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First edition February 2024

*Book design by James Kozlik*

eISBN:9781662940316

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# Tapas

By James Kozlik

Yesterday, I skied. Traversing into the wooded area where the wind blew the snow, there was no wind. I meandered and bush whacked my way through the understory of the tall pines and firs. I looked up through an opening at the crest of the ridge and realized I had arrived at the best place to emerge from the cocoon of the forest into the howling wind. I hiked the last fifty yards across the barren rock and crossed over to the downwind side of the ridge where the snow settled into a hardened drift with a light layer of wind blown powder. I arrived at the best place to start. I fumbled around getting my skies on. After a sip of water, I took in the views of monumental mountains, the Yellowstone River Valley and where I want to take my first turn. One way was a tentative start, the other way a plunge into immediate action. I chose the plunge, no thought, quick flowing turns. Feeling the skies carve as I followed the narrow path of packed snow, the only route after the recent wind scoured the rest of the slope.

When I stopped after my final turn I was right back where I started. A rush of adrenaline flowed through me, like the wind. It was a sensation of doing something that required no thought. Just being present, very present was the only requirement.

“What is life? It is the flash of a fire fly in the night. It is the breath of a buffalo in the winter time. It is the little Shadow which runs across the grass and loses itself in the Sunset.”

Crowfoot, Blackfoot Elder

## A New Beginning

We committed to this journey of love a long time ago. Julian and I somehow stayed the course. And yet after all of the years, there is still an awareness we both share. The awareness of being connected to something greater than the self.

Julian - It's been almost six months since I've been back at the cabin by the creek. Nothing has changed much...just some dust accumulated here and there. I brought some fresh coffee to brew on the wood stove. It's a blistery early spring day and I have a fire going. It's a nice feeling being in the solitude of the cabin again. Jim dropped me off and went skiing. What a lousy day for that. Whew, I wonder sometimes, what is his motivation for being out in the elements. Maybe it's the solitude he needs? Like I need this cabin for some space?

There's a knock at the door. It slowly creaks open...."Frank! You knew I was here?"

"Well, that's the greeting I get? How about a hug!"

"Of course, sorry, I was just reveling in the solitude this cabin affords me."

"It's cozy in here Julian. Is he out there? Or are you spending the night alone?"

"Yeah, he's out there. I tracked him until he disappeared in the woods."

There's a moment of quiet, it seems as if Frank is contemplating about the situation. Me being alone. What's he thinking?

"I have some coffee brewing, I'll clean a couple of mugs."

"Thanks, Julian."

A chair scrapes across the floor, I have my back to him not sure what to do. I was not expecting to see Frank. I hear a little thump on the table and turn with the clean mugs I dipped in the hot water I had placed on the stove. There's a small flask of Whiskey in the center of the table.

"I am replacing the one I took outta here awhile back"

I follow his gaze, towards the bed. I look back at him. As he looks up at me I ask, "what are you thinking Frank?"

"Just some fond memories Julian."

"Let's keep it as memories, right? We are straight about that correct?"

"Yeah little lady. We made our peace."

“And the Whiskey?”

“Irish coffee...our truth serum. So, you and Jim are heading to India I heard.”

## Chapter 1: Opposition

I pour us a couple of coffees. We stare at the flask of Whiskey. Then we look up at each other. Memories of a night gone awry. The night Frank knew my hidden truth.

Frank starts, “Julian, I came with good intention in my mind's eye. There is something right now that bothers me. It feels that whatever I share with you is a futile attempt at communication. You have your way. Your knowledge and beliefs seem to override who I am. So I have to ask, how do you reckon we not have a perception of who we think the other is. Or how the other is to experience their life. Whatever the other persons' journey might be. Like Joseph used the medicine wheel as a way to describe our personal journey”

“I am not following you Frank. Are we talking about the past, our past relationship? Or the more recent past, when I pursued a reconciliation of our past relationship. The using of each other to replace our lost lovers?”

“I think you called them soulmates. Soulmate lovers, that's what you said. But no, that is all behind us. There is something else, I'm not sure how to

phrase it. Let's just say I have a concern of your choice to you going to India with Jim."

"You know? Not many people know about our decision."

"I ran into Nirvana a few nights ago. She sure does like art classes. I am modeling for Molly this time. Jim turned her down."

"Nude?"

Frank has a chuckle that lightens up the conversation. "No way, swim trunks. Molly's asking this cowboy to do yoga poses. And Nirvana is assisting me to have the right posture. I am sore more now than I get after a long horse ride!!"

"Okay, so Nirvana mentioned our desire to go to Tapas. And what, you checked them out? The "sect", Ekam?"

"Hey Julian, you seem a little perturbed. Maybe it's none of my business. But right here, you are sensing what I might have to say that might interfere with the flow of your life."

"Wow, Frank, you are on spot. Yeah, well, I came to the cabin today hoping for some space and a place to check in with myself today. And here you are."

Julian - We both take a tentative sip from our mugs and eye the Whiskey. He seems so sure of himself. Like he has dominion over me. It's as if he is my steward and caretaker. And maybe his intentions are good. But I would like to steer my own ship. It might lead to destruction, bluntly put. Or it

could lead to my self awakening and personal knowledge. It seems that there is so much outside influence which makes me act out of obligation.

There's a long pause of quiet, stillness. I regret my biting comments towards someone making an effort to support me. I need to look at how I want to dictate the type of connection I desire.

I take my eye off the Whiskey. It's so tempting a vice to soothe me. Frank is looking at me. I can't tell if it's sorrow or compassion that I see in his eyes. Maybe I am blind to what this man is about. A deep furrow appears between his eyebrows. Where are his thoughts going? What state are we in (as Megan describes when talking about the Ekam teachings)?

"Julian? Julian, I am sorry that I barged in on your space. Especially since Jim might be joining you soon. I best leave."

"No, Frank. It's okay. My turn to apologize. I am just looking at my truth." Who do I think I am, that I want to so direct the course of another's actions. Why does everything have to fit into my blueprint?

The door creaks open again....

"Frank! It's been awhile."

Jim looks at me, then back at Frank, "Oooo, looks like I am interrupting something here."

He eyes the unopened flask of Whiskey. He looks at both of us with pleading eyes. I am spent already. My heart is in pain and my mind is doing what it does best, confusing me. It's a conglomeration of judgements, right and wrong, better and best and all of that stuff that is the dweller on the

threshold! So now is the time to arise to a beautiful state. But I need to be real about it first. I go to my heart. I feel the pain, the suffering. I am thinking ugh man and woman “we are so different”. That get’s me nowhere. And I look at the four sets of eyes that are gazing at me, waiting for a request, is it? And what I see is confusion and concern. Then I see or want to see love. And now I see eyes that want to love me. They are pleading for me to stop this nonsense. I feel the first tear and another. And before a cascade of tears start to flow, I feel the comfort of touch. The rough hands of a cowboy and the cold hands of a skier. And all I can do is smile and give my gratitude for two souls that have touched my soul in so many ways.

“Thank you guys, for your stillness and staying quiet while I process. The small space you both afforded me just now means more than you know.”

“Frank,” I nod my head as a way of greeting.

“Jim, Whiskey?”

I chuckle, “No, it looks like we don’t need it.”

We all have a good laugh. We have told our truth to each other before. As uncomfortable as it can get, there is an underlying understanding of our special relationship to each other.

## Chapter 2: Whiskey and Women

“You two looked pretty serious when I interrupted your conversation. And the Whisky? That’s looking pretty serious, too. Mind if I ask...?”

“I never did get to tell Julian why I am here. I saw the smoke from the smoke stack and thought I’d pay a visit.”

“Frank knows about us planning to go to India. You seemed to have a concern? Is that why you’re here? Now you can talk to both of us.”

“I wonder if we can hop in my truck. I wanted to show you some of the ranch and discuss how this vision Joseph had about community might work out.”

Julian - I was pretty poignant. Why am I so terse with him right now? I know there’s more coming. I know Frank, it takes awhile for him to say what’s on his mind. He knew he didn’t have to replace the whisky. Truth serum? What truth did he want to convey? Now that Jim’s here the energy of the room seemed to change. Where did my tension come from? I am searching eyes and body language from these two guys. There still seems to be some discomfort between them. Am I just projecting that or is it real? Looks like Jim is ready to say something, he has a look disbelief.

“Somehow I feel that you have something else to discuss. Am I fishing here Frank? Or is it true?”

“Like I mentioned to Julian, I heard about you and her possibly going to India for some kind of Hindu practice? I’m not sure that’s the right description, but I wanted to find out more about it and what role I will play in this vision of community.”

“Let’s do that I the ride. I’ll get out of my ski gear.” Julian throws another log in the fire box. We plan to spend the night. And we walk to Franks truck for a ride around the ranch lands.

Maggie - I notice the smoke coming from the pioneer cabin. I wonder if Jim and Julian are there. I haven't seen or talked to them for awhile. I think I'll pay a visit.

Joni - I stopped by the Grizzly Cabin as Jim calls it. Nobody there. I am aching to see one of them. I wonder if they went to the ranch. Julian's cabin perhaps. Shoot, I think I'll try. I didn't come all the way from Bozeman for the ride.

Maggie walks the path that leads to the old pioneer cabin. There's a rustling in the brush. She looks over and sees a small Moose nibbling the ends of the dogwood.

"Where's momma young one?" Ah, there she is with an eye on me. It sure is a nice wind break amidst the tall brush on this narrow pathway. Ummmm... there's the garden plot. Looks like it needs some attention. I wonder if Julian has an intention to spend time here this summer and work this plot. I hope I'm not disturbing Jim and Julian with my unannounced visit. It's been awhile since I've been in this part of the ranch. Frank is right, I don't know half of what I've got here. It's so vast.

As Maggie approaches the door, she hesitates and listens for any sounds. It's quiet inside, no voices. She knocks on the thick wooden planks that make up this old solid door. No response.

Humm, well I am the landlord, technically. Let's see maybe I can peak through the window, looks like the curtain is open. Well the bed's made and I don't see any bodies. I think I'll be bold and go in. The door creaks open, "anybody home?"

It's so cozy in here. Julian really lived a simple way in this old homestead. This place feels like days of yore. It fits this natural rugged environment. We've been so blessed the day Frank picked up Julian and worked out a deal for her to be our "master" gardener. Wow, we got five solid years of dedicated stewardship from Julian. What a blessing.

Maggie places another log on the fire and gets a whiff of coffee from the pot on the stove. She looks around and finds the cups stacked neatly on an open shelf above the small table against the far wall. She notices the Whiskey flask in the center of the table and two empty cups. She takes a deep breath and with a few steps, she is reaching for a cup on the overhead shelf. The flask of Whiskey appears to not have been open. There's a small stripe of the company logo label that seals the lid. It hasn't been broken. Maggie turns and pours herself a brew. Comes back to the table and occupies a chair. She places her fingers around the flask. The door creaks open, "hello? Jim? Julian?" Maggie is jolted from past memories.... "They're not here, come on in Joni."

"Maggie! I thought that was your truck along the road. What are you...I mean where is Jim and Julian?"

"Not my truck, I walked. I don't know where they are. How about joining me for a cup of coffee. We can wait for them together. Maybe get to know each other better."

Joni - Well this is an unexpected visit and what's she doing here anyway? Whiskey...is that what she's been drinking? Her fingers seem to have a slight tremble. Oh! She took them off that flask pretty quickly. I must be staring. I look over at the coffee pot. Maggie nods up at the cups on the

shelf. There's a blank look on her freckled face. She has beautiful features and eyes that grab ones attention. I grab a cup. And then I join her at the table.

I came with a small box of a few cinnamon donuts and a new "espresso" donut for Jim to try. It's his little addiction that brings him joy? I place them next to the Whiskey.

"You okay Maggie? Am I intruding on something?"

"No, I wouldn't have asked you to join me if you were. I came to pay Jim and Julian a visit. I haven't seen them for awhile. Not since our last meeting. What brought you here?"

"Same, I stopped by the Grizzly Cabin. You know their cabin in Grizzly Meadows. But nobody was home. So I thought I'd try here."

Maggie finally smiles. There's something missing in her smile. I look at the Whiskey. "Truth serum?" I nod at the flask

"Huh? What do you mean?"

"I have been witness to a stashed bottle up on that shelf in the past. Jim told me that when the relationship between Frank and Julian was breaking up Irish coffee was their truth serum."

"Ummm, okay Joni. Let us share a bit, without the serum. It's pretty ironic that we both knew Jim around the same time 20 some years ago in Chicago and we even both met Julian! How'd you meet them?"

"At an intrapersonal relationship workshop. It was a weeklong dedication. No outside contact. We were paired up with people that had similar

compulsive behaviors. I was paired with three other people. Jim, Jerod a gay man, and Cindy. Our commonality was sexual.”

“And that is what your group with Molly, Sadie, Jenny and Sammie is all about? Still to this day?”

“Maggie, I observed your trembling fingers wrapped around the Whiskey. You still have a compulsive behavior you’re still dealing with? To his day?”

Joni - Our stare at each other is hard and penetrating. We are looking deep into each others truth. Our eternal suffering. What difference does it make what one is addicted too. When we’re in it there is no addiction. We are seeking the pleasure of the behavior, the pleasure and we don’t see beyond it until it’s past. Then we crave it. We want it, and we don’t want it. And we continue the suffering of the pleasure.

Maggie - Whoa, this woman knows what she’s talking about. She has the depth of what she knows about her most inner self. Now I know a bit about her. She knows nothing about me.

“Alright, Joni, I met Jim in college. We had a couple of classes together. We talked about spirituality, mostly Hindu philosophy. He was shy, he asked me for a date. It was so cute, but I had a boyfriend. And Julian? I met her the following summer. It was registration day, I saw Jim laying out getting some sun and greeted him. Introduced him to my boyfriend. Then Julian appeared, and I was so happy for Jim. That was the last time I ever saw Jim until this last year. The alcohol addiction came much later. It was tied to my lifestyle.”

We are looking at each other. I am starting to feel compassion for Joni as a “sister”. There is a bond of womanhood that I am feeling in my heart.

“Joni, thank you for not letting me get away with denial of my compulsion. My ego wanted to be a better person than you. And I am not. If I try to attach my cravings, addictions and dependence to some past trauma I give them power over me. There’s some kind of self righteousness that prevails. I tell myself that “it’s okay to have the craving”. I blame it on my past existence. It causes me to have this recurring event. Whenever I recognize the craving, the addiction, how good or bad it feels I give it power. It controls me. Depression or joy, it does not matter - I crave it.”

“That’s beautiful Maggie. I mean the fact that you are willing to share your struggle. And your Buddhist path? Where did that come from?”

“I’ve been clean for seventeen years. I found a guy in Hawaii who lead me on a 12 step program following the Buddhist ideology. These days I find a chunk of the morning to spend time in stillness. I contemplate on nothingness. I observe without thought. I enter the day out of control.”

“What do you mean “out of control”?”.

“Nothing controls me and I control nothing!”

Joni - We are both staring at the Whiskey. Maggie has one hand on the table, near the bottle. I grasp it tenderly. She brings her other hand onto the table and we clasp both of our hands. We look up from the Whiskey. There is connection, woman to woman.

“Joni, let’s go up to the Yellow Room. Let’s meditate and talk some more and enjoy each other’s company. You can park your car at the ranch house and hop in the truck with me.”

And so we go.

## Chapter 3: Arthur and Molly

Molly - So, I am driving around and have no real need other than trying to get rid of my anxiety. I want to find Arthur and then I don’t. I want to let him know my desire for relationship with him, but scared that I’ll be thwarted. Probably in a gentle way, but still, the thought keeps me from wanting to approach him. Then, I want to drive to Maggie’s ranch and get some support. More like advice. But then, I don’t. I tell my self that I can handle my emotions. And so here I am. Heading towards Arthur’s home and pottery studio, which is towards the east end of Bozeman. Towards the final interstate entrance, east, out of town with no real commitment to where I am going. I turn, it’s the interstate to Livingston. And soon enough, I exit onto Trail Creek Road, the most direct route to Paradise and Maggie’s ranch.

It’s been a long drive which included about 30 miles of gravel and washboards! And here it is the entrance that I recall when we had our first group meeting to present Joseph’s vision to Maggie.

I slowly go down the incline and pass by the Ranch Manager’s (that would Frank’s) home. I see a car parked out front. I continue onward, about a mile or two. Oh there’s Jim’s car! Humph, I’d love to see him and Julian and just

talk. I need to unload this feeling of anxiety concerning Arthur. My artistic partner for the tree sculpture and year long countrywide tour.

I park. I see a well used path, slightly muddied from the splash of a recent drizzle. My artistic eye takes in the narrow dirt path with willowy grass along both sides. I want my bare feet on it and in it. I want to feel the mud, and let the damp cool grass wipe the mud off my feet. I want nature to ease my mind. I do it. I take off my sandals, roll up my pant cuffs, and head down the path in total bliss. I go several hundred yards and pop into an opening. A small meadow, a babbling brook, a garden plot? And an old, old cabin! There's smoke from the stove pipe above the roof pitch. Jim and Julian? Is this where he found her? This is it, gotta be. Frank never showed me the ranch. We'd always meet at the ranch house by the entrance. That's where Joseph, him and I would have our meetings to discuss missing person cases. Funny, I have been spending so much time thinking about Arthur these days, I am missing my personal life. With self! Shall I? Knock on the door? Unannounced? I can be a surprise, no matter what they are doing in there! Ha, I knock. No answer. I bellow, hello. It's me, Molly!

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Arthur - Frank mentioned at the last Men's gathering that he had a whole slew of used horseshoes that I could use to create sculptures. Not a bad idea, maybe make custom hot plates for the Donabe Bowls. Pretty nice day to take a drive to visit Frank. I've never been there. He said he'd be around. Just "come to the ranch, ask around and someone will know where I am." Yeah, I need something different in my life. An adventurous day on a mountain ranch. Anyway, Jim and Julian mentioned the possible location

to start a community with our small group of art enthusiasts. It is the ranch that Frank manages. I wonder how Joni is doing these days, now that Julian is in Jim's life again. I wonder if she still has that special Donabe bowl I made for her. One for her and one for Jim, filled with a hot stew. A date! That's what I sensed that day. Everybody knew of their attraction for each other. I think I'll heat up some of the lamb stew and put it in a Donabe, it will still be very warm when I am ready for a meal. Especially if I wrap it in some towels.

It's been awhile since I have been in the Valley. Last time was when I looped the northwest corner of Yellowstone. West Yellowstone to Gardiner. Coming from the north end of the valley is beautiful. I heard about the turn off before the Point of Rocks. A detour since the Cabella Bridge was wiped out by the flood. Here we are. Wow, this will be a nice drive along the river. I drive 20 miles and see the Ranch Entrance that Frank told be about. I turn and come to the first Ranch house. It has red siding, that's what Frank described. I park next to the car out front and climb the stairs. Knock on the door and there's no answer. I peer through the front window, looks like nobody is home. I walk over to the corral. A few horses look over at me, disinterested in my presence. I notice a wooden crate with old horse shoes. Now to find Frank. Guess I'll drive down the road a bit. There's Molly's car. What's she doing here? I get out and grab the stew. I enter the pathway and have expectations to see Molly. It's been awhile.

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As I step out of the insulated bush lined pathway, my eye sees Molly, sunbathing, naked as a model ready to be sketched. She looks so relaxed.

And the sun glows on her tanned body. I am not sure what to do. I edge closer, keeping quiet. After a whole year, on tour and sculpturing with Molly, we never made any kind of an advance towards each other. There's so much tradition between man and woman in Japanese culture. To marry someone from another ethnic race, might disrupt family relations. It has never occurred to me to pursue a woman who is not Japanese.

I whisper, "Molly, Molly...." I wait and with a little more virtuoso I call her name again."

"Arthur? Is that you?" I can't see his expression because of the bright sun over his shoulder. But the voice I know so well. I sit up. "I have just been dreaming about you. Not as in a dream, but as a thought. How did you know about this place?"

There's an amused smile, and his beautiful dark eyes seem full of intense joy.

"Frank, he invited me to come and get some old horse shoes. Hey, I have warm Lamb Stew. How about a mid day diner. For two, I made enough for two."

"I'd love that, let's go inside. This is where Jim and Julian hang out on the ranch. Lovely and rustic, wouldn't you say?"

I watch every movement of Molly, as if I am taking in a new body anatomy to sketch. The door creaks open. And she either does not realize that she's not clothed, or she has no inhibitions. As I observe her, I am aware that my connection with her is of muted feelings. It's as if she is just something to sketch or paint. "Molly?"

“Yes....”

I see a whiskey bottle on the small table, and a box of donuts? I am a bit befuddled. Maybe she's drunk? “Ah, did you come wrapped in clothes? Or do you always prance around nude when not in public?”

Oh my God! “Ugh, Arthur, oh my. You're, looking at the whiskey, I am not drunk. Yes, lunch...er food sounds good. Uh, turn around, oh forget it. I'll get dressed. Wait right here!”

“I'm not going anywhere Molly, I'll set the table.”

Molly - I hurry out, to tract down my clothes. Oh man, what a scene. I want to let Arthur know how I feel about him, but now what? What's he thinking? This image of professionalism I try to maintain, wow, now what. There they are, by the little bathing water hole. How cozy a life Julian must have had here. I better get back, oh yeah, I should put on some clothes. Oh shit, ha, what a mess my mind is in! A therapist? Me? Maybe I need one!

By now Molly can't contain herself and as she opens the door, she is howling with laughter. She drops and rolls over on the floor holding her sides. Eyes squeezed shut, face turning red....

And Arthur? He's just taking it all in. “Molly, after all these years of doing your classes, and us being on tour...I must say, I like your spontaneity.”

Molly, slowly sits up, one hand still gripping the left side, near the spleen! “Ok stop right there...don't... make... me laugh... anymore.” Molly shakes her head and her million dollar smile creases her face.

“Arthur, let me tell you this...before I lose any of the liberated feeling of self that I just experienced. I want to pursue us as a possible couple in relationship. I can't say I love you just yet. I mean I love you but as a person, not in an intimate way like lovers.”

Arthur has one look at Molly and then one look at the whiskey. He turns his head back towards Molly. “Molly, you stopped smiling, you look so serious all of a sudden. Come on I'll help you up, grab my hand.”

She lets the strength of Arthur pull her up off the floor. “Let's eat some, it's still very warm.”

Arthur takes the lid off the bowl and a slight steam can be seen, emanating from the stew. “Here, some chop sticks. Let's eat out of the same bowl.”

“Is this a Japanese tradition?”

A chuckle from Arthur, “I don't know but it's my way of saying let's talk.”

There's a longish interval of quiet. Very slowly, in a tentative fashion, morsels of food are plucked from the Donabe. Warm and delicious.

“Arthur, this is sooo good. I apologize for my craziness.”

“No need to. I know what you want to convey. When you mentioned something about a professional image, it struck a cord in me. When I saw you naked, I saw you as a model to sketch, or paint or sculpture. I failed to connect as a fellow human being. I didn't feel, I observed you, but I didn't know how to respond. I have a trait that seems to keep me calm and just accept the situation. I guess, like a Zen Master might observe the world.

Not that I know how a Zen Master observes the world. But, what am I trying to say? Uh, I am glad that you said what you did. As cautious as it sounds, I want to pursue us in a relationship, too.”

“Oh Arthur, you don’t know what this means to me. You seem tentative and that helps me, because I am scared to enter into a meaningful relationship with another man. And I keep checking with myself, what is it that attracts me to you?”

“My family is still in Japan. I come from a very traditional family. For a Japanese man to love a woman of another culture brings discord to the family, especially in marriage. The spouse might feel ignored. And there’s other traditions that you are unaware of. But for me, to witness your liberation, and how you just now unabashedly expressed your desire for connection with me... thank you. I can be inhibited expressing my feelings, it’s me being shy. Afraid that I might not be accepted for being me.”

“Yes, amazing how we can have such a limited consciousness about ourselves. It prevents us from so much opportunity to really connect honestly.”

“Let’s clear out of here, we kind of are taking Jim and Julians space for granted.”

Molly - We both eye the flask of whiskey. The seal is still unbroken. Who else has been in here today. There’s still hot coals in the fire box. I place a log in the stove, so that they can come back to a warm abode.

“Arthur, maybe we can drive back to the corral, you can get your box of horseshoes, then we can drive to the end of the road. There’s a trail head, we can take a hike.”

He nods his head in agreement. We walk the path in silence. As we get back to our vehicles, I want to hold him and give him a hug, and a kiss? But I don’t.

## Chapter 4: “Lets have Fun!”

It’s a beautiful day in Bozeman. The girls are sitting on their front porch over looking their front yard, full of flowering plants and herbs. They have a view of the Bridger Mountains. There’s a lumberyard that they can look past. It’s in the old part of Bozeman where the residential meets the old industrial part of what was once a town, now turning into a small city.

“Hey, Jenny, how about doing some investigating today?”

“What are you talking about, and what are you thinking about investigating Sadie?”

“The ranch where Jim and Julian are wanting to form a community with our sketch class. Joseph’s vision. I wonder where he ended up. The TM ranch, where Frank lives. Let’s snoop around, have some fun!”

“It is a private ranch, you think they’ll let us drive around?”

“I hear it’s a huge ranch, so my guess it’ll be awhile before any ranch hand finds us. Besides, it’s also a guest ranch, so we can pretend we’re lost guest!”

“Okay, let’s do it! I’m in love with a wild woman! How about making that cashew cheese cake that Jim made. Maybe we’ll find Jim and Julian, have dessert with them.”

“And we can bring the Twister Game, too.”

“This could get crazy. Let’s make the cheese cake and get going before the day passes us by!”

Sadie - And so we go. Escaping the noise of Bozeman for the quiet of the mountains. I am so glad for Jenny as a mate. Below her quiet demeanor, is a streak of adventure. Every time I think I might lose her as my mate, she shows her appreciation for me. So why do I carry this fear of loss. The image of myself, so self assured. But deep inside so co dependent. What is it from my past that I must have buried or maybe the hurt was so deep I don’t ever want to acknowledge it. At some point I need to dig deep and see the past for what it was so I can move beyond the fear of loss? Maybe the loss of connecting with my family for the choices I made as a feminist? Touting my lesbianism? As if it defines me, by rejecting their beliefs or thoughts of how I should have turned out as their daughter. And my siblings, why is it that my brother and sister can’t get beyond my sexual preference and know my soul, my being.

“Sadie, you’ve been pretty quiet on this ride. When I looked over at you I see you’ve been in contemplation. Am I correct with my observation?”

“Yes, you know when you said you’re in love with a wild woman back at the house? Well, I really seem to come off that way, how I act outwardly. But deep down I know it masks my insecurities and my vulnerability.”

“Oh, there it is, TM ranch. Turn right. Sorry, if I interrupted you. Is there more you want to share?”

“Thanks, no not now. Now I just want to have fun!”

“Okay, I do love you. And I know that we can both connect deeper with each other. That is what I crave in our relationship. A deeper meaning of sisterhood. I never got that with men yet. Of course we’re still younger, and most of the men in our age bracket haven’t matured yet. I think that’s what was so intriguing with Jim as a model. He was so willing to explore his depth. We all sensed that Molly was experimenting with the poses she had him doing. It was quite an experience for me to witness how the cross section of our various age groups responded in an artistic way.”

“How do you mean?”

“Well, the way we all sketched out of context of just sketching anatomy. Our sketches took on how we wanted to connect with Jim. And it wasn’t Jim as it turned out. Remember that reunion, he wouldn’t let Molly make it about him. It was about all of us. I wonder at what moment Joseph had the vision?”

“Did you know he is a medicine man?”

“How’d you find that out?”

“Joní, she told me about walking the medicine wheel and a sweat lodge ceremony she was involved with.”

“Really? We all knew she loved him”

“Hey, look. There’s Jim’s car!”

We park behind it. “Wow, now what?”

“Let’s investigate. See the path? Come on, I see a bunch of foot prints.”

We get out of the car. I grab the cooler with the cheese cake and Sadie gets the Twister game. We both are smiling. We slowly walk the path.

“Sadie, I feel like a little kid going where I’m not supposed to be going.”

“Ohhh, Jenny, you have some past issues too?”

“Ha, ha yes I do but I’m not discussing them now. But I recall a Halloween night getting chased in a corn field, with a group of friends. We trespassed on private land. The rumor was the Monastery had surveillance and there was a dare to see how close we could get to the Monestary before getting caught. Peak in the windows, see what goes on in there. Then all of a sudden there was rustling in the corn stalks, we screamed and ran. This muddy path surrounded by the high brush reminds me of laying flat in the cold mud on the rainy halloween night. Hoping I wouldn’t get caught!”

“Really, now you got me scared. Oh, a Moose! Look, over there!”

“Stop it, where?” I look where Sadie is pointing and by god, it’s a Moose!

“Shhhh, maybe it won’t attack us.”

“Shut up Sadie! Let’s get out of here!”

“That way, I see an opening.”

“You think it’s wise to be in the open?”

Sadie lets out a squealing laugh, “Come on scaredy cat.”

Jenny - And so we make our way to the opening and there it is a small cabin. What a setting. Looks like nobody is around. But it sure looks like there has been a lot of activity. I feel a lot of vibrant energy. It’s like a field of magnetized ions. So surreal, and if Sadie wasn’t here, I’d think I was in a live dream state.

“What do you think? Knock on the door?”

“Yeah, yeah, I’ll give it a tap.”

Nobody appears to be there. I notice a sliver of smoke coming from the stove pipe. We look at each other. I get bold, turn the door knob and there’s a creepy creak that sends shivers down my spine. I am waiting for a voice. Hoping we don’t get caught for trespassing. Sadie puts her free hand on mine, giggles and pushes open the door. We enter, stop in our tracks, look at each other. With dropped jaws we clamor, “how romantic!”

“Now what Sadie?”

“Well, look, a bottle of whiskey, a bowl of unfinished stew? And donuts! Let’s add our cheese cake to the array of goodies. Maybe we’ll all meet back here for a party!”

