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Introduction

As I struggled with the shifting emotions of living in the shadow of her past, I began weeding through her belongings—her memories, her journals, the fragments of her life. During this process, I rediscovered a present I had given her on Valentine’s Day in 1998: a collection of all the emails she sent during the first six months of our relationship. This treasure became the foundation of the opening sections of this book.

Our journey together began in a cyber chat room at a time when the internet was just taking shape. I have used direct excerpts from her emails to recreate the feel of our earlier conversations. Her words are, for the most part, verbatim. My words are drawn from memory.

The emails were not the only source material that I had to work with. As I continued to organize what had once been our room, I was stunned by how much she had written. She had books filled with her thoughts, hopes, gratitude, and fears. She had many letters, sealed and labeled, for myself and our children. Because of those, her voice is throughout the book.

Marine was an extraordinarily gifted educator. Transformed by her own traumas, her empathy for others guided her decisions. She treated students as family—this is not a romantic exaggeration. The hours we spent working through how to help this child or that child cannot be calculated. Her devotion led to her being named as one of Los Angeles most inspirational teachers by the United Way.

Reading through Marine’s letters, journals, blogs, and other writings reminded me of her journey—from young, fearful woman to a thriving adult, always curious, always learning. This book is in part a love story. It is not the whole of her life or who she became, but it is the story of how our love was born, shared, and how it endured life's battles.

Acknowledgments

This book was formed at the place where love meets loss—where family and friends tell stories and keep memories alive. Thank you for those conversations.

I am grateful for my sons. Their suggestions have added depth to this book. Their willingness to provide me access to the letters and journals she created for them was helpful in ensuring that Marine's voice is heard throughout.

To Marine, whose writings guide this work. Whose love gave me life.

I also wish to share my appreciation for the caregivers who walked part of this path with us.

Finally, to the reader. I am grateful that you have chosen to read, analyze, and sit with this book.

Prelude

Two

I am here to tell you
how two
become one—
a merged world.
My Kingdom.
Your Kingdom.

We meet,
and negotiate.
Treaty enacted.

Crane erected
wrecking ball smashes walls,
leaving skyline bare
raw.

Designs explored
essential groundwork finalized,
foundations laid,
certified—
building begins.
Story by story
Rising—
the Crane lifts beams
into place.
Rising.

We turn
our attention inside—
keep building
With boxes of screws—
some from your kingdom,
some from mine—
We attach sheetrock
twist by twist—
we unite.
Not too tight,
careful,
not to scar
the gypsum.

We tape,
we texture,
we paint—
And two
become one.

In Order to Rise I've Decided to fall

It does rain in Los Angeles
it falls in a burst—a Tsunami wave
short-lived but lasting
here—gone.

By choosing to write this,
like the mist,
I have decided to fall—
plunge
down the rabbit hole
into darkness again.

Like the twenty-three-year-old me
turning gloom into despair.
Wind-like angst raging at my hair—
loneliness, Isolation
broken.
Clouds opening—
bursting from darkness,
arose – not quite the opposite.
A sunrise of sorts,
a mirror, like the sun shining
upon a Sierra Nevada tarn
A pebble thrown in,
ripples of life—
love, lust, birth, birthdays,

anniversaries, cancer
and then more cancer.
And Things Fall Apart
like Achebe's tortoise shell—
shattered.
And the rain began again,
I descended into darkness.
So that once I crash,
I may ascend.

When We Met, We Loved

“All that you touch you change.
All that you change changes you.
The only lasting truth is change.”

– Octavia Butler, **Parable of the Sower**

December 1995 – January

1996: Cyber Chat

Transcripts Included

December 24th, 1995 – Cyber Chat Transcript

SC GAL

Hi Simple Mind

Simple Mind

*(Shyly walks up to her,
–standing on an imagined beach–
reaches up, pushing her hair out of her eyes.)*

How are you SC Gal?

SC GAL

*(Blushing, a tentative smile.
Stares into his eyes,
letting her gaze linger.)*

Better now, Simple-- and you?

Simple Mind

*(Standing next to her as the sun rises over the calm sea,
reaching– hesitatively–for her hand.)*

It seems to be getting better.

SC GAL

*(Lets him tentatively touch her fingers.
Just a light brush.
A canvas stroke.)*

Hmm--

What's up with your name?

You don't seem so simple!

Simple Mind

It's from a short poem I wrote.

Would you like me to share it?

SC GAL

I love poetry.

Please share it with me.

Simple Mind

Simple Mind

Ask of death

Simple Mind.

