

A landscape photograph of a sunset over mountains. The sky is filled with dramatic, colorful clouds in shades of orange, red, and purple. The sun is low on the horizon, creating a bright glow. The mountains are silhouetted against the sky. The foreground shows a valley with some trees and a small building.

# *The Essence of Existence*

*A Journey of Love*

# The Hero's Journey

Astrology teaches us that there is a time for everything. There is a time to act and a time to lie low. There is a time to plant and a time to harvest. There is a time to build and a time to let go of what we have created. The movements of the planets teach us to allow the tide of life to carry us to our best destinations rather than to struggle or fight against what is.

—Donna Taylor

From her monthly column in the “Emergence Magazine”

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Circumstance and Consequences: A Journey of Love

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# Chapter 1: I AM Still Here

The near-death experience was a personal glimpse into my desire for wisdom beyond all effluvia of my mortal thought. I felt my soul asking for the Divine grace that it deserves. I battled with my past, what I thought was good, what I knew was not honorable, and what had become ugly. And then I surrendered to an outcome. Out of gratitude I asked for forgiveness. And I felt the hand of the great Creator of all things bless me. I was blessed and meant to survive this battle of will. I had been given a glimpse of what could be. But here I am, two weeks later, and seeing this wonderful creation as if it were all new.

Like an adult baby, I moved around the house, peeked out at the world of nature, and slowly began to discover why I AM here. I took my time to reconnect with others. The cat, the family, friends. I found solace in the outdoors. The warmth of the atmosphere, the breeze, the colors of flowers. I was in awe of the vegetables I planted. They were still alive, bearing fruit, abundantly. The birds swished by with thunderous flutter. And the clouds, the clouds that I floated over in bliss, became my main attraction. Every day, I looked up to watch their movement. Their color changed throughout the day. And they were massive, they were dimensional, they were orange, and red, and gray, and pink, and violet, and white, and puffy. They collided with each other; they produced rain in different parts of the valley. It was the clouds that I contemplated on, about my existence. So one night I found a God Frequency U-Tube music selection. The photo brought me to my short time spent with death. It was a scene above glowing clouds.

Cumulus clouds glowing in sheens of gold and yellows. I could see these little figures here and there and everywhere, seated, all looking in one direction, towards the biggest puffiest cumulus shape that glowed brighter than all of the other clouds. How synchronistic, that I found that particular music choice to play for the night . . . . Three hours of the bliss that I craved for. Forgetting that I have been given a second chance to honor my soul's desire.

And poof, to this day I cannot find that U-Tube God Frequency music. Instead, what I find when I search for God's Frequency music is the finger of God reaching out to the human finger of Adam in Michelangelo's Creation. I think it's been about six weeks now, and I AM still here.

Miraculously I survived my ordeal with no physical loss. All organs are good;

speech, strength (I am at full strength now), and my mind is functioning. I have been blessed to live with more purpose. Purpose beyond what I thought of as purpose before. What my purpose is now, I'll just have to find out. I have a hunch it's way more than what I settled for in my past.

## Chapter 2: Frank and Julian

*Julian-* I am just about finished with the daily garden harvest for the ranch kitchen. Frank is going to meet me with a couple of horses and we're going riding up into the mountains. The last time we did this, it didn't turn out so good. Jim came to the rescue before Frank, in his crazed mind, forced himself on me! Even though I know that our relationship is over, I am trying to maintain a friendship. I think the pain might be too great for Frank to bear. After the five years of self-exile from my husband, Jim, my soulmate for life, I am happy to be reunited with him. Hummm, here comes Frank with two saddled horses.

"Hey, Julian, you done gardening today? Are you ready for a ride?"

"Can I trust you, Frank? No repeat of our last venture?"

"Yes, you know I was desperate. I didn't want to lose you. To be honest with you, I am still having a hard time ending what we had."

"Frank, what we had was each other to replace our soulmates. We filled a void for each other, while we yearned for our lost lovers."

"Is that what you really think, Julian? I thought we had a romance forming."

"I am sorry. The way I put it was pretty harsh. I'm not considering your feelings. Kind of like what happened up at your hunting camp, when you did not consider my choice. I went there with you to console your broken heart. Not to have physical love one last time. Thank God Jim showed up!"

"That was kind of you, and again, I'm sorry my crazed mind took over. I want to show you where I lost Bertha. I took Jim up there. I want you to see my grief too. Get some perspective on my state of being. Even after all these years I still have a hard time. The grief still comes once in awhile."

"Okay, Frank, and on the way, I wonder if we can quietly go to our feelings and how they might be affecting us personally."

"What do you mean?"

"For instance, you might explore your grief. Maybe you had loss before Bertha. As you were growing up. Go back to childhood. Did you lose an uncle or parent? Who or what did you lose? What effect did the person or persons have on your life, that you can't seem to replace? What's preventing you from moving on with the rest of your life?"

"I understand, Julian. Do you have some similar experiences that you're willing

to share with me? It might help me see myself with a different perspective.”

“Of course, Frank. How about we silently contemplate until you take us to the spot you want to show me? Then we will console each other with some empathy and compassion.”

And with that, we start out on the trail. Looks like we are heading out towards Sawtooth Peak, a series of teeth that make up the high Ridgeline. We cross the road and head through the first gate. There was a fire up there several years ago. Before I ever arrived at the ranch. I am marveling at this spiny ridge when a thought comes to me concerning my teeth and a root canal I had years ago. I recall reading a Louis Hayes book about healing your life. Teeth represent decisions. And the root canal is about root beliefs being destroyed. That takes me way back to early college days and the feminist movement and the group I was with, which included my best friend. There was an indoctrination that was occurring within the group that was not only anti-men but anti-social to the system that seemed to favor males. I realized I did not really have any strong beliefs or a code to live by. I went along with the program for quite some time but didn't really have a sense of myself belonging whole heartedly to the doctrine. I wanted something that would serve me for life. Freedom to create my own journey. Maybe the desire for freedom is what triggered me leaving Jim and abandoning the family structure. Hummm, maybe that was my biggest fear after a five-year hiatus, the effect it might have had on Jim and my children. That was really something how accepting they were when we were reunited. They were just so happy to see me alive. I want to create a foundation that will support me joyously in this lifetime. And I want to have more gratitude whatever comes my way and to be aware of the inner lessons.

I look at Frank riding silently ahead, leading the way. I am reminded of my first boyfriend, my first shot at love. At least that's what I thought, that it was love. At that young age, the love wore off. It was really infatuation with this mythical character. I was accepted as one of the “crowd.” I was indecisive. I chose the relationship to “fit in.” Or maybe because I thought Les was a nice guy? I had no compass to compare him to. I had no self-control or patience to wait for the right boy or man that I really wanted to live my life's journey with. Les was companionship to support me through the young years of my life. That seems kind of selfish to me now. And Frank, is that why I needed him, for companionship? He's a nice guy. He was there when I was wandering. I wanted to fit in somewhere. And I felt that I had exhausted my time with Jim. Yet I realized what Jim and I really had was the foundation that I wanted to create. There was no deep love for

Frank. Gosh, I used him to fulfill a void! Wow, what can I do to help him heal his pain?

Off in the short distance I see an area that has been cleared out. As we approach, I see what appears to be a monument of some sort. We arrive at our destination and Frank dismounts. I do the same. We let the horses feed in the meadow and drink from the stream. Frank walks to a tall tree stump. I follow and as he takes off his cowboy hat and bows his head. I gasp as I am looking at a tree carving of a woman with flowing hair and distinguished features. A body rising from the flames that surround her feet and lick up her legs.

“Bertha? Frank, is that Bertha?”

“Yes, this is about the spot they found her charred body. This is where I grieve.”

There is an interval of silence. I move over to a rock nearby and sit. Slowly, Frank comes over and sits in the grass, leaning with his back on the rock I chose to sit on. I start to massage his shoulders. They are tense.

“Frank, I was just wondering, and I’m not sure you can relate to what I am about to say.” I continue to loosen up his neck and shoulders. “Grief, anger, resentment, they are all suffering thoughts, just as joy, love, and happiness are beautiful thoughts. We become aware of thoughts with our conscious mind. Our personal thoughts become part of the collective consciousness. Think of a bunch of strips of paper, each one having a thought form inscribed on it and thrown into a bowl. Thousands, millions of these thought forms on strips of paper, in a bowl. Now you pick out a strip of paper with a thought form and feel the effect of the thought. It might be mental, or arouse a physical reaction, or one might relate to the thought with feeling. You accept the thought for what it is and replace the old thought form with a new thought form, which is released into the collective consciousness of being. Is the thought on the strip of paper a state of suffering or a beautiful state of bliss? How does a thought affect the collective consciousness? This is a game I learned from someone. It helped me to observe my thoughts. That is the awareness that we must have, observation of our thoughts, being witness to the consciousness thoughts, awareness of how they affect our being. So where are you with the loss of Bertha? Do you still have anger, maybe resentment? Or are you able to move on?”

“You just threw a lot at me at onetime, darlin’. I have a sense of what you are asking. That night when I aggressively attacked you and Jim stepped in with a hoot and a holler, I was acting from a state of anger and resentment. Perhaps I never accepted my loss of Bertha. As a result, I can’t accept that you are back with Jim as

his lover, or soulmate lover, as you describe your relationship with him.”

“Yeah, and if you are in a suffering state, that thought is part of the collective consciousness of humanity. Do you see the effect anger or resentment might have as part of the whole? Where might humanity be if we all were aware of our conscious thought? If our conscious thought served humanity from a beautiful state of joy, or compassion. A state of oneness of just being.”

Frank stands up, turns towards me, and gives me his hand as a gesture to help me get up. We walk in silence, hand-in-hand, and retrieve the horses for a quiet ride back to the ranch.

## Chapter 3: Blue Cloud and Joseph

*Blue Cloud* – I am from the Cherokee Nation. I am a distant young relative to Joseph, a medicine man of great stature. Joseph has been around a long time and has accepted me to pass on tradition. To teach and heal in the Native way. Joseph has found a group of people that he connects with on a spiritual level. I help him and am part of a small group of men that gather and share their life stories. Joseph guides the group through their process. He watches as us men assist each other telling the story of our lives and our journey on earth. Joseph passes on tradition to those that want to participate on their quest.

I speak, “Uncle, you seem tired these days. Are you okay?”

“Thank you, Blue Cloud, for having your concern. I am tired, but not the way you’re thinking. I am coming near the end of this life. I can feel the death calling me to the next dimension.”

“You say that as if soon you will not be with us.”

“My nephew Blue Cloud from the east, you see with wisdom. You are an enlightened soul. You will replace me. I want you to carry on the traditions and teach the ways of nature to these men and others.”

“When will we start?”

“We have started. You have been taking a path towards being a healer.”

My uncle Joseph has been working with Jim and now Julian as they walk the Medicine Wheel. I have been witness to the power of their connection to the four ways and their connection with nature. We Cherokee have watched nature and learned how to observe nature for survival. I watched my uncle guide Jim, Julian, Frank, and Joni through the entanglement of their relationships with one another. He teaches the subtle way to navigate through this life. I know there is so much more for me to learn. I need to pay attention. I need to know the four ways of the North, East, South, and West.

There is a quiet moment of contemplation, then Joseph speaks, “My son, there are higher dimensions that you will receive guidance from. Listen and pay attention to your intuition. You will speak truth from these higher dimensions. I have been told that Jim uses his hands for healing. He uses touch and sends his love through his hands. Molly has told me that at the end of his massage he places his hands on the lower back and behind the heart. He calls forth healing angels and a master of

the green ray of healing. This, I can tell you, is him connecting to a universal collective consciousness. He is using the energy from another dimension where a vortex of light exists. I doubt that he realizes what is actually happening. However, he understands the subtlety of the universe. He pays attention to the synchronicity in his life. He believes in himself. He has used grief and disappointment to know himself. He seeks to know more. He does not stagnate, nor does he use one method to know his truth. He is one to work with, my son. Pay attention, get to know him as a friend. There will be a gathering of people, and they will appreciate your knowledge passed on from the elders of our great nation, that still survives with patience for the great awaking of mankind.”

We sit and pass pipe. A ritual that has much meaning, most of all as a communication between humans and sacred beings. We are in personal prayer. I pray and visualize my role as an apprentice medicine man. I close my eyes and feel a presence beyond Joseph’s material body. I feel his power penetrating into my third eye.

## Chapter 4: The Gathering of Men

*Jim* - I pull into the parking space at Joseph's encampment. Blue Cloud is heating the stones in anticipation of a sweat lodge after the group meets. I see some recognizable trucks and cars and a couple of new ones. It's been a while since I have come to the gathering of men, so I'm intrigued as to who the new participants might be. Looks like we are meeting inside Joseph's home tonight. As I am walking up the path, I see Jerry as he's going through the door. Nobody is lingering outside, so I hustle up the path thinking that I'm the last one. As I enter, most everybody is seated around the familiar big drum, and I see some of the regulars have picked their hand drums. I notice Arthur and Sammie, sitting near each other! Joseph gives me a nod and I take a seat between Frank and Jerry. Blue Cloud enters with a peace pipe and his tobacco from Carolina. He fills it and hands it over to Joseph. Joseph strikes a match and sucks on the pipe until the tobacco is lit and smoke is inhaled. He lets out a puff and hands the pipe over to Blue Cloud, then announces, "Tonight we pass pipe to better communicate between us and sacred beings. May we be guided to speak honestly and share from our hearts."

Jerry asks, "What sacred beings do you speak of, Joseph?"

"The animals, the clouds, the sky, the stars and planets, the women, the enlightened beings."

The pipe is passed around in silence. I observe as each man takes a pull of smoke. I see Jerry, serious as usual. Frank, somethings on his mind, I can feel it. He was with Julian at the ranch. Julian likes the garden work and the little, old cabin. She likes the sound of the TM Creek, rushing by her quiet homestead on the ranch. She likes staying there once in a while. So she does it, determined to work out what she needs to with Frank. Next, I'm looking at Sammie. Wow, he looks pretty courageous being here. So what's my perception, a gay man at a men's group? This could get interesting, I'm intrigued. There are certainly gay men's groups he could attend. Still, I don't need to have those "us and them" thoughts. Like Joseph said, we are all sacred beings. And Arthur, too, I wonder how long he's been coming to the gathering? He gives me a smile and a nod. Blue Cloud looks pretty excited tonight. Usually, he can be very stoical. It seems to me he has an active role as a protégé, of Joseph? Joseph is getting up there in age. And then I peer into the eyes of Joseph's deep brown eyes. It's as if I am peering into a vision.

Joseph starts, “This group of men, right here, all of you. I give you a blessing, a prayer of protection, that all of you will remain together as one member, one person. You are all the same in oneness. Protect each other, open your hearts, and you’ll all be free.”

Jerry is first to share, “When Gerry’s cuckoo clock went off, and it was time for me to leave, I felt stuck, in a timeline of a prescript of events. It seems like my life has been dictated to me in advance. I don’t feel any spontaneity.”

“That sounds depressing, Jerry,” says Arthur, “the feeling of being stuck. What’s that all about?”

Blue Cloud participates and mentions that, “In animal medicine, the bird totem cuckoo’s medicine is for heralding in a new life.”

“I do want to ‘herald in a new life.’ I just fear doing it, making changes to my life. They might seem drastic. I get short of breath just thinking about it. I tense up.”

Again, it’s Blue Cloud, “Without telling us a story, what would it feel like if you didn’t feel as if your life was scripted in advance?”

“Freedom, my autonomy. I have discovered that I do not feel lonely going solo. I feel a sense of relief from responsibility to other people. Ah ho.”

“Wow, that sounds depressing, too! I mean, it sounds like you don’t want to spend time getting to know people. Am I hearing you say that?” This question comes from Sammie.

Jerry stares at him for a while, caught off guard, searching for something to say. “You mean how close a relationship you want with Jim?”

Oh boy, like I said, it’s been a while since I came to this group. So Sammie must have shared his desire to want me in a “physical” relationship? Oh man, how’s this going to turn out? I must have an expression of shock!

Joseph short-circuits the situation, “You are going to sound like two old women pretty soon. Jerry, just answer Sammie’s question.”

Jerry, “Sorry, I thought I was done when I said Ah ho.”

“That would have been too easy, partner,” Frank chips in.

“Okay, I am here, engaging with you guys. So what I mean to say is I am not feeling worthy of Gerry as a mate. We have such contrasting personalities. She drags me into social gatherings and most of them I have no interest in attending. I feel obligated to go, be with her and interact with her friends.”

Suddenly Frank turns to me and, looking me square in the eye, comments, “Yeah, Jim, Sammie shared his strong feelings for you and how you responded to

his . . . how should I put it . . . ? Advances.”

Sammie, “It wasn’t like what you think, just because he massages with loving hands . . . ”

Joseph, “Now we have three women yakking in this men’s gathering!”

I am getting a kick out of Joseph’s humor. I decide to say nothing as all eyes are on me. I am aghast and wonder what that emotion looks like on my face! Just the thought puts a smirk on my face. Ugh, circumstance and consequences versus present moment. How do I explain my relationship with Sammie, to everybody present? What I am aware of is perception and innuendo. Frank has no clue about the relationship between Sammie and myself. Yet, I do not want any kind of a conflict with words. I have compassion for Sammie. He has come to this men’s group to do some inner work. I have compassion for Frank and can feel his resentment that still lingers since my reunion with Julian. They both are in conflict with accepting what is. All I can give each of them is friendship. Let’s see, where do I start?

Arthur comes to my rescue, “I can go next.”

Needless to say, Sammie can’t look at me and Frank has eyes like daggers. Arthur’s share is just distant mumbling since I am preoccupied with thought, and thank God . . . we’re done as Blue Cloud closes out the session with gratitude that we still have a “men’s group!”

We usually have food and a drumming session, but not tonight. I stay plastered to my stool, and everybody else solemnly shuffles out of the house. Joseph is still seated. It’s me and him.

“Jim, do you want to stay for a sweat? Blue Cloud is getting the lodge ready.”

“I am honored that you ask. Yes, a sweat will be a good way to drift into bliss. I could use to do that. Thanks for your humor tonight. It could have gotten intense.”

“Yes, you decided not to share, let alone say anything. The dynamics of the group have changed. You found Julian; Matt and his buddy are gone; Jerry is newly married and having second thoughts again; Frank, well, you know about Frank; and Arthur is working with Molly as they continue to develop Molly’s award-winning sculpture of the sketch class. And I am not sure if Frank, Molly, and I will continue our missing persons investigation services anymore. And here you and I are in the present moment!” Joseph lets out a howling laugh. “Let’s go, help me up. I am aging and these old bones are getting lazy.”

I extend my hand and slowly I observe Joseph struggling a little; however, his grip is strong and I sense he still maintains a strong grip on the purpose of his life.

We pass by the food table and Joseph grabs a couple of, don't tell me, cinnamon donuts from the Hut? We go out of the house, and walk towards the sweat lodge.

Blue Cloud has scented the lodge with some sage smoke. The soft candle lighting makes for a very sacred sanctuary. Blue Cloud joins us as we each pick a place to be seated around the hot lava rocks. Blue Cloud lights the pipe and silently we pass it, knowing it's meaning for communication and trust. We settle in and still our minds. I am still buzzing from the group session. It's not easy to just accept what transpired and the insinuation that I am feeling concerning my circumstance with Sammie. I start to sense where in my body I might be feeling some energy. There's a blockage between my stomach and heart. I let thoughts drift and focus on breath, deep breaths with slow exhales.

Joseph hears my breaths. "Are you sighing over there, Jim? What can that be about?"

"Man, Joseph, you are full of sarcasm tonight."

He chuckles and so does Blue Cloud. "A lot of funny things we seem to be bothered by in this life. We always seem to be giving our egos a massage, like it's the best friend we have, and yet it wreaks havoc with our soul. You doing better now? You in a beautiful state now?"

"Yeah, you have a way with words that get my attention."

"Let's be silent now, for a while. Then I will share with you."

Blue Cloud drops a bucket of water on the hot rocks. Steam rises into the air above into the darkness, lit in some places by the candlelight reflection. I can see patches of buffalo hide in the ceiling. Lying on the elk and bear hides of fur is a treat. Softer than I thought they'd be. I take a couple of deep, slow breaths. The steam chokes me a bit. I lie still. To be in stillness even if for a brief moment. I heard Eckhart Tolle start a podcast by instructing all participants with the following, "Let's take some deep breaths, as many as you want, then let's just be still for a while." To be still . . . ahhh . . .

After some time, after the stillness, our minds come out of the slumber. Joseph speaks, "Jim and Blue Cloud, I am getting ready to ascend from this earth. Not right away. What I mean is that my purpose on this plane has been fulfilled. That is why I am making Blue Cloud my apprentice to gain knowledge of the way of life with the Mother, the all-prevailing earth, the giver of all things. And I have a vision that people will be living in small groups and camps. People will appreciate community. Jim, I will be thrilled if you and Julian would try to keep this group together. After tonight, it might not be so easy, my friend." Joseph chuckles. "You

are aware with how civilization is changing. There might be some hard times for a number of people. People, as a group with varied skills, can support each other, together, as one community. Are you up to the task?"

"I don't know. What I can tell you is that I have had the same thoughts. I loved this group and still do. I see that everybody is busy on their own journey, so I don't know. I am willing to pay attention and be aware of signs and gifts from universal intelligence that might guide me towards the group oneness concept. I realize the commitment it will take. And right now, I have a couple of relationships to nurture."

"We are here to support you. Molly's sculpture captures the theme of this group. Look to it for guidance," Joseph reassures me.

## Chapter 5: Before Maggie's Story

The next day, after the sweat and vision sharing, I drive up to the ranch, early. I want to surprise Julian at start the day with a leisurely breakfast, then help her harvest. The growing season is coming to an end. The harvest and food storage are “a happening” these days. Actually, the harvest is the awesome results of Julian's gardening. The surprises and disappointments, with the crops planted sixty-five or seventy-five days ago, are an amazing consequence of a dedicated time dealing with nature, dirt, weeds, and weather. I pull into the ranch and drive down to the cabin pathway. I see Frank on his horse in the distance. I wave but get no response. He may not actually be looking at me. I start my walk down the path to Julian's cabin. There's a little stream of chimney smoke. There is a chill in the air. I notice hoof prints on the pathway where dirt is exposed. I notice movement through the little window facing the path. I knock and give a little yelp, turn the knob, and as I enter, Julian faces me with drying tears streaking her cheeks.

“What's with the tears?”

“Frank was here. I'm not ready to talk about our encounter yet. I need to get some perspective.”

“I saw him riding down the road and waved. He did not return the wave. Maybe he did not see it was me.”

“Oh, he knew it was you. What the hell went on last night at your men's group? And what's the deal with you and Sammie?”

I grab a cup of coffee from the wood burner. The cabin is cozy. It warms me from the chill of the early morning, late season fog that is coming off the TM Creek. We move over to the table. I put down the cup and before Julian sits. I gently touch her for a hug. I am feeling her weariness. She looks into my eyes with a pensive expression. She lets me give her a gentle kiss and then tightens her grip and squeezes me close to her. Our heads are in the nap of our necks. I can feel the warmth of her breath. It's hard to let go of the sincere embrace. A few seconds later we move off each other, still piercing eye-to-eye as we sit at the table.

“He stayed here last night. He insisted. At first I thought he was mourning and needed some empathy. He took me up to see this beautiful wood carving of Bertha. He said he took you up to the Sawtooth Fire scene too.”

“Yes, but I did not see the wood carving, his monument to Bertha?”