“So shall we continue with the investigation Sherlock?”

“Yeah, let’s go back out prowl around.”

“Look, there’s a small garden. Huh, somebody’s under garments are next to the creek. Hey, how about taking off our shoes and socks and wade upstream of this meandering creek. See where we end up.”

“I like that idea Jenny. Let’s do it! Maybe we’ll find who these belong too!”

And so we wade in the water...All God’s Children “Wade in the Water....”

## Chapter 5: Belief or Truth

Jerry - I find myself wandering and wondering through life. I wander from one belief to another, wondering who’s truth I am living. Is it beliefs that come from outside my self. Beliefs handed down from generations of my ancestors? Beliefs I gather from the world of thought that influences me? Knowledge I get from books, or instruction, or another persons thinking of how to do something. My wife Gerry, telling me what to do or how to do it. Or my Christian bible study group, what is right living and what is wrong living. It goes on and on and on. I continue to swirl in a mind of thought, And so what is really true to me. Good god, I don’t even know how I got here. Sitting outside this small pioneer cabin. I think this is the place Jim once told me he spent time with Julian. This is where he found her after five years of exile and wondering what happened. Anyway, it sure feels good to just listen to this creek flow by. Hear the breeze swish through the trees. The birds fly over head, chirping. I finally am able to just be aware of how I am so tied to busy thought. I need some perspective. I have been asked to join a community and the thought of it scares me. To be in a group setting with expectations of accepting different mind sets. I like things to just be

black and white. That's what I like about my friends from Bible Study. The written word, the way to live, to be. But these people that I have meet over the past couple of years, they are all so different. How can I ever manage to cope with the differences of lifestyle I see in this group. My clan is the Christines. That's why I came here, nothing against Joseph's vision. I am grateful that he has led the men's group over the years I've known him and Frank. Frank, the ex-preacher who found his God again. But the Native American concept of life and nature. Just doesn't fit my Anglo-American upbringing. Gosh, I brought this lunch of sandwiches I thought I would share with Jim and Julian. They must be on a hike with whomever's car is parked by Jim's vehicle. I'm not even hungry yet, I think I'll put them inside, out of the sun.

The door creaks open once again. Jerry, feels the warm coziness and its' simplicity. His eye catches the sunlight reflecting shimmering bronze like rays on the table top from the Whiskey bottle? Whoa, and there's some other donations of food, donuts? Joni's gift to Jim and Julian? A pie? I might as well add my sandwiches. Now I wonder if I should wait for them. Seems like they have company. I could wander around and look for them. But I might get lost. I've never been here before. In fact if it wasn't for google maps I would have never found the ranch! Maybe I should just go home. Yeah, maybe that's best then I could just leave a note and not have to engage with them. Them of a different mind than mine. I scribble a quick note. All of a sudden I am in a hurry to get out of here, before anybody comes back. I leave the cabin, gather my things from where I was sitting and start for the path. I hear some foot steps and someone whistling a tune.

"Sammie!"

“Jerry!”

Both in unison, “what are you doing here?!!”

“I was invited.”

“By Jim? Are you still chasing him down?”

“What do you mean by that Jerry?”

Sammie - Of all the people to meet, I have to run into Jerry. Man, do I feel his judgements upon me! What a spontaneous question. That tells me Jerry is still stuck with his belief that a man should not be gay. Or have any attractions towards another man.

“Jerry, I am only here because of our friendship and special connection. Is that a good enough reason for me to be here? I’m not still “chasing him down” whatever you mean by that. Of course I can only guess, since you have a one track mind about gay men.”

“You mean sexual preference?”

“Okay, you made your point, Jerry. Is it the wall that prevents you and I from having a connection? A relationship? A friendship?”

“I believe it’s wrong. It goes against written word. Woman is made for man. Man is to love woman. Not other men.”

“Okay, I am consciously aware of that belief. I suffer in self judgement and the judgement of others. My truth is the desire to still be able to have a human connection beyond judgement. So I bear a different cross than yours.”

There is a pause, Jerry is just staring at me. As if he is taking the time to peer into my soul. Is he trying to understand my struggle with duality that causes my suffering?

“Jerry, let’s get something straight. Pun intended. In my mind - I first loved Jim’s physical presence. He sensed that and communicated honestly with me and defined his belief based on his learned behavior. And, yes I continued to pursue him despite his belief. The beauty of our relationship, and now that includes Julian, is that he shared his truth. And his truth is based on his awareness. What I now love about Jim, is his fearlessness to witness his feelings no matter where they take him.”

“If you don’t mind me asking, what is your relationship with Jim?”

“My guess is that you are wondering about the physical aspect of our connection. I can assure you that the physical aspect is not sexual. So you can finally get that thought out of your mind. Let me ask you something and you don’t have to respond. In the men’s group, you seem to still have this ongoing dichotomy with Gerry. You want to be married to her, and you don’t want the marriage. You desire connection with others, and then you talk of wanting to be alone. So is it your judgements that prevent you from pursuing relationships?”

Jerry’s eyes search for anything but direct eye contact. He slowly turns around and goes back to where he was sitting. He looks up at Sammie, “looks like you brought something for the party. In the cabin is a bunch of

food on the table. Why don't you go inside and add your contribution to the pot luck."

"Will you still be here when I come back out?"

"I will wait for you, and if you'd like, we can take a hike. We can talk. Check out the ranch. I think that's why there appears to be a group gathering or forming. I wonder if this is Molly's idea for another reunion?"

"Thank you Jerry, for being willing to connect with me!"

And so I go in and my eyes see the Whiskey!

## Chapter 6: The Gardeners

Deloris - Maggie invited myself and Faye to meet her at the ranch where our special community is forming. I am ready for an adventure. This may be my last time to contribute to society, as a mentor. I am excited to see what she has in mind for us in terms of living conditions. And I want to see the sculpture again. Faye's tree drawing that captured all of us entwined with nature. A community, like trees are a community. Connected, caring and supporting each other. Will we be able to accomplish this venture? There are plenty of success stories about intentional community and as many failures. How does the human self transcend self interest. We need to honor our self first and foremost, self care physically and mentally. However, for us to succeed, we'll need to go beyond self and recognize care of the whole. Just like companion planting and building soil, the foundation of the garden. Getting along with each other just as the insect and animal kingdom contributes towards the garden. Faye and I being the elders, I wonder if anybody is taking into consideration the caregiving

aspect that might be required in community. At least in the general public caregivers get paid, in community love will have to be the driving force. Will I still be loved by the young ones?

Faye - I better get over to Deloris. This will be interesting, committing to this community concept. Of course the sketch class was a community. Meeting at the hut, chatting. Jim coming over helping with gardening. Sharing his past with his long lost mate. Then us getting to meet Julian. What a sweetheart. Witnessing the drama of Jim's interactions with the group - especially Joni. What I really liked was that poem he made up. The "wrinkled knees of the wise old elephant". I sure hope that Deloris and I will be able to fit in with this group. I hope we can contribute and be appreciated for what ever our old bodies and minds do contribute. It's so fascinating to me to observe the next generation that will take over. Create their world. It upsets me when I watch the older people still running the show. Thwarting the exuberance of the youth. As we go forth, I hope the best Deloris and I can contribute is support and encouragement. Our life experience will be available for this group to glean from. I'll call Deloris, I'm ready to go. To adventure into the unknown. Ha Ha!

"Hello, Deloris, you ready to get this done with?"

"Hi Faye, gosh you are so excited, I can tell by your voice. You are raring to go. Just gushing with love. I made a couple of lavender-apple pies."

"Two? It's just us and Maggie, right?"

"I know but I got a nudge from my intuition."

“Well, I packed us a lunch. Some cabbage rolls and dipping sauce. Should be plenty for the three of us.”

Maggie - How did this shy guy I knew 20 years ago, my Little Big Man, bring together a cross section of society. I have to ask... “Joni, I am curious, when you and Jim meet 20 years ago what was your impression of him?”

“It’s not like I knew him that well. The intrapersonal workshop we were doing was not only about ourselves, but it was connecting with others as we would split off in groups and share what ever happened to us in processes. Jim dove right in, he was so open, I think he inspired others at least me to go deep. Not everybody did the work, maybe a forth of the participants were “open books”. We roomed together, there was four of us, two women and two men. Jerod was gay and older than us. We all were dealing with past relationships and our physical desires that clouded the love part of connecting with partners. Jim was so accepting and willing with all of us. Both of us woman desired his touch and he would give us massages. Jerod was desiring Jim. And it could have been so easy for Jim to have either one of us as a partner after the workshop. But in a graceful way he engaged with us but I think we all knew he found his true mate and was loyal to that relationship.”

“Was Julian the mate back then?”

“Yes, when she walked into the room during our last day celebration, we knew for sure that she was the chosen one.”

“Hey, I invited Deloris and Faye to the ranch to show them some possibilities for living here when we get the community concept in operation. Do you want to come with me? You know them better than me.”

“Sure, it’s been awhile since I’ve seen them. They are fun to be around. They really enjoy their place in life right now. So much of their history is behind them. It seems to be a life of joy for them. It’s as if they transcended all the mental baggage.”

## Chapter 7: The Three Sisters

Walking Stick, Nirvana, and Stephanie

Walking Stick - From what Joseph shared with me before his departure, was the special role that Nirvana and Stephanie played towards Jim’s awakening. Nirvana the Kundalini Yoga instructor and Stephanie, the model that Molly used as part of the therapy (unbeknown to Jim). Joseph instructed me to form a support group of Three Sisters. Just as corn, beans and squash are the three sisters of our traditional garden. We will be the three sisters to nourish Jim and Julian for their task of community building. Just as Jim and Julian are to let the Divine presence to guide them, that presence will be the intuitive sense that we will tap into, to nourish their spirit. Nirvana the formless one will guide the group to the oneness of the universe. She has learned from the Gurus Krishnaji and

Preethaji. Stephanie will be the conduit for Molly as she assist the group to get in touch with the inner most self. Each individual's truth.

Blue Cloud is gathering the group for an inaugural sweat at the Long House lodge on the ranch. I best call Nirvana and Stephanie.

Nirvana - Well, that was a request to be honored. Walking Stick, whom I have never met. A descendent of Joseph the visionary Medicine Man, whom I never realized held such a tribal position. I knew he had a Men's Gathering - that's what he called it. And I knew Frank, Jerry and Jim went to it. But other than that I do not know much else about Joseph. So for Walking Stick to refer to me as one of the "Three Sisters" is an honor! I think I'll make a nice squash dish spice it with some Indian curry and bring some warm melted ghee to sprinkle on top. One of the Three Sisters plantings! Yes, "we are what we eat" is the old saying I recall from my early vegetarian days. Maybe some of the Indian flat bread.

I wonder how Jim and Julian are doing. After my last meeting with Jim, he threw me off, naming Julian as Julie Anne. Julian being his perception of.... Julie Anne. I think that was all metaphor. I think what he was describing is how we tend to perceive another. Even someone close to us. I recall my own relationship with my ex. It wasn't just him that lost our connection. I had him in a "box" just as he might have put me in a box. Especially when I decided to become a Sikh and practice Kundalini Yoga. He didn't want anything to do with that part of my life. We developed false perceptions of each other based on our external interest. I had to forgive myself for the role I perceived that I played which affected our relationship. When I stopped being angry and disappointed I discovered my freedom from what

Krishnaji called, a suffering state. That's one of the lessons I learned in Tapas. Hummm, Jim and Julian going to Tapas, with Megan. My Kundalini class might just take on a new look when they get back.

Stephanie - Wow, what am I getting into. And Walking Stick? A Medicine Woman? Three Sisters to play a role in community forming? Joseph's niece? Joseph, the Native American from Mollys sketch class, when I modeled a few times with Jim. I wonder what Joseph saw in our poses? They were intense, that's for sure. And I was invited to be part of a supportive community, which does make sense to me. Considering the direction this country and world order is heading! I'd much rather be connected to a supportive group of people than some kind of tyranny, whatever that's going to look like. Okay, so let's see where did I scribble those directions...ah, here they are. The end of TM basin, the ranch where all this is happening. A map to a sweet lodge on the ranch. This should be interesting, I never had a native sweat before. I've herd about them. I wonder what I need to wear. Maybe a robe or swim gear. I picture a sauna. I'll pack some loose clothing too. Walking Stick can tell me what to wear. She wanted me to bring ears of corn. Perfect timing, the corn from Harden is now at the grocery stores. I'll pick up a dozen ears. Maybe two dozen. I wonder if there will be a fire we could cook them on. That would be nice. Ooooo, I'll bring some Umeboshi paste to spread on the corn. Wow, a new direction for my life. What will transpire? What a start, a special calling! Three Sisters, three different origins, African American, Native American and Caucasian, now that's fascinating. I wonder what our combination represents? I better get on the move, oh yeah, the map. Ha Ha a map to my new life? Wow!

## Chapter 8: The Medicine Man and the Matriarch

Blue Cloud and Maggie - Maggie is peering out the window and sees a figure next to the part of the sculpture, in the meadow. The part that is Joseph hugging a Bison. She turns towards Joni, "excuse me Joni, I thought I saw someone out by the sculpture. Wait here, I'll be right back. Then we'll meet Deloris and Faye." Maggie leaves the house. Joni looks out towards the sculpture, but does not see anybody. She watches as Maggie approaches the sculpture of Joseph....

"Hello, is anybody there? Can I help you?" Gosh, nobody comes up here unless they are invited.

"I am sitting down here, on the other side of the Bison. Please join me."

All of a sudden Maggie disappears from Joni's view, behind the large Bison. Joni waits, and observes the area where Maggie ducked behind the Bison.

"And whom are you?"

"I am Blue Cloud. You know me as the nephew of Joseph. The one who heated the rocks for the sweet lodge. You may not have paid attention to the one who prepared the ceremony."

"Blue Cloud, yes, I am sorry. I haven't seen you in a long time. And I must admit to not giving you much attention. Thank you for all you did to make my past sweats wonderful."

"Sit beside me now. I have something to share with you."

And so I sit. My curiosity is up. I feel mesmerized and follow his instruction to sit without any resistance. I feel his power and I feel my submissiveness.

“Maggie, it is you who is in command of this ranch. I want to thank you for allowing Joseph’s vision to manifest on this ranch. When it is meant to happen, Joseph’s presence will return on these sacred grounds which were once summer hunting grounds of the Absaroka Crow.”

There is a pause. I am not sure how to respond. “I thought I heard that Joseph is on his final Quest. That he is leaving this plane, or should I say leaving this earthly dimension?”

“Remember, Joseph is a Medicine Man who works in mysterious ways. We do not know how his return will occur. He chose this ranch for what it has provided in old times to the tribes. Today, after your meeting with Deloris and Faye, you are to take them to the sweat lodge.”

“How did you know they were here?”

“Intuition, you may leave now I think Joni is wondering where you disappeared to.”

Joni - I better see what the heck is going on out there. Where did Maggie disappear to? I walk out onto the porch and as I am ready to give a yelp, I see Maggie’s head pop up over the backside of the sculptured Bison. It appears that she is looking this way. Then I see her glance down at someone?

“Maggie, stay away from the Whiskey. It is bad medicine.”

I glance back down at Blue Cloud, “how do you know about the Whiskey bottle?”

“I am a Medicine Man”

Without responding I start my walk back to the house. I see Joni waiting on the front porch. “Let’s go meet Deloris and Faye.”

“You okay Maggie? Who was there?”

“Blue Cloud, we are to take the lady’s to the sweet lodge after I show them potential cabins as their new residence.”

“Maggie? I sense that you are a bit frazzled. Am I right?”

I look at Joni and am surprised about her sense of my confusion. Yeah, I will call it confusion as to what just occurred. It must be very apparent. “I am not sure what just took place. But some of Blue Cloud’s message unnerved me. He told me Joseph will come to the ranch when the time is right, and he told me to stay away from the Whiskey!”

We look into each other’s eyes. There is some depth to our stares. I feel as if I am inside of Joni. There is something that she is still dealing with from her past as I too am witness to my past addiction. Is it recognizing our pleasures that hide our suffering for self love? Seventeen years of discipline almost wasted with one thought. One memory of Whiskey and a way of an old lifestyle.

As we are driving to meet the ladies I inquire, “Joni, when we looked into our bedeviled eyes what did you see?”

“You would ask, I am still in contemplation. What I saw was what is in me. My struggle to accept what has transpired between me and Jim. I want to know that I am valued by him. A false pretense, a search for something external to compensate for my internal suffering of not feeling worthy.”

“And we intuitively sensed that about each other when we were at the table in Julian’s cabin.”

“Yes. There they are!”

“No mine has a ruby like you!

No world has a life like you,

For this is the diminishing world,

And you are the expanding soul.”

- Rumi -

## Chapter 9: The Gathering

Frank, Jim and Julian are heading down the slope, on horseback, after viewing some potential home sites.

Frank gently pulls the reins on his horse, stops and nods in the direction of Julian's cabin, "looks like something is going on down below. Two streams of smoke."

Yeah, the fire we started in the cabin this morning should have been extinguished a longtime ago," remarks Julian.

"You suppose the other stream of smoke is from the sweat lodge area?" Is my remark."

"We'll find out soon enough what is going on. Jim, Julian, you suppose Blue Cloud might've orchestrated a sweat?"

"Orchestrated? Now that's an interesting description. You suppose there's a group down there that we should be anticipating?" My curiosity has me guessing what might be going on. It's been a quiet time with Frank and Julian. Other than small talk, we all pretty much kept to ourselves. Our own thoughts, nothing shared. I can feel some tension amidst us. I'm not sure what it is. Maybe we all feel the weight of forming community. Commitment to others' well being. It's so easy to just be wrapped up in my own world, with Julian. And there's a lot of commitment in just our relationship. To be intertwined with a group energy in a selfless way, is new to all of us.

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Sadie looks over at Jenny. She looks so peaceful in her resting. Her fair skin getting lightly tanned looks so beautiful. How will we manage with this group. We have a nice synergy going with Julian and Jim. They seem to honor our relationship as we are. Will the others'? I nudge Jenny with a

gentle kiss. Her eyes slowly open.... "Hummmmm, you are smiling. What are you thinking Sadie, my love?"

'Oh, I was just admiring you, the way your body was absorbing the sun light." I feel her touch, so soft as she eases my hair behind my ear. "What an exhilarating day this has been. I am so glad we did this Jenny. What about you?"

"Yes, yes...Great idea prancing barefoot in the creek. And this spot we ended up in to just lay and be with each other in nature. Here, help me sit up." Just like that we are so close, peering into each other's eyes. Sadie's green eyes are so alluring. I place a hand over her heart, and slowly pull her towards me until our lips merge. I keep it brief. I just want her to feel my loving gratitude for this experience.

"We probably should head back to the cabin see if Julian and Jim are there, share some pie and thoughts about community and commitment. And thanks Sadie, for having me as a partner."

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"Sammie, this has been a refreshing hike. I want to request that you just be patient with me forming a relationship with you. At least we established how my beliefs put me in such a judgmental state of mind. One thing for sure, what I took as an aggressively forceful way about how you communicate, is really your determination to be acknowledged for who you are as a person. At least I think that we, or I should say I, established that much."

“Thank you Jerry, for your honesty and willingness to take down a barrier between us. I feel relieved that we can find some commonality despite our gender roles. I know I go against your morale standard or high ground. And I don’t mean to flaunt my choice or preference to be gay. I do have a desire to have spiritual content in my life. Maybe you can help me in that regard. It may not be a doable request for you. I wonder, can we see where that might lead us in forming a relationship.”

“Humph, that is a different avenue for us to approach each other in relationship. There’d be some deep soul searching for both of us. You’ve seen me in mens group. How I flounder sometimes, “a ship without a rudder”. I am willing to explore that we might have some “rough waters”, you ready for that?”

“Sorry for the chuckles, but I find your metaphors simply humorous. Yeah, let’s give it a go. Shake?”

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“Good to meet you Nirvana and Stephanie. I am glad that you heeded my call to be here. This will be a special night. Blue Cloud has gathered the new community members for our first sacred sweat in the long house for ceremony. We are to be the Three Sisters to play a significant role in this community of kindred souls. In Cherokee we grew corn, squash and beans together. Companion plants that nurturer each other to grow strong as one. This will be our role as sisters. Our service to the group.”

“And why us Walking stick? Why choose Stephanie and myself?”

“You Nirvana, are a teacher. A yogi that teaches the chakras in relationship to the energy that rises from the lower bodies of the material plane to the heart where the energy is transformed into higher consciousness. You understand the spirit world.”

“And me? I am new to all of this, what is going on. The forming of community and yoga and your Native American ways. How do you see me contributing?”

“Joseph saw your power through your ability as a conduit of energy. You were used by Molly to assist in Jim’s transformation. Do not think of your self lightly. You were invited into this group for a specific reason. You will help to nurture these members of our new forming tribe. Blue Cloud is the Medicine Man and he will instruct you on how to use your power.”

“We are the Three Sisters. Follow me to the Lodge. We will make ready for tonight’s ceremony. We will walk the two miles to the lodge. Observe our surroundings on the way.”

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Maggie and Joni make their way to the guest cottages and bunk house. There’s a reception office where Deloris and Faye are to meet with Maggie. As they arrive they see their vehicle out front. They park behind the car. The ladies are nowhere to be seen.

“Let’s see if they are in the office.”

Maggie - I am still not feeling very stable right now. The interchange between Blue Cloud and me is a bit unnerving. There is something that I am feeling and I can’t put my finger on it. I feel an under current of Blue

Clouds' power. I felt so submissive, it's as if I was giving myself to his every word. Even when he said I am in command of this ranch, I have a sense that I no longer am. I own it but I don't? And how did he know about the Whiskey. I am still shaken. I recall how I let myself be taken by the Whiskey. My battle was not so much with the addiction as it was with who I had become. The Whiskey had the numbing affect so I could hide from my true self. When Blue Cloud told me to sit, it was like taking an instruction from Tom, in Hawaii. Sit and be still, look within. Do you know who you are? You know nothing when you are submissive to the Whiskey. Submit to the universal energy and connect to it. Is that the message? How many times do I need to be reminded. Hiding in semi isolation high up the mountain side, in my cabin. Finally connecting with people that seem so similar, searching for relationship. And they come to me asking for the ranch as a place to convene. To live in community. What force is taking command over me? Maybe I am attached to some sort of outcome, and I don't even know what that might be. Okay, I look over at Joni and she seems to respecting to my need for contemplation.

"Maggie?"

I look over at Joni's concerned eyes. A heartfelt connection.

"Maggie, you do realize that we are all going through a transformation. We are all having to readjust the way we live - alone fending for ourself. We will be in a state of service for the good of the whole."

"Yes Joni, I do know that intellectually. Now I must become detached from ego as the Buddha would say. Thank you for being with me right now."

“Maggie, I have an intuition that Deloris and Faye are checking out the garden and green houses. Where are they located?”

Maggie shakes her head, looks at me and suddenly a genuine smile adorns her face.

“Follow me.”

And sure enough, there they are. Walking around, inspecting plants. And the gardening method that is being used for growing.

“Hello ladies!” Maggie is engaged and I am relieved that she came back to earth.

Arthur and Molly are descending from the slope across the road. They stop to get their bearings.

“Arthur, I am so happy that we took this hike and had our talk. I am especially grateful that you are willing to explore the possibility of a relationship.”

Arthur - Being with Molly this past year, working on the sculpture and doing the tour has given me much insight about whom this woman might be. When Molly talks about relationship, my guess is she means getting to know the depth of our being. Getting beyond the surface, penetrating our armor. What's my armor? Is it my cultural upbringing? My art work, cloistered in my studio and pottery shop? My aloofness towards society, and people. What's my armor?

“Molly, look over there the smoke is coming from two places. The cabin fire must mean Jim and Julian have returned. I wonder if they have an outside fire ring to enjoy the evening under the stars.”

“Yes, I see it. I hope we won’t be intruding. Arthur, I hope you don’t feel as if I am intruding on your life? I’m not sure that’s the right word to use. Maybe you can help me here?”

“To be honest with you I look forward to having a different relationship with you. Different than our working relationship. A more personal relationship. My honesty is that I say this with some trepidation. This will be new for me. So I will rely on you having patience with me. Maybe feel my emotions like you feel your art. Know my pain and suffering as well as my joy and happiness. Does that make sense.”

“Oh yes Arthur, thank you for responding. I will admit, I do have some apprehension. I am used to being the therapist. And somehow that title gets in the way of just being. When you saw me at the cabin, naked and a bundle of nerves. I felt like a teenage girl. In retrospect, it was so real and unprofessional. You got to see me!”

“That was the beauty part of Jim modeling nude and you guiding him as a therapist. He had the audacity to just let us know him in all his vulnerability. It will take some time, I want you to know me that way, too”

## Chapter 10: The Sweat

Sadie and Jenny are the first ones to meander back to the cabin. They are about 100 feet from the cabin, wading through the creek when they get a whiff of campfire smoke. Jenny puts out an arm and stops Sadie from

splashing the water with her foot steps. “Ssssh,” she whispers, “you see the smoke rising above the bush tops Sadie?”

“Yeah, I thought I smelled some smoke.”

“Let’s see what that’s about. Come on, there’s an opening up ahead. Be quiet.”

They gingerly exit the water and walk slowly along a shallow muddy bank. As they peer around the corner of the opening they see Walking Stick in her Native regalia tending a smoldering fire.

“Who’s that? Are we lost?”

“No way, we came along the same creek we walked before. I think.”

“Sadie, when we went out into the meadow, there was that other stream...”

“Don’t be silly, this is the way we came, I think. Although, I don’t recall this clearing.”

The girls are looking up stream when they hear a voice.

“We have been waiting for you. Come, show yourselves, I need to meet you.”

Sadie and Jenny glance at each other. Sadie gives Jenny a gentle shove forward.

Sadie - She can lead the way. Jenny the esoteric one. The nature girl always wanting to “connect with the universe”. This is weird. Are we in a time warp? How’d that lady know we were here? We couldn’t have been that loud.

Jenny - Ugh, Sadie wants me to go first? That figures, I have never wanted to go first. In fact she's the more domineering one in this relationship. Oooh, okay, this could be a different experience. An Indian camp?

The girls edge around the bushes into the clearing and are greeted with a warm smile. As they slowly, cautiously inch their way forward their attention is disrupted with a rustling off to their left. It's Nirvana and Stephanie. They all stop in their tracks and with exasperated looks and ask in unison, "what are you doing here?"

They all turn in the direction of the laughter. Walking Stick shrugs her shoulders and has her palms up towards the sky. Looking like the innocent messenger. "Did I not mention that we are preparing the lodge for a sacred sweat. With the whole group? Let me guess, you are Sadie and Jenny?"

"Yes, but we came to have a visit with Jim and Julian. We weren't quite expecting this... well this is becoming an adventure of sorts," remarks Sadie.

Jenny's turn, "if you don't mind me asking, first, what is your name? And why are you dressed like that? I mean you look beautiful, I'm just curious."

More laughter, "I am Walking Stick, a Crow and a descendent of the Absaroka tribes that used to inhabit this valley. We had a Pow Wow on the "rez" today. A ceremony. I decided to come as is."

Nirvana, "Stephanie and I have been designated as two of the Three Sisters" along with Walking Stick. We can get into the explanation later. For now how about helping us prepare for the sweat. We are arranging the seating and Walking Stick might need some more wood for the fire."

“Thank you Nirvana, yes I’ll need more fire to heat the rocks. We’ll need to heat extra rocks for the sweat with this big group.”

“Who else is here, or can I guess?” Ask Sadie.

Stephanie, “the whole class, we are having our initiation as a community.”

Meanwhile, Jerry and Sammie are just getting back from their hike and approaching their cars from the south when a vehicle approaches and parks behind theirs. They continue walking as they watch Maggie, Joni, Deloris and Faye pile out.

Joni shouts, “hey Jerry and Sammie, howdy!”

Sammie, “hi, looks like Jim and Julian are having a party.”

Jerry, “yeah and we’re the party crashers!”

“No your not, I think some synchronicity is happening.”

Now Sammie and Jerry are there and in a spontaneous jester, Deloris and Faye wrap themselves around both guys for a hug. “So good to see you two. It has been a long while,” Deloris says with a warm smile.

Faye introduces Maggie, “Guys, this here is Maggie the gracious owner of this ranch. She is the person willing to provide a space for our newly formed community that we all agreed to “give it a try”.”

Maggie steps forward and shakes hands, “Hello. I am glad to meet you. It is my understanding that we are all going to a sacred sweat. Did you two get an invite?”

“I’m not sure how I got here. I hadn’t seen Jim or Julian in awhile and I thought I would check out the ranch, your ranch Maggie. So it’s good to meet you. Jim had given me a map to the cabin. I got here and my mind was all over the place with thoughts. I was ready to leave, then Sammie showed up!”

“Yeah, I had nothing going on and the last interaction I had with J and J was a magnificent massage and a clear delineation of our relationship. Next thing I know, I run into to Jerry. And somehow, we ended up with a beautiful hike and meaningful discussion about our beliefs and truths. What about you Joni?”

“Ha, I was wandering around Bozeman, ended up on the interstate and went to the Grizzly Cabin hoping to find them. I knew this place well. Figured they were here and meet Maggie with her hand on the Whiskey bottle. Sorry Maggie, I probably should have keep that between us?”

Maggie - I wish you would have Joni. But I bet you have become somewhat open with your personal life. Especially with this group. So the Whiskey, what was that earlier today? I was mesmerized by the beauty of it, the way the light shined through the caramel color and put down a bronze shadow on the table. What did I feel? Was it desperation? Maybe I need support from my mate, who is no longer with me. And all that time with him, during our hey day of hedge fund trading, my real support was the Whiskey. And for 17 years the eight step Buddhist method has become my support. Who am I that I need an external connection to feel secure. What about my internal connection with my higher source? But is the higher source still external? An external thought form that gives me confirmation. Is that what

I am looking for here? Confirmation that I am making the correct decision to give up my ranch, my business for the good of a whole? And what is confirmation, why do I seek it? Maybe, just maybe I need to flow with the nature of my life. Let the universe guide me. Listen to my intuition be in a different way. Not a gut feeling but a heart felt feeling? There is something mysterious taking place today. People showing up thinking they were the only one to want to visit Jim and Julian. Jim and Julian unsure of how they are going to create community. Blue Cloud appearing by Joseph and the Bison at the sculpture. And me feeling so submissive when I have always felt so in command of my destiny.

