internet and the businesses who adapt to it are going to grow."

"OK sounds like we will need to present proposals next year and be prepared to make a decision. What are your thoughts, Lizzie?"

"Same as Ruth we need bigger places. There are many more choices outside of Franklin. We should look; we could find buildings like we did in Franklin that already have some of what we need. I must say I've been using email and getting on the Internet. Tom's right it is just getting started; it changes all the time."

"Thank you, we need to put in a year exploring options and then we can make a solid decision next year. Is there anything else?"

"No. meeting closed, let's eat. Shiloh looks ready."

"Yes, time to eat. Everything's ready someone needs to make the gravy that's an adult's job."

"Thank you, Shiloh where are all the other nonadults?"

"Upstairs Tom put in a new video card in our computer it is simply amazing."

"We'll be ready soon. All the kids are eating in the kitchen you want to join us in the dining room with the adults your being almost 18 now."

"Please do Shiloh I'd love to talk with you. This is your last year, you have an aptitude for new technologies."

"Turning him away from jock to tech nerd, Tom?"

"Shiloh may be good at football, but he's not a jock in the stereotypical sense."

"I will sit in the dining room, Mom."

"Shiloh, go roundup everyone and get them in the dining room."

"Everyone hold hands. Ruth will lead us in prayer then the kids can move in the kitchen."

"Lord God, you have blessed this house and all of us here. We ask your strength flow throughout all our efforts that we in our work glorify your name. Guide us as we grow. May our efforts benefit all the people who work with us and those who enjoy the fruits of your good earth. Be with Della at school. Amen. Now Lizzie and I are getting you kids set up in the kitchen. "

"Shiloh help me get things on the table here."

"Mom you want me to pour water and tea?"

"Yes, thank you"

Ruth and Lizzie returned, "The kids are happy, everything looks great. We can sit for a while. Brent and Jimmy are making sure no one picks on Elly since she is the youngest."

"Junior I fixed those carrots with the recipe Tilly gave me. She said you loved it. "

"I think I only ate them to be polite at first, but they've grown on me. So how is the team looking this year?"

"We will have a good season, how far we will go I don't know. Our line is very good, I think we will go as far as they carry us."

"What position do you play?"

"I am a tight end on offense and a defensive end on defense, Tom."

"The other teams don't run around his side."

"Thank you Junior, sometimes they do."

"Shiloh was all conference at both positions last year."

"I was only honorable mention at tight end, JB"

"You go to the games then."

"Yes, we all have kids in school, and it is fun. At home games we make up a large Franklin contingent."

"After school this Spring, I could probably find an internship for Shiloh. It would be a good experience in the tech field. Would you like that?"

"I would; I want to do something in IT. I have become fascinated with computers and software."

"Yes, Tom ever since the Christmas you came here when Shiloh was just a little snookins and called you Uncle Tom."

"Mom"

"You are not little now how tall are you?"

"I'm 6' 2", I'm probably done growing, I'll not make 6' 3"."

"I'll keep emailing you; I'm sure I can find a good fit for you."

"Max Greene will miss your help with the square bales."

"JB, it is mostly big round bales now. I am sure Brent and Jim can handle it. Working out on the coast would be a big change, but I'd like to try it, thank you Tom."

"What about this millennial thing? Is the whole country going to shut down? Lizzie and I have friends and relatives preparing for the apocalypse."

"Junior we've always got friends and relatives preparing for the apocalypse. We seem to not have a problem at our facilities, everyone has assured Ruth and I not to worry."

"I call it the miloonium, it is being blown way out of proportion. It is not going to be like Mad Max. I've checked operations at the office and at both facilities in Franklin. I do not think it will affect us. Someone may have to get a new clock, or they will be late for work. Nothing more serious than that."

"Now that Monica-gate is over I guess the news needed something to sell papers."

"JB, the newspapers have bigger problems facing them. The privatization interests took over government at just the wrong time as far as tech is concerned. We need a tax-based system to fund security protocols and insuring content providers get fair compensation. This idea that it should all be free will haunt us for decades. Government created the Internet it needs to be more involved. My libertarian minded colleagues and the total lack of competence in our Congress will ensure that it will not happen. But Parker Produce and Fruit can use it effectively and benefit from it. You can stop taking checks; people will be able pay directly from their bank accounts. Government ought to be taxing to install better communications everywhere, what we are paying out here for almost nothing is ridiculous. Don't give anything away for free or use free software."

One by one the Williams children appeared. "Brenda you can take all the kids back upstairs."

Brent and Jim appeared ready to head back to conquering civilizations or monsters or whatever they had been doing.

"Brent and Jim, you two start cleaning up the kitchen."

"Oh Mom, the other kids got to go play."

"Brenda is in charge of the kids. You get back in the kitchen and get going. Staring at those TV screens for so long must cause brain damage anyway."

"They're monitors Mom."

"Go, now!"

"I bet other Moms around here aren't so bossy."

"We mind are own business in this household, and I know the Donaldson and the Williams households are the same. Now get to work."

"OK"

"Shiloh, I think your mother is a real authoritarian, she runs a tight ship."

"You should work for Ruth or Lizzie down at the plants, they rule with iron fists."

"You seem to have turned out rather well. I think you should be thankful for us; we must be tougher than any football coach."

"I am grateful to all of you, if I am going to be honest. I couldn't have had a better home to grow up in."

"Ruth and I were talking the other day how fortunate we have been to have such great kids. I think Lizzie and Junior would agree. We are a very fortunate family."

"Carol do you keep some of that bourbon you are importing. I didn't get a shot back on that long ago Christmas. I think a toast in honor of Grandpa Tom would be appropriate. As I've been told none of us would be here if he hadn't decided to keep the farm."

"Shiloh clear the table while I get ready for a toast."

"I do and you are right, he could have just sold out. We have built many lives here because he didn't. I talked with Mom on Sunday she's enjoying her Virgin Island escape. She really relaxed here for a couple years, but her friends who were also widows talked her into buying a condo in the Virgin Islands. It was her old bridge club. They are where it is warm and can play bridge. I don't think they ever go to a beach or do any tropical island stuff. Here is a bottle of bourbon and shot glasses. I opened a bottle of wine here are glasses. Shiloh you may join us in the toast, but don't tell the coach. I think we should remember all the people who have worked very hard to make this a productive farm. Every one of us here can be thankful we have Parker Farms. It is not just Eldon or Tom, but many many hands have worked to allow us this time. I am filled with gratitude for all of them."

“Carol, I’m going to check on Brent and Jim, they can be marvels or slackers sometimes.”

“I’m going upstairs it is far too quiet up there.”

“Ruth and I have the kitchen covered. Lizzie is going upstairs. You gentlemen are on your own. I think the porch would still be nice, even though it is getting dark.”

“Tom, I wanted to ask you. I’ve heard on this Internet thing you can find people like old friends. “

“Sometimes JB, were you wanting to get in touch with someone?”

“I had a friend in Vietnam, I just wondered what became of him?”

“If we search for his name, we might find him. I’d rather do it at the office. Carol’s dial up is enough to kill me. I’ll be there all day tomorrow and most of the night. Come by after work we’ll see if we can find him. What’s his name?”

“Jerome Lemuel Robinson he was recovering from his injuries when I saw him last in California just before I came back home.”

“With a full name we may find a reference. I started using this new search engine called Google.”

“I don’t understand anything about your computer voodoo, but I do wonder sometimes about Jerome.”

-

“JB, good you came over.”

“Let’s just plug his name in see what we get.”

"Not such an uncommon name several links. You said he was from Los Angeles?"

"He was and he was in California when I last saw him."

"Here this looks useful, it is a school website. Coach Robinson has had a long career here. Here is a link to a bio. It says Coach Robinson was in Vietnam. Here's a photo and it gives his unit. Come look at this."

"That's Jerome's photo and our unit, a successful basketball coach. "

"He started at this school in 1980; he's been the coach almost twenty years. His teams have a good record."

"Is that his photo now?"

"It says championship game 1992, six or seven years ago I don't see the date just the year."

"We wouldn't be alive without each other. A good life for both of us."

"I've gone out here to the faculty directory, Mr. Robinson has an email would you want me to email him?"

"I don't have an email. I couldn't respond. He's a successful city coach and I'm a mechanic here. I don't suppose we have much to say now. It is real good to see he's done well, makes it seem both of us were worth saving. Thank you, Tom. Ruth appreciates the changes you've been helping with. She says this homestead purchase is going to prove out for the company. She doesn't understand how the Internet thing will develop, but she is excited to see what it can do."

"OK good night JB."

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‘Dear Mr. Robinson, My name is Tom Parker. I am a technology person, but also have an interest in our family farm. I am back improving our online presence at Parker Produce and Fruit. One of our shareholders is Jamison Brenton Donaldson better known as JB. His wife Ruth manages our freezing operation for fruit and vegetables. JB is a diesel mechanic. He helped get Parker Produce and Fruit going in 1975. JB doesn’t do the Internet or email, but he asked if I could learn how your life had gone. He was very pleased to see you are doing well. He and Ruth live a good country life with three children, their oldest is in college now. I didn’t grow up here on the farm, but I have heard until he met Ruth JB’s life was erratic. Now he has been in church every Sunday since before he was married. He is a fine father and very well liked. I just thought you might be curious about what became of him like he was of you. Wishing you the best in life and coaching.

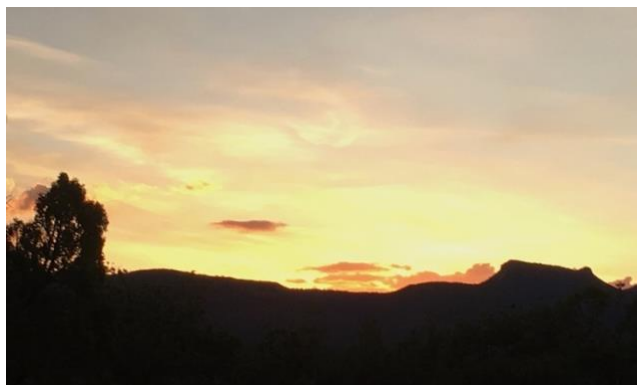
Tom Parker ‘

Chapter 44

Carol and Karen continue to search and listen to life. Summer has seen the return of Karen and niece gentle saddle horses for rides to the lake or Zoo.

Before the winter fire,
We'll still be dreaming.
I do not count the time
Who knows where the time goes?
Who knows where the time goes?

Sandy Denny — Who Knows Where the Time Goes
Judy Collins Who Know Where the Time Goes



Colorful skies – Lynne Jensen

Helen Loomis and Bill Forrester

"I've come to know you friend. What are you pondering, it must be a dramatic life decision the way your nose is wrinkled in thought?"

"Carol, I'm glad we take these moments at the end of the afternoon. A later than teatime pause, and better than tea, we have wine."

"When I was vagabonding, we thought Boone's Farm Apple Wine was so great. Now the wine is better, but at that time I would have chosen the Boone's Farm."

"Boone's Farm must have given you headaches, we are responsible sophisticated drinkers."

"Sophisticated? Social drinking is promoted more than necessary and has become a little too common. People do downplay the harm of alcohol and exaggerate its benefits. All aspects of life are a delicate balance. We wobble between licentiousness and puritanical prohibitions. I enjoy listening to you as we watch sunsets."

"I have been thinking about priorities, responsibilities, and purpose."

"Karen fretting over growing up, life looming around the corner ready to pounce. No one orders you to walk around the corner."

"I've had a great summer, but school starts soon. I'm thinking, why am I in school, what should I accomplish in life? Madison sees school as a path to earning a living. Skills to acquire that will reward her, help her survive life. What am I doing there besides doing what people expect?"

"You seem to enjoy school. You take your courses seriously; college would seem to be a good use of your time."

“It may be. Am I just getting a degree a resume place holder? Is there a purpose? Is a degree a must see on the paper trail of my life? Everything needs to change, and I see no path to change it.”

“None of us individually feel we are powerful, but we can be allies in change. People may vote once but often pay no attention to local elections. People seem to lose concentration, too many of us have the attention span of a one-year-old.”

“Carol you came here created a business, many people have lives here because of you. The people I’ve met this summer love living out here in the country. Many have said without Parker Produce it wouldn’t be possible for them to live here. “

“I’ve worked hard; I’ve been lucky. When we took risks, we didn’t have a drought or other disastrous event immediately. Once we digested the risk of loans and learning new skills; we were in position to weather the storms. I work with great people.”

“You made it on your own, not on your privilege.”

“I had privilege. My family had this farm, my father decided to buyout the other two thirds. As much as I had to make a go of it on my own, as a woman in the male farm world, I was a Parker. My family had been farming here for over one hundred years. Privilege doesn’t make it an easy road, but it gives someone a path other people don’t have. “

“I have been thinking about privilege as I went to college and during my Covid isolation. How did you spend Covid isolation?”

“My friend Shelly called, and she drove here. There hadn’t been any cases here at the time. Chicago and other urban places were really set to become hot spots. We had a nice spring together. As soon as tests became available, we insisted every employee get tested including me. There were many problems in Midwest meat processing plants. We offered tests for the community. We only had a few cases here in Franklin or at our other location in New Harmony. “

"I spent Covid isolation on Dad's yacht. The college closed Madison went home to her family. Her mother lost her job; her father worked on limited hours. Madison began a delivery business to help bring in more income. Dad wasn't a jerk about it; he tried to take care of his crew. The Captain brought his spouse who is one of the funniest men I have ever been around. The three other crew brought their families two of them have kids. Dad's current girlfriend came along. Everyone was tested. Wealth gets a test even when they are limited. We were very careful when docking and getting fresh produce. The families loved it. I spent a great deal of time playing with the kids and helping with schoolwork. Yes, there is Internet on the yacht. Madison went to work hustling food and groceries while exposing herself to Covid. I went on a Covid-free cruise. We had just gotten back; I was hanging in Dad's Condo thinking about privilege when all the demonstrations for social justice occurred. "

"When did you or Madison choose to be born to your parents?"

"I know it's not like we choose."

"It is what we choose after we become aware, we have choices. It is good to be serious, but don't take on blame for what others chose. We all benefit from acts that deprived others. Native Americans once roamed over these lands. Creating villages and cultures, but not the landowning culture that we live in. We in the North did not have slaves, but we didn't care enough to insist on enforcing laws after the Civil War. Majority Americans didn't care enough about people of other races to demand fairness or an end to discrimination. We all share in benefits from the deprivation of others. Our responsibility is to share equally in working towards a better future. I have little sympathy for the tradition of poverty and begging like a Buddhist. I believe in practical ways to improve lives not some transference of karma points."

"The security guard in Seattle sent me back up to learn something. I did; I had no idea how violent we had been in America. Massacres cheered on by White people who controlled everything including the history books. He was retired Air Force and was called Sarge. I learned so much from the

books he recommended. He said people in my position who were informed could do more, than being another body in the street protests."

"I never loved history like my sons or Mark Greene did, but when I get interested in a topic, I do inform myself. Mark Greene gave me an eye-opening recounting of Reconstruction years ago. I guided both Shiloh and Brent to the topic in high school history. It is such a depressing history; I have trouble learning about it. I keep throwing the book down."

"Knowledge helps, it does allow me to better understand what must change. I suppose you could, sell your business. Do you see your business as a force for good?"

"We've been approached many times by the heartless MBA crowd or the buzzards of Wall Street. They want us to pay them to make us more efficient. They want us to go public. They want to simply buy us. What they want is to buy our market share, our smooth web platform, the ability to raid our pension accounts, to make our employee contracts more efficient, to fill our product lines with cheaper lower quality products or imported products. All their offers would shift our value from customers and employees to soulless stockholders. They want to steal wealth from the land and give it to a few. I try to use my privilege to do good things for my people. I know I can't solve all problems, but I do right by my people. Selling everything and giving it all to charities would do far less and not last a lifetime. You have time to seriously look at what you could do to build better lives for people. When you have found your vision, your privilege may allow you the resources to pursue it; do not dismiss that as anything other than a good."

"Doing good in the world seems only to be blocked or turned to graft. People are so corrupt."

"Trump Republicans were parasites, but they were never the majority of America. Conservative pundits portray people using demeaning labels to attack without the need of substance or facts. They then use their toxic labels to accuse working people of being envious of the rich, hostile to the successful, simply dismissive of hard work. Some rich people work hard,

but not as hard as poor people. People want respect, people want opportunity, people just want to provide for their families. Families need homes, healthcare, and education. Our government and our businesses must serve the public good, that is not socialism. It is American democracy and capitalism. I'm sorry to lecture, you might think I was Mark Greene. You need not throw away your privilege. You must acknowledge it, use it for a good purpose. Always, always know everyone wants to feel respected, they want to be useful, and they want to help you as much as you want to help them."

"Carol you are a thoughtful person, very deep, and astute."

"It comes from living an isolated life. Also, from having taken some long historical tours with Mark all those years ago."

"You think I should finish my degree?"

"If you can find classes that allow you to learn and widen your perspective, yes. Change schools if you feel you need to. There are many knowledgeable people who are aware of many knowledgeable people there is much to learn. If you find your vision do not be afraid to quit, you are not going to starve whether you finish a degree or do not. "

"I met the Greene Farm crew; they were nice enough but didn't seem to be lecturers on history and American culture. They seem not much like the Mark Greene you are telling me about."

"I have trusted you as a friend and now I have fewer secrets to try and hide behind. The Greene's you met are Mark's cousins. What have you learned of Mark Greene?"

"Here is the Mark Greene I have discovered. Mark is Max's son your long-time neighbor and farm partner. Mark still advises to the State Department has a PhD, is an author, and does guest lectures. He was back living at home helping his father before finishing the doctorate and working for the foreign service. He especially liked going to Civil War battlefields. You loved going to Shiloh; you felt deep feelings when you were there. You

named your son Shiloh because it means peace. On the long drive with Mark you earned a master's degree in the development of American society. This is the image I pieced together from your stories."

"Once you learn a few things, it opens an unending curiosity especially with someone like Mark."

"It sounds dull, but I'm not judging. Maybe you should have married Mark."

Carol paused and her nose wrinkled before she answered, "I have another book of stories. They are the most personal ones. I will share them with you after I feel your soul has opened to the spirit of the land. These stories are not a house without drapes they display me on a prominent hill like a Greek sculpture. I call the book of stories Null Stillness. You have learned silence is not silent. When you are still and silence yourself, you hear. Null is not empty, if you achieve null-ness; it is filled. I couldn't marry Mark. He needed to leave Franklin to pursue his calling and mine was here."

"Many people live apart as their jobs demand and come together when they can."

"Did that work for your father?"

"No, but you are different people."

"We are, but on different trains headed for different destinations. Have you ever read a novel by Ray Bradbury called Dandelion Wine?"

"No"

"He wrote science fiction. Someone had left shelves filled with paperback books in the house where I lived when I was working at the college. Asimov, Heinlein, LeQuin, Zelazny, Clarke, Vonnegut were all on the bookshelves. I got a paying job, while taking classes. It was the first step in running away from my runaway life. I began reading them before I went to sleep. In Bradbury's book two people fall in love but they are two

generations apart. They are in different time streams interacting by happenstance. Mark and I were in different time streams. He grew up here and had to leave to become himself. I grew up in Chicago and had to come here to become myself. Our time streams just intersected by a quirk, a happenstance. Besides all those hostages would likely be dead if he weren't there with all his skills of diplomacy."

"That sounds like a story."

"It is but not now. No more about Mark, let's just enjoy the sunset."

"I should go finish a year at school, but could I leave my things here? I want to come back on holidays and next summer. Could I make this my home like I was your daughter at college?"

"Yes, I have enjoyed you. You and Madison worked so hard it made my daily life easier, but you already have a mother."

"I do have a mother, but I do not have a home. This is the home I've needed all my life."

"I have two sons; a daughter would be nice. Also, you are beyond the teen drama years. I think you are offering the best years of your life."

"Thank you, it is amazing to sit and watch the colors change. I could do this every night. I am at peace with whatever my course in life should be. I do not have to decide. I can simply enjoy now."

"I do sometimes sit out here when the weather is too cold, I slip on a coat and sip on hot tea. Winter has an intense and extraordinary beauty."

Chapter 45

Tense and pleasant – Carol and Mark meet with Stephen 1981

Well you're a real tough cookie with a long history
Of breaking little hearts like the one in me
That's okay, let's see how you do it
Put up you dukes, let's get down to it? –
Edward Schwartz – Hit me with your Best Shot
Pat Benatar – Greatest Hits



Steak and wine eyeDyllic Photography (Bill Dodd)

Brandy a fine girl

“I appreciate you accompanying me, Mark. I know it isn’t something anyone wants to do. No one wants to jump into the cesspool of a messy relationship. If you could be like you were with our amateur blackmailers, a quiet presence. Your being here is a strong support for me to navigate this reunion, confrontation.”

“I will have a chance to practice my diplomatic skills.”

-

“Stephen this is my neighbor Mark Greene. He drove most of the way out here. He accompanied me to my meeting this morning.”

“I have met Max Greene.”

“He is my father.”

“Mark has a master’s in international studies. Fortunately, he is home. He is ready to transition to a new phase in life with the foreign service. ”

“Ms. Parker your table is ready, would you like to see the wine list?”

“Yes, thank you. I believe this California red blend would be good.”

“A nice restaurant with semi-private seating.”

“Mr. Simmons at the law firm recommended it. He also said he enjoys your radio show.”

“It has gone well, and I would hate to lose it.”

“After our meeting today, I think your career will not suffer from this. I would say indiscretion, but this is far beyond that. You are deep into degeneracy here Stephen.”

“I am sorry, I should have known something was suspicious.”

“I could apply a wide choice of terms loutish, reprehensible, betrayal, but that is not going to help you or me. They signed our legal agreements today. If they come in tomorrow and sign the release for their checks then this incident should be sealed away. Your career here will not be ended by this. It will be up to you to not be a dipstick when dipping your stick. JB taught me that one. Your college has a policy on age. It is twenty-two or over. If you can manage just to seduce women over twenty-two you won’t lose your job and radio program.”

“The book should do well and be good for us. I will behave myself.”

“Good, wine and menus. Mr. Simmons said to order an appetizer a crispy potato puff?”

“One of our most popular. Is the wine acceptable?”

“It is.”

"We have a select menu on weeknights, all of our most requested entrees. May your evening here be memorable whether for food, pleasure, or business?"

"All three I believe."

"Brandy will be over soon to take your order and serve you. You will love the puff poppers."

"Stephen, there isn't an us, but we need to appear as if there is. I will not ruin the book promotion. It is good for what is left of the us part. The devastation of trust cannot be fixed."

"I do still care. I felt we were both moving towards our goals."

"You do not care enough Stephen. I am not surprised you indulged in an affair. All our history is false, there is nothing to fall back to where there is an us. We will structure a divorce agreement; we will still be officially married for another four years. I read your draft for this book. You did cast a wonderful vision of an idyllic farm, romance, and married life. I would not want either the hardcover or softcover to have to move to the fiction section. Mr. Finn will work with your attorney. Stephen, I do not hate you, I am disappointed in myself."

"I have disappointed myself, as well."

"I'm Brandy, here are your potato poppers, are you ready to order?"

"Yes, we will order, the check is mine Brandy."

"I respect you for that Ms. Parker. Yes, the fettucine with mushrooms is an excellent choice. I recognize your voice. We have asparagus as a side freshly cut from a Florida farm which should please you Mr. Capuano. The sirloins come with potato would you like to substitute or add asparagus to your choice. Are you involved with local foods and produce, too?"

"I am; we're from the Midwest. I operate Parker Produce and Fruit there."

"That sounds exciting, Mr. Capuano's radio program is a great help to me in the garden, and he is charming and funny, even discussing weeds."

"Brandy are you a student?"

"I'm in the nursing program; I will finish next year."

"How old are you?"

"I'm 22, I will be 23 when I finish. It seems like I've been in school for years, Ms. Parker."

"Good luck I am sure you will be an excellent nurse."

-

"Stephen, she seems young, yet she is not in the losing your career category."

"Carol, I didn't think, again I am sorry."

"I believe you are sorry you got caught. It sounds like you had a rather torrid affair with that treacherous little hillbilly, Tara Rose. Please for the next four years a little discretion. If you want to come to the farm you may ask. If you want a more intimate visit, I think a very recent clean bill of health would be required. Not to boost your ego, but Tara Rose was very impressed with your romantic skills. Now it looks like we can enjoy dinner. Did you know Mark has been to several Asian countries? He speaks some Chinese and Japanese. "

"Traveling must be an adventure."

"I was part of a tour arranged by the state department. I was an aide to the principals on the tour. It was fascinating. If my job offer comes through it will be in Asian studies."

"My radio show may get syndicated. I am so grateful Carol has allowed me to fix my mistakes. I am willing to make a suitable arrangement between us. Carol is far more mature and adult than I am."

"I am and being the adult isn't always fun, but it is satisfying. Stephen, you may grow into it. Mark used to buck bales on the farm for my grandfather."

"Isn't that rather man killing work?"

"I started when I was thirteen; I considered it man building work. When that old New Holland was rolling, we would do fifteen or sixteen hundred in an afternoon. I was there every summer until I was twenty-two. I got too busy in grad school and Asian studies to come back after that. The little squares are a thing of the past mostly big round bales now. I would think it is much harder for farm boys to grow into men these days. I paid tuition for four years with my baling checks. "

"A very different life back in Franklin than where most people live. I didn't fit in, I realize that."

"I didn't either when I came. It is my whole being now. Will syndication make you money? I now know your first two books have gone mostly to Pam."

"It will if it happens. My lawyer tells me you aren't trying to take any future incomes. You are just making sure we are not responsible for each other."

"We need not seek to hinder each other's business. Real food, thank you Brandy. Stephen was telling us his radio show may get a wider audience. We don't get to hear it back home. If you have suggestions to improve it, you should write him. Maybe Mark and I will get to listen to it sometime."

"Enjoy your meals. I may Mr. Capuano. It is a great show."

"This is far better than I anticipated. I may look back on this as an enjoyable evening."

"Stephen, I didn't want to be here or in this situation. There is no reason to turn every moment into torment. I hope to build to a better future. I am sorry this is how it ends, because Mr. Capuano you could make even weeding sound fun."

"You have saved me from myself; I will try to be more careful in the future. I wish I had been straight with you from the beginning, it seemed easier to play into the dream."

"We slowly give up childish things. Mark, do you think Stephen could get a high security clearance?"

"No, I am sure he wouldn't. I believe Mr. Capuano's report would say vulnerable to compromise. I don't think the Soviets are trying to get moles in the vegetable industry, but these potatoes are worth expending some intelligence assets for."

The meal ended with pleasant small talk. Carol thought maybe Mr. Finn was correct a contentious divorce would be far more costly. This road bump did seem such a waste of money, not to mention being another dead end in her life.

"Thank you, Ms. Parker it was a pleasure come back again. I will write you Mr. Capuano."

"I will look forward to it Brandy. It is important to hear listener feedback."

-

"Good night Stephen we will see what the lawyers work out. Mark and I will stay until tomorrow afternoon to make sure our criminal pair sign and get their checks. We must get back to my world after that."

"I wish I could hug you and make it all OK, but I cannot."

"I wish you could, but we are in a different place. Good night."

-

Mark started the Dodge.

"Thank you for driving, let's get back to our hotel. I am going to start crying now. You may hold me, but no talking let me cry it out. In the morning I will make it worth your while for being a total rock of security and comfort. Stephen is a worthless womanizer. There is an upside to all this trauma. I would have never gotten to appreciate you, if Stephen was a real husband. Mark Greene, you have a tremendously strong body and are far more handsome than Stephen. I am sure Stephen was always the clever witty one, charming and popular. There is nothing superficial about you. You are authentic, exactly who I need to weather this."

Chapter 46

A sudden end and a new partnership – Carol, Shiloh, Brent, Lawrence, Young Tom, Helen
- 1994

"Where've you been?"

"I've looked for you forever and a day."

"Where've you been?"

"I'm just not myself when you're away." -

Don Henry / Jon Vezner -- Where've You Been?

Kathy Mattea -- Willow in the Wind



Photo of B-24 crew piloted by James Stewart - plane and crew lost on bombing mission a great uncle of my grandson James E. Davis named in honor of his MIA relative – yes, my son and I did want to name him James Tiberius

Sudden Sadness

“Can you and Katie stay with Mom for about an hour? Tom wants to talk to Carol and I about the farm. Mom won’t leave, maybe you and Katie can go home with Tom when we get back. Carol and I will stay.”

“Let’s go over to that café on Huron, it should be quick at this time of the day. Brent and Shiloh, are you hungry?”

“Starving Uncle Lawrence, waiting is hard work.”

“We’ll soon fix that.”

“The doctor said his vital signs are fading, it was a massive stroke. He doubts he will last the night.”

“Grandpa will die?”

“Yes, Brent there isn’t any hope now. I was thinking of asking Grandma to come stay with us what do you boys think?”

"I think she would love it, much more beautiful than here."

"What do you think Lawrence, they have lived here a long time?"

"She might, going to be difficult to live here without Dad. We can ask her tonight as we sit with her."

"These boys are starving I believe they said."

"Yes, let's order."

The waiter took Lawrence and Tom's order, then Carol ordered for the boys and herself, "Cheeseburger, fries, coleslaw, and strawberry shake for each of them. I'll have an Asian salad. Now we have food on the way; we can talk with Tom."

"Tom why did you want to talk with us?"

"I know things will change on the farm when Grandpa Parker dies. I want to buy my father's part of the land and be your silent partner Aunt Carol."

"Why do you want to do that Tom?"

"Katie and Mom really have no interest in the farm. I have wealth accumulating from stock in the game development company. I bought other stocks in tech companies that are growing and adding value. Now, I am working on a finance development team for online loan applications. I believe it will be even more lucrative for me; international finance firms have all the money."

"How did you go from games to high finance?"

"We were trying to protect our game from piracy. I became a security expert. I am highly valued now for my skill in online security. I always get paid in shares which have greatly gained in value. I can direct some of my assets to be farmland. Mom would love to use the money to buy a vacation home in a warm place with water and sand. "

"That's true Tom. Your mother would rather have a place in the Caribbean than a farm. I also know your wealth has accumulated; farmland would at least be something real, not electronic imaginings hidden in a television screen. I would be willing to not be an owner. Carol can you work with your nephew?"