“You’ll have to see it someday. Jim, he crawled into bed with me. And I let him. I’m not sure why I let him, that’s what I am still trying to figure out. He wasn’t forceful like the night at his hunting camp. Yet, he would not leave. He seemed remorseful, yet had no qualms about spending the night and hopping in bed. It happened so quick I felt threatened and told him so. I told him to leave. He ignored my request. And started blaming you for something that came out of the men’s group? Something about you and Sammie and that maybe you don’t deserve me as your mate. He was distraught and all I could do was try to settle him down. It was like a bad dream. And a long night. I was worried that he would force himself on me. He pulled me into him and wrapped his arms around me, spooning me. That’s as far as it went. But I can still feel his body wrapped around me. I was scared and did not know how to react. Thank God, that’s as far as our contact went. He left early; it was still dark out. I didn’t move. I was limp and listened as he dressed and left. I haven’t slept a wink. I feel his pain. I’m not sure I can remain a friend to him. I don’t trust him right now.”

*Julian* - I can feel my lips trembling right now. I wonder if Jim is feeling my anxiety. I am also feeling some perspiration under my arm pits. I must look like a mess, hair disheveled, dried, crusty tear streaks on my face. My face, ugh, I am not smiling, that’s for sure. Man, he is just staring into my eyes. What is he thinking? I am not ready for his heart-to-heart touch. Why did I even tell him about Frank?!

“So, Jim. what’s going on with you and this Sammie guy?”

“Julian, let’s slow it down for a bit. You are jazzed. I haven’t seen you like this for a while. Listen, Nirvana has us do a meditation once in a while to get us in touch with our body. Are you willing to change the mood right now?”

“Wow, have we changed. You really are becoming a new you! Sorry for the sarcasm. Okay, I can use some soothing of my nerves.”

“Let’s move our chairs to the middle of the room and face the incoming sun filtering its’ warmth through the east window.”

We shuffle around and get adjusted in our new location. We sit down, get comfortable, then I start, “Close your eyes, and take some deep slow breaths. Let your exhale be longer than your inhale.”

Several seconds pass. I can hear the birds getting active outside.

“Every emotion has a sensation. Observe where that sensation might be. Feel the sensation in your body. Continue to breath.”

“Breath in calm and exhale calm. Do this several times. Breath in calm and exhale calm.”

Time passes as we stay with this calming breath exercise.

“Now take a deep slow breath . . . . Again, let’s take a deep slow breath . . . . Now just be still.”

A couple of minutes pass. “Feel the warm, incoming sunlight warming your body. When you’re ready, gently open your eyes.”

We let silence linger for a long while. We are with our own thoughts or bliss. I am feeling calm. I am feeling very present with the environment around me and the change of energy in the room. I look over at Julian. She’s still staring out the window. I slowly get up and pour each of us a cup of coffee.

“Thank you High-Me. Thank you for reminding me why I love you.”

“You’re welcome. Thanks for taking me back.”

“This was an early morning surprise. What’s the occasion?”

“I was wanting to help you with some harvesting. Potatoes? Beets? The rest of the beans and peas? Whatever you plan on bringing in now. And I was hoping to meet Maggie, if that’s doable.”

“I think she’s here this week. So are you going to tell me about Sammie while we fix breakfast?”

“First, I want to tell you about a message, or I should say a vision and request I received from Joseph.”

“Really? Joseph shared a vision with you?”

“Yeah, we all can see what’s going on right now between governments of countries. The shifting of powers and the globalists doing whatever it takes to dictate how the future will be. Then there’s those of us that just want to connect with Mother Earth and the spiritual realms. Joseph’s vision is that a time will come when small self-reliant communities will be necessary for the survivors of the great reset that is happening. Joseph would like to see the group of sketchers that I modeled for to remain together. He says it will not be an easy task. He asked if you and I will consider gathering the group to work as one, towards this vision.”

“We have quite a challenge going with just the relationships that we’re dealing with now. Frank, Joni, and now Sammie? You ready to go there, talk about what’s going on between you two?”

“Not right now. I’m still processing that. You remember Stream of Life? And that night you came in while I was in a passionate kiss with Joni? And the gay guy Jerod? You remember the story I told you about him, and he suddenly started kissing me? Anyway, the Sammie situation is similar. I don’t know what was going on with Jerod during that time of my life. I have no recall of his motive. With

Sammie, he has told me he loves me. But his context of the meaning of love is physical, whereas my context of love derives from compassion.”

“And how can you know that Sammie’s perception is purely physical? Just because he’s gay?”

“Hummmm, that is what I need to understand. I am not wired to be gay. And I have told Sammie I am not his man. He is one of my massage clients. I have told him to feel my love through touch. You need to know and trust that it is therapeutic and relaxing, the massages I give him. I am not sure what Sammie shared in men’s group, since I haven’t been there in a while. So Frank must have been reacting to whatever Sammie shared. I am dedicated to you, to us. And Sammie knows that. I have been very clear with him.”

“You have in a real problem. Maybe that’s not the right word here. Just like Frank, I don’t want to make him a problem. But then there are limits. We’re just not wired to set our boundaries. Jeez, we’re both dealing with past relationships. They haunt us now. Some kind of a returning karma? And Joseph wants us to promote community? That’s a tall order to fulfill. And that’s just the people part.”

“That’s one way to look at it, Julian. I look at our situation as another opportunity towards growth in relationship. I am convinced that we are all part of the whole. All of the emotions, all of the substance of the human form, is part of our unresolved essence. How compassionate can we be to another, no matter what. Is there something in ourselves that we need to be aware of that attracts a particular energy? What is it in me that attracts Sammie and Joni into my world at this time? What about you and Frank? What comes up for you? Are you aware of what you still need to resolve?”

“I see where you’re going with this. Part of the oneness concept, your molecular theory? We are all one, interconnected, working towards peace on this planet. We must first look inward and resolve our innermost truths, no matter how uncomfortable they are. What we need to resolve is our personal issues. Is that what I am hearing you say? Is that why you are honoring my relationship with Frank? It’s my situation to work out, all you can do is support me with loving compassion?”

My left hand reaches up to Julian’s disheveled hair. Her eyes have a glassy, tired look. Her vulnerability has an attraction to my innermost being of Divine love. She is me and I am she and we are one. My right hand gently moves into the small of her back and I slowly pull her into me. I receive her head on my shoulder. Julian nuzzles her face into my neck and I feel her sniffing as she hugs me as if it was the last hug we’d ever have.

## Chapter 6: Finding Maggie

Julian and I decided to spend the night at our cabin up Grizzly Meadows. She did not want anything to do with the ranch after her night with Frank. She called the chef, Shaw, and told him she wasn't coming in. She had picked enough veggies from the greenhouse for the day's lunch and dinner. He'd have to get one of the chef assistants to prep for him. She looked haggard, gave me a look, and I thought I heard her say, "I feel so unclean." Then Julian crawled back into bed as if she wanted to hibernate. It was a tenuous situation last night. Julian was very sensitive to my touch and would push my arm away, or roll to the other side of the bed to dodge my attempt at soothing strokes. I rose very early and didn't get much sleep myself. I was concerned for her well-being and feared Frank's advances since I thought we had an understanding and trust that Frank would honor Julian's choice. I got a fire going to compensate for the early morning chill in the cabin. Mountain temps swing dramatically and mornings can be quite cool anytime of the year. After observing Julian's demeanor and ravaged body, I could feel her pain of the violation of trust that Frank forced on her for the second time. Now I am impacted by it, and I am not sure what to do. So I decide to put a bucket of water on the wood stove. I make a fresh pot of coffee and prep a hearty breakfast for us. I pull out the massage table and set a bottle of sesame oil in a small pot of water to warm it on the stove. It's an overcast day and the cabin is dark inside without the sunlight pouring through the south windows. I slowly pull out my yoga mat and put on some soft frequency music, something that soothes the mind and cleanses the aura. I start with some poses, taking my time with each one. I find myself in deep contemplation about the past day events. A couple of hours later as I am coming out of a deep meditation, I see Julian's legs pass by my line of sight. I slowly turn my head in her direction and observe her walk over to the stove and take a position in front of it to get some heat and warm herself. My eyes glimpse at the back of her legs and work their way up her backside and torso. She slowly turns to warm up her back and catches my stare.

"What's with the massage table set up? You expecting a client?"

"Yeah, you."

"I am sorry I was so restless last night and cold towards you, Jim. I was dwelling about the previous day and night with Frank. He said you don't deserve me, but I

feel that same way now, that I don't deserve you. My effort to separate from his affections towards me seem to be sending the wrong message. I think there is too much pain for him to want to accept me as just a friend. I am not sure about my conviction that we can make that work."

"I feel your pain. It hurts me to know what you are going through. I want to nurture you right now, give you some tenderness. Are you willing to receive right now? I have some towels, hot water, and warm oil ready. You can get on the massage table and absorb my love. With me, you are safe. Do you trust that?"

Julian gives me a nod. "Come, warm me with a hug first."

I rise up off the floor, from my mat, and make my way to Julian, where we embrace in a strong, sincere hug. A lover's hug and a kiss that lingers and could go on forever. Slowly, we separate and she takes off her robe and lets it crumple to the floor. As she places herself face down on the massage table, I dip a towel in the hot water, and wring out the dripping towel of excess fluid. I start a gentle slow rub on her back, from her upper buttocks up the spine, and across the shoulders. I witness her first moan. I leave a hot towel draped over her back and buttocks and start on her. Legs, then feet, with warm sesame oil. After I work on the feet, ankles, calves, and hamstrings I cover her with a warm blanket that I had left hanging near the wood stove. I take off the towel and start on the back with my typical massage routine of deep strokes mixed with relaxing and some sensuous raking from the legs up through the back. I have Julian turn over and we start a dialogue.

As I am massaging the belly and middle of the chest region Julian speaks, "Somehow I have got to get Frank to go to his heart, not his broken heart, rather, his compassionate heart."

Now I find this an interesting observation, since I am full of heart felt compassion for Julian's situation. "There's something strange happening here, dear. I have been connected with my heart energy, full of compassion for you, and your comment is centered on heart energy. How connected is that?"

"Well, I am laying here feeling your loving hands and the energy flowing through them, so there must be some kind of exchange that happens between the heart, mind, and body. You are affecting the circulation of not only the lymphatic and blood circulation, but also the synopsis of the nervous system must have an effect on the neurological aspect of the brain."

"Whoa, so if I understand you correctly, the heart is in control. The mind has many functions, including storing subconscious behavior. But when the heart is open, we can heal the body and change the thought behavior of the mind. Is that

what you're getting at?"

By now all massage has stopped. Julian sits up and wraps the blanket around her and, in contemplation, heads towards the wood stove. I follow and place another log on the fire. We sit on the yoga mat and the old ponchos I like to use on top of the mat. They're warmed by the fire and our bodies are feeling the warm glow of the fire.

She chuckles. "Alright, let's follow this train of thought. So the subconscious is full of past thoughts. Some positive, some negative. Let's use that as a simple context of the subconscious mind. Meanwhile the heart might be full of joy, love, and well-being. When I say, 'Franks broken heart,' I am giving power to a subconscious thought of his past. So how do I not give up my power to him, to his reactionary state of mind?"

"Yeah, yeah, so we give up our power to someone out of fear. Fear of not meeting their needs. That leaves our bodies drained of our energy. If we go on like that . . . giving away our power, eventually it can affect our health. But if we keep our power, and our heart is strong, full of joy, positive behaviors, our energy or forcefield that we put out into the world is pure love."

"Something like that. For me, I need to love myself so much, that it doesn't matter what someone else might think of me. I am coming from a space of love; let's call it God realization. The five years that we were separated, now I see that I actually found my power. My intention when I walked out on you was to find out who I was as an individual, separate from the duality of wife and mother. Am I making any sense?"

"Yes, you are, Julian. If we set an intention, visualize something in the future as if we already have it, then our present moment is what's in our heart. Past thoughts or habits might come up; we let them pass. The future is already a given. We live as if we already know our future result . . . the intention we created, and our present moment is open to the joy of life. We are living in the moment of whatever we are experiencing."

"Yeah, living life experientially. I love it."

Julian abruptly drops the blanket and plops in my lap. We readjust ourselves with chuckles and giggles, peer into each other's eyes, and place our hand on each other's heart center.

"High-me, I love you for who you are!"

"Julian, I love your power source, your heart intelligence!"

"Jim, I am grateful for your support."

“Julian, who owns the ranch?”

“What? That’s on your mind right now? You are a crazy dude.”

“I love that you are so connected to nature and you have a natural flow. I am just curious, who owns the ranch?”

“Maggie Jensen. She was a hedge fund gal from Chicago, who did well and invested in the TM Ranch. Why?”

“Joseph’s vision, of us forming a community with the group of Molly’s sketchers. Look, we still have our hands on our hearts. We are still in this heart connection and I suddenly have this sense of oneness. The joyful thought of you being in nature, a regular flower child”—Julian let’s out a burst of laughter with that comment—“and Molly’s tree sculpture with all of us wrapped in the embrace of the huge tree . . . I can relate to Joseph’s vision.”

“So, you’re setting an intention for the future? And you can live in the moment, without dwelling in the past?”

And with that comment, Julian pushes me playfully down on my back and straddles on top of me with her loving eyes and revived power. With a joyful smile and twinkling blue eyes, she bends forward, and kiss we do!

Afterwards, as we are eating breakfast, I ask Julian, “Maggie, from Chicago land, you say. She owns the ranch, by herself?”

“Yes. Her husband was long gone by the time she purchased the ranch, is the story I heard. I don’t have much detail beyond that. Just some of what Frank has shared with me. He’s been her ranch hand manager for about twenty-plus years now.”

“So she moved here that long ago,” I muse. “Does she have long dark hair, probably has some gray in it by now, with freckles across the bridge of her nose? Attractive features with a soft demeanor?”

Julian takes a gulp of her coffee, licks her lips, cocks her head, and says, “Don’t go there, Jim. You’re going to tell me this synchronistic thing like with Joni, someone you know from over twenty years ago?”

“Well, did I describe Maggie?”

“Hell, yes, so Jensen is familiar? You remember her last name?”

“No, but if it’s the same Maggie, we had a couple of classes together in college. She always encouraged me to stick with yoga and we’d talk about the eastern philosophies.”

“Okay, listen, buster, let’s finish breakfast, and see if we can find Maggie. So you have Joseph’s vision in your head—”

“Heart!”

“In your heart and you already set an intention, which includes me . . . .”

“And it is in the future as if it already happened, so I guess I need to ask you if you’re ‘in’. Your choice, of course. I wouldn’t want you to give up your power.”

“You are something else. Alright, soulmate lover, take all of me! My power will be your support. I can see it now, a vision of oneness.”

There’s a euphoric feeling floating around us as we laugh at the thought, not in a mocking way. It’s just funny, how we have taken to heart, pun intended, what we just discussed as conviction versus a belief. Big difference, to be committed to one’s personal wisdom. And for each other’s well-being. This entire morning has had a great effect on me loving myself in a truly meaningful way. Not just pretending by saying it, rather, really feeling love of self. The essence of existence.

“Wow, Julian, are you really cognizant of what we just shared?”

“You mean the beautiful love session?”

“Well, that too and everything we discussed and shared.”

“I am. It has added a new dimension to our relationship. There’s a difference between having a supportive partner versus being codependent. It’s such a freeing up of the mind. And loving self is not about ego; it’s about sending signals to the body for the power of healing. Amazing. Let’s find Maggie.”

We ride over to the ranch in silence. I sense that Julian is feeling apprehension in case we encounter Frank. I reach over and her hand is ready for the taking, as if we are aware of needs and support. We are feeling each other, whether it’s pain, joy, or apprehension. As we are driving on the gravelly road, we spot a moose gnawing on the tops of some dogwood. The tender young shoots, I suspect. The sky is clear blue. A brilliant morning. We drive through the gate and our eyes are darting around the corrals and ranch house that Frank lives in. No sign of him, yet.

Julian reminds me, “It’s been kind of a tense ride up here. Seems like we both need to let go, stay detached from thoughts that don’t serve us. After all we’ve talked about this morning, this will be a good test. Let’s savor the moment right now. The past is the past; the future is our intentions. And our intention is to gracefully sever our romantic ties with Frank and Joni and still maintain a vibrant friendship with them and all of life. Agree?”

“Stay in the heart, the flow of life. Cease to judge. Always love.”

“Jim, take the right-hand road up ahead. If we’re fortunate, we will find Maggie up ahead in her cabin. See it in the distance?”

“Yep. She live alone?”

“As far as I know. I run into her periodically. It’s not like I know her well. She knows that Frank brought me here and set me up with the pioneer cabin. I’m just a ranch hand who serves a specific task. Let’s pull over there, up ahead. There’s a little open area to park.”

“Okay, you a little nervous?”

“What I’d like to do is park, get out of the car, and sit in the grass and just be for a while. Is that kosher with you?”

“Yep. That will fulfill a need to reconnect and let thought just pass through this anxious mind of mine.”

So that’s what we do. Park and silently get out of the vehicle and find separate places to sit. I find a nice, big, smooth boulder, warmed by the sun, to lean against. There’s a flat rock close by, so I grab it and place it next to the boulder. A seat to sit on. Across from where we parked is a big meadow of purple Lupine, wild geranium, sun flowers, and purple asters.

*Julian* - I notice that Jim took a boulder for a hard backrest. It reminds me of a hiking path in Colorado, along the Flatirons, where people created rock chairs and thrones and benches to sit and view the Colorado plains to the east. I want to lay in the tall wispy grass. A soft mat of grass to lay on and view the puffy clouds streaming overhead. I wonder what it was like when Jim had his NDE and said he remembered floating over clouds. There’s so much on my mind right now, I just want to escape somewhere. This vision thing with Joseph, trying to keep the sketching group together, I don’t know if I am up for that. Why can’t Jim just take us somewhere far from Frank and Joni and now this Sammie thing? I don’t even know all those other people except for the extravagant class reunion, Molly’s idea of glorification.

And Maggie, I barely know her other than a few times taking a sweat in Joseph’s sweat lodge. And as my employer, at least I know she is very gracious, letting me stay in the cabin and working the greenhouses. But starting a community on the ranch? Alright, time to let all these thoughts float away just like the clouds overhead. Ugh, Frank, so maybe this is my karmic return for walking out on Jim. And now I want to escape again. Life gets complicated and I want to retreat. I can talk to the plants and animals. With the gentle earth relationship is easy. With the human form, I give up my power. So maybe I need to take to heart what Jim and I contemplated this morning, setting an intention and letting go of future thoughts as if they already happened. Maybe I need to cancel that word future, get it out of my vocabulary. I need to reconcile with Frank, the existence of our relationship. He

needs to honor the fact that our time as lovers is past. It was created out of our craving for something that was missing in our self. Our love of self. I must see him again. Here, I lie in the grasp of the gentle earth. I receive her power. I can feel it enter me now. I love who I am, me, Julian. I love Julian, for God created me and connected me to this mystery that I am here to master. So I am grateful for the opportunity now to ask for Frank's forgiveness? Understanding? Compassion? I must continue to forgive him, not fear him. He is the lost soul that I recognize in myself. The last of the clouds pass; the sky opens to a brilliant blue. The sun blinds my eyes. I shut them now and feel the warmth penetrating my being. The sun burns power into my being and I am aware of another source that gives me strength. To love with compassion, to love myself, and love others with that same burning desire to be part of the whole universe. To be here now because there is no escape from the present. It is the essence of my existence. DO YOU HEAR ME, FRANK? I AM COMING TO FIND YOU AGAIN. TO KNOW THE TRUTH OF WHAT IS, NOW. NOT WHAT WE HAD IN THE PAST. THAT WAS ME LIVING IN ILLUSION. THAT WAS YOU, TOO, LIVING IN ILLUSION. IT'S TIME FOR US BOTH TO FACE OUR TRUTH. I AM COMING, FRANK. I AM COMING.

I am startled out of my reverie. Julian is shouting something. I go over to Julian and gently shake her.

"Jim?"

"Julian, you are screaming, I hear you. Have you dreamed?"

*Julian* - I sit up, open my eyes and Jim is looking at me, amused. "No I have not dreamed. I have been witness to my ways of past behavior. I know what I must do to claim my honor."

I am not quite sure what Julian means. She looks as though she has come back from a battle that dwells in her mind. Her message sounded like she is presiding over a future meeting? With Frank? Did I hear her say his name? Was it anger or what? "I am coming," that's what I heard. "Julian, I heard you tell Frank 'I am coming.' do you recall what you said?"

"I am scared, Jim. I must find Frank and face him again and again until we have our resolve."

Julian sticks out her hand and I reach out to pull her up, out of the tall grass. Some loose grass is tangled in her hair. She brushes herself, shakes her head, and runs her fingers through her hair. There's a great big smile starting and she's looking at me, so strange. That smile has some sort of significance. It's powerful and I find

myself smiling with her.

“Come on, sweetheart, let’s find Maggie.”

## Chapter 7: Maggie's Story

We get back in the car, look at each other, and Julian nods towards the road. "Let's get going, see if Maggie is at her cabin."

It's a beautiful drive to the southwest corner of the ranch. The graveled road skirts the barren ridges and ravines and starts to climb into the wooded forest. There's an opening with a high, flat meadow and a midsize log cabin with flat logs heavily chinked. A large, covered deck wraps around two sides. The cabin looks beautiful. It was meant for this spot. We see a truck parked alongside the cabin and park near it.

"You ever been up here, Julian?"

"No, never. I was unaware of where Maggie lived on the ranch. I see her and occasionally meet her, chat for a bit. That's it. I never really had the opportunity to befriend her. Hummm, that must be her coming out to greet us."

I look up and, sure enough, Maggie is walking onto the front porch. As we approach, I notice Maggie's longish black hair, a friendly smile, and freckles? Am I seeing freckles across the brow of her nose and upper cheeks? As we start up the stairs, her features haven't changed in twenty years. It's the Maggie I knew from college. Will she remember me? The quiet guy whom she inspired to keep seeking?

"Hello, Julian and Jim, welcome. Come on in."

Julian responds, "Hi, Maggie, it seems like you were expecting us?"

"Well, I heard the car approach, and Joseph told me that you'd eventually come see me. So, yeah, intuitively I felt like it was you. Come inside. I have some hot tea and coffee brewing."

We enter and the main room is simple, spacious, with very little furniture. The west wall has a huge canvas painting of a sitting golden Buddha surrounded by bright yellow rays of light. It must be an eight-foot square canvas, flanked on each side by long narrow windows that let in the late afternoon sun. Very meditative, it radiates light and joy. The south wall has the huge, thick, wood door with the Tree of Life carved in it. The door is flanked by two six-by-six foot windows that look out past the front porch over the meadow with a view of the distant mountain peaks. Maggie disappears around a wall that separates this room from the rest of the cabin.

I whisper, "Julian, I think that it's Maggie from my past. From twenty years

ago!”

“Get out of town! Another woman from your past just so happens to be here in Montana? From twenty years ago? Are you kidding?!” Julian starts to laugh and shakes her head. Her piercing eyes are glaring at me in amusement.

“I think so. I’ll check it out, later. Maybe she’ll recognize me. But for now, let’s see what she has to say about Joseph’s vision.”

Maggie comes back into the room with some coffee, hot water, and an assortment of teas. She places the tray down on a low table and gestures for us to sit down. There are some pillows, and we sit.

“Before we get started, I need to share some news, Julian. Nobody has seen Frank in a few days. His horse is gone and so is his rifle from his truck rack. One of the guys checked under his truck seat and his revolver is also missing. There was a shot heard in one of the canyons, but nobody was able figure out where it came from. I thought you’d like to know. I’m just giving you a heads up.”

“I know where he probably is. Up by the Sawtooth. There’s that little lake up there, Star Lake. I’ll bet he’s there. You remember the fire up there? It was before I arrived.”

“Yes, I do. I’ll send somebody up there.”

“No, Maggie, I’ll find him. I need to.”

I react and immediately say, “I’ll come with you.” Is it out of fear for Julian’s safety? Or not trusting the outcome of their next encounter?

“Jim, this is still something I need to take care of. I need to take back my power. The best support you can give me right now is prayer, for me and Frank, too. If you don’t mind, I’ll take the truck down to the corrals and grab a horse and some gear from my cabin. Can you take Jim down later, after you two talk and get to know each other again?”