“Yeah Joni, you didn’t need to bring up the Whiskey. But you did. I thought maybe our day spent together, our honest sharing was between us.”

Joni has a look of regret, “I am so sorry that I ever mentioned that Maggie.”

It’s Deloris, “where is the sculpture anyway?”

“It’s up at my Cabin, sitting in a meadow. All the pieces are there, all of you depicted with meaning, entwined in the roots of a grand tree. I see it every day I look out my window.”

“Us roots take to each other, Maggie. This is what we have become. Like brothers and sisters with no secrets. Just our stuff to share. And some of it might seem like it should stay private. But if we don’t engage with the other, then how do we achieve real community?” Faye looks over at Jerry and Sammie. “Am I on tract here boys?”

Jerry responds quicker than he has ever done in any of his mens group gatherings. "Sammie had the courage to confront my judgements about him being gay. And not just him, I now am looking at beliefs that are not my truth. What I thought was my truth, was created from external influences."

There is no breeze whistling through the brush. The air is still. There's the Moose nibbling the fresh dogwood shoots about 50 yards away. Meadowlarks are chirping, but can't be seen. There's two plumes of smoke arising about 200 feet away. It looks like they are coming from the other side of the pathway in the direction of the pioneer cabin. Sun has gone over the western mountain side of the ranch. Dusk is getting close. A horse whines in the distance. The silence of the group is lingering. The minds of all gathered, grasping each others words and the exchanges that just occurred.

Maggie breaks the silence, "I have been instructed by Blue Cloud to take Deloris and Faye to the lodge for a sweat. Let's go, it's time to gather with friends."

Coming from the other direction, towards the cabin from the back entry road that leads to the National Forest camp ground are Molly and Arthur.

They descended from the mountain after hiking the State Land, and crossed the public road onto the back entrance road of the ranch. At some point, with nonchalance, hands clasped together, Molly and Arthur stepped into the area near the cabin. Just as Maggie poked through the pathway with a bunch of people following.

Maggie can't help but smile and shake her mane of hair. I should have known. "Well, Molly it's about time you showed up!"

"Huh?, what's going on?"

Sammie, "it's party time, come join us. Whisk.... Uh, I mean, wish you were here sooner. You missed some of the fun!"

"Okay, Sammie, so what's going on? We all just decided to visit the ghosts of Julian and Jim?"

Maggie intercedes, "no probably not. They'll be here, with Frank I suppose. And whom else haven't I met yet?"

"Hummm, this is Arthur," Molly starts the introduction as they slack their clasped hands. "Arthur meet Maggie, she owns the ranch and is considering the community to be part of the scene here?"

"Good to meet you Arthur, I guess you know everyone here."

"Yes, of course, Hi Deloris, Faye, and Sammie and Jerry. Good to see you all again. Sadie and Jenny, that's whom you haven't meet yet."

"Thanks for the update Arthur, I'll bet I meet them tonight."

"Let's get this food out of our hands and into the cabin Faye."

There's a rustling on the path that Maggie et al came down, a snicker and a hard breath of a large animal. Heads turn and behold, it's Frank. He moves aside so Julian, then Jim appear mounted on their horses.

“Whoa! Hello all. Figured you’d all show up. Must be a big Pow Wow tonight.” Frank tips his hat, “Maggie, glad you made it.”

“You mysteriously bring us all together Frank?”

“No, but we saw two plumes of smoke from afar and figured something was cookin’.”

Meanwhile Deloris and Faye have their eye on the Whiskey.

“Oh dear this could be a wild time Deloris.”

“You mean fun, if the heat from the sweet don’t give us a stroke!”

“Look at all of this food. At least these young ones like to eat!”

“Jim sure knows how to pick his friends.” Faye has a little sarcasm with that remark.

Deloris doesn’t miss a beat, “you mean because of his personality or nudity?”

Laughter from both. “But seriously what do you see here? Maybe the Whiskey, untouched up to now has a purpose.”

“Yeah, that little exchange between Joni and Maggie had some meaning there. We don’t know anything about Maggie’s background.”

“I also, am curious how this reunion manifested. It seems like we all wandered over here. Magically, we’re together again. We all committed to see if we can live together. And there are some conflicting personalities. Wouldn’t you say so Faye?”

“That’s an understatement. Yet that tree sculpture is a reminder that we are all one when we can put ego aside.”

“But we need ego. I mean the sense of accomplishment...that’s ego. The sense of self worth...that’s ego. What we believe to be true...that’s ego. Wouldn’t you say?”

“If I had a shot of that Whiskey, I could tell you what’s not ego!”

“Faye, if you had a shot of that Whiskey, why, you would fall over, onto the floor and you know it!” chuckles Deloris.

“And my ego would feel embarrassed!”

“Let’s go, see what’s happening between Arthur and Molly. Did you see them holding hands?”

And the door creaks open. The ladies enter the foray of bodies, all wondering how and why they got here. Suddenly, out of the bush Blue Cloud appears in Pow Wow regalia.

## Chapter 10: Whiskey

Blue Cloud - “Stay away from the Whiskey. It is all of your addictions. Your self made beliefs. Your beliefs that have been induced into your being. The Whiskey camouflages your truth. Whiskey numbs you from the nature of existence. It numbs you from what is real. Your addictions to all you think to be true, cuts you off from what is true. So what is it that you observe? Have you taken the time to watch the sunrise everyday? Do you stop and watch the Moose chomp on the bush? Do you see the focus of the Hawk looking for its’ prey? Do you consider the other? The beings that you

engage with? How much time do you spend listening to those that are in your presence? Are you addicted with what you know while they speak to you of their knowledge? Are you listening? Now?"

We have all been seated on plush animal hides. Elk, Deer, Bear and Bison fur, so soft and natural. The hot rocks steam, the flickering light of candles are aglow. The setting captures my being. It's so mesmerizing and the warmth comforts me. Am I listening? Now? I am jolted back into this inquiry that Blue Cloud is asking of us. I speak, "my addictions are not addictions, this is the false pretense I have lived by. I also witness my desire to respond to another before they complete their thought. It's my ego saying "I know". As a result I tend not to feel the other. At least this is what I recognize now. Not being conscious of the present moment unless it is a physical activity."

Nirvana proceeds to join the discussion, "to be able to listen to the whole of all beings is worth dedicating time to. To take a pause, to tune into what is present. A bird singing, I want to stop and listen, perhaps find it in the bush where the sound is coming from. Acknowledge its' presence in my life at the time of connection. To make eye contact with an individual and stay connected without judgement or thought. Just being aware of another being. This is how I like to live the day. And when things are hectic and I am overwhelmed, I listen to my heart.

"I listen to my thoughts. I seem to be preoccupied with thoughts that limit me to be a free thinker. However, I aim to remain unattached from thought. It was so refreshing to be able to let down my barriers and learn who Sammie is as a person. I listened to him and not whom I thought he was," is Jerry's contribution.

Maggie, "I saw you by the Bison, Blue Cloud. I am not sure what I heard, then I knew you wanted me to come. And you had disappeared, I found you sitting against the broadside of the Great Bison, with Joseph. I felt submissive - is that a trait? It doesn't matter at the time I just was, submissive to your concern. "Stay away from the Whiskey." I was in a transcendent state. I briefly visited my past, and quickly I was present with you. Is it you who will define my role as steward of this land. Or are you willing me to play a submissive role? Are you saying, this is no longer my ranch, my land? Is it I, my human form that is addicted to ownership of who I think I am? Or shall it be that I am to identify with a higher self, a higher consciousness?"

"We saw the Whiskey and thought it might be for a wild party and reunion. And now I know there is something deeper going on here." Deloris looks at Faye. "I am quite comfortable with the life I have right now. Aging in grace I would like to think. So why am I drawn here? To this group? What use can I be in a community where some of you are more than a generation younger than myself?"

"I for one am amused. Why Am I doing this. Maybe it's that I just like the companionship that Deloris and I have. I don't want it to be long distance. I can understand, Deloris, if you like the idea of down sizing. You still have the big house and property. I am just following along. At least I thought that. Here in the Sweat Lodge, well this is different. This organic sharing interest me. Maybe I need this connection with you youthful ones'." Faye looks around the circle.

Faye: It's too dark to see expressions. I am feeling something that is "bigger than me". Maybe a new meaning for my life journey. What can I contribute? Deloris and I are not mentors or maybe we are somehow. How did that poem end that Jim shared a long time ago? The wrinkled knees of a wise old Elephant?"

Julian: Whiskey? Did I hear him say "stay away from the Whiskey"? My truth serum. My calm go to remedy. My way to have a serious connection with Frank. I was addicted to Whiskey. It would stay hidden high up on the shelf above the little table. I knew right where it rested. Behind the jars of oats and rice. Hidden, just like I hid from society's status quo. Here in this pioneer cabin. Minding my own business. Being with nature. A job that might seem like insignificant to most. Work the greenhouse garden for the ranch kitchen. Drop off the daily harvest to whom ever was cooking and be gone. Back here by the creek, amongst the dogwood. Amongst the mama moose and her gangly looking, long legged young one. The sounds of birds, a grunt from the visiting bear, coyotes messaging. Star gazing and once in awhile time spent with Frank and wondering about Jim. Wondering why I left. Thoughts floating through my mind. Until I couldn't stand them anymore. Whiskey, did he say I am addicted to my beliefs. Whiskey, my truth serum?

"I have addictive, ego behavior. Was that you Maggie? Who said just awhile ago, "Is it I, my human form that is addicted to ownership of who I think I am?" Yeah that's what you asked. So who am I without all of the influence that registers as waves of thought. Never resting, like the ocean waves that make their way to shore. Some gently washing up on a flat

beach, others violently crashing against a rock cliff. Is there something better than Whiskey to ease my mind?"

Sammie: "I am obsessed to be loved. I want to be understood? I want to be treated as a normal human being. How am I going to fit in with this group? Will everybody be able to accept me as I am? Thank you Jerry for taking the time this afternoon, to listen to me. Now can you accept me not as a gay man. Can you accept me as an equal? Can all of you? And when I need love and compassion through touch, will you be able to hug me? At least hug me. Will you be able to look into my eyes and connect without judgment?" I feel desperate, maybe too dramatic for this crowd. But they have listened to me before. In the past, at the mens group, the sex therapy group that formed recently, and is ever growing. We are discovering habitual thought forms that get in the way of what love is. Whiskey, Blue Cloud, you said it was bad medicine. Beliefs versus truth, it all seems to overlap. Seems full of contradictions. To believe in something so much that it becomes my truth? I wonder if that bottle is still on Julian's table.

Stephanie opens her eyes and glances around the circle of new found friends. With eyes open, this is her time to speak. "I am honored to be considered as part of this community of artist. And to be asked by Walking Stick to be one of the Three Sisters is a dubious honor that I accept gracefully. As I listen to the sharing I realize how connected you all are. Entwined like the roots of the trees. When I was modeling for you I coyly observed facial expressions. As you all sketched I saw joy, disappointment, stress, anger, and seriousness. Sometimes I would see laughing eyes, sometimes sad. And when I posed with Jim, I became a conduit for energy to pass between us. I learned the subtleties of energy

being exchanged from one person to another. It all was very profound. I felt engaged with your process and connection with what or whom you were sketching. It has been a very refreshing change from the norm I have become accustomed to modeling. So I ask, did you see the personhood of the model or just my nakedness? Did you hear my thoughts? Did you look at my facial expressions? I haven't sipped the Whiskey."

Joni: So what is the difference between addiction and obsession? Have I chased after a man because of addiction. The pleasure of sensational love? Or was I trying to fulfill a need for partnership. Fearing I would never find the right mate? I told myself I desired both. So how does that play out? "I recognize my past periods of just giving up on the fixation that I had to have a mate to make me whole. And finally the physical desire for pleasure was totally non existent. Then, it came back. And when I saw Maggie's hand on the Whiskey bottle, I knew that the obsession to have Jim and the pleasure of being with him was a fixation. And how I suffered when Julian came back into Jim's life. And like Maggie's hand, I saw trembling, holding the Whiskey, I knew that the desire to have him, is so strong that the past behavior can recur at anytime. I need a strategy that acts like the seal on the Whiskey. Not to be broken."

Molly is gawking at Joni. She looks over at Maggie, but can't quite see the expression on Maggie's face in the low light of the candlelight. She takes a deep breath, then another and another. With each breath I can hear the exhalation. We all realize she is about to speak.

Jim: Do I detect a reluctance? Maybe, why do I need to even start to consider anything other than just prepare to listen. And so I take a deep

breath, then another and another. The Serene Mind isn't that what Nirvana showed us in our yoga class?

Molly begins, "So, I just want to acknowledge the Three Sisters Walking Stick, Nirvana and Stephanie? Yeah, then there's Maggie, Joni and I. Your share Maggie is relevant for me too. Yes, I am blindly trusting this new direction I am heading towards. Somewhat reluctant, maybe unconscious? How about this, consciously unconscious?" Molly giggles at her own awareness of thought. "Oh, shit, here I go, wanting to be in control of my presence. How can I be present, of my presence if I don't just flow with it all? And Joni," Molly turns her head towards Arthur, "you are so bold to share your inner most vulnerability. Your reference of the seal on the Whiskey not to be broken. And Maggie, if you don't mind, your past truth haunting you once more! And me, with trepidation, wanting the Whiskey to flow. I am inebriated with an obsession of the past. I am fixated with the potential of a future with Arthur. And I want the world to know I am drunk on the Whiskey and I don't care. I am naked for all of you to see all of me. The real me that hides under the armor I wore all these years."

Sadie: "I am overwhelmed with the newness of this raw energy that is so much more sincere and real than I have ever been part of...."

All of a sudden there is a strong, deep emotional voice. It's Frank, "My intention is for deeper emotions, deeper love, deeper compassion, deeper gratitude, and joy, and happiness, and kindness and emotional states that express and feel the companionship generated by this group. I want to be recognized as more than the ranch manager. I want to serve from my heartfelt emotional state. If this makes any sense. I was the one that put

that Whiskey on Julian's table. It was once a truth serum when Julian needed to get me to feel. One night I walked out of the cabin in a rage of anger. I swiped the bottle and drowned out my emotions that night. I replaced the bottle. But it's a mystery why I felt that I needed to replace the Whiskey, I took so long ago."

Sadie: Whew, wow, oh my god, what is it that I can contribute? What are my beliefs? Is that what's expected of me to share? Me, the feminist lesbian how do I fit in. Same as Sammie I suppose, but he is making some connections. Oh yeah gratitude, he was grateful for his time spent with Jerry today. "I just want to give my gratitude for Jim and Julian accepting me for who I am. And for the therapy group to support me as we explore our preferences? Or is it obsessions with sexual preference? At least Sammie and I are similar in that regard. I'm grateful that Jenny committed to have us join the group. Thanks for your commitment Frank, to all those wonderful aspirations that you share. Now maybe we can have a relationship. Maybe it's my perceptions that, you being a cowboy means you probably don't like feminist especially lesbians. Sorry Frank, if I categorize you as being bias. Uh, I think that's good enough for now. Just having gratitude is a huge step for me. Oh yeah, I love you all for who you are." Did I just say that? Wow, maybe I am learning to not be such a bias ultra liberal progressive! Maybe I need to loosen up a bit.

Arthur looks at Sadie, "your pause means you are finished talking Sadie?"

Sadie nods her head.

"I am glad to see some cultural dynamics in this group. As a Japanese from a traditional Japanese family, there are some conditions that you all might

not relate to. I appreciate that you have included me to be part of this community endeavor. Thank you for using the tree sculpture that Molly graciously let me be part of. To have that as a symbol of what's to come with this group means a lot to me. Of all the art works I have done and placed in galleries or sold at exhibits, the tree sculpture has the most meaning for me, other than the traditional donabe bowls I make. Family tradition is what I am all about. I want to be part of this family. May we create some sort of a structured community that fulfills all of our needs."

There is a hiss on the hot rocks as Stephanie and Nirvana pour some water over them. There are two piles as the sweat lodge is full to capacity this night. We are mostly sprawled out on the animal hides. Settled into this sweat. Absorbing the thoughts that seem to linger in the dense humid air.

A soft voice speaks in a melodic tone. It's Jenny, "I have been listening. What do I hear? All the personal issues and intra related issues, that we think are caused by external influences. What about our internal turmoil. The stories we tell ourselves that keep us suffering? How do we examine the blame and make it about ourselves? Not the other? How will we heal each other? What is true liberation from the illusory self? I seem to always be in contemplation of my awareness. That which is internal and also the external influences. I guess I can call myself a seeker? It's not a spiritual quest I am indulging. But maybe that would help. See everything from a different dimension. Hummmm, yeah, I'll leave it at that. I think the Whiskey would just confuse me."

"Ah Ho," bellows Blue Cloud.

I hear some rustling. I raise my head off my bed of animal hide, just in time to see the backside of Blue Cloud as he exits. Followed by Stephanie and Walking Stick. Nirvana gently guides us back into our personal meditation of self. She leaves the lodge briefly and comes back with more hot rocks and water. The steam rises off of the sizzling rocks.

We lose sense of time and space. There is some movement going on. I suspect that people are coming out of their reverie. This sense of honor for each others honest, personal revelations has been reveling. Nirvana ask that we slowly get up from our meditative slumber. She announces, "Stephanie is back at Julian's cabin. I hope it's alright Julian, somehow we all ended up there with food so the universe has provided us a place to celebrate our first gathering. Please, let us remain quiet on our walk to the cabin."

And that's what we do. When we get there, food is out on a table and an outside camp fire has been started. Dusk is settling and the first sightings of stars are visible. We start to come out of our silence and mingle. We share thoughts, there's laughter, and conversation with depth. We are each sensing the personal commitment to community. There's discussion about being all inclusive. We want to make sure that nobody becomes an island onto themselves. It is such a beautiful celebration. Everybody is gathered around the fire singing fills the night air. Then something, a thought a feeling, I don't know what, I suddenly feel lost. Not part of the whole. I slip away and start walking down the path to the road, into the darkness. The light of the stars are bright enough to see where I am going. I find my self breathing deeply and slowly. I want to be by my self. I feel done for the

day. Overwhelmed, that's it. What has me feel vulnerable? I hear the gravel crunching behind me. Sounds like something running. A spooked deer?

"Hey you," it's Julian's voice, "hey, Jim stop!"

I feel a tug on my right arm and Julian is peering into my eyes.

"Where are you going? What's up? Tell me."

"I just wanted to be alone, gather my thoughts. I needed quiet."

"Do you mind if I join you?"

"No, not at all. I just feel so contemplative right now."

A silence ensues. She feels me. Julian knows me like nobody else. We are just walking now. Separate from each other, but next to each other. It's a moderate pace that we are walking. I am pretending now...that I am in deep thought. But knowing she's here, all I can do is anticipate that she will say something. And I know it will be for my benefit. And I am aware of past behavior when I get in a mood. I will want to resist her effort to council me.

And in my mind, I am already to defend my actions. My wanting to be alone and not interacting or socializing with the group.

"Jim?,"

"Yeah...."

"Are you feeling overwhelmed by the whole aspect of forming a community? Do you feel it's you who needs to be responsible for carrying out Joseph's vision?"

"How'd you figure that out? Is my mood that reveling?"

“Dear, I know you well enough to detect your vulnerabilities. We are all light beings here to assist each other. When we are detached from all thought and are in a state of pure consciousness, it is then that we are connected in oneness.”

“Where did you come up with that?”

Julian is giggling, she lets out a little laugh, “it just came pouring out. I don’t know. Maybe I’m a Guru!!” Now she is laughing. In a sincere and grateful way. She throws her arms in the air and swirls in a circle.

“Hey, we are like in the song, Ong Namō by Snatam Kaur. Let’s try to sing it. You remember how it starts?”

“Yeah, one of my all time favorites. Gosh, Julian you are a light being! Okay, ready...?”

“The rain is falling down like all the souls you send here

Coming to this earth to find healing.

Mother earth takes in the rain like your heart takes my voice,  
let us treat each other with our grace and our voice.

Oh my beloved

kindness of the heart.

Breath of life

I bow to you

And I’m coming home

Ong Namō Guru Dev Namō...”

There’s a soft sound of feet swishing thru the light, very early, dew on the grass. We stop singing and turn.

“Halt, who goes there,” I say with a deep baritone voice!

There’s a giggle. “It’s me Maggie. Everyone is getting ready to leave and wondering where you two disappeared to. That would have been a nice campfire song.”

We start to go back to the cabin.

“Oh, sorry Maggie. Something came over me. My insecurity of doing this venture overwhelmed me. I fled like a scared cat. Then Julian came and...”

“I get it. What is it that you said Julian to settle Jim’s nerves?”

“I don’t know, just spoke from my heart I guess. Just reminding him that we are all intricately connected. How did everybody get here in the first place?”

“Well, all the stories are the same. No invitation. Just an inkling to come visit Jim and Marian. Then Blue Cloud appeared at the sculpture and I went out like a Madian in a trance. And next thing I knew we all had a bout with the Whiskey bottle on your table. So it’s a mystery.”

We get back and everyone is mingling around the parked cars. There’s a small cheer.... “They’re here...hoorah!”

Next thing I witness are the hugs starting up. What a beautiful sight. I feel a tug on my arm and swing around into the tender grasp of Joni. With pure

liberation from inhibition she has her lips on mine. It's quick and tenuous. As she pulls away her eyes are glistening and her smile is broad. "I love you Jim, I just wanted to feel you again. I hope Julian doesn't mind."

"Well we know how she feels about us kissing." I chuckle. "Thank you for your authenticity. I love you to Joni."

We let each other out of our grasp, smile and go to the next person who's not hugging someone else. It is quite an experience. And so the night of our first group meeting to form community ends in celebration. Julian and I wave as the last of the tail lights heads north towards the ranch gate. When will we see each other again? There is much to contemplate on, for all of us.

Julian and I walk down the star lite path as early dawn starts to emerge in the sky. The door to the cabin creaks open and there it is, the Whiskey. Alone in the center of the table where we left it. There is a lamp burning, a soft light in the cabin. We circle the table, like an animal that might be circling its prey. We close in.

"The seal is not broken," remarks Julian.

"No still looks full to me."

"Do we dare? Some Irish coffee and talk? Decipher the events of the day? What say my man?"

"I will get a fire going, you get the coffee ready?"

"Deal, my love...."

## Chapter 11: Tapas - The Journey Begins

There's a nice warmth settling in the cabin. We spend most of our time now in the Grizzly Cabin. But decided to stay here after this marathon day and night. It is very early morning and we are finally face to face at the table, coffee in hand. It's quiet expect for a few coyote yelps and a crackle from the fire once in awhile. The coffee is soothing. We look at the Whiskey and the broken seal. We toast in silence.

"Check in?" I ask Julian

"Go"

"What I observed was how much of each persons shares were similar to some of what I go through. I was able to witness some of my apprehensions that I visit and how much time I will spend in thoughts that burden me."

"Burden you in what way?"

"Just like the overwhelming feeling where I just wanted to escape. The sense of obligation to connect. And not really feeling a heart connection at the time. I was just there with the group, all of us mingling. Not feeling present with the celebration. I enjoyed the silence we had coming back from the sweat. A time for introspection. I was mentally drained and just wanted the comfort of a human body to squeeze and hug and..."

"Kiss, I saw you and Joni. What was that like for you?"

"Bingo, an apprehension. I thought that we had an understanding about our relationship. I'm not sure if Joni was...I mean it was a kiss but not like a deep...."

"Feelings, Jim. What did you feel?"

“I wanted to hug and kiss everybody as we were saying our good byes.”

“We are talking about you and Joni, she’s the one you kissed.”

“Well, hummmm, ah...the glistening look in her eyes, the smile...”

“Where you stimulated? What did you witness? A bodily sensation?”

“I was overpowered by her advance.”

“That’s your evaluation.”

“I was bewildered, confused. I want the autonomy to enjoy the moment of our connection. My mind was telling me to be careful. Physical touch... more than a hug.”

“Okay, so you witnessed the desire, the rapturous memory of Joni and you in a physical way. And then the ego jumped in and interfered with your affectionate, loving thoughts. What are you feeling now, besides me acting like a therapist.?”

I have to chuckle at that last comment. Julian has a smirk on her face. I don’t see any hurt, hostility nor concern. “I feel supported. Truly supported that I can be so honest with you.”

Julian smiles, takes a long, slow sip from her mug. She rises from her chair and straddles my legs, then plops on my lap.

“Jim, first off, thanks for being real and not just brushing off my inquiry as if your exchange with Joni meant nothing.”

We look into each others eyes. It’s brief, but the connection is made. Julian moves slightly forward and our lips are glued, our tongues are

communicating. It's as if our kiss is talking to each other. Honoring our love for an honest relationship of true feelings. Tender, warm compassion for our human existence as a couple. As soulmate lovers.

We don't linger in the moment, but the action was impactful. Julian pulls back a little and says, "okay, my turn." She gets back into her chair takes a sip of coffee and starts, "what I felt is past, what I am feeling is compassion. Compassion for the human condition. Compassion for my self and for you and for everybody in the group. I am feeling like I belong. Wait, that's not a feeling. I am feeling included. How about involved and touched by the openness of the group. It was a glimpse into what's current with each of us. I felt inspired to share. There is an aura of trust. Do you think that was the point of Blue Cloud getting us all together. Mind you there were no invitations. Wasn't that crazy?"

"Yeah, for me the way this gathering manifested seemed magical and mysterious."

"Now I have a question I have been meaning to ask you. Getting back to your encounter with Joni. The more time I spend with my thoughts, I feel taken for granted, rather I feel some disappointment and hurt to be really honest with you. I need you to delve deeper and answer truthfully if you still have a physical attraction towards Joni. And I want to include what it is like for you with Sadie and Jenny. I sense flirtatious exchanges sometimes. You are not a womanizer. At least I never knew you as one."

"So, do you need some appreciation, or consideration maybe trust that it is you I love?"

Julian gives me an affirmative nod, yes, “I just want to know. After all you are in that self created therapy group with Joni, Sadie, Jenny, Molly and Sammie.”

“Alright, with Sadie and Jenny, they entice me with a feeling of youthfulness. After all they are more than 20 years younger than me. If I let my ego go wild then I’d be thinking that at least Jenny has an attraction for me. But that is not the case. With Sadie I enjoy her verbal bantering, with Jenny, I am enthralled with her perception of connection with the universal energy that is all inclusive. She seems so fascinated in connecting with a higher energy. Am I making any sense to you. Anyway, I was impressed again with what she had to share tonight.”

“And Joni?”

I take a sip of my coffee, place my cup down slowly, on the table. I look at the broken seal on the Whiskey. Amazing, we never poured a drop into our cups. I look over at Julian. “I’d be lying if I said I was not attracted to Joni. What you need to trust is my sincere love for you and respect for our relationship. I choose monogamy over an open relationship. Now the way society understands an open relationship is in a sexual context. That is not my intention with Joni. I want to have the freedom to be able to give her support when she needs it, caring, and appreciation.”

“So you need me to trust you that your interactions with Joni and other women for that matter, is a sincere heart connection.”

“Yes, and not just women. I feel so much joy when I connect with others as equals with no bias and judgements. Just pure conscious love. That to me is an open relationship.”

“I must say, that I too want that same interaction with others and not have to be concerned with how my actions with others might affect you. I know that I have to check my initial reactions from learned behaviors of the past. I like the thought of not being a possessive mate. Clarifying how we want a deeper connection with others is huge right now. I feel a true sense of freedom and respect. Respect for our commitment to each other and empowering each other to interact with others in a meaningful way.”

“It’s the energy, isn’t it? The energy that flows from one being to the next. I’m not sure what’s happening to me, but if I feel the energy shift. In me and whomever I am with. Like what you observed between Joni and I. She was so exuberant and spontaneous that it was easy for me to receive her being. When she moved into my field with those glowing eyes and big smile...pulled me in for the kiss. Wow, there was nothing I could feel except for that moment of her joy. It could have been my joy too, except that my thought process was flooded with apprehension. The lingering memory of your comment the night we had our reconciliation with her. Do you remember, Julian? She asked, what about a kiss?”

“Yes, and I said, I don’t know about that I’ve seen you two kiss before.”

“So, just as I felt her joy and spontaneity, she must of felt my fear.”

“I see what you are saying, High Me. How about this, we might emanate kindness, passion or ignorance. You feel kindness towards someone ,a

person or something a cat, or dog. Or it might be passion towards or for someone again a person or something let's call it an activity. Or you might have pure ignorance for whatever the energy is. You just want to experience the energy?"

"I like that, the freedom of experiencing the moment. Without any inhibitions. So what prevents us from having the pure conscious awareness of experiencing the energy of someone else?"

"The fear of, you name it. Depending on what force field you are entering. Could be joy, attraction, vengeance, underlying circumstances anything. Go down the list. We proceed with caution verses spontaneity. What are you feeling right now High Me? My soulmate lover who gets me high! No Whiskey needed for this lady! This discussion inebriates me with energy!"

"What now? It's time for bed before the rooster crows!"

And that's what we do just before dusk, we pull the curtains shut, peel back the sheets, slip out of our garments and crawl into bed with kindness, passion and ignorance. And I wonder what the rest of night prevailed in terms of process for the rest of our friends. It has been quite a day full of personal revelations.

## Chapter 12: India

I am en-route, in flight, on my way to India, without Julian. Her decision, after many discussions Julian decided it best to spend the next four weeks dedicating her energy for the group effort of transition towards community. She also wants to reconcile her five year self exile with our grown children. Walking Stick came to her one evening and under the

starlet sky, full of constellations that told a story. She shared her vision of what was to come. I wondered if it was my friend and guide who was sending the message through Walking Stick. What influence does this mentor still have with his apprentice Blue Cloud. And I wonder, how is Joseph doing with his final Vision Quest. Where is he and how will he survive the winter atop Big Horn Peak? Will we ever see him again or is he in the next realm of existence?