"I think I could, I'm surprised. I don't think you've been there since that Christmas when Mom and Dad came out."

"I haven't but I want to help continue the family tradition. I feel like it is a good use of my income. Also, I want to help you get an Internet presence."

"Internet I am not sure I know what the Internet is."

"I will show you. You need to use it for promotion and efficient delivery of products."

"I don't understand now, but maybe I will."

-

"Cheeseburger, fries and a shake were they good?"

"Yes, almost as good as home."

"When we're done, we'll walk back over to the hospital. Tom you can drive the boys to our house, Carol and I will stay."

"You OK going with Aunt Carolyn and Katie?"

"Yeah Tom has great games on his computer."

"We'll call when we know."

"You two do what you're told, Tom may let you play computer games all night. You do what Aunt Carolyn tells you."

"We will"

"Everyone go home with Tom; please rest we'll stay here."

"Let's go into the room now."

"We will sit with you. Our touch and voices may be comforting."

"He was just like always. I didn't see any change. Tom just fell and was unconscious. Thank you for coming so quickly Carol. The boys are so big now. I am glad they are here. My tall handsome pilot now so sick."

"Is that how he was in Kansas a tall man in uniform?"

"I decided he should meet me. You see how the officers reacted. It became obvious who were the decent guys by the way they interacted with the trainees. Peggy had access to the personnel files. She told me Tom was from a farm; he was back from Europe. A group of us were at the movies. Peggy was so bold, she just said to him 'Hey Captain flyboy where you from?' Tom said he was from a farm. Peggy was expecting him to say something like this she immediately said, 'Helen is from a farm maybe you both speak cow or something.'

Tom laughed so hard. He asked, 'how well I spoke cow?'

I told him, 'I had many words with our milk cow, but she had never had much to say.'

He asked me if I wanted to grab something at the canteen where we could discuss the proper words for milk cows his had often been harsh. We just bonded after that. It was the right time for us. Tom was looking to life after the Army Air Corps. Within a few weeks we were planning our lives together. "

"Did you worry about living with his parents after you got married?"

"No, they had a big house. Much larger than my folks and it seemed the best way to get Tom through school. Leon was in the Navy and gone. After I had Lawrence Grace was a great help. Kenny was too, he was still in high school when we were there. In those days people grew up with families around. I am glad we did. Grace taught me so much, she and Eldon were like my parents in some ways but very different in others. It was a great start to our marriage."

"What have the doctors told you?"

"They say there is no hope, he's in a coma. The nurse said watch the monitor and I will see when the levels decrease. Touch, talk, and pray was her advice. It is time to talk about a memorial service. We will have one here and Tom wanted to be buried in Franklin."

"Should we have a service at the church?"

"I think so. We have many connections there. There are spaces in the plot beside Eldon and Grace that was his plan. It seems best to end back where we started."

"Lawrence and I talked at the café with the boys. If you want to come, live with us at the farm, we would all be glad to have you."

"It would be a big change from where our lives have been. I might, it may be best. I will think about it."

"Here Lawrence I'll hold his hand awhile, you can sit with Mom."

Carol held his hand and began to softly sing, she had learned several old hymns, carols, and kid's songs from church. Helen noticed the monitor change; she and Lawrence stood on the other side and held his hand as Carol sang. Thomas Parker tenacious winner of legal cases, survivor of the B-24, preserver of the Parker family farm, passed away with his family at his side. His passage accompanied by the soft sweet voice of his once rebellious daughter.

Chapter 47

History with pleasure – unexpected opportunities follow disasters -- 1981

There goes Robert E. Lee
Now I don't mind choppin' wood
And I don't care if the money's no good
You take what you need and you leave the rest
But they should never have taken the very best -
Levon Helm – The Night they Drove Ole Dixie Down?
The Band Greatest Hit



The Cornfield at Antietam – early morning quiet

Stars in Their Courses

“Yes, we checked out this morning; I’m using a pay phone.”

“They were both in promptly at two this afternoon, signed the releases. One of the paralegals here has recorded the agreements. I met Mr. Capuano’s attorney this afternoon. Call me sometime next week. You’re going to Antietam and Gettysburg then home. It sounds like a great time.”

“Thank you, Mr. Finn. We will leave and head up there then.”

“Back to the Civil War Mr. Greene everything is finished here it seems. I hope it is; last night was a flood of tears, but this morning was all joy. The Psalm was certainly proved true. ‘For his anger endureth but a moment; in

his favour is life: weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning.' Mark you bring me much joy, and the coming part is really great."

As Mark blushed, "I am not sure that verse was ever applied as you just applied it. You study the Bible often?"

"Ruth had it stuck on my refrigerator. "

"Scripture served with milk."

Carol continued- "I am a forward-looking person, yet you are making me wade deep into the past. Were you always fascinated with history and the Civil War?"

"Yes, and Yes, the centennial happened when I was a kid. Toys, games, and even comics in the Sunday papers I loved them all. We are headed over to the Blue Ridge and the Shenandoah Valley. There were many skirmishes and battles. Winchester is where we should be able to find a motel. Winchester changed hands from Union to Confederate more times than any other town. It will be a short drive to Sharpsburg. Winter may cause some worry over roads but less worry about a No Vacancy sign."

"I thought we were going to Antietam, not Sharpsburg. "

"Sharpsburg is the nearby town; Antietam is the creek that runs through the battlefield. The Union and Confederates still fight over the names of the battles."

"Why do you want to see this battle?"

"It was a horrific one-day battle, more casualties than on any other single day. It was enough of a Union victory for Lincoln to issue the Emancipation Proclamation. It is a significant part of the war."

"Wars, we seem to continue to fight them. Do you learn anything by studying them if they keep happening?"

"History teaches lessons. The world is complicated, and the lessons are easily forgotten or misunderstood."

"Of course, some of us didn't pay much attention in class."

"It will be all new to you. Antietam happened in September of 1862. It is the first of Lee's grand raids, as I call them. Gettysburg was his second in July 1863. The Union was able to turn Lee and the Army of Northern Virginia back on both occasions. Lincoln followed the Union victory at Gettysburg with his famous address in November of 1863. These are two very important battles and very key events in making our country."

"I wish we had connected earlier, but I had never met you until the reunion JB took me to in his Orange beast."

"I remember you in Sunday School and Bible School, but I didn't have much interest in girls back then. Especially you older women."

"Two or three years means so much when you are a kid. I think you are the most mature man I know. You were calm, cordial, and a rock of support. I feel like that song Lizzie sang at Ruth and JB's wedding 'I will always love you.'"

"It's a breakup song; Lizzie sang it at their wedding?"

"Lizzie explained that to me when we practiced, but she had rewritten the lyrics. It was a breakup from her parents and a new commitment to JB when she finished her editing. Lizzie soared on the chorus and no one much cared if it was a breakup song, it was beautiful."

"I wanted to be there with you. It went better than I had feared. You are a very controlled and courageous woman."

"I am just moving finding the best course from moment to moment. Now I'm going to relax and enjoy being with you enjoying history. I will not

look to a future today. Why did Lee make these grand raids, as you call them?"

"General Lee always knew the North needed to stop the war. The South couldn't actually defeat them. He hoped to make the North war weary, then they would agree to separate countries. The North was very motivated to preserve the United States. Lee brought his army to Antietam after several victories. Victories where he took great risks because the Confederacy's back was against the wall when he took command. He faced Union generals who did a less than spectacular job and did not work together. The South had completely turned the momentum of the war in the East around when the Army of Northern Virginia marched into Maryland. "

"Sharpsburg is in Maryland?"

"Yes, Maryland was considered a border state. Lee actually hoped people would see his army as a liberation force, but the supporters had already joined the Confederate armies. People just viewed them as a pestilence. The Union's Eastern army desperately needed to stop the Army of Northern Virginia. People from where we live were called Western. Lincoln was also considered a Western man, an uncouth woodsman until people got to know him."

-

"Even in winter this is a beautiful country."

"It looks like we have choices."

"Go with the chain I'll feel more comfortable."

"They have a Stewarts. I don't think their root beer is as good as Dog and Suds, but it is good. Feel like reliving high school?"

"I sometimes wish I could, much of my life is better, now. Except for a marriage in shambles, treacherous black mailers, and losing so much to a charming charlatan. Let's go, do they have good fries?"

"Decent, they are no McDonalds."

"Sounds like a good place, I am not a big fan of root beer. I will have a shake. When I was finishing college living with my parents, I somehow fell in love with shamrock shakes. If I see a McDonalds in March I still stop and get one. It tasted pretty much like a vanilla shake, but it was a lovely shade of green."

-

"We can head back, not as fancy a restaurant as last night."

"I enjoyed our drive-in meal. Did you like the root beer?"

"I did. I asked the desk clerk; he says there is a café in Sharpsburg. We can get there early and have breakfast then go out to the military park."

"You seriously want to be there for breakfast, no morning joy?"

"I think we can have a joyous evening and still get to Antietam early."

"Well I am just a passenger on the trip now. Lead on General Greene."

"There was a General Greene, he was instrumental in the victory at Gettysburg."

"What is he famous for?"

"He occupied and defended Culp's Hill. It was essential to hold, or the Union right flank would collapse. He directed the building of very effective fortifications. He commanded as the Union repulsed many determined assaults even with very limited troops available to him. I always imagined we might be related as I learned about Gettysburg, but I do not think we

are. He was from Rhode Island and our family was already farming like the Parkers near Franklin before the Civil War."

"Were there any general Parkers?"

"Not at Gettysburg, Grant did have General Ely Parker on his staff a Seneca Indian and engineer."

"You may need to research some more, because this Parker is about to breach your defenses General Greene."

"Culp's Hill did have one of the few night battles, a very intense affair."

"Shut up Mark and start your assault or I'm going to attack you."

-

"It must have been awful to be here during and after the battle. All the dead horses as well as the dead and wounded men. Clara Barton was here, I read a Landmark biography about her. I didn't remember it was this Civil War location. Lincoln looks very tall. How tall was he?"

"The hat makes him look even taller, but he was 6'4" and average height was 5'8" he was tall."

"It seemed like the Confederates were about to collapse several times. Why didn't the Union attack all in the morning instead the three separate battles they kept talking about? Those troops from Harper's Ferry would not have been there then."

"Now you are asking why McClellan was McClellan. The ranger told me he knew the owner of the house where Lincoln stayed before the famous speech. He would let people rent a room if the rangers recommended them. He says the house will soon be sold to the historical society. I thanked him profusely, we have to find Mr. Smith's house, now. History knows it as the David Wills Home. We should be there in thirty or forty minutes."

"It seems rather spooky."

"Some people believe in spooks at Gettysburg, but Lincoln only stayed there. It is not Ford's theater. I had to promise not to go up in that dreadful tower as the ranger phrased it. There are two park service towers we can climb. "

"Climb?"

"You'll love it"

-

"I'm glad we saw that electric map, it helped me orient the different stages of the battle. It seems odd the South came to Gettysburg from the North and North from the South."

"The Confederates had left Virginia and came into Pennsylvania; the Union followed when they pulled together it was at Gettysburg. It wasn't a planned location. I researched; a Parker was part of the 8th Illinois Cavalry. Not everyone believes Lt. Jones did fire the first shot at Gettysburg, but someone in the 8th IL Cavalry did. It could have been a Parker. He was a private but who knows."

"General Greene certainly did play a large role at Gettysburg. Now that we will stay in a place more modern without all the ghosts. I might countenance a night assault General Greene. "

"I very much enjoy our skirmish's. I didn't hear any ghosts last night."

"Sensing doesn't just make use of ears. Out on our tour, I listened to some of the people on Little Round Top. They were complaining people didn't know history anymore. They asserted the war was for states' rights. What is that all about?"

"The Union won the war but lost the peace. Even in Chicago if we looked at any Civil War chapters in your textbooks, it is likely the Southern point of view prevails. After the war Southerners rewrote the 'causus belli' of the Civil War. The secession documents of the states clearly state they were seceding to preserve the institution of slavery. Even when the Union had withered the Confederacy to a lingering corpse, Jefferson Davis and the Rebel leaders still tried to hang on to slavery in any peace agreement. "

"Did all the Southern troops own slaves?"

"No, a few large plantation owners did own the majority of slaves. The majority of the soldiers for the confederacy did not own slaves and many Union troops were not fighting for emancipation. These are facts used to support a false premise. The better interpretation of the cause of the war is White Supremacy. Even Lincoln in 1858 running for Senate in the Lincoln Douglas debates had to assert he was not saying a black man was an equal to a white man. He was opposed to the expansion of slavery, he felt it was a brutal institution. Racism was too prevalent in every White American when it was time to reconstruct the nation."

"Weren't the ex-slaves uneducated and not ready for freedom?"

"Many were uneducated, but all were ready for freedom. Our modern sons and especially the daughters of the Confederacy have to turn this into a noble struggle. Their ancestors were heroic fighting overwhelming odds in a noble cause for liberty, individual rights. They were defenders against an invading North. Many fought for all sort of motivations; many fought because everyone in their hometown signed up, so they did too. White supremacy caused the course of the war to run as it did. White supremacy ruled public opinion to the ruin of Grant and Lincoln's plans for reconstruction. Blacks both well-educated and uneducated did very well after the war when left alone and allowed to make their own way. "

"I never looked at it like that, I never really thought about the real history as anything other than old statues. Gone with Wind we all knew it was about the Civil War."

"Yes, 'Gone with the Wind' and D. W. Griffith's 'Birth of the Nation' became the greatest rewriting of history ever accomplished. Let's drop the war on the way home. We have a long drive and I have likely buried you in more Civil War history than any one woman can take."

"You are not wandering off into some sexist narrative, are you?"

"What?"

"More history than any woman can take, implying women can't or don't understand history?"

"Sorry I suppose it is mostly men who study the Civil War, but I realize this is likely because we buy into traditional roles. I hope you enjoyed our diversion from the main purpose of the trip. On the way out you talked about wanting children and how that is where Stephen had hurt you the most."

"I see Della and think this is a great place to raise a family. It has always been the purpose of people farming making a living to support a family. I didn't expect Stephen to live there and be a day to day father. I didn't know he was lying about everything. I expected a marriage like a Navy wife with occasional service deployments. I could have lived with that, but it wasn't even,, I will not cry again I am done."

"Now you are married for four years and not married?"

"This is my choice. I still want children; I am not getting younger. Age is very important to women especially in the motherhood field. Too bad babies cannot be grown like cabbages."

"Carol, I love you, I love you more passionately than anyone I've ever known. Now, no one can be your husband for four years."

"Mark, I knew that when I made my decisions. My life is fulfilled on my farm. Your life is fulfilled by leaving your farm. We each have left behind our childhood to find fulfillment. My brother is good, something of a jerk

at times. You will soon have your foreign service career. The path in life you were meant for. You are too giving. I won't allow you to change for me. It was part of why I made this agreement."

"I would have a good life on the farm with you. A life many of my fellow farm boys would dream of, being married and enjoying Franklin is a good life. A life I do enjoy."

"Not the life you were meant for, not the life our country needs from you. We desperately need people like you making the world a better place. The trains of our lives run on different tracks."

"I've never started a fight, but I thought you might ask me beat Stephen to a bloody pulp. He deserves it, but I am glad you didn't."

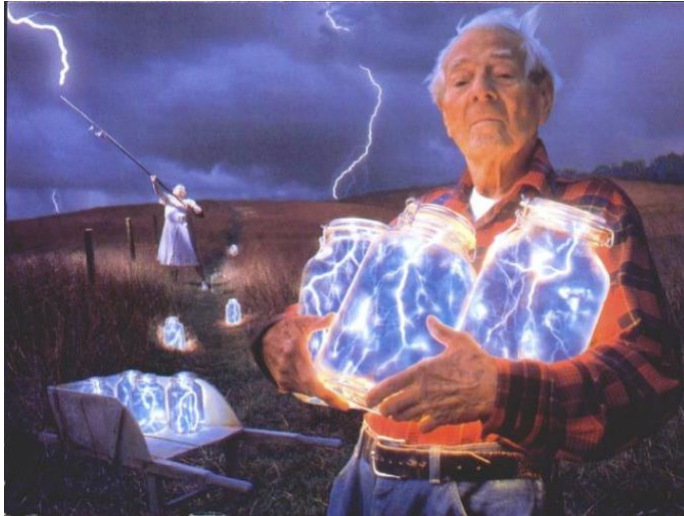
"I know, but I think JB might be a better choice for a brawl. It never helped him either, Ruth saved JB. Please be my lover, a strength to sustain me, and a super nice guy. I need that now more than I ever have, even more than a traditional husband."

"I will but starting a fight may have been easier."

Chapter 48

Internet connections have brought us together – and driven us insane 1999

There's a hole in daddy's arm where all the money goes
Jesus Christ died for nothin' I suppose
Little pitchers have big ears
Don't stop to count the years
Sweet songs never last too long on broken radios - -
John Prine – Sam Stone



On a backup of my drive – global village?

People in the Tubes

Dear Mr. Parker:

I was pleased to hear from you. I have often wondered about JB. I feared his life had mirrored another one in our platoon; I was asked to speak at his memorial service. The JB I knew seemed unlikely to be in church and the father of three. I am being honored for twenty years here as the coach next March is there any way JB would come to LA? I would love to introduce him as the man who saved my life. JB always said it made us even. He went above and beyond on that day. In a predominately African American school, I would like to demonstrate in crisis we succeed when we pull together.

Thank you for your email.

Coach Robinson

Coach Robinson

I live in Seattle and am back at work now. I will contact JB back on the farm in Franklin. I doubt he has ever been on an airplane unless it was in going to Vietnam and back. He told me you owed each other your lives, and he had learned much from you. JB admitted he was insulated in his rural all white community. He came to see the Black community through you as

people very much like himself. JB doesn't have a web presence. There are some photos of him and his wife soon after they were married, at about the same time you took your coaching position. A library may have a copy of Stephen Capuano's book the 'Illustrated Edition of a Bountiful Earth', and his sequel 'The Abundant Earth'. The photos were at the Parker farm where his wife Ruth became a manager, and he was the all-around fix it guy back in those days. I will update you when I know.

Tom Parker

Coach Robinson

JB and Ruth would like to come. We have time to plan their trip. Ruth has never been on an airplane. Carol Parker's son Shiloh may come with them. He has been going to school in California. He began working an internship in the tech field and then decided to go to school in California. He can help them navigate O'Hare and LAX. JB says he will participate in any way to support you, but don't expect a speech.

Tom Parker

Ruth and Tom

Thank you for Ruth Donaldson's email address. I will copy you both on emails. Hopefully Tom can update Shiloh. Ruth I would like you and JB to stay at our house. Our kids are on their own now. My wife and I would love to take you to our church. Hopefully JB will come to my school with me and meet the students. The event is on a Friday night, the 29th. If you come out the week before we could have time to catch up and I can schedule the school-week ahead of Friday. Students and alumni in preparing for this have found photos taken of our unit in Vietnam. I have a set of prints for you to take home. Tom told me about the books with your photos. Our librarian was able to find them and get me copies. You and your little daughter were so charming and JB looked good, much better than our bedraggled selves in Vietnam. After showing them to some of the faculty we started a garden in a vacant space by the school. A student group has a plan to expand more community gardens next year. I know you may have concerns about coming to our city. I can assure, you will be safe at my home and at the school. I know your only image must be of the riots. The Watts riot after the MLK assassination was the cause of my being in the

Army. I was just out seeing what was happening like many kids when I was arrested. I was told if I joined the Army everything would be dropped. Next thing I know I am slogging through that miserable mud, and in the bush beside JB hoping the noise we heard was not a hostile. I am so glad you and JB are blessed with home and family. I look forward to your being here.

Coach Robinson

Dear Coach Robinson

I must admit I have never been to a large city. I was concerned. JB told me it would alright if Jerome had planned our visit. I truly look forward to joining you and your family in church. I have faith that God has given us an opportunity to expand our own image of God. Carol and Tom are helping us with coordinating tickets and the trip. They have suggested we fly to LAX on Thursday and come back the Sunday after your event. If that is ok with you, they will confirm their ticket purchases. Tom suggested Shiloh rent a car and drive us to your house. Shiloh said he has a TomTom; he says it gives reliable driving directions. I have never used one. JB is excited to talk with you, he always reminds us no speeches. We will continue to walk in faith.

All our love

Ruth Donaldson

Tom and Mom

We got here on time. The car was ready, and I drove out with no problem. It was the middle of the afternoon which helps. I am at Kelsey's house; I may give her a ride back to school. We have unlimited miles. Mr. Robinson and his wife came out to meet us when I drove into their drive. JB got out and he and Mr. Robinson hugged and cried. I've never seen JB cry. Mrs. Robinson introduced herself to Ruth. Her name is Marcella. She and Ruth instantly became friends as everyone does with Ruth. I carried the luggage into the house for Ruth. When I came out JB introduced me to Jerome, Coach Robinson. Marcella and Ruth walked with their husbands into the house and I left for Kelsey's.

Salutations from the land without weather

Shiloh

Just disasters earthquakes, wildfires, droughts, weeklong traffic jams

Tom and Carol

Thank you so much for making Ruth and JB's visit possible. Shiloh made it much easier to navigate for them. He is very polite. He is also a well-built young man, he said he was still lifting to keep in shape. JB also tells me he is a very good student. They told me how their family and your family are very close. They have invited us to Franklin and insisted our being the only African Americans for at least thirty miles would not be a problem. I am sure if Ruth is with us it would not be. She loved and was loved back by everyone at our church. Ruth is a large miracle contained in a small body. My students were very interested in JB. He comes from a world different than theirs. He did relate how he won't let the use of the N-word just slip by because of our time together in Vietnam. They loved his story of a fight back in his drinking and brawling days. A guy in the bar kept talking about he hoped that loud mouthed N-word got his ugly face broken. He was talking about Muhammad Ali. JB told him to knock it off with the racial slurs, he was disrespecting men he fought with. The man went on using the term and provoking JB. JB was pulled off the man and popped a couple of more guys at the table. He said he had to pay the doctor bills, but the guys were more careful with their language around him. It was a popular story. JB apologized he said he didn't drink or get in fights, anymore. His life was a much better one. People's language could be altered without kicking anyone's butt. When someone asked if he had learned something from me besides not to use the n word, he said he learned to like James Brown as much as Buck Owens. They had a laugh over that. I had forgotten how much JB and I came to rely on each other. We trusted each other and not much else.

Thank you

– JB is very lucky to be surrounded by such supportive people.

Coach Robinson

Tom

Thank you so much for contacting Jerome and Marcella. JB said he asked you to check on Jerome but did not ask you to contact him. Thank God you did. It meant so much to both of them. The Robinsons are a wonderful family. I got to meet the kids as they all came to the ceremony. I loved their church. We Franklin Methodists sing but will not move a muscle. They are so animated it was joyous. I didn't think we would ever get home they were so loving to talk with after the service. It was odd to be the only or near only white people. It was what God wanted us to experience. Marcella took me out to Knott's Berry Farm. I had read about them and it wasn't too far. In LA too far doesn't mean much it is all about the traffic. They are a mockery of what we do when it comes to quality food products. I did get some ideas. I am sure Carol will love them. I cannot imagine living in such a place, but the people were wonderful. It is a much richer life here in Franklin. I am so glad for JB. He and Jerome talked about Sam from Stockton. He had been the one guy who could lift everyone up with a joke or a look. He never seemed to lose control during his tour in Vietnam. He had come home and was lost to drugs and alcohol. Jerome said one of his first teams had some great players who all got college scholarships a couple made it to the NBA. They went to the state tournament and won. He was featured on TV with the players and they highlighted his being a Vietnam Vet. Sam's daughter was with him when he said, 'I was in the same outfit as Jerome.' He told her about the time in Vietnam. Just a few months later Sam drove his old truck off the road and was killed. His daughter said nobody would miss her Dad maybe just herself. She asked if he would come speak at his graveside service. Jerome said he did and heard all the spiraling down after Sam had come home. He and JB sat silent for a moment then turned to us and thanked us. Told us we had been the wives that kept them from losing control like Sam had. I will never forget that moment.

Thank you. Keep faith, know Jesus needs you in this world

Ruth Donaldson

Chapter 49

Lawrence Parker does restore Mark Greene to his inexorable path to success -- 1981

All the federales say
Could have had him any day
Only Let Him Get Away
Out of Kindness I suppose
Townes Van Zandt – Pancho and Lefty
Merle Haggard Willie Nelson Columbia Country Classics



Old Federal Courthouse – St. Louis (Dred Scott)

Elusive Justice

“Hi Max, we finally have our date set to present our case on the appeal. September 3rd. The other side has been delaying and the court has had enough. I think they were trying to get it after the election. We are prepared; I am sure we will win. I hope it is not a narrow technical decision. I hope we will get it completely overturned.”

“Good about time, but then I will lose my son. He will likely be in DC next year, if it happens as you believe.”

“He is a well-qualified individual that PhD in International Studies he is about to earn, may not be the most suited for running Greene Farms.”

“I don’t know look what a tailspin our Moscow Olympics boycott got us. Lost export sales do impact our operations.”

"Mark may help form better policies to benefit all farmers. Have Mark call me I would like to have him attend the arguments with me. It is unusual but if he is my aide, he can be there. It will put a face on this case. My Dad said to say hello and have me assure you we will win this appeal. How are the crops this year?"

"We've had a good year. Rain after things got going, yields should be good. Always better to have something to sell, no matter the price."

"You manage the farm well; I will see this case is well managed."

"Goodbye, Lawrence give my best to your folks."

"I will"

-

"Glad you are accompanying me. You must not say anything or express any emotion or display any reaction. You are here as my aide. I have slipped in your biography when I could in my arguments. Sometimes our appeals courts seem to forget real people are affected by their decisions. I heard from Dad and Sean some tidbits. I am glad you helped Carol, apparently even protecting her from blackmailers."

"They were young not Godfather types. I was there just to back her up. "

"Your father will miss you on the farm."

"He will, but he wants me to attain this goal. I like it on the farm. I enjoy being outdoors. You observe the seasons change. There is knowledge my father and grandfather had and your grandfather. A wisdom of observing the weather patterns, learning the soils, deciding on planting. If you mud the seed in and it keeps raining it will all come up. If a farmer plants in wet soils and then the predicted rain doesn't happen, the soil will crust. The seedlings will not break the surface. They all weighed their decisions based on volumes of experience and intuition. "

"You'll miss it too; I think?"

"I respect the skill, the art of farming. I do not like the fishbowl aspect. Everyone knows each other. You get judged not just on your social behavior; you are judged when you try something new on the farm. People judge how well you mow the road banks, but bankers judge how well you raise crops. Now there is much competition to expand as modern farms need to be large. This results in passive aggressive interactions. Our close neighbors and the people in the Franklin church are wonderful. They support each other when there is a need; they celebrate your joys as their own. The people in small communities entertain themselves by discussing the behaviors of those who they know but are not close to. I will not miss that aspect of farming in Franklin. "

"After grandma and grandpa died, I haven't been back. Dad says Carol is succeeding doing very well. She started her produce and fruit business from scratch. "

"Carol has Ruth and Lizzie, together they are a force. JB is good at fixing machinery and equipment. Dad will come over if they need a big tractor. Carol had a vision and researched her market. It is working for her. My father says he had doubts when this city granddaughter of Eldon and Grace Parker came. He thought she was just an unrealistic flower child. He said she proved him wrong. Her hard work and business sense have impressed him."

"Both my father and Finn have been very tight lipped on Carol's divorce agreement. Unusual for a divorce agreement to have a specified end date four or five years in the future. My mother said Carol is going to have a baby. Is this part of the agreement?"

"I was not part of those negotiations. I only handle black mailers. I think Carol took me when she met with Stephen to pull her back in her chair if she began to attack him. Carol joked if JB had driven, he was experienced at barroom brawls, but she valued my diplomatic skills. She did suggest JB could give me some pointers if she needed a more muscular approach with

Capuano in the future. Carol handled a horrible mess with great pragmatism; she made the best of a big buffalo wallow of slime."

"I always wondered about her stability after she ran away without a word for two years. Carol has been all business ever since she came back home. All business on the farm she operates too. I thought she would have left the farm and gone with you maybe; Stephen was in no position stop or hinder her divorce."

"Carol is Parker Produce and her life is the things she grows. She has become as tied to the land as your grandfather was or my Dad is. She wouldn't trade her identity to be a diplomat's wife. I might well have become another generation In the Greene Family Farm, but Carol wouldn't allow me to lose my dream either. She says our lives are on different tracks headed to different destinations. I've learned many lessons from Carol. One is accepting hard choices. Celebrating the present letting the future keep itself."

"I met the boyfriend she ran away with that seems ages ago. I met Stephen Capuano once, when they came to meet the family after the wedding. Carol should have had me do a background check on him. I must say you're the best man I know of, who has had a relationship with Carol. You do have a relationship with Carol it seems, or she wouldn't have taken you out East to be her bodyguard. Am I allowed to know anymore from you than Dad or Finn are willing to reveal?"

"No. I will say this; Carol and I are star-crossed lovers. I met her once before she was married. Carol's intelligence and attractiveness made an impression. I was headed back to work in government and pursue a doctorate. We became friends while we both believed she was married. When her life imploded, I was there to help. I will miss Carol Parker; she is a homesickness I will always carry."

-

"Do we wait in the courtroom?"

"We will wait in a conference room until we are called. They are usually on schedule. When we go into the courtroom stand until the judges are seated and then do not speak unless a judge specifically asks you a question be as succinct and courteous as possible. Addressing and thanking 'your honor' is always a good practice. We are going to win this case, relax."

-

"Hello"

"Hi this is Lawrence Parker is Mark available?"

"He and Max are out in the field harvest has begun. They're doing soybeans today."

"Margaret, I have very good news. The decision has been announced. We are completely vindicated. The court also added in the comments they could not see any basis for a retrial. It was a stern rebuke to the prosecution. Mark should be able to proceed with a clear record in six weeks."

"Thank you, Lawrence. It always seemed so unfair. I will tell them when they come in tonight. Say hi to your folks."

"I will, Mark was a victim of a prosecution not to improve society, but for personal political gain. Sadly, this type of thing has become more common. Usually people with the sterling character Mark has are not the victims. Hope harvest goes well."

"Thank you, goodbye."