“Sure, Julian. What do you mean get to know each other again?” Maggie looks at me, head cocked brow furrowed. “Do I know you, Jim?”

I avert Maggie’s stare and turn to Julian. We get up and I give her a hug and kiss. “Be safe, my love. You sure you want to go alone? After last time, at Frank’s hunting camp?”

Julian gives me an affirmative nod. “Yeah, I am trusting a higher source, my Divine being, and my heart. I’ll be alright. Whatever happens is meant to be.”

I walk to the door with Julian and out onto the front porch. My eyes follow Julian as she climbs up into the truck and starts up the engine. The crunch of gravel affects my nerves. I am aware of Maggie’s presence behind me, off to my right. I

turn and look into her eyes. Her face has a more relaxed look. There is a synergy passing between us. I can feel it, and I let it just be there for now. Seconds pass, not a word spoken. We are just staring at each other. Slowly, very slowly Maggie starts to smile, and I feel the corner of my lips turning upward too.

“Wow, I am not sure what just happened between you two. I know that you and Julian have a past, and so does Frank and Julian. He’s taking Julian’s choice to go back to you pretty hard. You seem to trust that Julian will be safe. A love triangle can have a tragic ending.”

“Well, you know Frank better than me. He’s been your main man around here for a while. You know his history. I have gotten to know him, too. From a men’s group and art classes. I know he is struggling right now and I have compassion for him and that is also what is fueling Julian.

Her compassionate, loving heart is what motivates her to come to resolve with herself and Frank. It’s their relationship that needs mending. I pray that they remain the best of friends and that I too can continue to have a meaningful relationship with Frank.”

Maggie’s amused smile is back. “Okay, Jim, I am intrigued. Clue me in. Have we meet before?”

“You are from Chicago land?” Maggie nods yes. “Did you ever attend Mayfair/Truman Junior College?” Another nod yes again. “You took classes for nursing and there were some other required classes. I don’t recall what they were, but I do believe we had some of those classes together.”

“That was, what, twenty or so years ago?”

“Yes. We would discuss Hindu and other eastern philosophy. In fact, you turned me onto Ram Das and gave me a book called *The Seed*. It had a huge, folded mandala in the book that could be spread out. Julian and I made a collage with it and got to know each other as we cut photos and articles and pasted them around the perimeter of the mandala. You inspired me to continue to seek a spiritual path. You suggested yoga and other books. Do you recall any of that?”

Maggie is staring again, brow furrowed, again. I can tell she is trying to recall her past. “Did I have a boyfriend during that time?”

“Yes, the second year during registration I was laying on one of the concrete blocks that was part of the architectural design of the building, getting some sun while waiting for Julian. You saw me and came over. To this day I can remember your warm smile. He was with you, your boyfriend at the time. You introduced me to him and then Julian appeared and the brief introductions continued, and that

was the last time I saw you. This is my memory. Obviously, Julian has no recall of you, but I do because of time spent in a couple of classes, sitting next to each other and talking.”

“Let’s go back inside. The coffee is getting cold. I’ll make a fresh brew. We have a lot to discuss. Wow, Jim . . . hummm, fascinating that we’d cross paths again. And even Julian was with you then. And she ends up here, too! You know, Joseph is a medicine man. You don’t suppose that there’s some kind of supernatural powers at work here? You know, bringing us all together somehow. For a purpose? Have a seat at the table. I’ll be right back.”

I position myself so that I am facing the Buddha painting. It is gifting me with calmness and joy. I wonder how all of this will play out, especially with Julian and Frank. I close my eyes and picture Julian on her journey up the mountain, on a horse with a bedroll? I am guessing it will be an overnigher, to say the least. I send energy of peace and calm to Frank. I am hoping for a mutual resolution of cooperation and understanding. A benevolent outcome. I am aware of some movement and I am aware of Maggie’s presence. She places some saucers and cups on the low table and sits across from me. Maggie reaches over to pour some hot coffee, then looks up and searches for my eyes. We make eye contact.

“Okay, where do we start? Maybe I could give you a brief description of how I ended up here. Some of what you shared with me is familiar. Truman/Mayfair, nursing, *The Seed*, yeah, I recall some of that time in my life. A lot of my past I have blocked out of my mind. Slowly I am reconstructing my past only to gain a better understanding of why I am here, how I have arrived at this moment in my life.”

“It’s intriguing how your terminology ‘reconstructing my past’ resonates with me, maybe in a different way than what you’re about to describe, but nonetheless how many more times will it take for me to not dwell in regret of past misdeeds . . . ?”

*Maggie* - Alright, I just had a déjà vu moment. Of course, he looks different. But yeah, this brings back memories of our discussions. “Okay, yeah, past misdeeds, let me continue. That boyfriend I mentioned back then when we were classmates, we ended up getting married. He was into finances and worked at the Commodity Market as a broker. I gave up my pursuit of nursing and became a hedge funder. I got quite good at it. But that whole lifestyle took a toll on me. It was not who I really wanted to be as a person. I lost any semblance I had of a spiritual path. Of being a seeker towards personal enlightenment. I just had a déjà vu moment of our discussions back then. Wow, small world . . . .”

Maggie's face lights up. She is looking at me differently. The connection is feeling different, too. It's hard to describe.

“. . . So here we are, Jim and Maggie. Yeah, we met twenty some years ago. Woo . . . let me continue. Anyway, there were a lot of parties, a lot of schmoozing to get clients. The high rollers. Big money to be made, using other people's money. It was a whole different mindset than who I really was, but I got immersed in the lifestyle. I became a creature of addictive habits, always craving for more. Our marriage fell apart. It's ironic what you said a while ago, 'not to dwell in regret of past misdeeds.' When I contemplate my past, just sitting and looking out at the mountains, I am finding myself letting go of guilt and shame. These days as I watch the changing scene of nature, I let those past thoughts dissolve. Like a passing cloud or a gust of wind, a rising or setting sun. You get the picture?"

'Yes, yes, it's amazing how when I pause to take in my surroundings, especially in nature, the past just dissolves; it's no longer there. Yeah, I get what you mean!"

"Okay, back to my brief story. I am excited to share this with you. So, what happened was that I had made a trip to Hawaii, the Big Island, and ran into a guy, Tom Cotton, who was a recovered addict. He wrote a couple of books. He held gatherings and taught the twelve-step method to recovery using Buddhism, a noble eightfold path. He used Tibetan singing bowls as therapy and meditation, and I started connecting to my true self. The first treatment plastered me to the floor. Tom had probably twelve bowls, all different tones, in a circle around a mat where I laid on the floor. I shut my eyes and the vibrations were incredible. After the last sound, I vibrated to nothingness. I opened my eyes, Tom was smiling at me, and I could not immediately rise. I laid there for a while, first not thinking about anything, then slowly I knew my time with my broker husband was over. My life needed an abrupt change. I forgot to mention I was an alcoholic by then. So we did a lot of various meditations and mantras to overcome the suffering of negative emotions. This replaced my addictive behavior of substance abuse. It's amazing how once I saw the calming effect of meditation, I was able to put an end to using any substance to alter my state of consciousness. I got back to Chicago, officially ended my marriage, sold my hedge fund brokerage, and next thing I knew, there was an opportunity to purchase this ranch in Montana!"

"Did you paint the Buddha?"

Maggie has this wonderful smile, just radiating. "Yeah. Now I remember you. You're still a little big man!" She's laughing at her own joke. But at least I have verification; it's official. We briefly knew each other in the past. "Oh, the Buddha.

A friend of mine helped me move out here and painted the huge canvas while she stayed with me. Sunflowers were in full bloom and the Golden Buddha in the middle just radiated. When the sun rises in the morning, the brilliant light floods through the east windows and this wonderful picture reminds me to let life flow into and around me as I look into the sun. The source of light from the Creator of all life gets me going every morning. Amy, she helped settle me into my new surrounds. Kept me on track with my commitment towards recovery. A very good friend with a lot of contacts. Enough about me. Joseph had a vision. What did he tell you?"

The Buddha is so still and the sunflower so bright. What is it that I am on this earth to do? When I was floating in bliss above the clouds in near death, then rudely awakened with the nudge "you're not done yet," what did that mean? Am I given a second chance to be "saved" from my past? Am I meant to find my purpose, not for something outside of me, but for my inner purpose, to gain personal enlightenment? Or is there something I was chosen to do by God, for mankind? I feel so peaceful right now, and I feel the stillness and hear the quietness that surrounds me right now. I am not compelled to do or think about anything. Not now. It's so nice, this pause, to hear the breeze rustling the heavy fir tree branches. The sunflower petals on the canvas seem to be moving and the Buddha remains still.

There's a whisper, "Jim, where did you go?"

I turn my head in the direction of a whispered question. I see a gentle smile. The woman's face is smooth, with freckles across her nose and upper cheeks. She has slim, black-rimmed glasses resting on the bridge of her nose and a slight furrow creased between her beautiful, light blue eyes. Head slightly titled, long, black hair dropping to the side. Some strands of grey glisten in the sunlight.

Oh, oooh, it's Maggie! With a quiet rasp, I acknowledge her, "Maggie, sorry, I got lost in contemplation. That is one powerful picture. I'm sorry, what did you ask?"

Maggie's smile relaxes. "Joseph's vision . . . what did he say to you?"

"Only, that he dreamed that Julian and I where to keep this special group together and form a community that will be a basis for developing a community that thrives because of the Creator's earthly abundance. To know the way of mastery that keeps us connected to our true source. To love Jesus as God, as spirit that dwells in all. To love self, therefore to love all of life. I don't know, is this a woo-woo explanation? Maybe I am just blabbering right now."

Maggie is laughing out loud. She rolls off her pillow and onto the floor. This causes me to smile and just watch her in full joy. Finally, she straightens up.

“Gosh, I didn’t realize my true skill is to be a comedian; that’s my purpose! Yeah, that’s it, you helped me find purpose!”

Maggie is chuckling again. “No, no, that is not your purpose, little big man. No, if Joseph has given you a vision, your purpose is to serve. What I learned during my success as a hedge funder was that the contacts that fueled the success came to me as gifts from the universe. Not the other way around. And here you are, a gift from the past that has come to me now, twenty years later. We’ll figure it out together, what our service is to be. I’m excited and grateful. How about you?”

“Thanks, Maggie. Yeah, I am not ready to discuss anything now. This has been a blessing, to meet you under the circumstance.”

“Hey, I can drive you back down to your vehicle. My guess is Julian and Frank will still be up on the mountain. You have quite a woman as a mate. I am happy for you. I’ll go get my keys.”

## Chapter 8: Star Lake

As we're driving down the hill, towards the ranch corrals, Maggie pulls off the road and the truck is facing the Sawtooth Ridge. We're just staring in the distance, but Maggie seems to know what she is looking for. "There, do you see a thin film of smoke rising out of that distant canyon?"

I am looking in the direction she is pointing and suddenly I see what Maggie sees. "Yeah, campfire?"

Maggie pulls out some binoculars. "Yes, definitely, right in the area of Star Lake. Up the canyon from where you ski!"

"Oh, you know about that?"

"I have been alerted. Frank clued me in and both of us thought it to be harmless. We rather enjoy watching your sojourns. Apparently, Frank said that Julian always figured it was you but she never could get the gumption to chase you down. I wonder why? All of a sudden, she fell back in love with you?"

"Maggie, my guess is that she was experiencing what compassion really is. She told me that she felt more of an obligation towards Frank; however, I think there is more to the story. Frank being an ex-preacher and Julian finding the way of Jesus. You know, in the Bible it is written that once a man takes a woman and vice versa, it is forever. And if the woman leaves her man, and cohabits with another, that is adultery. So there's a lot to unravel there. For both of them and me, too. And in that whole mix of emotion and guilt, there lies forgiveness and compassion.

For self and each other. I also, have a relationship to reconcile, so I am not second guessing anybody here. It's painful."

"And Joseph has a vision of you and Julian forming a community, on this ranch? I don't think this is a time to discuss that aspect of the vision. Joseph certainly hasn't given me any details, and it doesn't seem like you have much to offer in way of details right now. Well, let's get you down below. I'll call Pete. I think he's the chef tonight. We can have some dinner together."

And with that, we are headed back down the road.

*Julian* - I stop by Bertha's wood sculptured shrine and memorial. It's near where she died in the great Sawtooth fire several years ago. I dismount and check my pack horse. I do a quick bear check and peer over the backs of the horses. It's a good day for horse travel. Bright sunlight, warmth from the sun, a crisp cooling sensation in

the shadows of the forest trail. I give homage to Bertha, someone I never knew, only that her death had a dramatic change on Franks life. Then I came along, out of nowhere, and slowly our relationship was formed. I think it was out of some desperation and grief for both of us. It feels good to stretch out of the saddle. I think I'll walk a bit. Come on, Hazy and Myrdal, let's get the show on the road. I listen to the hooves clack on the rocky path. I notice some newer hoof tracks, probably Franks from a few days ago. I am guessing we still have a mile or two before we get to Star Lake. We should make it before dark. *Boom*. I hear a resounding echo reverberating off the canyon walls. The horses hesitate. I hold the reins snug. One shot. I wait for another that doesn't come. My hope and prayer are that Frank shot dinner, and he still has the will to live! I do not want to find a suicide! I gently stroke Hazy, and Myrdal gives me a nudge with her snout. I mount Hazy and we slowly pick our way up the trail. It's really amazing that I feel calm, despite the shot, and not knowing exactly what I am doing. Just following my intuition to find Frank and give him comfort. My mind is not creating a scenario, so this is good. I stay focused on the ride and the beautiful surroundings. It keeps me very present; for this, I am grateful. There's a small clearing ahead, a mini meadow. I slow the horses to a halt and take a pause to observe. I pay attention to my breath and look up. Over yonder, I see a thin thread of smoke rising above the trees, not too far off. Thank God, Frank must have a fire going, preparing for a dinner of wild animal. We move on. I think of Joseph and Blue Cloud for whatever reason. It must be memories of the Medicine Wheel, me the Woman of the North. I wonder what a life as a Native American woman might have been like. If I was a Native American woman, what would have been expected of me? How different my ways and thoughts of who I am would have been. I am lost in a dream state when I hear the whine of a horse. I stop and look around. There are Frank's horses grazing up ahead. Not far off. We must be close. I see some ripples of water oozing out of a hollow, filled with rotted limbs and long grasses. My eyes follow the start of a creek that flows slightly downhill. I dismount, I feel a little nervous now. Not so calm. What is it that I have come to accomplish? Bravely, I continue on foot, reins in hand along the path. I can't be far now. I smell meat roasting and hear some spit from the fats, a bonfire crackling. I take a turn through some tall brush and see the empty camp. I wrap the reins loosely around some limbs. Cautiously, I step into the camp. I see Frank's bedroll. Looks comfy, like he intends to stay for a while. I sit on a log stump and take a deep breath.

"I wasn't expecting any company, little lady." I am startled and look up over my

shoulder. There's Frank coming out of the bush, a wry smile crosses his lips.

"Frank." I don't know what to say. We are awkwardly staring at each other.

"Do I get a hug, or are we going to be strangers?" Frank stays stationary. It's me who gets up, and slowly I make my way over to him. Frank pulls me tight, rather aggressively, and starts as if he expects a kiss.

"No, Frank, we are doing this whole scene differently this time." I pull away. My bones are shaking. He backs off with a surprised look.

"So why did you come up here, Julian? I thought you had a change of heart."

"I am totally committed to my man, Jim. I came to reconcile with you and put our past to rest so we could start a new and different relationship honoring each other with respect to our current circumstance. Can you please, no, I pray that you will honor my request and take some time to get past your desire body."

Frank's expression is of surprise. I can tell that he thought me coming up here to find him meant I decided to choose him over Jim. Just like last time.

"Frank, this is not going to be a repeat of the hunting camp scene. You were forgiven once; how many more times must you live in an illusion of entitlement?"

"Okay, sorry, you can leave now. Why did you come up here to find me anyway? To make me suffer more?"

"You are the one responsible for your suffering. How about you having a talk with God, mister preacher man? And don't give me your pity story of being a fallen man. You know damn well what the Bible has to say about adultery. That's why I am here. So that we can repent and be humble in the eyes of the great Creator, who created woman for man's enjoyment of companionship. Not to be misinterpreted as means towards physical fulfillment with whomever. Maybe we both can be humble enough to search our souls in raw honesty, together. And with that, know love as compassion and the spirit that dwells within us as love that flows unconditionally."

Frank's face color is ashen white.

My body is trembling.

The fire crackles.

Eyes stare into empty spaces,

That need to be filled.

We glare.

The horse's hooves can be heard,

Shuffling impatiently.

There's a snort.

I can't tell where it came from,  
But I feel my nostrils flare.  
And Frank has steam coming from his.  
It's time to get down to what is real.

## ...And a Day of Reckoning

*Jim* - I head into Bozeman. I have two massage appointments to give in the evening. I take a slow drive along Trail Creek Road. One of my favorite scenic drives. I am hoping to see some animals, maybe a sign to connect with Joseph's vision. I say a prayer for Julian, for her safety, and her bold attempt to convince Frank. I have time for an early dinner and I decide to stop by the Hut for some coffee. I park about a block away. Bozeman has changed and it has a city-type atmosphere now. So much more traffic, and finding a parking space isn't as convenient as it used to be. I walk past the windows of the Hut and notice a back booth available. Good time of day to be there, almost a private hangout for me. I see Melody and give her a nod. She comes over. "Well, we haven't seen you for a while, Jim. How have you been? Coffee and a cinnamon donut?"

"I've been good, busy, just getting my bearings with my life. Trying to reconnect with some people here on the other side of the Gallatin. Cancel the donut. You have any of your famous green chili?"

"Huevos?"

"Yes, that will satiate the appetite. I'll be in the back booth over yonder if you don't mind serving me there . . . . I tip well!"

"You got it, Jimmy. I'll have Pete put it together for you. Eggs over easy, with no whites jiggling!"

I smile and nod. Melody is always so cheery. She sure knows how to make a customer feel good. I take my coffee and head back to the booth. I have a lot to contemplate, concerning Julian's situation and meeting Maggie after twenty some years, Joseph's puzzle. I turn my head to the window just in time to notice Joni strolling past. I frantically tap, and she turns, looking back over her shoulder. She sees me and greets me with a quick smile. My gaze follows her, and it seems like she's going to come join me. It doesn't take long, and Joni is sitting across from me, in the booth. Our hands slide atop the table, and they grasp each other in a warm, tender embrace.

"Jim, how are you? Back in action? I haven't seen you since before your NDE. Gosh, it's so good to see you. Julian? How's she doing? You two are together still? Right? Or do I still have a chance? Is the massage office open again? Can I sign up for appointments?"

“Whew, Joni, Joni, Joni, I am doing good, and it is good to see you again. Slow down. Let me have a look at you. I want to feel your presence.”

*Joni* - God, Jim can get so quiet. Just like that. What is he trying to communicate to me? I avert my eyes and grab his right hand with both of mine and gently rub it between my hands. I entwine the fingers, and look at him. “Oh, Jim, there’s so many times that I just want you. For myself, it’s almost lustful and self-serving. Have you thought about me lately? Do you miss me, too?”

I take a deep breath. I slowly place my left hand over the top of our hands and the touch is sensuous. “Your desire seems so physical. And, yes, you come to me sometimes in dream state. You’ll become an object of my thought. You mentioned a self-serving lust; maybe that’s what it is. I lose sight of you as a human being. The memory of our previous interactions, when it was so pure before Julian came back to me, gets obscured as I crave for the sensation of our carnal knowledge that we shared. During that NDE experience, I was given a second chance. All I can think of is that it’s a chance to live fully in truth and conquer my denials. So I have a question for you. We know a bit about each other’s history. We shared our addiction to sex as love when we were younger. You recalled that, from twenty years ago in the Stream of Life workshop. Now, in our maturity as adults, when you have ‘self-serving thoughts,’ are you able to witness them for what they are, a craving, an addiction for physical love?”

Our eyes are locked. The energy is intense. I feel Joni pulling her hands away, ever so slightly. I don’t think she was expecting this conversation. What made me go there in the first place? I hope I am not insinuating something that is not real for her.

“Well, answer him!” It’s a male voice from our left.

Our trance has been jolted. We shockingly look up and Sammie is hovering over us.

“Do you mind?” As he slides into the booth next to me. The entire energy field has been rudely disrupted. “Sorry, I didn’t mean to butt-in. We all saw it in Molly’s class, you two lovers. Me the jealous gay guy wanting Jim for myself.”

Joni has a very discerning look of contempt. Her piercing eyes are shooting bullets. She pushes her hair back with the swipe of one hand. “You have the gull to come right in and take over the conversation and demand that I give you what . . . ? What is it you want, an answer? You just want his body, that’s what you want. Isn’t it? Huh?”

“Whoa, Joni, Sammie, we’re pressing some buttons here. Joni, do you mind if I

give Sammie some history? Sammie, can you not be so aggressive? Give Joni and me some space?" I feel another aura field over to my right beyond Sammie. Joni and Sammie's gaze follows mine. It's Sadie and Jenny, the lesbian lovers, just staring at us.

Jenny pipes in, "Are we disturbing something, or is this a class reunion?"

Well, that just cracks me up! Even Joni has a smirk on her lips. And Sammie raises an eyebrow. He invites the gals, "Have a seat. This should get very intriguing. We're playing Truth and Consequences. You want to join? We are having True Confessions, so this conversation isn't for lightweights."

They're game. They squeeze in next to Joni. Sadie talks first, "I'm not sure this is the right lead in, but it's good to see you all here. It's been a while, and we love to play games."

Well, that just makes me chuckle even more. Okay, I didn't see any animals during my Trail Creek Road drive to Bozeman. I was looking for signs that would give me clues of Joseph's vision. I recall Maggie's response . . . "and Joseph has a vision for you and Julian to start a community with the sketchers?" Good luck with just straightening out your relationships with ex-lover wannabes! I wonder if Joseph's vision took into account this menagerie. So, there's my sign, and it's not an animal totem! Wild lovers, on the prowl. It ain't going to be easy. I am laughing now, shaking my head to-and-fro. It's so out of place, but suddenly we're all laughing and nobody knows what we're laughing about.

Love, sometimes it is so difficult to separate physical attraction, wanting a hug, a kiss, or sensuous touch, from the non-physical. The non-physical, just feeling someone else's presence. As I sit here and with the laughter starting to die down, I am reminded of the end of a meditation I did in one of Nirvana's yoga classes. As we took a deep breath, we opened our arms wide, and as we exhaled, we gathered our family circle a visual of family, friends, and whomever else we wanted to include in a massive hug. Then as our arms embraced our chest and wrapped around our upper torso, we loved ourselves. It was such a moving experience. So pure to love self, to love God's gift of spirit in me. As tears stream down my cheeks, I notice that we are all connecting with each other in a special way. Slowly we all start placing our hands on the tabletop. It seems that I am not the only one moved by this moment in time. We hold hands, and then Pete shows up with the Huevos Rancheros. Pete looks around and says, "Oh, is this a Kumbaya experience?"

I look at Pete. "We have a party going on, Pete. I wonder if you can put that over a warm part of your grill, and when I ask, can you cook up one for each of us,

in a while? And in the meantime, a cinnamon donut for each of us. Please.”

“I’ll be back with the donuts and more coffee!”

We have all settled down. There is a brief moment of quiet stillness. “Sadie and Jenny, let me explain how this celebration began. I saw Joni walking by, outside and tapped on the window. She came in and joined me. There was excitement to see each other again. It has been a while. Somehow our conversation quickly became about physical love and non-physical love. Joni and I have a past that goes way back, in a workshop we took, where we processed our self-serving need for physical love. Sammie showed up—”

“Yeah, I hadn’t seen Jim in a while either, and I saw these two intensely chatting, so I came over to their table and they didn’t even know I was there—”

“Until he demanded that I answer Jim’s question, that he heard him say to me,” blurts Joni.