Stephanie will stay with Juliane at the pioneer cabin on Maggie's Ranch. Sammie and Joni will stay at our Grizzly cabin. Sammie will teach massage techniques to Joni and they will apprentice the healing arts together. Jerry will help Frank manage the ranch. Deloris and Faye have already settled in their new surroundings. Condo living at the ranch. They will assist Julian and Stephanie with the garden and harvesting of food. Molly and Arthur are creating a new studio in one of the old barns on Maggie's ranch. They will build a loft for their quarters and develop the new part of their relationship as partners. Sadie and Jenny will occupy one of the guest cabins. Jenny wants to be in the garden with Julian and Stephanie. She wants to be mentored by Faye and Deloris. Sadie wants to do pottery under the guise of Arthur, and create her own style of Donabe Bowls.

Maggie has opened her home to Blue Cloud and Walking Stick so they can be in council as time progresses. However, Blue Cloud wants to stay with his tribe. Walking Stick will alternate between their community and Maggie's cabin when they spend time with the group. Nirvana will set up a meditation hall and yoga center in one of the conference rooms at the main lodge. The plan is to integrate her practice as a service for the guest ranch visitors. I

am beginning to recognize how a small sustainable community can develop and offer services to the greater masses.

This is part of my new family. A circle of friends that are willing to truly connect with each other. It seems that we are unabashedly opening our hearts and souls to each other. This is a beautiful process in the making. I am encouraged to be part of this phenomena that seems it's the natural law of the universe. For my part, I chose to go to Tapa's and continue my personal journey, my quest towards enlightenment. Whatever that might mean.

I land in Chennai India after a trip over the Arctic and Siberia. Crossing over desert and mountains. When I land I find myself in the midst of chaos. My amusement is peeked. So many people, a packed mass of human existence, eagerly waiting for their baggage to descend from the conveyor belt. The front row of people standing like a fence that can't be penetrated. Anxiety pushing from behind, squeezing through any opening that can be found. Grabbing and yanking their worn suitcases, one by one from the conveyor. I wonder how am I going to get my bag? And some how the mass of bodies have flowed forward and I miraculously end up next to the conveyor and my amusement turns into hope. Maybe my bag will appear and I can get out of here, uncrushed! And I do survive this process only to be confronted by the next mass of upheaval as we are herded into custom lines. Now I am part of the anxious energy of making it through customs with the correct documentation needed to enter the country. I stand in waiting, like herded cattle forced through shoots at the stockyards during a livestock auction. Okay, I am taking this scene too far. But there are a dozen long lines, and I notice other people from my flight in

other lines, and I hope I am in the right line. And I hope I don't miss my taxi. And I wish my line would speed up. And I wonder where do I go after I make it through customs. And what if I don't make it through customs. And I need some fresh air. And I am in India!! Just following the crowd, hoping this is the right exit. As we exit the fresh air is the air of a massive construction site. And there are a line of metal barriers of people with smiling faces and signs and hand waving, shouts of "come here", "I will drive you", "Hello, I am Shiva, come with me!" And somehow the taxi driver I was meant to meet appears and asks me the right question that my consignor said would indicate whom I was to trust as my driver to the hotel. And I am in India. And so here I am in a large van with several people some of who I recognize from zoom calls that preempted my venture to Ekam.

I see Megan, seated in the back of the van with an empty seat next to her. She recognizes me and waves me over. I feel a sense of relief. Someone I know, I immediately respond and walk down the aisle...

"Hello Megan, I am so glad to see you! At least I am sure that I am in the right vehicle!"

"I am glad to see you made it too. Did Julian come?"

"No, she decided to remain back home. She wanted time with our children. She felt that she needs more time to reconcile the abandonment issue that still weighs heavy on her heart. Megan, I remember a previous discussion concerning Nirvana. She was here once? At Tapas?"

"Yes, she is the person who introduced me to this group."

“And yet she identifies as a Sikh. Wearing the turban and teaching kundalini Yoga. How did she get involved with Ekam?”

“I have been a good friend of Nirvana for many years. I knew her when she broke up with her husband. It was devastating for her. She suffered and somehow found out about this group and the movement that was all about reducing ones suffering states and move people towards joy. Even though she still practices Sikhism her personal psychology has shifted. I don't think she identifies with one belief as much as she used to. She felt like she now better understands that existence of pure consciousness is formless. In other words she told me that when she identifies with her body, or spirituality, or a “guru”, master, or God as form then the ego gets involved. She might feel knowledgeable. She said that when she doesn't connect with any sort of identity or perceived belief, then she receives the wisdom of witnessing all that is. The essence of the now!”

“Do you ever sense that, Megan?”

“There are times when I think of my self as a portal, an opening to let energy pass through me and into me. I have had that sensation at times when Nirvana has led us through meditations. One time I opened my eyes and saw Nirvana with her eyes closed and palms out towards our group as we lay in Savasana. I asked her later, what she was doing. She said she was giving Deeksha. Just letting energy flow through her to us.”

The ride is long, as we travel the turnpike in the dead of night we zip pass the city swell of human existence. The life that is so foreign to me, city

living, that I left so long ago. This place was nothing like Paradise Valley Montana. It was huge, people living 24/7. Truly a look at third world existence. The vast chasm between the wealthy and the not so fortunate. Layers of people, cars, food smells, shanties, shrines, buildings crumbling from erosion. Then new, modern structures being built. And boom we land at the Palace Hotel with lavish architecture and gardens. Upper first class service and interior surroundings. This is my indoctrination of India. The west meets the east. It is 1 AM in the morning and the city is still buzzing. As is the inside of the Palace lobby. When I finally get to my room, I could not believe how lavash it is. When I open a night table I find a Gideon's Bible. Out of curiosity I open the draw of the other night table and behold a Bhagavad Gita! I feel wired. No way I am going to sleep. So I decide to dive into the Bhagavad Gita. I open to a page with a picture (Plate 35) of the creation "AS IT IS". And it's all there, from Dante's Inferno to Bosch's Garden of Earthly Delights. All of the human elements and above it all are the other realms beyond conscious. The man disentangling himself from the material world depicted by the upside down tree with the weapon of detachment. I look at the top of the plate and see Krsna and His internal consort, in Paradise above all desire. I close the page keeping a finger to hold the place. I close my eyes and drift into a meditation. I feel Julian, and Nirvana, and Joseph I feel their presence in my life. I am recognizing the whole of all I have been through with the group of people now in my life and my past. It's all there in the illustration. I open to the page and start reading the inscriptions. Where am I in these tree branches? How ironic, Molly's tree sculpture seems so synchronistic with my journey now. This trip to India, Tapas, what am I in for? I was told that it's all about one's

state. I read some, and then slowly fall off to sleep with a smile and a good feeling of things to come.

The room is filled with light. I awake look at the clock and see that it is only 7:30 AM! About three hours of dream state. Pleasant dreams of spiritual awakenings. Anyway, that's what I fell to sleep reading in the Bhagavad Gita. Beautiful interpretations of the quality of life that I want to transform towards. I know I have a ways to go, but I had great visuals during my sleep. I take a leisurely hot soak in the Jacuzzi tub, then I step into the shower stall for a cold shower. I feel refreshed. I open the blinds and look at my view. And from this deluxe hotel I can see the beach and ocean. I also see the shanties along the spit of the sand bar. I turn towards the west and see what appear to be ten story apartments. The beautiful architecture is lost amidst the eroding white concrete. A green forest rises below the structures emanating a beautiful tree canopy of tropical trees. The white walls of buildings have streaks and blemishes of grey. Is it mold dust or is it from the pollution that appears as a stratosphere from the oceans eastern horizon? I am waiting for the sun to rise above it, even though the sun rose awhile ago it still hasn't made it's appearance above the broad band of grey. I see what appears to be a temple, in the distance between the white like pillars that are the apartments. It's beige looking from my vantage point, it's rounded dome like towers sit above the roof line. I look further west and I see the bustling freeway slithering from the city. A mass of buildings and a string of traffic. I take one more peek at Plate 35 and head down for some breakfast.

I enter the dining hall. It's big and forks off into several other areas. The breakfast buffet has so much food to offer from bakery goods to fruit,

cereals, egg dishes, meats and on and on goes the food carousel. So now I know how the upper class lives. And the servers? I wonder where their homes are and how they are fairing in this monetary structure of status quo. And what I do is say Namaste with the hands clasped to my chest in prayer fashion. I receive broad smiles and nods from the Indi servers. I spot Megan at a window table. She turns from the window and sees me. A quick smile and wave, lures me to her table. Following me is a server and before I can be seated he ask if I want coffee or tea.

“Good morning Megan, did you get any sleep?”

“Not much, I had a lot on my mind. How about you?”

“I found the Bhagavad Gita in my night stand drawer and couldn't put it down. I was up until about 3:30, had some dreamy thoughts of spiritual bliss and ended up in the tub for a hot soak, cold shower and now breakfast. Maybe I'll get some sleep at the pool today.”

“There's people going on some temple tours or market tours. I might go on a Temple tour.”

“So, Megan what is the reason you decided to do this Tapas event? Seems like you had some previous indoctrination? With Nirvana?”

“Yes, I have been a longtime yoga student with Nirvana. It has been about three or four years. We have become good friends during that time and we both have made some major changes. I observed her after the breakup with her longtime husband. I think they were together for about ten years. Anyway, after her break up she took some time off from her yoga class. about two weeks. She had been telling me about this place in India where a

couple, two gurus, guided one's individual journey of inner work. She had me sign up for a special manifest which was a three hour virtual live broadcast from India. Nirvana had been doing these on a monthly basis since her breakup. Anyway, my initial experience was profound. There was a lesson, some meditation and during the meditation Preethaji guided the participants through a process that had me visiting a past incident in my life. You don't need to know the story, what happened is that I had a self realization of how that incident has affected my well being. I had created a mental barrier and every time a certain condition would happen I would suffer emotionally. Back to Nirvana. I noticed a slight change the first time she came back from Tapas. She went back a second time. Meanwhile I started searching for Ekam teachings and meditations on Utube. When she returned and started the yoga class again, every once in awhile she would have me share a meditation recording from Ekam. You are aware of that, since you are one of her students. It wasn't to long ago when we got into a discussion about identity. How our ego wants to create a personal identity. We identify with an emotion for instance, "I'm sad" or we identify with something, "I'm a yogi."

"I see where you're going with this. So in your case you identified with a past condition and every time you would get triggered, that emotional barrier is what you would identify with?"

"Yes, good point. So, here we are Jim. Look out the window, across this inlet. What do you see?"

"Looks like a shantytown."

"And what emotion do you identify with?"

“Well, right now I’m thinking of what to say.”

“So you might be identifying with thoughts versus feelings? Maybe comparing what appears to be poverty as we sit in this luxurious hotel having whatever we want to eat.”

“Whoa, Megan, yeah, I’m wondering how is it that I deserve this luxury as you put it. I can’t say I feel compassion right now, maybe lucky?”

“What in your past perhaps can you recognize that might trigger an emotion?”

Suddenly, I have some heavy breathing, I look out the window, and my eyes start to well up I am feeling emotional. I face Megan.

“Survival, is that a feeling? We, Julian and I were dead broke, a failed business venture. We had to give blood just so we could buy some food. Fear of lack, that’s what’s coming up right now. Across the street was a man playing with some children. He saw us and came over, waved us down. He had seen our van parked outside a house in his neighborhood where we were going to open a business. We told him our story and he told us to park our van in his driveway.”

Now I am quietly weeping. I am struggling to speak, “this beautiful family was by no means, was well off. And they feed us and offered us their driveway until we could find work...”

“And what are you feeling now, Jim?”

“Gratitude, so much gratitude!”

Chapter 13 : Friendship, Love, and Extraordinary Love

Julian - I wonder how Jim and Megan are doing with their first days in India. It's a cold day with snow threatening as we are emerged in winter.

Stephanie is in Bozeman today and there's not much to do around the ranch. The winter greenhouse has been taken care of so I think I'll go check on the Grizzly Cabin and see how our greenhouse, the one Jim and I built, is doing. Also, I can get a chance to visit with Sammie and Joni. I'd love to find out how their healing practice is coming along. I wonder if Joni is going to the Bozeman Massage school or just learning massage techniques from Sammie. I'll stoke the fire so the cabin is warm when Stephanie and I return. The ride to the Grizzly cabin is uneventful until I reach Old Yellowstone road. As I approach the final turn I am greeted by a small herd of mountain sheep including three rams. I stop for awhile and just admire their rugged splendor. One of the rams has part of his curled horn missing. He must of lost it in a battle sometime ago. I inch the car forward and move slow enough so as not to spook them from their grazing. As I approach the cabin I see some smoke coming from the chimney of the cabin. Good someone is there. I am hoping to see Joni. I park and walk up the stairs. Looking out the window I see Sammie. He greets me at the door.

"Hey Julian, come on in. I have some tea steeping and a nice fire going."

"Hi Sammie, thanks I'd like some tea. It sure did drop in temperature today. I thought I'd check on the greenhouse, see how the plants might be surviving."

"No worries, Joni and I have been taking care of your home and the greenhouse. Thanks for letting us stay here while Jim is in India."

"I don't see Joni's car, is she in Bozeman today?"

“Yes, she had some errands and is contributing a column in the Journal.”

“How has this arrangement been working for you two? It is a small one bedroom cabin after all.”

“We have been managing and getting to know each other. She occupies the bedroom, I sleep out here when we are both here. We still have our places in Bozeman. She’ll probably stay at her house for a couple of days in Bozeman. It all works out for now.”

“How has Joni been doing with massage lessons? Have you been teaching her any techniques?”

“A little, She registered for the class at the school in Bozeman. And she has engaged in herbal studies with a locale mentor, also in Bozeman.”

We are both standing in front of the wood burning stove sipping our tea. The warmth of the cabin has a mesmerizing effect on me. I am not sure what to say and as I look into the eyes of Sammie, I realize that there is a very slight tension between us. Whenever I think of Sammie I think of his attraction for Jim. I wonder what it might be like for him as part of our community, being the only gay man.

“Have you been in any relationships lately Sammie?”

“You mean found a man to love?”

“I’m just curious, I don’t mean to pry about your personal life.”

“That’s okay Julian. I know you mean well. I feel very comfortable right now with the direction that our relationship has taken. I do believe that you

sincerely want to know me as a person. Not as someone who desires your man.”

Well, that is being blunt, Sammie knows no boundaries. He is not afraid to be honest. Now I am feeling nervous. I let out a nervous chuckle, “I’m not sure how to respond to the “someone who desires your man” statement. I feel a bit threatened by that statement.”

“I truly did not mean it that way. I think the three of us have a clear understanding of how our relationship is to progress.”

There’s a silence as the energy in the room has become awkward. Then Sammie is the first to speak.

“Julian, the time that you and Jim gave me that massage it changed me and the way I want to relate to others. Especially you two. What I would like to do right now is pay back and offer you a massage. The room is perfect temperature wise. I could set up the massage table. Are you open to that?”

Julian - Hummmm, well that is a nice offer. Do I trust his sincerity? I’m pretty sure that we have a good understanding of our relationship, especially concerning Jim. Now why is my mind going there? Having judgements that create conditions. That’s a sure formula to squelch any kind of relationship.

“Gosh, Sammie, thank you. Yes, I can really use a massage. I’ll help you set up the table.”

Sammie has a beautiful smile, “alright let’s do it. I have been wanting to give my love to you both. And I can’t think of a better way to connect.”

We set up the room, Sammie warms the massage oil, and I get ready to slide under the sheets. Connection, my life has all of a sudden become about connecting with people at a deeper level. I am no longer a recluse hiding in a cabin just doing a job. A person with a hidden past. And here I am with Sammie, alone. What will I experience? If I don't stop thinking I won't experience anything but my perception of this experience. All right, I slip under the sheets and focus on breath and then I feel gentle hands rocking my body, softly, side to side.

"Relax Julian, let me have you. I feel a little resistance."

Hummm, yeah I need to surrender? Just that thought puts me more at ease. Submit, surrender, relax, trust - now I am feeling less fear.

"You know Julian, that day I walked into Jim's massage office for my weekly massage, and I saw you searching for something in his desk, do you remember?"

"Yes, of course. You were not happy to see me there! Then when I told you that I was going to be massaging you along with Jim, yes I recall your resistance."

"When I finally let go of my emotions, there was a point in the massage where I could not recognize who's hands were massaging specific locations. I want you to relax, make your muscles supple. Clear your mind of my being gay and my friendship with Jim. Know that I now love you too. And maybe you will have an extraordinary massage."

I can't help but giggle. And respond, "okay Sammie, thank you for your healing touch and reassurance."

The massage is progressing quite nicely. He has a wonderful touch mixing deep firm strokes with some sensual strokes. As he is working on my feet he ask me a question.

“Julian, how can we form a friendship?”

“This sure is a good start. I will admit when you offered I had some inhibitions. I think that’s why you felt the resistance in my body. When you asked me to relax, first thing that came to mind was surrender. And I realized that I had to surrender my distrust of your motive. My preconceived idea of who you are. I only know you as someone who desires my husband. So there’s a barrier that I create out of jealousy. I ask myself, why does Jim want to befriend a gay man. Is there a physical attraction and what might that lead to? So that is my perception and I have now known facts of your relationship with Jim and I wonder, how can this be that I am again, faced with the dilemma that I witnessed so many years ago between Jim and a gay man. You need not know the details, that’s not what is important. What does have meaning is how can I know you as a friend and love you as a friend without limitations?”

Sammie, lifts my foot and slowly positions the front area of the ankle of my foot over his thigh. He is sitting at the edge of the table. He starts with his thumbs rubbing the sole of my foot. Then his fingers are gently squeezing the webs between the toes. It feels so good.

“Thank you Julian for your honesty. As you are well aware, if you did not come back into Jim’s life, Joni was sure to have Jim as a mate. So it wasn’t just you that I had to work on resentment and anger. Jealousy and envy too. It was also Jim’s choice not to feed my desire body. If I remember right

you came to one of our sex therapy groups with Molly, Sadie, Jenny, Joni, Jim and I. What I realized, and I think all of us realized, that the work we were doing was leading us towards true friendship. There is something about addiction groups that if one goes in with an intention to be honest, and willing, then support happens and friendships are achieved as part of the organic process.”

“I am going to have you turn over now Julian.”

I feel the sheet being pulled off of my torso. No draping? “Ah, Sammie, are you expecting me to lay nude?”

“Yes, and I am going to massage your breast, check for any lumps or anything that might not feel right. I promise to avoid your nipples. And if you start to feel arousal, let me know. Although I will probably be able to tell. But at anytime, you can request me to stop. I’ll be working on your stomach and digestive organs, your arms and hands and range of motion. I will be giving you a facial and scalp massage. I will work on your lateral hips, quads, knees and do some traction. And we will be working on trust.”

When Sammie finishes his description of what’s next, I slowly turn, anterior facing up. I watch as he refills his oil bottle. One of my judgements of Sammie crosses my mind. He knows no boundaries. And I am in thought of what my limitations are concerning trust. A true friend will honor and respect your “space”. I could ask that I be draped properly, after all he is a professional masseuse. I could just get up, ask him to leave the room, get dressed and get out. Or I could recognize my vulnerability and believe in his sincerity. I could just be, and experience the moment.

I sit up cross legged on one end of the table. "Sammie, here's what I want to do before you get started. I want you to sit opposite of me, here on the table."

He looks at me with a confused look. "You do not have to continue the massage. Maybe I went too far?"

"Just do as I ask, please?"

Sammie takes off his belt with the massage oil holder and sets it down. He gets up on the table and sits opposite me with his legs crossed in a yoga position. Just as I am. I take my right hand and place it over his heart. We are staring at each other. The eye contact is intense. I feel the energy as his right hand approaches my heart. We continue to look at each other.

"Sammie, I am grateful for this massage. You have a good concept of the direction of my muscles. I love your smile right now. And appreciate your direct eye contact. I acknowledge your acceptance of forming a friendship relationship with me. I love you for who you are,"

There is a brief silence. Then Sammie speaks, with tears streaming down his checks, "Julian, I admire your boldness right now. I am grateful for your truth. I love your eyes, the color of them, their intensity. I feel as if you are peering into my soul and making contact with who I am, not what I appear to be! You feel my pain, right?"

"Yes Sammie, and I feel your courage to reach out and get to know me. Not as Jim's mate. Not as a hindrance to your pursuit of him. Rather now as a true female friend."

“Thank you for saying that Julian. This means a lot to me. I have never felt a love like this.”

## Chapter 14: In My Yellow Room

Maggie - As I'm looking out my window I notice Blue Cloud standing behind the Bison that's part of the sculpture. He told me that's where we'll meet. And there he is, good thing I had the intuition to be looking out there. I wonder why he doesn't just call me or knock on my door? It seems so mysterious. After the first time, the way I felt so mesmerized, I feel apprehensive to go out there. I also, feel part of something that is bigger than me. Beyond my comprehension right now. Hummm, his hair is blowing, looks a little chilly today, let's see where's my coat. Huh, he doesn't appear to see me in the window. Ok, shoes, deep breath Maggie, do some deep slow breathing. I place my hand on the door knob, close my eyes momentarily and open the door. I look out toward the Bison and Blue Cloud gives me a nod. I guess that means we are to meet, so I proceed down the stairs and into the meadow. I am feeling that surrender I had last time with him, to what is about to take place. I don't feel threatened, that's not it. What is it that I feel?

“Good morning Blue Cloud. Do you want to come inside, out of the chill?”

“Greetings Maggie. No this is our meeting place, have a seat the Bison will block out the wind.”

We sit in the tall grass that has cropped up around the sculpture. I look and next to the Bison is a bronze of Joseph, Blue Cloud's uncle. I am speechless, just like last time. I am determined to not go unconscious like

last time. I want to have some control of the conversation. I try not to look into Blue Cloud's dark brown eyes. But I feel his penetrating stare, and I look up.

He smiles, and says, "you are to have a community meeting in your yellow room".

I close my eyes, and with no conscious thought I have my hands in a prayer pose, the Namaste greeting. I bow to the light within you. At least that is how I translate it. I open my eyes, and he is gone. I stand. I scream, "Blue Cloud, wait! Hey, what am I supposed to do?" I look around in a panic. What is going on? My peripheral vision catches the bronzed face of Joesph. I look and he too is smiling! Buddha, I need the serene image of Buddha and I run to my yellow room, where he is immersed in the center of a large sunflower."

After awhile I settle into a peaceful state. Now I am amazed at the role I seem to have in this great scheme. The one with the ranch. The coveted property for a resilient community.

I call Frank, "hello? Frank, thanks for picking up. I thought you were looking for cows today."

I was, found a few up near Canary Peak. What's up Maggie?"

I need you to come up here. I have something to discuss with you. And can you pick up Julian to? I need to talk to both of you."

"Okay Maggie, you alright? You sound different."

"I am and I'm not. I will tell you why when you get up here. Thanks."

Frank - I wonder what is going on with Maggie. She sounded a little rattled. Well, I guess I better find Julian and head on up to Maggie's. I better put on my coat, that wind sure does bring in a chill. It's starting up, coming down from Ramshorn Peak and the Big Sky side. Would't be a bit surprised to see an early season snow. I get into my truck and head down the road towards Julian's pioneer cabin. As I approach the pathway to the cabin I see her and Stephanie coming from the greenhouses. I cut the motor and get out to greet them.

"Hello ladies, how's the day been?"

"Hi Frank," it is Stephanie with the first greeting.

Followed by Julian, "Hello Frank, what brings you over this way today?"

"Well, I got a call from Maggie. She seemed a little shaky and wanted to meet with you and me."

"Oh, I guess I could hop in your truck with you now, if you're ready. I don't need anything from the cabin."

"I'll get some diner going Julian, You think you'll be gone long. I just want to gauge the time."

Julian looks at Frank.

"I don't know how long we'll be Steph. Maggie didn't give me any indication what this is about."

“Okay. I will be with Nirvana and Walking Stick later. We are doing a sweat in the lodge tonight. See you later, dear.”

Julian hops into the passenger side. Frank climbs in and starts up the truck.

“I’ve been wondering how your arrangement with Stephanie in the tiny cabin is going? You two sleeping in the same bed?”

Julian looks at Frank with a quizzical look, “yeah, sleeping in the same bed, like sisters.” She lets out a little giggle, “What are you thinking?”

“Oh, just wondering what’s going to happen when Jim comes back.”

“She’s setting up a place in a spare room in the lodge where Nirvana is setting up her yoga studio apartment. Frank, you mind if we ride in silence for awhile? I want to gather my thoughts and chill a bit.”

“Sure, thanks for asking how I’m doing?”

“Ha, Frank okay so I heard Jerry has moved in with you? The two Christians...oops I don’t mean to make that sound like an off hand comment full of judgements.”

“I know you better than that Julian. You do have a sharp tongue once in awhile. Yeah, Jerry has settled in with me. Plenty of room in the ranch house for extra hands. We’re starting a church for you agnostics to be converted!”

They both laugh at the comment. They briefly lock eyes.

“Frank, thank you for bringing the teachings of Christ into my life. I do have other avenues of spirituality that I like pursuing, as you are well aware.”

“Hey, Julian, thank you for waking me up from my beliefs that I abandoned so long ago. As I look back, the time we spent together was well worth the suffering that I endured during my absence from Christianity.”

“Frank, thanks for recognizing our continued love in friendship. Mind if we chill now, because now I have more thoughts racing through my noggin than I had before!” Julian lets out a sigh and a giggle.

And with a broad smile Frank nods yes to Julian. It is a beautiful ride that up to Maggie's. Bumpy in a few spots, the surrounding environment is magnificent. Trees, creeks, mountain views and wildlife.

Julian - This ranch has so many trails and roads that lead to so many new places to explore. They remind me of all the different paths I have taken on my personal journey through life. I walk these trails and always end back at my home base, the cabin. Walking the trails afford me contemplation. The alone time in the solitary cabin, afford me process. It is really interesting having Stephanie as a temporary mate while Jim is gone. She has shared with me the processes she went through with Jim during some of their modeling sessions with Molly's sketch class. We lay in bed at night, talking like sisters growing up. Inquiring about our experiences. My time with Frank, with Jim, with my children and now this group of people. So many entanglements. When my mind is freed up the relationships seem so easy and connection just flows. Oh, I ache for Jim to be back, I want my children with me. I want to find out about all of their journeys. It will be like listening

to the news...the family news. And here I am with Frank going to see Maggie to talk about God knows what. I look over at Frank. Stoic Frank, just driving now, honoring my request to be still. And I am not still. I close my eyes, I breathe slow, deep and long. I silently hum a soft tune in my mind, I recall the gurgle of the creek during my walk today. I hear Waheguru buzzing through the frequency of my brain. That's the last thing I recall when I feel someone's hand on my shoulder, softly shaking me awake from a deep, quiet place that I finally arrived to.

“Julian, darlin' we are here.”

I open my eyes and feel a smile caressing my face. All of the facial muscles involuntarily smiling. I look at Frank and his expression is full of joy too.

“It is so beautiful to see you smile Julian. It fills me with joy too. Where'd you go, darlin'?”

“Why, I thought we were going to Maggie's!”

Frank lets out a hardy laugh and I do too. It is so sweet to disappear for awhile into an indescribable state.

We walk up to the cabin and I can't help but look at the sculpture. I want to see Jim and Stephanie with their hands on each others heart. Stephanie told me all about her experience. I can only imagine. It is such a power connection when Jim and I do it, especially as a start to, or during one of our love sessions. Hummm, get home soon my love!

Maggie ushers us in and looks out before closing the door. I sense what Frank was sensing something has Maggie spooked. She has some tea on the low table and we sit on the cushions.

Frank doesn't waste any time, "what's got you so anxious Maggie? I haven't seen you like this since the fire!"

Maggie gives Frank a look of compassion. She knows who Frank lost that day not so long ago.

"He was here again, out there." Maggie is pointing.

"Who, where?" Frank ask.

"Blue Cloud, I asked him in and he insist that we always meet at the bronzed Bison of the sculpture. He says that is our meeting place. And when I get there I am in a state of confusion, then submission. He gives me an instruction and disappears!"

"Okay, Maggie, what did he tell you to do this time?"

"To have a meeting."

"That's it?" Frank continues to ask the questions.

"I am guessing that he means with the community members? Is that right Maggie?"

"Well, yes I guess so. But there were no instructions, no hint of what to discuss. Nothing like that. Just a smile, I closed my eyes for a second and he was gone! I screamed for him then my eyes caught the bronze image of Joseph peering at me. With his smile. It was so real but surreal if you can imagine.

It's my turn to talk, so I ask, "Maggie, you agreed to try a community on your ranch. So do you have any fears, or apprehension of what you may be committing to?"

"Oh, Julian, yes I am so used to being in control and I want details. My interaction with Blue Cloud seems so contrite."

"I wonder, you know the history of this ranch. You know it was the summer hunting grounds of the Absaroka tribes. So maybe you have some guilt of owning property that was never really meant to be owned."

"But I didn't have anything to do with how this country was structured concerning land ownership."

"I'm just saying Maggie, dig deeper. Look, maybe you are struggling to let go of total ownership just because of the formation of community. We haven't discussed how that's going to work yet. Then there's the Native American aspect of Joseph's vision and you bought into it."

"Yes, but there's something that's affecting me it's kind of unnerving."

Frank has been quiet up until now. "Maggie, many of the paths we take whether it's spiritual seeking or lifestyle choices they have some mysticism involved. Even when we think with our rational mind there is some anxiety. Wouldn't you agree?"