Chapter 50

Sometimes risks are required even a deviation onto a strange and not routine path. Mark Greeng, Julie Greeng, Rojas, Deng Chi, and Colonel Araujo --- 2018

They sell us the President the same way
They sell us our clothes and our cars
They sell us every thing from youth to religion
The same time they sell us our wars
I want to know who the men in the shadows are
I want to hear somebody asking them why
They can be counted on to tell us who our enemies are
But they're never the ones to fight or to die

And there are lives in the balance -

Jackson Browne – Lives in the Balance



Central America – Joni Moore

Cowboy Diplomacy without a Pickup

“Mark why are you going?”

“I have the skills needed. There are several Asian nationals; I speak bits of most of their languages. I am remembered for my efforts in East Timor.”

“Why would you leave retirement to help this administration? They are nothing but crooks and their policies are insensitive. They are incompetent.”

“Hopefully it will not be as intense as East Timor. It is sad to feel all our American values are being undercut. We have been a far from prefect nation, but we had admirable goals. Our goals have become as corrupt as any junta led by a tinhorn dictator. Policies filled with prejudice are never solid ones.”

"All the more reason to stay here with me. As Kirk said, "We have done our bit for King and Country."

"Yes, he did, but he went any way. I have worked with some of the hostages. I am very fit; at sixty-six I am not an ancient relic. I am not helping an administration. I am helping our nation and the people held hostage. I have been called by people from two foreign embassies."

"Ah foreign embassies, but you do not listen to me."

"I listen."

"Listen but ignore. Are your ears filled with a selective Julie ignoring beeswax?"

"I have heard you say this before. I do listen."

"Let me hug you. I want to remember how you feel. Try not to stand in front of the shooting."

"Maybe it will only be tear gas."

"When are you leaving?"

"Tonight, I intend to be there in the morning. I usually have more faith in my own government that is the sad part. Come help me pack, your help always brings me luck."

-

"Mr. Greene I will brief you on details we've been able to assemble. I will not take much time; we can pick up at the embassy in the morning. I will try to let you sleep some during the rest of the flight. First on behalf of all the professional service we thank you for coming back. I can tell you this confidentially we are alone and no one else will hear. We have no faith in decisions at the highest levels of the State Department. Any response is often reversed a few hours or days later. The government of El Salvador

has new deals for resettlement of immigrants from our administration. They will not want to upset official policy. The group holding the hostages is a combined rebel group some members of the former military before the current government. Some criminals trafficking people and drugs, also possibly other elements from the neighboring countries. The hostages are being held right on the border area; it is difficult to know which country they will be in. We believe they have been moved and possibly have been or will be in Honduras or even Guatemala. We do not have a strategy to suggest. There are several Asian nationals many are trade officials. All the hostages were on rain forest tours. Some are American tourists. Many governments have expressed their concern. At the embassy tomorrow I doubt you will hear any information you can rely on. Everyone has an agenda and a story to spin. We have some jeeps and a private security team to accompany you out to the border area. There are local contacts there with the hostage holders. There are no formal channels; periodically we get a video release on social media. No, we will not turn the plane around."

"Thank you it sounds like there isn't reliable information. I will have to put it together once we are out at the border. Besides the security team what personnel will be out there?"

"Several of the foreign nations have a representative and El Salvador has an official in charge. We have a political affairs officer who is an expert in the region. His name is Rojas. He will be your most reliable source of information."

"Thank you, I will try to sleep and not have nightmares."

"Good luck Mr. Greene."

-

"I'm Rojas Mr. Greene. Any trouble coming out here?"

"An overnight flight and traveling over this marvelous terrain in jeeps for a couple of days I would like a week's rest. I will however listen to what you recommend."

"I have a meeting set up tomorrow with a contact. We need to go introduce you to the officials at the hotel, then I will take you back to a house I've rented. Actually, rooms the family still lives in the rest of the house. Don't tell anyone about our meeting. We must work outside of the official government coordinator or we will not make any progress with the rebels. Politely meet and greet, explain you are tired and promise to be back tomorrow. We will leave at first light. I cannot promise anything, but we will meet with someone in leadership of the rebel group. The beginning of the real work."

"Do you always flaunt rules and procedures?"

"Not always only when we must. Besides doesn't this look like Nam there are no rules here."

"I have been around some younger people. I am aware of the Big Lebowski. Hopefully some of the Dude's Zen will be with us."

"Let's get over to the hotel and then get back. You will need to sleep and be ready for tomorrow. I have yet to understand the goal they wish to achieve with hostages. You are essentially a private citizen, which gives us more leeway in conducting negotiations. I know we need to move quickly, or this brew is going to sour. Hostage lives may not be valued by the other interests."

"I will listen at the hotel. I have been doing this diplomatic gig a long time. Tonight, will be all pleasantries."

-

After quick introductions with few words at the home of the family, Mark crashed in his room. They seemed very pleasant. Mark said he didn't speak Spanish well. Rojas said it didn't matter as this family was indigenous and didn't speak much Spanish, either. In the dark Rojas awoke him and they were headed out as daylight began. After a couple of hours, they pulled into a village 'park'. At least it was a flat area with shade.

“Sorry to put you at such risk, but it is the only way.”

“We wouldn’t be much safer with a security contingent. There are always more guns.”

Rojas handed him a water bottle and a tortilla thing, “Now we wait.”

After about forty minutes there was a reflection in the mirror; he casually confirmed there were two vehicles behind them. They contained several men with assault rifles there was no need to turn around or count them. Two vehicles approached from the front. One with a fifty-caliber mounted on it. The other pulled up and two men stepped out. A man followed them at least not holding an assault rifle. He called to Rojas. Mark understood he said come here.

Rojas smiled, “Let’s walk over and talk. Try not to start a war, I believe we are out gunned. ”

Mark grinned back at him. Rojas did have a cool hand laid-back style. They walked over to the man. He spoke in a mixture of Spanish and English.

“This is the money man?”

“You want money for the hostages. Our government does not pay ransoms, but he is here to negotiate. We should start, many things are possible. This is Ambassador Greene.”

“Mr. Greene did you bring money?”

“I am here to negotiate terms.”

“What is it you Americans say, talk is cheap. We are expensive.”

“I have to speak with the hostages and then I can negotiate terms.”

"You will ride with us Mr. Greene, it will not be a good view, your head will be covered. Bring the boy" - as he gestured. Two men brought a boy with his hands tied.

"Rojas you will come here to this boy's home which is just across the street. He will have a letter when there is a message. He will not lose it, or we will kill his family. Come every day and check. It will be the only way to get a message from Mr. Greene. You take the boy home Rojas. We will take Mr. Greene."

A hood went over Mark's head as the boy was pushed to Rojas. Every vehicle left quickly. Rojas took the boy and spoke with the family. He tried to assure them everything would work out. He went back to the hotel in early afternoon. When he told them, Mr. Greene had gone to the hostages to negotiate a release it caused a great commotion. The military head in charge was especially upset talking about the fool Americans. "Rojas you have given them another hostage. How will they contact you?"

"They said they would get me a message."

"This is not possible; you cannot be stupid."

"They had the guns and we tried to advance a peaceful path, like the Beatles 'All you Need is Love'."

"Rojas you should be shot. Come back when we you get this miraculous message. Maybe the Pope will declare this a holy spot. Leave."

He drove down to where the security team was set up. He gave them the details of the plan. Which really consisted of Ambassador Greene being able to talk his way out of this situation. Rojas packed his jeep with water, extra fuel, and rations. He went over to his room. He told the family his plan. They gave him better food to carry. Later that night he went to a more raucous establishment than the hotel. He paid for a room and a girl. He told her she had to stay, and he would buy her anything she wanted to drink, but he was going to sleep. At three AM he thanked her and ambled out to the jeep, he drove back to his rented room. He wished these

wonderful people knew how to make a decent cup of coffee. At four thirty he got in his jeep and left quietly. He got out to the village. He gave the boy and his family some money and shared some food. They guided him to a lean-to to park his jeep. The boy promised to come find him if a message arrived. He took his small tent near to a stream and became a camper.

Mark Greene's trip was bumpy and dark. He arrived late in the afternoon and met a man who seemed to be in charge. Mark requested to speak with the hostages and then he would try to work out terms. The man ordered he be escorted to the hostages. He said many of the Asian hostages were difficult to communicate with. Mark said he understood. They went through some outcroppings and then a cave entrance. They came into a larger cavern that was bright. It was open to a ledge and cliff. It was more of an outcropping but to get to it he had traveled through a cave. The hostages were surprised to see him. When they found out his purpose they wanted to know when they could be released. He explained he was leaving them to work out the details. He wrote down all their names home addresses and ages. His guards were surprised he conversed with the Asian tourists seemingly in their own languages. The last man he spoke with was the one he knew best. A Chinese man he had worked with and in competition with on many occasions. Mark knew his connections to important interests. He was able to access much wealth. A fact best kept concealed. His old acquaintance gave him names and phone numbers to contact that could meet ransom demands. Mark said it would be a deal for everyone. He would work to get silent compensation for the Americans repaid to him.

Mark then announced to everyone, "I will go try to find a settlement for everyone, no one will be left behind."

He was led back to the man in charge. "Everyone seems reasonably well, thank you for their humane treatment."

"We are fortunate for the weather. We were worried about a military attack. I thought it was a mistake to kidnap tourists. It will bring down disaster on us. Many factions are here, we do not all have the same agenda."

“What demands do you have for their release?”

“My demands are simple I would like a trip out of this country. I was once in a more official position, but circumstances change. I am afraid the many factions require cash, but it is a simple demand.”

“Less complicated than weapons or some other contraband.”

“Weapons flood the world; cash is more protection. Before you tell me, the United States does not pay ransom, I have a counter narrative for you to consider. I want to end this with hostages free and my successful deliverance away from this country. Let us make that happen as soon as possible.”

“How can we get all the hostages out and you, if that is the package?”

“We can shut down the highway for a runway, if you can get the plane. We can’t safely drive out of here. The man in charge would love a shoot-out. A few hostage casualties would be a propaganda coup.”

“It would take a long runway for a plane large enough to carry everyone.”

“When I was in charge of suppressing rebels out here, we landed a C-130 on the highway; unloaded Strykers. It was a surprise to the rebels; some I fought are now a part of the group I supposedly command.”

“I think we can get a plane to Guatemala and free the hostages there, acceptable?”

“Once the ransom is unloaded and the hostages on board they can leave. A private jet must land for two of my men and myself. You and Mr. Deng will fly with us in a private jet to Europe. I know who he is, no one else does. He can easily afford all this.”

“I and Mr. Deng as you called him will accompany you to Europe?”

“Accompany us to our waiting cars, then I will release you. I will give coordinates for a remote landing strip in the air.”

“You want a transport and a private jet? Isn’t that a long flight for a small jet?”

“I am not keeping the planes Ambassador Greene. But we must regrettably keep the money I demand. It is here to pay my loyal troops and without it their loyalty will cease. I have searched for you once I found out you were the man sent here. An Asian specialist, your Mr. Rojas is the Central America specialist, you speak little Spanish, but you spoke easily to our Asian guests. I must believe you are here for them. The proper plane is available to them”

“You have assembled a plan and your explanations. How much money?”

“I will require a million and a half dollars. The people who will be getting it will want dollars. Now you should not feel badly. Much of the money will help the lives of the people here. My troops all have families.”

“A million and half dollars in cash is not easy to assemble.”

“Ambassador Greene, you and I both know Mr. Deng’s family can easily do it. They probably are already prepared. Your government could do it, but they seem rather, shall we say, incompetent these days. Would this be the reason for your retirement?”

“Age would be the reason for my retirement. You seem to believe I have cash and planes, private jets in my pockets.”

“Ah, you have the connections. We must be straightforward with each other or many will die, possibly you, and likely me. Do you have a death wish Ambassador Greene?”

“This is not the negotiation I expected, but if your plan works it solves many loose ends. Isn’t there a cause for your resistance here?”

"I could have easily been America's best friend here. Our politics are rather complicated with many parties. I am afraid the ruling party convinced your government we were the bad guys, horrible socialists, probably communists. Many being sent here are not as intelligent as your Mr. Rojas. I know you do not want the bad guys to prosper, but I could easily have been the man in charge of the command post back at the hotel. I would be the good guy tracking down my counterpart out here on the border. Is this not the best solution? Do you not want to see your wife and family again? I do, now I suggest the enemy of your enemy be your friend for two days."

"I agree I was sent on an unorthodox mission. Let us work together for this unorthodox solution. I will need to send a message to Rojas?"

"He is hiding in the village where you became our guest. We can put together a message."

"We will need to be accurate on numbers. I want no mistakes. We will trust each other, even though we do not."

A document was prepared for Rojas containing the location of the landing area and the number of the contacts, information neither party wanted to share. "Your Mr. Rojas will get this early tomorrow morning if he replies with a go then the next day, we are all gone. My security will show you to a room; we will bring you back tomorrow. We will wait for word from Rojas. If our movements or locations are revealed there will be an attack. Rescue is not their priority; I was upset my forces kidnapped tourists. It endangers everyone."

"Until tomorrow then"- Mark left thinking of the millions of things that could go wrong. He was not in control and a plan was in motion. He returned to thinking how it could happen successfully. Mr. Deng not quite the right name, but why correct his host, was part of one of the world's richest families. Money changes a situation, at least only his host knew. Hopefully they would be in Europe safely together before anyone else in this ragtag militia knew.

Rojas was awoken by the boy calling his name. It was predawn, but not completely dark. He crawled out of his tent. Two armed men were standing behind the boy. They handed him a sealed envelope. "I need to go back to the Jeep; I will need some light."

The armed men walked back to the lean-to. Rojas read the message with help of a flashlight when needed. He would have liked to express how crazy this was, but he felt silence the best course. He unpacked the sat phone Greene had told him would not be instantly tracked. He typed the first number listed. It was instantly answered, "Mr. Greene?"

"No this is Rojas; Greene is with the hostages; he says all hostages are in good health. Greene has sent me a message there are ransom demands."

"We were expecting demands, what are they?"

Rojas carefully read the message. The person on the phone repeated each detail, "I will call back in an hour, we think this can happen."

Rojas told his small audience they would reply this morning. He decided not to put out a time in case one of the men was a clock watcher. He got into his special apple stash. He had them sent to the embassy before he left on this possibly career ending mission. Mission seemed too routine a term. The container kept them very well even in heat. He ate one a day, his special moment. He decided all four needed to share a moment this morning. They were unfamiliar with apples but seemed to enjoy them. Rojas had grown up camping he always found apples great gifts of friendship. Greene's phone beeped and he answered it.

"We were prepared with the cash ransom. That plane will carry all the hostages to Honduras that was where we prepared our response. The jet and trip to Europe is a surprise, but we can do that. The transport will land at the target site at 7:30 tomorrow morning. The jet will be in route and prepared to land forty minutes later. Fuel will be close no deviations. Wish Mr. Greene well."

Rojas took the document and wrote his response on it. He had duct tape in the jeep and sealed the packet back up. He told the two armed-men, take this back, the exchange would be tomorrow morning."

One replied, "Greene he was the money man."

"I will be here until I am called. We all want the hostages out and safe. I hope not to see you again." Rojas said, "Your group should do well."

He wished them a happy life, then added, "you know money can't buy you love."

The militia men both laughed. After the men drove away the boy asked if he could have an apple for his mother. Rojas had four apples left. He gave them all to the boy. Tomorrow a phone call all is well would be his apple.

Colonel Araujo got the envelope mid-afternoon and brought Mark Greene to his room. "Is this duck tape?"

"Yes, it is. Rojas must have been winging it or it was to amuse me." Mark opened the envelope. "The transport will land at 7:30 tomorrow morning. The jet plane to land forty minutes later. The transport will have a million and a half dollars on it. The money will be in nine large storage containers the ninth is about half full. It is coming from Honduras that is where they had the plane in anticipation. We are warned the jet plane will not have a margin of fuel beyond the estimate. Is this OK Colonel?"

"Agreeable, let's start moving we will travel most of the night. The security team will take you back to the hostages. Tell everyone the plan for a transport plane. Do not mention a jet, then stay with Mr. Deng. You and Mr. Deng will have two personal bodyguards."

All the hostages were excited and moved efficiently to the several trucks. They got started in daylight and bumped along until about 4 AM. They were told they would remain here until daylight. Mark was in a customized hummer with his Chinese friend. They spoke in Chinese softly between each other.

“Thank you, Mark. I hope this all works out.”

“I hope so, I wouldn’t want to waste your money.”

“What do you make of this Colonel. I saw him briefly; he has kept us decently treated. We’ve had no threats, abuse, or demands since we were turned over to him. “

“He wants out of here as much as you do. He knows you are an important person, that is why we are getting a separate ride. Also, he feels the hostage taking threatens everyone. There are several factions even within his organization, he was not pleased to have a hostage situation. I think if everything stays on schedule we will get out of here before the official rescue force comes in and the shooting starts.”

At 6:30 the Colonel had a formidable force block the highway. The runway was now open. Our little convoy came onto it from the side road and parked in open area well off the road. At 7:20 a transport plane made a pass over the highway. It circled back began an approach, the weather was calm, the time of day was well chosen. The plane stopped; the men with trucks we had come in moved out. They checked the containers; all was in order. The Colonel had four main factions. Each faction took two containers; the trucks left each were followed by members of their own contingent. The hostages got on the plane as the last storage container was put in the Hummer, we had been in. We stood with our bodyguards as the others boarded. We had told everyone we were leaving separately as part of the agreement. We waved, a few worried looks were returned, but no one was surprised. A jet appeared in the sky and took a high wide loop around the area. The transport plane fired up and lumbered off. Watching it take off seemed endless as if it never could get off the ground. It easily cleared the militia forces shutting down the highway. The jet came by on a lower flyover. It circled and made its approach. It came down with much more nimbleness than the transport. Our bodyguards started us toward the jet. Colonel Araujo was by the Hummer. We began to hear crackles. It was clear there was gunfire in the distance. The sound indicated it came from the direction the convoys of troops and cash had taken. A helicopter came

towards us from our right. The fifty calibers on the vehicles near us unloaded on them. I do not know what the plan was, but the copter was soon crashing a quarter mile off the road. The Colonel had quick words with a man with the Hummer. Our guards started us to the jet with more haste. As we approached the jet, shots from the crashed helicopter came towards us. The fifty-caliber on the Hummer soon silenced them, I took a bullet in my calf. The colonel shouted, "On the jet." The Colonel seemed to have confirmed a plan to consolidate forces to our right where the assault was occurring. We and the bodyguards were on the jet; the colonel climbed in and ordered a take-off. The pilots were in agreement; we were off the ground quickly. Colonel Araujo used the med kit to slow the bleeding as the pilots ran a checklist on the jet's condition. The Colonel was adept at combat first aid. He asked the pilots, "how is the plane?" Deng Chi translated, after the pilots reported, "He said everything is sound no issues." The Colonel gave me the coordinates. I shared them with Deng Chi. He gave them to the pilots. They replied the location wasn't in Europe.

Araujo said, "it should be shorter."

"I asked the pilots is it shorter than Europe?"

They said, "It is."

I asked, "any problem going there?"

The reply was no problem. Deng Chi was trying to take my pulse, I didn't think that would help. I asked if there was water? He quit messing with my pulse and gave me a water bottle.

The Colonel pushed his fingers against my carotid artery and assessed my temperature and looked me in the eye. "I've nearly stopped the bleeding do you feel like passing out or are you with us?"

"I think I'm with you. I don't like being shot."

"It passed through the calf It missed your bone. The doctors will do more tests and likely tell you the same. I disinfected it the best I could. Mr. Deng,

I apologize for the kidnapping. I had to get enough money to appease everyone very few knew I was leaving. The kidnapping was not my plan. My plan was everyone's escape I hope that has worked. Ambassador Greene I do hope you are the only casualty among the hostages."

"Deng Chi asked the pilots to check. They reported the transport had cleared into Honduran air space. All was well at present. I translated for the Colonel.

"Good your Mr. Rojas took a great risk, but it has saved many lives. I am counting on you being tough Mr. Greene. I want to leave behind no casualties."

"Your men were engaged in a fire fight when we left."

"The government was pushing for an attack. They will be disappointed the hostages are out and safe. Mr. Deng has made my men's fight worth something."

"Colonel, Mr. Deng wants to know who would have ordered the attack on us as the hostages were being released."

"That would have been Governor Cristiani"

"He also asked who ordered the kidnapping?"

"It was a faction called the Mudanzas led by Mauricio Ungo."

"Yes, Deng Chi, I can get profiles on these men."

"Pilots say we are 45 minutes out from your airstrip, Colonel."

-

Rojas heard the phone beep. "Mr. Rojas the transport has landed in Honduras. Everyone is safe. Pilots in the jet have landed not in Europe but on an island. They are back in the air they will land in San Juan Puerto

Rico. Mr. Greene was shot but we are told not seriously wounded. There was an attack as they left. Please be careful we thank you for your assistance."

Rojas had everything packed he drove over to the home of the boy. The boy's mother greeted him by saying apple. He informed them all the hostages were out and safe. He said Mr. Greene had managed to get shot but was supposed to be alright. He gave them all the cash he had, a small payment for having guns held at your head. They promised to pray for Mr. Greene. He headed back, apples always a good idea. He needed to get more apples. He pulled over in a beautiful spot grabbed his other phone turned it on. He decided it was time to see if he still had a job or would he be arrested and shot back at the hotel. He doubted he had any friends there and he was all out of apples.

Chapter 51

Sometimes a moment can be found and experienced – relived. Carol, Karen, Madison, Lee

Perhaps it's the crossroads of another time
Maybe it's too lonely out here
But I can hear the voices of misery cryin'

Some day these highways will all disappear -

John Mellencamp – Ghost Towns Along the Highway
John Mellencamp – Freedoms Road



Horse woman and lake – Boyarov Family

Land Memories

"Come in the kitchen and have lunch before you leave. "

"We will. Madison how did you ever acquire all this stuff in just one summer?"

"It was a busy summer; you know that Lee."

"Dad was right he said get a full-size bed. Pick-up trucks are just pretend trucks anyway. If it can't haul a load don't drive it down the road."

"You should write a country song with that line; Elly and Lizzie got you to perform many country songs."

As they sat down Karen asked, "do you want water, iced tea, or milk?"

After she poured drinks for everyone, they began lunch. "Thanks Ms. Parker it has been a wonderful summer. I was pleased by how many people came out for the concert at the pavilion. Our group gathered a real following around here."

"Pete made it an employee appreciation event and the demand from the public was very strong. Your appearances at the fairs and festivals drew notice. Parker's Chill Pills catchy I guess, but now Ruth wants to sell a fruit flavored treat as chill pills. Your friend the drummer is a real character, adds a lot to your stage personality."

"If he could also pay attention and not change our tempos."

"Madison he is not the best, but he is fun and a friend since first grade."

"You sounded great Karen. I was impressed; you carry the big voice for any solo."

“Once you get roomie to stop being Miss Metropolitan Opera singer and find her female rocker voice. People loved the Ronstadt, Harris, Nicks, covers. Carol you suggested Grace Slick and Pat Benatar.”

“I always liked ‘White Rabbit’ and ‘Take Your Best Shot’, Lee seemed to enjoy leaning into classic rock.”

“I do get to play some great guitar solos. Elly and Lizzie could do a whole country bluegrass thing. We were able to flow through many styles. Madison hit a groove with those keyboard intros from classic rock. I had to find the right songs for us. The Buffoons are getting together to put down another album. They want to end this year’s tour back at the Homestead like last year. Mr. Navarro says it was a great kick off to the season. “

“Pete told me he was excited it could happen again.”

“The band had a great time and it brings me home. Lizzie, Elly, and Karen are better singers than anyone in the Buffoons. I hope there is a second summer for the Chill Pills.”

“How did you book all those events, Lee?”

“I called all the festivals. I am kind of a thing now, at least around here. All of them have stages set up and not much on the opening nights. Elly does weekend shifts and I agreed to do weeknights. Most of them want us back for a weekend night next year. I will have to check with Elly.”

“Madison did you enjoy your summer working at the Homestead?”

“My sketch events became a daily thing, the parents and kids seemed to love them. It has been wonderful, living here this summer. It is nothing like home. Ruth and Pete joke that I now know the working end of a horse. I have a new appreciation for horses and pickup trucks.”

“I’m not telling Ruth, but it was nice having a couple of horses back at the farm. You’re going to visit your parents?”

“Lee and I are moving some of my stuff in at school and then over to my parents. I haven’t seen them much since Spring. They were very supportive after seeing the recording on the porch. They liked our report and were pleased about my coming here for the summer. Karen may have gotten a great grade without me, but it was a total blow out for me. I am now being offered more projects in media production.”

“Thank you, for lunch, Ms. Parker thank you for the best summer of my life. These monster cookies are great. “

“Thank you for the best summer of my life is how I feel. I am glad Karen kidnapped me out here to the middle of nowhere for a boring report.”

“I’ve packed cookies and water for you to take along. You two stay safe, see you later.”

“Next summer if not before.”

“Karen let’s clean up and go for a ride. It is a nice cool day.”

Karen and Carol saddled the horses and began. Karen had learned a great deal about horses. She had known almost nothing before. She understood why Carol wasn’t sure they should stay; horses were a lot of work waiting for a perfect afternoon to ride.

“Why did you want to go for a ride today?”

“I feel like recapturing old memories.”

“Are we going to ride through some of the spirits the land holds?”

“If you are open to sensing them, they are there.”

They rode down to the Hayes Place and up to the pond. It was a very lovely spot. Karen tried to quiet her mind and enjoy it. She tried to be sensitive to the land itself. She had learned to see and feel the land with a new appreciation this summer. She became more a part of the family by

reading Carol's odd diary and sorting through her memento box. The mirror in the morning shared a presence, gave Karen Grace a perception. It made her open to seeing and feeling far more than most modern people were aware. Riding out the drive knowing JB's father had died there as well as a young woman. Seeing the old unused gate knowing that massive hedge post had been set by Eldon's father. Karen knew these were memories she had learned. Carol told her to try and quiet her soul. Her horse didn't require much direction; she fell into the rhythm of the ride. As they turned there was a feeling of struggle, there and then passed. Looking around she knew these lands held the efforts of many straining to survive. Life held by a fate indifferent to their prayers. They rode on up to the gate. Karen dismounted and opened the gate as Carol held the reins to Droopy (his ears) and led him through. Karen shut the gate and remounted. They continued up to the pond. Karen caught another sense just as they approached the pond. A release, freedom, a warm feeling she thought a child's immersion in the moment of joy. More time placing it to words than it lasted. A more perfect sense than the words expressed.

"I used to come up here often in weather like this. A late Sunday afternoon when I had a little time. Sometimes, I parked my truck in the drive over on Furniss Road and would walk up the holler. I drove in here many times, but there was a time when I rode up here almost every evening."

"It is nice; I have ridden up here a few times this summer. Madison got me to ride with her down to the Homestead on several mornings. I would take care of the horses. I would help them get ready for the day, then ride back."

"We don't need to tie them we can let them graze. I have a blanket, water, and some apples. A few apples for our horses when we are ready to go home. A good apple is a nice enticement to get them to come or stand as we are ready to ride back."

Carol spread out their blankets and they laid down enjoying a breeze and a warm but not hot late summer afternoon. Karen laid back watching the few cumulus clouds form and transform. She simply admired their abstract

shapes, trying not to anthropomorphize or characterize them, just observe. Carol seemed lost in a dream on her saddle bag pillow, but not asleep.

"Pleasant memories or are you sensing an ancient being? Should I be getting my ghost detector out? I think I found one in the closet of old toys. It must have been when your boys were Ghostbusters."

"They loved that cartoon; no cartoon amounts to much without accompanying toys. Pleasant memories no ghosts. Today makes it feel like I could almost step into them."

"Want to relate your memories?"

"Now, that is stepping into a most private side. You already have the archive of stories."

"I do it is fascinating; I did not mean to pry. You said you have a personal book."

"When we get back, I will let you look at it. We share so much it is not prying. I will not live behind a series of facades. You describe your actress mother like that. I am your friend; we have a special relationship. You have respected my privacy. I let people have their space and you do as well. I was living back to the times I came here to swim. You see where there is still a sandy place down to the pond?"

"Oh, it is, I hadn't paid much attention."

"It has been a long time since I had a load of sand brought up here. Grandpa Eldon had sand dumped up here. I did it again two or three times, but it washes into the pond and grass grows through it. Eventually it just makes the mud have a sandy texture. I used to swim in the pond on a day like this."

"Isn't the water cold?"

"By this time of year, it is warm, cold at first but pleasant after you are in."

"Did you carry a towel and a bikini in your saddle bag?"

"I carried a towel."

"No suit?"

"There was no need for a swimsuit up here."

"You skinny dipped?"

"Old timers simply called it swimming or bathing. I was the hippie flower child, I had to try to capture the illusion of the Woodstock generation."

"Did you ever get caught?"

"Max Greene was all stressed about the pond being a liability, and we would be sued. He rented the pasture and cropland. He went on a real crusade to keep people out. I never did see anyone up here that I didn't know. I guess the answer is I was never caught by anyone I didn't want to be caught by."

"You swam with men; you had a tryst up here."

"Karen my life is not a romance fantasy. I was not taken like some naïve water nymph of mythology. I swam many times alone. On some occasions, I invited a man. It was wonderful to come out of the water dry each other off then warm, excite, and satisfy each other. If I could step back into a memory and exist here, there is only one man. Only one I would choose. A memory I will linger in many times, especially up here."

"It may not be the stuff of a romance novel, but it does sound very romantic."

"Swimming by myself was just fun. In fact, I think we should get in the water, a baptism of the land for you."

"You mean, now, naked."

"I have towels in the bag. Re-imagine the wild days. My generation broke down all those barriers, you young people can be rather prudish. The water, I will warn, will be a shock when you first go in."

Carol began to undress, Karen against her nature followed suit.

"I thought adults were supposed to be examples of model behavior for the younger generation."

"Pretend you are Scandinavian."

"Are you sure this is safe?"

"My advice would be not to drown."

"Are there fish in there?"

"Yes, fish, turtles, and water skimmers, but not piranha or alligators. We'll frighten most everything away. It is shallow and gradual to begin with but step with care. Here I am exposing my old, wrinkled, and weathered body and you are the one complaining."

"It's cold."

"Wait a moment."

They stood neck deep in the lake.

"How's it feel now?"

"It feels good almost warm."