Silent Heart

Ask of love

Silent Heart.

SC GAL

Why do you ask of death, Simple Mind?

Sounds so dark.

So, depressing.

Simple Mind

Let me send you a poem

that better sets the stage

for Simple Mind's emotional

state of being.

Lost Life's Breath

Lost life's breath,
in the valley of fog,
where no flowers bloom,
I journey alone—
tired and forlorn.

No sun exists
to cast a shadow.
No reflection
in the muddy Styx.

I must be death,
waiting to be saved
or waiting to be named.
But no one is coming.
So, I linger here.
Alone
is where I'll stay.

December 25th, 1995 – Cyber Chat Transcript

SC GAL

You were the most interesting person I met yesterday.

Simple Mind

I hope interesting is positive.

SC GAL

Your poem floored me.

Did I tell you I'm taking psychology and British literature?

There's so much in your poem to explore.

Simple Mind

Should I be excited or scared?

SC GAL

(Warm smile and twinkle of the eyes.)

Simple Mind

You want to remain mysterious, I see.

But have you enjoyed our talking as much as me?

SC GAL

What woman would not enjoy the warm kiss we shared.

Questions I Asked

How I remember it

What's your real name?

I'll tell you,
when we talk--
so, you can whisper it
in my ear.
And let me hear it
roll sweetly
off your tongue.

Do you hide who you are?

I am an open book
I know
such a cliché.
I wish
I were a mystery.
Total secrecy--
but here,
alas, I am not.

Have you loved before?

I thought so --
I don't know.
Let me tell
you about it,
and let you
unpack
the story
of my heart.

December 26th, 1996, 9PM – Cyber Chat Transcript

SC GAL

Simple, I am Armenian.

It is important to me.

I love the culture, the food,
and the connection to family.

My name is Marine (Ma-ri-nee).

Someday I may pronounce it for you.

Simple Mind

I remember when the Armenian earthquake happened.

I was a junior in high school.

SC GAL

The earthquake was horrible.

A few of our relatives still live in Armenia,
and the stories they tell are sad.

As for your other questions:

“age” 18.

“Party” No.

“Drink” Never.

“Drugs,” I don’t want to tell you yet, but I can’t say I don’t.

No boyfriend.

Tell me more about you?

Simple Mind

I am a mutt.

SC GAL

What do you mean, a mut?

Simple Mind

I am a mixture and I don't know who my father is.

SC GAL

I can't imagine. It does not matter.

Simple Mind

I was born in Southern California.

When I was three months old, my mother

married, put me in the back of a 1971

Ford Bronco, and we moved to a small town

in the foothills of Northern California.

SC GAL

What about the questions you asked me?

Simple Mind

I don't drink.

Never been to a party.

Sad, since I attend Chico State,

known for being a party school.

Never used drugs.

And no girlfriend.

Of –Marine’s Story

You of Yerevan,
of Echmiadzin,
of Garni-Geghard,
of blood traced back millennia–
before communism,
before genocide,
before the Ottoman Empire–
a proud Armenian.

You, daughter of Armen,
descendant of Sis in Anatolia.
Only the youngest boy escaped
genocide, in 1915–
You ascend from that line.

You, daughter of Siran
Family fled from Yerevan–
for Lebanon.
Where bombs
brought the ceiling down
upon your crib.
Carried to America.
Arrived before you were two.
You a storyteller at eighteen–
paint an epic tale
of you.

December 27th, 1995 – Cyber Chat Transcript

SC GAL

I am reading Sidney.

Do you want to read some?

Simple Mind

Yes.

SC GAL

“And oft so clings to my pure Love, that I
One from the other scarcely can descried,
While each doth blow the fire of my heart.”

I hope your eyes are sparkling
as much as mine

When you read his poems—
but is it a good thing
for a man’s eyes to sparkle?

(Shy smile.)

Simple Mind

I am reading Henry Abbey.

Here are a few lines I like:

“I found a flower upon the walk,
A dear syringa, white and sweet,”
and later in the poem

“And something in its odor speaks
Of dark brown eyes, and arms of snow,
And rainbow smiles on sunset cheeks—”

SC GAL

That is lovely.

But it is much more modern.
Do you prefer modern poetry?

(Slight pout.)

Simple Mind

Yes.

(Half smile.)

Is that a deal breaker?

Hope

Hope created out of sorrow,
when common connections
cement new bonds.
neither internal,
nor everlasting,
it is brittle like ceramics,
fearful like rabbits.
Once raised,
we wait for it,
to be crushed.