There's a pause of silence. The room takes on an aura of contemplation. Maggie gets up and walks towards the big window. She is looking at the huge tree sculpture now. Frank and Julian follow her and stand behind her on either side of her. The wind can be heard whistling outside. Maggie

turns slightly towards Frank and rest her head on his broad chest. There is a tear slowly cascading down her left cheek. Frank has an arm around her.

“Frank, we’ve been together for a longtime. I am so grateful to have you as the ranch manager. You have been a blessing. Yeah, I feel a transformation happening around here. Maybe more of a transition for me. I’ve cloistered myself up here for such a longtime and now I am engaging with a group of people that I am just getting to know. Julian, you might be on to something that even you aren’t aware of concerning Blue Cloud and his descendants. I have a sense that, oh, I don’t know. Forget it, I’m not even going entertain the thought! Ok, let’s set the meeting for tomorrow. Frank, bring some elk meat and a barbecue oven.”

“Julian, we can meet up here early and put together the side dishes.”

“Okay Maggie. Too bad Jim isn’t here he could bake some pies. Hummm, I think I’ll get Sadie to do it. She teases him by calling him Jimmy Pie. Did you know that?”

“What?” Frank bellows.

## Chapter 16: Blue Cloud - Maggie and the Bison

The day has turned into a warm fifty four degrees, no wind, and bright sun. Maggie decides to put on a long dress and blouse. She’s put a denim jacket over her button down blouse. When she comes back into the yellow room, she goes to the window and looks at the huge sculpture of the tree and all of the community members. She is admiring the life of the sculpture.

All of the action figures each one in the midst of thier personage. The sun is warming her as it comes through the window. Maggie is drawn to the sculpture and desires to be part of it. She walks out the door, feeling refreshed from the visit of Frank and Julian. She is still uneasy about Blue Cloud and her relationship towards him. Maggie walks towards the bison and Joseph.

Maggie - Ahh, my bare feet feel so cool in the tall grass. It feels so good and this late season warm day is exquisite. Wow, the sun on the flank of the bronze bison is glistening. So this is where Blue Cloud wants to always meet me. I wonder if he is getting his guidance from Joseph. Is Joseph sending signals of his vision. I wonder how his vision quest is going. Alright Blue Cloud, this is where we meet. And today I am calling for a meeting.

Maggie pats the grass smooth along the bison. She lays down under the warm sun and peers up at the blue sky with passing bright white clouds. She sees the tips of the tall ancient fir trees. She closes her eyes and feels the warmth. She focuses on her breathe slow, full and long inhales and exhales. Her chest rising and falling. Her thoughts of the meeting and anxiety are leaving. She is feeling a stillness. A resolve is present in her mind, all is good.

It feels so good to slip into bliss. Just to totally relax and not be concerned about the outcome of what I have committed to doing. My ranch, opening it up to community. That's a good thing. A good action. A Buddhic action. Detachment, isn't that one of my beliefs. It is what it is. Even the mystery of Blue Cloud and how I seem to do whatever he says no questions asked. Just surrender, submission. That is what unnerves me. What is that

rustling, where is that coming from over on my right...woah, whose feet in the moccasins?

“Blue Cloud?”

“You asked for my presence.”

I look up as he is straddling over me at my feet. He is dressed in native garb. Leather pants leather fringe along the outside of his legs. There's a leather loins clothe around his waist. I can see the slightest of flesh under its draping. He is sleeveless and appears to be wearing a sort of armor made of small bones and beads, some feathers adorn the armor. His long black hair flows over his broad shoulders and his dark brown eyes stare at me.

“So you heard me but I never called you. And you appear, dressed with a painted face. Am I here in real time? Or am I dreaming?”

No response.

“Talk to me Blue Cloud, how did you get here?”

“You called for a meeting.”

I am feeling my shaky breath. He has taken me by surprise again. My confidence is shaken. I am no longer in bliss. I am getting that submissive sensation again. Okay, close your eyes Maggie, breathe. Again, a long breathe, come on one more. What am I feeling? Nervous, anxious come on why did I want to see Blue Cloud? I want to meet him on my terms. I need to really connect with him. I need to get grounded in this relationship. I want equanimity.

I open my eyes and see this beautiful man above me. Just standing there in his regally. A Medicine Man. I slowly slide the front of my skirt above my yoni. I reach up and unbutton the first three buttons of my blouse to reveal my cleavage.

“Maggie, you are giving yourself to me?”

“Yes, Blue Cloud I need us to connect. I need to be grounded.”

“In my culture it was uncommon to have sex before marriage. My Cherokee woman ancestors were known to display more freedom without disgracing themselves.”

“I feel no disgrace, I hope you do not feel disgrace. Rather I gracefully offer my self to you as a submission. Just this once. It is not a seduction or temptation. I need a physical connection. I need your medicine and I want to give my medicine to you. It is my way to become blood brothers.”

Blue Cloud unties his loin cloth, and it drops to the ground. His Jade stem is exposed.

“I am young and fertile.”

“I am older and beyond children.”

Blue cloud slowly moves over Maggie and kneels over her, they look into each others eyes. They stare and wait until all inhibitions begin to melt away. Guilt, fear of disgrace, and desire for self gratification. Blue Cloud slowly bends forward and places his hands on each side of her head, fingers slide like a comb into her hair and their lips meet. There is an exchange of energy. And medicine is exchanged.

Maggie - I feel a calm and a gentle masculine energy that is coursing through my body. I visualize the energy flowing through my blood. My nerves are calm and sublime. I open my eyes and of course he's gone. Like the wind. But this time I am reconciled to the fact that is how it will be with us. As we meet by the Bison. I still feel a oneness as if I was him. That might only make sense to me. I start to sit up on my elbows and I look down at my chest. I thought I felt something placed there. It is a bouquet of sweetgrass, and a late blooming Indian Blanket flower and an Indian Paintbrush Flower. My skirt is pulled down to my feet. I look up at the bronze sculpture of Joseph. It is peering down at me. So what just happened. Was this a day dream or was it real? Who put the flowers here if it was a dream? No, this was not a dream. It was a connection and a healing for me. I have come to the conclusion...maybe that's not the right word. Let's see a self realization that I need to give up my ownership of the ranch. Of my ego. I need to give up the ownership of who I think I am. My identification. Just as we stared into eyes of forgiveness. That's when I felt joy.

I walk back to the house. The bare feet of a virgin caresses the grass beneath them. The pebbles of the driveway, massages the acupressure points and energizes by body even more. I find a small vase fill it with water and place the bouquet on the conference table where the community meeting will take place tomorrow. I walk to the window. The sun has sifted now, it's late in the day. The bronze is dark, like Blue Clouds skin. I feel his medicine and I feel the liberation from thought. I feel gratitude. Precious gratitude of love for what is.

## Chapter 17: The Three Sisters

Stephanie - Julian wasn't back from her meeting with Frank and Maggie. I left her some diner that could easily be warmed up on the wood burning stove. I left her a note and let her know again about the sweat with Nirvana and Walking Stick. I meandered over to the trail that lead to the lodge. As I poked through the brush, I saw Walking Stick tending to the hot rocks over the coals. "Good evening Walking Stick, how are you tonight?"

"Very well, thank you sister. Nirvana is inside the lodge making preparations for our sweat. I am almost finished here. Can you take some of the rocks into the lodge and place them in the circle? There's a tub over there to carry them."

I smile and nod. Walking Stick has such a gentle demeanor and does not waste words. I enter the lodge and see Nirvana placing the animal furs on the ground. She gives me a smile and nod as a greeting. I sense that we are already in a mode of stilling our minds. I tip the tub and watch the rocks take thier place in the circle. As I set the tub aside, Walking Stick is right behind me and proceeds to piling her rocks in the circle too. There is some water jugs and she pours a little water over the rocks just to generate some steam. We take our places around the circle. A few candles have been lit and a soft glow illuminates our faces. After some silences Walking Stick says a prayer.

"Oh Great Creator of all things, be with us in a divine way, that we might know our position in this great endeavor that we are part of. May the vision of Joseph our Medicine man elder be passed on to Blue Cloud and may he fulfill his honored title as Medicine Man of our tribe. Aho!"

We sit in continued silence. I close my eyes and just focus on breath.

Time passes and I utter, "So why me, why am I chosen as one of the three sisters. You two have some wisdom. Why did you choose me?"

It's Walking Stick responding, "my sister, you have a quality to connect with others."

"But I am just a nude model for artist to paint and sketch. How can I contribute? What will I do on behalf of us, sisters, as you label us?"

"Three Sisters is not a label, it is a title to respect. I will let Nirvana speak now for she knows why you have been chosen."

"Stephanie, when you entered this world you were naked. A pure soul. As you grew into this world, you like the rest of us, were burdened with ego. Metaphorically, you were dressed with identities. At some point you chose to expose your vulnerable soul. You shed your cloths, your armor so to speak. As a nude model you gave those of us that engaged with you, an opportunity to feel liberated from our inhibitions. For this particular group you became a conduit for energy to pass. You could see that in how we sketched you with Jim. You realize that at some point you became part of the process that Molly created for Jim's psychology. Am I right?"

"Yes I sensed that, the first time in the heart to heart connection, then when he was in a supplicant pose at me feet. And other times as the class evolved."

"We all started sketching ourselves taking your place with Jim. You modeled but we sketched ourselves with Jim. Our personal psychology was being exposed. You saw some of our sketches right?"

“Yes, I did. It was amazing because in another sketch class that Jim actually took as an artist, he never drew me in classic lines. There was no sketch of me as I appeared. It was always abstract flowing forms. You’d see a face or the position I was holding, but it wasn’t me.”

Walking Stick interjects, “that is the mystery we hold for this group. To be there as intuitives. A source of nurturing energy as we serve in an ordinary way, we will have a power that is subtle and used by the divine creator. Think of us three sisters as the feminine ray of energy.”

“I never thought of having a purpose. I am just kind of living my life. Finding out who I am along the way.”

“You didn’t know about Jim and Julian’s past. Yet you have been an integral part of Jim’s growth. Even without realizing it, you have a purpose. We all have a purpose to connect with the people that come into our lives. Just being present with whom ever is a purpose that we all share.” Nirvana’s wisdom.

“That’s all us three sisters need to do is be present, listen and have no judgements or perceptions of others. If we do that with no identity to ego, then we can be a conduit for divine intelligence. Aho!”

Stephanie - We become still in our contemplation. We lay down on our furry mats. The air is hot, and I am definitely sweating and it’s not just my “pits”. There’s a soft drumming and chanting being done by Walking Stick. After awhile Nirvana creates a mood with some yoga mantras. Me, I am in total bliss. A relaxed mode of mindless thought. Thoughts that bring me joy as they pass.

As we finish our sweat with a ceremonial closing prayer from Walking Stick. I am inclined to take a cold dip in the creek. So that's what I do on the way back to the cabin. Under the star lit sky. I shiver a bit then lay down in the creek and let the cold water flow. Just a few seconds is all I need. I am refreshed and hope that the fire at the cabin still has hot coals. As I approach, I see a dim light through the window. I enter and look at Julian with her head on her arms crossed on the table. The Whiskey bottle is open and there is a slip of paper clutched tight in one of Julian's hands. She is sobbing, unaware of my presence. I kneel beside her and gently place an arm around her back.

"Julian, my dear, what is it?"

She looks at me. Her eyes are bloodshot red.

"We never touched the Whiskey that night not long ago. I decided I wanted it out of the cabin and found this poem, with Jim's writing, under the bottle. It's a Rumi poem..."

She hands me the paper....

The moment you left me,

Sweetness was stolen from my tongue.

I turned to wax, burned like a candle

All night, scorched by fire,

no honey.

No way to reach you,

no way to touch your beauty.

My body lies here in ruins.

My soul, a night owl.

Stephanie - We are staring into each others eyes now. There is movement, and it is coming from me. I am still kneeling on the floor, facing Julian who has shifted in her chair to face me. I take my right hand and place it over her heart. This is an unconscious action that suddenly becomes very conscious. I recall the heart to heart pose with Jim. It seems so long ago now. In one of the sketch classes. Walking Stick and Nirvana reminded me that we all serve a purpose in another's life. I reach for Julian's right hand and place it over my heart. Julian's body language is limp and she seems willing to let me take control. We continue to look into each others eyes.

"This message has a profound meaning. Jim went to Tapas, to do inner work. An owl can symbolize the duality of change. It depends on the cultural beliefs. Maybe this message was left behind for the both of you. Maybe you both have work left concerning your separation and reconciliation. Maybe, in reality, there are still issues you both face to release yourselves from past wounds. Maybe you haven't forgiven yourself enough to let go of guilt and shame? Or whatever it is that you identify within your thinking."

Okay, enough said. I just want to feel her now. Lord knows where that all came from. My two sisters must be nudging me.

Julian - Oh, now all of a sudden Stephanie is a sage. She doesn't have a clue what I am thinking or feeling right now. Wait slow down, why am I

resisting this connection of compassion. Gosh, I can go into some dark places with my thoughts. Okay Stephanie, I hear you. Yeah, what am I identifying with? Forgiveness, that is a good place to start. I wonder what she's thinking right now. Okay Julian get out of your head. Just connect, eye to eye. Her hand has warmed my chest and her eye contact has warmed my heart. Now I can feel her compassion. She doesn't even have to know what is triggering my reactions to this Rumi poem that struck me deeply. My pain and guilt wrapped around my abandonment issue. So I abandoned Jim and the family. And they did forgive me in such a way that all I felt was their sincere love and joy for having me back in their lives. So why am I still feeling the burden. Maybe I need to check out my history of and when I felt abandoned. Hummm, was it when the folks would disappear and let my older siblings take care of me? The baby sitter routine, if no one else was around. Feeling ignored? No mom and dad around for protection, communication, or to play games with? As I sink deep into the looking glass I get lost in thought and the tears come again. Even more than before when Stephanie found me in this state.

Stephanie - Yes, sister let the pain get washed away. At least that is what I am wishing for you right now. Praying for you. Dear God, heal this beautiful woman. My fellow sister. Stay with it Julian, stay with the pain now. Whoa, I can feel perspiration coming through her garment. She shifts her head and now I feel tears dripping onto my hand. I give her a slight squeeze to let her know I am here. Her head comes up, she is looking at me again. There's a smile starting? What? She is smiling, now. She releases her hand from my heart.

“Oh, Stephanie, thanks for just being here now. With me and my crazy mixed up mind.”

“It’s not mixed up, just mixed with thoughts and emotions.”

“I know what I have to do!”

I watch as Julian stuffs the poem into the bottle of Whiskey, puts on the cap. Get’s up from the table. Swipes her tearful face with her shirt sleeve, laughs out load and heads for the door. She kicks it open like a drunkin’ sailor kicking open the hatch that keep him cooped up at sea too long. I follow her out the door, what is she...

Julian - “Aghhhhh,” I let out a mighty grunt and heave the bottle as high and far as I can. I watch as it flies over the bush and meandering creek. It disappears from sight. And I hear a distant thud. I turn and there’s Stephanie now saying, “Go girl, yeah dissolve that shit once and for all!!”

Now we are both laughing, in hysterics. Loud and with an echo in this still night.

Bonk, “Hey, what was that?” It’s “poppa” Moose who’s was nibbling on a bush enjoying a late dinner. His eye catches the glimmer from the Whiskey bottle as it settled to the ground after knocking him on his large antler. With a shake of his head he utters to himself...” must be them party goers I sure hope they don’t ruin the neighborhood”

## Chapter 18: Community Meeting

There's a nice big conference table set up at one end of the Yellow Room. Frank and Maggie hauled it up from one of the storage sheds. It was left over from Maggie's days as a hedge funder broker. It's solid oak with plush chairs to go with it. Something you might see in a big old corporate board room. Frank has the grill going on the deck, people show up with dishes of food and desserts. Everybody is here, including Walking Stick. Julian, Joni, Sammie, Nirvana, Stephanie, Jerry, Deloris, Faye, Molly, Arthur, Sadie, Jenny and Frank. Maggie waits for the chatter to settle and looks over at Julian.

"Julian, I think you and Jim are supposed to be carrying the vision for this community. You want to set the stage?"

Julian - It sure would be nice if Jim was here. Gosh, where do I start? Maybe I reference the mystical gathering that Blue Cloud manifested. Or maybe, the ride with Frank when we looked for ideal private home sites. Hummm, maybe...

Jenny's soft tender voice breaks the silence, "How about we start this meeting with heart to heart connections. Connecting with each other's hands on hearts and eyeball to eyeball? The Stephanie and Jim pose, we all experienced, that one. Well, maybe you didn't Maggie, but it's part of the sculpture."

Wow, she's rescuing me. "That is a most beautiful suggestion Jenny. Thank you." I look around the table and there are a lot of smiles coming my way. I wipe my brow and we stand and move into the open end of the Yellow Room, amongst giggles, chuckles and Faye's loud laughter. It is a wonderful site to behold and to be part of. Unencumbered freedom to

touch and be with another person. I remember once about reading the act of white Tantra. Loving without the sexual context. Just pure innocent connection. It takes about a half hour and slowly, one by one we all take our seats.

“Wow,” I look around the table at each person, “thank you Jenny for that suggestion. Maybe we can do that at every meeting? Or maybe we can make that a sort of salutation when we meet, or when there is an indifferent energy between individuals. A way to connect and feel the other’s pain, or joy whatever it may be. Just feeling the other.”

Nirvana contributes, “we might even get to the point to recognize heart connection even without the salutation. Just knowing each others rhythm as we progress in community.”

“Okay, I have been guided as to the course of our first community meeting. I would like to do a sort of “check-in”. Let’s go around the table, anybody can start, and give us what you might be feeling. How has it been the first couple of weeks as a community member?”

There’s a shuffling of chairs and some bodily readjustments. I hope I haven’t put anybody on a hot seat, so to speak.

Maggie-I am and feeling so bold right now. I don’t care whatever judgements might come my way. Hell I am the one who offered my ranch to do this project, this experiment, is that how I want to look at it. Whoa, what is this demeanor I am witnessing. Come woman, humble yourself. I take a deep breath and offer myself as a sacrifice.

“Okay, I will start.” I look over at Walking Stick, then at the quaint flower arrangement. “The Sweet Grass, Indian Blanket flower and the Indian Paint Brush flower is Blue Clouds presence.” I take in a gulp of air, I feel my belly rise and collapse. “The first couple of times I meet Blue Cloud was without notice. We met at the Joseph/Bison part of the sculpture. He said this is where we will meet. He told me to sit down. And I did, a feeling of total submissiveness. I felt helpless, mesmerized as if in a trance. I obeyed him. The first couple of weeks I have felt regret, remorse and surrender. A surrender of ownership. Not only of the ranch, but also to my dominant ego self. So the other day, I went to the sculpture. I laid under the Bison and Josephs peering bronzed eyes. I closed my eyes and willed, demanded that Blue Cloud meet me now. I felt total control. I knew what I wanted to do. My need was to become grounded in our relationship. I had a perception of how I wanted it. I want the say so of how this is all to evolve. I opened my eyes and he was there, standing over me. At my feet. He was in total warrior regalia. Sparing you what transpired, I received his medicine and when I opened my eyes he left this bouquet on my chest.”

I look over at Walking Stick, then at each person. I feel my belly rising and falling as I gasp for some deep breathes. Not a word is spoken. Not a whisper, just stares. Okay, after what we just did, what am I receiving? Anybody connecting, feeling all of my emotions. Maybe I didn't share enough of my feelings?

“So right now Maggie, what do you own in your feeling world?” Ask Walking Stick, the Medicine Woman!

“Anxiety and shame for my seduction and telling you all about it. I also feel resentment and blame”

I think I have said enough. But this is the truth. I look over Faye's shoulder at the Buddha in the sunflower. All the years spent in meditation. Living the Buddhist way. This feels so much like my time spent with Tom Catton drying out. Overcoming my addiction. The Mindful Addict, that was Tom's story. All that resentment, blaming external situations. Not wanting to take responsibility for my internal state of mind. That was my story. I hang my head. Embarrassed, humbled to the zero denominator. I just want to leave, then I hear a soothing, mellow voice.

“Maggie, be easy on yourself. You shared with the utmost honesty. You are courageous to have told us all you did.” It was Nirvana, one of the Three Sisters, their task to nature us.

Julian is next to her, “thank you Maggie. I think you have just inspired us. This is the honesty it is going to take before we even think of the physical logistics in forming community. Today, let's focus on self. Anybody else want to share?”

So we went around the table. It was random shares. Whom ever felt like sharing. Maggie's share was deep. She went for it. Sadie had a request for more of her peer group to be invited. Her and Jenny being from a younger generation. Her biggest fear was being accepted for who she is, a feminist lesbian. Jenny came up with the idea of inviting woofers. Young people interested in exploring a small farm lifestyle. She suggested checking out [wwolf.org](http://wwolf.org) to help with the ranch chores. Jerry was appreciating rooming with Frank at the ranch house. A fellow Christian for support in his beliefs.

Joni was still caught in the web of romance and desire. Sammie was grateful for time spent with Joni as they both pursued massage therapy together. He was feeling the nurturing he was receiving from Joni, and shared how he was recognizing the love he could give another man through massage via healing touch. His thoughts were less on the physical desire to show love through sex. Molly was in a state of joy to be forming a relationship with Arthur. Both working on their art together while getting to know each other intimately and not just professionally. Frank was a bit confused about Maggie's dilemma. Deloris was pleased with her position as a garden consultant. She also shared some of her apprehension sharing a place with Faye. Even though they are the best of friends, living under the same roof had challenges for someone older and set in her ways. Faye dittoed Deloris and requested her own living space.

We began our feast. Frank had some elk steaks going on the grill. The pot luck dishes were set on the table and discussions filled the room. Maggie was staring out the window and looking at the sculpture. Walking Stick came up behind her and put an arm around Maggie's waist.

"Maggie, my dear sister. In our culture we have our role. You will never have control of the vision that Joseph set forth. It is our position as women to support our men. We must surrender our ownership of self to the man. You gave yourself to Blue Cloud. You took his medicine. And he received yours. That was no small act. I see that you are troubled by your action. It has put you in a state of suffering. You are an honorable woman. You are troubled because you wanted the power. You will not have the power of the Medicine Man unless he chooses to give it to you. The best thing you can do right now is to have grace."

There was a long moment of silence.

“Walking Stick, can a Medicine Man be married to a white woman, or will that tarnish his position in the tribe?”

But when Maggie turned to look at Walking Stick, she was already gone. She looked at the room full of people, but Walking Stick was not in the room. She was gone.

## Chapter 19: Returning from Tapas

Megan and I leave from the dorms in a vehicle that was supposed to have four of us sharing expenses to the airport. It turns out to be just the two of us on this flight, in the same cabin. Megan is sitting a couple of rows ahead of me but in the aisle across from mine. She's got an exit seat. The seat next to her has been empty and now we are racing down the runway. I like closing my eyes during take off and feeling the power of the plane. It is exhilarating for me. I pretend to be an astronaut in awe of the lift off into space. Once I sense that we have leveled off, I open my eyes and look around. People chatting, or reading, perhaps getting ready to watch a movie. Megan happens to turn in my direction and waves me over to her side of the deck. I excuse myself and mosey on over to her and sit.

“Hi, Megan,” I didn't know what else to say.

“Did you ever call Julian from Tapas?”

“I did, and she had quite a bit to say about the home front. It's another world apart from what we just went through.”

“I can imagine. I called Nirvana, and she said they had their first meeting. It was the start of forming community. Did Julian share anything with you?”

“She mentioned the sharing that affected her the most was Joni and Sammie’s simultaneous share.”

“I don’t know them, do you mind telling me thier story?”

“Well, briefly, Joni and I had meet 20 plus years ago at an interpersonal relationship workshop. Marian and I took it with two separate groups. The facilitators thought it best to keep us in separate workshops. Sammie is a gay man that had an infatuation towards me. They are both massage clients of mine and they were in the sketch class that I modeled for. Apparently Joni is recognizing that what comes up periodically is her wanting a relationship with me that’s more than friendship. She also knows that she does not want to interfere with the marriage I have with Julian. She wants Julian to be a friend and she wants Julian to disappear. She is still suffering in that regard. Yet, Julian see’s the wonderful relationship that Joni is having with Sammie. They are rooming in our house Sammie teaching Joni massage. They want to be community healers. Sammie is acknowledging Joni’s nurturing of Sammie’s desire body. Something they both have in common. And through the healing touch they are seeing how love, real love is transmitted to another human. The are sensing how sexual love is a passing pleasure. How it has become addictive in their lives and keeps them from experiencing the true joy of love. God love, which is compassion and feeling the other. That was Julian’s biggest take away from the first community meeting.”

“Wow, Jim, Nirvana said there were deeply felt, honest shares from the entire group. Similar to what we experienced at Tapas.”

“We sure did a lot of internal work. Did you...”

“I went through a lot of processing. Especially with addiction. I don’t need to get into the details, but early in my life as a teen and young adult I recalled what seemed like fun at the time, but how it was really canceling any real heart connection with whomever I was with. Instead of being a friend with people I might meet, I was selective and just felt safe with the crowd I was hanging out with. I always wanted to be part of a community but I had insecurities because the drugs shielded me from the external world around me. Does that make any sense to you?”

“It does and for me it’s also feeling secure with those closest to me. Once I felt brave enough to interrelate with others outside of those whom I was familiar with I discovered all sorts of fears. What will others think of me? Am I good enough for them? I’m so different I can’t relate to “that person”? I’d be comparing or judging, any emotion that would block me from connecting.”

Megan continues, “yeah, so here I am later in life and those samsara’s, is that what they called them at Tapas, are still haunting me. So I have my friends from Yoga, you being one of them. A few close friends that I relate to mostly on the surface. Then acquaintances from work. And what I found out at Tapas is that the comfort and security of my small world is robbing me of real connection. It’s like the addictive habit I had, a safe world of pretend. Pretending that I could relate in my altered state. When in fact I was disconnected from forming emotional relationships. You with me?”

“Yes, even now I see how my life was so internalized with my beliefs. Beliefs I created or absorbed as a norm. It became part of my character. We were definitely challenged to recognize the dichotomy of our thoughts. I see how those thoughts could be a wedge concerning trust. Trust of oneself and another.”

There’s a brief silence. Megan looks at me, “Jim do you mind if I lay my head on your shoulder?”

I take her hand, “no Megan, rest now. We have had a lot of personal transformation.”

“Thank you,” she whispers, “Jim, do you think this community you all are forming could handle another person?”

“I think you would fit right in. You certainly just did some prep work and we are now part of a Oneness Movement community!”

It’s late, we land in Seattle and have a long lay over into the early morning hours. We checkout our gate, it’s empty but at least we know where it is. We decide to look for a place to get breakfast. Eggs, bacon, potato, toast some missing elements from our Tapa breakfast. From a nice cleansing, healthy diet to piling on the protein. Hummm, another dichotomy, maybe. At least that’s what I am thinking, but it sure sounds good to me. And so here I am craving! Ugh, almost everything is closed this early or late whatever time it is. I am still experiencing the time zone changes and realizing the great place I like to be... space in time. A time zone with no schedules!

Megan, “over there.” She points, “looks like it’s open and it’s in a nice quiet zone of the airport.”

“This whole place is a quiet zone right now, Megan!”

“It won’t be for long. Come on, I’ll treat.”

We approach and the cook and server are talking to each other. They see us coming. The cook ducks into the kitchen, and the server straightens out her skirt. It looks like a nice place with dim lighting.

“Good morning, you’re open?” Magen ask.

“Yes, of course. We’ve been expecting you.”

I smile at that tongue in cheek comment. But you never know after what we just went through. Maybe she’s a divine being we are supposed to meet. We get seated and are handed menus. “Coffee? Tea?”

“Yes, coffee for me,” I look over at Megan. She smiles and nods yes. We look at each other and take a deep breath. What does Julian call it? A fire breathe to get the digestive organs going. I chuckle at the thought since most of the time I don’t think of my digestive organs until I am done eating. They let me know what they think about the food I consumed!”

“What’s the chuckle for, Jim?”

“Oh, nothing but while we were looking for a place to eat, all I thought of was what I wanted to eat. Period.”

“And I was wondering what you might have been thinking about. I guess we were still in the silent mode from Tapas.”

“Yeah, that was really something. How did you handle that?”

“Well, I did chat once in awhile. But for the most part I kept silent. I found that I had to work through my perceptions or first impressions of people even though they weren't talking to me. Then I would sometimes get smiles, or eye contact and some people would look away or keep their heads down so as not to be disturbed. I guess they needed to do that. So finally I settled into just absorbing their presence. Their aura around me. I would just try to feel energy flowing from one to the other. Then I thought how wonderful it will be to just be with someone for a short few seconds, before blurting out whatever comes to mind. I was enjoying the quiet connection. How about you?”

“The first time venturing out on campus I would give the Namaste salutation to the people that worked there. The Indies, that's how I described them in my head. I would get beautiful, instant smiles showing their white teeth such a brilliant contrast to their dark brown skin. They would give me a Namaste too. A terrific welcomed connection. So I did that to everyone that I would pass on the campus. There was such an exchange of joy. And if I wasn't handing out Namastes' I would smile and nod.”

The waitress comes over to our table with the coffee pot for topping off our cups. I notice that she is definitely Pakistani or Hindu. Which is it? So I decide to mumble Namaste with a smile. I mean, geez whenever I say it I smile unconditionally! I bow to the light within you. How can you not love saying that? So I get this big smile with perfect white teeth contrasting her

beautiful brown skin. And she puts down the pot and gives me the prayer pose and says, "Namaste." Wow, yes! I look over at Megan who is sipping her coffee. And with the sweetest smile and a diminutive voice with a Hindu accent she says, "Are you ready for your oatmeal?"

Megan turns her head, spits out her sip of coffee and breaks out in hysterical laughter!

The waitress looks at me, shrugs her shoulders, gives me the Indie left to right nod which means okay, or yes, whatever. And I must have the most awe struck, disappointed look because she responds with the utmost sincerity, "at this hour, all we have is oatmeal. A type of porridge. It's very good with some butter and honey. Not bad for your health either."