Jenny engages, “Ah, this is sounding like a private party—”

“You and Sadie have been invited. The only condition is that we all share our perception of our sexual needs to feel loved. To inquire, what is our truth about our need. Is it an addiction, is there another way to love another? I am not sure how you two fit in with my personal struggle. It seems like Joni, Sammie, and I have been drawn together for this particular reason. You two in?” I ask.

I get an affirmative nod from them. Now I am feeling self-righteous. Maybe this is a self-serving situation that is an effect stemming from Julian’s insistence to understand her separation from me and the impending relationship with Frank. It’s absolutely my infatuation to know what love is. Or maybe we’re all trying to figure that out on this planet!

Joni has her head turned and is looking out the window. Suddenly, she starts to talk. “Okay, where do I begin? You know how Molly was intrigued how we each sketched Jim different from the poses he did in the class? It seemed we all had different interpretations. And we included ourselves in his world. Does that make sense? Like when Stephanie and Jim did the pose with their hands on each other’s heart, my sketch was of me, not Stephanie, in that pose.” Joni turns her head to face the group. “I wanted to feel that energy that transpired between them. I wanted Jim’s energy for me. I tracked him down from a long time ago, and had expectations for a relationship with Jim. Now I am starting to understand better, that I haven’t loved myself enough to be able to receive someone else’s love in a way that is divine essence.”

There is a reverence that dwells over us. I can feel the spirit of Jesus hovering

over this party.

Sammie has a say, “So, Jim, you know my feelings towards you. You have been graceful enough to not push me away. In our massage sessions, you told me to feel your love through your touch. It seems like Joni is talking about a divine love, something that is perfect and infinite. Whereas my desire is to have a physical interaction with you, what you want to give me is a love that continues on. It is not about organism. Is this true?”

“Yes, my friend, I love you for who you are. It’s not a carnal desire. Before, I was starting to explain the workshop Joni and I attended way back when we were younger. All of the participants took some kind of psychological survey. And the result of the answers we gave had us paired up with other similar types as roommates for the weeklong workshop. There was four of us, Joni, myself, a gay man, and another woman. Correct me if I am misinterpreting our pairing, Joni, what came to light was that all four of us had an addiction for sex, to be blunt. We all seemed to enjoy physical contact. The processes in the workshop had different effects on the participants. Am I describing Stream of Life correctly, Joni?”

“Yes, and the four of us had a past to reckon with. I’d say the four of us had huge desire bodies for physical love. That’s a fair assessment, wouldn’t you say so, Jim?”

“Yes, and through the years I have struggled with it. Especially in thoughts of sexual fantasy. And just when I felt free from those thought forms, I have come to this day of reckoning. I am grateful to have met all of you. Each one of you have made me go deep and visit my past carnal thoughts. The poses Molly had me do became a process of witnessing my past in a way I hadn’t recognized before. I craved for the physical need for connection in relationship. As I matured, I wasn’t ‘on the hunt,’ so to speak, but the sexual thoughts still persisted. When I checked into spiritual and religious teachings about sexual desire, I rejected the perception of tying it to evil. I want spirituality; it’s part of who I am. However, I don’t want to be confronted with judging myself and guilt. The effect of the poses caused me to not be in a constant struggle with my sexuality and the effect is to know God as love and love as compassion. And compassion as connection for myself and for all whom I meet. So now I want to discover what compassion means for me. I might not be making any sense right now, but at least I am with y’all, who are willing to dive in. Get some context of what overcoming our deep craving might instill in our attitudes towards . . .”

“Towards sex? So how do we fit in this conversation? We’re an anomaly!” Sadie

seems exasperated. “I crave for sensuality and long foreplay and the beauty of another woman. I haven’t found that with men I had been involved with in the past. I had trust issues to work through at Jenny’s request when we had dinner together.”

Jenny speaks up, “I count on divine mercy to intercede in our relationship. We both seek spirituality, and don’t want to fear that our same-sex attraction will prevent us from experiencing a higher ground.”

I intercede, “Sadie, the night you and Jenny had me over for dinner. Do you remember how that night ended? I’d have to say that we were on higher ground. Remember, the oneness the three of us felt as we formed a human mandala. The loving energy we felt with heart connection.”

“Yeah, that was special. Thank you for reminding me of that moment, Jim.”

“You know there are Christians that might feed that fear of damnation because of what is written in the Bible. So maybe you’re hope for divine mercy will overcome the fear of being denied a spiritual experience that we all deserve. Lord have Mercy! For you too, Sammie,” this I say with upmost sincerity.

Sammie gives me a thumbs-up. Sadie and Jenny nod their approval. Joni is peering out the window again, and looks back at us as if she came out of deep contemplation. She gives us all a weak smile. We break out in some lighter conversation, Pete comes with the Huevos and more coffee, some orange juice, and a dozen more donuts. The party continues for another hour. Stories told, some true confessions, too. The support and camaraderie is essential to the human kindness I am feeling. We decide to meet as a group once a month, starting in a couple of weeks, and explore our experience of love as sex, compassion, and God. We decide to rotate at each other’s homes.

# Chapter 9: What Is Real?

I really enjoy the walk from the Hut to the massage office. It goes through a parkway that's a city blockwide and about three blocks long. What I like is that all of the traffic noise, the people's hustle and bustle, are on the periphery as I meander through the greenery of grass, bushes, trees, and flowers. A bit of nature that settles me, stills the mind. I try to make it a mindless walk, but today I am thinking of Julian and Frank. I feel inclined to say a prayer, but I don't know what to pray for. Maybe I can just have gratitude for a benevolent outcome. Just like the party I just came from. How special was that? I know it was a blessing for me to be able to recognize carnal thought versus loving energy. It was ironic that we all gathered together. Lost lovers, defining our love in a higher context. As I approach the office and come to the end of the parkway, I realize I'll have some time before my first massage. Today, I will be seeing Nirvana and Megan, from the yoga class. This will be a first time with Megan. It will be good to reconnect with them. Slowly I am starting to make contact with whom I have befriended and whom I want to stay in contact with. A good circle of friends. Wow, I might become an extrovert yet. Ha, Ha.

I enter the office space, turn on some soft lights, and decide to settle into a meditation. I have some time. I put on some Buddhist music. It seems so distant, like going to another worldly space in time. I see Julian and I want to touch her heart. Can she feel me? See me? Know I am with her?

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*Julian* - "Frank, I don't intend to leave. I came here specifically for us to have inquiry, concerning our relationship."

"Suit yourself, stay then. Looks like you have a bedroll. I've got dinner cooking. I am going to collect more wood for the fire. It will be chilly up here tonight."

"I am goin' to head for the spring and wash up." We go our separate ways. Frank's body language is slack, somewhat depressed. Is that what I am detecting? I grab a towel from my panniers and head towards the spring.

The spring seems so private and alluring. I want to wade in the water and wash

my sins away. There's an old spiritual song rumbling in my head. There's a small pool of water that has collected on some bedrock. Just enough to form a small, shallow bath. I shed my clothes and slide into the cool water. It feels so good, so natural. Just like the creek by my cabin on the ranch. Gosh, I hope Frank and I can finally resolve his indifference about the circumstance that I am back with my true soulmate. I hear some rustling in the bushes . . . .

"You're looking good, Julian!" It's Frank's voice. Ugh, just the direction I do not want this night to go! I get up and try to keep my backside in the direction of where I think his voice came from. As I reach for something to grab onto, my left foot slips and the ankle turns. I give a "Yelp."

"You okay, Julian?"

"Yeah, I think I just turned my ankle."

"Hold on, I'll come help you."

I slowly turn and he's coming directly at my naked body. Oh brother, now what? "Frank, don't you dare go apeshit on me!"

"It's not like I haven't seen you like this before. You're safe, don't worry. What you said a while ago, back at the camp, struck me like a bolt of lightning. We have a lot to talk about."

He's on me now, looking down into my eyes. I see something different, a tenderness.

"Here, put your arm over my shoulder. We don't have far to go. I'll come back for your clothes. I have your bedroll set up by the fire. Dinner is almost ready."

And with a feeling of reassurance and trust, we hobble back to camp. Frank gently helps me down to a sitting position. My bedroll has a pair of clean jeans, socks, and my favorite insulated hoodie. Without saying anything, Frank starts heading back to gather my towel and clothes from the spring. I give a not-so-loud shout out, "Frank, thank you, thank you, thank you!" He doesn't turn, but I am sure he heard my gratitude. After what he just acknowledged concerning the "bolt of lightning," I don't feel so harsh and self-righteous. Maybe we'll find peace and resolve and start to cherish each other's presence. Dinner smells so good. As I dress my body starts to warm. I reach over to the log pile and put another log on the coals.

When Frank returns, he places my folded clothes into my panniers and looks down at me with a smile. I wonder if my expression is vivid enough for him to register my awe and gratitude.

"Well, dinner is ready and I have an extra set of eating utensils for you. Let's dig

in.” Frank has a tripod set up and a cast iron kettle hanging from it. “Whitetail stew with wild edibles and some veggies from the ranch garden.”

“Did you anticipate me coming up here looking for you?”

Frank smiles. “Yes, I did. I know you enough to know that you need resolve. I realized how cruel I have been, rejecting your effort to be kind, to get in touch with feelings and be truthful to myself, you, and Jim. Even though I figured you can tell by my actions, I must admit, that’s not the most sincere way to express them. I haven’t given anybody a chance to actually speak their truth. I have even done that in the men’s group lately.”

“Thank you for this opportunity for us to have some closure with our past relationship and move towards a new direction. It means a lot to me.” Frank smiles, gives me a nod, and hands me a warm bowl of stew. “Just out of curiosity, this is bear country up here . . . ?”

Frank reaches over and exposes his Mag 44. “You mind if we eat in silence, then talk? I need to digest this feeling of compassion that has settled over me and listen for bears.”

“Yes, let’s eat in peace. Before we start, how about a prayer of gratitude? Do you mind if I lead?” Frank gives me a quick nod as he serves himself. “I have a small book with writings about gratitude in the left pannier; you mind grabbing it?” He reaches over and hands it to me. I open to a random page and start, “When you are able to forgive and let go, when you can have mercy for those who have caused harm, when you can feel grateful for tough lessons learned—then you can be healed; you can become whole.”

And with that said, we both smell the food and dig in. The stew is fabulous. Nothing like a campfire meal after a long day. The temp is dropping and the sun is setting. I feel so comforted. That was the gift of Frank. Back then when I needed a place to fall, he was there with no conditions. As time went on, the relationship changed. And right now, Frank seems to be revealing a change of heart. This moment can be special. I never really left Jim or the family in my heart. They were always present. For that I am grateful. There’s something about keeping love energy for family alive in the heart. After all, I am the matriarch of our Elmore Clan. Mom, wherever you are, thank you for lessons learned under your watch. I see now how grandma’s traits were passed onto you and then to me. The ancestral lineage continues on as I hope to pass on this love for meaningful relationships to my children. Our reunion was so amazing when I came back to Jim and family. It’s as if they knew or at least accepted that I had to embark on a personal journey to find

my truth. Just as you did that solo trip around the world for a month. Back then, when I was young. I didn't understand why you had to leave our family. Yet I watched dad support you and take care of us with as much love as you had for us. May your soul rest in peace as your divine soul continues on your journey. I can feel your presence now, and your eyes on me. Thank you for all of your blessings.

"Julian, you seem a little preoccupied. You certainly slowed down your eating. Is the stew alright? Too spicy?"

I look over at Frank. His expression is of concern. "The stew is great. I just had some memories of when we first met, of my mom, and children. And of Jim."

"Okay, I am going to get some coffee going and let you finish your dinner. If you don't mind, I'd like to talk some tonight. I'll let you finish up eating in peace while I gather my thoughts."

I close my eyes with each bite and relish the taste of each morsel. I chew slowly to get full flavor. I smell the campfire coffee brewing. I complete my last of the stew, place my bowl down, and open my eyes. When I look across the fire, Frank is staring at me.

"Julian, first I want to tell you how beautiful you are. Your beauty within. Your determination to get me to feel. Your honesty about how you saw our relationship. When you truthfully told me how you felt obligated to oblige my advances for physical love. I knew how much you loved Jim, and I told him so, but it was pride and my desire to have a female companion that kept me from wanting to just be friends. It is painful, and my reactions indicated as much. But when you challenged me earlier, and called me 'preacher man,' that was the bolt of lightning that struck my heart. I know now that you have no desire to support my self-pity, and I recognize it as a manipulation. Ever since I lost Bertha to the fire, I lost my faith in God and was a preacher no more. And when I tried to banish you from this camp, and you denied me that vengeance, it was then that I felt God's presence. I know that you have somewhat of a different viewpoint about God than I do, but I also know that you have been reading *The Way of Mastery* and you know Jesus in your own personal way. And what I felt was humility. I knew that God sent you to me for healing. That the effect of knowing you was for something greater than a human relationship. It was to guide me back to the divine relationship I once had with Him. For me, there is no other love greater than the relationship with my divine spirit."

"That is so beautiful, Frank. I am so grateful. All I can say is that I kept chasing you down to heal our relationship. And now to be considered as a conduit between

you and your relationship with your Divine is so humbling. Jim mentioned something to me the other day. He has been reading the Bible lately, and has seen so many parallels with his conviction of his relationship with his Divine. He has read several times how the trinity is one spirit and God has given us the Holy Spirit to dwell in each of us. The Father, Son, and Holy Ghost is all one, and we are one with the One. How beautiful is that?”

“Yes, so many times Joseph and I have had that discussion. He talks about the day when he will go back to be with the Great Creator, back to being one with the one that brought him into this world. He is passing his lineage onto Blue Cloud, the next in line to be a medicine man. Funny, how I am a Christian, yet I can see the light within others as long as I don’t pass judgement or have a perception of how it should be.”

“Bless you, Frank. I am so grateful for what you have shared tonight. It is great relief and joy that I have in my heart right now.” I start to crawl over toward Frank.

“What are you doing?”

“Lay down, Frank, I just want to give you a heartfelt hug. I want you to feel this oneness that I feel right now, and I don’t know how to express it.” Suddenly I am on top of Frank, peering down as we make eye contact, then I am prone on top of him. “Just feel me, Frank, take it no other way. Just accept my gratitude right now for all of our past these last several years we have known each other.” My face is snuggled into the nape of his neck, and I feel his arms around my back. And that is all we do physically. Just being one big compassionate bundle of human form transcending into beings of light. “Oh, God, you are so magnificent.”

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*Jim* - I finally make it over to the massage office. The light is disappearing from the sky. While I am getting some hot towels ready, and setting up the ambience in the massage room, I try to imagine how the night might be evolving for Julian and Frank. I have a good feeling about the situation. I see both of them with smiles on their faces. That’s the best memory I can have of them, so I keep that image in my mind’s eye. I go back into the reception area and wait for my first client. There’s a click of the doorknob and Nirvana walks in. We greet each other and she winces as she sits across from me.

“What’s going on, Nirvana? You look like you have some pain.”

“Yeah, I tweaked my sciatic nerve a couple of days ago. So that’s what I want you to focus on tonight. Give me a second, then I’ll get under the sheets. I might need some help getting up on the table.”

“I’ll make some compresses and I’ll put a little stool alongside the table so you have a little step. When you are ready, you can come in. I’ll put together some menthol, cayenne, and comfrey for the compress.” While I am busy getting the towels set up, I can hear Nirvana changing out of her clothes. She lets me know that she’s ready. I turn around and she has the sheet deftly wrapped around her. I come over and take the ends and use it as a drape while she gets up on the table. Once she’s settled in, I place a hot towel across the lower lumbar region and one along her spinal column. I decide to start at the feet and gently apply some traction.

“This is feeling good already. It’s so good to see that you are back in action. Do you feel totally healed from your NDE? That’s the last time I saw you. Tell me, what has it been like for you?”

I guess I could have anticipated that inquiry from Nirvana. After all, she was there when I came out of the battle for my soul. “I must say, I have had a lot of insights. I miss that blissful state of floating above the clouds. There are so many times when I just zone out, and this physical life seems so foreign. I was fortunate to have had a brief peek of what’s waiting for me in the end. I think I had shared with you how I had the sense that I wasn’t done yet. It wasn’t a voice, but then again maybe it was. What I am noticing is some profound revelations that has to do with purpose. My spiritual influences have always been biblical, Hindu, Buddhist, and Zen. I am finding myself earnestly mixing the elements of each discipline. What is beginning to be revealed to me is the meaning of the message, ‘you’re not done yet.’”

“The compresses seem to be relaxing my sciatic nerve. You can go a little slower and deeper with your strokes. Sorry for interrupting your train of thought. Please keep talking.”

“Okay, so Jesus died on the cross for our sins. God dwells within us as the Holy Spirit. God is the trinity. All one. So the part I am not done with is overcoming my denial of immorality, self-righteousness, judgements, and the list goes on. The Hindu and Kundalini philosophy give me the processes to recognize my karmic ties to past behaviors. I have a path towards the wisdom I need to gain an enlightened state of conscious thought. The Buddha and Zen Buddha give me the calm perspective of accepting all that is.”

We continue the massage in silence as soft frequency music is playing in the background. My choice just happened to be God Frequency music. Sounds for a delta state of mind. It seems as if Nirvana has fallen asleep. I give her a blessing and slowly, gently rock her side-to-side. I hear a slight murmur, and let her know to come back to the earth plain. “Nirvana, I am going to place this block under your legs and have you do fifteen minutes of static back. You’ll have your legs at a ninety-degree angle, with your calves over the top of the block. This will help relieve some of the lower back discomfort.”

“Hummm, sounds good to me, Jim.”

I go back out to the reception area. Megan has come early and is sitting on the couch, looking blissful. She looks in my direction and has a wonderful smile to share with me. Needless to say, I breakout with a smile of my own. It’s such a refreshing greeting, the smile. “Hello, Megan, good to see you! I am glad you’re early. Nirvana has about fifteen minutes left. She’s doing a treatment for her back.”

“It’s so wonderful to connect with you again. I sure hope you’ll get back into our yoga class. I miss seeing you there. You’re looking good. How’s Julian doing? I haven’t seen her since you were in the hospital.”

“She’s doing very good. I don’t think you know all of our history, since you only knew her for the brief moment when you met her. We’re both in the midst of healing past relationships. Julian happens to be up at a mountain camp with the person she needs to be with right now. I pray that it all goes well.”

“Jim, I’m curious, how do you pray?”

“That’s a good question. I never know. Sometimes out of desperation, or I find myself asking for the outcome I would like to see. Sometimes it’s just a rote habit.”

“I’d like to suggest that maybe you start with gratitude for receiving what you desire as if you already have it. And maybe just pray to accept the outcome that’s meant to be?”

Suddenly, Nirvana comes into the room. “Did you forget about me, Jim? Hi, Megan, you’re in for a treat.”

I give Nirvana a response. “Oh, sorry Nirvana, actually you got off a little early.”

“I was so zoned out, I lost track of time. Seemed like forever. It was a little awkward getting off the table with that block on it, but I managed.”

“Good. You can do the static back at home too. Even if you don’t have a block, use your couch. Just keep the legs at ninety degrees and the arms along the ground at a forty-five-degree angle.”

“Great, I’ll try that. My back feels relief from the pain right now! Sorry for interrupting your conversation. I’ll let you two get ready for the massage.”

“Not so fast. Jim, do we have time to chat a bit more or do you have another appointment?”

“You are the last appointment, Megan.”

“Okay, so, Nirvana, we have been talking about prayer and gratitude. Do you have any input you want to share?”

“I do. Jim, when you do the gentle rocking at the end and place your hand on my back over my heart area and small of the back, what thoughts do you have?”

“Well, I’m calling forth healing angels and asking for whatever needs healing to be healed in your body.”

“So you’re a conduit for energy to flow? Can you relate to that?”

“Yes, in fact, we were talking about gratitude. Now that I think of it, I thanked the green ray angels for your healing. When I place my hands on you, here is what I request, ‘In the name of my mighty I AM presence and the holy Christ flame within my heart, I call forth the beloved angels of the green ray to heal, heal, heal any discordant energy that needs healing in Nirvana’s body and I thank you it is done.’ That’s a form of gratitude. Isn’t that what you were referring to, Megan?”

“Now that you put it that way, yes, prayer becomes a way of connection to other energies that assist us. Prayer is our connection to the flow of energy that is abundant. I call it God abundance.”

“Well put, Megan. Hey, I need to get going. Enjoy your massage, Megan. Thank you, Jim, see you in two weeks? Same time? And will we see you at yoga again?”

“Yes and yes. I’ll bring Julian, too.”

“Jim, when you end my massage, I want to feel your healing energy. Instead of you calling to what you perceive as a higher source, the healing angels, I want to feel your healing hands and your Divine energy passing from you to me. You have the gift to heal,” is Megan’s request.

# Chapter 10: Joseph, Blue Cloud, and Walking Stick - The Torch is Passed

“Blue Cloud, my beloved nephew, he who is next in line, will now be the medicine man, and all who seek the wisdom of a medicine man will come to you. It is you who will share the vision of what is to come. Your apprentice will be your niece Walking Stick. She is the one chosen since she has learned the way of the Cherokee and will pass it onto to future generations.”

“What is your intention, Joseph?”

“It is time for me to walk the way of the West. I am ready to be free of this world and know the afterworld as promised by the Great Creator.”

“When and where will you pass into the next realm?”

“I will go to the top of the Big Horn Mountain where there is a Medicine Wheel that has lasted generations. From there, I will do my vision quest and be taken to the next dimension. I will leave after I do a final sweat lodge with Jim and Julian. You will contact Jim and give him the news. You, too, have a vision of what energies will besiege Jim’s consciousness. Warn him. Walking Stick will give him the guidance, too. He will need to overcome all resistance. I have spoken.”

“Uncle, I am filled with much sadness. I am honored to carry on the way of medicine man. I thank you for your knowledge. I will use the wisdom I have been gifted with and teach the way to those that seek the wisdom of the universe.”

We have finished. Silence is all there is left as we hug and part our ways. I watch as my uncle walks through my door for the last time. Tears roll down my cheeks. I give chants of gratitude. Tomorrow I will track down Jim. Tonight, I will grieve.

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*Julian* - I awake to the smell of bacon and coffee. Frank has breakfast started. He looks my way as I crawl out of my bedroll. He gives me a nod to greet me. I smile and it seems a tone of quiet contemplation is set. The mood is subtle. We both have confirmed the extent of our relationship with new terms. There are bird sounds, a horse snicker, some black birds croaking, and a faint smell of smoke. It’s a

beautiful morning, with the sunlight starting to lift over the high ridge.

“Here, Julian, a cup of coffee to start with. I have some baked beans and eggs ready, just waiting for the bacon to finish.”

“Thank you, Frank, and I am so grateful for your witnessing last night.”

“I, too, am grateful that you persevered to heal my contentious relationship I have had with God and with you and Jim. I have a lot to still process, so I want some space to do that. I might not be up for a lot of conversation today. Just so you know.”

“I understand, Frank.”

*Julian* - We break camp, extinguish the fire, pack up, and get the horses ready. We do all this in pure silence. I am appreciating the stillness in my mind. We start our journey from Star Lake, back to the ranch, with very few words spoken. I realize that this shift between Frank and I is nothing short of the miracle I was desiring. I was amazed how quickly Frank was able to shift his consciousness and rid himself of this painful experience. This healing happened in the blink of an eye. I wonder what actually came over him. And for him to reconnect with his God source . . . there must have been something that registered in that thick skull of his. Maybe his heart opened up, maybe he connected with Bertha. Who knows? All I know is the relief I feel. I am beginning to see the worth of having deep, heartfelt empathy for others.

Maybe that's what quelled his defensive nature. I know now that true empathy is when I can feel the other's pain, look at the situation from his or her perspective. It's not easy to do. I regret not being able to do that with Jim the times I left him. I see now the lesson I have learned that when I want a relationship on my terms, it just doesn't work out. That way of thinking is just a huge block towards negotiating a more benevolent outcome. I also recognize the change in me. What took me so long? I do not want to carry around the feeling of guilt. That would not serve a purpose of forward movement. One thing that I am noticing is how quickly I can move from old subconscious thoughts to new patterns of thought that are inclusive to the other's feelings. Whew, well, at least that makes sense to me. I'll own this wisdom for now until something better replaces it. I surely don't want to stagnate in thought! Time to enjoy the ride down on this mountain on this beautiful beast that's so willing to carry me over this meandering descent down to the basin floor.