"I haven't done this in years, I may order more sand next year, redo the little redneck riviera."

“How do you know the water is safe?”

“This pond or lake, Grandpa called it a pond, so I do, is supplied by a small spring fed stream. It runs year-round. No livestock have access to the pond or source water. There are some farm tiles that flow into the stream before it gets here. I’ve been grabbing water samples for twenty almost thirty years. I document the water reports after I pay to have them tested. I want to be aware of what the chemical spray boys are up to. I think someday documentation of all inputs will be essential. “

“This is fun. I am still a little worried about turtles. I did not know skinny dipping was a feature of summers here.”

“Just a secret you and I know. Best not to put it in the brochures.”

“I am guessing these wonderful men you swam with didn’t just show up on white stallions or something.”

“No very much normal real-world trysts as you phrased it. I enjoyed my moments with them. I was the only one riding a horse up here, times past, just memories. I don’t regret growing old; I am blessed and healthy. I only miss that opportunity of coming here with the man I loved and reliving the moments of complete passion and pleasure. If time and the demands of the world do not rob you of those opportunities, then age eventually will. Even if he were here, and we could slip away, we are not living in those young bodies anymore. It could never be the thrilling innocence we once had. My children, my family, my friends, my business are all more deeply satisfying than any afternoon of passion and lust. I would advise you, if the person is right and the opportunity is right, enjoy the pleasure, passion, and lust. People may regret immoral choices, but never passionate connections between two free and nakedly honest people. My husband was never honest with me, until the truth spilled out. I was always honest with him. I don’t regret those moments with him. I would never relive a memory bubble with him. I would only want the man I loved, and the one who truly loved me to exist in that bubble of memory. If I could step into it again. “

“Even if it can’t last?”

“Even if it can’t last. We both knew that going in. When we get out of here it will be cold again. I will toss you a towel.”

“OOO wow cold. The towel feels good. Now that I’m getting warmer, it was fun. I know not everyone has a little private lake but living out here is fantastic.”

“Jobs Karen, most people can’t find decent jobs in rural areas. We can eat the two apples I brought for us. We will see if our horses are interested in getting going. I bet they will soon come over to check on their apple opportunities.”

“Maybe if people could be paid in apples, they would stay around.”

“Then the place would get crowded.”

Chapter 52

Mark checks in with Carol each have lives to live - apart. -- 1989

If there's something strange in your neighborhood,
Who you gonna call? Ghostbusters!
If there's something weird and it don't look good,
Who you gonna call? Ghostbusters! –

Ray Parker Jr. – Ghostbusters
Pentatonix – Ghostbusters Sound Track



Doodlebug -- Justin Hardecopf

East Bound West Bound

"Carol, It's Mark, how are you?"

"We are all well. Where are you now?"

"I'm in New York. I've been here about ten days. I've been in Vietnam for most of the past four months. We're rebuilding a diplomatic bridge between our nations. It is very preliminary."

"An amazing change from the days of the war."

"The Vietnamese people are ready to resume an open exchange with us; we have to be aware of our domestic politics or nothing agreed to will hold up in the Congress. The boys must be little men now."

"They are excellent learners and have so much joy in their lives. Their exuberance is rather contagious. Did you know there are ghosts everywhere? Brent has been trapping them and Shiloh is assembling some sort of perimeter defense."

"I may have to question my safety when coming back to Franklin, unless you assure me the spook patrol has been successful."

"The daily report is the ghosts are contained, but I think they must let them out again. As busy as Brent is catching them every day."

"Carol, I have a more difficult issue to talk about. I have become involved with a woman."

"Mark unless this woman is holding you hostage, and you need an escape plan. It is not a difficult issue. You don't owe me an eternal commitment. I didn't believe the foreign service was a monastery."

"I have been cautious. When on assignment if an attractive a woman approaches me, it is likely she is a plant. This woman is an American we

both have been working in Asia. She is a translator, almost as good as those universal Star Trek translators. Julie has been working with the tense Cambodia, Laotian situations. If I could do my job and be a husband to you, I would."

"Mark it was my choice, I would love you coming home to the farm every night. It isn't possible with your career. I won't leave mine, either. Life with the boys and the close-knit families we have is the best life."

"Julie and I think we could make a marriage work. Our careers would require accepting some separations. She has decided on a career not children."

"Are you bringing her home to meet the folks?"

"She's afraid to come."

"Cambodia sounds a lot more dangerous than Franklin."

"Julie is African American, she asked me how many Black people lived in Franklin?"

"Mark that's an easy answer. You can count on one hand with no fingers. People here are not going to be anything but polite. They would be filled with well-meaning insensitivity."

"Julie is nervous about meeting my parents."

"I've always found your parents to be reasonable and very decent people. You know them best. I would write a letter put in a photograph of you and Julie, then call them. She could stay here I would welcome the opportunity to diversify Shiloh and Brent's life experience. Maybe she could translate for one of the ghosts, I was informed one of the ghosts didn't speak English very well."

"Julie was born in New York and grew up in the UN, she may even know ghost. Her mother came from Liberia to become a doctor and developed

programs to expand African nurses and nurse practitioners. Her father was from the Congo. She knows people still are not used to mixed race couples."

"I guess no one will find it normal, if people keep hiding themselves."

"Carol you are always my best listener. You even tolerated all my lectures on the Civil War. I continue to love you like no one else, I have been honest with Julie. She simply says she has come to trust me. She adds there is enough love in me to light more than one candle."

"Is that some kind of African proverb? I must say Julie isn't the most African sounding name I have heard."

"When her mother was going to medical school here, she loved Julie Andrews in the Sound of Music and Mary Poppins. Her birth name is Julie Iléo. I will write my parents, thank you Carol."

"Julie sounds very accomplished; I hope you make each other happy. You will always be my most special love. In our next lives we can spend more time together."

Chapter 53

Carol and Karen welcome Brent and family for Christmas – Legz comes over

One pill makes you larger, and one pill makes you small
And the ones that mother gives you, don't do anything at all
Go ask Alice, when she's ten feet tall -
Grace Slick – White Rabbit
Jefferson Airplane – Surrealistic Pillow



Ellison Barn

Rivalries & Lawyers

“Is Lee coming over? “

“Yes, he was thrilled to learn we were having Christmas dinner on Sunday. His folks had one yesterday. I think Lee has worms no one could eat as much as he does and be so thin.”

“Lee is a mere youth maybe he is still growing. You are thin.”

“I eat one quarter of the calories Lee consumes.”

“When is Madison coming?”

“A friend is taking her to Chicago, and she is taking the train. Lee will pick her up on Tuesday.”

“Are they here for the week then?”

"No, the Buffoons are playing concerts on Friday and Saturday night Madison is going with him. She and Lee will be back on Monday."

"Madison has become a groupie then."

"They have an amazing intense relationship. While we were recording Lee and Madison seemed to be in constant sync, even though she was at school.
-- When is Brent getting here?"

"Soon, they left this morning and unless they have a problem should be driving in about now."

"Shiloh and his family are in sunny SoCal?"

"It is where his wife's parents live. It is hard to get everyone together as people get older and families grow. We are doing a special New Year's weekend. Shiloh and family will join us. Everyone will join us then"

"Tonight, it is just Brent's family plus you and Lee. Brent has agreed to discuss some contracts with Lee."

"I hear a car. I'll go help them."

"Hello, you must be Karen. It is good to meet you as an adult. Mom tells me you've become the daughter she never had. You certainly look like a daughter. Do people tell you look like Mom?"

"It has been mentioned, I have loved being here, and we have become very close. What can I carry?"

"Hello Karen, yes nice to meet you. If you would help Brent with the luggage, I'll take the kids inside."

"Should I collect these books and toys in the back seat?"

"May as well. Is that Lee in the truck?"

“Yes, the chow hound has a nice pickup now. Good timing Lee, grab a suitcase.”

“Nice to meet you Mr. Parker. Thank you for agreeing to look over my contract.”

“Mom said you are doing well as a musician and had a couple of questions. I am glad to help; you can call me Brent. Everyone moves Mr. Parker up a generation. “

“The Orange Buffoons have another tour in progress; our newest music released in November has had good sales. Is Karen your niece? “

“My mother says I should call her my little sister, but formally Karen is my first cousin once removed.”

“Lee and I will carry this stuff upstairs.”

“Mom so good to be here,”-as they hugged the kids came racing out of the kitchen.

“It looks like my kids are already making themselves at home. “

“They remembered the back stairs to the kitchen, and I allowed them one cookie. Dinner won’t be ready for an hour.”

“I’ll talk to Lee then. I read his contract and prepared a summary of guidelines for other ventures. Always good to be home. Karen does look like your daughter. “

“My sons look like me, too.”

“We do, but Karen must be the same height, build and I bet hard to tell from you at her age. Appropriate, if she is my new little sister.”

“One more hug. I miss my little boys, all so big now.”

“OK Lee let’s go into the living room. I will give you my summary.”

“Do you need me? Carol”

“Not for an hour, Karen.”

“I will go listen in about the contract.”

“I made a two-page outline of not allowed and allowed.”

“As part of the group the Orange Buffoons you are required to be prepared, be on time, add to the unity of the group. A rather vague phrase. You can do any performance or recording as yourself. You cannot identify as a member outside of their performances and recordings. Lee the guitar player from Walnut Ridge can put out an album or perform. Are you really from Walnut Ridge?”

“Yes I am.”

“It must be an exclusive club. You can play on other albums as yourself. You could not start a competing group. The vague unity of the group phrase might apply if you were sued. Musicians sue each other often. I decided the guidelines in outline form would be most useful to you. Why are you questioning the contract do you want to leave the group?”

“No, I am not leaving. Ray and Sheryl are the main part of the group. They have written most of our songs, especially the hits like the first one ‘Orange Buffoonery.’ Karen came to our recording session as a backup singer. They had seen the video of the first time we played on the porch and the recording of the end of summer concert at the pavilion. We even put our cover of ‘White Rabbit’ on the new album. Sheryl and Karen traded leads on that, otherwise Karen blended and really helped their new songs. I want to do more summer events with the Chill Pills. I don’t want them to think it is a rival.”

“The Chill Pills?”

"Lizzie and Elly sang with Karen, I played guitar, my friend Russ was our drummer, and Madison was on keyboard. Madison is my girlfriend and Karen's friend from college. We called ourselves Parker's Chill Pills, I am not sure your mother loved the name. I want to do more events this summer. We were quite popular around here."

"Parker's Chill Pills reminds me of Carter's Little Liver Pills, clever I guess."

"Do you do any Orange Buffoon songs? Do you imitate their style?"

"None of the Buffoons music. We do rock and roll covers, country, traditional, and bluegrass. It is a wide range, but we are not imitative of the Orange Buffoon band."

"Are the Chill Pills going to record?"

"No, Karen is going to record, and I want to play."

"A woman who worked for the recording studio asked me to listen to songs she had written. "

"Karen is going to record them. They are a little quirky."

"We would also like to record a traditional bluegrass album of Lizzie and Elly while we are paying for the studio time. We think it would be great to have in the store here. Karen would back them up and I would play on it. Honestly Karen is underwriting the venture with next semester's tuition I believe."

"Is that a good investment Karen?"

"Maybe not, but I liked the woman's songs, she liked my voice. I think they might catch the attention of a name artist. If that happened it might be a good investment. "

“Your contract as a backup singer is simple. You will get small royalties if the album sells, you cannot claim to be a member of the band. Lee can collaborate and play on any album as long he doesn’t try to use the Buffoons name, style, or logos. As long the Chill Pills are not recording as a group then I see no issues. Karen Parker vocal artist, hmm?”

“Actually, not Karen. Karen is a meme now. We’ve settled on Gracious Notes by Grace. Grace is my middle name. My parents found the name looking back through family names. I’ll be Grace because it made the writer and her producer friend more comfortable, now that Karen is synonymous with racist. Never become a meme if you can help it.”

“There must be some concern Lee, or you wouldn’t have asked about contracts?”

“I am afraid Sheryl and Ray would get jealous if the Gracious Notes album sold. Sheryl was somewhat jealous of Karen’s voice. I think they feel I am their discovery and shouldn’t branch out. Karen never upstaged anyone, but there is a real complexity and quality to her voice. It just comes through.”

Carol came in, “Time to get to the table and get the food on. I assume none of these music whimsies will affect my company.”

“Not at all Mom, unless Lizzie and Elly sell many albums, then it will add profit. I haven’t heard Elly sing since she was a little girl, Lizzie always had a great voice.”

“They are spectacular together, a special blend. Let’s gather round the table. We should pause for grace at Christmas. My new daughter now Grace would you say a prayer. We are using Grace’s dishes again. It seems appropriate.”

“Oh wow, this is usually Ruth or Lizzie’s role. I would thank God and all of you. I haven’t had this loving connection of a family Christmas maybe ever. I am thankful for the land, the family, the food, the cooking, and the joy I have being here. Thank you.”

“Not bad Karen Grace. Eldon and Grace would have approved.”

“Who are Eldon and Grace? Eldon’s an odd name.”

“We will eat, now, Jonathan. After dinner I will tell you about them. They were my grandparents and this house I feel is still theirs. Thank you for coming over Lee”

“This is great. I love the applesauce, these potatoes, the turkey. I especially like the dressing just the right amount of sage and the gravy I love gravy.”

“Thank you, I enjoy having you here. I know you also love my liberal use of onions and garlic. Potatoes should not be bland.”

“I put your applesauce in a bowl. It won’t get in your potatoes that way”

“Well Jonathan here’s a little secret your Mom may not know; a bit of mashed potatoes mixed with this exquisite applesauce is a very good combination. Put just a little dab of potatoes in your bowl and try it.”

“Lee first came because Madison invited him for Sunday dinner. It turned out to be a fantastic day, but you should have seen two young women trying to duplicate a Sunday dinner with biscuits and white gravy. Ruth and Lizzie came over and we had a great time. What did Lizzie call Madison’s first attempt at biscuits, Karen Grace? I think I like calling you that.”

“Madison’s biscuits were awful hard little things, Lizzie said they were flat as flitters. Lizzie took her back into the summer kitchen and taught her how to make her fluffy delicious biscuits. Has Madison tried to make you biscuits Lee?”

“She has and they were very good. She’s still trying to capture Lizzie’s magic, maybe you have to grow up in Tennessee.”

“Is there a recording of Parker’s Chill Pills we can hear?”

"There is Brent, after dinner and after presents, Karen can play it. They are very fun to hear, but maybe the Walnut Ridge Wailers would have been a better name."

"Potatoes in applesauce is really good. Mommy."

"Brent how many bumpkin habits are you going to allow your children to pick up on this visit?"

"A few Honey, I thought they could ride a horse tomorrow. I have heard you have a couple of very gentle saddle horses here now."

"You have been talking with Ruth."

"She had some questions about a title a couple of weeks ago. I handled JB's estate. I will miss JB. Is Jimmy still living in the old house?"

"Everyone misses JB. Jimmy is running a busy mechanic's business in the shop that JB and Ruth built. He is still working at the implement dealer keeps himself very busy. I would have invited them over tonight, but they are at his wife's parents and Ruth went along with them."

"Have I told you about the time Jimmy decided we could put a ladder out the haymow door with planks on it to make a ramp. We took our bikes up into the hay mow. Shiloh helped us get them up there. He thought we were going to ride in the empty section of the mow floor. We hadn't told him about the ladder ramp. We came flying down our ramp Jimmy went right into the corral fence and broke his arm. I didn't hit the fence but tumbled over with the bike and got scraped up. I remember JB telling us it was one of the gall darned dumbest ideers he had ever heard of. JB fell back into full hillbilly when he was mad. Ruth told us we weren't getting new bikes; we would have to fix them ourselves. JB took the bikes in his truck to his shop. He showed me how to fix them. Jimmy wasn't much help with his arm in a cast. I learned a great deal from JB about fixing stuff. Jimmy's arm healed; it was a benefit to learn some consequences. On the plus side I learned a few shop skills. It was a thrilling ride while it lasted."

“What’s a haymow Daddy?”

“I’ll show you tomorrow when we saddle the horses.”

“You seemed so sensible when I first met you in the court hearing. I didn’t know you were a daredevil.”

“It is why I am so good at liability cases; I am well aware of the stupid things people will attempt.”

Chapter 54

Mark Greene’s long planned assault of Tennessee and Mississippi includes Carol steering a new course. – 1981

Gone to Shiloh
For the Union
Shoulder to shoulder
Side by side
Gone to Shiloh
Men stand united
When flags and bullets start to fly -
Bernie Taupin / Elton John – Gone to Shiloh
Elton John Leon Russell -- The Union



Batteries at Ft Donelson

Northern Aggression

"Mark, have a good time, if touring history can be a good time. "

"I will Dad. I began planning this trip last summer."

"I know you love it. Danny will help me with the cows while you're gone. I told Ruth at church it wasn't necessary, but no one should argue with Ruth."

"I may be spinning my wheels on my plans but seeing five major battlefields in a few months is a bonus. If Tom and Lawrence Parker are correct, I may not have much time for poking around history."

"It has been nice having you on the farm this year."

"I really enjoy being home, but it wasn't my goal."

"You sure about the old Monaco?"

"Dad it only has 75,000 miles on it. You and Mom take very few trips always stay close to the farm. Commuting on the farm is the walk to your pickup. I have changed all the hoses and belts, it has new tires, and all the fluid levels look good. I appreciate your concern it will be fine."

"I got Danny to help. If he wears one of those cowboy outfits like he does driving Ruth's team of horses, I'm sending him back to the locker plant."

"Our home was a great place to grow up; it is good to help out now. Thank you for letting me off for so long."

"Not much going on right now, how you go'in down?"

"Toward St Louis and into the Bootheel then Memphis and on to Vicksburg. Doing reverse chronology. I will start with Vicksburg then Shiloh and back to Ft Donelson."

"Well don't let them Rebels get you."

"They have a special fear of Yankees in a vintage Dodge Monaco."

-

"Carol do you have everything packed?"

"Yes Lizzie, I am much more prepared than my last road trip with Mark."

"When are you leaving?"

"Mark said 7:30 which is now. It looks like the green beast is coming down the road, better meet him."

Mark pulled up and got out. "Here Carol, I'll put your suitcases in the trunk."

"It is too bad you're not going over to Eastern Tennessee; it is beautiful. The kinfolk would love to show you around."

"Sorry Lizzie the Chattanooga Campaign will have to wait. We're going to capture the Mississippi and Western rivers this time."

"You Yankees behave yourself, don't go burning everything down this time."

"You Eastern Tennesseers used to support the Union. Before Gone with the Wind and Birth of the Nation."

"Wasn't Scarlett pretty?"

"She was Lizzie, she was. We need to roll; I have to be back in time for Spring planting."

"You two have fun."

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"General Greene are we going to turn the secesh back this trip? I did listen the last time; their way of speaking was very amusing."

"We are going to complete the first stage of winning the war this time."

"Where are we going?"

"We will go to Vicksburg Mississippi first it is the culmination of a great strategic campaign for Grant."

"Will we get to Vicksburg today?"

"We could but we are on no schedule. Tell me when you want to stop. I had planned this trip since before we got the crops out. My time as your security detail was a bonus. Far less stress this time no blackmailers or dangerous husbands to protect you from. Five major battlefields in a few months I'm thrilled."

"I thought being accompanied by a 'femme fatale' would be the thrilling part."

"Being with you is beyond thrilling it is any man's wildest fantasy come true."

"I learned from our last Civil War tour; I am really interested now. It was unbelievable destruction and I have become far more aware of the political forces. I am looking forward to listening to you and seeing the museums."

"I read and write about these events; it means a great deal to see the actual locations. You were a happily married woman when I planned this trip. I

am glad that has changed. I wanted to ask again are you sure about risking pregnancy?"

"I'm not risking it, I am hoping and praying for it. You are wonderful, you would be a great father, but you can't stay. Being with you brings a special tingle to my body."

"Won't this potential child want to know who their father is? Won't it cause them trouble in the community."

"I won't lie to the children, but I won't tell them what they don't want to know. We've been discreet and it will be like many other marriages where the wife ends up raising the children after the husband leaves. I was headed for that scenario even if Stephen hadn't lied about the having children part."

"I could not imagine a better woman to be a mother of my children, but I thought I would be an active father."

"You are going to win your case and then you will be in the Asian studies branch of the foreign service, isn't that what is going to happen?"

"Well yes your brother says we will win, then I would be able to accept that job."

"Lawrence knows his business and doesn't string people along. Haven't you always wanted to serve as an expert?"

"Yes"

"Aren't you going to be in Asia or some faraway place by this time next year?"

"Possibly, maybe, probably."

"I would be alone anyway. How many government employees live in Franklin?"

“Zero”

“You can’t live in Franklin and have a career like you are destined to have. I can’t operate Parker’s Produce and Fruit any place else. I would not give my life up to be a diplomat’s housewife.”

“You are infernally annoying because you are pragmatic, and your arguments are fact based.”

“I’ve watched you cowboys. Don’t you pick the best bull for the herd?”

“Stop that Carol. I feel like I’m on an auction block.”

“Put it this way aren’t you a better man than Stephen Capuano?”

“In every way”

“See logical choice, fun, and the best choice for me. Pragmatism is a good life philosophy.”

“Still annoying sometimes.”

“Did I tell you Stephen is coming around the first of May, maybe last week of April?”

“No, that seems strange, weird, should I say fascinating.”

“He called; his publisher and the radio syndication want to add some feel good news to build interest. I agreed, if it included local newspapers, tv, and radio. It is a perfect time to promote our business.”

“How is this visit by your husband who you are essentially divorced from going to work out?”

“It will be glorious. I will behave and act with grace. I will be the perfect Stepford Wife. It will cement the narrative in his book.”

"A false narrative"

"It means so much to Stephen; I suspect he will be his charming self. He could be clever, witty, and charming. It was all a facade to hide the rotten maggot filled carcass underneath, but I will help plaster over that. I will make the facade appear real. It is in my best interest."

"Maybe you should have been the diplomat or possibly a spy."

"A journey with a femme fatale is good practice for an aspiring diplomat. Consider me your practice Bond girl who is really a foreign agent."

"When I first met you at that reunion party, you seemed like such a simple farm girl. Just come back to the country to knock down barriers for women."

"I really enjoyed meeting you but without a wrench in the gears to your inexorable path to success, it may have been one of the few times I would have ever met you. My life would have been much less if you hadn't returned for a sabbatical on the farm."

"I agree my life would have been much less, you are the most fascinating person I have ever met."

"Yes, we are in love, and it is real and authentic. There is no deception in Mark Greene. Now, we can make a child together as a couple in love. At our age we should. A child that I can support now that my business is making money. We will be surrounded by nurturing and loving families. If traditional was possible I would love it, it is not possible."

"I feel like you have just turned every teaching in my Franklin Methodist Church on its head."

"I've been talking to Ruth who loves your church and is extremely serious about it. I think maybe not, we are only turning the made-up rules that religion has created on its head. Jesus' message is mysterious, but it is

simple. I believe we are only violating traditions and expectations, not Jesus' essential message."

"This old car needs a tape deck. We could rotate between the Rolling Stones 'Sympathy for the Devil' and the Gaithers' 'Because He Lives' "

"I don't know the Gaithers."

"You played and I sang 'Because He Lives' in church last year. "

"I didn't remember who wrote it."

"My parents love their music. I was amazed when they told me they were going to a concert. They loaded two other couples in this car and drove over an hour to a Gaither concert. The Gaithers are the equivalent of country gospel's Grateful Dead."

"We have enough gas to go for a ways. You seem to have snacks enough to hold out. I thought we would stop at this café along the Interstate where they will throw you a roll. We should get there after the lunch rush."

"They throw rolls? How do you know this?"

"Late in the football season when I was in college. My friends and I decided we could go to an NFL game. The Oilers were terrible before Earl Campbell. Tickets were almost free. We drove straight through taking turns driving. It was much warmer in Texas. We stopped at this place. They wouldn't stop feeding you. Also, there were the well thrown rolls. It became such a thing they built a new more tourist friendly location. "

"OK is there some Civil War backstory to this. A former Confederate who used to throw hand grenades who started a restaurant where he threw rolls?"

"No, they didn't have hand grenades in the Civil War. They did, but not like modern- "

"Stop enough details for now."

-

"Mark, I don't think I can walk – they just kept offering those wonderful sides. Except that one thing I didn't care for – what was it?"

"Okra"

"Parker's are not growing okra."

"You do now"

"We do?"

"Lizzie started growing it. She said there were enough displaced Southerners to make it worthwhile."

"You were good at catching a roll."

"I was a tight end; the team should have thrown it to me more often. "

"You were a good football player from what I hear."

"It was a small school. It is a whole different game than the one played by the talented people on television. Small school football was fun. I appreciate the effort when I watch a game now."

"I just see people running around and then they cut to a commercial, I don't watch."

"Changing subjects, I am considering deviating from my planned schedule. A choice for you. Would you like to stay in Memphis listen to some music on Beale Street this evening? I have read they were renovating several blocks."

"Sounds like a good time."

“And there will be BBQ.”

“I don’t want to think of food. I am pondering my sanity for allowing more potatoes on my plate, then eating them.”

“We can run over to Shiloh from Memphis and then take the Natchez Trace Parkway down to Vicksburg. It would be more relaxing. “

“You are in command General; I suppose you researched all these things?”

“Research is always important. I began last summer, but now I am adapting. I don’t want to waste this time. I do not want to toss away a precious memory.”

“We’ll enjoy the time. What is the significance of Shiloh?”

“As you may remember from your last lecture on the Eastern Civil War. The Union was focused on capturing Richmond, but never effectively used their superior army. In the West often under the direction of U.S. Grant the strategy to win was being implemented. The Union Blockade continued to expand shutting down the Southern economy as control of the Mississippi and the major rivers was established. Shiloh was where the Union cause was almost lost. Only a tenacious and cool-headed general saved the Union. “

“Did Grant drink?”

“The Lost Causers would have you believe he was a drunk and a butcher of men. Grant was a small man he may have been an alcoholic. He kept his drinking under control with family and when at war. He wasn’t any more of a butcher than Lee. It was a brutal war. As they learned the tools and strategy of war the armies became more deadly.”

“Was Shiloh as terrible a battle as Antietam and Gettysburg?”

"Yes, it was, it was the first terrible battle; it shocked both sides. Shiloh is where Grant and many in the nation realized it was going to be a long and terrible war. "

"Shiloh is something of an odd name."

"Shiloh was named after a Methodist church there at Pittsburg Landing. Shiloh is supposedly the Hebrew word for peace. I don't know Hebrew, but every history of the battle always states that it is. The Shiloh church was part of the pro-slavery Methodists who split away from the Northern abolitionist Methodists twenty years before the war."

"The Methodist Church split over slavery? It wouldn't seem like a church ought to be a pro-slavery church."

"Slavery was the great wealth of our nation. The South and cotton merchants in New York did not want to disrupt slavery. People warp their theologies to please wealth and status. They did in Jesus's time and they do now. People kneel in prayer, read the Bible, and meditate on God's word which amazingly rarely is in opposition to what they want to believe. Their god continues to pat his people on the back saying yes Jesus didn't really command his followers to care about the poor and downtrodden; he didn't mean all are equal in the eyes of God."

"You have serious thoughts on church. Ruth will enlist you in converting me."

"Ruth has faith and lives a life of love. There are no more wonderful people in our churches than the Ruths. I grew up listening to the sermons in church, reading stories in Sunday School. I study and question religion like I do every subject. I don't accept things on faith. I have to examine. "

"You are skeptic?"

"I have experienced the power of connected prayer. I do know we are so limited in perception there is much we are unaware of. I don't dismiss a Spiritual world. I don't believe all the nonsense created and thrown into

religion. I would not have believed slavery was sanctioned by God. I do believe women can make just as good ministers as men. You don't have to, in fact you can't, make yourself stupid and expect to find God and a path to Heaven."

"I bet your mother wanted you to be a minister."

"I don't think she did, she wanted me to be what she would call a Christian man. I would have made a poor minister. Now here I am traveling with a married woman not my wife. I am undoing all that Christian teaching."

"Your mother likes me."

"She does; I know they were disappointed when I told them I was not going to stay on the farm and marry you."

"Hey fifty miles to Memphis not so far. Have you researched where to stay? "

"I will have to rely on instincts or tourist information. We will be entering a new state. We will likely see a rest area Welcome to Tennessee center with helpful brochures. "

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"We will stop at Shiloh today, then we will stay near the Natchez Trace. It will be a nice drive to Natchez. We will likely find a small independent motel, tonight."

"Memphis was very nice; I did enjoy the food. I managed to restrain myself. The music was good, an evening of Blues. I will be happy to be in the country. I've been on the farm so long now; I find cities noisy usually a siren awakens me. You said Shiloh was almost lost, but Grant was calm and tenacious?"

"What do you know of Grant?"

"He drank, he fought bloody battles, and he was corrupt."

"The South apparently even writes the textbooks in Chicago. Did you know Grant Park was named for him?"

"I never thought about it. It was just Grant Park with the fountain."

"Grant did carry a reputation of drink, but he never had a problem with his family, in war, or in the presidency. The battles were bloody, but both Antietam and Gettysburg were fought while Grant was in command in the West. It was a corrupt age. Grant was personally honest, but naïve in his business dealings. There were few men less corrupt than Grant."

"He wasn't a drunk butcher, then?"

"He was not a butcher, but he came to realize he had to destroy the Southern armies. The North had to take the fight to the enemy. His drinking problem was exaggerated by his enemies."

"Grant had political enemies?"

"Many tried to keep him out of the war. Rivalries grew worse after Grant was called a national hero. He had won Donelson, a victory catapulting him to fame. Jealousy amongst many other things combined to create tensions in command. "

"We are going to Donelson?"

"Yes, on the way back. Grant kept falling in and out of favor with his superior Halleck. There were many rivalries in the army between the officers."

"Did it affect Grant or the Union effort?"

"Grant's command was effected. Grant wasn't in charge when the Union headquarters was established in Savannah on the opposite side of the Tennessee River. At Shiloh no one seemed to believe the Confederates

would attack them. The Union at Pittsburgh Landing assembled around Shiloh Church had not put up any fortifications. They were ill prepared for an attack. “

“Why?”

“A question with no answer it was early in the war. The large armies were formed but inexperienced. Their assumptions about the Confederates were wrong. It was like a large boy scout camp, not an army base.”