Now I'm laughing, Megan is pointing at me, still in hysterics and the waitress says, "you two have some kind of craving mara going on? You wanted eggs and bacon?"

We are shaking our heads up and down YES! Now I am in hysterics, too.

"I am Symithaji, your waitress. Just so you know, I am the only one here at this hour. The cook left, his shift was over. All we have is oats. Good for your health."

Megan and I are starting to settle down. Now we are deep breathing between chuckles and wiping our eyes. Finally, Megan looks at Symithaji and says, "sorry, we are not laughing at you. It's just that we have come from India and, well we were looking forward to an American breakfast. Oats will be fantastic. If you have any bananas we'll take a couple of those

too. With honey and some milk. I will clean up the floor. I can follow you to the kitchen and perhaps you can give me the mop.”

Symithaji looks at us, pretty serious now, and says, “so you two just came back from Tapas. And I’ll bet your mara’s are going wild.” She turns and heads to the kitchen.

Megan turns to look at me with mouth wide open, she abruptly turns her head to look at Symithaji. Back to me. She gets up and goes to the kitchen and comes back with a mop. I just observe her as she starts to mop. Not only the small spill, nope Megan doesn’t stop there she is mopping the entire area of the restaurant. As she passes me I say her name, “Megan”. The only response is a look of anxiety. And she continues to mop. The long tangled bundle of mop going in a figure eight flow. Back and forth. Symithaji is coming with a tray of oatmeal, butter and honey. Two more fresh coffees. As she walks by Megan I notice there is an exchange without sound. Megan rest the mop handle against a table and follows Symithaji to our table. Okay, I decide to stay silent too. This coincidence or is it synchronicity, is the mystery part of the current way I am living my life. I don’t need confirmation of this interaction. I plan to enjoy my porridge and coffee. OH my there is a banana, too! Symithaji sets everything on the table and I give her my best Namaste. I receive her beautiful smile and a whisper of Namaste. She departs and I watch as she grabs the mop and disappears into the kitchen. Megan has her head down, eating in silence. We finish, leave the money on the table and exit the restaurant without ever seeing Symithaji again.

“Megan, if you want to be part of the community you will have to embrace the mystery for what it is.”

“You mean the ranch community or the Oneness Movement?”

“The mystery of life, to use a cliché.”

Megan - I have had a pretty routine life up until now. This whole Tapa experience just keeps on surprising me. It did not stop once the event was over. I'm not sure if Jim noticed how my mopping motion was the figure eight flow. Gosh, when I went to get the mop Symithaji was nowhere to be seen in the kitchen. I wasn't sure anymore if this was a waking dream or what. All I could think of at that moment was to clean up my mess. I started to identify with my position in life. Comparing it to the cook, and Symithaji and all the workers at Tapas. The cleaning ladies, the cooks, the servers, the women who dragged long heavy fire hoses, I called them the water ladies. The women who cleared weeds and dug trenches with the two foot long hoes. Crouched over thier work, with diligence. The security guards, bus drivers, the guy slicing coconuts with a machete and selling coconut juice. All for my benefit. And I laughed at the mention of oats and porridge being good for my health? And I made a mess because of what? Was it the irony or was it synchronistic coincidence to have me appreciate the beauty of our position to serve the whole of life!

I shared this all with Jim and bless his heart for at this very moment I am listening to what he is saying.

“Megan, stop, look back from where we just came.”

I turn my head and notice that the lights are out at the restaurant. The closed sign is up. I cock my head and look at Jim with a furrowed brow.

“So if we think this space in time was a mystery, wait until you meet Blue Cloud and Walking Stick who are the reigning Medicine Man and Woman. A position they inherited from Joseph who is on his final Vision Quest as an elder.”

“Nirvana told me a little about her transition into community.”

“It’s only three in the morning. How about finding a place near our gate. Kind of off the beaten path. And just watch this airport wake up to a new day?”

“Sure, just observe? Is that what you’re thinking?”

“Yeah, over there. Looks like a nice couch area. Behind that paneled wall with the metal art of the whale. Looks like a nice out of the way spot.”

We meander over there and pick out our seats with a view of the terminal. We are settled in and have a good view of the main thoroughfare. We close our eyes and just take several deep slow breaths. Now we are just silent just being present. There’s some noise off to the left and behind us. It’s a big floor scrubber with a man riding it like a small sit down lawn mower. It passes by us and disappears in the distance. There is someone, a man with a walkie talkie. It looks ancient. He stops and is looking at one of the airline gates, talking on his apparatus. He turns and follows in the direction of the floor scrubber, away from us.

There’s a long silence. Megan has her eyes closed and is sitting cross legged in a meditation pose. I observe her chest and belly movement. It is

slow and calculated. After awhile meditation tends to slow the heart rate. I close my eyes and do the same. There is a stillness now. This present moment is void of all thought just a still mind.

# BE STILL

“I’ll bet you wish Julian was here with you right now.” It’s Megan. “Is that true do you want Julian here right now? Jim?”

## BE STILL

“I am with you right now Megan. That’s all that matters. What time is it? How long have we been gone?”

“It’s four thirty.”

There is a golf cart coming towards us. It has a crew in it. Stewards and stewardess along with the flight crew captain. The activity has picked up. A slew of people heading towards an early flight. The shops are starting to open up. An airport worker sits in one of the couch chairs next to Megan. We nod as a greeting. I say, “good morning.” He responds with another

nod. Then two more workers, same uniform, show up and sit on the couch across from Megan and the other worker.

“Good morning, Pete” one of the workers says.

“Mornin’ Scarlet and Davy,” Pete responds.

The guy I saw earlier with the walkie talkie shows up, “you all slackin’ on me already?”

There’s a few grunts and chuckles. Scarlet responds, “we ain’t no slacker like Josephine! What you gonna do about her, Joseph?”

“Ah, you know, the union rules it’s hard to get her fired. I just hope she’s half way sober today.”

Joseph ask Pete, “How’d your night go Pete, my man? You look tired.”

“Huh, worked last shift at Home Depot, yeah I could use some java, man.”

I decided to ask, “excuse me, are we in an employee lounge area?”

It’s Joseph who responds, “no, you two are alright. I seen you earlier. You must be coming from India or Asia with this long lay over. No, we meet here every morning filing our complaints from yesterday, before the new ones of today arrive.”

I chuckle, “that’s an interesting way to put it. Anticipating another day of something to complain about.”

Everyone is kind of chuckling, Joseph says, “ ahh it ain’t that bad at least we have a job, pays the bills. What about you folks, you married.”

Megan's turn, "no not married and yes we just spent four weeks in India at a retreat. I guess you can call it that. An enlightenment workshop."

"Oh, yeah. What was that about?" ask Pete.

"Well, best explanation I have is we did a bunch of inner work, looked at what we tend to complain about." She laughs at her personal joke.

"Actually, we looked at the different ways our mind just keeps feeding us input from all that we are influenced by. The news, peoples perception, family or generational influences, habits, all the above and then some."

"Woo, sounds like therapy, you could use some of that eh, Joe," ask Davey.

They all chuckle but their body language is serious. It's as if Megan made a real connection that has them contemplating.

Joseph pipes in, "hey we better get going or boss man will be calling me soon." He waves the walkie talkie.

I clear my throat, "ah hum, ah we, Megan and I went through an event where we got blessed to give what is call Deeksha. It's a blessing we can give to others too. I wonder if you all would like to get a blessing to start your day. From Megan and me. It will be an honor and a way to stay connected with you today."

Davey says, "in my religion women don't give blessings."

"Come on Davey," Scarlet says, "don't be rude." She looks at me, "he could give you a blessing."

Pete ask, " so what's involved?"

Megan, “what we’ll do is say a mantra that means You are me, I am you and we are one. Consider us as friends that just want to see the most benevolent outcome for you throughout the day. After we say the mantra we’ll stand in front of you and place our hands on your heads for about 10 seconds. What do you think?”

“Ok, I’m in,” says Joseph. And the others nod yes. And so we do it. So beautiful and what an experience for me to connect with these people I never met but I can relate to their position in life.

We complete the process, Megan takes Pete and Scarlet and I do Davey and Joseph.

Pete has the first response, “man, I felt some heat on my head.”

Scarlet, “I feel peace.”

Davey, “I felt gratitude to be recognized as a special human being!”

Joseph looks at me with his dark brown eyes and a smile on his face, “I feel like I know you man. Thanks. We gotta get going.”

And they get up to leave we embrace each of them with hugs of friendship.

Joseph whispers in my ear, “You take care of yourself, Jim.” He turns abruptly and leaves.

Jim - Wait awhile, how did he know my name? The mystery of life continues. It can’t be the Joseph I know as the medicine man! Maybe he checked with security since we were the only ones here so early in the morning. And our flight went through the middle east. I think I will leave it at that, but on the other hand, you never know.

Megan is looking at me as if she has seen a ghost, “Jim, you’re looking a little flushed. You alright brother?”

“ We I’m not sure what just happened, but Joseph knew my name! His brown eyes looked so much like Joseph the Medicine Man, who asked Julian and I to form community. I can’t help but think of how it will be when I get back home. At Tapas, there were so many times when my thoughts were in the past or future. There were so many personal challenges at Tapas. The mind was probably my biggest challenge. Finally, as the time was ending, I had a sense of what enlightenment meant. So I have been focused on being aware of what is present, witnessing it. Even the sensations how they build into emotions. What about you Megan? How do you deal with awareness and witnessing your emotions?”

“What I finally did was visualize an EKG graph that you see on a heart monitor. There is the flat line, then you see the up and down lines that vary. Sometimes it’s above the flat line then below all at varying heights depending on the strength of the heart beat. So what I visualize is that the above movement is the beautiful state and below is the suffering state. The line is always intersecting the flat line. That intersection is the calm state. And if the heart stops and flatlines that’s the state of bliss or unperturbed calm.”

“So your state of bliss or unperturbed calm is the sign of death?”

“Death of the ego.”

“I like that Megan, let’s go to our gate. It’s time to go home.”

## Chapter 20: Julian

Today is seasonally warm and a good day to finish the winter preparation of the garden beds outside and bring the late plantings into the winter greenhouse. It amazes me how much Deloris and Faye can still do physically as gardeners. They are so dedicated to our Earth Mother. The forgotten Mother of us all. The universal Mother is how I view this wonderful planet. In Her silent way she has shown me a way to nurture my soul and Her soul. I'm observing my servitude to this small space of earth that produces so much in it's entirety. I have so much gratitude for Deloris and Faye's contribution to this effort to care for our true mother the giver of all life. It is so easy to abandon Her. To go to toil in creating a life that is so complicated. I look over at Faye as she shovels out the results of our compost heap. Filling the wheel barrel with dark, moist earth. All the food waste and garden waste becoming nourishment for the beds. There's Deloris raking leaves and she appears to be talking to the fruit trees and even the Aspens and Russian Olives. The snowbirds fluttering and diving to the ground to find seed to eat. They scatter to the fence line as Deloris approaches. I hear her say, "you stay right there, I'll be finished raking this area and you come back and find the seeds. Oh, by the way thank you for your droppings, you've help create our wild garden." I stop what I am doing and continue to watch as she gently fingers the tips of the cherry tree. And I listen, "oh look at you, all this new growth you managed this year. Ummm, yes you will have more cherries to give us next season. Thank you little one, you continue to grow and have so much to give. I never thought your sour cherry could taste so sweet. I am amazed how you can

produce in this climate, a fruit to eat. So different from your cousins up there in the Flathead Valley.”

I am beyond gratitude now as I continue to transplant some of the Swiss chard and Kale plants into containers to transfer to the greenhouse. I start to tear up as my emotions want to visit my issue with abandonment. I have to chuckle and whisper to the plants, “well, I am not abandoning you, you will have a nice warm shelter this winter, you young ones that still have life left to give.” I don’t know how much time has passed. Not much, but I am touched by two hands one on each shoulder. I am amazed to find myself in a kneeling position, head bowed down as if I am looking at my heart. I look up to my right and I see Deloris’s tender smile through the rivulets of tears. I turn to my left and see Faye’s wry smile obscured by a new flow of tears.

“Up with you my dear,” it’s Faye giving me a squeeze on my shoulder. I feel both of them tugging and guiding me to the bench under the Russian Olive. We sit and view the garden. Beds covered with straw waiting for the winter snow to insulate the ground beneath.

“Julian, we feel your pain. What you shared the other night at our meeting. We knew about the abandonment issue you have with Jim and your children.” I listen to Deloris’s voice.

Then Faye remarks, “and there could be generational wounds that go beyond your childhood. And of course that rascal Jim, my word, letting you get stuck with motherhood while he does his business.”

Deloris reaches around me and gives Faye a poke in the ribs. I get the humor, we all have a quiet laugh.

“Okay, Faye, I get it. My self pity is the reality of my state of mind.”

Faye continues, “look at the beautiful dirt we made as we fed the heap of waste with more waste. Then left it to do what it had too, to form rich soil full of nutrients. We abandoned the compost and it gave back beautifully.”

Deloris makes her statement, “the Cherry tree with all its’ new growth this year, and we didn’t do a thing to it. Left it all alone. Gosh this is the first time I acknowledged it all year.”

I chuckle, “okay ladies, I love you for these insightful references. Yeah, amazing that I am still going to a dark place of blame and shame of myself. Even after my children showered me with love upon my return. And my steadfast husband gave me the perspective of our personal growth while we were separated. And gosh, where is my gratitude? Wrapped up in self pity. Poor me?” I look at them both smiling now. “Okay, tickle my ribs until I fall off this bench in hysterics.”

And that’s what they do and sure enough I find myself laying on the ground looking at their laughing faces with mischievous smiles, through my tears of joy.

“I’m going to just lay here for awhile ladies, if you don’t mind. I’ll finish the transplants in a little bit.

“It’s time for us to go Julian. It’s been a nice afternoon spent in the garden with you.” Deloris has so much grace. I give them a smile and gently close my eyes.

I want to be with my family now. I just let faces with smiles enter my thoughts, George, Dillion, Susie, and my dear Jim. Blue skies, sunshine,

grass and a flowing river. Rafts, inner tubes, laughter, and a warm breeze. A river island with a beach provides a place to bring out the food and lay on the warm river sand. We dip in the cool water, splash each other and enjoy the pleasant fun of just being with each other. I drift into all of the good times together. Fond memories and lots of love vibes. I pray for all of us to stay united forever, somehow unforgettable. I pray for our blood line to stay strong and for the abundance of wisdom for each one of us. I send out a blessing and drift towards a slumber. I hear a voice in the distance...

“Julian? Julian, sorry to disturb you but...”

I open one eye at a time. It's Sadie and Jenny. I smile and hold out my arms for them to pull me up into a sitting position. “Hello you two beautiful women!”

They look at each other and shrug their shoulders then look back at me and smile.

Sadie, “you sure looked blissed out, Julian. Where you dreaming?”

I giggle, “well sort of. Humm, I have been dealing with an issue. Abandonment, how I left my family, and the circumstance that might have been the influence to make me flee. I have been dealing with it as a sin, as fate and as chance. Why did I do it? It's been a recurring event that creeps into my thoughts and wreaks havoc. And just now, awhile ago after being with Deloris and Faye and listening to their wisdom, I lie down, closed my eyes and visualized a good time with my family.”

Jenny is smiling, “how wonderful, that can be a strategy you can use whenever the dark thoughts want to creep in.”

“Ha, thanks Jenny. I like that idea. A strategy next time the recurring event pokes its’ ugly head into my business!”

“Speaking about business, we’d like to talk to you about something.”

I look at Sadie, “here. Help me up, there’s two more beds to prep before winter. We can talk while we work.”

They grab my arms again and lift me to my feet. “Jenny, how about bringing some leaves over there, the two beds under the Teepee frame is what needs to be done. Sadie, if you want to grab the hori-hori’s and that bag of chicken manure, I’ll get some compost and we’ll meet at the Teepee.”

We are all settled in, on our knees bent over the plots digging weeds out with our hori-hori multi purpose tools. At the same time we are gently tilling the soil without turning it.

Sadie starts the conversation, “Julian, we like the idea of being in this community venture. But we are the youngest and also lesbian. When we shared, you heard me request some younger people get an opportunity to join the community. Have you given anymore thought to my request?”

“I did mention about the Wwoof program. So I started a membership as a host. There’s no guarantees that people will join the community. But it’s a place that we can reach out to a younger group.”

“I like that idea, what would make anybody want to consider being part of community?” ask, Jenny.

“This plot is looking pretty good lets top dress it. Jenny why don't you put down a layer of leaves first. About six to eight inches should be good. Back to your question, maybe you two can write a narrative for our hosting bio that is about community. I don't think you can use the bio as a recruiting tool. But you can at least mention the name of our community.”

“We don't have a community name yet. Maybe we need to bring that up at our next meeting?”

Sadie, “Julian, what do you think about us. As lovers, lesbians, feminist?”

“First off, why do you ask? Secondly, you offered up three identities of who you are. I wonder Jenny, do you put yourself in the same categories?”

Sadie, with a furrowed brow, responds “I want to feel free to be who I want to be. Especially since everybody is from another generation. Maybe, there are some judgements or resentment from others that I am unaware of.”

“No matter what crowd you are with there will be people who have an opinion about your lifestyle. Especially since you want to pontificate about it sometimes.”

“Pontificate! I didn't expect that kind of response. Is that something Jim shared with you about me?”

“No, he actually likes your feisty personality. He enjoys your bantering with him. I don't really know you that well. Forgive me for having that judgement. Funny how a thought will cross my mind and I will say it before pausing and respond in a friendlier way. I accept you as a young woman, making choices with your life. Who knows how and if those choices will

change. But that's what you will find out during your lifetime. For me you are just Sadie. Someone that I want to get to know. And maybe you will give me wisdom of what feminism means, to you. And wisdom about what it means to be a lesbian. And wisdom of how to love another woman."

With mouth wide open, Sadie ask, "what goes on top of the leaves?"

Julian smiles, "the compost in the wheel barrel. Spread it out over the leaves. Then some chicken manure over that."

Jenny ask, "looks like you have been putting straw over it all. What will that do?"

"It will help insulate through the winter and hold moisture in the early spring. It also keeps the wind from blowing away the top soil. Hopefully, by the time we are ready to plant we can just move the straw aside, plant then use the straw as mulch. So, Jenny what about you and what you identify with?"

"Okay, let's see, okay,"

I can feel Jenny's discomfort, maybe some anxiety. She's gathering her thoughts, but she is a rather private person. What Jim told me and what I experienced so far is Jenny's sincere desire for connection. Her heart to heart salutation. I wait.

"I love because I can feel compassion. Love as sex is pleasure. Loving Sadie fulfills both of those sensations. As for being a lesbian, I do not identify with that label. That's something that some activist coined to describe a persona. Being a feminist doesn't mean that I am equal to a man, physically or mentally. All I desire is that we learn to live together no matter

what our gender is. Men have a feminine side and woman a masculine side. So what is there to prove. The best we can do is honor each other as a human being. Be aware of the two hemispheres we each have and connect.”

Sadie is taking it all in. Staring at Jenny. She looks at me. “That’s what I love about Jenny. Her perspectives serve me in a big way. More than you know Jenny. I feel that I have latched onto these identities, as you call them, and aim to become them. Along the way I have lost who I really am.”

“Well our work is done here. I wonder if we gave any consideration to this earth mother that provides our substance for health?”

We look at each other, then slowly turn our heads to the garden beds.

Jenny starts a prayer...

Oh Mother Earth, I bow to thee.

Your soil replenishes me.

Sadie adds...

May I care for it as you care for me.

May I be always grateful for what you have to give.

I chip in...

May we serve the community with your abundance.

May we serve for your healing.

We look at each other and Jenny reaches for a heart. Then the three of us are entwined in the heart salutation. Hands on each others chest. There are tears sliding down our cheeks and soft smiles on our faces. Our eyes glisten in the last of the sun rays that hit our faces. The ray of light that rips through the clouds is a spotlight on our beings. We look up to the heavens where it is coming from and scream HERE OH UNIVERSE I AM GRATEFUL.

The three of us make it back to the “ranch central”, arm in arm singing gleefully anything that comes to mind. I spot Faye and Deloris on their way to the “dude” ranch restaurant. Faye does a little jig.

Finally we slow down and have a good silly laugh. Our eyes are twinkling and we do a group hug. I feel so good and released from the burden I have been holding in my heart. Abandonment, not a friendly state to be in. I thank Sadie and Jenny for their time working in the garden and for just being who they are in “real time”.

I am heading back to my cabin when I run into Frank.

“Hello Darlin. Are you done with your work for today?”

“Yes , Frank. I had a beautiful day in the garden. How about you?”

“Yep, a good day. I’ve been working with Jerry. He’s going to be a good ranch hand. And we have been talking a lot. He is sharing more one on one than he ever did in the men’s group. He’s been through a lot and is hanging on to some old patterns that don’t serve him, and definitely won’t serve the community. It’s been good for me too, to have a Christian brother.”

“We have a very interesting mix of belief systems concerning spirituality. I wonder how that will all play out. Hopefully we don’t end up in conflict because of beliefs.”

“I sure don’t have any comment about that at this time, Julian. How about hiking up to Maggie’s with me. We still have enough day light to get up and down.”

“Okay, why Maggie’s? How about the lower trail that swings around the knob.?”

“Something is telling me we need to check in with Maggie. She’s by herself up there and after what she shared at our meeting the other night. I don’t know. It would be nice for a woman’s perspective if she needs it.”

I notice that we are already close to the trail head that leads up to her cabin. I look up at Frank and give him a nod. “Okay, if you don’t mind I’d like some quiet time to start with. Jim and Megan are flying back from their Tapa journey. I want to be with them for awhile. I want to send Jim some love energy, if you know what I mean. I miss him, it’s been four weeks.”

“I hear you Julian.”

And so we start up the path. Somehow I feel that I experienced Tapas with Jim. Just being here, and knowing the connection we have. Our depth goes beyond the external these days. I sense that whatever he has processed during his time at Tapas, some of it was centered around our relationship too. He did mention a couple of times when he was aware of how we interact because of learned behavior from our generational tribe. That’s

what he called his family, a tribe. Crazy dude, but yeah, my big family upbringing felt tribal.

## Chapter 21: Maggie's Dilemma

There he is, at our meeting spot. I expected him to return. Especially since Walking Stick took me aside at the community meeting. Okay, breathe deep and slow Maggie. I am feeling some anxiety. How will this work out? What ever lead me to do such a thing. Thinking I would have power over Blue Cloud.

I slowly walk out towards the sculpture. He turns his head and those dark brown eyes begin to mesmerize me agin. I will myself to be rational. I cautiously approach Blue Cloud. He is in jeans and a nice beige button down shirt, His hair pulled back and a band around his head, holding his long dark hair in place.

“Hello Maggie, thank you for knowing I am here. And thank you for honoring my request to always meet here.”

“Why here Blue Cloud, wouldn't it be warmer and more comfortable inside my house?”

“This Bison represents abundance of all life. Its' broad shoulders carry the burden of those it serves. And Joseph carried the vision and passed it onto me.”

“The last time, when I gave myself to you, I was wanting the power. I fooled my self thinking I was a Goddess who could have my will enforced.”

“And do you still think that?”

“No, I saw how twisted that thinking was. I must tell you, that I felt your mesmerizing presence. I had a sense of surrendering to you, to your will. Especially after you talked to me about ownership of this land.”

“Maggie, there are Medicine Men who learned their trade by lessons taught. Then there are Medicine Men who observe their mentor and become intuitive like nature and the animals. I am of the later. I am here as a nurturer. I heal through the organic process.”

“When I received your medicine, and opened my eyes, you had disappeared, like a thief in the night. And you left that small bundle of flowers on my chest. What happened there? Please explain.”

“I left you with the power to heal yourself. I am a healer and used energy to help you balance mind and body. It is up to you to discover who you are. The flowers appeared in the grass. Late to bloom, this time of year. I saw them as a gift of nature and they were a gift to heal your heart.”

“I shared with the group our encounter. I felt shame, and resentment. Please forgive me.”

“I did not mean to dishonor you. It was you who wanted a physical connection thinking that would ground you or should I say balance your mind and body. We exchanged medicine. I felt your pain then I felt your sweet surrender. And now I feel your love. Maggie, know this, my blood line who once roamed this free land, will return. It is part of Joseph's vision. It is a vision of oneness despite differences. That is why this group must make

living together work, despite their differences. They must make their different dynamics work as one. And that oneness must grow.”

“So my power is ownership of this land. And I must surrender my sense of ownership and not think I can control of what is to come.”

“Your surrender is the surrender of ego. Your sense of ownership will be like the Buddhist way that you follow. All the Buddha owns is his destiny. His destiny is detachment.”

We stare at each other. I see Blue Cloud like I never saw him before. I feel his young wisdom. I feel his strength in his beliefs. I feel nurtured by his presence. I slowly bow my head, then raise it. I give him one last glance, turn and walk back to my home. I do not look back. I open the door of the Yellow Room, arrange a pillow and sit cross legged and stare at my Buddha in the sunflower. I go into meditation and process what has just occurred. I sense that my life is about to change in a transformative and physical way. I still feel Blue Clouds medicine. I feel Buddha’s detachment of the material world. I wonder if I can make it last. And I realize that I will need to do a daily ritual that clears the chakras, to balance my body and mind.

It is a while later, when I hear a knock at the door. I am not sure how long I have been in meditation. I have a surreal feeling, dream like. I slowly get up and go to answer the second knocking on the door. I crack it open and see Frank and Julian with looks of concern. I think that’s the energy I feel. I am glued to the spot I occupy with the door still cracked open when I hear Frank’s voice ask, “Maggie, you gonna let us in?”

I give my head a little shake and open the door. "Sorry, I was in deep meditation."

"You had us worried for awhile, you alright Maggie?"

Frank, "can we sit for a bit and chat. Julian and I just hiked up the trail. We wanted to check in with you. Especially after the first meeting. You shared some personal concerns. I guess that's the word to best describe what you talked about."

Julian, "yeah...and there was some personal emotions too. You and Blue Cloud? I don't mean to pry, it's none of my business."

"Oh Frank and Julian, thank you for coming up here. I saw him again, at our meeting place. By the bison and Joseph sculpture. This ranch is going to change way different than I imagined. They are coming."

"Who, Maggie, who are coming?"

"Blue Clouds' clan. His ancestors occupied this area long ago. We discussed the perception of ownership. My will to control. I saw my vulnerabilities emerge in a big way. My odd way of using seduction to connect with Blue Cloud was not a seduction for pleasure. It was for power. And there was no power to be had. Instead I received wisdom. Once I could get past my folly, I meditated on what he said to me. Now I am able to grasp what is happening for my ultimate benefit. Look at this card I just opened in the mail. After I saw Blue Cloud again. He told me to be with my Buddha. I just finished meditating. And, well...here Julian you read it."

## The Sacred

In the mountain I felt it

But in the climbing I lost it

In the animals I felt it

But as I farmed I lost it

In the water I felt it

So I swam and I lost it

In people I felt it

So I made them mine and I lost it

In the sky I felt it

But in learning about the stars I lost it

Whenever I felt it I tried to hold it

In the trying to hold I lost it

In thought if I held it I could keep it

So I clung on but couldn't feel it anymore

Jake Wilson

Frank - Here I am with these two beautiful women, and Bertha on my mind. My relationship with Julian whom I anticipated as my lover to ease my pain of my loss of Bertha. And Maggie, whom I have worked for so long. Managing this ranch, the dynamics of which is about to change. Maggie,

someone to cling to in the future. She was going to be my woman in the future, was what I wanted to muse about. And then she shares her sweet surrender to Blue Cloud, for all to witness. Here comes my emotion that I can not hide any longer.

Julian - I look over at Frank with his head slightly bowed forward. I see a drip of tear hit the floor in front of him. I turn to Maggie and I know she is noticing the same. There is a long silence before I ask, "Frank?" That's all I have to say and he weeps. This big, burly, muscular man is gently crying. Maggie moves closer and slowly, very slowly she wraps an arm around me and we both gather in Frank for a soulful hug of letting go. Detachment, that's what all the masters teach, from Jesus to Krishna, and Zen and Buddha and all the others. Detachment from the material world is such a dichotomy when we are so connected with each other. I don't understand the why, but I get the meaning. "So I clung on but I couldn't feel it anymore" is such a disconnect to the feeling world. What can it possibly be like to just be aware and witness feelings and then to move onto the next moment of what? Feeling again, connecting again and then not having a past identity with the past? "Frank, I am forever connected with you. I love you for who you are. You can cling to me and trust that you have a friend."

Maggie - Now I know why Blue Cloud surrendered to my need. Even as my motive was wrong, he gave his medicine so I could witness this very perception that the author of this poem wrote. The language of this poetic prose is a language I understand. I felt Blue Cloud as if in a dream. A woman mesmerized and in a trance and then I lost it. "Frank, I feel your pain, feel my love and cling to it until you lose it. Let your tears mix with ours. And let all our tears be tears of joy and not loss. We are connected

forever so there is nothing to lose now. Just the sensation of the emotion until the next, and the next and the next emotion surfaces. Then there is no more just what is. The presence of it all.”

## Chapter 22: Meeting the Tapasvi's

Julian and Nirvana are to pick us up at the Gallatin Yellowstone International Airport. It's been a long journey home. And not just because of the two day flight. So many memories that we didn't leave in India. And so much that we did leave there. Inner work can be exhaustingly gratifying if you are not in denial.

We have landed and taxiing to the “off ramp” gate. “How you doing Megan? You had a pretty good sleep on this last leg of the flight.”

“Yes, I was finally exhausted. My mind finally settled into that serene space of calm. What about you Jim?”

“It's going to be good to get two feet on the ground and be home!”

As we descend down the escalator we spot Nirvana and Julian waving with big natural smiles of joy. Suddenly, without a word said I am embraced by Julian's loving arms. And a warm long kiss. The kiss I have been longing for. I whisper into her ear, “surround me with your boundless love”. I must have said that loud enough for Nirvana to hear. As she says, “we all have boundless love for you, come here you.” And I get greeted with her big hug too. Megan is giggling as she is embraced by Julian and the we are all in one beautiful group hug, just looking in each others eyes, giggling, chuckling and laughing. A “sea of joy”!