*Frank* - Bertha, I feel your presence as I look at this monument I had created in your memory. When I look back to see where Julian is, I can't help but think that you used her to rekindle the flame in my broken heart. For all of my resistance and

blame towards God when you died in the fire, somehow I finally stopped grieving after all these years. I don't know what happened to me at Star Lake. Was it Julian's determination to tear down my wall or was it you that I saw in Julian's eyes? When she talked about me using her to replace you, yeah, I can see the truth of that now. When she jumped on me and hugged me, I felt like that was you celebrating my liberation from the dark space I keep buried in my heart. When I tried to banish Julian from the campsite and she wouldn't leave, I wasn't prepared for what transpired. My eventual change of heart. When she went to wash by the spring and I followed to peek through the bushes, to catch a glimpse of her naked body, what came to me was Proverbs. 'Was that you washing at the spring of life? Where water flows from the earth to give nourishment for growth and wisdom.' Anyway, that is what flipped my switch. I can't wait to get back home and pick up my dusty Bible just to read the book of Proverbs. The book that "speaks the kind of wisdom that helps to embody heavenly truth in earthly context." That's the way my study Bible put it. I guess you can say it's a key to understanding universal law. Thank you, Bertha, thank you for having my back. I love you, and thank you for your blessing.

I look back and see Julian approaching. She has a smile on her face. I turn and see all of the new plush growth amongst the burnt monument of trees and exposed rock that inhabit this once forested terrain. There's got to be some symbolism here. I can't help but smile. "Looks like you're enjoying the ride down the mountain."

"Oh, Frank, you too. Your smile is so real. Did you have a visit with Bertha?"

*Julian* - I say this as I give her tree sculpture a nod.

"Yeah, a long visit. Thank you, Julian, there's been several life-changing experiences in my life. This time spent with you is one of them. Thanks for your friendship."

*Frank* - She has such loving eyes right now. Looks like they are glistening with tears. Here comes that smile.

"I am so grateful right now, to have you in my life as a best friend. Come on, let's get back. I'm guessing Jim will be waiting."

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*Jim* - I decide to spend the night at Julian's cabin on the ranch. I have some anxiety wondering how she and Frank are doing. Do I really need the anxiety? After all, it's their business and I already prayed about it. So let it be, Jim. I have a nice,

little fire going since I woke early. I am recalling my time with Megan and absorbing her observation of me as a healer. How I can let the energy flow through me to another? I recall how it took a while to clear my mind of thought and just be there as a source for the energy to flow. What did she call it? Deeksha? Give me a Deeksha blessing. She mentioned her association with Ekam and how she was initiated to give this Hindu blessing that is passed on from Sri Krishnaji. Megan has encouraged me to do a Manifest with Sri Preethaji. To do some processing and connect with the universal intelligence. She's got my curiosity. I'll have to check it out. I step outside for some fresh air and stretching. The wispy clouds are passing overhead and the sound of the creek is soothing. I walk over to Julian's garden plot to see what's growing. I pick some Swiss chard and sorrel for my egg omelet. I pluck a shallot from the earth and pinch off a few sprigs of chives. I look up and see a moose peering at me across the other side of the creek. Luckily this garden is well fenced. I look up towards Sawtooth Peak. All I can see is the jagged ridge line. I wonder if Julian and Frank will be back today. I turn to head back to the cabin. I close the creaky gate and set the latch. I whisper goodbye to the moose, who is busy chomping on the fresh shoots of the bushes. I get back to the cabin and pour a cup of coffee. Julian has been keeping those luscious cinnamon donuts stocked in her little pantry. I grab one to have with the coffee and get started with breakfast. As I am opening a can of baked beans, I hear a knock on the door.

"Come on in." The door opens. "Hey, Blue Cloud, you are just in time for breakfast. Grab a cup and some coffee. What brings you here?"

"Thank you, Jim. I have a report to give you. About my uncle."

"I haven't seen Joseph for a while. How is he doing? Last we talked, he had a vision that required Julian and I to form a community. So I have some information for you too."

"Good, let me tell you what will happen very soon. Joseph wants to do a sacred sweat lodge with you and Julian. He will bring sweetgrass and blessings to tell you both to be appreciative and gentle with your partner. You will meet Walking Stick. She will adorn you each with a medicine bag for empowerment. This gift comes from her grandmother. In this bag, you will each choose small things of significance that you relate too. This might include a buffalo coin, or herb, maybe a small piece of a gem, whatever has meaning for you personally. You have both been on a personal journey. This is why Joseph has chosen you to share his vision. Continue to find balance in your relationship with Julian. She will support you and you will support her, but neither needs to depend on the other for self-completeness. And

one is not to dominate the other. When you both understand this wisdom, you will understand the feminine and the nature of yourself. Love yourself and it will have an effect on all other relationships. Joseph will explain how to hold council as you gather the people to form community.”

“Blue Cloud, who is Walking Stick? And what is the reason that Joseph’s vision calls for the forming of a community?”

“Walking Stick is my niece. She has a yearning to be a medicine woman and carry on the family lineage of medicine healers. She will perform the task that I did for Joseph while being the apprentice to prepare for her time of grace.”

“Whoa, what is going on with Joseph? Is he ill?”

“Joseph’s time on this earthly plane is completed. He is going on his final vision quest to meet his creator. He will remain in spirit. His physical body will be collected and cremated on sacred ground. We will hold a ceremony to spread his ashes on the top of the mountain, and float some down the river to flow to the sea.”

“Your news is astounding. I am speechless and honored to bring Joseph’s vision to fruition. I am waiting for Julian to return. She went to reconcile her relationship with Frank, who fled to the mountains in grief. I am not sure when they will return.”

“You have honored Julian by allowing her to be separate from you, to fulfill her many purposes in life. This is the wisdom that Joseph recognizes in the both of you. This is why he intuitively chose you and knows that after he holds council with the both of you, his time and purpose on earth will have been consummatory. You are to remain here at the cabin, share your love with her. Let your reunion be consummated. This will prepare you for your sweat with Joseph. Walking Stick will come to prepare the lodge.”

“I am honored to be chosen for this task. To be honest with you, I also feel burdened.”

“I must go now. I hear your concern. Contemplate on it and consider the worldly developments. It might help you understand your path or journey, and why you have connected with the people that have come into your life. Fast while you wait for Julian. Do your own vision quest to prepare for this ritual with Joseph.”

“Here, take these donuts with you. If I am to fast, I need to get rid of the temptation of my addiction.”

With a smile, Blue Cloud takes the dozen donuts. He reaches in his pouch and hands me a hand-wrapped cigarette. “Take this and share it with Julian as you would pass a peace pipe, it will be part of your celebration with her.

I watch Blue Cloud as he walks down the path. When he disappears around a bend, I admire the setting of this old pioneer cabin, the small garden, the creek. I truly feel my essence of existence wrapped in nature. I bare my feet and walk the earth over to the creek. Slowly, I walk into the cold water and feel the soft mud ooze between my toes. I adjust to the water temperature. There's a depression that Julian had filled with smooth river rock. I step out of the creek and take off the rest of my clothes. I walk a ways and find the creek-side bathtub. I submerge my body into the icy mountain creek and focus on my breath. As my body adjusts to the temperature again, I begin my vision quest. Several minutes later I rise out of the water and walk over to the cabin. There's a low folding beach chair against the outside wall facing the warm sun. I settle into it, close my eyes, and drift. After a while, I realize the gist of Joseph's vision. The recent landscape of the world is rapidly changing. The battle between globalist and nationalist dominates the tense direction of the future. This is more than countries without borders; the climate is about a lifestyle change being forced on the masses. I am reminded of God's abundance as I feel the sun and listen to the warm breeze flutter the leaves as bushes sway. I smell the fragrance of the earth. Then my mind wanders, and I see the desperation on the faces of people who wonder what is happening to their comfortable life. Do they feel manipulated and thrown into the chaos created by the hierarchy of the rich? I drift again. I am groggy and my mind settles, I feel the warmth of the sun. I doze, not knowing if I am in mediation or sleep state. When I come to, I open my eyes and Julian is looking down at me. There's a blanket over me and the sun is over the mountains to the west. It's still light out but cooler now. I blink, and Julian is still there. We look at each other in silence. Finally, she utters the phrase, "Where have you been, Jim?"

"Ummm, wow, my love, it is you! Thanks for putting the blanket over me. How long have you been here?" Julian stretches out her arm to help me up. "Thanks. Where have I been? I'm not sure. First with you, wondering what was happening in your life, then there was a whole bunch of people, journeys to other enclaves, and it was like the earth embracing me. I am so glad to see you."

"And I am glad to see you waiting for me. Hey, you, hug?"

*Julian* - It is so nice to feel Jim's hard squeezing embrace and deep kissing. Yum, I am melting into him. Time to slow this guy down or we'll be on the ground! I pull my lips off of his just so I can breathe! We giggle at each other after this passionate exchange.

"Hey, buster, come on, let's get inside. You have to be getting cold out here."

Dusk is here. We enter the cabin. “There are your pants and shirt. I picked them up. You must have had a cold soak? Let’s get a fire going and then we can continue where we left off, maybe ease into reunion?”

“Yeah, sounds like a lovely idea. I am so glad to be with you again. And you’re safely back. How’s Frank? Is he back too?”

“Yes, it went well. I’ll fill you in on the details.” I grab Jim’s arm and twirl him into mine for one more squeeze and smooch. “Hummmmm, you want to get some coffee started? I have a hunch we’re going to have a long night!” I love these moments with just the two of us, preparing for a time of sharing, and romance? Yes, I feel certain that is where we are heading. I like how Jim takes his time and creates a mood. He’s patience with me is admirable. “Sweetie, I am going to the creek and wash up. Keep the fire hot, and your heart warm.”

*Jim* - I look up from the table where I am getting coffee ready to brew and give her a smile. She’s changing into her robe and I get a nice glimpse of her beauty. “Okay, love. I’ll be ready to warm you up, too.” I get a smile and a wink. As she walks out the door, I am feeling so much gratitude to have her back in my life. I have no sense of a possessive nature in regards to Julian and her relationship with Frank whatsoever. It’s part of her journey how she relates to others. Why would I want to interfere with her choice? I trust the love between us is real. I appreciate her sincerity of our relationship and her honesty of our past and what she went through mentally.

The door creaks open, a head peaks around the edge of the door, and what greets me is her radiant smiling face, which sets a tone for fun. “Bring that smiling face in here!” Julian slithers through the door. “Yahoo, good to see you! All of you .

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So pretty you are, lock the door, my love  
Tonight, it’s just you and me,  
Unconditionally.  
Let’s dance, let’s have romance.  
We’ll talk from the heart,  
Share our gratitude that it’s you and me.  
I don’t care where you’ve been,  
What has meaning now is our existence together.  
One heart, one being enjoying, excited  
To be together now.

We will smoke pipe, have ritual, be tender  
And wake in each other's loving arms.  
Entwined as one, lost in each others soul.  
"Where have you been, Jim?"  
You asked. Well, I have been here all this time  
Waiting for you!"

Julian has her back pressed against the door. The smile turns into a cackling laugh and a subtle giggle. "Oh, a poem for me. How sweet. Or is it a poem for us?"

"Yeah, for us. Here, I poured some coffee. You still have that Wild Turkey stashed away?"

"No, Frank took it quite some time ago. It was going to be a truth serum, Irish coffee, but that idea didn't work out.

He left in a rage with the whole bottle! I'll clue you in about our time at Star Lake, but tonight let's just be."

I smile, feeling Julian's loving energy. "Blue Cloud was here earlier. He left me this rolled cigarette with the special tobacco that we use at the men's gathering. He gave this that we might do some ritual to prepare for a special sweat in the lodge. With just us and Joseph. Joseph wants to give us some council. Apparently, his mission is complete. He is passing the torch to Blue Cloud as a medicine man."

We stare at each other. Our eyes look down at the rolled tobacco on the table. We return each other's gaze. Julian responds, "Let's do it. Maybe we can dedicate our love session towards the commitment to fulfill this vision that Joseph has chosen us to accomplish." She reaches for the cigarette and I give her a light. Julian takes a draw and exhales the smoke. She hands it over to me without a word. I inhale and exhale and pass it back to her as I say, "Let us focus on the four directions, the woman of the north, the woman of the south, the illumination of the east, and the liberation of the west."

"I am focused on my man of the south who is my husband, and our illumination of wisdom that we gather from the east. My man of the south who gave me comfort when I needed it, and our liberation, that is to be experienced, in the west."

"How beautiful, Julian. I, too, will give gratitude to you, Julian, the woman of the north who birthed my children, the wisdom from the east that has affected our lives, the woman of the south who gave me her heart, and the liberation that you and I continue to experience as we continue our journey."

*Julian* - I join hands with Jim and we smile. We blow each other a kiss with our lips. I feel joy and connection. I nod towards the couch.

“Yeah, why don’t you sit? I have some hot water on the stove. I grabbed a muck bucket from the tack room. I’ll wash your feet then we can do some foot massage?”

“I’d love that, Jim.” We get up from our chairs and I give him a soft kiss and feel his warm hug. My hands subconsciously move along his back. I feel his embrace, and squeeze before he goes to prepare the water. I surrender to what we are about to share. Right now, thoughts dissolve. We don’t need to think how this night will unfold. There is just our divine intelligence that is guiding us. The aura or energy in the room is a nice combination of the feminine and masculine combined in oneness. I am feeling a soulful connection that transcends the physicality of sexual desire. I am liberated from the act of love. I am pure. My love is innocent. It’s as if I am a siren of early Greek mythology, female and male. Willing to give myself to my partner who relishes a variety of experiences, as I, too, seek the same. Not an evil siren, no, no, no. I am joining my spirit with Jim’s spirit as one that dwells in both of us. Love anointed by God. A love supreme.

# Chapter 11: Council with Joseph

It was a long night, really a celebration of our relationship. We made divine love, talked, shared stories about our children, cooked together, washed feet, massaged using acupressure points to enhance more love sessions. Then Julian shared Frank's miracle. When we finally woke up from a deep slumber and looked out the window, we surmised that the sky was overcast. Instead, it was already dusk. We laughed about the wonderful experience of space and time. The timeless hours spent together. There is a knock at the door.

"I'll get it, Julian." "

Put on your robe."

I shout, "Coming, be right there!" I look over my shoulder before opening the door and Julian is sitting upright, with her back against the wall wrapped in the sheets and blanket. I open the door, leaving a generous gap, and see a tallish, slender Native American woman with long, dark hair.

"Hi, I'm Jim." I open the door wide and she looks over at Julian. "That's Julian, my wife. Come in."

"That's okay. I am Walking Stick and I'm here to let you know that Joseph is waiting for you both in the long house sweat lodge. I think Blue Cloud mentioned to you that Joseph wanted to have council with you when Julian came back from Star Lake. Please prepare yourselves and make haste as Joseph is already in the sweat lodge."

With a smile, Walking Stick turns and makes her way to the path that leads through the tall brush to the lodge. "Well, Julian, I think I mentioned the council with Joseph. It will be about his vision, I suppose. We probably want to put on some loose-fitting garments and make our way over there."

"Yeah, listen, Jim, this took me by surprise. Do you suppose we have enough time to readjust? My mind is still lingering with thoughts of this past night."

"I know of a short three- or four-minute meditation that Megan from the yoga class shared with the class. By the way, Nirvana wants you to come next time I go. Anyway, it's called The Serene Mind. A quick breathing meditation I can guide us through and get us to a present moment mind set."

We complete the meditation and start towards the lodge. We cross a narrow foot bridge that crosses the creek. The brush opens up to a small opening, and there

is the lodge in all of its natural beauty. Walking Stick is tending the hot coals and bed of lava rock for the sweat. “Joseph is in the lodge. Go right in.”

We enter, let our eyes adjust, and see that there have been two mats arranged for us to sit on. We are silent, and since there is no greeting, I am guessing that Joseph is in a deep meditation. The lodge has been halved with a curtain through the middle. The coals are glowing, and the heat is already affective. Julian and I sit. She takes the north direction, I the south. We close our eyes and wait for Joseph, who is seated in the east direction.

“Ah ho, my friends Julian and Jim. I am glad that we can have this meeting. I have much to share. First, we will pass pipe. Let us ask the Creator for guidance.” Joseph lights the pipe, takes a draw, blows out smoke, and passes it to Julian. “My intention is to council you concerning the vision.” Julian is silent and passes the pipe to me. I inhale and exhale and pass it to Joseph. “I will take one more to complete the four directions. I want you both to ask the Spirit what you might work on, personally, to clear any blocks that will hinder your ability to accomplish the task.”

*Julian* - I am not quite sure what Joseph expects from Jim and I. All I know is that Joseph has this expectation that we will convince the people that Jim befriended in Molly’s art class to form a community. That will surely involve building cohesive relationships. I have apprehension since I still want to be able to work out abandonment issues with my children. Sure, we had a great reunion, but we never really shared honestly the effect of me walking away from family. I also just spent an intense time working out my relationship with Frank. It was the grace of God that intervened and created the spark that Frank needed to “turn it around.” And I question myself, how can I support Jim?

*Jim* - I have my relationship with Joni and Sammie to work out. I have my personal demons to conquer. I know there’s more I need to iron out with Julian. And Joseph’s vision includes me as an integral part of the mission. Form a community? Me? What do I know about bringing people together? I am starting to sweat already!

Joseph begins, “My friends, let’s enjoy a good sweat.”

“Joseph, I am sweating already just thinking about this vision you have,” I couldn’t resist, and then Julian jumps in, “Yeah, my pits are dripping wet and we haven’t even steamed the rocks!”

Joseph chuckles. “Pretty soon you two will be asking for deodorant! You humor me. For all of your seriousness, I also see the fun you two have and how you enjoy

each other. This is why I approached you, Jim, and asked you to carry on my mission. Blue Cloud told you I'll be leaving this plane and moving onto to another dimension. It's time."

Julian asks, "Where are you going? Are you going to just leave your physical body, ascend to heaven?"

Joseph laughs at Julian's question. "I don't mean to offend my sweet, white sister. Sooner or later, my soul will leave this physical body. Who knows where I'll end up? Did you know, Julian, when you left Jim where you were going? Of course not. Yet, isn't it ironic that here we are, you, Jim, me, and all of the people that are meant to be together during the changing times that we are experiencing. The world is changing, and the new world order is accelerating their agenda. There is no avoiding the consequences. The question I have for you is: do you want to live under a false ternary or do you want to live in an environment that is more conducive to your lifestyle? A lifestyle that you create? Isn't that what you were seeking when you left Jim and family? Do you want to eat the food Bill Gates and other large Farm holders are expecting us to eat? Or do you want to control what goes into your body? Do you mind surveillance? Do you not care that the media and corporate society are performing a subliminal seduction with your mind?"

"Alright, Joseph, enough said. It is ironic how everything has turned out since I ventured out to be free from what was." I look over at Jim. His head is hanging down. I wonder if he is listening or fell asleep. "Jim, you with us?"

"Oh, I was just starting to leave my body . . . . Seriously, I was listening. Sometimes it is hard for me to hear why you left. And yet, the way the Medicine Wheel was explained previously, I am grateful that we both got in touch with our true self and now here we are . . . ."

Walking Stick comes through the entrance with some more hot rocks and pours some water on them to create a little steam. Joseph nods his head and thanks Walking Stick. "Julian and Jim, there have been eco village enclaves starting throughout the world. They are very different from one to the other. Some are urban neighborhoods; others are rural or outside of the big cities. What they all have in common is they want to create a society that is more self-reliant versus reliant on government programs or corporate dominance. All of what transpired this last year in Molly's class had an effect on my soul. When Molly revealed her sculpture of the tree, the earth, and our group, I had a vision and saw a community develop. The reunion, when you felt uncomfortable about what Molly had planned as a celebration for you and Julian, and you demanded that it be a celebration of the

class, confirmed my vision.”

“And you are not going to be part of the community? It’s your vision.”

Julian also has a say, “It’s your vision. Why won’t you guide us through to the end?”

“My purpose as the medicine man is to pass on wisdom. I have always sat in the east, the direction of illumination. My mission here has been accomplished. I will be going to the west for my liberation from this world. That is all I have to say. It is up to you how to solve this riddle. Listen to Blue Cloud and your intuition, and the puzzle will be solved. Ah ho!”

And with this last “Ah ho,” that I will ever hear Joseph punctuate, as a final statement of being complete, he closes his eyes and gives a low, guttural-sounding Native American chant. Silence follows. He rises and says, “Farewell, my white brother and sister. Lay now in meditation. Walking Stick will awake you when it’s time.”

## Chapter 12: What Now?

I feel a nudge of my shoulder. I slowly open my eyes and watch as Walking Stick's feet leave the lodge. I whisper, "Julian, are you awake?"

Groggily, Julian croaks, "Yes. I went deep. Do you recall anything from your meditation or was it sleep?"

"I know I started out focused on breath and conscious thought of how this venture might work. All I recall after that are scenes of people, meetings in a big sunlit room and mountain scenes. What about you?"

"I remember buffalo, young people joining the community, and a I was with our children, Susie, George, and Dillion. Jim, I still need to have time with them. As nice as the reunion went with them, what I experienced in this dream state was resentment, abandonment issues, and denial."

We are on our sides with our heads propped up, looking at each other across the coals with the candlelight flickering. Simultaneously, we reach across with our free hands, touching our index fingertips. Michelangelo's painting of Adam reaching for God flashes before my eyes. "Hummm, there is going to be a lot to consider as we attempt to build a community. You ready? Let's see what awaits us." Julian smiles and slowly we rise and leave the lodge. Walking Stick and Blue Cloud are sitting cross-legged around the fire.

Blue Cloud invites us, "Have a seat. Let's explore your visions. What did you learn during the sweat?"

*Julian* - The fire has a warming effect. I can hear the ripples of the small waterfalls as the creek meanders downhill past rocks and around brush along the creek edges. The gentle rustling of leaves in the breeze has a soothing affect for my chaotic mind full of thought. I start the conversation, "What I recall was me as an elder, and admiring the growth of community as youth moved in, some starting families, some already with family, and others single. I also experienced tension, an inner tension. My heart was sad. I saw my children and felt rejection."

"Did you see any animals?" asks Blue Cloud.

"Yes, buffalo. They left Yellowstone Park and found their way to the ranch."

"Julian, the buffalo symbolize all good things. The bison provided our people with so much, it is an honored being. The buffalo means abundance. When you see buffalo, know that your prayers have been answered. You will experience great

healing for yourself and Mother Earth. Julian, this night you have been blessed. Remember it. Have gratitude for your position in life, for your awareness, and understanding. Perseverance will be your virtue. My friend, Jim, what did you see?”

“It was pretty much a blur, a meeting of people in a big room full of sunlight. I saw mountain peaks and I felt ants crawling on me.”

“Walking Stick laughs at your humor. What I am sharing with both of you are learned lessons from Wh-Na-Nee-Che. He wrote the book *White Eagle Medicine Wheel*. I suggest you get it. You will develop a method to council people using Native American wisdom. Jim, you let the ants tickle you. Did any bite? That would be good too. What Wh-Na-Nee-Che teaches about ants is to remind you that ‘you are a part of a group, a family or society, and the greatest good and security come from supporting the needs of the whole. No one can thrive in isolation, so be aware of your brothers and sisters on this planet.’ I quote this directly from the book. I remember it well; it is what I struggled with until Joseph made me his apprentice and I learned to serve others until it became a joyful act from my heart. You are connecting with the people you need in your life right now. ‘If you care for them and your environment they will care for you.’ Wh- Na-Nee-Che has spoken through me and you have received a blessing. I am also aware of your winter sojourns up the mountain. Isolated from people, willing to die there. I can hear your soul cry out, ‘Take me, take me. I am in bliss.’ Jim, know that bliss is not your final end. Joseph is on a quest and even though he says his mission is complete, my wisdom tells me that he is just moving on to where ever the Creator needs him to serve. He has passed the torch to carry the vision that was sent to him. We, Julian, Walking Stick, you, and me, were chosen. Let us all consider this a blessing too. Ah ho.”