“When did the attack come?”

“On early Sunday morning April 6th, 1862. The first day was a confusing mess. Some of Grant’s men put up a determined defense. Some of the men were so spooked they drowned trying to swim across the river. Grant built a final stand with well positioned artillery. When the Confederates pushed at them it was late in the day and their attacks were easily repelled. The first day was over. Grant took the reinforcements and his re-organized troops who survived the first day and ordered an attack. The Union reversed the fortunes of war. “

“Shiloh was before Antietam?”

“It was in April and Antietam was in September nearly six months later with many Union disasters in the East in between those two battles. Losses at Shiloh were about equal to Antietam but over two days. Grant never fell apart and he held his army together. There were many questions, the casualties were high. It was the first deadly battle of the Civil War. Grant was easy to blame. He deserved some of the blame.”

“What did Grant do after Shiloh?”

“He tried to start a campaign to capture Vicksburg and win the Mississippi. Eventually after many attempts, he came up with a brilliant strategy to succeed in the most important victory of capturing Vicksburg. It is a campaign still studied.”

"You seem to think Grant was a good general and a decent man. Was there corruption? "

"Grant never sought graft. He was naïve never believed anyone else was corrupt either. Grant was a fair man. He was the only president who defended the rights of African Americans until the twentieth century. White supremacy won the post war period and wrote the textbooks. Grant had to be torn down to build the marble statues to Lee, Jackson, Stuart, and Davis. The Southern perspective on history came to be the narrative of all history books. It is comforting to White America; it just isn't the truth."

"I've noticed how many Black people live here in the South. I might never have thought about it at one time. I have been living in Franklin for several years. In Memphis it occurred to me I live in a world almost as white as milk. You grew up in Franklin and you seem to understand racial division maybe better than I do."

"Growing up in Franklin doesn't mean the whole community was racist. There were a few mean racists like everywhere, but most people were simply ignorant of racial problems. They held stereotypical images but were not hostile to civil rights advances. I developed my perspective from listening to those sermons and studying history. Authentic history especially the story of reconstruction, the massacres and lynchings. It is the history that is there but not taught. It is unpleasant and difficult for people to want to learn. It is easier to ignore, pretend it wasn't as brutal as it was. In doing so even the not stridently racist people of Franklin become complicit. "

"It is better now we are moving forward; don't you think?"

"Here we are in the 1980's the Civil Rights bills, our second reconstruction, have happened. Republicans now pursue a Southern strategy to win. Reagan tells anecdotes that disparage minorities. Our leaders allow Whites to further reinforce racial stereotypes. Budget priorities not purported to be race based are all detrimental to minority interests. "

"Would it have been different, if Lincoln had lived?"

"If Lincoln had served his second term, and Grant had followed him a different America may have followed. America may have won the war and the peace. John Wilkes Booth killed Lincoln because he feared and hated Freedmen. Couldn't accept Blacks voting."

"You mentioned Grant Park and I remember how scary the Democratic Convention was. The riots after the King assassination and other 1960's unrest, were frightening. I hope there will be no more riots."

"Yes, riots do you know where and why the NAACP was created?"

"No"

"Have you heard of Wilmington the 'coup d etat' or Tulsa, the destruction of the Black Wall Street?"

"No, there was a Wall Street in Oklahoma?"

"Tulsa was a prosperous Black business community and whites attacked it. The NAACP was created in Springfield, Illinois after whites attacked the Black community there. After World War One there many racial incidents of violence including Chicago. The scary part is how few people know these things. At least how few White people know these things. Incidents of uncontrolled and unpunished white mobs are numerous. Our next history lesson will have to wait. Shiloh is just a few miles ahead, and it is time to just enjoy the ride."

"This is something of a boat of a car, but it rides well, better than sitting in my living room."

-

"We're coming back to Shiloh?"

"Yes, we will stay somewhere close, so we have all day to visit the battlefield itself."

"It was a nice walk down to the landing; I saw there is an Indian mound city."

"I looked at the map we can walk through it when we're back."

"I would like that."

"Where do you think we can stay tonight?"

"A town over by the Trace Parkway"

"A city or a small town?"

"No city, not a Memphis, a larger Franklin."

"Limited night life."

"There may be a roller rink, they are probably still popular down here."

"I never trusted shoes with wheels on them. We may have to make our own adventure."

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"This Natchez Trace is a pleasant ride. I am gliding on air."

"It's fun. Even at 55 it is still fast because of the lack of stops. "

"I'm having such a great time on this trip. Maybe I should have tried to make you give up the foreign service and live a life on the farm in Franklin."

"If I did, it wouldn't be like this. We would not take a trip like this. Maybe a weekend at the end of August if the combine was ready. We might take a trip in January if we had reliable help with the cow herd. We wouldn't want anyone to think we weren't tending to business on the farm."

Appearance is important to neighbors and landlords. We would never leave during Spring and Fall. We would have to get the hay up after the crops were in. You would be running and expanding your business. I would be paying off equipment loans. Possibly forced into buying a farm or losing it, and then paying it off. There is nothing wrong with that life. I know it is similar to what you are doing. You are doing it with just as much and maybe more risk than my parents take. I respect the life, but my heart isn't in it. I love meeting foreign people. I like speaking a little of several languages. I love libraries and research almost as much as being outdoors on the farm. Being outdoors is the best part of being a farmer. I thank you for making the decision for me. I do love you. Yes, enough to convince myself to continue Greene Farms with my Dad."

"I know. It is where we are; no fighting reality. I am just laying back enjoying the mild Southern breezes. Soaking in the moment and the man I am with."

"We have to return to a normal highway near Jackson, the Parkway isn't finished in that section. We will still end up in Natchez tonight."

"This is the best experience of my life; I'm trying my Zen approach."

"What would that be? "

"No striving, no aspiring, no reflections, just now."

"That is not the Carol Parker I know."

"Carol Parker is on vacation."

-

"Mark, I read they make many movies here because of all the old mansions."

"Makes me a little uncomfortable. I am not trying to recapture this, old times in the land of cotton thing. These are truly those lands of cotton, but the times were not good for most people."

"The Trace Parkway and seeing Natchez is a wonderful tour, thank you. Where are we going now?"

"Up to Vicksburg."

-

"Vicksburg was impressive, I have learned so much."

"What have you found important?"

"Grant planned a risky yet strategic campaign at Vicksburg. He took risks but seemed to understand what had to happen and when. It must have been horrible in the swamps and mud before they moved across the river to the Mississippi side. They surrendered on July 4th the same day Lee retreated from Gettysburg. Isn't that a coincidence or do you believe in providence?"

"It seems too coincidental, not to be providential. When were you turned into a Civil War buff?"

"I've come to appreciate the immense challenges they faced. I've also come to appreciate Grant's determination and his fairness. They emphasize Milliken's Bend as a marker in African American history."

"They had many misconceptions and it took time to view African Americans realistically. The Union troops of black men fought their way to respect."

"Were there a lot of Black soldiers?"

"By the end of the war nearly 200,000 Union troops were Black. We are going to be heading north back to Shiloh. I am going to make one stop at a minor battle."

"Where will we stay tonight?"

"We should still get up past Corinth, near enough to go to Shiloh and be there in the early morning. I would like to watch the mist rise off the Tennessee."

"You are a real romantic in a morbid ten thousand dead sort of way."

-

"I must say even these little dive cafes have great food. Assuming it involves grits, potatoes, and gravy as accompaniments to a fried piece of roadkill or something. I thought you were a little obsessed to be here as the gates opened, but there is something special down by the river. "

"Any General Greene's part of these armies?"

"No General Greene's. Lots of enlisted men named Greene in the Illinois ranks. I don't know the family tree well; we were just common soldiers if some of my Greene's were here."

"From what I learned it was the common soldiers who hung on and fought, in spite of the mistakes of the officers, who won this battle."

"True in many battles. A few good officers and regiments of determined men. "

-

"Let's drive over to Sherman's area and the Shiloh Church. We will work our way over to the Hornet's Nest, then we can walk through the mound city left by the Native Americans."

"It is beautiful and eerie by the river. The mists swirled and it was quiet. I lost track of all time; you could have been gone for days walking. This place hold spirits; I will have to work back through my experience before I can grasp it all."

"Try not to talk to them, they may want to be left alone."

-

"Shiloh was a marvelous place to visit. It is like a sanctuary to human struggle. I loved walking through the Indian village."

"Shiloh may be the best military park."

"Where to now?"

"We're headed to Dover and Ft Donelson. We can likely find another roadkill dive in Dover and a small motel."

"Walking through the Indian Village, seeing the effort to building mounds, it was so quiet, just waiting for the builders to return."

"If you get deeper into this Spirituality thing, some of those lost wandering hippies may show up at your place. They will still be thinking it is 1968."

"If they come, they better know how to weed and then box later in the year."

"Mention the farm and Carol Parker returns."

"I'm going back to Zen mode; this is all going to end too soon."

-

"It is lovely down on the Cumberland. I can almost visualize the gunboats coming around the bend. I liked the surrender house, seemed a peaceful place. Many Freedman came here after the victory?"

"It was a Union stronghold slaves flocked to Union armies. They were desperate to escape and be free. A fact that undercuts the 'happy darkie' of Southern revisionism."

"Ft Donelson would be a nice place to have a picnic today."

"It would be. We are heading back, there are two stops if you want to make them. I thought we would go to St Louis, spend a night there. In the morning we could visit Cahokia Mounds. Afterwards drive to Springfield and see Lincoln's New Salem. Have you ever been to either place?"

"No, I have never been to St Louis or Springfield. Is Cahokia Mounds an Indian site?"

"It was the center of a large Indian culture. One sign at Shiloh Mounds told of a Cahokia piece found there. It must have been in trade or a token of friendship."

-

"The Arch is neat. The desk clerk told me never go up in it. Those claustrophobic little cars are no fun. Why are there Blues signs; is it like Beale street?"

"The hockey team is the Blues; they've had a good year. We are going to a restaurant near St Louis University, their mascot is blue. St Louis does have Blues clubs, but a friend recommended this restaurant. I was planning on getting back to the hotel after dinner. This trip has been too filled with fun and pleasure for me to sing the blues."

"Yes, I think we can find fun back at the hotel. Maybe there's a hockey game on TV."

"Maybe we won't need the TV to find something fun to do."

"If you don't have a hockey stick, I suppose I could search for something else stick like."

"You've found many fascinating things; I wouldn't discourage your research."

-

"It was a big hike up the large mound, but once there it is easy to see St Louis and the Arch. They don't know why the Cahokia Civilization ended?"

"No, it happened at least two hundred years before any European contact. Some natural event, floods or drought may have stressed the culture. The hierarchy of rulers providing benefits to a people may have failed. Eventually the average guy has to ask, 'why am I packing seventy pounds of dirt to build a mound for a pompous jerk to live upon?' People may have drifted away. Made lives in smaller communities of extended families."

"There were several Mississippian communities and several mound-building cultures. I was mostly unaware of this. History wasn't my interest in school. It is fascinating to me how people organized and sustained themselves on the land. Maybe more fascinating to me than a hopeless charge into artillery loaded with canister. I bet I have impressed you with the Civil War knowledge I've acquired, haven't I?"

"You have. I am more impressed how you have listened to my boring lecture-like discussions then quiz me. You are the most wonderful woman I have ever known. I have rarely met a woman to challenge me on every aspect of life. Your intellect, your strength, your spiritual insights, and you're sexy. I am not good at talking about sex. I have always hoped a woman would consider me a good lover. Hopefully, I have given you as much pleasure as you have given me. This trip with you has been a fantastic experience for me."

"You have been; you are generous and playful, for a body builder type you're not macho and selfish, you are passionate and caring to me. We cannot have each other forever; we cannot bind each other's future. This Zen moment is good enough to last a lifetime."

-

"How far is New Salem?"

"Fifteen miles I think, not far."

"What was that gargantuan thing you ate last night?"

"It was a horseshoe; Springfield is supposedly the origin place of the horseshoe sandwich."

"Does it start with a dead horse?"

"No horses or shoes were harmed in its creation. It is an open-faced sandwich, mine was a hamburger with French fries on top covered in cheese sauce. We had some snacks at Cahokia but skipped lunch."

"I had a sensible soup and salad which was very good. I was astounded when they put your platter down."

"Your salad was covered in mold, but you ate it, as well as stealing fries from my plate."

"Those were blue-cheese crumbles from Nauvoo, one of the finest blue cheeses. I only took fries to keep you from exploding."

"Your concern for my welfare is noted. Did you enjoy touring Lincoln's home?"

"I was surprised they had added the second story later. It is fun to imagine Springfield in the 1850's. I liked the visit at his tomb. I guess no one will

kidnap his body again. I wonder what he would think of everyone rubbing his nose in front of the entrance?"

"I suspect Mary would find it disrespectful, but Lincoln himself would have a laugh over it. He would probably tell a story about a man whose nose was so big his sneezes rattled the neighbor's windows or started a war or some outrageous tale."

"When did Lincoln live in New Salem?"

"Lincoln lived here in the 1830's. He agreed to help his father move from Indiana to Illinois some where's near Mattoon. He was twenty-one then and struck out on his own. Children seemed to be under legal obligation to their parents until twenty-one. His father hired him out. Lincoln was a strong youth able to do a man's job. His father kept all the money. Lincoln did not like his father; I think he felt treated like a slave. He referred to slavery as one man stealing the bread out of the hands of the man who made it."

"New Salem started about the same time as the first Parker came to settle and farm."

"All of Western Illinois and Iowa had a large influx of families starting farms and small towns like New Salem about that time. The Greene's did not come to our farm then but were in another part of the county about the same time. It is amazing how many troops from Iowa were in the Civil War most of the state recently settled not long before 1860."

"Do you just walk around?"

"They tried to create the houses and stores as they were. New Salem had disappeared as a town, winked out as Lincoln said. It is quiet here until the school trips and summer tourist season begin. We can walk around get a feel for 1835."

"Did you come here on a school trip?"

"We did it was fifth grade. I read all sorts of books, short romanticized histories, not historically accurate histories."

-

"New Salem reminded me of the Shiloh Mounds city. It seems ancient people were not much different than we are."

"We all have the same needs to meet. We all have a challenge to organize tasks."

"Were there mound builder villages near the farm?"

"Not that I am aware of, Indians inhabited the woodlands. No one was foolish enough to try a village in the swampy prairies. The first American settlers were the same. I know of no long-term sites in our area like Cahokia. There were villages, but they moved after a generation or so it seems. "

"What about the Native Americans today, what do you think?"

"We owe them respect. We owe them the rebuilding of a healthy world and inviting them to be partners in guiding us. Their cultures had more respect for the land, we could use some guidance on that approach."

"I will at least try to make my corner of the world healthy."

"We can easily get home tonight, maybe ten o'clock."

"Can we stretch it out one more day?"

"We haven't spent too much, I guess we could both afford another night. Weather is still cold up here; Dad won't be too nervous. Where do you want to go?"

"Nauvoo, I can buy some of that wonderful blue cheese. The drive up along the river is pretty even in the winter."

“We could walk around; they have restored some of the buildings, Nauvoo was a decade after New Salem. When you buy the cheese, it goes in the trunk. “

“You’re trying to pick a fight, so we can have a little marital spat. Have you tried blue cheese?”

“No, I’ve always avoided rotting roadkill, just stayed with the fresh stuff. We could have lunch at The Pink if you still need more fried food before getting home.”

“I intend to keep seeing you when we get home. I have a plan.”

“I knew you would.”

“Pretend to be a big lummoX and listen.”

“There is a good chance you will be here for the season but gone after harvest. My brother is sure they cannot stall longer than that. I will appear married this Spring when Stephen comes. We just have to not be seen together. It will be warmer by then. We can meet up by the pond in the evenings. I will ride up on one of the horses; Sam loves to tag along. You can drop in from the pasture. You can simply do your standard farm gig. I am sure I want to keep this beautiful romance all through the summer.”

“You mean the lake, everyone but your grandfather called it Parker’s Lake. Yes, I could meet without leaving the farm. Your riding up there isn’t different than what you always do. Are you bringing food along in those saddle bags?”

“I was thinking of salads with blue cheese crumbles.”

“I’ll have to bring a pack with my own roadkill.”

“We could have a grill, make it a nice camp out area. “

“Sounds good if you get pregnant can you still ride?”

“Women do all sorts of things. Ruth would have ridden to the delivery room, but JB wanted to drive her.”

“It sounds like the most fun summer, for pretty much no money, any couple could ever have.”

“When we know I’m pregnant I think I will explain it to your parents. Ruth and Lizzie will know, but just stay quiet. No one need to be aware of a scandal.”

“This is all rather scandalous.”

“But it is not necessary that it be a public scandal. I think it is the right thing why bring in outside opinions?”

“An odd path to what is right.”

“A good path to a magic summer; it is beautiful at the pond, lake, especially at night.”

“If you aren’t fighting mosquitoes.”

“Go with the dream Mark.”

“Hopefully there will be a breeze, it seems to help keep the skeeters more tolerable.”

“I have a question. When I first met you all your classmates laughed about a plow, I never understood that.”

“Oh, it was a silly thing started in junior high. John Deere ran a series of ads about the Long Green Line. Being kids, someone made a joke maybe Mark has a long green line. It kept being a running joke as it continued someone would invariably joke whether I had hooked my long green line to a plow or the right plow or some foolish vaguely sexual thing. I never

reacted much, but it embarrassed me. I do not know why the nonsense continued, but it did. “

“Sometimes knowing more doesn’t mean you know more. Your line was long enough for me; I am the right plow. Good still a little blush, you are adorable Mark Greene.”

Chapter 55

Karen Grace wants to join protests; an older and wiser man advises she learn the real history – 2020

Freedom, freedom
Freedom, freedom
Freedom, freedom
Freedom, freedom -

Richie Havens – Freedom
Richie Havens – Paris Live 1969



Photo of painting by Don Lacey

No Justice in Ignorance

“Where you are going Miss Parker?”

“I was going join the protests. No Justice No Peace”

"As a Black man I appreciate all you, White people, coming out and joining in the protests, but you are not going to change anything by yourself. It is risky out there."

"I just couldn't stay up there and ignore life any longer."

"Come here and look at my television screens."

"This is the first night, people are angry, people are scared, and troublemakers are out. The people upstairs have called a couple of times checking that the building is safe. Why don't you sit here and let me tell you about being a Black man in this country?"

"OK I guess other than hello I have never spoken to you. We just came back here after it seemed Covid-19 was under control in Seattle. I was finishing my year at college when school was closed down."

"I was in the Air Force; I was an MP for thirty years. I retired and got a security job. When they opened this building five years ago, I started working here. My oldest daughter is a grade school principal in Renton. My son is in Oakland California, he organizes youth sports. My youngest is a nurse working to become a physician's assistant. I am not saying my life is a bad one; it is not. I was filled with pride with President Obama and his family, weren't they wonderful?"

"Yes, the Obama family was wonderful far better than our current president."

"Even though for the most part I see great things in this country. Sometimes out of nowhere your Blackness is an issue. A policeman pulls you over for nothing. As you leave a convenience store when traveling you overhear someone making slurs. In our neighborhood most everyone gets along, but one woman won't talk to us. I work my being an MP in if I do confront a policeman because I have to sometimes. I am a fellow policeman. If I left to protest especially up around Capitol Hill where it looks hot tonight. I am very likely to get pepper sprayed. I look like I am a

threat. Too many police think African American means threat. You wouldn't look like a threat, but if you got obnoxious or they decide to clear an area out. You could get hurt."

"Did Obama being president awake people's racism or is Trump fanning the flames?"

"Racism is like a virus. It is lurking even when dormant. It reoccurs sometimes without a trigger. Obama brought the racism to the surface and Trump exploited it. Trump's 'Real American' approach has been around for a very long time. Are you aware of the Tulsa Oklahoma massacre of Black Wall Street in 1920's, or the Colfax or Coushatta massacres in Louisiana in 1870's? Did you know there were over one hundred lynchings in the 1930's? Many people who saw those were in World War Two and Korea, they didn't like Truman integrating the military. "

"No, I haven't heard or know any of it."

"You probably wouldn't have learned about it in history class. It is the unpleasant history. It is the denied history. No none of it is taught in most schools. A MP has to spend time waiting. I was sent to the Middle East. I had time to read. I read W.E.B. DuBois, Eric Foner, and James Baldwin. You should watch that Henry Louis Gates special on PBS. It is not in some far-off past it carries through to the present. The children of the men who waved those rebel flags and beat John Lewis and Martin Luther King were in the military I served in. Trump told them they shouldn't feel wrong. He was just like them. Trump has allowed the hatred to parade down the street like the KKK did in the 1920's. I am glad you want to go protest, and they need all people out making them listen. It would be so much better if the protesters also learned the history."

"We do not learn history because it makes us uncomfortable?"

"It is dangerous to make White folks uncomfortable. That's what is going on out there; they are making White folks uncomfortable. Maybe it is different this time, maybe Trump brought out what was hidden and more of the rich White people are aware of it now. We can hope and pray for

that, but I warn you it is dangerous especially for the people who are not White. I worry for my kids and grandkids."

"I think most young people see it different. I think they will demand changes."

"Pray you are right. You can go protest, then come in, say hi to me. You just go upstairs to your White world. Today's talk of institutional racism doesn't affect your life. It won't tomorrow if everyone forgets about it."

"I should look up this Henry Louis Gates special instead of protest?"

"I think it would help, on the list I have Karen Parker and Tom Parker – you must be the Karen."

"It has gotten to be embarrassing to be the meme for racism."

"Be the Karen who knows the real history. You could change your name to Keisha, I'll still be Black can't just change my name. Neither can my grandkids."

"I'm thinking of using my middle name Grace."

"I like Grace, a nice name."

"Why don't you write down the name of those books, and I will go back upstairs and find that documentary on PBS."

"I will Karen or Grace, I doubt there are any blonde-haired Keisha's."

"Now I feel I should learn more to even protest. "

"Protesting is good but more prominent people like you being informed may have more effect."

"What is your name?"

“My last name is Henderson, and I was a sergeant in the Air Force. Most people call me Sarge.”

“I will use Sarge from now on.”

“I will call you Keisha each time you come in or maybe Grace.”

“Thank you Sarge. I’ll head upstairs and become more informed.”

“If all Americans did, things would change. Grace is a great name; everyone needs more Grace.”

Chapter 56

Lost in the mists of the Tennessee, Carol gains a vision, existing in peace. A moment holding a lifetime, or a lifetime captured by a moment.

To fallen soldiers let us sing
Where no rockets fly, nor bullets wing
Our broken brothers let us bring
To the Mansions of the Lord

No more bleeding, no more fight
No prayers pleading through the night
Just divine embrace, Eternal light
In the Mansions of the Lord

Where no mothers cry and no children weep
We will stand and guard though the angels sleep
All through the ages safely keep
The Mansions of the Lord

The Mansions of the Lord - Randall Wallace – Nick Glenie-Smith – Soundtrack ‘We Were Soldiers’



Morning light at Shiloh

Spirits in the Mist

Carol had given Karen a book with *Null Stillness* written in large script lettering on the title page. "Karen Grace, I have come to trust you and love you like a daughter. These are my feelings written usually on cold nights when all was quiet, either because I was alone, or everyone had gone to bed. I would still my mind and try to allow the words to come to me. I always find myself back at Shiloh on Pittsburg Landing. I am sitting absorbed in the swirling mist. Mark had left me to walk part of the battlefield, he said it was Grant's last line of defense. I had wanted to stay and meditate on the mystical feelings engulfing me. Mark placed a gentle kiss on top of my head then he began his hike. March in Tennessee is pleasant for a Northerner to sit by the river. I sensed, heard, felt, and had visions while I was there. When Mark returned, I awoke from a lucid dream, but I had never slept. When I try to express myself to myself, I am always back in the mists of Shiloh."

"What are you trying to express to yourself?"

"Sometimes recapturing the vision on the banks of the Tennessee, but often writing about my life trying to appreciate it and preserve the joy. There is great satisfaction in much of my life. My moments of joy have evaporated too quickly. The pain of my poor life choices can overwhelm, but it seemed all revealed as I waited for Mark. This was the most joyous time of my life in a place of great agony. JB's stories of his Vietnam intermingled with the cacophony of anguish held there at Shiloh. My mind thrust forward a projection of my life to come. I was secure and accepting, my grief over my failures was erased. Inconsequential the mistakes of naively trusting, not something I needed to atone for. I knew then I would name my child Shiloh. I was sure there would be a child. Mark would always be my anchor even when we lived our separate lives. It seems when I write in my personal diary, I only recount the revelation of Shiloh. My underpowered computer is still slowly processing the vision of the moment."

Now I am left to read and choose which events reveal Carol. Her business path was set in motion like a spaceship on course for a rendezvous with a distant planet. Carol could not have foreseen her young nephew, my Dad, being a business partner. Another generation of Parkers who brought technical skills for gadgets yet to be invented. The future may not have included expanding to a business of its current size or the zoo, but some type of successful business was in motion. Ruth, Lizzie, and Carol were a team dedicated to building a business adapting as opportunities and threats occurred. They would succeed at reaching their destination; the unknown part being what that planet would consist of.

Carol said, "I was left in the mists doubting, analyzing myself. Hadn't Cosmo/David and Stephen shared similarities? What drew me to them? They had an easy charm. Quick with quips drawing one in with their witty asides each had a natural talent at making a good first impression. Both were slim and a few inches taller than I was. Their appearance carried the look of rock stars with long hair stopping somewhere below their shoulders but above their butts. Each one had been self-centered once they had moved past the seduction phase. I had agreed to marriage too quickly. JB and Ruth had married quickly, but JB and Ruth were a solid couple. Solid was an adjective for Mark. It described his body and his character.

My business decisions were sound, my romances had been nightmares. Now, I had found a rock, yet I chose the swirling mists. "

Irresistible and Precious

"Good evening, Max and Margaret, you come to see the baby?"

"We did Lizzie. I also want to tell Carol I've had a change of heart. We need to be a family, if secretly."

"Come on in the little bundle may have opened his eyes. He still weighs twice what little Brenda does, and she had a three-month head start. Della is so thrilled she just beams at the babies when we're together. She was real proud her new baby sister was baby Jesus in the church Christmas pageant, but she did ask if a girl should be Jesus. Ruth told her Jesus would be proud of Brenda and an all-powerful God contained the souls of both men and women."

"Everyone was touched to see a real newborn. Hello Carol, I've come to say I was wrong. I want to hold and grandma this little baby."

"I am thankful. I am sorry I have put you in this uncomfortable position, but I couldn't deny Mark a life he has worked hard to attain."

"Everyone just knows you're married to Stephen and makes those assumptions. No one knows any different other than Ruth and Lizzie. I want to keep it that way. It would be embarrassing if the community knew the truth. It would hurt Shiloh growing up. We'll be surrogate grandparents as close neighbors ought to be. I can live with that."

"Yes, Margaret it will be best for everyone. Do you want to hold him?"

"Please, oh he is so precious."

"Carol, all babies look much the same, but this one is special. Margaret and I won't say a word, but we want you to be family. We are proud of Mark

and you in every way, even if it upset us at first. Some things are as they are, and we will love this little boy.”

“Thank you, it wasn’t Mark’s idea it was mine. My parents think I have Stephen on a probation period, but they don’t know the full details of his deceptions. Dad is pleased Shiloh will be known as a Parker. He says it fits Franklin.”

“Tom is right your family has a long tradition here. One you are carrying on with your hard work. I know Eldon and Grace would be pleased.”

“I hope so. I feel they would.”

“If we can all just stay quiet, I will feel better. I couldn’t live with the constant gossiping, otherwise.”

“Margaret, I have decided we need not say anything. Nothing then will be rumored and gossiped. Mark and I had to tell you and then it was your decision.”

“We will be grandparents and good neighbors. It will work out.”

“Max, you want to hold him, he’s so sweet.”

“When he’s older Margaret. I feel I have forgotten about one so small.”

“Mark questioned my naming him Shiloh, but I insisted.”

“Carol, people will say it is exactly the type of name some city girl coming out here to start a feminist hippie commune would name a baby.”

As the laughing stopped Carol said, “Max, you Greenes have a wicked sense of humor once you are part of the family.”

Mark first got to hold Shiloh at Shelly’s condo. He could drive that old Monaco to Chicago, when Carol took the train to visit her parents. Shelly was dating a divorced man with two children. She said watching Shiloh

was trial motherhood. She wasn't sure she was meant for it, but Shelly thought Shiloh was the perfect baby. Mark would work all the weekends, someone had to, he built up extra weekdays off. His Chicago furloughs were interrupted when Mark was assigned to Hong Kong for six months. He was immersed with native Chinese speakers. They were only able to work a visit to Shelly's a couple of more times. Eventually Mark had seniority and experience and then was assigned in Asia more permanently. He stopped maintaining a residence in the U.S. The Green Boat, the dreaded terror of secessionists, became a gift to a younger cousin. Carol always smiled when she saw it around Franklin. One time she heard the booming speakers, the young Greene had installed, blaring Billy Idol's the Rebel Yell; she nearly choked laughing.

Carol did go visit Stephen for interviews when the paperback edition was set to be released. He also got syndication of his garden walks radio show. Stephen used recorded interviews with Carol as an introduction to the first season of his program. Local NPR affiliates came out to the farm and did interviews. Eventually, Parker Produce and Fruit became local underwriters of Stephen's program. Ruth and Lizzie questioned her, but Carol said it was good for the business.

Mark was able to get together with her on these visits for Stephen's promotions. Brandy had really helped Carol make the visits feasible and found an isolated cabin for her and Mark. Brandy said Stephen was still lecherous, but she had nailed him down on truth. Stephen did regret his untruthfulness with Carol. Brandy said Mr. Simmons had pulled her aside at the restaurant one night when he learned she was dating Stephen. He discreetly warned her not to trust Mr. Capuano. Brandy made Carol's visits work with minimal Stephen interactions. She joked with Carol on the last visit that her doing so was good for her business, as well. She controlled the business and financial side of Mr. Capuano. Brandy said Stephen wanted some Italian car, but she loved her Corvette.

Mark held Brent, as a small boy, but after 1985 he rarely got back to Franklin or even to the U.S. The sporadic visits with Carol ended. This became his life regret.

Magical Moment

"Hello Carol, it's Mark."