We grab our baggage and head on out. I notice early snow has settled in the higher elevation.

Meanwhile back at the ranch ...

Maggie is feeling a sense of calm and understanding. It seems so simple in thought, just to be detached. Yet, it is not a learned behavior until it is. So much of the emotional aspect of self to overcome. Getting clarity sure helped.

Maggie - I am waiting for the water to finish boiling for some tea. I decide to have a glimpse of the early night sky. It's so calm out now. I walk out on the deck and hear some light drumming and chanting. I turn in the direction of the sounds and notice a fire lighting up part of the sculpture. Of course, it's by the Bison, he is here! At our meeting spot. I smile now, and whisper "go figure" to myself. But right now I feel so sure of myself even though I do not know what my destiny will be starting from right now. I am appreciating my new found confidence that my relationship with Blue Cloud will not be so daunting. I go back inside and put on a coat and hat. The early winter chill is definitely in the air. A funny thought runs through my mind, marshmallows, I wonder if Native Americans roast marshmallows at the camp fire? I have a personal chortle over the thought. I head down to our meeting place. I am actually looking forward to this meeting.

As I approach, ever so silently, I stop to just observe Blue Cloud as he sits, watching the flames. Hummm, all of a sudden I feel a tightness in my belly. I breathe deep. Then I hear a voice.

“Good evening Maggie, or should I call you the great Mother who owns this land. Let’s see, that would be Mother Earth Feather!”

“Is that your sarcasm? And what’s with the feather part?”

“Your sensuous touch is like a feather. It’s like the warm summer breeze that flows over the grass as I lay waiting for you.”

“Ah, are you...?”

“Just picking out a name for you. Mother Earth Feather. Do you happen to have any marshmallows in your house?”

“Marshmallows! You want marshmallows?!”

“Please if you have some. I will whittle us some pointed sticks, while you go get them. If you have some, Mother Earth Feather.”

This is crazy, and humorous. The boy in him is coming out. God, I can’t help but wonder where this is going. Okay, I will be a good little girl and fetch the marshmallows. So I nod and start up back to the house. What am I being tested on? That is the most positive question I can ask myself. Otherwise, I am feeling manipulated and violated by my own doing. So on one hand I am thinking that this is a grand lesson just like the Buddha had to learn. On the other hand I am angry at myself for letting this charade play out. Hold on there Maggie, what did you share with the group. All these mixed emotions just keep surfacing and I lose what is present. The

playfulness of Blue Cloud's humor. And his little boy desire for a pleasurable comfort food. And me, yeah, this whole scene is, all of a sudden, feeling romantic. I let out a loud laugh, followed by a scream and run the last 50 feet to the house. I am amused, and having fun. Tonight is different. Our special meeting place, ahhh!! I know right where I hide the marshmallows. I open the cupboard and reach behind the big pot I never use, grab the bag and fly out of the house and jog down the sloped meadow and jump around the Bison sculpture and land abruptly to the left of Blue Cloud. I see that I startled him, then he quickly gathers himself and smiles. The smile radiates as I jiggle the bag in front of him. He gingerly grabs my wrist and pulls me down to him. He is strong but gentle. And now we gaze at each other. But instead of the kiss I was expecting, he produces two sharpened stick ends and with a glittering smile says, "here Maggie, this one I carved especially for you. Your name is inscribed on the stick."

I look and I read the inscription out loud, "Mother Earth Feather."

"So, you weren't joking before. Are you giving me a name?"

He is serious now, "Yes, Maggie. If you chose to be known by that name in my presence I will be honored."

He slowly pushes two marshmallows on my stick and then his. He nods towards the fire and we are roasting them to our personal liking. I am still processing what has just occurred. Blue Cloud holds his silence.

"Blue Cloud, so far I have done everything you have asked of me. In my past I have been in control of my environment. Now I am starting to let go of

my ego state. That is the simplest way I can describe it. It has not been easy. As much as you have relied on me I have resisted. To the point where I used sex as power. There was nothing about me being a “sensuous breeze as you lay in the grass” the last time we meet. And yet you will be honored if I take the name Mother Earth Feather. Why?”

“I see good in you. I hear your honesty. I trust your actions on behalf of this group and Joseph’s vision. I would not have given you my medicine if it was otherwise. I am an honorable man. I felt your confusion and determination to want to be one with me. If it is not true say so now.”

I am speechless. He takes the marshmallows away from the fire and blows the flames out of both our treats. He sets them aside. I watch the slow precise movements of Blue Cloud. Then I speak, “I am so humbled that you are giving me the name of Mother Earth Feather. I have read that a feather is a gift of honor. I will wear it truthfully. I am willing to deserve it.”

Blue Cloud puts the end of his stick at my mouth. With open lips and a wide mouth I suck the marshmallow off the tip of his stick. I reach over for my stick. I lick my lips and then put the end of my stick and watch as Blue Cloud devours the marshmallow from the tip of my stick. He licks his lips and smiles.

“Mother Earth Feather, we need to have a meeting followed by a sweat. I want you to gather the tribe together, in the Yellow Room. Walking Stick will guide the meeting. Afterwards, you will take the two mile hike in silence and arrive at the sweat. We will have ceremony.”

“Okay, Blue Cloud. I can do that. Do we have a relationship?”

“Yes.”

“And how so? I am not of your clan and I am a white woman.”

“You will deserve it. I promise to be your mate. But that is in the future. First you must assist with helping Julian and Jim as this community forms. You must constantly remind them that there is a Divine Intelligence that will be with them. All they need to do is the right action.”

I watch as he takes a couple of bites and relishes his other marshmallow. He looks at me sheepishly and says, “they are good, aren’t you going to finish yours?”

I nod no.

He takes my stick and eats most of mine. But he holds in suspense the last bite on his lips. He approaches me on all fours and presses his marshmallow lips to my open mouth. Our sweet lips touch. And playfully I gently push him back, so I can breathe. I try not to laugh, it all seems so romantic. I swallow the mallow and laugh out loud.

“You are a good woman Mother Earth Feather. Now go in peace.”

Blue Cloud rises in the most eloquent posture, turns to the forest and disappears from my sight. The fire is still hot. I put another log or two on the coals and curl up into the warm blanket that Blue had left behind. I am wrapped in his warmth. I feel his soul and kindness. I smile at his humor. And it feels so good to be here.

## Chapter 23; The Return of the Tapasvi's

We wake up, actually Julian wakes me from my deep slumber. I'm feeling the space and time differential from India and Montana. She's got the fire going, I smell the coffee and what? Bacon, eggs and hash browns with bread slices toasting on top of the wood burner. No gruel? She's looking at me with a smile. "It's good having you back, partner. You were "lights out" last night. I don't know if you even felt me, dear. You and Megan have so much to share tomorrow at our community meeting. I hope it's not too soon for you two, time zone wise."

"No, I don't think so. Wow, smells like breakfast is ready. Let's eat and talk some."

"Okay, I set the table. Did you miss your coffee at Ekam?"

"No, actually they had a Yogi Cafe and there was a guy who would see me coming and immediately start a brew. It was funny, because some times I would just pay for ground coffee so I could mix my Rasa with it. But I told him he made the best coffee. And it was. Better than what I smuggled from home."

"You crazy dude. Come on let us eat."

So we dig in, and I am savoring each bite. I did enjoy the meals we had there. But there was not a breakfast like this. However, a light stomach made it easier to digest the lessons, processes and meditations.

"What do you have planned today?"

“I am going to be helping Frank and Jerry build a new greenhouse. Want to join us?”

“I would like to prepare for this meeting and sweat that Blue Cloud requested. At Tapas we would spend a night in the forest. It was a special end to each week. At first I had a lot of resistance to being there. Then I saw the value of the whole ritual, and ceremony. So what I'd like to do is spend the night up at Maggie's. And camp out at the tree sculpture. You okay with that?”

“Oooh, I really missed you in our bed. Stephanie was like a sister, you are my lover. Really, you want to do that, camp in the cold tonight?”

“If you don't mind, it will bring back memories.” I say this tongue in cheek because my resistance at Tapas was not preparing mentally and physically for the weekly event.”

“Hummm, yes I recall your desperate call. You, ready to come home. What changed your disposition?”

“The first two weeks I was journalling. Writing up a storm of judgements, comparisons, thinking I have already done this several times. Oh, I had beautiful realizations too. But, it all seemed the same as before. You know, same content. I stopped writing, then I started to absorb the wisdom. Listening to others share. Getting some clarity about ceremony and ritual as devotion. Realizing that in India and in particular to Ekam I not only get to realize the states of my conscious mind, I also understood the benefits of spirituality. It didn't matter to me what form I connected with as a source of wisdom. God, The Divine, The I Am, The Great Creator, I realized my

personal wisdom gained was just being aware of my conscious mind and the state of it.”

“I think I was there with you, Jim. I felt our connection many times. I would just sit and stare at the forest, the creek, the garden and visualize you there doing your soul searching. And I opened the Whisky bottle...

I look up on the top shelf and see it missing.

“...and I drank the truth serum and was drowning in my state of guilt and shame. I had no way to get out of that STATE, as you call it. And Stephanie, one of “the three sisters” cheered me on as I heaved that bottle to the heavens, over the bush and lord knows where it landed. But I was freed at last from my abandonment issues.”

We have a long serious stare. And slowly, ever so slowly we start to break out in a smile until we are both chuckling and letting out sighs of relief. We reach for each others hands and say no more. We look at our plates of food and steaming coffee and replenish our bodies.

“Okay, Love, so you will not be home tonight? And will you just stay up there until the meeting?”

“Yes, you know there are times I just need my solitude. Like when I ski or hike on my own. I never know what I might gain from the natural environment. Just like you and the garden, your connection to the earth.”

“Thank you for that explanation. I know it is healthy for us to have some space once in awhile. And I appreciate your need for processing what you have just gone through. Hey, let’s clean up. I have to meet up with Frank and Jerry in half an hour.”

We have a soulful hug and long embrace with many kisses. The warmest sense of love that I can feel from another.

Julian is on her way. I take my time to acclimate back to these surroundings. I take a walk across the stream. Shoeless, to feel the cool earth and cold water. I feel the gravel, the mud, the stiff winter grass, and the feet getting used to the cold. I am feeling exhilarated. Then I spot it. Hung up in the lower branches. The Whiskey Bottle! And there's my note, the Rumi poem.

The moment you left me,

Sweetness was stolen from my tongue.

I turned to wax, burned like a candle

All night, scorched by fire,

no honey.

No way to reach you,

no way to touch your beauty.

My body lies here in ruins.

My soul, a night owl.

What ever made me leave that Rumi poem under the Whisky? It sounds so desperate now. What was my intention, my motive? Connection? So she thinks that throwing the bottle dissolved her state of suffering? That's her situation to figure out. We laughed at the Whisky bottle throw. But really, she drank a pint of Whiskey. My hunch is that she numbed her mind. And

that she suffered even more. It's bound to show it's ugly head again. Oh there are so many ways to fool ourselves into a resolve.

I really want to just still my mind now. Be quiet Jim. Go pack your bag and take a slow hike up to Maggie's.

I get back to the cabin and look at the bed. It looks so comforting right now. I have all day so I decide to lay and rest a bit. When I awake it is late afternoon. I am ready to go. I have all I need, sleeping bag, a light blanket, a ground cover and water. My plan is to do a camp fire and sleep under the stars. Temps will be in the 30's but I think I can handle it.

There's a big meadow to walk through before ascending the final animal trail that leads up to Maggie's. It is surrounded by forest. There's a horse trail that guest use at the ranch. I cross it and continue onward until I reach a large rock field that looks across the meadow with a view of the distant mountains. A good place to rest and enjoy the view as early dusk settles in. I find a rock that acts as a lounge chair. I place the blanket on it for some warmth. The sky is changing hues. There are streaks of orange clouds with an azure sky. Further towards the distance peaks are clouds going from pink to purple to gray. I see the first of the stars. Just a few, but there is a very bright one. I wonder what planet is in view. The moon is starting to peek over Emigrant Peak to the northeast. I take in the whole scene. I can feel the temperature dropping. It's time to continue this last leg of the hike.

As I come up the crest of the final pitch, the top of the bronze sculptured tree rises over the crest like the moon rising over the peaks. Oh how I missed the sculpture and it's significance for this group. The inspiration for community. The care of others. That is what it means to me. Just as the

real trees care for each other. Roots entangled. Branches touching and hugging as they follow their geometry of the golden ratio circling each trunk from bottom to top. I wonder what happens when I trim trees, the lower branches. Or bushes around the home, do they hear me asking for forgiveness and encouraging new growth?

I see the bodies in all forms, Jerry, Frank, Sadie, Jenny. Oh, there we are Julian and I. All the others come to view, but my focus now is on Joseph and the Bison. I notice a pile of wood and as I get closer I see an already made fire pit. I consider that maybe Maggie is drawn to this place to sit by the fire. Wow, how fortunate I am to have this fire pit set up already. I pay homage to Joseph, my guide and mentor. That is what I recognize him to be for me these days. I am here tonight as I seek to prepare for this special community meeting.

It's dark now, so I set up my camp over the flattened grass. I start a fire and begin my meditation.

Joni had come to visit Maggie earlier in the afternoon. They are completing the last of their diner.

“That is quite a relationship you are starting with Blue Cloud. It seems like he is accepting your advances.”

“Ha, I wouldn't call it like that. Let's say for now I am feeling a magnetic pull. And a surrender to what is taking place between us. Right now I am joyfully intrigued and wonder if he is developing some feelings for companionship with me.”

“After what you described, I’d hardly say that it’s companionship. I sense some love elements taking place. Whatever love is.”

“Hey, let’s have some after diner tea and a couple of muffins before you leave Joni.”

“Okay, I’ll take the cups and plates out to the Yellow Room.”

The gals put everything on the table, when Maggie spots a flicker of fire. She whispers, “Joni, he’s here!”

“Blue Cloud?”

“Yeah, look over there. I see a fire. By the Bison. That’s our meeting place. Hey, come with me. My guess is he’ll be glad to see you.”

“Okay, I’ll come with.”

“Wait, I want to bring some marshmallows. We’ll have some fun with Blue Cloud. He likes marshmallows on the fire. And he burns them just right.”

The two of them slowly and silently head down to the bison. Maggie whispers, “ssh, be quiet, you surprise from the left side I’ll take the right side, ssh.”

As they quietly peek around the Bison and Joseph, there is someone sitting by the fire. Meditating actually, and it’s not Blue Cloud!

“Jim?”

With a sudden jolt I look to my right, “Maggie...” then to my left, “Joni?”

“What are you doing here Jim? Where’s Julian?”

“I guess I could have given you a call. It was a spontaneous decision. I needed some time before the meeting tomorrow. I am still processing a lot from the India trip. Between the Tapas and long travel I wanted some time, up here in Joseph’s presence.”

“Julian knows you are here?” Ask Maggie

“Yes, she is working with Frank and Jerry on a new greenhouse.”

“Mind if we join you? This is where Blue Cloud and I meet when he needs to talk to me. Seems like he uses Joseph’s bronze image like you are. As a way to connect?”

“Yeah, a way to connect with his vision.”

Joni, “we brought some marshmallows to roast. Blue Cloud likes them.”

This connection with the gals is seeming a bit awkward. I am feeling Maggie’s disappointment. “How you doing Maggie? I am sensing some disappointment? Is that true?”

“I am surprised to see you. Yes, I am disappointed. I was anticipating Blue Cloud. Especially thinking he might have something to say prior to tomorrow.”

“Maggie...you have told me more than that.” Joni chips in.

Maggie smirks, “Okay, I am definitely attracted to him. There is more than that happening. I am not sure how to explain it. Come on let’s get some marshmallows on some sticks and talk.”

It's feeling like a special reunion. The marshmallows are sizzling. "Well ladies, here we are twenty some years later. How'd we get here? What are the odds that we would reunite. Even though our past connection was brief, there must have been some kind of universal, mystical energy? You get what I am saying?"

"Yeah Jim, how odd I would find your name tag from Stream of Life and track you down, based on a 20 year old memory. And how about you Maggie?"

"I forgot all about Jim until I meet him and once he shared about our spiritual discussions, the memory flooded back in a hurry. Jim, when did you know about me?"

"As soon as Julian mentioned your name and being from Chicago, I described your features added some gray tones to your hair. Boom, she couldn't believe it!"

We pause and relish our mallows. We have some quizzical smiles and lick our lips. The fire crackles. Joni reaches for a log and places it on the fire. We are silent for awhile. Just observing the flames. I feel bodies sliding closer to me and then arms draped over my shoulder.

"You know, there is a reason why we cross paths with certain people and either their likeness or actual presence reappears in our lives. I would not be doing what I am doing right now if it wasn't for you Jim. This ranch is going to change, it already has. My life has changed. It is a pleasure to be part of this undertaking. Community and family in this world that is

heading in a strange direction. I just feel blessed that we have the abundance of this beautiful part of the country.”

Joni turns to me, “thank you Jim for our relationship, even after you reunited with Julian. It means a lot to me. You mind if I spend the night with you? Out here, under the stars. I would like to share some of my insights.”

“I have an extra sleeping bag in the house. We can go up there and get it Joni.” Maggie states as she attempts to interrupt Joni.

“I was wondering if I could slip into your sleeping bag, with you Jim?”

“As long as you keep your cloths on!”

“Ah, Joni, Jim? Are you considering Julian?”

“Yes, no kissing, that’s her requirement!” Replies Joni.

I laugh at that comment. “Maggie, Julian and I have a lot of trust built into our relationship. As far as the three of us, we have a special understanding. Just like Julian, Frank and I. We worked out our situations. I trust Joni will respect that. No worries Maggie. Thanks for your concern.”

And with that, Maggie gives us a nod and wry smile. She rises, “You all have a special relationship, the four of you. I pray that the special relationship you are building is contagious for the forming of this community. Good night.”

I bank the fire. Joni is crawling into the sleeping bag. It’s a double, one that Julian and I like to use for our night time sleeps outside. I slip in and here we are facing each other.

There's a smile on Joni's face. I am feeling her joy in accepting her request for this moment. I am not sure what to say, but I awkwardly start anyway, "the last time I did this was with Julian..."

"Did she have her clothes on?"

"No, we were in the Baja, it was hot, we were under the stars, in an alcove overlooking the desert to the sea of Cortez. Her request was to just talk. Get to know each other."

"Hummm, that sounds beautiful. This was before we met at Stream of Life?"

"Yes and before we became a unit. Like I have told you before, I chose to stay with Julian because we had so much already invested in each other. She was already taking me to places I had never been before. Especially concerning relationship."

"Okay, the reason I asked for this time with you is first of all I want to thank you for our time together. Even though it did not go the way I had hoped for, I have finally come to a place where the desire for love as pleasure has ceased. I have recognized my folly and how I tricked myself into relationships that ended because of my internal craving. I wanted the pleasure but wasn't willing to make an honest effort towards connecting emotionally. When we reconnected here, in Montana, where I tracked you down, I was in the midst of really recognizing love in friendship. And we started that way, and I honored your desire to slow things down. But that's when I reverted to my desire for pleasure with you. I knew Julian was gone from your life for five years. I became incensed to have you for a mate. And

when we finally did connect romantically, well it was so different than I had ever experienced before. So when Julian came back into your life I was crushed and I lost my moral compass. I just want you to know how grateful I am to you and Julian, for how you both tried to ease my pain. This time spent at your Grizzly Cabin with Sammie has been life changing. As he teaches me massage and we both study healing practices together. I and he have also talked about our dichotomy of what love is.”

Joni is just staring at me now, with a heartfelt tear coming from one eye. I place my hand over her heart and she knows what this means and places her hand over my heart. We absorb this energy flow of a heart connection. Compassion for the other. Compassion as God Love. I gently place a kiss on her forehead. As I retract my lips I see her warm smile.

“Thank you, Jim. I can love you differently now. More fully.”

We sustain this pose and fall off to sleep with the flicker of light from the fire, under a star lite sky.

Maggie - I come out of my deep meditation. I'm really connected with my divine source. Buddha is the form I choose. We talked, I was asking for guidance concerning this up coming meeting and ceremony. I look at the clock and see that it is late. I was in a very deep place, not having any recall at this moment of where my meditation went too. Was I in a dream state, or a transcendent state. I get up and see a faint glow coming from the bison sculpture. My meeting place with Blue Cloud being taken by Jim and Joni. Come on now Maggie, you surrendered the identity of ownership. I put on my Pancho and grab a thick comforter and head out the door. When I get to the bison, I slowly and quietly circle around it and see that they are

sleeping. They are facing each other and there are soft smiles imprinted on their faces. How sweet, I know they have affection for each other. I gently place the comforter over them and fuel the fire. I stand off to the side and watch as the fire rekindles to warm flames. I can feel the warmth of both their hearts. I see the marshmallow bag and pick it up. As I rise and give them one more glimpse I feel movement behind me. Before I know it there is a strong arm gently embracing me. Somewhat startled I look up along my side and it is Blue Cloud, looking down at me. "You are here, this time of night. I should say early morning. Why?"

"You called for me."

He is smiling now. I have a faint memory of my dream? Meditation? Prayer answered? A telepathic connection that became present?

"Oh, Blue Cloud, you are so magnificent." His smile broadens. "What's with the spear? Bears?"

"No, to roast marshmallows!"

With a shake of my head and a smirk on my face, I hand him the bag, "how'd I know you'd ask? I am going back to the house and get some sleep. Would you like to come?"

"No, Maggie, this is our meeting place. You go, I need to talk with Jim before our ceremony today."

"You're not going to wake them," I whisper.

"No, I will feast and silently send him my message. Thank you Maggie, for the marshmallows. How did you know I craved for them?"

“You told me to bring them when I called to see if you were coming tonight”

He chuckles, I smile and with a finger at my lips I whisper, “ssh.”

With a mischievous smile, he takes my hand away from my lips and kisses me good night, sweet dreams...

## Chapter 24: The Community Meeting

Everybody received “the memo” and we are all getting into our places, greeting each other and sitting around the huge conference table that Maggie confiscated from her hedge fund office years ago. We are in the Yellow Room. This is our meeting place. The Last to be seated are the Three Sisters, Nirvana, Stephanie and Walking Stick, who is the chairwoman of this gathering.

The room quiets down. Walking Stick opens the late afternoon gathering.

“Thank you all for coming to be part of this community. Tonight we will be having a ceremony welcoming back Megan and Jim from thier pilgrimage to India. They may have a lot to share and each one of us will be sharing as preparation for the sweat lodge. When we finish sharing we will slowly hike down to the lodge taking slow sacred steps. Stopping along the way to admire our surroundings. Being grateful for the Great Creator’s gifts and each other. Blue Cloud is preparing the sweat lodge. So let us begin. Who would like to start?”

Surprisingly Jerry is the first contributor, “I can start.” He takes a long slow look around the room and with his eyes, acknowledges each of us.

“When I decided to be part of this group, I was not sure how committed I wanted to be despite having already known you all from the sketch class. I had a lot of judgements and saw each of you through a critical lens, a critical mind. Now I see how my beliefs have shackled me for such a long time. When I look back as a child I recall the critical eye my parents had. They were disciplinarians, not with a heavy hand, rather with a critical eye. The right and wrong way of doing things. They both had prominent roles as a scientist and professor. Their emigrant parents, my grand folks, were proud of thier heritage and from what I recall, the stories and lessons my folks had along the way, were strictly enforced. By the time I entered adulthood, I lived in fear of how I lived my life, in the eyes of what others might think. I ended up being somewhat reclusive. Relationships became strained. It was hard for me to make decisions. This community concept is a big step for me. I want to thank Frank, my Christian Brother for his support. He is showing me through his actions, accepting what lessons God gives him. We talk, it’s not easy for me to accept. My time spent hiking with Sammie, was a liberation from judging someone for who they appear to be. By that I mean Sammie’s choice to be gay, does not preclude my getting to know him by his character. I am learning new physical work as a ranch hand. I am getting physically stronger and it is also showing me that I can participate in life, without feeling the need that life needs to be on my terms. Thank you all for accepting me as I am and whom I am becoming.”

There is a long silence. We are all looking at Jerry. As I look around the room, I see so much compassion. My gaze catches Megan’s eyes, and we lock in. I am guessing that we both have some memories of our Tapas

experience. About the same time I start to smile, Megan is doing the same, we nod and look around the conference table at our friends.

“Ah hum,” it’s Jenny, “If you all don’t mind I would like to follow Jerry’s most eloquent description of his discovery.” She giggles. “Thank you Jerry, you inspired me just now. As you are all aware I tend to be on the quiet side of our conversations. Sometimes I get this sense that there is a type of power?...I don’t know if that’s the right description. But what happens is that I’m being guided to do something. Like the heart to heart salutation that I asked us to do that one day. It’s not like I thought about doing that, it just came to me. And so I suggested that we all do it. And wasn’t it wonderful? There’s times when I can feel the other persons pain or joy whatever it is they might be experiencing at the time. But not only can I feel the emotion, I feel as if I am them! I’m not sure what you’d call it. An out of body experience? I don’t know, for me it’s the deepest compassion I can feel for the other. I don’t know, is deep compassion the right description. And so when it’s hard for me to communicate what I want to say but don’t understand, I get quiet. Rather shy and introverted.”

Nirvana speaks, “thank you Jenny for bringing up an esoteric quandary. We all have a personal divine. And that is a phenomena that is hard to describe. Some of us give it a form and some of us see it as a formless source of energy. Some of us call it the holy spirit that dwells in us. A God given gift. However you want to describe it, or whatever you believe it to be, when we allow the Divine Intelligence to operate on our behalf then we do not have to indulge in thought. Then our intention becomes pure energy. We connect with the universal energy of humans, plants, animals you name it.”

Walking Stick rubs Nirvana's back with a gentle stroke, "thank you sister, thank you for that wisdom. And you to Jenny, your young wisdom is ancient to me. I ask myself many times, how is it that I am a medicine woman, and where do I get my intuitive powers from. You both have shed some serious knowledge on my quandary too."

There is a reverent silence. Eyes are wandering around the room.

"Right now today, I have a feeling of liberation. With the help of our sister Stephanie and our wisened elders Deloris and Faye. I have been blessed with understanding my abandonment issues without guilt. I feel now that guilt is the real issue. Guilt of past actions that have been part of my life up to this point. And why should I want to suffer with guilt? What happened then, in the past, has lead me to "now", the present moment of my life. And in-between was forgiveness, clarity and freedom. The freedom of not clinging to past actions. Especially since they don't serve me now. I also feel liberated to know I can choose. I feel liberated in knowing that whatever circumstance evolves from my choices, I get to ponder the outcome without guilt or shame. All of us here sat with the Whiskey that first sweat we were destined to come too. It stayed capped until one day when Stephanie found me drowning in it. Yes, just for the record, my guilt and shame raised its ugly head, and I called whiskey the truth serum, Frank and Jim are aware of that. And the truth is it did not dissolve the guilt and shame I was dealing with. And all of that whole scene is in the past. And today, I am liberated from it. Compassion for self is what I needed the most. When I am hard on myself it tends to be passed onto others. And when I start in that course of thought my dark side has power over me. My escape had been the pioneer cabin, the gardening, and seclusion

surrounded by nature my friend. But now I know I can be liberated from that dweller on the threshold that lurks to mock me into submission of suffering. The joy of gratitude for having this insight has given me a course of action that leads to a "Beautiful State" as Jim explained to me upon his return. He asked. "Julian, are you in a suffering state or a beautiful state?" This was after he found the Whiskey bottle I had tossed over yonder, where the moose hide in the bush. I had found a Rumi poem that Jim had placed under the bottle. And I blamed him and myself for my stupor. How about that. What self pity can lead too! So that's my share. I feel liberated to know that I can share honestly with all of you. I have nothing to hide. You get all of me when I am not hiding from all of you."

"I feel inclined to go next. The journey of love, that has been my journey. That poem Julian referenced was powerful. "My soul a night owl" is how it ends. The poem it self laid blame on the other, the other lover for the loss of love? But now I know love is about connection and feeling the other. When I am indulged in my own thoughts or distractions I lose the connection. How can I be with the other. As Jenny alluded to, not only feeling the other, but also being the other. I get it Jenny. Hard to explain, it requires full attention to be and stay connected to another person. Love has nothing to do loving someone "non-conditionally". That has to do with acceptance. Julian, when I found the bottle in the bush, with the poem rolled into the bottle, I asked my self, what made me do that. What was the message I was conveying to you? And why go back to grieving my loss in that distant past now? I came up here to spend the night alone. I wanted to prepare for this meeting. I did not know what I was preparing for, all I knew is I wanted to contemplate more, alone about my Tapas experience.

Instead, I ended up in the sleeping bag with Joni.” I can hear a few chair readjustments going on, and a slight gasp coming from somewhere. But I have direct eye contact with Julian now. We are emotionally “naked now” in front of this group. “We talked, like that night you and me spent in the Baja, under the stars and galaxies. And now I realize how that poem must have renewed your sense of self. We laughed at that bottle throw, but I had a sense that your truth serum just numbed your state. I knew that you must have suffered more.”

I can feel Julian now, is it painful for her to know about my time spent with Joni?

“Right now at this moment, I feel a sense of anxiety, some pain and remorse. Is that what I am sensing Julian? That I would crawl into a sleeping bag with Joni. Do you have disappointment?”

Julian is nodding yes. I can see her vulnerability right now.

“My love, just as I am feeling you right now I felt Joni’s strong desire to get to a final resolve concerning our relationship. You, me and her. Our relationship together. And what happened in that sleeping bag was Jenny’s Heart to Heart Salutation.”

Julian’s body language changes, she starts to smile and slightly shakes her head.