The fire crackles, and slowly smolders out until just red-hot embers are glowing. We have all sat in silence for a while, as this night settles into our consciousness. I stand first. Slowly one-by-one we are all standing circling the fire pit. We get closer and nod at each other. With a slight bend forward, we have our arms around our shoulders and we bend our heads in a bow until our heads are touching. The warmth of the remaining embers lights our faces. I can feel the heat. It feels good. “Thank you, Blue Cloud and Walking Stick. Thank you, Julian. Let us seal this night and our commitment to the vision with fire. May all of the inner states that don’t serve our purpose be burned in the fire. May our hearts blaze with love and may we go forth on our task with joy. And humor when we need it!”

“You would add that last tidbit, love. You almost had me crying!”

Walking Stick is giggling and Blue Cloud says, “We’re off to a good start. Ah ho.”

When Julian and I get back to the cabin, I ask her, “What now? How do we move forward?”

“One thing that I recall from my readings lately is how God is one. God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit all encompasses oneness. And the power of the Holy Spirit dwells within each one of us. It’s a gift from God. So I have faith that we will know what to do and we just need to get out of the way and let our intuition lead us.”

“I like that it is truly a blessing. Man, we sure are getting a lot of blessings lately. ‘May you be blessed’ is going to become a mantra!”

“Start the fire, silly. I’ll get some tea going. You hungry? I have a nice slab of elk steak and I can pick some veggies and salad fixings from the garden. What you say about that?”

“Yummy!”

We finish a late dinner and decide to take a moonlight walk. We head down the narrow path that connects with the main road where it opens up to a wide meadow. Here, we can see the full moon lighting up the surrounding mountains. It is very illuminating. “Julian, how did you feel when Blue Cloud mentioned my winter sojourns?”

“I felt scared that someday I might lose you. I am not ready for that. Despite what it may have seemed like when I flew the coop, I missed us. What I am beginning to recognize is the odd way life unfolds. The universe is operating in our lives to fulfill a divine plan that we were unaware of until recently. The temporary break in our relationship brought together the people that we were meant to have in our lives to serve and to learn, experience, and connect with. It’s as if we each were on a Vision Quest, and we didn’t even know because we were so wrapped up in our own self-serving world. Does that make sense?”

“It does. All of the suffering we inflict upon ourselves prevent us from the joy of being one with the vibrant life that surrounds us. Yeah, I will continue to do the inner work. I want to know what causes my suffering without dwelling in it. Once I deal with the suffering, then it’s time to celebrate the wisdom gained. Do you agree?”

Julian screams, “Ah, Jimmy, yes, I am free . . . . Let’s dance and twirl ’til we fall in a dizzy stupor of crazy love!”

Just like that, Julian grabs my hand and swings me around and we dance under the moon, I hear a moose snort, and a bear grunt, and a wolf howl. Julian is

laughing and we are swinging as if we are circling a May Pole! “Whoa,” says I, and I am the first one to crumple to the ground as the stars spin overhead.

Julian lands partially on top of me and rolls off to a side. “Wooweee, I feel drunk.” Julian is still laughing. After a few seconds, she’s able to say, “It’s all crazy, this whole idea of the life we create . . . . Oh, I am so dizzy, dizzy in my thoughts. I really needed this, Jimmy, fun, laughter . . . .”

I feel her lips on mine. The kiss catches me by surprise and now it’s my turn to laugh. You crazy woman, you. And I start to sing, “You are so beautiful to me.” Julian chips in, “Can’t you see, you’re everything I hoped for. You’re everything I need. You are so beautiful to MEEE E!” We try to hit that high note that belongs to Joe Cocker, may he rest in peace! We howl like wolves and get a response from several wolves and a chorus of yelps from coyotes. The night is grand and tomorrow we will immerse ourselves in the illusion of what some consider reality.

## Chapter 13: Sex, Love, and Spirituality

We have plans to meet tonight. The five of us, Joni, Sadie, Jenny, Sammie, and I. It was agreed upon to meet at Sadie and Jenny's place. Prior to that, I have massage appointments with Molly and Joni. I am slowly gathering my clients as I ease back into my massage practice after recovering from the NDE. Molly has the first slot available. I am looking forward to seeing her. The art exhibit tour is over. I am hoping that we can talk while the massage is in session. We'll see; it's up to her. At least a little catching up will be sweet. Julian came back to the Grizzly cabin this morning and we are finishing a late breakfast.

"I am not remembering if I told you I have some massages today."

"I didn't get the message. What time are you heading over?"

"In about an hour. I have Molly and Joni. I am anticipating some tour stories from Molly. One thing that I haven't mentioned to you is that a few weeks ago, while I was getting coffee at the Hut, Joni showed up, then Sammie. Sadie and Jenny joined us too. The meeting was all coincidence. Somehow, we got on a topic and started exploring sex and spirituality. By the time we started to wind down, the conversation turned, in a subtle way, to the desire body wanting sexual pleasure versus love of the other. And with Sammie and the gals there, we started to talk about sexual preferences and how that might affect spiritual growth. We decided to meet once a month. Tonight, we meet at Joni's house. So I'll be home late."

"First you're going to massage Joni, then you're all going to be talking about sex and it's going to be a late night. So, I am trusting that you won't be calling to let me know that you'll be spending the night with Joni."

"Julian, when you left in a lurch to find Frank, did you ever consider my emotional state of mind? I trusted you. Even Maggie knew I was a bit taken by surprise."

"Sorry, sweetie, ugh, amazing how quick the mind wants me to be possessive and hang out in the realm of mistrust. Why do I go there? Both Frank and Joni know our commitment to one another. Oooo, so sorry." Julian moves in my direction with soft eyes of regret that she started down that rabbit hole. Before I know it, she's on me in a tight hug and kiss. "I am so grateful to have you again."

"And I am grateful too. Gratitude for each other is the best place to hang out. It's better than hanging out at the Hut, eh?"

“Well, you seem to like that place. It’s like a classroom for you, eh?”

“Better than hanging out with ants that bite.”

“You nutty guy, get out of here. I am going to start a garden plot here and you can build a hoop house for it.”

“I love your connection with nature and gardening. Save some seeds for me to plant. Maybe I have a green thumb.”

“Hey, you’re the grunt building soil. That’s the foundation of it all. So build our foundation of substance and I’ll love you forever! I do love you forever! Now you better go before you’re late for your appointments.”

*Julian* - I watch Jim go. I follow the trail of dust from the gravel road. I am sad what comes out of my mouth sometimes. It is so nice that Jim is resilient and knows my vulnerability and I can witness my thoughts with him. Being so spontaneous with my partner has opened my heart to so much more compassion for myself. I get to see how the effect of my mood changes affects the other person, even animals, plants the whole universe, the whole shebang!

*Jim* - I get to the massage office. It’s quiet. In fact, the whole town seems calm. Not many people walking the streets. Most of the shops are closed. Small gatherings at the eateries. A very intimate sensation comes over me. Molly, gosh, it’s been a long time since I last saw her. I am getting excited to be with her again. She has been an integral part of my essence of being. All the people that entered my life would not be part of it if I had never met Molly. I flip on some lighting and start prepping the room. As I complete my tasks, I notice that I have a little time to relax while I wait for Molly to show up. I sit, place my hands in my lap, get comfortable, and close my eyes. Take a few conscious breaths, then I check to see what state of mind I am in. I have no anxiety, just calm and joy to be able to serve Molly. I notice my breath, filling the diaphragm then the lungs, pause and slowly exhale. I take one last conscious breath and exhale with a smile on my face. When I open my eyes, she is starring at me. There’s that alluring smile that has haunted me since we first meet. She giggles, “Beautiful. You look so peaceful, Jim. I kind of snuck in nice and quiet. How are you, my friend? And Julian, how is she fearing?”

“It is so good to see you again. Yeah, we are doing very good. Our relationship is stronger than ever. Hey, I have another appointment after you. Do you mind if we get started and maybe talk some or would you rather just have silence during the massage?”

“I would definitely like to have some intervals of conversation. Give me a minute to get undressed and under the sheets.”

I gently rap on the door, “You ready, Molly?”

“Yes.”

“I heated up some river rocks to place on your back get it warmed up and loosened up some. I’ll start on your feet and legs.”

“Okay. The hot rocks sound lovely. Listen, I met with Frank and Joseph. We needed closure concerning our missing persons operation. Joseph’s on a new venture and it sounds like Frank has had an awakening. Julian somehow turned him around and he is eager to get back to preaching, maybe pastor a small church. You have a brave woman, Jim. I am happy for you two. How is it between you and Joni?”

“She is still having a hard time of letting go of the passionate part of the relationship that was forming. Do you recall that Joni and I did an interpersonal relationship workshop together?”

“Yes, I remember her or you mentioning that.”

“The latest development is that Joni and I, Sammie, Sadie, and Jenny have decided to meet on a regular basis. We were drawn together inconspicuously at the Hut. First I flagged down Joni, then Sammie showed up at our table, and midway through our discussion Sadie and Jenny arrived. I know I have struggled with sexual fantasy and desire. My mind mixes that up with the act of love being pure from immorality. Knowing a bit about Joni’s past record with relationship, Sammie’s attraction for me, and Sadie’s feminism which excludes men, leads me to think that we all meet for a reason. Jenny, I’m not sure how she fits in other than being Sadie’s mate, and a desire for a spatial experience. Anyway, we touched on some commonality with our issues, and I think we are all seeking acceptance from a higher source and fear that we will be shunned because of our past and current thoughts and actions.”

I am working on Molly’s feet, ankle, and calves. Circular motions around the ankles, thumb strokes on the base of the feet, pinching the sides of each toe and snapping the tips. Something I learned in an acupressure class. I am squeezing and then raking Molly’s calves when she quietly speaks. “Jim, I really needed this massage, but more than that, I needed our connection. During the tour, the sculpture began to have a captivating hold on my soul. That reunion we had when my expectations were to have you and Julian as models and you refused, wanting the final sketches to be about us as a group. Well, that scene stayed in my conscious thought, and by the end of the tour, Arthur, Sammie, I don’t know if you knew that Sammie was helping out. Anyway, the three of us were missing the group. I feel

so part of your life and the lives of the group.” She trails off into silence. I say nothing; her insight is so heartfelt I have no response. I continue up her hamstrings, squeezing and releasing. I take my fist and use a circular motion around her hip, then continue down along the outside of the leg with deep penetration of my knuckles to the knee. I do this several times, both sides. I do similar strokes on the inside of her legs, gentler, with the movement up towards the groin, making sure to stay clear of her sacred yoni. I pull the top sheet back just above her buttocks and cover her legs. It’s time to remove the hot rocks. Her back along the spinal column has a nice reddish coloration. It feels warm to the touch. Great, this will open up the fascia so I can work deeper, easier. I start with some soothing slow strokes, just letting one hand follow the next along each side of the spine. Then, placing one hand on top of the other, I slowly apply some extra pressure, and with stiff fingertips moving along the spine starting from the lower back to the neck, I feel for any knotty areas.

Groggily, Molly mumbles, “You know I am a relationship therapist. I wonder if you can ask the group if I could participate in some of your weekly gatherings. Not to facilitate, just be there and contribute. Ummm, this feels so good. You don’t have to answer, just think about it.” Nothing else is said and we continue the massage in silence. Only the meditation music plays softly in the background. We melt into each other, me the giver, Molly the receiver of energy that is a returning current of electricity. The massage ends and Molly leaves after we have an intimate exchange.

As I am getting the room ready for Joni, I am very aware of Joseph’s presence, and I am beginning to have confidence that the divine intelligence is in full command of how this will all play out. I just need to continue my journey with observation, witnessing, and awareness. Sounds easy. I chuckle at the thought and let it go. I hear the door open to the reception room. “Joni? Come on in, the room is ready.” As she enters, Joni seems hesitant. I am trying to get a sense of what might be brewing. She seems so innocent today, and humbled? I’m not sure. “You look beautiful, Joni.” And she does. Her hair is flowing and freshly washed; her eyes are sparkling. She starts to crack a smile at that comment.

Now the smile widens. “Thanks for that recognition. I needed to hear that from you. I am happy that you are back giving massages.” *Joni* - Hummmm, how do I do what I want to do? God, he’s just standing there waiting for me to say something, or what? “You have the room set up nicely as always. Listen, I want you on the table. I mean I want to give you a massage.” Oh man, now I am getting

flabbergasted. Oh boy, he's got that Jack Nicholson look, the smirk, the raised eyebrow . . . . "Wait, it's not coming out right. I want to give you my love, ugh!"

And with that, we both break out in a hearty laugh. We take a step forward and Joni says, "We better not. This is not what I intended." Joni, of all people, is blushing. Her eyes divert to the ground as she momentarily drops her head, as if she's looking down at her heart. The head comes up abruptly and her black mane swishes all over the place. The smile is still there. The twinkle in her eyes is resonating a different kind of energy. Something special is about to happen. I can sense it. "Okay, Jim, seriously what I want to do is give you divine love by way of touch. You have given so much of yourself in a compassionate way, not only to me but I've seen it played out with Julian, Frank, Sammie, and just about everybody, including me. Gosh, how can it be that all I witness is my own desires. I am seeing how what you call Divine love is loving all with the same amount of heart. Not picking and choosing for some kind of end result that will benefit oneself. Sooo, today, I want you on the table. I am the masseuse, sir. Are there any special places that you want me to work on. I mean, where are you aching? Ugh, just get under the sheets and let me know when you're ready." She shakes her head as if she's clearing her mind. I am humored.

"Wow, Joni, I was thinking when you first walked in that something special was going to happen today. What a beautiful gift. I am a little nervous. What about you?"

"Yeah, me too. I couldn't even control my thoughts. Everything I said sounded like an innuendo. I have no ulterior motive than to give you my love through healing touch."

"I know that. I feel your sincerity. Megan, from Nirvana's yoga class showed me a quick three-minute breathing meditation to calm the mind. Shall we do it?"

"Yes, let's still the mind, ummm."

We plop down on the floor into a yogic sitting position, make eye contact with each other, and Joni gives a nod as an indication to begin, the serene mind meditation.

"Gently close your eyes. Let's take three deep abdominal breaths with total attention. Continue to fill the lungs. Slowly exhale between breaths. Let the exhale be longer than the inhale." There's a space of quiet time, then I say, "Observe your state until you find the exact emotion you are feeling." There's a brief stillness. I continue, "Observe the direction of the flow of your thinking. Are you obsessing over the past? Are you projecting into the chaotic future? Or are you in the

present?” Its’ quiet for about twenty seconds. “Imagine that there is a tiny flame at the center of your eyebrows and see it move inward to the middle of your skull. Envision this flame floating in the middle of emptiness.” After about thirty seconds, I guide us to . . . “Take a deep, conscious breath. Take one more deep breath and as you exhale. Slowly open your eyes and place a genuine smile on your face.”

We’re looking at each other. Smiling, not saying a word. Joni eventually nods at the massage table. “Get on the table. It’s your time to receive.”

This is such a beautiful moment for me since it is usually not my style to receive gracefully. I realize that the act of gratitude includes giving and receiving with grace. How many times has my responses to giving been, “No problem,” or “My pleasure,” maybe a “You bet,” as if there was no heartfelt connection? And receiving a gift from someone, I can hear, “You didn’t have to do that,” or, “Oh no, I can’t take that from you,” and worst yet, no response at all, maybe a, “Thank you.”

“Joni, I want you to know how much I appreciate this wonderful offer. This time we are sharing, and the gift I am about to receive means a lot. More than I can express.”

“Jim, thank you for accepting my gift. I love you.”

## Chapter 14: Group Therapy

Needless to say, the massage from Joni was special. When I told her about Molly wanting to take part with our group tonight, she was game. So she called Sadie and Jenny and I called Sammie. All agreed and seemed eager to reunite with Molly. After I straightened out the office, I had some time to hang out before going over to Joni's place. I am intrigued to see how we will proceed tonight. Will it just be a get-together with stories from Molly or will we do some work? I give Julian a jingle . . . "Howdy, love, how's the garden plot shaping up?"

"Hi, sweets, a lot of pick and shovel. There's a big rock pile to create a raised bed. I have a plan to create a small greenhouse using sandbag construction. I'll show you when we get home. How'd your appointments go? Did Molly show up? Is her tour finished? Where'd the sculpture end up?"

"Yeah, Molly is back. I never did ask about the sculpture. We ended up in a brief discussion during the massage about the group meeting tonight at Joni's. She's going to participate so it might get intense if we do THE work that we intended to do."

"And Joni? The massage? How is she doing?"

"Well, she gave me a massage. A therapeutic massage, in case you're wondering?"

"Oh, so are you questioning my trust? Maybe a perception that maybe you two haven't worked out what your relationship will be like and it has me concerned?"

"I haven't thought of it that way. She wanted to give me her love through healing touch. It was kind of awkward for both of us, fumbling through the essence of love in a non-physical form. That's the direction our self-created group therapy session is heading. And if Molly does some work with us and we are honest with our hidden addictions that preclude what love is, then it might be an intense night. I haven't really asked you what went on with you and Frank. So we will have some catching up to do. Eh?"

"Stop with the eh, eh? Yes, what happened with Frank was amazing and I am not so sure what role I played. It was intense. He wanted to banish me from the mountain, but I refused to leave. And God took over. That's the best description I can give you now. Do you have something to eat? And hey, if it gets really late and Joni invites you to spend the night . . . know that I trust your discernment. I love

you, and it is your journey. Just be a good boy! Let me know if you are staying in Bozeman.”

“I will. Hey, I have enough time to chow, then I gotta go. I love you. Be a good girl! Eh?”

I hear a quick laugh. “Ugh, stop it.”

I arrive at Joni’s the same time Sadie and Jenny are walking up the stairs. “How are you gals doing tonight?”

“Hi, Jimmy pie, and we are women, not gals. You sound like a macho cowboy. Where’d you pick up that expression?”

“Just being out west for over twenty years. Like learning a new language. It’s part of the western culture. You’re a little feisty tonight.”

Jenny defuses the situation, “Ease up on the poor man, Sadie. Hi, Jim.” Sadie has a smirk.

“I love when you smile at me, Sadie. It just warms my heart,” I tease. We are both dripping with sarcasm for whatever reason.

We get to the door just in time. I think we’re both a little feisty, maybe a little anxious to face our demons? At least I know I am. We enter Joni’s house. Sammie and Molly are already there helping set up some chairs in a circle. I notice some pillows haphazardly thrown around. It’s starting to look like a Gestalt session. Humph, leave it to Molly the therapist. Maybe Joni set this up, Stream of Life II? Man, I am feeling some resentment. I wonder where that is coming from? What’s triggering me? We say our hellos and other greetings and pick a chair to sit in. We are quiet for a while as we settle in.

Molly starts, “Thanks for letting me join the group. Jim and Joni know that I am a relationship therapist. Joni and I talked beforehand about me being a facilitator tonight. Joni’s thought was that maybe I can give the group some structure. A format, so to speak. So I am wondering if that is okay with the rest of you.”

We agree, nodding our heads in approval.

Molly continues, “For our personal safety, the honesty we are about to share stays here. Can we agree to that?” A unanimous agreement prevails.

There’s a very brief silence when Sammie inquires, “So, Molly, are you here to run the show?” There seems to be a bit of resentment. “What’s your story, how do you fit in other than being our art instructor? I don’t know anything else about you.”

“Fair enough. Several years ago I was in a marriage that did not work out. We

got to a point where we could not wait to get rid of each other. I could not fulfill his physical desire that came often. He could not fulfill my need to have a spiritual balance of physical and spiritual love. He wanted sex, I needed ritual, a romantic setting, communication, sensual touch, a real connection. The love part of us evaporated rather quickly. The entire relationship became a hollow relationship with no substance. I had a lot of resentment since I felt that I fulfilled his cravings with no reciprocation. I walked out, just packed up, and left one day. I ended up meeting Nirvana and took up some yoga. She helped settle me. We connected since she left a similar situation. She mentioned the Golden Temple in India and I decided to take a journey. My art career was on hold. I wanted to seek some spirituality. I spent time with the Sheiks. I got some insight. I heard about a temple in southern India called Ekam and went there. I spent four weeks doing what they call Tapas. Inner work, a lot of silence that facilitated looking inward. The processes opened me up to a state of liberation. I came back to the states refreshed with a purpose for my life. I went through therapy, and did more inner work. Eventually, I became a licensed therapist and focused on relationships based on my experiences. So Sammie, do you want to share your story?"

"I am not ready yet. Let someone else start. I'll contribute, just not right now."

"I'll start." It's Joni. "Today I had a massage appointment with Jim. I proposed to give him a massage. After that day we all stumbled into each other at the Hut, I really see how, to this day I search for love, yet my personal definition of love is misconstrued. It's always been about infatuation, then self-fulfillment, followed by an emptiness. I would tire of my relationships and seek something new. Right there, I use the word 'something' instead of referring to another human being. A mate, or man, or lover became a 'something.' How crude of me, to use another person and think that our union was love. I was mired in an addiction. I tracked down Jim like an animal tracks a scent. To devour him like a predator." Tears are starting to stream down, flooding her cheeks, dripping down to her chest.

"Joni, Joni, my sweetheart, you were seeking love. You are finally seeking love. I could tell by your sketches. There was emotion in your—"

"Molly, let me finish. This man," Joni is gently shaking her head and her hair swishes ever so slightly, "this man has given to me a love that comes from his divine source. Whatever that might be. And so, tonight, tonight," her voice begins to fade behind a new set of tears, "I wanted so bad to give to him." Joni gestures with an open palm raised up to the heavens. She looks upward, then crumples onto a large pillow that she placed in front of her chair. She goes into a child's pose as if bowing

in total humility at the foot of God. Molly, the nurturer of my soul, now gives Joni the love she needs. Molly looks up at all of us and instinctively we lift Joni up and encircle her. There is nothing said as she looks around the circle of familiar faces, and with each eye contact there is a reaction. Sadie has compassion written all over her face. Jenny is teary eyed. Her lips move as if saying, "I feel your pain." Sammie seems to want to comfort her like a sister. And me? What am I feeling? Grief. I take my hands and place them on each side of her head and slowly, gently pull her towards me until our foreheads are resting on each other's.

"Thank you, Joni. My source is your source. It's the divine being in all of us. It is the great spirit that dwells within us all as one love. I see that now. You have given me the courage to share my struggles."

We have a small break, get some water, go to the bathroom, peer out a window. We do these little actions in silence. There is an air of deep contemplation. We're unconsciously avoiding each other. We might catch each other with a wan smile. I suppose we're all thinking whose next? Molly softly asks that we get seated. I can sense this process is about to get deep. We are sitting, heads somewhat drooped, when Joni says, "Gosh, you guys, I didn't mean to scare you!"

Sadie responds, "Girl, you scared the heck out of me. I don't know what dark secrets I want to share! Not yet anyway."

Sammie, "Uh, yeah, not ready yet."

Jenny is eyeballing me, like, "If you're ready, go for it." I give her a raised right eyebrow, like, "I don't know where to start, so you go." I think we both sense the nervous humor of wanting to say "you first." She starts to smile and I chuckle. In unison we say, "Not ready," and laughter breaks out. Whew, the heaviness is temporarily lifted.

"Alright, one more share tonight, okay? Why don't you go, Jim?" asks Molly.

Oops, I shouldn't have looked at her. There's that seductive smile. I just smirk and shake my head no and say, "Okay, I'll go. Gosh, where to start?"

"How about you start with me?" That's Sammie's request and pray tell what the hell does he mean by that?