"How are you doing Mark? Max and Margaret were excited and a little overwhelmed by New York."

"Yes, they felt out of place, but Julie's mother exudes warmth. She sent escorts for them and they didn't get lost and had a good time. They are as accepting as they know how to be of Julie. People want to think they are not prejudiced, but when it is put into practice it is not as easy. We do share the same church and I must say Methodism was what bridged the gap."

"Margaret shared the photos with me, you and Julie look very striking. It was an adventure of a lifetime for your folks."

"It was. As cautious as they are talking about the boys at home, here they were free to describe all Shiloh and Brent's wonderful adventures. I am grateful they have the boys' lives to share. Yes, I wish I did, but we made our choices. We face difficult challenges in the world; I know my work is an important duty. Thank you, my life was not meant for Franklin. I wish it was."

"Life is the best it can be for both of us. The boys have about the best life here. They love Max and Margaret. The Donaldsons are here constantly, Little Jimmy and Brent are inseparable. They love school and are learning a life of work outdoors at the same time. If Vietnam was as close as St Louis, you could experience some of their escapades in person."

"Actually, I am being sent to Beijing. I will likely live in China for the next several years."

"Is Julie assigned there, too?"

"Julie is working with China specialists at the U.N. and our embassy. She will be making frequent visits but will live with her mother while in New

York. This is why I called. Julie wants to get to know you. We don't get paid fortunes, but we haven't had a house or other expense. Julie wanted to know if you would allow us to take you and the boys to Disney World. She would like to call you and work out a plan. I told her you were excellent at plans. I was sure you would be willing to talk to her."

"Yes, I would like to talk with Julie. I suppose she already knows how boring you are, but we likely have secrets to share. I don't know, the boys and I have never done more than visit my parents in Chicago. Ruth and JB went to Tennessee to visit family and went to Dollywood. Have Julie call, I will think about it."

"I have been open and honest with Julie, but now I will have to worry about secrets you will share. When should she call?"

"In the evening after nine here, if that is not too late for her. I have the boys upstairs and at least in their rooms by then. "

"No, ten here should not be too late. It is nice to hear your voice."

"Yours too."

-

"Katie, why did you pick Florida as your college? Do you love Gators?"

"No, Aunt Carol actually the gator mascot was something of a turn off. Living life in Chicago we had winter followed by cold springs, Florida meant being warm year around and an easy drive to many beaches; it was irresistible. Dad refused to let me go to school in Jamacia."

"Lawrence is rather stern sometimes. Thank you for coming to help with Shiloh and Brent. Old enough to be independent but at ten and seven not safe on their own. "

"I also get to see Benji. Ben would prefer I not call him Benji, but I told him he was so shaggy I would call him Benji. He has a better haircut now that he is working at Disney World."

"What does he do?"

"He is a waiter at EPCOT, but occasionally gets pulled in to help with the parades."

"I hope I am not interrupting your classes."

"No, I am done until Fall, I wasn't headed home. This will be fun. You'll like Benji; he is coming back to school when Fall starts. He wants to be a teacher and coach; the nephews will be a good trial run. Who are the couple we're meeting?"

"I know Dad brought you out to the farm once or twice did you meet Max, the farmer who farms the crops and cattle?"

"Yeah, he was a real old MacDonald type."

"His son Mark works for the foreign service and his wife Julie will be with him. The Greene's love the boys like grandkids. When Mark and Julie had this Disney World special, Max and Margaret wanted the boys to come along. Coming up to Chicago is the biggest trip we have made. They were excited because of Chip and Dale they love the Rescue Rangers. I remember Chip and Dale as mischievous Christmas tree hitch hikers not Indiana Jones types. I hear voices let's go in. We were up early, and it was a long flight. The boys crashed once we were in the room."

"The Rescue Rangers are cool. We'll have fun, a nice room for all of us to stay in, it is better here on the Disney complex. Benji's apartment has bugs, I know it's Florida. I still hate bugs. I'll stow my suitcase."

"Hi Katie, Mom says you've been here many times. Do you know Mark and Julie?"

"No, I met Max when Grandpa brought me out to the farm."

"Max and Margaret are so fun. Margaret makes wonderful custards. Max has big tractors. We love going over. We don't know Mark either. He's been in Asia; we've colored maps."

"Mark's wife is Black she's from Africa."

"No, Brent, Julie was born in America; her parents were from Africa."

"The boys have looked at the wedding album over at Max and Margaret's. Margaret does usually say that she is from Africa."

Carol opened the door answering the knock. A young man was there a little scruffly but not shaggy enough to be called Benji. "You must be Ben."

"Yes I am. Hi Katie."

"Shiloh, Brent, Ben works here in the summer and he will guide you to a good place to watch the fireworks. "

The room phone rang, "Hello, good you are here. Ben and Katie are just getting organized to go to the fireworks. Why not come over. Pluto 205"

"Mark and Julie are here and will walk over. Katie charge food to the room we are getting the bill. Boys, tomorrow you can start doing the rides but let Ben guide you tonight. Fireworks should be fun. I am going to have dinner with Mark and Julie. We will start planning our time here, maybe Ben can suggest the best rides."

"I like Space Mountain, but there a height limit. I think your boys are tall enough."

"Do you like roller coasters Katie?"

"Yes, I love them."

"I am not sure if I will. I can barely stay on those horses Ruth keeps on the farm."

"Ruth says you love the horses, you just like ribbing her about them."

"Maybe Shiloh, Ruth's ideas often have to grow on me, but she was right about the Shires."

A knock, Carol opened to see Mark and Julie, for a moment her mind paused. She could not simply hug Mark as she would have, the reality of the choice was present, but she simply said, "Let me introduce you."

Her boys both came over and gave Julie and Mark hugs, "Margaret said to give you both hugs. We love coloring maps and reading the stories about the foreign countries."

Carol said, "This is my niece Katie and Ben. Ben goes to the university with Katie and has a summer job here."

Mark asked, "Where do you work Ben?"

"I am a waiter at the Garden Grill in The Land exhibit at EPCOT and sometimes help get the parades under way. "

"We'll have to eat there."

"The food is good; EPCOT offers many choices. I've been able to try many cuisines I guess is the proper name. I work lunch and dinner tomorrow."

"Ben and Katie are taking the boys to eat Magic Kingdom food and see the fireworks."

"I used to imagine the fireworks on our black and white TV on the Disney show. Disney was a highlight of Sundays in the old days of Franklin."

"I am meeting Julie for the first time. Mark used to bale hay at our farm. He knew Grandpa Eldon and Grandma Grace; we have stories to catch up on. We will plan out what we want to do here. You discuss it with Ben and Katie, and we'll decide what to do in the morning. You two behave for Katie."

"Mom, we will."

"We made reservations at the China Pavilion of EPCOT. Food will likely be very Americanized but there may be some native speakers. If you are ready, we could head over there."

"I guess I am. I was told all I needed was my room key. Disney would gladly ease my way to many purchases."

"Carol and Mark, give me a hug. I liked Margaret's greeting. Yes, both at the same time, we are building a connection. A prayer of thanks, we are together. Your sons are fine boys, Mark holds both our love, let us have fun and share a special time."

"Yes, I hope we can all enjoy being here. Chinese food not easily attainable in Franklin."

"The China Pavilion will have people from mainland China, a little practice for Julie and me."

-

"Good Morning let's plan the day."

"We want to do Space Mountain first; Ben thought it would be the best time."

"Mark, do you enjoy roller coasters?"

"I do like the rush."

"Shiloh and Brent would you be OK going with Katie and Mark for the thrill rides? I believe Julie and I would prefer to spend more time at EPCOT. We could all come back here and then go to dinner tonight."

"Katie is fun. Mark can tell us about Franklin in the old days. Max always says, 'well back in the old days.'"

"The four of us will have a great time. Katie did you know I owe my career to your father's lawyering skills?"

"I knew he did something for you and the farm, but I try not to listen to his work, often very boring."

"It is boring, but he turned around a very tough time for me. I will always be grateful to your family."

"Mark, Tommie has a really cool game. We play it on our computer."

"Yes Mark, my brother Tommie's computer programming is amazingly boring. His company has some neat games. I have met his co-workers they would not be fun to take along. They can barely talk to real people and the sun might kill them like vampires. All you Midwesterners need to use sunscreen, a safety advisory now that I am a Floridian."

"Thank you, Katie, let me give my boys a hug."

"Don't say it Mom."

"What Shiloh?"

"We'll be good, don't tell us."

"Ok Mark and Katie, don't lead my sons astray."

"Yes Mark, you represent the United States Government be a good example."

"I'll uphold my oath Julie, but I may scream on the roller coasters."

"Carol and I are going to have another cup of coffee and plan a leisurely day without screaming."

-

"I hope you don't mind coming back to the China Pavilion for dinner tonight. Mark was forced to promise out of politeness. They were intrigued with Americans who could speak Chinese, and Mark is going to Beijing."

"I loved it, and I am sure the boys will. I am enjoying EPCOT, but everything has a corporate sponsor. A biased view of the future, possibly."

"Disney knows how to make money. It is still amazing. Lunch at Ben's Garden Grill?"

"Sounds good, Ruth came back with many ideas from Dollywood. Good she is not here; she overflows with marketing ideas. I couldn't possibly be as successful without her."

"Mark says you, Ruth, and Lizzie are a force to be reckoned with on the farm, and a wonderful extended family."

"We are one big family. It includes Max and Margaret. They are surrogate grandparents and Margaret is firm on not revealing they are grandparents. Shiloh and Brent were excited to come and simply accepted that you and Mark had been given discounts. Margaret said she suggested you use them for the boys as you didn't have children."

"We won't have children either. It makes it especially wonderful to meet your sons. Our careers require travel and separation, but your wonderful extended family must be a joy."

"It is and our lives seem full. Being here does make me realize how isolated from much of the modern world we are. It makes me appreciate our shared lives and what a unique world we have. "

“Mark has been extremely open and honest with me. He doesn’t like to talk about intimate things. You need not worry I don’t know everything about you. I do know how much he loves you. Mark thought possibly after a few years when you were actually divorced, he might be able to be your husband. His career got more demanding, your business growing, he accepted it wouldn’t happen. Yet he wasn’t pursuing a new relationship. I decided to approach him, and I had avoided men for a long time.”

“The men I have been with weren’t all encouraging, the ending was painful. Mark is wonderful but he doesn’t pursue like other men. We got to know each other as neighbors when I was married. We both thought I was, my marriage certainly wasn’t what I believed. We became friends. When my world collapsed, I had a friend I deeply desired. He was everything for me, but I couldn’t steal his future.”

“I thank you. Mark is a great gift to me. He is also excellent at his job. I can’t imagine him as a farmer riding horses.”

“Mark was not meant for farming, but he wouldn’t be on a horse. He is much more of a pickup truck type of guy. Horses aren’t part of real farms anymore.”

“Mark meets people easily; he can find a conversation with almost anyone. He still is withdrawn. He is outgoing and introverted at the same time. I don’t understand, but with me he does not hide his feelings or his life.”

“Did Mark tell you about our summer going to the pond?”

“He said you rode a horse and he drove in from the pasture. Honestly, I have a little trouble picturing Franklin and the farm.”

“We were able to be together unnoticed there. He drove his truck like always and I went for an evening ride. Someday maybe you can come back and see our world. What I wanted to say was I studied and listened to Mark every night in his world where he grew up. I think I understand his outgoing introverted personality. His parents are very conservative, I don’t

mean that in a political sense. They are conservative in their lifestyle. They tend to their farm and their words. They are quiet and down to Earth. Mark has no brothers or sisters. He learned to stand back. He wasn't pushed around, but he wasn't pushy. Being from Franklin in our school system is being an outsider. Mark had to learn not to talk like many in Franklin. I still hear people warshing their clothes going down to the crick. I find it charming, but it gets a kid in class laughed at. He grew up learning to stay silent, stand back. I told him one night he must have been every high school girl's dream. He has a muscled body, he was a good student, he played football, he sang in the choir. He laughed no he was never comfortable with the girls. He had pimples, he wasn't clever or witty. He got along but he carried an inner voice that cautioned him not to believe anyone would be interested. It was best not to make a fool of himself. He said it just carried through.

He doesn't want to embarrass or offend anyone. In his mind to approach a woman who wouldn't want him would offend her and humiliate himself. He lets his mind tell him not to ask, not to open up. It makes him seem dull and awkward when he first meets socially. We were just friends as I played for him at church. You worked with him as a colleague and had time to become friends. I came to realize pondering my disastrous relationships Mark seems boring unless you are his friend. He can be boring if you cannot find some interest in the things he studies passionately. Mark as a friend is witty, he is empathetic, and makes life fun. He also seeks to give more than he takes, even in his approach to intimacy which he doesn't like to talk about. Once you unlock Mark, he is a very desirable lover or husband. He doesn't broadcast that, and most women aren't tuned in to guys like him. Once you read the whole book, Mark blooms into a beautiful flower. You have said he can hold two loves. He has one in the past and one in the present."

"I believe it, I want it to be true."

"I had made my choice before we took our Southern tour to Shiloh. I sat in the swirling mists as Mark walked part of the battlefield. The moment held all the past and future. All summer I kept puzzling on Mark, what made him different. It seemed I was remembering the vision."

“Did you solve the puzzle? Mark still mystifies me at times usually in his quiet generosity, his patient persistence.”

“I believe it was revealed to me although it took years to be able to express it. Mark told me of working for my grandfather as a boy. He felt if people were paying you, you owed them hard work. He never felt like he gave them enough. Later as an adult he realized he was considered a very hard worker. He was giving them more than they expected. I compared him to my other relationships. It coalesced one day Mark gives to be giving. Other boys and men give for what they get in return. An evening of flowers, flattery, and fun, for a night in bed. I used to be more explicit and cruder but being a Mom and hanging around with the Greene’s I am more modest.”

“Mark is very giving with everyone. He builds people up.”

“Most of us sacrifice for a personal gain, we give to earn something in exchange. Not Mark, he sacrifices to make sure others are not lacking. He gives because he is giving not for an exchange. If you share your trust, your honesty, and your love with him, he will always give back more.”

“I can see this is true. He does not puff up. He dresses out of respect for his position, but he is very modest in what he buys. It is easy to save with him as a husband.”

“Mark only sees the need of others; he is always OK getting by. I thought I would make some suggestions for going forward.”

“Mark said you always had a plan.”

“When Ben welcomed us as we were waiting, he spoke softly and said it is great to see families getting along after a divorce. He wished his family could. He went on to say my boys were great kids and Brent looks just like Mark. He does. Margaret insists we not reveal Mark. For now, we can’t get together at least not in Franklin. It seems you and Mark will not have much

time, anyway.”

“Mark has been asked to live and adapt to Chinese culture to immerse himself; he won’t be in the U.S. much for several years. “

“I will never call Mark or write him. I would like to write to you and call if you want to. He will be updated from you, a focus on you as you build your relationship with Mark. Max and Margaret will keep him informed on Shiloh and Brent.”

“I am coming to trust you Carol, but it may be best.”

“When I saw Mark last night I wanted to dive into his arms, hug him, and never let him go. I do not trust myself. I must create the separation, even China might not be far enough. I don’t think the boys will suspect Mark is their father from this trip, but eventually they would. At this point it is mostly up to Mark and his parents. I said I wouldn’t lie to them, nor would I tell them until they were ready, not a lie an omission. I would like to be open and honest with you. I want to build trust and be a friend. Be warned I am not as filled with sacrificial love as Mark is.”

“Few are, he doesn’t always act like he is steeped in religion, but he seems to have absorbed the lessons of his church. I will write, I want to hear the events of Franklin and your farm life. Do you think you might find the right man in Franklin and marry him?”

“My life is full, but there is a loneliness. I have decided unless I become friends with someone who is as good a man as Mark, I will be satisfied with the wonderful life we have. Shiloh and Brent seem to be fine and picking the wrong man would hurt them. I haven’t always made the best choices in men.”

“I think I have a bias like you, I doubt you’ll find as good a man as Mark. I will listen to you in the letters. My experience is less than yours and my advice cannot carry much weight. We should pray for each other. I prayed many times before approaching Mark, when I did, I was assured it was right.”

"I agree, letters and prayer. Let's go get in line for the big silver dome thing. Then we can go back and relax. I want to be there when they come back, I hope no one threw up."

-

Shiloh and Brent gave Mark and Julie each a hug, "Thank you, Mark and Julie, we can't wait to tell Max and Margaret what a cool son they have. You and Julie speaking Chinese sounded so strange. We want to go back and try to learn to be like you. Mom is there a Chinese restaurant back home?"

"I don't know we may have to wait until we visit Grandpa and Grandma Parker in Chicago. I may try to do more stir fry dishes."

"Egg rolls maybe you can make those, they were good."

"We'll see Brent, I did buy a cookbook. Thank you, Katie are you driving back to school, now?"

"I am after Benji is off work. There is an in-between terms party. He has a couple of days off, then only a week left here. I'll come and make good use of my season pass. Some rides, I never tire of."

"Well Brent and Shiloh I didn't know Chip and Dale were so cool, the Rescue Rangers are very exciting. I see you decided to wear the Hawaiian shirts home. The hats will come in the mail."

"Thank you, Mark, but you didn't need to indulge them."

"Julie and I won't be in Franklin for some time. I won't be around to indulge my neighbors who are bringing so much joy to my parents. I've committed to four years attached to the embassy in Beijing. My supervisors hope I will extend it. They want people who will develop lasting relationships with Chinese officials. "

“The shuttle is here, hugs around. Goodbye”

“Carol thank you, letters and prayers.”

“Yes, Julie letters and prayers.”

The trains returned on course to their separate destinations. They were connected by letters and prayers. I asked Carol about not finding another man in her life. She said, “Karen Grace I knew in the mists at Shiloh that I would not search for or find another man. Shiloh washed away my fears and left me at peace.”

Chapter 57

Grace Parker has to face a painful end but also gets a blessing. -- 1969

Pass me not O Gentle Savior
Hear my humble Cry
While on Others Thou are Calling

Do Not Pass Me By - Fanny Crosby – William Doane – Pass Me Not O Gentle Savior



Crete -- Manuele Dellanave

Love is Love

“Grace, you look rather flustrated. Have the Methodist Women been arguing over fifty cents?”

“I should not even let it matter. It doesn’t matter, but Maggie Vickers.”

“She trading you pullets for the price of large eggs?”

“I told her I would not pay the same price. She is always going on about paying for their farm, pinching her pennies. She even saves water.”

“The water is dependent upon the aquifer can’t actually be saved. Hard to pay for a farm with pennies. They are paying for their farm same as we did. Pray you have decent crops for a few years after borrowing all that money.”

“I know she was a depression child; we all went through it. Sometimes some of the women can be so small and petty. They have the habit of being giving and selfish at the same time. “

“The world had the penny pinchers before the depression. Some people can’t even enjoy a sunset. I was out with the conservation board and we stopped for lunch. Grisham always gets a plain hamburger because he won’t pay a whole dime more for a slice of cheese. Now we don’t waste money in restaurants, but if I’m out like that I’m going to get a cheeseburger if I want one.”

“Isn’t Grisham just as grouchy as his Dad?”

“He been practicing on it should have it down pat in another six months. Put it aside; I’m glad you’re home. Let’s think on the good things.”

“Maggie was prying about Kenny and explaining to me how much I was wasting buying the Gold Medal flour. We were baking to give little loaves of bread out on Sunday. I was providing the flour. Driving home, it got to bothering me. You are right, put it aside.”

“Kenny seems to have found a home on that island studying the minnows.”

“Eldon he is on Crete and it is the Minoans.”

"I admit I was floored when he told us he wasn't interested in women and never had been. I would like to think it wasn't who he was, but he seems to enjoy his sculpture. He has a right to be who he is."

"It never seems right; I just think about my creative little boy. I do not think about things that upset me; I know he is such a good person."

"I guess we should be glad for Max Greene's younger brother John. He stopped some boys about to beat up Kenny in the eighth grade. John said they must be a bunch of sissies, four little sissy boys beating up one boy. He wasn't gentle and even though there were four of them they soon ran away. He told Kenny to act more like a man and he'd have less bullying. John was a year older than Kenny. Kenny said he went all through high school and even in the army thinking he had to act like John Greene. Kenny said after he was out of the army and went to school he couldn't act anymore. He decided he would find a life away from here. He has, he's successful, and he likes living on the Creek Island. "

"When and what are we going to tell the boys?"

"We should write them all when we get back from the hospital. We will know what to write then."

-

"Eldon, we should be able to complete everything in three weeks. A septic tank and field are expensive but a good thing. We can finish the new bath and bedroom. It will not look like you tacked a room on, I will make it look right. It should make a nice downstairs bedroom with a new bath. Some people your age might move to a smaller more modern house."

"We will live our lives here."

"Would any of the boys come back?"

"Tom is considering buying the farm, but I do not know."

“We’ll do right by you; Grace will enjoy it. We can use the old warsh room and that north entrance no one uses, give us the dimensions we need. Much more convenient than having everything upstairs.”

“Thank you, Leland. We are going to visit Grace’s sister and then her brother. Here is Tom’s office number call him if you need to; I will check with him at night. Do it right. I was born in this house. Grace was a neighbor; she was eighteen when we got married. House has been good to us. I want to leave it right for who comes after, hopefully it will be family. Either way I like to leave things cared for.”

-

I am writing all of you. I will mail each the same day, but I don’t know when you will get them. Your mother had surgery on Thursday. She did have a tumor and it was cancer. She is still in the hospital, but we will be going home possibly by the end of the week. There may be treatments the doctors are still discussing things with us. I had a bedroom and bath added downstairs off the living room. The bath can be accessed from the summer kitchen, as well. It should make a good place for Grace’s recovery. It is serious, but we do not know what the future will hold. Pray for your mother,

Love from Mom and Dad

-

“Having everyone come home more often has been one advantage of getting cancer. The only one, I think. Tom didn’t mention Carol, did he to you?”

“I didn’t want to pry, but he said they hadn’t heard from Carol for over a year. The world is in turmoil, she left with a boyfriend. She hasn’t been in touch; they just don’t know. “

"Carol was such a good girl when she was here. Always willing to help and seemed to really enjoy the garden and learning how I cooked. I hope she's not hurt. I would like to see her again."

"Another thing in life we don't control. How do you feel?"

"I feel no worse than I have. It was depressing when they told us the cancer had spread."

"What can I do?"

"Oh Eldon, you've done everything I could ever ask. I would like to go to church as long as I can. When it's nice I want to walk in the garden or sit on the porch. If I decide to cook something don't tell me to rest. I will rest when I have to, but you can clean up after me. I want to die at home if at all possible. I don't know how this will go. The doctors said it will be our last year. We've had fifty-one great years all in this house. No one has had a better house or husband for fifty-one years. I am blessed. Are you going write the boys or call them?"

"I thought I would write I will get it correct then. Kenny has been sending the most beautiful cards. The mail seems to be reliable."

-

"Hello"

"Hi Dad, its Lance or Kenny as you still call me. Is it too late? I'm never sure I am sometimes an hour off."

"It's about ten, but I think your mother may be asleep. She has been going to bed by 9. I can wake her."

"Don't wake her I want to come home. I can stay and help."

"It would be great to see you here. It's been a long time."

"I have a request. I know it is a lot to ask."

"We could buy the plane ticket."

"No, I am doing well money wise. I have already booked tickets tentatively. I want to bring my partner and friend for the last twelve years. I know that you may not want us to come, but he wants to see my home and meet my parents. We'll stay very low key. We are not trying to make you uncomfortable or embarrass you."

"I will probably still call you Kenny. We want to see you. We will get along just fine."

"I was sure you would. I appreciate how fair you have always been. I hear people tell stories that are really horrible. You and Mom are kind, even when it is difficult. We will help and you won't be sorry."

"OK when are you coming?"

"We would be there Wednesday afternoon at 2:12 PM according to the schedule."

"I can drive to the airport and get you. Your mother can be alone a while."

"Thank you, Dad, your saying yes is about the greatest gift you've ever given me."

"You are my son and we want to see you again. I won't let my confusion ruin it."

"The travel agent said it was the only arrival at the airport in the afternoon, we shouldn't have much problem connecting. "

"I just met Leon and his wife a couple of months ago. It is a rather slow low-key airport."

-

"Thank you for giving us these three months. You and Rene have been wonderful to Grace. I don't think your Mom will last much longer."

"No, she will not. You have a person to help administer the pain pills. We would stay to be here at the last, but more and more people are going to come. It is embarrassing for you and Mom."

"We wouldn't let that separate us."

"The minister has come since Mom was too ill to go to church. He assured Mom all would be in heaven who repented of their sins. He emphasized the repent as he looked at me. After he left Mom said it wouldn't be heaven without all her family. She said Rene was a fine friend. She didn't see we had any different sins than anyone else. It is time for us to leave and Franklin normal to resume. Would you come visit us in Crete it is a lovely climate?"

"I have never left the United States. I can't imagine it at my age."

"I will try to get back again, I don't know when. I make money appearing at the shows and selling works at our shop. I need to return."

"You have made a good life, thank you for sharing it with us. I have come to respect Rene very much. I had my doubts when you called, I am glad he got to see your home. When Grace dies it will never be the same home."

"It will in my memory"-Kenny/Lance and Rene gave Eldon a hug and they took their bags to check in.

-

"Eldon did the boys plane get off OK?"

"Yes, it left on time."

"They were so good to me. The pain is getting worse; they don't need that memory."

"More of the family are coming. We will be here for you."

"Carol have they heard from her?"

"I don't think so, Tom would have called if she had gotten in touch. They had a fight over the war, music, boyfriends, and what girls should wear. Helen didn't bend much. It may take time before she overcomes her anger."

"Carol is a smart girl; she will get back. She will be here in this house again. I can feel she will."

Chapter 58

A new year and a new era in the Parker-Greene family – Carol, Mark, Julie, Shiloh, Brent, Karen Grace, Tiffany, Morgan – (Jimmy Ellen – Ruthie)

I've been walking through the fields
And on the streets of town
Trying to make sense of what you left me
Everything that I believed in
Has been turned upside down
And now it seems the whole wide world's gone crazy
Don Henley, Timothy Schmidt, Stuart Smith – Do Something
Eagles – Long Road Out of Eden



Shiloh Grant's last line

It's not over – No, it's never too late

“Thank you for watching the girls tonight. Normally they would be at Mom’s, but she’s spending the weekend with Della. Brenda is coming over there.”

“Jimmy it’s fine we already have four here, what’s two more beside it balances boys and girls we now have three of each. Doing a church lock in on New Year’s Eve, I hope you survive.”

“It has been a long time since we could safely gather. Several churches are coming with youth groups. They have a gym and a fabulous recreation hall. Music all night may be the hardest to endure some of the youth groups are loud but lack other talent. Our kids wanted to go hoping we are able to be normal again. “

“Brent and Shiloh’s families are going to a movie; Karen will go with your girls. Avatar was the top choice, but there was still an ongoing debate.”

“My Ruthie probably hoped Little Mermaid was still a choice. She has watched that a hundred times. We need to get to the church many kids and sleeping bags to load up, thanks again. “

“Jimmy your mother hated being called Little Ruthie, that was her first rule when she came here no more, Little Ruthie.”

“Ruthie likes it, but we will listen more than her father did. See you tomorrow.”

“OK Karen the stew is ready, and the biscuits are done in 30 seconds. Go round everyone up.”

“Tiff I appreciate you taking the kids to the movies. Morgan let me give you a hug, thank you too.”

“We are pleased to; the kids will love it. Everyone has spent several months not seeing movies in theaters. The first Avatar was spectacular hope this is as good.”

"I want applesauce."

"There's applesauce in the small bowl."

"Here Jonathan, crumbling a biscuit into the applesauce is almost as good as mashed potatoes."

"This stew is good, but I thought we are vegetarians?"

"There are lots of vegetables in the stew. This is Midwestern vegetarian, Ulysses."

"Biscuits with apple and strawberry jelly mixed are the best."

"I think peach jam, is best."

"Karen you have been here most of the year?"

"Once school was out. I have been here except for the recording sessions with the Orange Buffoons."

"Brent says you are going to be a big star."

"Now Morgan, I bet he says I am just going to throw away some of my Dad's money on an album of quirky songs."

"He says that too, but everyone was impressed with the recordings we have heard."

"Are you going to sing on Lizzie and Elly's album?"

"I am doing backup vocals."

"I haven't seen Lizzie since we were here."

"They went on a Christmas vacation back to Tennessee to see family. Junior is from there, too. Tiff you cannot imagine how many relatives they have back there."

"Have you been to the theater over at New Harmony?"

"Lee and I had an outdoor event at the mall, our small entourage went to a movie afterwards. They have ten screens."

"There will be nine of us, but Shiloh and Tiff's car can hold four or five. Our suburban tank can easily hold seven or eight."

"We want to ride with Karen."

"Karen's car only holds one, she is riding with us."

"The kitchen looks good let's get going."

"Are we getting popcorn?"

"Elijah, you just finished dinner."

"Popcorn doesn't weigh much."

"We will see."

"See you later, Dad needs a hug."

"Why aren't you going Daddy?"

"Cate, we have more guests coming tonight. We have to be here to greet them. We'll see you later."

-

"Mom I have the table set. What time are they coming?"

"Thank you, Shiloh, 6:30. I have a new batch of biscuits set to come out five minutes before."

"I think they are coming up the drive. Go out and help them. Mark insisted on bringing custards the ones his mother taught him to make."

-

"Mark I'll take these in."

"Thank you, Julie. Shiloh and Brent, I think I last saw you at my mother's funeral?"

"It was, we both came back. Should we call you Dad, now?"

"Mark if it makes you more comfortable, I have missed being called Dad all of your lives."

-

"Where should these go Carol?"

"I'll put them in the refrigerator I left a shelf for them."

"Thank you for coming Julie."

"Thank you for inviting us. Mark says the Parker House and his place are neighbors. We seem rather far apart from my New York sense of neighbor."

"A long distance but few human inhabitants in between. Are Mark and the boys coming in?"

"They were still hugging when I came in."

"I see them, a missed lifetime of hugs. I am so glad you came over tonight."

“I am glad to be here. We were back once at Christmas. Mark’s parents came out to DC once and we went to museums and memorials. I came for the funerals; I do feel out of place in Franklin.”

“People will get used to you. I was an oddity when I came, the hippie city girl, but not black, of course.”