Like Jenny mentioned, my compassion is so deep, when I am connected that I not only feel the other, it’s as if I am the other. And what that does is put me in a state of sweet surrender. All I want to do is be there for the other. Sometimes I resist wanting to fulfill another’s need then other times I

just do it without thinking. It's as if I am fulfilling my own need. And so getting back to the poem, interesting how it affected both of us in different ways, but we felt the other even though we weren't in each others company at the time. I'm not sure where I am going with this, I'm just rambling now..."

Julian and I are still locked in, as if nobody else is in the room. Someone is clearing their throat.

Julian responds, "You could have stopped at sweet surrender."

There is an overwhelming silence now. A few chairs shuffle. Molly, rises and gets some tea. I slowly drop my eye contact with Julian, bow my head and briefly close my eyes.

Stephanie is the first to speak, "Jim, that pose we did with hands on our hearts, you all remember it, heck you all sketched it. And all of your sketches replaced me with you. Molly showed them to me. We all felt the other that day didn't we? The power of connection as a group. And so maybe we are forming community beyond just a physical form of living together, but rather community is connecting with each other. Loving each other. Connection is love. Love is compassion. And compassion is God Love!"

"Boom, well said Sister!" It's Maggie. "Thank you for this raw honesty. Wow, where shall I begin?"

Everybody is reengaged in this epic moment of community forming.

"Control, power, attachment and surrender. These are the areas I have been struggling with. Believe or not, the pretense of me living in a Buddhist

way has been shattered. I still wanted control of this whole undertaking. It is my ranch I am offering. I, my and mine. That is what was rattling around in my brain. But unlike a true Buddhist, who uses control of the mind for insight and mindfulness, my control was about ownership. To lose control of what goes on here and how community will function on MY ranch was causing me to suffer. And concerning power, I still have the sense of power over others. My management skill set left over from hedge fund days. In business with my ex. When I look back, when I first meet Jim twenty years ago, we engaged in spiritual conversations. We talked about the spiritual path. And how that can bring us happiness. I lost my spiritual direction along the way. And in losing it, I used control and power as a means towards a false sense of happiness. My sense of power became very apparent in my interaction with Blue Cloud.”

Walking Stick intercedes, “Maggie, Mother Earth Feather, please honor your special moment of awakening. Consider Blue Cloud and your current relationship with him. You have transcended into a special place on your Buddhist path.”

Maggie is somewhat startled. But just nods her head.

“Thank you Walking Stick and thank you for honoring my new namesake, Mother Earth Feather. Well that takes me to detachment. Letting go as we say in Buddhist terms. I was indulged with my sense of power. You Jim, Frank and Julian, coming to me to ask about fulfilling Joseph’s vision for this group and ranch. It was finally with Blue Cloud that I saw my denial of who I was or had become versus my pretense of whom I wanted to be seen as. I really was suffering because I was disconnected from my feelings. I

wasn't really engaging in life. Now I see if I really am in the flow of life, then I am not attached to the outcome. Ah Ho!

Jim - It seemed that Maggie ended rather abruptly. I think that she just had another self-realization that she has not explored. I wonder if she recognizes spiritual self righteousness? At least that is what I am seeing in myself right now. How once my ego mind gets involved in thinking how present I am to the moment, then that present moment doesn't exist anymore. But I am so eager to share it with everybody. How special it is to be in beautiful state. I develop the pretense that I have reached the state of total detachment. Of always joy. No more suffering. However, I may pretend that I have dissolved the suffering, but it comes back to haunt me. So it's a constant cycle. What is a strategy to witness the suffering, know it's there, but not let it linger. Move on with the next moment. What did Krishnaji say? The great delight, delight in the suffering and delight in the beautiful state. Yea, I can just be delighted with all this life has to offer. From trials and tribulation to celebration and joy.

Sadie - Okay, nobody is volunteering to be next. Heck, I'll go, "good evening everybody. Wow, everybody is so forthcoming! Whew, where to start. Just to get my request out of the way again, I'd like to request more people in my generation to be included in the future. I know we talked about Woofers, so I'll leave it at that. Okay, so here is what I am recognizing about my self. I have been basing my life on a bunch of outside influences, belief systems that are created by others. It's like brainwashing I guess. My mind gets indoctrinated to distrust men, to replace them with woman power. To rebel against a system of governance and old ways. I can go on, but you get the picture. Jim and Julian opened their hearts to me, I

could feel it. Deloris and Faye, god bless you both, are like the grandparents I never had. I'm not so sure of Frank and Jerry yet, you guys I still have my doubts about. I guess their judgements, that you do not approve of lesbians or have a disdain for feminist. That's okay, just letting you know my hesitation around you guys. I do want to thank you both for what you do around here. Can you accept me for who I am? Not as a person you might think "lost their way" or one you have to "convert" or as a "sinner"? Molly, momma, where have you been? Hiding out with Arthur the classic Japanese male? You seem untraditional, are you? How do you see me? Do I mean anything to you? Joni, Joni, Joni, when will you get over your crush? And Sammie, well at least your gay, too. So there, I said something..."

It's Megan that soothes the energy, "Sadie, you started with so much gratitude for Jim, Julian, Deloris and Faye. Do you recognize the difference between appreciation and lack of discernment? You gave gratitude to Jerry and Frank for the physical work they do, then turned right around and judged their person. How does someone open their heart to you if you close your heart to them? I ask you are you defending your feminism? Because you chose the lifestyle you prefer? Do you have to protect all the supposed belief systems that go along with it? "

Sadie - "My father left us, walked out on the whole family. My mother was shattered. Left with three children, no job and no support. She keep us together determined to make life work without the need for a man to "head the household". I hated him for what he did. And that hate still lingers. It seems like yesterday that he left! I never felt his love for me. I felt my moms love through her labor. But I never knew if it was a labor of love or to prove

something to the world. A world that benefited men. Yeah, I think you all just witnessed how my life was influenced by something out of my control? I don't know. You all can help me here. Not now. Not tonight. But please don't forsaken me for my truth. My mixed up truth. I just don't have a compass to guide me. Jenny, I'm sorry. Maybe I love you for a selfish reason. Maybe I need you because you are gentle and kind and, and..."

Sadie is in tears, she is shook. It's Walking Stick that slowly looks around the table and says "let's give our sister some love". And before she had even finished her statement, there was Jenny, and Deloris, and yes, Frank with arms around her. Sadie, turned her sobbing head into Franks big chest and broad shoulders. Frank hugging her so tight, that I too started to shed tears. With a forlorn face I looked at others, in Molly I saw with the tears of a mother, and Julian whom I suspected revisited abandonment. We all surrounded Frank and Sadie a huge circle of friends committed to be one big family.

It took some time to settle down. And we were still wiping tears on our shirt sleeves when Sammie "took to the pulpit".

"Thank you Sadie, thank you so much for being real. Here I am, harboring much of the same emotional conflict as Sadie. I have been fortunate to feel a transformation start to dissolve my anger towards the social standards that I believed distanced me from everybody else. So much so that I could not tell when someone was sincerely trying to understand me. Now I am feeling a transformation taking place. It started with my relationship with Jim. He has been so accepting and caring. He shared his vulnerability towards my steadfast desire to love him as a gay man with a physical

attraction. And Julian, the true lover and showering me with her compassion for the situation. That added to my slow transformation of opening my heart. Jerry, it was rough being in men's group with you. That day here at the ranch the hike you referenced and our understanding of each other broke a barrier that I never suspected would be broken. Not with you. Like Sadie, I had my judgements towards you and Frank and really judgements with people I did not even take time to know. Joni, it has been special with you as we become healers for this community. Learning through the touch of massage that we can be close to another if we focus on the healing energy, as we heal ourselves. Thank you for all of the discussions, and late nights sharing with each other. Getting beyond our sex addiction. Might as well call a spade a spade. My desire body acting as if a demon or demons controlled my every thought. Oh, to get beyond that, just to notice them for what they are. I still don't have a total handle on it. That's not who I am. I know that I have more compassion now. I am understanding better how love is tied to a compassionate mind."

Sammie is done. He has a smile on his face as he connects with Joni. She smiles ever so sheepishly and nods at Sammie, yes, yes, yes.

"Unity," it's Deloris, "unity, I am feeling that right now. It's strong. I feel all of us willing to listen. Connecting energies with each other. Like the tree roots connecting with each other in a community of trees. We have our tentacles reaching out to touch each others hearts, and souls. I am getting goose bumps. I thought that this would be a nice place to retire to. You know down size. Be on a beautiful ranch, just "chilling" as you young ones say. Now I am inspired to participate more than I thought I would. In all my years, I don't think I have ever been part of a group of people that were so

forthcoming with their raw selves. Naked models that's what you all are! Gosh, and the talk about suffering state and beautiful state. You all might think I am a wisened woman because of age, but you all, looking within, now that is wisdom. Let it ripen. My guess is by the time I wake up tomorrow my past will have been woken too. And I look forward to revisiting what I thought was dissolved and witnessing it all new again. From childhood to now. What a journey of love this is going to be. Thanks for having me. I have a lot to learn about myself, you all and the way of the mysterious universe."

"Deloris my dear, I think we came here on blind faith." It's Faye chiming in on "the heels" of Deloris. "You know, I might not be around long enough to see the final results of this changing world we live in today. But of course it's always changing. Faster now than ever before. But I have faith that we are going to recreate something that is more connected to human existence than what any globalist, or marxist, or totalitarian government can even accept. I see us having the opportunity to remain free thinkers in a society that relies on domination. Working together. That unity that Deloris mentioned. Hey, don't count us out we can still work the hoe and shovel. Maybe not as fast as you young ones, but we need to do it for our continued health. There's many a gardener in their nineties still harvesting today. A harvest of health tied to the earthly delights. I still delight in the wonders of this great earth. I can't think of anything else to put my energy in but this community. There was a song I recall, I think it was John Prime,

"Blow up your TV, throw away your paper, go to the country, build yourself a home, plant a little garden, Eat a lot of peaches, try and find Jesus on your own..."

It went something like that. Shoot I don't recall the whole song but it was about a soldier and dancer and the soldier listened to the dancer and that's just what they did...blew up their TV. And that's what I did before movin' out here! Yep, blind faith, I sure don't have a crystal ball, but I know you all mean well and have blind faith that maybe Joseph has the right idea."

Molly has a smile as wide as a crescent moon, "wooo wee, Faye and Deloris. That's what you always sketched, the beauty of nature. Trees and plants, and birds, bees and butterflies. And you gave me inspiration and this group a focus of connection, strength, flexibility and change. The tree sculpture captured all of that and then some. And all of you in this room have given me your honesty in so many different ways, that I was and still am being more honest with my obsessiveness that blocked my heart connection in my previous relationship with my ex. I am able to see more clearly that same obsessive behavior of judging, blaming and just thinking about my self. How I think, in a relationship, what affects me. Not even considering the effect of what I may be projecting towards another. Jim, many times I thought that the poses I had you do was therapy for you. Then after awhile I realized that they were affecting me. Once I let go of my obsessive behavior, I was able to finally open my heart. I feel so much more alive now. Just being aware of the energy of another person. Engaged in the other versus obsessed with myself."

Molly gives us all the Namaste salutation. I bow to the light within you.

Arthur clears his throat, "It is appropriate that I follow Molly.

Obsessiveness of cultural upbringing, is a reason I came to America. Yet

what happened is that the tradition of my ancestors are still part of my being. My work with the donabe bowls and my art are all classical Japanese. My relationship with Molly is a stigma on our tradition concerning mixed marriage. Even though we are not married, it is part of what I struggle with. Will my family honor Molly as they would if my relationship is with a Japanese woman? Joseph, Blue Cloud, and Walking Stick follow their cultural traditions. Now that I sense a special relationship between Maggie and Blue Cloud, maybe we can help each other concerning tribal traditions. My personhood has been somewhat of a hindrance in my relationships. My Japanese Zen Buddhism practice contradicts my concern with family tradition. There are Japanese men who marry foreign women. In my case my family lineage is very traditional Japanese. They will be kind but will it be kindness from the heart or out of consideration for my choice. So on one hand I feel liberated from attachment to family tradition and on the other I am burdened by it. Also, our tradition is the male as bread winner and female as stay at home with children. There are these norms that are part of the traditional cultural marriage. Yet here I am, in America with a woman who is liberated and not to be thwarted by what might seem normal to being a traditional wife. Walking Stick warned Maggie about honoring her new name sake? Honoring Blue Cloud's position? Is that what I heard before, when Maggie shared? Is there a relationship forming similar to mine with Molly? And is it of my concern?

All eyes turn towards Molly who looks over at Walking Stick and she immediately responds, "we are all a liberated group of people just forming this union of varied beliefs and culture. If this group is to survive we need to honor each other in a way that allows us to be free from self obsession.

We need to honor the other person in a way that lets the energy of the oneness flow. We need to be aware of the natural flow of this earth and all earthly beings. Your concern will be love as connection. Love as compassion. And compassion as God Love!”

Joni - I am looking around the room and seeing a lot of different expressions. Frank has his eyes cast down. Sadie seems like she is in a state of anticipation. Jenny has a sweet smile, Sammie isn't giving anything away. Deloris has a quizzical look. Faye has her eyebrows raised. Jerry is looking at Jim who is looking at Julian who is looking at me. I am reminded of an old John Mayhall tune “I am looking back at her to see if she is looking back at me to see if I'm looking back at her “. Just being quiet to gather my thoughts feels so good. I'm feeling empowered. I don't feel vulnerable and emotional right now. Calm that's what I'm feeling. I clear my throat.

“Well, you have all covered a lot of territory and I felt each one of you emotionally. That's to say that I connected with you all at some level. My time spent with Sammie has had an impact on me too. A psychological healing. One thing for certain chasing for physical love in relationships with men left me empty with a lack of real connection. I was so focused on having a special relationship with Jim that I didn't have the wherewithal to form other relationships within this group. When Julian reached out to me and offered a supportive friendship that is when I realized my obsession with self. Last night I was finally able to connect with Jim differently than ever before. When I first met Jim and we did a workshop together the theme was loving unconditionally. Despite that knowledge what I found was there's always been some sort of conditions. What I am realizing now is that

loving someone is about connecting with that person. Listening and being in the “space” of the other person’s presence, if that makes sense. Now I have the wisdom to live my life experientially. And tonight I have experienced all of you.”

I can’t help but let my smile shine. I am exhilarated to feel a release of pent up sorrow and self pity. Now as I look around the entire room, the expressions have softened and slowly expressions change from wonderment to smiles. I sense that everyone agrees what real connection means .

“Beautifully said Joni.” It’s Megan the last of the group to speak. “I want to thank you all for allowing me the opportunity to be with this family. Before I left for Tapas with Jim I had read a book by Gary Chapman called The Five Love Languages. It is all about the different ways we give and receive love. It filled me with more knowledge. More teaching. I have been taught many concepts. By attending Tapas I have obtained wisdom through experiencing my internal feelings through meditation and self realization. I don’t have the sense that I know it all. Every ounce of knowledge I learned does not compare to the wisdom I recently gained. I want to give a shout out to Nirvana for her support, encouragement and inspiration to attend Tapas.”

“Let us pray.” It’s Frank with his eyes closed, head bowed and hands clasped. “To the spirit that dwells in each one of us. To the power of God, the great creator of all that is. To whatever form or formlessness He represents to each of us, let us recognize the Great Creator of all that is, no matter what our belief is on how we got here, let us honor each other as the special beings we are and the special energy that is in all life forms.”

“Well said Frank, thank you. Blue Cloud is preparing the sweat lodge. As we hike down the mountain side take time to prepare for this ceremony of going inward by stopping every so often and taking in the natural beauty of this basin. Honor your individual path that you have taken throughout your life. The evolution of this group and the dynamics that continue to evolve might lead to a more peaceful life than the urban life you have come from. But no matter where you are it is up to you individually to make peace with your soul. Then peace with others and family will come naturally. I am Walking Stick and I am so fortunate to be with you all. You give me hope in these turbulent times. And I am feeling so blessed that you have welcomed myself, Blue Cloud and Joseph and our indigenous ancestors into your worlds.”

“As you take the trip to the lodge, you might consider going in silence,” a suggestion from Nirvana. “This is a good time for some contemplation. Perhaps something that was shared by your colleagues resonates with you. And take your time. Enjoy the hike. There are several trails down so you’ll have some space. We will see you at the lodge.”

We shuffle out the door. I hang a right and go towards the end of the deck to linger awhile. Julian joins me. She takes my hand in hers and we have a tender exchange with our eyes. She snuggles up to me and I place my arm around her back with a hand on her side. We look out over toward the meadow and the sculptures. The bronze tree with figures. My focus is the Bison and Joseph. Where can he be? I wonder how his final vision quest is turning out. And how will his vision manifest.

“It’s beautiful, isn’t it Jim?”

“You mean the sculpture or the view?”

“Both, all of it. Even this evening as the sun sets and all of the sharing. A community forming of friendships. And maybe relationships of lovers? Do you get the sense that Maggie and Blue Cloud have more than a one time sexual encounter manifesting?”

“Most certainly, That’s their meeting place, under the Buffalo. When I came up to camp, there was already a fire pit set up complete with stacked firewood. The grass has been matted down as if deer or elk bed down there on a nightly basis. And the way Walking Stick reminded Maggie that she didn’t need to share too much.”

“I did pick up on that, yet there are the cultural aspects same as what Arthur shared.”

“Yes both of those relationships will be interesting to watch. Will there be a new way towards marital relationship or will they follow old traditions? I would say that our relationship broke the mold of our family lineage. And it was not easy, between our traditional tribal expectations and even us going through all we’ve been through. Breaking the old patterns of whom was responsible for what in raising a family and relating as “husband and wife” versus as “friends and soulmates”.”

“Hummm, yeah it was not easy. Even now, to be honest with you, I was, oh how should I put it, I was surprised when Joni shared her stay in your sleeping bag. I thought you needed some space for contemplation.”

“I did not expect that at all. Just as I did not expect to find a camp site set up under the buffalo. What was different is that I went with the moment, and trusted the strength of our relationship. Especially what we had to deal with between Frank and Joni. So yeah, old patterns of fearing an outcome that might result in dividing us. Or being present for another’s needs to be met, in an honorable way. That you must know for sure. There was nothing other than discussion.”

“What is it with you guys, how you describe what I am sure produced some emotions as if it were a business meeting. Did you have some emotions with whatever you and Joni...DISCUSSED?”

That produced a smile and chuckle from me, “well yes, she teared up and I felt her emotionally. And no, I did not tear up, I gave her a peck on the forehead.”

“Ugh, you sound so, so oh compassionate! I’ll give you that only because I know you. And you didn’t give her a peck, you kissed her on the forehead with a breath of tenderness. Am I right?”

“Thank you Julian, thanks for the acknowledgement. Yeah, there was a sweet flow of energy and a true sense of completeness. How she can love more fully now. You heard her share. There is a light shining from her eyes again. She has seen her folly.”

“Thanks for telling me that Jim.”

“I want to make you aware of some of the ways we men actually do show some emotion. Start paying attention to when we choke on words, or take deep breaths, or go into defending or denial. Those are times when we are

getting emotional but just have a hard time expressing. I have witnessed it in the mens group. We spend time finding the emotion in our body. Sometimes we just have to scream, and bang things before we can really cry. You noticed the body language from Frank and Jerry, how he kind of choked a little when he shared about his walk with Sammie. You know how sometimes it will take hours or days for me to process a situation before I can really connect with emotion.”

“What are you telling me?”

“Don’t give up on us guys. We need to connect with our emotions and those of others. That’s the only way we will change the pattern of the male and female roles. The cultural change is happening. Kind of mixed up in some ways, with the pronouns and gender conditioning going on. But I trust with sincere guidance we will all benefit in a way where normality will prevail and men and women will be more accepting of their differences.”

“Hummm, I hear you HighMe, I am glad neither of us gave up on the other. I love you. Shall we start on our hike?”

“Yeah, you go ahead. I want to take in the scene right now. Remember when I told you about finding that you tube music with the picture of the clouds and glowing light. I thought I saw small figures sitting in the clouds. Look, see everybody spread out through the meadow? I am grooving on the scene. You go love, I will join you at the lodge.”

We embrace with a long gentle kiss and heart felt hug. Julian, finally backs away and lets go of my hands. With eyes glistening, she turns and joins the others as part of the wandering souls. When she reaches grass, she takes

off her shoes. I watch as she starts her descent. I am mesmerized now, and slowly make my way past Joseph and the Bison. I pack the sleeping bag and head down. I think I hear a voice, "My White Buffalo Man". I look up at Joseph and recall his laughter when I asked him long ago, why do you sketch me like a bison and he said, "because you are hairy like a buffalo!" I mumble to the sculpture of Joseph, "thank you for being in my life."

We are all gathered near the fire pit being tended to by the three sisters as they walk hot rocks into the lodge. We are all here except for Julian. Blue Cloud is giving some instructions, "Jim I want you at the west end of the medicine wheel. Each of you gravitate near where you are feeling inclined to sit. Let's keep a circle so we can pass pipe." We maintain a silence and hear a splash in the creek and a thrashing in the bush. It's a moose. She gives us one look and continues on. A few seconds pass and Julian in all her glory approaches with a smile on her face. Her hair is blowing in the breeze, there's some sphagnum moss tangled in her curls, a few small pine cones glued to her skirt by the sap. She has a handful of flowers and her bare feet are muddied. Blue Cloud speaks, "Ah Ho, let us go into the lodge now. Julian you will sit by me, in the east under the auspices of wisdom."

We enter the lodge and everybody grabs a fur piece to sit and lay on. We start to find where we want to sit. I am surprised to see that we are all gather towards the west quadrant. Liberation. Nobody on the North or South nodes. Blue Cloud starts to laugh. Finally he speaks, "so the white man thinks he is liberated. How can this be? What are you liberated from? We need a circle. I would like to place you along either the north or south side of the circle. Jerry please come sit along my right side. Joni, please occupy the South node for you are the woman of the south. Maggie you

take the North Node woman of the North. Molly and Arthur sit on either side of Maggie. Sammie you and Sadie please sit either side of Joni. Jenny I am not sure where to place you, but I think you and Frank can sit on either side of Jim. Deloris and Faye, how about Deloris you sit next to Julian and Faye you keep Jerry company. Good thank you all for this special gathering. We are going to pass pipe now. As you puff, considered your position in this circle of friends. The pipe represents both the masculine and feminine. Our passing pipe is for peace between our core group. Let us see a union of cooperation and understanding. Your perceptions will not serve anybody. Self obsession will not serve the group. The Medicine Wheel is a place to pray and meditate for your healing. Healing your inner struggles. Create a vision and clarify the changes you personally need to make to become a fully integrated person to serve society with joy, kindness and love in your heart. You can only do that when you dissolve all that you identify with or latch onto, thinking "this is who I am. This is what I have become" Yet the seasons change, the wind blows, everything changes. Even the earth goes through erosion and it's physical aspect changes. Contemplate on nature and the nature of your being."

The air is filled with smoke. Stephanie and Nirvana put some more hot rocks in the fire ring. A little water is sprinkled on top and the hiss of the steam permeates the air. We are still.

"Frank, I would like you and Jim to reconstruct the old barn near here. The one with all of the ancient equipment. We will call it Molly's Barn. This will be a meeting place for connection and therapy as you like to call it. Jenny will work with you. Jenny you will be in charge and design the space. I know

some of you have started a group, keep it going. When you counsel together and you gain wisdom over your demons, you will be elders or as you call it mentors for others. As you all bare your soul, you will see what counsel you need. You will all gain the wisdom to serve others. There will be others that come to live as community. Joseph's vision for community amongst this group is what he felt could be achieve for he saw all of your compassion for each other. And it is that compassion that will serve you and others the best. There is a different world developing. As you are all aware the man made forces of power are shifting. The economies will be different, alliances will be different and choices will be made. Try will be attempts towards a free world away from a totalitarian type of governing. Not to mention the mechanization of man and AI. This community will require being and living with nature. God's true abundance in this creation is of nature. The indigenous people are the true nationalist of this country. And they are true nationalist of all countries. We have waited a long time to return. So be it. It is time now for us to lay and be still. Drift off now to a transcendent state knowing we are all one as brothers and sisters of the Great Creator."

Drumming starts and there are native chants echoing from distant voices.

And so I drift off. With thoughts of the essence of existence. What is the purpose of life? When I had my glimpse of bliss, why is it that I have to exist on this planet? Service with gratitude? Was I doing karmic yoga all these years? Is my purpose to do bhakti-yoga? The clouds, above the clouds I drift. Breathe in breathe out. Inhale, exhale. Images of Molly, Sammie, Frank, Joni, Sadie, Jerry, Megan, Jenny, Arthur, Blue Cloud, Walking Stick and Julian my soulmate lover. Their images, fading. Are they leaving this

plane too? I drift, as I drift who is that in my vision, Nirvana? I see her in this dream state, smiling at me as she did once before. The Bliss of Nirvana! I Let It Be. And the chimes of a heavenly choir burst through, it crescendos into full sounds of Trumpets and Horns and I drift into the Delta State and then I sense the explosion of Gamma Rays! I awake startled. I sit upright and look around the circle. It's Julian I see, also upright at the wisdom node. There is some steam and I notice we are the only ones left in the sweet lodge. She yelps our customary "HU". I yelp back. I see her rise and beckon to me. Come my love, let us meander to the cabin this is a special night. We have completed a critical stage of the vision. We are part of community. I rise as she takes my hand. I feel a little wobbly and her strength settles me. We walk to the creek and as we cross, the Moose family greets us. They watch and give us a nod. We smile Julian, acknowledges them, "you take care of your family, papa. We promise to take care of your natural surroundings. This is your space we will live in harmony."

We make it to the cabin, someone started the fire, it's toasty in here. There's a note on the table, I pick it up and read it out loud,

Julian and Jim, "that mockingbird's gonna sail away, that big fat moon is gonna shine like a spoon, you're going to let it, kick your shoes off, do not fear, that bottle over there..." and we both take a peek at the bottle, "is Reeds Ginger Ale, drink it up and celebrate your love tonight!" We both love you dearly, signed Frank and Joni.

And so that's what we do. Enjoy the cold Montana night in the warmth of each other's loving embrace.

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The Sawtooth Community - This is the finale of the Journey of Love series. It is currently in production. Here's an excerpt;

We are seated at the small table in the pioneer cabin where it all started a second time for Julian and I. The fire has warmed the cabin, food has been eaten hours ago. We ate in silence. It was hard to look at each other. So many memories and thoughts. So much love bursting in this little cabin. The energy wanting to blow out the walls. Wanting to escape the moment. I felt it, she felt it.

“You’re going through with this, this vision quest? Now? Without me? This time it’s your turn to abandon me and family. And your family has grown beyond anything you ever imagined. How do you explain yourself?” Julian stands and reaches the top shelf and places a Whisky bottle on the table. It hasn’t been touched.

“Oh my love, Julian, all of your suffering is mine and all of your joy is mine. The beauty of the suffering is it passes into joy, if you let it. And you know how to witness the suffering and move to joy.”

There’s a knock at the door. It’s rather loud. The latch is turned and it slowly creaks open. “Jim, Julian?” It’s Frank.

“Come in,” we both mumble the simple greeting.

“How are we doing here my friends? Jim, there is a sadness permeating the land around these parts.”

Julian is streaming tears. They started the moment she abruptly placed the Whiskey on the table. Frank puts an arm around Julian. His big heart full of so much compassion for this woman he once loved and always will.

“So you are going up to the Medicine Wheel on Big Horn Peak? Where Joseph started his final Vision Quest? It’s winter coming on and up there it has started in earnest. Why not wait until the late spring at least.”

“It is my time Frank. Julian knows it deep in her heart. The grief is hard to let go of. Frank, please take care of Julian. And Julian live your life to the fullest. Care for Frank. When you grieve, grieve not out of pity for your loss. Grieve for the times we have spent together. Make it a celebration of

all the rough oceans of emotion that we navigated through and all of the clouds we floated on.” Julian takes my hand in hers.

There’s another knock on the door, the latch turns again and as it creaks open we just stare as Maggie enters.

“Oh, sorry but I think I belong here too. To shed a tear? Julian, my sister I feel your despair. Jim, reconsider who you are leaving behind.”

“I will never leave any of you behind. How could that be when you all have buried me deep in your hearts. If I do not return in form, you will still know me as being and you can communicate with my presence. I will never leave you.”

“It is amazing that we crossed paths so many years ago to “be here now” as the saying goes.” Maggie chuckles at the memory of our school day discussions. “Thanks you James for all that you have done here. For this community.”

“Well, Maggie, Frank, Julian, all I have done is let energy pass through me. And it came in so many different ways. Through this human form a divine spirit flowed. Nobody can define how that happens. When the opportunity to grab onto that energy passes onto another, if it’s beautiful energy do not let it go. Hang on to it, love it, be grateful for those wonderful moments. Never let that beautiful state go. Witness everything, but stay in that beautiful state and all grief will dissipate.”

There is the third knock on the door and a swift opening of the creaky door. It’s Joni, full of crying eyes. She looks at Julian, and Julian gives her a nod, “yes Joni, shower him with your love.”

And Joni places her full lips with tears on them, and encapsulates mine, our tongues talking. Communicating with the memory of a long ago kiss. There is no time or space. All in this room had been waiting for this moment for a very long time. Finally with an exasperated rasp, "thank you Julian for allowing me with all your grace to have this moment."

The last knock on the door? It creaks open as the image of Walking Stick slips into the room. "Friends, it is time for Jim's sweat with Blue Cloud. Julian, I will walk you and Jim to the lodge. Please say your good byes and leave this area. Tonight is a sacred night for Jim and Julian to be in union."

Walking Stick closes the door behind her and waits outside. We all stand, looking at the Whiskey, untouched but know the significance of what was once called the truth serum. We hold hands in a circle of friendship and love. There is an energy I can feel sizzling between us all. I am certain that we all feel it in our own way. With tears of sorry and joy we silently touch foreheads as a sign of brotherhood and sisterhood. A sense of oneness pervades.

As we file out of the cabin, Julian and I follow Walking Stick. I look over my shoulder for one last connection.