"Yeah, start with the gay guy who loves you too. Who has your scent, the predator. I am . . . I'd love to hear what you think about me!"

Wow, bold move, Sammie, yet I am the only one that seems startled. I look at him. "I am feeling resentful that you demand me to be honest about my dark side. My ego is in denial every time I fantasize about what it would be like to have sex with another man. I have an immoral judgement about myself for even having those

thoughts. I know how desperate you want my massage to go beyond healing touch. Your aura is so strong in that regard, I tremble with the thought of surrendering to you. And I choose not to. What comes to me is the Bible verse that God created woman to please man. Once in marriage, may their pleasure be for each other and none other. That's not the actual Bible verse, just what I remember reading. So all of a sudden I have to deal with moral issues. So I bury the thought of sexual desire. But it has a way of showing up."

Out of the blue, I hear Sadie's voice, "So, Jim, when you look at another woman, do you have lust?"

"Sometimes yes. Let's call it temptation. That's what I am processing, and it has to do with my thoughts. Which is the desire to surrender to physical pleasure with another person. That is my addiction. My biggest battle that lurks within. The 'something' that Joni refers too."

"So what do you do? How do you not surrender to those strong desires?"

"Somehow, maybe being a massage therapist is my test for overcoming the desire I just described. When I place my hands on someone's flesh in a massage, it is to join in their healing process. It might be what they need most. It is another person's touch versus healing techniques to soothe the fascia. Somehow, I rid myself of my lustful desires. It's like a light switch with an automatic on/off. That night when you, Jenny, and I played Twister, the thought I struggled with as I walked up your stairs and entered your house was a thought of a threesome outcome. I had no intention of that, yet the thought was there. When we all fell in a heap all twisted up, and Jenny sat up cross-legged and we followed suit. Then the heart-to-heart connection happened, do you remember that? The feeling of love, that was not a bodily experience. I know for me it was a very high experience of loving in oneness. Was it for you? Jenny, you started the energy field that night. How was it for you?"

"Yeah, Jim," Sadie starts, "yeah, there was a trust that I felt, like 'I can trust this guy.' Really, maybe my feminism is about that, not trusting that a male doesn't have an ulterior motive. That bible verse that you just mentioned rubs me the wrong way. It's like a free pass to use women for pleasure. I was appreciative of how our night was pure fun with no innuendo."

Jenny, "That whole night was so eclectic, we didn't have the same beliefs. I guess that's the best way to put it, yet we had so much fun and you trying to explain your molecular theory, that was hilarious. Well, I think what happened is that our divine, like Joni said, my divine connected with your divine, connected with Sadie's divine, and boom, we were one, not in body, rather in soul connection. Does that

make sense?”

“Yes, absolutely.” I look at Sammie. “My feminine ray. . . You know, we all have a masculine and feminine side if we admit to recognizing them working in conjunction. Anyway, I started to say. My feminine ray has developed into a strong aspect of my being. However, I recognize my masculine ray for what it is and so to want to have physical love over spiritual love with anybody except for the woman that I married is not what I choose to do. Sammie and everybody in this room, I ask you to accept my heart love. I ask that from each one of you. That’s all I have to give. This work we have all committed too, I take seriously. Thank you for letting me be honest. It is this inner work that I desire. The wanton thoughts are what I need to clean up in my church of one, so I can serve all in a loving way. For this, I am grateful to know you all in my life. I am honored that you think of me so much that you want my truth to be known. Thank you for your love.” There are tears streaming down my face. I am not choking in regretful emotion; it’s tears of joy that flow now. I smile at each face I see. Molly, first, she is slow to smile. I think something hit her deep in her heart tonight. There it is, the haunting smile and an affirmative nod. I look at Sadie. She is smiling like she now knows who I am, a man friend! I see Jenny for the beautiful soul she is, and her smile is of innocence. Sammie? Well, I am not sure what to make of his smile. I do sense his renewed love for me. I think we have a very definitive understanding now. And lastly, Joni has her million-dollar smile with tears also continuing down her cheeks as if they never stopped from when she shared. I think our relationship just turned into a “best” friendship. What a relief for me to finally admit to these dear friends my human struggle. I have plenty. This deep desire to want to “know what love is” has come to this revelation tonight. Love is the essence of my existence. I want to feel pure, innocent love with the absence of clouded thoughts.

We all hug and pick out a date for our next gathering. We help Joni get her house back in decent order and head out the door. There is six inches of snow on the ground. The first early season storm. Fall is in the air, and I can sense winter. Molly nudges me. “Jim, Walking Stick and Blue Cloud are staying at my place tonight. They want to share Joseph’s vision. Why don’t you spend the night, get in a soak? Julian will be there, too. She drove up earlier with Frank while we were in session.”

## Chapter 15: The Soak and the Service

“Jim, how about coming with me? We can get your car tomorrow. I have something that I want to share with you.” We drive in silence for a while, then Molly reaches over to clasp my hand. “That first time we met, when you reluctantly said yes to being a nude model, I sensed something about you. As time went on and your venerability surfaced, I was intrigued by what might be lurking inside that mind of yours. The share that you and Joni gave tonight was valuable to all of us in that room.

You being so real and honest with your thoughts pierced my heart. I never saw a sketch class where all of the student artists put themselves in the sketch with the model, or formed their own pose unrelated to the pose you were doing. That’s when I started to experiment with therapy and art. You were so willing and in some instances you knew what my intentions were and you unabashedly went for the process to do inner work. What you shared tonight about thought patterns that are dark affected me. I want to acknowledge that wanton fantasy is a nemesis of mine, too. I need to say it to you, to admit my struggle as one of several that ultimately destroyed my marriage. I would go into a dark recess of my mind whenever I felt failure, that maybe I wasn’t good enough for whomever I was trying to please. Sometimes that condition of suffering still comes up. When you shared, it was as if I was talking. I haven’t been in that state for a long time.” Molly releases my hand and puts two hands on the steering wheel. The road has gotten slick. All I can do is listen and wonder, is there more? I look over at Molly and notice a tear rolling down her cheek. “Oh God, during the tour, Arthur joined me. You know that, right?”

“Yes, you two started fine-tuning the sculpture before taking it on tour.”

“Yeah, well, there’s an attraction I have for him, for us, and I am scared. I don’t feel emotionally ready, even though we have so much in common with our art backgrounds and how we worked so well as a team. That love you and Joni described is so prevalent in our relationship, and I fear that the physical aspect of love will take the relationship in a different direction.”

“I hear you Molly. In the relationship with Joni, I went through a similar situation. But in my case it was that I still believed that Julian was out there somewhere. Then there was such an attraction for Joni I finally gave up on the

notion about finding Julian. Joni and I developed a real heart connection. And the physical love took on a whole new meaning. When we made love there was a feeling of oneness. The night with Sadie and Jenny showed me how to connect heart to heart. And even now I feel we are communicating from our hearts to each other. A sense of what each partner in a relationship feels from the other.

Physical love transcends into a higher dimension where feeling one with the other prevails. It's crazy, but I'll feel what Julian must be feeling, and in my head all other thought that separates us is gone. I am her and she is me; we are one being merged together in A field of love energy. It doesn't always happen that way. When it does...."

"You mentioned the love energy you had with Jenny and Sadie . . . ."

"That was the same thing. The only physical touch was our hands on the heart. I am starting to appreciate that I can love someone, everyone, in the context of God love. The pose you had me do with Stephanie, wow, that was some energy transfer going on, and I was witnessing my thoughts and became very aware of the process to just connect heart-to-heart with no perception of the other. Just two souls connecting like an electrical circuit."

*Molly* - The snow is starting to come down again, muffling the car noise. There's a quiet calm between us. We continue the last couple of miles in silence. I am wondering what Jim might be thinking now. I am wondering what Arthur is doing. It's been a while since we saw each other. I wonder if he has an attraction for me and now I wonder if I am in an infatuation stage. What do I want? Intimacy in friendship with him, or romantic love with no commitment? Or do I slowly pursue a consummate love with intimacy, passion, and commitment? Do I deserve a second chance? And what about Arthur? Is he even on the same "wavelength" as me or am I fantasizing? Here we are. Great, there's Frank's truck. They made it. Jim and Julian, how have they managed to reconnect and love again, without any animosity? I park, and before turning off the car, I look over at Jim. He is looking straight ahead as if in a trance. Slowly, he looks at me. His smile is soft. I give him a smile, and with a raspy voice all I can say is, "We are here."

"Molly, isn't it just amazing how much we can enjoy our life no matter where our thoughts lead us if we always stay in gratitude? I am grateful that I met you because I would not be here if I didn't. What a night of super-charged energy, and it's not over yet!"

I gotta laugh at that. Sometimes he is like such an innocent little boy, just discovering the world around him. "You're like little Krishna with his hand in the

honey jar! Discovering the sweetness of life. Even the challenges are fun for you?”

“I don’t know about all of them being fun. The one’s that aren’t sure are interesting though.”

“Let’s go. There are swim trunks in the changing room for you. See you in the hot water!”

*Jim* - We enter Molly’s house, and she disappears down a hallway. I smell the scent of coffee coming from the kitchen. I am guessing that this will be a long night. I wonder if Julian is already in the hot nature pool that Molly has created. I am familiar with this creative, eccentric adobe and head to the coffee. As I enter the kitchen, I see the broad back of Frank as he’s reaching for a cup from the cupboard. “Coffee?”

“Yeah. You want a cup, Jim?”

“Please. How’d it go up on the mountain with Julian?”

Frank turns and places the cups on the kitchen table, a 1950ish antique. The entire kitchen is of that era. He pours the coffee. “She didn’t share much with you, huh?”

“No, mostly that at least you two can still maintain an intimate friendship.”

“You have a beautiful woman for a mate, Jim. You don’t ever want to lose her. When she chased me down and found my camp, I told her to leave. She insisted that she would stay until we worked something out. All the details are fuzzy. She went to the spring to wash up and left me seething in my own demise. She had called me out about me abandoning my relationship with God. ‘Preacher’ she shouted at me. I went hiding in the bushes, and peeked at her bathing. She slipped on a rock, and I came out to help her back to camp. As I carried her, I felt the strength of the Holy Spirit. I was aware of my role as a follower of Christ. The power of God that dwells in me was awakened. I finally was honest with myself, how I wanted to possess Julian to take care of my grief.”

“Do you every fear being honest?”

“What do you mean, Jim?” It’s Molly’s voice. She walks into the room, nonchalantly grabs a cup out of the cabinet, and pours herself a cup of coffee.”

“I feel venerability when I expose my truth. To be honest without holding back. I fear the effect it might have on others, especially if it’s about them. When I do that, I miss out on any insight another might give.”

Frank, “For me, it’s keeping a false image of my emotional strength. Joseph saw that in me and was able to bring some of my truth out.”

We all seem to sip our coffee at the same time, which I find humorous. Like

we're taking a big gulp of courage to express honestly. Maybe we need the whiskey in the coffee for our truth serum? There's a short silence.

We all seem to be contemplating when Frank speaks, "With Blue Cloud here and this meeting concerning Joseph's vision, I am guessing honesty will be the best policy." He chuckles at his own humor. "Hey, I am going to get changed into my swim trunks. See you two in the water."

Without a word, I start in the same direction as Frank, when suddenly I feel Molly's hand on my arm with a gentle pull. "Hey, you, not so fast." She has turned me around and is searching my eyes. "I want you to know that your honesty tonight, at the group gathering, during the ride over here, has opened up a deep, dark hole that I need to visit. I have buried some deep pain way down inside." Suddenly Molly is hugging me with a slight shudder. I feel her trembling body. She whispers, "I need to learn to love." Molly pulls her head back and again searches my eyes. I feel much compassion for her. I don't have to say it. I have this intuitive sense that she feels what I am feeling, just as I am feeling what she is feeling. There seems to be a light energy permeating around us. I ask, "Do you feel a special aura surrounding us right now?"

"I am not sure what it is. What I feel is your warmth, your nurturing love energy. With our chest in this hug, I feel connected to your heart."

"Yeah, I feel you like I have never felt you before. I was always infatuated by your smile. It lured me into what I thought was your being. There seemed a distance though. I used to think of you as Molly the therapist, then found out you are. It made me feel distant from you. This here is so real, a friendship forming. It is so meaningful for me at this point in my life to form intimate friendships."

*Julian* - Blue Cloud, Walking Stick, and I have been in the water for a while waiting for the three of them. Blue Cloud wanted me to sit on the rock that was north-facing. This hot water pool is set up like a natural hot spring. The water flows from a manmade rock formation into this naturally shaped pool, where the water rises about waist high. There are smooth rocks placed in various spots to sit on and a couple of slabs along the edges. This thing probably fits about eight or ten people. Molly has vegetation surrounding the pool. It is truly a magnificent setting. Blue Cloud suggested we mediate while we wait. The water is a conduit of flowing energy. He blessed the water for good thoughts to emerge. So here I sit recalling my conversations with our grown children. There was some territory to cover and I especially wanted the abandonment issues to be foremost in our discussion. Considering I walked out on the family for five years, it is hard to deny that there is

no resentment.

I started with our eldest George. He went through so much with us hippies living off grid at eight thousand feet. Friends and social life so far away. We had a great bunch of friends with children roaming around at get togethers. And when we pulled up roots from there, to live here in Montana and follow a spiritual new age community, I know it was rough for him. He shared his feelings about us spending so much church time and leaving him in childcare. How does one ever bridge the gap of the suffering of another, especially when parenting follows a specific discipline and education that is different from the social norm? We sent him off to boarding school, then college so far from home, and missed a huge part of his life. I wept recalling all of that with him. How I wanted to bring up all of the good times we had, living on the homestead, cross-country trips, camping stuff that a lot of families never do. I didn't do that; I just listened. And then we shared about his family, and again I wept for the distance that keeps us apart. When will I see them, growing up? Just in photos and videos. I miss knowing them. George reminded me so gently that we are all on some sort of journey (as I would say) and that someday soon we will reunite.

Dillion was a whole different conversation. He was appalled that I would leave Dad the way I did. And not ever telling anyone that I was alive and well. That whole disappearance scene was shocking when he found out the story. He was so glad to see me alive and reunited with Dad and the family that he never could bring up his feelings of watching his dad grieve. Now five years later, "How could you do that and not once contact one of us?!" Dillion was and still is good at speaking his mind and questioning my judgement. He was the stay-at-home kid. Kept with the local schools to be with his friends. He had a special group of friends. He amazes me with the insight he has. He'll even let me share with him my spirituality and question me about it. Our conversation was in depth, testy at some points, but loving too.

And then there was Susie. Mother and daughter, we covered a lot of past and present thoughts. The abandonment issue was huge for her, and it was best for me to just listen and know that I hurt her. I asked if our relationship is repairable and she said, "Of course. I love you, Mom. I just don't understand you some of the time!" Susie has a hard time when I proselytize about my faith, or diet, even gardening. When we talk about relationships, that's when we have heart-to-heart communication. And that's what we had. About holding me accountable for the hurt I caused her, she has internalized the fact that she and only she can take care of

that with her therapist. As far as having me back in her life, she is excited and promises to call and visit often. Relationships are a big part of Susie's essence. I am grateful that she has forgiven me and look forward to our mother-and-daughter relationship growing stronger.

I feel a presence entering the water. I open my eyes and see Frank. I give him a smile and a nod. Blue Cloud instructs him to be seated on one of the rocks that face west. This is the start of the four directions of the Medicine Wheel. Soon, Jim and Molly are in the pool. Jim sits near Frank in the west and Molly is the woman of the south. I remain in the North with Blue Cloud taking the direction of the east. Walking Stick is seated outside of the pool. A place that Blue Cloud occupied as Joseph's apprentice. She has a cache of buffalo drums, animal bones, a buffalo horn to blow through, and rattles. She is lighting a peace pipe for ceremony and Blue Cloud speaks. "We will pass pipe before we start. We are gathered tonight to share in Joseph's vision of things to come. You will all play a role in bringing it to fruition, for your safety, prosperity, and to bring in the new age. Others will join. I ask as we pass pipe for your surrender and service to the oneness of all beings in the human, animal, and earth kingdoms. Visualize how you might contribute. You were chosen because of your commitment towards friendship and relationship." As he finishes, Joni walks through the door that leads to the pool and catches Blue Cloud's gaze. We all turn our heads and Blue Cloud invites her in, "Joni, I am happy to see you here. Please sit with Julian in the north direction." Julian slides over to make room for Joni on the slab of rock that she occupies. We pass pipe.

*Joni* - I am so humbled to be here and considered by Joseph and Blue Cloud to be part of this group. I wonder why Blue Cloud has me sitting next to Julian, woman of the north. Last time we did this, I was considered the woman of the south to Jim. Now Molly has that place. Julian places a hand on my thigh and whispers, with a reassuring smile, "Hello, sister!"

Blue Cloud shares, "As you are all aware, times are changing in this world. The white man is at war with himself. The innocent are being affected by the greed of the few that hold power. Joseph's vision was of community enclaves, a gathering of like-minded people to form tribes and live in harmony with nature. Create a new system as the old one is about to collapse. Joseph has talked with Maggie, who is a bit reluctant about the idea. Joseph's vision includes the troubles that have besieged the country and world, economically and its resources. Also, the globalist strategy to control the population through ternary and 'Hunger Games.' This is the history of our people. Now the white man is doing the same to his own. It's up to you to

convince Maggie her ranch is an ideal situation. The Essence of Existence is our connection to earth. People are concerned with earth's resources. There is more taking and not enough giving back to Mother Earth. The mass consciousness keeps moving farther away from the source of God's abundance, that being what nature has to give. And our responsibility to take care of it just like we take care of the aging or disabled. We need to continue the cycle of life that the earth provides to all living creatures. Tonight, this group will speak. It will be your choice if you want to move forward and serve."

We pass the pipe with Blue Cloud's North Carolina tobacco. I start to have a clear vision of a small mountain community. I wonder what kind of thoughts are going through other people's mind when Blue Cloud says, "We will pass the pipe six times as you contemplate on your visions and desires. I want to know if you choose to take part and why you will or why not. Now we will continue to pass pipe and be in silence."

The last puff from the peace pipe is inhaled by Blue Cloud. He hands it over to Walking Stick.

"I imagine you have me sitting in the west direction since the west is about harmony in one's world." It's Frank musing why we have been assigned specific rocks to sit on. "I can truly say that I found my harmony at Star Lake. It's been a long, long time since I have felt at peace. I thank Julian for my change of heart. What I can contribute to the manifestation of Joseph's vision is the physical management of the ranch. That is what I have been doing.

I also found my faith again. I feel ready to serve Jesus and his flock. I am in." There's a swirling gust of wind for a brief moment.

"While I was doing the tour with the Community of Trees sculpture, I was able to visit with all of the beautiful people in this special class. I had their sculptured features to talk too. Sometimes I would remain at the gallery, or wherever we had a show, late at night, and give my gratitude. I want to be with this group. I know there is something bigger than a sketch class that was manifested. I am in," Molly affirms. "The direction of the south is all about trusting instincts.

"Joseph asked Julian and I to carry on his vision. I am somewhat daunted on how we will accomplish this monumental task. It has always been a desire of mine to be in a community setting where all of the members are focused on a common need to serve each other with self-reliance as the focus. I am in!"

"I am inexplicably in. To be honest, my life is a blur right now. I am in a state of unknowing. All that has transpired in this past year and a half has left me in a

time of introspection and change. I have nowhere I desire to run to. That has been my life up until now, chasing someone or something. I want to get to know my new sister. That's what you called me, right, Julian?" Julian gives a nod and wraps an arm around Joni. She gently pulls Joni into her. "Thank you, sister! It's always been strange for me to call another woman sister or a man brother. I never felt connected to others that way. So community is sounding good to me right now. Maybe I found my tribe. I hope the others accept me like you do in this circle of friends. I am in!"

Julian releases Joni from her hug. She's emotional, I can tell. She gazes around the circle. "I want to be one with all creation, all of you, all of nature, all of the Supreme Being who created life on this planet. I have been fortunate to have the cabin life on the ranch. I am in transition. My relationships with our children needs repair, with Jim, Frank, and above all with my Divine being. There is no better way than to serve with humility, all that cross my path, animals, plants, people, and Mother Earth." Here come her tears, tears of joy. I feel it, joyful. "I am in!" And with that last statement, Julian burst out laughing.

I am affected by her humble admission, and all the shares. My emotions are welling up within. Frank has his hand on my shoulder. I look up and see his broad smile and kind eyes. Molly is making her way to the sisters of the north node. We are up and hugging with tears, and laughter. Walking Stick is wading in the water and handing us drums and rattles and Blue Cloud announces, "We have a committee. Now we celebrate. Let's pow wow!" And with that, we are jamming, pounding, rattling, chanting, and just letting go of all our inhibitions. It feels so good. Blue Cloud and Walking Stick are playfully splashing water at us. Like a blessing, water is such a conduit of flowing energy. We are yelping and laughing. Now I know the true meaning of pow wow. The power of connection is a real wow! Wowie, zowie!

## Chapter 16: The Yellow Room

*Frank* - Out of everybody in our newly formed committee to explore the possibilities of the ranch as a community, I am the natural choice to approach Maggie. I know her best. I've been her ranch manager for over ten years now. Ever since she purchased the ranch. I know more about ranching and the entire property than she does, or ever will. It's huge. There are new places I discover every year, either when I am hunting or looking for cattle. I must admit, the other night was a real release for me. I felt like I had so much to celebrate, letting go of Bertha's soul, and my relationship with Julian. To finally hear what Julian desired for our friendship to move forward in a new direction. I enjoy my friendship with Jim, so yeah, to have conflict over a woman who loves us both goes against the compassionate love that Jesus taught. Concerning our previously physical part of the relationship, I was able to celebrate forgiveness. It was a lost trait that I abandoned when I admonished God for the death of Bertha. Yeah, forgiveness. I owe Sammie an apology, and Jim too, for the comment I made at the men's group. The pow wow was very powerful for me. My whole body feels different, lighter today. I feel I have a purpose to be honest with myself and others. I think having an awareness of where my thoughts take me and taking a pause to what comes up before I react is a huge lesson. To be accountable for when I do react, that is a humbling feeling and one I have forgotten about since Bertha's death. Hanging around Maggie, Molly, and Julian for so long has changed me. They really have made an effort not to categorize me as someone not worth the effort to associate with. They really showed me how resilient one needs to be for relationships to work. When I recall times with Bertha where I tended to be hard-nosed in my way of thinking, and chose not to change. Well, that affected our relationship where love couldn't flow easily. I thank God that she seemed unperturbed and kept up communication that nurtured my soul. I am so much more receptive to being able to see both sides now. Thank you, ladies.

Here we are. Maggie's expecting me. Time to figure out how to get her to see "the vision." There's still a little dusting of snow on the ground from the early storm. A chill is in the air. I hope she receives me with an open heart. "Dear Father, give me the wisdom that I surely need to convey Joseph's vision, if it's Your will."

The sun is shining brightly this day. As I come up the steps, Maggie meets me

on the front porch. “Frank, how are you? Come on in.”

“Hello, Maggie, I am doing good. How about you? I am here to give you a report about the ranch and some of what we need before winter sets in.”

“Yeah, but that’s not why you are here, Frank. I have been tipped off in advance of you coming. Let’s sit in the Yellow Room. You want some coffee? I am going to grab a cup. I just made a fresh pot.”

“I’d like that Maggie, thanks.” She disappears and here I sit looking at her big, full-wall picture of Buddha in the center of a huge yellow sunflower. I wonder how this will work out, within a community. How many beliefs and religions can coexist in a community and it still be cohesive working towards the same goal? Maggie is back and sets a pot down on the table with some cream and honey.

Hmmm, Frank is eyeing Buddha with a contemplative expression on his face. “So, Frank, word has it that when Julian found you at Star Lake, you were smitten with a renewed faith in Jesus. It’s what I heard. Any truth to that?”