“Most of the people are polite, especially when at the church. They all know Mark; I am connected by family. Many of the women at church talk about helping build schools in Liberia. I may not feel Franklin fits me, but I know they were trying to reach out.”

“If you were not African American, even being from New York, with the U.N., a linguist, and a U.S. diplomat, would be different enough.”

“In the snow-white world of Franklin, I feel as much in a foreign land as when I was in Cambodia and Laos.”

“You will have to rely on your diplomatic skills, I am getting those boys in here. No one needs cold biscuits.”

“Julie if you will sit to my right and Mark beside you, Shiloh to my left and Brent beside him. We will join hands and give thanks, without Ruth or Lizzie I will muddle through.”

“No, Mom ‘guns for God’ “ – as Brent and Shiloh held their hands pointing their fingers to the sky like pistols.

“Didn’t you two ever grow up?”

“We’re home, it all comes back.”

“Since you are still too immature to hold hands, here we go. Lord bless this family as you always have, may we in life share your blessing with others, may we never forget all those who have helped to make this reunion possible. May the five of us form a new and lasting family. Amen”

“Amen”

“Do you pray before all meals?”

“Ever since Ruth came it never seemed right not to pray especially at family meals. Even when I was by myself eating food that Grace had put away, it seemed a moment to be grateful was required. I do think this is the first time ‘guns for God’ was allowed at the dining room table.”

“I am feeling a real connection; I think it is irreverent respect. I appreciate it, not many families have it.”

“Thank you, Julie my sons were respectful, but often pushed the irreverent part a little too far. Julie and I talked after Mark’s mother’s funeral. We thought we should get together just the five of us and talk. Your wives and Karen agreed to take all the kids to a movie. It seemed important to maintain our roles at the funeral; Margaret had always insisted on that. We still have several years, and we should be a family. Mark and Julie, you have been married almost thirty years?”

“It is thirty years.”

“I know you told me when you were in high school, you had decided Mark Greene was your biological father. I told you Max and Margaret knew. They could be open about being the grandparents they had always been with you. From this point on Julie and I have decided that I am your mother, she is your stepmother, and Mark is your father. No one left to hurt, no reason not to be open. Have you talked about it; do you have questions?”

“Max and Margaret always knew we were grandsons?”

“Yes, we told them. It pleased and hurt them. They agreed to hold their silence. Margaret did not want anything public, anything to encourage gossip. They were thrilled to be grandparents in private.”

“Did Grandpa and Grandma Parker know?”

"No, we did not tell them. Even my attorney Mr. Finn who was part of the firm kept some details confidential. You were simply my sons to them."

"I met Sean Finn. He is retired. His reputation was to be polished and prepared. He comes in to assure we maintain the standards of the profession; he never mentioned anything to me, either."

"Brent my father just wanted to put away a problem. He didn't want to know too many details and he trusted Sean. They knew Stephen had been untruthful and unfaithful. They knew I had agreed to stay married for a limited amount of time. They assumed it was because I wanted children who would not be born outside marriage. You were wonderful sons any grandparent would have been proud of you."

"It was great to be a kid here. Many others at school didn't have a father at home. I didn't think much about it. Did you Brent?"

"Jimmy and I were very busy. We found so much mischief to get into I didn't think about it. I knew our Dad wasn't here, but I had plenty of parenting. Everyone thought we were Stephen Capuano's sons and he had abandoned us for his books and radio program."

"I did have one incident before Brent was in grade school. One time in second grade two boys were pushing me on the playground. Neither had a father at home but they were teasing me, asking where was my daddy? They were bigger than I was even though we were all in the same grade. This changed when we in high school and had gone out for football, they didn't like matching up with me then. Della saw them picking on me. She was on the middle school section of the playground. Della grabbed a handful of jump ropes and came running over. Before anyone knew she was there, both of my tormentors were tied by their ankles and hanging upside down from the swing set. Rumor at school was she pants them. They squalled and kicked so much their jeans just slid. The teachers came running and Della had a visit with the principal. They realized the boys were bullies. Della was given a type of community service. She began visits with senior citizens and brought kids crafts to their homes. It turned into

an ongoing program. The seniors loved getting visits from kids. The kids usually got treats. A wonderful small-town thing. My bullies left me alone and Della turned a punishment into something the school administrators bragged about."

"I was never bullied maybe I had Shiloh to thank for that. We determined you were our father when at Grandpa and Grandma Greene's. When I was in junior high Shiloh and I were looking at photos of you. We began to compare. Shiloh said you look a lot like Mark. I did by the time I was in high school I looked just like those photos of you."

"It was about that time one of the coaches who had been there when you went to school asked me to come in the office after practice."

"Who was it"

"Ben Yoho said he remembered you."

"He was a young teacher at the time, he had played Division III. He really worked with me on technique, moving your feet maintaining balance is very important. Did everyone call him Coach YoYo?"

"They did; he was a good sport about it. He pulled me in and said, Shiloh you remind me of Mark Greene. The way you stand and walk, the way you play. He said Shiloh you are a good student just like Mark was and you work your tail off just like Mark. He told me, if I was your son; I should be very proud of it. He felt no one was a better student athlete than you had been. Then he said he shouldn't have said any of that, but I should know it anyway. I thanked him. I talked to Mom. We knew, then it was an open truth within the family. It made our relationship with Grandma and Grandpa Greene even better."

"You were both good at football and obviously good students, I am thankful for that, I saw you play."

"How? were you home?"

"Dad sent me those highlight DVDs. I watched them."

"He did; he spent hours watching them."

"Julie not obsessively."

"Yes, Mark obsessively"

"I enjoyed them."

"We both enjoyed high school, but we were glad to move on. Franklin lacks many things. "

"I agree Brent, but I wish my sons were growing up here like we did. I think we had the greatest childhood here. I wish Mark could have been a part, but he was off being James Bond, I guess."

"Julie and I are not agents. We mostly patiently put together information and then watch the top officials ignore it."

"Mark is getting too old for James Bond; he got shot in his last attempt at cowboy diplomacy."

"I did but I think age wasn't the reason. It was a sticky situation I was working outside of channels. The hostages did get out. Julie got an unexpected Caribbean vacation."

"I almost lost my husband; he has agreed no more cowboy diplomacy."

"Now that we have a more competent administration maybe it won't be necessary. Hostage negotiations are always volatile. Carol this is a fabulous meal basic Midwestern and of course my favorite foods. The wine is very good, thank you for having us."

"The subscription service keeps sending wines I don't know much about selecting them. Should we have your custards, now?"

“We could wait until everyone gets back from the movies.”

“Not the time to be polite Shiloh, go get everyone a custard. If Mark learned how to make them from grandma, I want one, hers were always great.”

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“Thank you, Shiloh for bringing the custards. I have a question, Julie. Are you OK with us bringing all this ‘back home’ into your life?”

“Carol and I have spent some time talking and getting to know each other. Mark is retired and I am working more in New York and not being assigned overseas. I welcome it. I told Carol it is odd to be here; I am in a foreign land again.”

“We grew up eavesdropping on your lives. Hearing what country, you were in then looking it up on maps. We tried to keep up with the things you were doing. Once we were in high school, we would read articles on foreign policy issues. We have never felt as separate as you may have thought. I don’t want you to feel we are stealing your husband for a Dad we never had. I want you to feel we are welcoming you as returned parents. Grandpa Max and Grandma Margaret were wonderful to us. We worked on their farm as well as ours. We learned how beautiful living here is. I agree with Shiloh sometimes I look at my children as Morgan loads them up for daycare or soccer lessons, or dance lessons, I think wasn’t it better to be here. We learned to work and help. We learned to run, play, have some mischief, and not everyone broke an arm. We want to welcome you to this wondrous world of our memories. We do not want to be thieves of your life or your loves.”

“Mark your sons are considerate and polite, I am impressed.”

“Carol undoubtedly was as good a parent as she is a businesswoman. Julie and I have discussed this many times, and we feel it will enrich all our lives. We want you to include me as your father even at this late stage. We

want both of you to know Carol is a friend to Julie and me. I hope you come to know Julie as the wonderful person she is."

"These custards are really good; you must have paid attention to Grandma Greene."

"Shiloh and I will clean up and put things away, you, old people, move to the living room and relax. We will join you soon."

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"The fire is nice."

"Brent got the fireplace ready earlier, Shiloh lit it just as everyone left for the movies. Fires in the fireplace have become a tradition ever since my folks came out for Christmas several years ago. When they all get home, we would like you to meet the kids as grandpa and grandma. Are you ready for that?"

"I think Julie is too young to be a grandma, but I think it would be nice."

"I know lots of women my age who are grandmothers. I want to be included, even if I look too young for the role."

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"What do you know Melania is moving to Slovenia."

"Your phone works out here, Shiloh?"

"You need to connect it to the wireless network in the house. Let me add it."

"Why would she go to Slovenia with Barron?"

"I don't know Shiloh, maybe there isn't reciprocity with Slovenia. Ask the foreign service experts."

“I suspect she hopes The Donald will not follow.”

“We are Asian specialists. I have heard Slovenia has spectacular caves, maybe she hopes to stay hidden until all this blows over. None of us honest public servants want them to stop investigating and prosecuting until all the corruption is exposed. I wouldn’t have gone to negotiate for the hostages with a functioning administration. “

“He wouldn’t have gone at all if he had listened to me.”

“I had to go I knew people being held. I spoke the languages. There were several Asian nationals being held. I knew the current administration would try to find political advantage and people would get killed. I was retired I had fewer restraints.”

“How did you get shot?”

“The provincial governor ordered an attack. He officially was trying to free the hostages. In reality he wanted Colonel Araujo, the head of the rebel faction dead. One helicopter came flying at our plane, it was still on the runway. The runway was actually a blocked off highway. The rebel factions had a military vehicle with a fifty-caliber type gun. They unloaded, and the helicopter went down to the left of the highway. I believe there was a bounty it seemed a rather desperate strategy. We were headed for the plane when small arms fire opened from the site of the crashed helicopter. Return fire quickly suppressed it, but bullets were flying around one struck me in the calf. Deng Chi helped me on the plane, and we took off. The plane had suffered no damage. Colonel Araujo was adept at battlefield first aid. He kept me from bleeding to death. Colonel Araujo and his two top aides escaped in the plane with us. All the hostages were delivered safe. I can’t go back to El Salvador but would be welcome in many other countries. My contact Rojas now works for Deng Chi’s company; he also was banned from El Salvador. Those hostages would not have all lived without Rojas’s work. The Colonel and his aides left us after our jet touched down at a landing strip used by smugglers. We flew to Puerto Rico. I went to a hospital and Julie came down to help rehabilitate me.

Colonel Araujo used a hostage situation to free himself he wanted a way out as much as the hostages. It was my first and last cowboy diplomacy.”

“How much does it affect you Mark?”

“I have done rehab regularly I try not to limp. I can walk but not run, I can do an elliptical. I’m doing alright, Carol.”

“He’s been using it as an excuse for being lazy. Julie can you get me a glass of water. I left my glasses in the kitchen. “

“There must be some advantage to being shot. “

“Mom said you are keeping the farm?”

“Yes, we will keep the homeplace. We have sold our super pricey modest home in DC and purchased an even more overpriced and smaller condo in New York. Julie will be working at the U.N. with our new ambassador. I am retired from government and hostage negotiations. I would like to come back and be here in retirement. Julie is uncertain. I know she feels like everyone is looking at her.”

“Because they are.”

“It would get better if you lived here. You would always be welcome here with no staring. “

“I haven’t decided, as I have work to do in New York. Decisions will wait. It is good to be here. Margaret said the people at church were really good people once they got to know you. I believe she was correct; they have been very nice to me. Margaret also said church women liked it best, if they could find projects to collect something they didn’t want, that would help someone they didn’t know.”

“Yes, that is true. Grandma Greene was always getting us to load bags of bottle caps, aluminum cans, or some other type of junk they were collecting for a charity. “

"I think the family will be back soon. Karen told me the plan was to let the kids who could stay awake watch midnight on the East Coast and send them to bed."

"We have often gone to movies over the holidays. Shiloh installed streaming apps here now that we have fiber optic."

"We could watch Star Trek Picard or the new Captain Pike Enterprise, Anson Mount is great as Pike, or Discovery while we wait. Mom said, you were once a Trekkie. Have you seen any of the new shows?"

"No, I haven't."

"Mark and I do not have an ability to stream. We aren't home often; it didn't seem worth doing."

"I think Picard. I read about it. "

"Shiloh, explain how this works I may want to do this in our New York condo. Mark's considering coming back here to write a book."

"On the cowboy diplomacy and the getting shot adventure?"

"That would be a better book. Mark wants to write a comparative study of civil wars and the effects on the foreign policy of world powers. I have predicted ten people will read it."

"Julie you are supposed to be my rock of support."

"Support people need to keep you grounded. OK Shiloh, if you have the Internet then you need this box?"

"I am going to get ready for the kids, we will give them custards and apple cider. Karen, Tiff, and Morgan may need wine. I really enjoyed Picard. I like them all. Each ten-part series seems to wrap up in the last episode a little hurriedly."

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"No Brent, relax I don't need help."

"I came in because I just wanted to ask. If Mark is back here to write and Julie is in New York isn't that a setting leading to jealousy?"

"Julie and I have been communicating for many years. We have made agreements. Lines not to be crossed."

"As a lawyer I see people when the worst comes out. People become irrational and angry from verbal understandings."

"We are good on this; Julie and I have much in common. We have had serious talks. We are all senior citizens now, at least by some people's definitions. It surprises all of us to be called old. We are feeling it is a time not to stress and enjoy moments like this. We do not have a verbal agreement we have a connection, a permanent bond. You go enjoy a moment with parents you never really knew. I have some New Year's nonsense to set out to make this a real party for the kids."

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"Oh, grandma those creatures they're blue and tall. Everything glows. Johnathan was scared."

"Was not."

"We were all startled, Cate."

"Did you like the movie?"

"They all did, a little long for our youngest."

"I like those flower creatures. Do you grow those, grandma?"

“They don’t grow on this planet, maybe we can import them some day. Flower creatures might become an invasive species, usually happens when people import plants and animals. Go put your coats away and then come back to the dining room. I have custards the Greenes made and cider.”

“Have a good time Karen Grace?”

“It is a great movie, the children enjoyed it. Hard to keep those little bundles of energy in one place.”

“Ask Tiff and Morgan if they want cider or wine. They may need wine, but the cider is very good.”

“Grandma, this is all slippery I like it.”

“Would you like more cider?”

“We should be careful, I heard people shouldn’t drink too much on New Year’s Eve.”

“I think a second cup of cider will be OK, you’re not driving anywhere.”

“Is it New Year’s yet?”

“In a few minutes, take your horn and let’s go into the living room.”

“Hello Mrs. Greene, we’re going to give you a hug. Grandma Ruth said we should give you a hug because you’re a special person.”

“Why am I special?”

“Grandma Ruth says you can talk to all countries and you keep them from starting wars.”

“Maybe she could speak to the blue creatures.”

"I've talked until I was blue in the face, as the expression goes, but never to blue creatures."

"Carol, I've only met Ruth a couple of times, but I think I would like to know her better."

"Ruth is wonderful, if every church goer was a Ruth you would have a much easier time as a diplomat."

"Get ready to blow your horns. They are counting down."

As the raucous horn blowing subsided- "Is that it, is it a new year?"

"Yes, it is Johnathan, upstairs now. We need a good rest. In this New Year there is much work to do to clean up the messes of the past."

Karen led a parade of kids and parents headed upstairs to put them to bed accompanied by enthusiastic horn blowing.

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"We've confiscated all the noise makers, hopefully complete silence by midnight in this time zone."

"Tiff I want you to meet Mark and Julie Greene. My father and stepmother."

"Morgan, I want to follow suite. Mark is my father and Julie is his wife of thirty years. They both work or have worked in the foreign service. Julie is headed to the U.N. as part of the ambassador's team. Mark is retired now as an Asian specialist and cowboy diplomat."

"Hugs in a family circle. Get in here Karen Grace my new little sister. May we always celebrate joy and face crisis as one unified family. A new year, a new day, a new family, and a better world."

"Mark, I think maybe Shiloh ought to be a speech writer instead of a geeky tech-er."

"I just said what I felt."

"A true and rare skill, Shiloh. Carol I am feeling much more at home. Franklin may be easier to navigate than Cambodia after all."

"Brent, I think you should add one more log, while Karen and I refill everyone's glass."

Julie moved over beside Carol and Karen, "Now Carol how is Karen my new stepdaughter, other than she appears to be your clone?"

"Karen Grace is my great niece, but she has decided to make this her home. Unless she is off being a recording artist or a college student. She is my friend here at Parker's Produce."

"A recording artist?"

"I will record an album of songs; I may not be an artist. I did do backup vocals on the Orange Buffoons latest album. "

"The Orange Buffoons?"

"They are very popular, Julie. I had never heard of them until Karen and Madison came back for the season's first concert out at the Homestead."

"We came back for our assignment, the concert was a serendipitous coincidence."

"Yes, maybe coincidence or possibly providence. I know four lives that have been changed dramatically. Possibly Lee and Madison will be back before you go back to New York. Lee is the world's greatest guitar player at least according to Madison and Karen, who just happens to be from Walnut Ridge a neighboring town even smaller than Franklin."

"Is that possible, Franklin is very small."

"Most people would not call Walnut Ridge a place, but they do around here. Lee is exceptionally good Julie. Madison does say he is the world's best, but she has become his rather biased girlfriend."

"Karen came here in the summer when she was twelve or thirteen. Her father is my nephew and partner in the business."

"I've made this home base, Carol has been a wonderful mentor, friend, and mother."

"Karen Grace is phasing through to her adult course in life. We are already in a new year and new era in this family. It is satisfying to see Mark, his sons and daughters-in-law sharing the stories of each other's lives."

"Carol a new year and we will make it a very good one "-as Julie gave Carol a hug.

"About tomorrow, I thought we would have dinner about one. Brent asked for ham a favorite of his. I didn't think to ask if anyone didn't eat pork."

"I'm a Methodist Carol, just like Mark. The Liberian church helped my mother come to the U.S."

"I think Tiff is putting vegetarianism on hold until they are back in California. Besides we will have plenty of food to surround a ham."

"How many tomorrow Carol, should we do anything tonight?"

"Not tonight Karen, the Donaldson girls will go home in the morning. There will be twelve of us. Plenty of time in the morning. I was never a fan of the parade; it seems such a waste although the floats are amazing."

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"Good night, we'll be back after 12 o'clock then, catching up must be put on hold until tomorrow, rather later today."

"See you tomorrow, sons. We can watch football together."

"I've heard horseback riding is happening in the morning, you can come back early if you like."

"I was here many times when Eldon and Grace were here, well mostly in the hay mow. There were no horses when I was a kid."

"I have a love/hate relationship with horses. Ruth keeps finding ways to get them back. Take care on the way home, it is unlikely you will meet anyone, but they might be drunk."

"I doubt we will meet anyone in the two and a half miles. Franklin is a far cry from New York."

-

"Good morning Jimmy would you and Ellen want some coffee?"

"Yes Carol, it would be good. Need to stay awake to make the mile back home. How were the girls last night?"

"Fine I think they all loved the movie. Elizabeth is in watching television, I think she is watching the Rose Parade. Everyone else are with the horses in the exercise shed. I have a couple of custards left. Mark made them from Margaret's recipe. Would you like one?"

"Margaret made great cream pies; coconut cream was so good. I may need sugar to make another mile."

"Ellen would you like one?"

"No thank you, we snacked all night, instead of sleeping. Oh, here comes Ruthie."

"Mommy can we stay another night? Without us Cate will be left alone with just boys. She is just learning to ride a horse and we should help her. Did you know there are no fields in Chicago?"

"The boys are her cousins Ruthie. It is up to Carol."

"Ruthie you and your sister can stay. I remember two boys named Brent and Jimmy who seemed to always have a reason to stay another night. Ruth, it is easier to have a horse out here than in Chicago, not every little girl has a grandma putting them on a horse at two years old like you did."

"Did someone take care of grandma's horses she isn't home?"

"They did Ruthie. Grandma will be home tonight. Now thank Carol for putting up with you two for another night."

"Thank you, Mrs. Parker"

"You're welcome Ruthie, now you be careful with my grandchildren. They are all city kids, none of them know anything about a horse."

"Karen is helping, she is very fun. She didn't know anything about a horse either a year ago. She had been kayaking and sailing, but a horse is the best friend. Bye"

"Thank you, Carol we could use the uninterrupted sleep. Sorry about Mrs. Parker."

"Jimmy I never worry about such small things. If someone tries to talk to my husband at the office or thinks my being a woman allows them to make less of an offer. They soon learn Ms. Parker can be a force to reckon with. Ellen did you grow up on a horse like your daughter?"

"I was never on a horse until I started going out with Jimmy."

"Yes, Ruth and her horses, well I think your daughter is headed for barrel racing."

"I hope not, it looks dangerous to me. Jimmy leave that last bite, this custard is good."

"You could have had your own you didn't need to grab a spoon and eat mine."

"Sharing is a good lesson."

"You send the girls home if they cause trouble, otherwise I'll run by around noon. I wanted to say goodbye to Brent before he left. I knew he would make a good lawyer. He was always trying to talk our way out of the trouble we got into. It has been good to see him again this week."

"Brent and Morgan haven't come down, yet. Brent laughed as he retold your bicycle adventure. I don't think he talked your way out of that one."

"Best thing about that was the broken arm. By the time I got back from the hospital Dad had cooled down. He was so patient with Brent helping fix our bikes. I was mostly watching couldn't do much with my arm in a cast. I do miss Dad."

"We all do. Junior looks like a lost pup most of the time without JB."

"We'll go catch up on sleep, you have a nice day. Growing up I felt like Brent and I had two moms."

"Thank you, Jimmy."

"Hey, Jimmy how you've been?"

"Good Shiloh, just tired."

"I came in to see if you needed help Mom. Ruth said she was staying."

“Yes, she reminded me of three almost inseparable boys that used to hang out around here. I’m good at the moment. You left Karen with six kids and three horses?”

“Karen is doing OK with the kids, and Ruth has the horses well in hand.”

“Good morning, Morgan.”

“Morning Carol I’ll help once I get a cup of coffee.”

“Good morning Ellen I see you and Jimmy survived.”

“We were just leaving; we are ready to crash. See you later.”

“I’ll go back out then.”

“Shiloh, Brent will be out soon.”

“What can I do Carol?”

“Why not put the coffee in the thermos and make another pot.”

“Karen heard me get up. We have the ham in, it will be over cooked by dinner time. It can sit before we slice it. We made up the scalloped potatoes. I plan to steam broccoli and use the same pot to steam peapods. It would be a good time to get the pot for steaming out. We’ll pull enough broccoli and pea pods from the freezer. I have squash and corn in the oven. I have this warming tray to put them on, then I will put the potatoes in. Will your kids eat broccoli and pea pods?”

“They will likely eat everything, maybe not squash.”

“I was sure Shiloh’s boys would like the green, yellow, and white vegetables, being vegetarians. At least until they came to the Midwest. The Donaldson girls are adventurous when it comes to foods.”

“Jimmy didn’t take them home?”

"Little Ruth came in. If they left, Cate would be the only girl, and she needed to be here to teach everyone how to ride. We will have six kids and eight adults. Karen and I will sit in the kitchen with the kids until they are finished with dinner."

"Mark and Julie, I did not hear you drive in. Meringue pies, coconut cream and what?"

"Chocolate"

"I like the sound of that Carol."

"I agree Morgan, but the coconut cream is exquisite. You said you would bring a dessert; those look like the ones your mother made."

"When Mom was getting less well, I was retired I slipped home still limping a little. She said I needed to learn to make these because I loved them so much. I have gotten quite good at it."

"Put them on top of the range in the summer kitchen. Morgan open the door for him."

"I convinced Julie jeans would be appropriate, especially if she wanted to try and ride a horse."

"Little Ruth will be so pleased."

"Morning Mom, what can I do?"

"Hi Brent, take the thermos with coffee out to the barn. There are cups in an old cabinet out there. Shiloh would like a cup I am sure. Escort Julie to the barn; she wants to try riding a horse. I hear lessons are in full swing. Future World Champion Barrel Racer Little Ruth Donaldson is teaching. Shiloh and Karen are out there as well. If everything is under control send Karen back in."

"I'll bring in the other two pies."

"You made four pies?"

"I know how much boys can eat. I've noticed when it comes to chocolate women seem to find a way. I had all those egg whites from the custards"

"I see you learned the lessons of a farm kitchen make plenty."

"Hey, Tiff how you are doing?"

"Fine, still on West Coast time, I think."

"Grab a mug of coffee, or I can heat water for tea."

"Coffee is needed. What are those?"

"Two more meringue pies, one chocolate one coconut cream."

"Two more, you mean there are four of those things?"

"Yes, Mark needs to get out to the summer kitchen."

"I will hold the door. Those look great, you made them?"

"I did, my mother insisted I learn."

"You and your mother are winning my heart."

"Karen, good you're here. I've just taken the corn and squash out and put the potatoes in. If you could help Morgan and Tiff get started steaming broccoli and peapods. I think Morgan has the pot out. Then you can take a shower, you've been wrangling kids and horses all morning. Mark and I will walk out and watch the New Yorker getting riding lessons from a ten-year-old. I will send Shiloh in to slice the ham. We should be ready to get this New Year underway. We need a good year."

“Mark did you ever ride much.”

“No Ruth persuaded me to try, and I rode a couple of times. Dad said Danny rode a horse and Ruth would come on hers. He thought he was in Montana when they did a round up. Eldon and my Dad remembered having to work horses in the field. Often a farm may have had a tractor, but they still had horses. They weren’t sorry to see them retired.”

“I had retired them from here, but Ruth convinced Karen horses should come back. I enjoy them occasionally. Karen has cared for them every day she was here. She and her friend Madison would often ride them to the Homestead to work during the summer.”

“I feel you and Julie are accepting or at peace about all of us being here, reunited. I am thankful to get the opportunity to know your sons. They are fine young men.”

“Ours sons, they have the best of nurture and nature. It was amazing to see you growing in them every day. Julie and I know we both love you and we know you love us. We’re not going to mess up your marriage or your relationship with our sons. I like Julie more and more as I get to know her. She seems to be beginning to find the charm in living here. It takes a long time to lose the blinders of the big city. “

“They will be in the machine shed now the exercise building. Good thing you Greene’s had all the equipment. Ruth turned this into a training building. She trained Seven Up here. “

“Seven Up?”

“Seven Up was her prize quarter horse. Ruth trained him. He was very valuable after he won those races. She sold him and bought the big black Shires. Honestly those huge Shire horses were a great marketing promotion. I can never forget how lucky I am Ruth came here. She was somewhat uncontrollable.”

Mark and Carol entered to see Julie riding somewhat uncomfortably on a horse, led by little Ruth on a horse beside her.

"Hey Grandma, the horses are so big."

"We can ride them now. "

"They like us."

"They're pretty horseys."

"Shiloh take all the kids to the house. It is time for dinner. After you clean up slice the ham. We'll be up after we care for the horses."

"Brent, keep holding Billie Roo, as I get on."

Carol mounted with ease and rode out to Julie and Ruth. "How you do'in Julie?"

"Getting more comfortable."

"She's never been on a horse. It seems New York is maybe worse than Chicago, I don't think I'd ever want to go to those places."

"Ruth there are no fields or horses like here, but many people live there. It can be interesting. I'll take the reins you ride over to Brent and help put the horse in the stall. It is time for dinner."

"OK she needs a good run around."

"One trip, stay gentle with her."

Ruth and horse went out and round the building; truly the rider and the horse were part of the same being. Carol kept the reins tight as motion flashed by.

"Let's ride to the end and back; that little girl is her grandmother reborn. I had never been on a horse until Ruth came. Do you think you could learn to enjoy this?"

"I think I might. Does Mark ride?"

"He's a modern farmer, they think horses are a nuisance. You will have to keep your horse over here. We should go in, time for dinner. We have to put the horses in the barn."

-

"Carol could I lead the prayer before dinner?"

"Mark that would be nice and seems right. If everyone is cleaned up, we should start."

In spite of everyone being ready, it takes patience to assemble six children ten and under plus eight adults. "Karen and I will be in the kitchen with everyone too young to vote. First let's all gather in the dining room and Mark will say grace. Mark why not take the head chair, Julie to your right Shiloh and Tiff to your left, and Brent and Morgan next to Julie. The rest of us will gather here."

"Thank you, Carol if everyone will do the guns for God pose. I doubt Eldon and Grace, or Max and Margaret would approve, but I found it cute. Hands up, that's right point right to heaven. Lord we can never be grateful enough for your blessings. Thank you for the food and those who grow it, those who prepare it, and those who consume it. Without your providence many of us would not be here celebrating this loving connection, able to share life as one family. May we dedicate ourselves to building a healthy world for all families. May we always understand we are all children of the same God. May we understand saving the planet and saving humanity must walk arm in arm. Amen. I would express more thanks, but we are all hungry."

"OK kids, we have all the same foods in the kitchen so let's move in there."

"You know Mrs. Parker Cate is getting very good on a horse. I think she is ready for a trail ride."

"That's nice Ruth, you don't need to be so formal. Lizzie used call me Miss Carol. How about Miss Carol we will stay on a first name basis."

"I like Miss Carol, are you Miss Karen then?"

"Sounds like a good name."

"We don't have mashed potatoes to put in the applesauce."

"We do have cottage cheese your father always mixed applesauce and cottage cheese, I'll put a dab in your applesauce bowl, and you try it. What do you think?"

"Oh, it is good."

"I'll add a little more cottage cheese then."

"Miss Karen did you see how good Cate was doing?"

"I did Ruthie."

"Grandma Carol everything is very good. I like putting these peaches on the ham."

"I think peach marmalade could be very good on ham. Ulysses, do you like the potatoes?"

"Yes, can I have more?"

"Here I will add some."

"Mom said you grew the broccoli here and froze it."

"Yes, that is true."

"I would like to see things grow; they are always dead in the stores."

"Elijah, I think it is called harvested, now just enjoy them."

-

"Hello Mark, running out of food in the dining room?"

"You know that is not possible, but it does sound like Shiloh and Brent required huge quantities of good food to become the fine men they are. Shiloh, Brent, and I are going to clean up and put things away. Would you play and Karen sing with the children? I think Julie would enjoy hearing them. I was told you did this at bible school this year."

"We did and the Donaldson girls were part of the sing-alongs."

"Miss Karen sings really good doesn't she Elizabeth?"

"mm, huh"

"Ruthie you should say Karen sings very well."

"I did Cate, she's got a good voice. Miss Karen is real pretty, too. I hope I grow up and look like her."

"Ruthie, I have learned all women have their own special beauty, and it flowers at different ages."

"Mark your years in our diplomatic service have turned you into a charmer filled with platitudes."

"Careful Carol, don't cause me to rethink cleaning up."

"No Mark, we will go have a real hootenanny and leave my men in charge."

“Hootenanny what is that Grandma?”

“It is an old-fashioned celebration of song; you will soon find out Cate.”

“Karen, I think the kids are playing with the food as much as eating it. Let’s get all the hands washed in your bathroom and then head to the parlor.”

“Parlor?”

“If we are going to have a real hootenanny, then we have to be in the parlor.”

“OK then I will take the boys. Carol, you follow with the girls. A dozen hands are a lot to wash.”

“Mark, we all need time before your great desserts. OK girls follow me.”

“I will cut the pies and put them in the refrigerator. I would go run a mile, if I could. I need exercise, before I eat anything else.”

“Here Dad just wait a moment, this is our kitchen. We know where everything is, open the cabinet behind you and get out the Tupperware bowls. Every lady at church used Tupperware.”

“I didn’t know it was still around.”

“It is in Franklin. Mom installed this fancy garbage disposal, something severely lacking in the times of Eldon and Grace. Mom always said it was because Sam had died, but she put it in before Sam died. It is really a composting system for the flower gardens and vegetable gardens around the house. It makes clean up easier and is separate from the septic system. It is a bitch to clean out if it screws up isn’t it, Brent?”

“Yes, Shiloh what a stinking mess. Do you remember Sam, Dad? He was a very old dog by the time I remember him.”

"I met Sam; he was a good dog. He liked me. If a prospective guy is liked by the dog, it is always a good sign for a woman."

"You named your son Ulysses, are you a Civil War buff then?"

"We both are. I am named Shiloh, after all."

"We geeked out on American history; it made us stars on the scholastic bowl teams. We played another school with two brothers on the team, they were a tough pair to beat. They were very conservative, very smart, and completely obnoxious. Shiloh always said their father had filled them with propaganda from day one. Beating those guys was greatly satisfying, especially when they pulled a wrong fact from Fox News. We silently basked in the glow of their disbelief and anguish."

"I take it you didn't mock them."

"No need they wallowed in their own despair. Shiloh said think of it like football, crush them so hard they are afraid to take your hand to be helped up, but don't trash talk."

"Brent got to trounce the younger brother for a couple of more years, I and the older brother graduated the same year. The brothers had an alternative set of history that sometimes got them to the wrong answer."

"Mark, will we ever live in the same country again? There seems to be two separate realities."

"Brent, the words of the Trump supporters echoed the complaints of the secessionists. It was frightening. It was infuriating."

"People lived in different realities before the Civil War. History has repeated the separation from reality in Trump times. Do you agree Mark?"

"The Trump administration almost destroyed government; it will take a decade to rebuild the economy, the institutions, our role in the world, and a more normal America. The pendulum almost swung out of the clock, but it

is coming back to equilibrium. America has always had a strong segment of people who define and are hostile to groups called other. How other is defined changes over time. At the very core of America there exists an animus. Part of our humanity instinctively feels some groups are to be feared. As much as we try to vanquish the demons they can still be summoned by the right conjurer. We are now in an era where our better angels can be encouraged. The more we live into our better angels the weaker the demons become. Do your children have diverse friends?"

"We do, California is very diverse, I'm afraid the last year of Trump made even Ulysses aware of race. It was like his class looked up and realized they had differences; ones they didn't see before. It was in the news. Good for adults to reckon with truth, disturbing for children who live in a different world."

"Chicago remains very diverse and very segregated. Johnathan's best friend is the son of one of my firm's attorneys. He is African American; the boys haven't said anything. We decided it is best to let them bring it up if they were concerned. "

"I'm sure Brent would agree. The hard lives of the economically disadvantaged are different than our worlds. Our kids do not know diverse people in an economic sense. "

"Chris and I were watching Johnathan and his son play so innocently. He related the history of institutional racism that created segregated Chicago. Chris feels if we invested in social service resources and better transit instead of evermore militant police, the communities would begin to reinvigorate themselves. Make people's lives livable and our communities will be livable."

"When you study the evolution of many things in America you realize the defining motivation of much of our history is racial animus. How we define the other has changed. As our definition of 'An American' has expanded; the fear of others has continued to be our strongest political motivation. "

“Are we all racists? Even you, married to Julie?”

“Shiloh we all have innate biases. It is not that all Americans are racists, but we have all been influenced by racism in America. Trump realized the majority of the Republican Party was as racist as he was. Institutional racism today runs in a straight line from the nineteenth century. “

“You mean our failed reconstruction?”

“Yes, after the Civil War, even with constitutional amendments including Blacks as citizens, fear allowed inherent rights to be ignored. Fear and greed are the most powerful weapons any demagogue can wield. A skilled demagogue can rely on these political wedges and levers just as basic tools work in physics.”

“Do you ever lose faith in America?”

“No never, I am forever moved, and I firmly believe in Lincoln’s words of 1862. ‘We shall nobly save, or meanly lose, the last best hope of earth.’ I have dedicated my life to this end, I know many men and women who have done the same. We need Americans to take voting seriously and to demand solutions, not emotional remedies.”

“It seems we always fall short. We have failed for so long. We’re one hundred sixty years past those words. Still our institutional racism and gridlock in Congress undermine a better America.”

“I agree with Shiloh, Mark. We are always left short. People rally for a day, or a month, or a summer, but they move back to normal. Average people must find jobs to support families.”

“Yes, the powerbrokers are supported by manipulating the system; it is their job. Lincoln’s assassination greatly harmed our nation, it destroyed any gain toward racial justice. We had four years of Andrew Johnson. If Lincoln had passed his administration directly to Ulysses Grant, we would have had the new birth of freedom. Andrew Johnson was maybe our most racist president; read Montgomery Blair’s campaign speeches when

running for vice president in 1868. It is easy to see the political forces being exploited to undermine progress.”

“You feel Lincoln had influence enough to change the course of our nation?
Hi Tiff”

“I came to see how things were going. Karen is a wonderful singer. The kids are singing along having a great time. It looks like you are about done and are deep into the Civil War. I will just back on out of here. You two have always been a pair to endlessly discuss old things most people want to forget, now it seems you have found someone equally as boring.”

“Tiff we will be done soon, then we will see if you find the pies equally boring.”

“I will come back for pie, love you Shiloh.”

“Shiloh, I guess Tiff is not a buff. Yes, Lincoln was at the height of his political power. Lincoln believed in fairness; he felt the African American troops had earned the vote from fighting the war. When Blacks voted, there were schools, freedman were allowed to make their own living. When Whites ruled, they violently suppressed black votes, their goals were to return freedman back to slavery.”

“Trump attacked everything not just racial divisions. His administration wanted to destroy the climate, worker safety, trade, immigrants, democratic values, rule of law, press freedom, everything that we hold up as American values. The administration was corrupt and untruthful, we’ve lost credibility. You must have felt that when in contact with foreign governments.”

“It was very disappointing; I could no longer be proud. I refused to be without hope, I couldn’t believe the Republicans as a whole would be so complicit. Unfortunately, we have become very corrupt; we no longer have competitive capitalism, our economy is mostly crony corporatism. When policies have 80 percent majority support and cannot get to the floor, we have the gridlock of the powerbrokers.”

“There was high turnout in the election, maybe it has changed.”

“Yes Brent, a refreshing change. The grip of delusion was still strong. The agents of power were back to work bending policy to favor their interests before the ballots were counted. We may be ready for a new era of government, there are plenty of tools.”

“We never build anything. We have energy efficient technology. Tesla talked about a hyper loop from O Hare to Downtown, but nothing evolved.”

“I agree Brent. We fail to plan an integrated transportation system. We piecemeal everything without any vision. We could have high speed rail links from regional airports to hubs. It would be much more efficient and more secure. Many things are possible with private public partnerships if America could innovate.”

Brent added, “it seems people are far more progressive than Congress now. How do we change it, Shiloh?”

“I can envision designs. No one has yet designed the web of connection that would really empower people. We need the Amazon of policy formulation and motivating voters to vote.”

“I agree Shiloh this could be done, but innovation is no longer our strong point. Corruption has so warped the systems of our government we consider it normal. We may be in the age of reform, but people will have to keep communicating with the government. “

“Brent and I think it may change. Now our climate has to be the highest priority. Existential threat is not an exaggeration.”

“My fine sons, A new year and a new hope, is that Star Wars? I have not seen all of the Star Wars franchise.”

“Early Star Wars the first – you must have forgotten.”

"I may have been on the first Asian tour. I probably thought studying Mandarin was more important. "

"Hey Shiloh, we're done, time for that pie and some football; the Rose Bowl hasn't started yet. "

"Sounds like the best of New Year's."

"I suggest you use a bowl. It may be runny. It is good, I tasted the puddings."

"Brent, chocolate or coconut cream?"

"Chocolate."

"I'll take coconut cream."

"Good choice Shiloh, it is my favorite, as well. We should check on the hootenanny."

-

"That looks good. Brent, let me taste. Mmm good I have to have one of those."

"Shiloh you share a bite. Yes, I agree. I love coconut."

"Morgan, I learned something in the kitchen besides where there are more of these excellent pies. The long never-ending discussions about history these two carry on. It is an inherited trait."

The boys were standing and then the girls jumped up as they all sang the final chorus of 'Standing on the promises of God'.

"Looks like you have broken into dessert."

"We didn't want to interrupt. "

"We've exhausted our repertoire a good time to break."

"They were so good, a super sing fest" - Julie slid her arm into Mark's.

"OK kids it looks like someone has broken out the pies would you like to have dessert?"

"Yes, and then can we go back and ride some more."

"Do you think the horses are too tired, Ruth?"

"Oh no Miss Carol they didn't exercise too much this morning."

"Let's go to the kitchen and see if Mark learned how to do this right."

"The pies are very good Mom; I think he knows what he's doing."

"I've got a game on TV, it's about over. Rose Bowl is next."

"Wow these are good, I love coconut."

"Chocolate is the best."

"Looks like everyone has a bowl now. "

-

"Now that you are done, who wants to go out and ride some more?"

Cate and Ruth's hands went up quickly, Elizabeth's followed. Ulysses said, "We want to play video games upstairs."

"OK Karen can you help the girls go ride?"

"Yes, I'll go with them."

"I'll go along, Tiff will you get the boys started upstairs?"

"I will Morgan, but I may need a half piece of that chocolate pie just to see if it holds up to this coconut."

Carol heard a beep, "Dishwasher is done I better unload it. It looks like we will have several bowls to put in."

"I will help Carol."

"Thank you, Julie."

"Time for the horse cavalry to head to the barn. Let's get your boots back on."

"We can get the games going without you, Mom."

"I will go along to watch then."

"All the bowls are in; I think I will try a small pie. Margaret's were truly the best."

"I tasted the chocolate pudding. I could try a half piece of the finished product."

"Should we take these and join our men?"

"We should, this house feels filled with love. Thank you for sharing your sons."

"Thank you for sharing their Dad."

"We are more when together. It isn't sharing, more growing in light and love."

"I have learned that one lesson from helping at church, even if I don't want all their beliefs."

"Enough love to light five candles?"

"Yes, enough love, an overflowing spring."

As they approached the living room, they could hear the shouts. "Keep him from getting outside, fight through that receiver."

"He's the deep threat don't leave him uncovered."

"Yes, yes, did you see him close for the interception, an amazing play."

"Watching them I feel complete."

"I do too, as if we will always be united."

"We will. Carol, it is too bad they have missed these moments. Look at how much joy they have sharing this time watching a game."

"There is still a lifetime of moments. No regrets now, let's slip in quietly and watch and share them."

Carol sensed a touch. She thought Julie had touched her, but her hands were on her bowl and the spoon as she finished her pie. Carol didn't know why she sensed a touch, but it was reassuring. It was after all the perfect moment of reunion, worth watching and sharing across times and places.

Chapter 59

Karen Grace Parker – lives in the silent stillness allowing her to hear the human soul -

She's so many women
He can't find the one who was his friend
So he's hanging on to half her heart
He can't have the restless part
So he tells her to hasten down the wind –
Warren Zevon – Hasten Down the Wind
Linda Ronstadt (Don Henley) Hasten Down the Wind



Eclipse at Land Between Lakes KY

Empty is not Nothing

The porch concert had been fantastic, Lizzie and Elly had a special mother daughter blend. Lee was flexible, able to adapt to many styles. Madison was floating afterwards.

“The audio will be an excellent background, and we can use the video as an intro to the report. Karen, you will read your report as a narration as photos and sketches appear in a slide show.”

“OK Madison I will go write the report.”

In spite of the looming disaster this morning when Madison revealed we were fixing dinner for Lee. Carol, Ruth, and Lizzie had brought about a magic moment. Now I needed to write a report with some graphs or charts or something to break up the boredom had been Madison's advice. I sat at the desk in the office and opened the book, Carol had given me last night. A listing of the ancestry tree started by Eldon, followed by a few entries of events. Carol had added the current family members. There was my name Karen Grace Parker added to a page near the front of the diary. Eldon's diary was a once a year account of the year in a few lines. It was followed by many writings of Carol. Carol had started her own summaries. They mostly recorded the business of the year like Eldon's had; she had left enough room on blank pages for several years of notes. Following those pages Carol had written stories, vignettes of the people. All family in the extended sense, stories of Ruth and JB, Lizzie, Eldon and Grace, even a story about Sam her dog. I decided to open the big box. It had weathered newspaper clippings mostly of obituaries of family, some stories of World War Two, an article about Tom returning to Franklin after coming home from Europe. Other clippings of the family that Grace must have saved. I also found two books, the illustrated books of Stephen Capuano. I looked at a woman on the cover with a basket of peaches. It could be me. I flipped through the books, photos of Lizzie when she looked more like Elly, photos of the early days of Parkers Produce and Fruit. Ruth with JB and a toddler. I could feel the changes passing through me. What had been a simple small garden and orchard was now a regional business. Peter Navarro had given me a detailed report of the current operation. He said I may as well have a copy. He sent one to my father every year, but he didn't believe he ever actually looked at them. I had all I needed to write a nice report. A graph to show one woman in 1975 to a business in 2020 employing over one hundred people. It was time to get it done. I had to be ready for a return to school tomorrow. After a couple of hours, I was done. I then started losing myself in memories; lifetimes contained in the diary and artifacts in the box. A moment living in one lifetime, became many lifetimes. I paused, enough for now. I would visit these worlds many times. After dinner today I should never eat again, but if there was one of those biscuits left. Fortunately, for me there was a biscuit in the kitchen. I put some jam on it, a fantastic treat. I was drinking a glass of water and saw Carol sitting on

the porch with a glass of wine. I found a glass and the wine bottle. I poured a glass and went out to sit with Carol.

"I got a text from Madison. She is going out for pizza with Lee and his parents. Sunday night pizza is a tradition in Lee's family."

"Meeting the parents usually a big step."

"Madison and Lee thought it would be a good thing, prove she's not just a groupie. Also, the fact that there is a Parker connection made them more open to her."

"People here grasp to find a connection to their own world. A stranger is less strange if there is some common link. I suppose being part of the Parker family was my best asset other than an excellent farm to grow things."

"I do want to come here after school is out, I suspect Madison is coming too. Are you sure it is alright with you? We will interrupt your listening to the noisy silence watching the sun and stars."

"With Shiloh and Brent gone Ruth, Lizzie, and their families are not here very often. I miss it. Young people need to come remind old folks what they were, once in a while."

"Good I started looking through the diary and the box, I finished my report, but I feel there are several lifetimes to learn from here. I want to be your helper. I will work where you need me to, no one in the diary was a privileged princess like I have been. I think they were all happier and understood life better than I do. I have much to learn."

"Learning is simply being open to experience. Willing to change as you find new things revealed. Your approach is the key, you're doing fine. Cut yourself some slack."

"Do you play your guitar when you sit on the porch?"

“Not often, too much variance in temperature and humidity I prefer my office in the house. If I want to sit here and listen to music now, I have my iPod and Apple music. I am really just a family member on Shiloh’s account. It is amazing just search for a song and there it is.”

“No one out here listening to you play and sing, rather disappointing.”

“The only one who ever did that was Sam, my coon hound. He would come lie down when I played. I don’t know if he liked it, or thought I was being attacked.”

“Sam was a coon hound. Did he hunt racoons?”

“The neighbors gave me a pup when I first came. He was a loyal companion sniffed everything, but never hunted or paid much attention to anyone or any animal. Once he identified them, he didn’t much care.”

“You’ve written many stories of people and yourself. Stories connected to the farm and your life. Are you sure you want me to read them?”

“I want you to. There is some hesitation; we all hope to keep our foibles secret. When writing it must be authentic, or it will not matter. It is living in a house without drapes. I wrote for myself suspecting someday there would be a yet unknown reader. I wrote about my experiences and researched the people of the past to identify my purpose. I was searching for my place, my obligation to the world. Karen Grace Parker is now at the same place in her life. I trust you. “

“A good feeling trust”

“I need to share myself with someone. Someone who cares but has some distance some autonomy. My story is tied to this land on which we sit. I tried to keep it healthy in a world filled with sickness. “

“We ought to find a way to create more of these healthy oases where life can grow.”

"I was fortunate to have accomplished one. I had partners willing to risk working for nothing to share in uncertain profits. In your future you may plant other gardens, but I am now content. The business is stress for others. I am just around to keep it focused on making better lives. "

"Your goal for Parker's Produce is other people's lives?"

"My personal goals are family, spirituality, and to be at peace. Pete Navarro is right I have all my financial needs met. Making money is no longer my goal. Making healthy lives is the goal."

"You have Spiritual goals?"

"Just as I don't ignore science; I don't ignore what makes us human. I believe in imagination and the ability to be open to the unknown. I know I walk in a spiritual realm. There are no ghosts here, but there are deep spirits. I want to walk in Spiritual union with them. I want to be open to possibility not closed off."

"I will come and try to learn and experience the spirit of the land. Are you sure about no ghosts?"

"My ghosts are in my head. Ghosts that are screaming with memories of failure and self-shame. I have worked to corral them safely in the pasture of the past. "

"Your life seems successful. I suppose I should be open to a spiritual world."

"Your life will be better if you do. You may well do more to heal the world than I have ever accomplished. I am thankful I found healing for myself. You do have a lovely voice hearing you with Lizzie and Elly was a special moment. I think Madison may have it right, Lee might be the world's best guitar player. I am going in and get ready for bed, it has been a long weekend for an old woman used to being alone."

"I will sit. I may take a walk to watch the stars. I have learned my eyes will adjust. I guess it is not dangerous here."

"Do not frighten a skunk if you encounter one. Everything wants to avoid you, let them slide away. Walk softly, stand quietly, be still. When I had Sam, he loved to walk at night. He sniffed and tracked. A small yip once he had found a track. He always found me. I wonder who has a redbone hound? Puppies are challenging, but he was a wonderful companion. I am once again living on a lonely farm. A good dog, it might be the right time for one. Enjoy the night, the stars are never boring."

"Good night Carol."

I walked softly, stood quietly, and became still. More sounds, stars, shadows came into my awareness. I almost missed the deer trying to out still me near the garden, it slowly moved on. Now this was my assignment to learn the life here, the lives that had been here. The land held more than I could yet imagine. Time would blend, lives would blend, I would never be alone here. What was once empty now seemed richer than any other place. Whether searching the old mirror or on the porch watching the heavens rise and set. I knew, Karen Grace Parker now had a sense of bearing in the world. A foundation on which to fight to heal the world. How to bring the soul of the land back into the hearts of humanity? Humanity whose hearts are lost in a modern world. I found myself down by the old market sitting where Madison had begun her first sketch. The night was clear and cool; the stars dazzled. A purple hoodie made good camouflage on a moonless night. A car came down the road a rare but sometimes occurrence. The lights were glaring I had to look away, after a while my vision returned. Awareness dawned I was the one perceiving the world around me; I was not blinded by the lights. I sank back into the solitude. My soul and mind stretching to the stars. I had opened the first layer of a puzzle box. Sitting here on the original Parker homestead. I began to burrow into that realization. Here someone came with a family and decided to build a life. It was one hundred and eighty years before my being here now appreciating the stars. The same stars, the same land, but not unchanged, nothing is ever permanently fixed not even the stars. Someone who had contributed a small portion of my own DNA had made

a commitment that yet carried through. A racoon ambled near; I could see much detail even in what many would call darkness. It paused when it became aware of me. Stood up folding its paws as it pondered me. I stayed still; the coon moved on back to its destination. I sensed not alone, not empty, but fullness. A welcome to a real world, a warm embrace reaching around and through me. Another self who also shared aspirations and awe. I felt a hug of togetherness just a sense. An odd sensation but a comforting one. It was time to head back. It was still a six-hour drive back to school tomorrow. Madison would be sleeping on the way back. Maybe Lee was watching stars with her in Walnut Ridge. I could record a narration tomorrow night. Madison was good at assembling media into movies. It would be a good report. Madison was correct this was a big part of the grade. Madison was wrong about one thing. Our professor was correct freeing the mind is the first step towards liberation for anyone. Who would have thought being here in the middle of nowhere with the spirits of the land would be my liberation moment?

Epilogue

"OK, Karen Grace I've left the stories in the order you chose, added notes to guide, and trimmed some of the lectures. Still, I am amazed you could move into a small community and not feel like an alien."

"I did bring a different world, but I am at home now."

"Everyone knows everyone, all the histories, and all the unwritten rules without a Google local guide to help."

"I had a guide. One who knew all the histories."

"I am sure Carol was a great guide."

"No, a guide more spiritual than Carol."

"I learned lessons; I'm never going to spookville. Some of your land spirits may not be friendly. Are you still wandering alone in the dark emptiness?"

"I have Sarge. Carol did get a hound pup. He is a great companion on my night meditations. Sarge has the floppiest and softest ears of any dog I ever met. Carol let me name him. I named him to honor a very good mentor."

"Carol survived her failed loves, but what lessons have you learned? What mistakes are you avoiding?"

Karen Grace smiled, sat silently, then wrinkled her nose. Eventually, she spoke "In business I have many solid supports and analysis tools. We will fail at times, but I am not stressing over the business. On a more personal and spiritual level, it is not certain. I am not afraid of a special connection, but I am not in haste. My life has infinite moments yet."

"Do you have an insight to share? One gained on your night meditations?"

"I have thought about this. Life at the eternal core is unchanging. Each age adapting to bring love into its soul, a love as infinite as the stars in the sky."

"I will reflect on that, safely, here in my office away from the ghosts."

"Thank you, for your work I am going back to commune with the spirits now. Even the angry ones have fascinating stories to tell."

Karen Grace returned many times to find the stillness of the night. She would find herself watching the night skies by the old market, the homestead.

Karen Parker in business and Grace Parker as a singer. Everyone can contain many women. One unified soul when back at this spot, the old market, the original homestead. Lost in a sense of timelessness, how many nights absorbed into these starry skies a thousand, ten thousand, or just one? One being living in this experience across many times. She would always be here. Karen Grace had found new purpose radiating from here in this land.

Karen Grace Parker wrote this for the web site of White Rabbit Sustainable Solutions. WRSS is dedicated to bringing real business profits through personal connection to common people. There are places in cities where

no one wants to be anymore. Sometimes it means there is land to be restored to health. Dedicated families can begin to return it to abundance. WRSS has established a network of interconnected markets and suppliers. This connection hub can aid in making profitable businesses. There are places in rural areas where a variation of Parker's Produce and Fruit can prosper. More profitable sustaining small farms are disrupting corporate agriculture, similar to micro-breweries and mega-beer.

Communities of practical food suppliers supporting workers and planet health. Local foods but not some elite costly approach; methods dedicated to simple and good. WRSS tries to encourage green centers to flourish reversing the sick cancers of the modern world. It requires work as hard as anyone ever did on the Parker farm, but people deeply desire to work when building better lives. WRSS respects each person; the knowledge base allows them to find practical paths.

Karen Grace maintains an informal partnership with Carol and her father, even her mother. The streaming series was popular; the role of an obsessive middle-aged woman seeking fame and the desires of the moment had brought her celebrity and her character notoriety. Like the old song, all she had to do was 'act naturally'. Momsie, lending her celebrity to aid in kicking off a new location has allowed Karen Grace to reconnect at these publicity events. White Rabbit seeks to establish centers of health. Tom is a great ally with his climate work, and Shiloh advises on innovative web interfaces. WRSS creates opportunities to improve people's lives. People do want to help as much as they need help. White Rabbit tries to make their efforts count.

Karen Grace Parker will always be here, even when in some other place. Null Stillness was the most intimate and crushingly honest book she ever read. It made her an old soul at a young age.

She walked into the kitchen and found two of the oldest cups. Carol had put them way in the back of the cupboard and told her they had been Grace's maybe older. She poured coffee in both and watched as the steam curled up a delicate gossamer.

"Grace, I know you're here. Can you join me for coffee? Will you?"

Karen Grace felt a tingle on her hair, as if someone lightly held the sides of her head as they left a soft kiss on the top. The cup she had set out for Grace moved slightly. She imagined two hands clasping drawing warmth from it.

She felt words, 'I can only join you in a sense. Karen Grace there is love here, you are loved.'

"Thank you, Grandma Grace – I realized you were guiding me."

'No, just joining the connections, moments of the past, always rejoicing in the prayers of love.'

"I have absorbed so many lives, you guided me to avoid the mistakes."

'Grace I am not here; you have found the lives and your choices.'

"We all search for love. Few seem to find life's abundance here. I do want to live in some of my moments. I want my love of a lifetime. Someone who can sense the Spirits of the land."

'Be easy on yourself, be open to love, even if you have to teach them to listen to the land.'

The gossamer steam flickered; she felt alone again. Being home and loved, Grace was all she ever needed.

Appendix

Null Stillness: land of spirit for a barren soul

Thoughts on a generational novel

Maybe a couple of notes, this is entirely fictional. Many of the words are ones I have heard people use. I named a character Karen; I was feeling maybe some real life Karens were getting tired of being a meme. It is a novel of people's lives on a family farm across many generations. I have tried to portray a world I knew and one I grew up in. My characters are not unlike people I have known, but none of them are based on an actual person I have known.

I try to make no reference to anything not in line with the timeframe a story is set in. Stories occur in different times starting in the 1960's to 2022'?. Although the present is ever blended with an ancient past in this novel.

It is a series of dialogs where people relate their stories and reveal themselves not always intentionally. Many reveal selves at odds with what they believe about themselves.

It is a collection of stories or scenes, that tell a longer story of a family farm.

Enjoy my playlist on Apple Music Null Stillness. The song lyrics are referenced, or the song is mentioned somewhere in the novel. The songs are not paralleling the stories, usually chosen because I heard a phrase in my mind and then added the song.

<https://music.apple.com/us/playlist/null-stillness/pl.u-xRjdsK60z>

I cannot count how many times I cried as I wrote and reread these stories. I am not hoping you cry; I am hoping you find the characters as real as I did.



Lincoln's New Salem – Livestock Shed

The unidentified narrator tries to be a trail marker for this nonsynchronous novel. My wife does not like this style. I suggested it was a puzzle allowing her imagination to slowly fill in a new world. I got the stare of a long together couple, -- yeah, why, didn't you just write a romance or a mystery.

Parker Family

Parker Family Came before Franklin to farm 1836

Eldon & Grace (Hays) Parker m. 1918 in Franklin

Children:

Thomas 1920

Leon 1923

Kenny (Lancelot) 1931

Tom and Helen Parker m. 1944 Liberal KS

Children:

Lawrence 1944

Carol 1951

Lawrence and Carolyn Parker m. 1965 Chicago IL

Children:

Tom (Young Tom) 1966

Katie 1970

Young Tom Marries in California 1997

Children:

Karen Grace 2002

Carol Parker

Children:

Shiloh Thomas Parker 1982

Brent Lancelot Parker 1984

Donaldson Family

Grandpa Donaldson and Grandma Dell Begin Working for Eldon - 1930

Jim born 1925

Jim Donaldson works for Eldon his whole life

Jim's son -- JB Jamison Brenton born 1950

JB and Ruth (Cullens) marry in 1977

Della born September 1979 – daughter Brenda 1981 – son Jim born 1983

1977 Cousin Lizzie sings at wedding helps Carol -- marries Junior Williams 1982 Elly is her youngest

Carol marries Stephen Capuano 1979

1980 Capuano's book is taking off

1980 & Jan 1981 -- Stephen faces career collapse is stuck in dilemma Jan 1981

Shiloh Thomas born 1982 wife Tiff two sons Ulysses & Elijah

Brent Lancelot born 1984 wife Morgan children Cate & Johnathan

In Spring 2021 or 2022 Karen Parker and Madison visit Great Aunt Carol Parker

Lizzie's adapted Lyric for Ruth's Wedding		Lyrics to Orange Buffoonery
<p>If I should stay, I would only be in your way So I'll go, but I know I'll think of you every step of the way Ruthie will always love you We will always love you</p> <p>Now, my darling you, I Will leave sweet memories That is all I'm taking with me So, goodbye Mom, don't you cry We know It's time for me to be with JB And I will always love you I will always love all of you</p> <p>We hope life treats us kind And I know JB is all I've dreamed of And I wish to gift joy and happiness to all who are here, I wish you all love And We will always love you We will always love you We will always love you We will always love you Thank you, we will always love you Oh JB, darling, I love you Ooh, I'll always, I'll always love you</p>		<p>Boo Boo Boofing – Buffooning all the day blow blow your boofing are you here to stay?</p> <p>More hot air more hot air Just a big ha-boob Blast our ears Blast our skin Oh what a state we're in</p> <p>Boo Boo Boofing – Buffooning all the day blow blow your boofing are you here to stay?</p> <p>When did we fall When did we crawl We need to breathe See the blue sky Not Orange Dust Filling our eye</p> <p>Boo Boo Boofing – Buffooning all the day blow blow your boofing are you here to stay?</p>