“Yes, Maggie. I am inspired to preach again. Maybe in a different way than before. Maybe all I need to do is be the church within. Preach through deeds and spirit. Not from the pulpit. Rather from my heart.”

“I like that, Frank, from the heart. So let me hear why you requested this meeting. Give me your thoughts about Joseph’s vision. Come from your heart and I will open mine for a heart-to-heart talk.”

“Well, you are well aware of the changing dynamics on a geopolitical scale. The globalist, nationalist, and military dictatorships that are on a collision course. The world economy that is affecting a whole class of people. Anyway, I think you’re well aware of the dramatic changes that are taking place. Joseph calls it ‘white man in conflict.’ His vision is all about self-reliant communities forming that exist separate from the chaos that is taking place. His wisdom is for a return to a simpler life living with nature and taking better care of the Creator’s gift to humans, Mother Earth. So he was impressed by this particular group of people from Molly’s art class. He wants us to stay together and form an active community.”

“Tell me. Why the ranch? And how do you see it being accomplished?”

“Well, the ranch is already pretty self-sufficient. We have a dude ranch business, cattle business, and it is located in a pristine mountain basin. To be honest with you, I do not have the plan. You’ve met Jim and Julian, and it is my understanding that somehow you crossed paths with Jim many years ago, while attending college. About the same time that they both knew Joni, who is one of the group that Joseph speaks of. Somehow there is some kind of weird irony that you all meet again. The

other night, we met with Blue Cloud, the heir to Joseph as a medicine man. You may not know this, but Joseph has gone on a vision quest in the Big Horns. We may not see him again. He is up there in age and told Blue Cloud and Jim that his work is completed here. He has passed the torch. There was a committee formed to carry on his vision. The reason I am here is to arrange a meeting with you and our committee to share a plan or vision of our own. I think it was Jim's hope that you might be receptive to forming a community that will thrive, despite the change that will occur in the next several years, worldwide. That was why he had Julian arrange a meeting with you. According to Julian, Jim had an intuition that the Maggie who owned this ranch was the Maggie he befriended twenty years ago."

A gentle smile creases Maggie's facial expression. "Ha, when they came up here and we talked, I started to have some vague recollections of Jim. He recalled what classes we took together and some other details. Hummm, so you sense some irony. You know that I operate this ranch with a business mindset. I haven't considered all that is going on geopolitically. I do know that some commodity brokers I still have contact with have told me about what's going on with dairy and food farmers versus the climate change globalist. Also, I have been asked by the Department of Agriculture to take an inventory of our operation. You also know that we have been seeing rises in costs. So maybe Joseph has a direct intuitive vision of the future. Maybe it's time to start to listen to our native brothers. I'll tell you what, Frank, why don't we get your committee together figure out two days when we can meet? Most of the guest are gone for the season, so we can accommodate them in the lodge. How many on the committee?"

"Just five of us. I am not sure if Blue Cloud intends to be part of the committee. So we'll just need a room for Molly and Joni and Blue Cloud, if he tags along."

"Okay, we'll have our meetings up here in this space."

*Jim* - Julian and I spend the night at Molly's. I was hoping to see the sculpture again, except most of it was still packed in crates. Julian got to know Molly separate from her therapist personality. There was some real sharing on an equal basis. Real emotions. The three of us never tried to educate the other. There was a rawness to our honesty. When we depart, the morning air is fresh, crisp, and fall-like. As we walk to the car, I ask, "Hey, how about we do a yoga session with Nirvana? I'd love for you meet her and a couple of the yogis. I haven't been there for a while, and I'd like to get back into the routine. It is an inspiring class since Nirvana explains all of the benefits of the various positions."

"Okay, that sounds like a nice way to spend a morning. After all, she's one of

‘the chosen!’” Julian lets out a little giggle.

“Yeah, that’s a good point. We need to start recruiting, eh?” My turn to chuckle.

We get to the yoga studio and people are getting their mats arranged. Nirvana sees us enter and comes over. “Julian, good to see you. It’s been a while since this guy here gave us a scare. Are you going to join us?”

“Absolutely! Do you have any spare mats?”

“Yes, over in the corner. You’ll find a mat and some blankets, also cushions if you need one to sit on. You two get yourselves ready, then join the group. I need to finish setting up.”

We gather some paraphernalia and take our places. We happen to be next to Megan. “Well, hi, Jim, and Julian! I am glad that you are joining us this morning. I have something to share with you after class. May you both enjoy this yoga session.”

We all settle in, get comfortable in a sitting position, and slowly the chatter stops and the vibes of the music are quieting the energy. After a couple of minutes, Nirvana gently opens the session. “Good morning. I am glad to see that Julian is joining us this morning.” Heads turn with brief smiles and affirmative nods. Julian returns the smile. “Okay, let’s start with our opening call. Om Namō Guru Dev Namō. Three times to call forth our divine source within.” We say it in unison three times. After a pause, Nirvana instructs us, “Let’s start with alternate nostril breathing.” Next, it’s gentle neck rolls, then the grinding pelvis, followed by twisting the upper torso with hands on shoulder. We get to the downward dog, variations of the cobra, tree pose, stretches, and I don’t recall the rest except that we did a mudra called the fire breath and all of these are timed for three minutes. Exhausting, but it sure does get the Kundalini rising! Finally, we are in sponge pose and relax to the music and a gong session until we’re plastered to the floor. Picture Gulliver tied down on the beach in Gulliver’s Travel. It’s quite a session, with so many capricious thoughts, visuals, and drifting in and out of various states of consciousness. There’s a warm feeling between all of the participants. Needless to say, we all went somewhere as we surrendered our mind to the presence of now.

As Julian and I are gathering our things and putting mats, blankets, and pillows where they belong, we are approached by Megan. “Hey, you two, I want to mention an event that you might be interested in attending. Jim, I’ve mentioned Ekam before in class. In fact, we’ve done some meditations with Preethaji in the past. Anyway, they do a Tapas two or three times a year.”

“What is Tapas?”

“It’s a month long quest of inner work that addresses suffering states we all have. The processes are designed to recognize those states through observation, awareness, witnessing, and contemplation. They help one achieve more beautiful states like joy and happiness. I can email you a monthly Manifest event that’s a good place to start. The vision is to gather eighty thousand seekers who thrive for a oneness consciousness, to save the planet.”

“Thanks, Megan, we’ll check it out.” Julian gives Megan a hug, then I hug too and we part ways.

“Wow, Jim, you are really entrenched with this group of acquaintances-turned-friends.”

“Yeah and you haven’t gotten to know all of them yet. Soon I want you to meet Deloris and Faye, the garden ladies, and then there’s Arthur, the potter. So far, you seem to be very receptive to meeting whom you’ve met. I am so grateful how you have opened your arms to Joni and not shunned her. Where are you at right now with this idea of starting a community with this group? You know, Joseph’s vision.”

“I need to ponder on it more. I’ve never known you to want to be part of a community. Seems like you always feared that you’d have to give up some of your freedoms. Not only activities that you enjoy, but also some of your personal freedoms of just being who you are. Didn’t you always fear ‘self-discipline?’ That’s how you would describe having to change certain behaviors of self for the good of the all. In reality, most communities have guidelines or special covenants. I think that’s an accurate term to use, covenants to follow. All sorts of considerations, dietary, spirituality, dealing with conflict, consensus, governance. That’s just a start of what to consider. I don’t know if I am ready to be a supportive partner. Just staying in contact with the group, maintaining a strong, long-lasting friendship with each other. Isn’t that community? Caring for each other when the need arises, being there for each other. Isn’t that community?”

“Well, we formed this committee at Molly’s the other night, with Blue Cloud. And Frank was going to set up this meeting with Maggie. Are you still willing to go the meeting?”

“Yes, of course. I’m just being honest with where I am with my thoughts and maybe their limitations. I don’t know. I do know that I have some reservations about commitment to such a grand venture. How do you comprehend Joseph’s vision for keeping the group together as one body or family?”

“I haven’t really thought of it the same way that Joseph might be envisioning as a community. How’d he put it - to survive whatever he sees might be happening

with world events. I haven't stopped to consider how the rest of the group might think when approached. They haven't had the same connection with Joseph as we have. Actually, Stephanie, Nirvana, Sadi, Jenny, Deloris, Faye, and Sammie are the only members that only know Joseph from the class. At least Jerry has known Joseph longer than me from the men's group. So at least they know him that way. And we don't know if people are even paying attention to the changes happening in this country or the world. And if they do, they might have a totally different take on the events. To tell the truth, I have a dichotomy going on about what my role might be and why Joseph asked that we spearhead this venture. I am just going with the flow and waiting for guidance from the universe."

I don't know why, but Julian starts to chuckle. Maybe she appreciates that we're both in the dark of what this visionary, Joseph, dropped in our laps. "What are you laughing at?"

"It all seems so serious, this responsibility that is seemingly bestowed upon us. I'd love to hear your molecular theory now. How does it fit this scenario?"

"Ha, ha! How about this . . . all of our thoughts, all of our beings are connected, whether we know it or not. And if our hearts are open, we become channels of universal messaging. Kind of like the way our nerves connect with the rest of the body organs and glands to send messages back to the brain. The synapses or impulses of one neuron to another are connections that either transmit an impulse or inhibit an impulse. If our hearts are open to receive the certain connections that resonate with our souls' connection to universal intelligence, then maybe that's what has an effect with our connecting to another being! What do you think about that?"

More chuckling from Julian. "Okay, professor, you have got more explaining to do . . ."

"Megan once mentioned Preethaji from Ekam, who explained how no matter how far apart two molecules are, there is a connection. Apparently, science has figured this out. When I had my near-death experience, all the prayers, the thoughts, the tears that were coming from other beings, people in Tennessee, family in Ohio, Michigan, Florida, Chicago, India, Montana, and right at my side, you, made a connection with my being. They were like the neurotransmitters that connect with the synapses. As I floated above the clouds, there was a cloud shaped like a sideways pyramid. The right side was an obscured mass of gray cloud that drifted to a form with the shape of a triangle. An opaque sun filtered light through the mist. Now I recognize that mass of light as the Supreme Being, God, the Great

Creator of life, and from that mass, I was shown the chaos of my karmic life. And as I entered into the battle for my soul, all those synapses of thought, and prayer, connected with my thought as I was about to check out. It was then when I gave gratitude for my human form, for being home to my soul. And I gave gratitude for my soul being. It was then that the prescript was sent to my heart that I had more work to do in this lifetime. And it was the neuron impulses connected to my brain that sent messages to my cells that kept me alive. What I recall was surrendering to some kind of Mantra, Hum Sa, So Hum, Ekam. I don't know what it means, so when Megan mentioned Ekam to us today, I don't know, there might be a connection happening, I'm just sayin'.

“Anyway, the next thing I knew was that I made it to live the next day. And now we get back to Joseph, and this entanglement that we find ourselves questioning. What I like about this mystery of the Medicine Wheel is the subtlety of the message. And the humility for the connection to the earth. Remember when I used to hunt? I never realized it, but I hunted like a man in a story I read about. A Native American hunter who packed a lunch and went to a spot, and sat all day waiting for the deer he was supposed to shoot to come to him. The deer knew he was meant for this hunter. The deer knew he was a gift for the hunter to feed his family. The deer knew his purpose had come to its end. The connection was made from one molecular form to another. I call that universal intelligence. When I shot my first deer, it was a big buck, and I wounded it. It ran past me and I could not get another clean shot at it. It was smart enough to keep trees between him and me for protection from further injury. I followed the blood trail, hoping to come to a fallen animal. But the blood trail was drops, not a big flow of pools of blood. I came to a fence and dusk, which prevented me from following the trail. And so I gave it compassion and prayed that it would live a long life and heal from the wound. From then on, when I hunted I waited for the animal to come to me. The elk that ran right towards me, the deer that waited patiently for me to shoot. The buck that ran up the hill and found a place to die were it was easy for me to drag it downhill. I remember sitting next to it, looking it in the eyes as it made its last breath. I thanked it for its meat to nourish our family. I am rambling now, Julian. Bear with me. I see how we are all connected for some reason beyond our knowing. So far apart yet so close together.”

“Okay, Jim, okay, that's a lot of words. I'll never ask you again to explain your molecular theory! It's a beautiful explanation of your journey so far. So here we are, you and me connected. Are you asking me for my support into the unknown?”

“I haven’t asked you that straight-out. I am not expecting it either. All I know is this present connection to what is and what may come. And what may come is the mystery.”

“You are getting to be a mysterious man. I wonder if I am loving a ghost!”

“How about a spirit in the sky?”

Julian lets out a shriek of laughter. “You are one crazy dude. That’s what I love about you. I am still not totally committed. I do know that I will be by your side. And this Ekam thing seems to be a connection we should check out. Let’s go to my ranch cabin tonight. I want to be by the flow and sound of the creek. I need to clear my head before we meet Maggie tomorrow.

# Chapter 17: The Yellow Room

Julian and I decide to hike up to Maggie's cabin. We follow a much-used elk trail that meanders through the woods, cross a stream, and rise up out of a deep ravine to a broad meadow. This time of year, the wild flowers are spent and seed pods magnetize to our pant legs. The grass is long and there are many areas that deer visibly have bedded down at some point during the day. As we crest a hilltop, we can see the cabin just a couple of hundred yards away. The closer we get, the more we can see some vehicles already parked outside. The air is crisp enough to notice our breathes. I can see Frank's truck and Molly just pulling up. As we proceeded to close in on the cabin, I notice Molly and Joni climbing the front deck steps. I look over at Julian and ask, "Are you ready for this?"

"Gosh, I don't know what I'm ready for. It's not like we have any plan or presentation. I guess we'll see how this all evolves, with no expectations, right?"

"I'd have to agree. I have some suggestions and reasons why this might be a good place for community, but I can't say I'm the mastermind of Joseph's vision. Somehow I have a sense of his presence, so maybe we'll be led by divine grace." Julian tugs at the sleeve of my jacket. "What?"

"Jim, let's do a prayer, maybe set an intention?"

"Okay, go ahead. You start."

"In humble gratitude I thank Thee, my God, my Lord, for this opportunity to support and serve my beloved Jim and all those that are attending this gathering. I pray for divine guidance and accept whatever outcome may prevail according to Thy holy will." Julian looks at me.

All I can muster is a call that resonates from my past spiritual seeking, "I am Presence; Thou art Master. I am Presence; clear the way. Let all thy light and all thy power take possession here this hour. Charge with Victory's mastery. Lead the way. HEAR, O Universe, I am grateful."

And with our innocent minds clear of thought, full of intrigue for the good of all, we quietly trounce through the field as if we conquered our inhibitions and fears. When we enter, there is the scent of frankincense. The room is laid out with pillows in a circular fashion. All other furniture has been removed. Beneath the pillows is a plush Persian rug with padding underneath. The sunlight entering the room makes the subtly painted walls have a yellow hue. I turn to the south wall and

eye the massive painting of the sunflower with the sitting Buddha appearing to be levitated in the center, bursting with sunflower seeds. I have memories of *The Seed*, the book that Maggie turned me unto twenty some years ago. Julian and I quietly take our places on our pillows. There is no greeting as everyone is already seated. Joni and Maggie have their eyes closed as if in meditation. Frank gives us a friendly nod and Molly gives us a smile. There is soft frequency music filtering through the room as sweet background noise.

Maggie opens her eyes, “Welcome, everybody. Frank has arranged this meeting for the purpose of inquiry to know if I am willing to explore the possibilities of opening this ranch to form a community for the security of a special group of souls that have merged in friendship from a ‘special class of artist,’ is how I think you, Molly, expressed it. There seems to be reason to believe that some of our paths have crossed before, in a prior time, and others have some sort of soul connection that has surfaced into a physical group of people that our friend Joseph, the now mystical medicine man, has determined we should be united as a tribe. Of course, we all know that he has disappeared on a personal quest and can’t be here today to guide us through his visionary insight. So what exactly, or I should ask who exactly, formed this ‘committee’ to meet with me?”

Frank speaks up since the rest of us are in quandary, “I’m not sure. Blue Cloud, who is Joseph’s successor, warranted a meeting to be held at Molly’s pool with all of us that you see present. We’ve all been entangled in a web of interpersonal relationships with each other that includes some of us being lovers, therapist, and grievors. Does that about sum it up, gang?”

“I enjoy your truthfulness, Frank, and for some reason I really see a humor in this whole situation.” Nobody is chuckling or laughing yet. I look around the circle. “Maybe I’ll use the word amused. I am amused that the visionary is missing and maybe we are vibrating at another frequency or dimension of consciousness.”

“No molecular theory, Jim. I don’t think I can handle it.” As Julian burst into a laughter about our personal run-on.

Maggie intercedes, “Joni, how did you end up on this committee?”

“I was the woman of the south.”

“Huh?”

“You know a little bit about the relationships. Jim, Julian, Frank, and me? We were all interwoven and the decoupling wasn’t easy. Joseph had us walking the Medicine Wheel, in the sweat lodge. You know about that, right?”

“Yeah, yeah, it’s over near Julian’s cabin. I’ve been at a few sweats with Joseph.

Go ahead, continue with your story. I am curious.”

“So, Julian is the woman of the North, where wisdom resides in this scenario. She bore Jim’s children. Their children. I was the woman of the south, who was also in relationship with Jim. No children. Joseph knew about me and Jim. Frank and Molly were the couple of the west, where one is liberated. Joseph was in the direction of the East, which represents illumination.”

“Okay, I get the picture. Frank and Molly, why were you two chosen to be in the west?”

Frank starts with his insight, “We represented Jim and Julian’s final destination, fully liberated from past attachments and perceptions, united once again.”

“For me, personally, I am able to see how I need to liberate myself from a dark past. I was a seductress and used my sex as power to get what I wanted from my ex-husband. I am done denying my past.” Molly shocks all of us.

“Whoa, Molly, is this a recent admission? I never knew about your past history.”

“I just recently mentioned this to Jim. We have a group of us who are starting to meet once a month to process our sexual behaviors.”

“And, Frank, what about you?”

“Well, you know about Julian and me and about Bertha and the fire. My loss, twice. Truth be told, I took advantage of Julian. She was my replacement for Bertha. And I abandoned God, too.”

*Joni* - Shit . . . why did Molly have to bring up her buried truth? And Frank, such a simple assertion of his relationship with Julian! What is it that we had that night? And I felt it again giving Jim a massage for a change. I just can’t get over that Julian all of a sudden plucks him from my clutches!

What a way to put . . . . How about my loving grasp? Agh, that doesn’t sound much better. I feel so DESPERATE right now. If they only knew what I have gone through and all of the hope and desire I put into tracking Jim down. Damn it, I am so obsessed for him, or maybe it’s the feeling of being one with the other. Maybe it was the actuality of being loved. Him feeling how I was feeling as he gave himself to me. And then me feeling how he was feeling physically loved when I gave myself to him. We both knew it was special. Does Julian get that too? So does being one with all mean loving all, as it is? God, my journal is smeared with my tears of obsession.

I am gazing at Joni and see a tear streaming from her left eye. She looks so lonely and vulnerable right now.

Molly whispers, “You okay, Joni?”

We all look at Joni now. Her head is slightly bowed, so that her flowing mane of hair obscures her tears. She flips the hair back, wipes her cheek with her hand, and replies, “Yes and no. Let’s carry on . . . .”

“It amazes me how you all were chosen as committee to form a community. How do you propose to do it?” asks Maggie.

I decide to create a vision, “What I’m thinking is more of a co-housing community, but where homes are spread out, community gardens, and a place where small businesses are created along with jobs and maybe our own economy that is separate from whatever the world globalists are concocting. So I just thought the ranch, since it has a lot of acreage, it has a couple of built-in businesses, gardens, big game wildlife, and cattle. The group has some entrepreneur types that could create other income outside of the community, and provide jobs—”

“Whoa, Jim, let me rephrase my question. How are you all going to get everybody on board? How will you form relationships as a group and make sure that everybody feels good about each other? How will you form trusting relationships, with honest feelings and resolve disagreements? The physical part of community is easy. The people part, interpersonal relationship building, is a necessary focus. Don’t you think?”

Molly steps in, “I agree, Maggie. I think you pose great questions and concern. How we form unity between us is probably the best place to start.”

“Well, all of the men are part of a men’s group,” Frank remarks.

Joni, “Some of us started to meet as a support group concerning our obsession with love.”

Heads turn towards Joni again.

“I mean, isn’t that what we need to do, love each other?”

“Okay, Joni,” Molly remarks rather quickly, “I like what I am hearing. I really think that the group needs to Connect in various ways, get to know each other in depth. To make sure that you can live and be a community cohesively and develop various processes when things go haywire. What about spiritual and religious needs? How will a Christian be able to live with an agnostic without judgements or trying to convert? How can we as a group be one despite our difference of opinion and beliefs?”

“I have done some research on community and the ones that succeed are the ones that have a structure, some governance. So there’s a lot of work to be done and not just by this committee. I think once we have the core group, then the blueprint can be created by consensus. I think we are a small enough group that we can do

that easier than if we were a bigger group. Of course, as the group grows we will have to allow for some changes of amendments to our ‘constitution.’”

Frank remarks in a tongue-in-cheek way, “Jim, it’s sounding like the remake of our country, a throwback to 1776!”

“Well, that’s the only model we have had for over two hundred years. And now it is being undermined by the globalist. I think the difference is our approach, which includes adapting to how society has changed since then. So our constitution will look different. It will fit whatever criteria we want to base our community on. We’ll define what we are about and have the flexibility for change,” is my response.

Joni, “I think we are getting somewhere. I have an idea. What if we establish a place, on the ranch, if you are willing, Maggie, where we can meet as a think tank? And if you agree, Molly, we can reconstruct your sculpture in front of the designated building as a focus. We can call the meeting room the Great Hall of whatever we want to name the community.”

Molly and Maggie are looking at each other, eyebrows raised. They are processing Joni’s proposal, I can tell.

“Well, I am willing to donate the sculpture. It is bronzed and should withstand the weather. Kind of a cool idea, Joni. I like it. What about you, Maggie?”

“I haven’t totally committed to lending the ranch as a community yet. I am still intrigued by the concept. It’s not a new one, but gosh, there are adult co-housing communities popping up all over the country. Maybe we can make something work. I’ll tell you what, this room is big enough to hold fifty people easily. I’ve had plenty of large gatherings in this room. It is away from the ranch facilities. I can see the sculpture out there in the meadow, for all to see when you drive up, and from these windows. Okay, I am willing to take part. If we, and I mean me too, come up with a feasible master plan that makes sense . . . maybe Joseph’s vision can come to fruition.”

There’s a hum in the room, some sighs as in “ahhhh,” some chuckles and a few yelps.

Maggie is smiling. “Gosh, we’re like kids right now. I feel the excitement. I’m getting goosebumps and I haven’t even committed to the whole shebang! Okay, by the way, I call this the Yellow Room, if you haven’t noticed.”

## Chapter 18: Going to Tapas

The night descends and the stars are brilliant as we leave the Yellow Room. It's late. Julian and I catch a ride down with Frank and stay at Julian's cabin. It's a pretty quiet ride down the mountain. I think we are all in contemplation about not only the meeting and possibilities, but also about relationship and the three of us. I know for me, there's still a lot of inner work that needs to be done. The morning comes swiftly. Julian starts a fire to take the chill out of the cabin and I start whipping up a breakfast and some coffee.

"Lookie here, some stale cinnamon donuts. How long have you had these stashed away?"

"A while, but you can dunk 'em in your coffee. They'll be a real treat for you!"

"Yum. How about you join me at yoga in Bozeman today?"

We can meet with Nirvana after class. Maybe we can chat with her about community. Get a feel if she is game for the idea. Then I have a massage with Sammie. You suggested to start giving massages together. The masseur and the masseuse. It should be fascinating how Sammie will respond, and we'll have connected with two people. Then if there's enough time, maybe we can meet with Deloris and Faye. They will love meeting you. I bet they'll invite us to dinner."

"That sounds like a pretty full day. You can help me gather up veggies and salad fixings for the restaurant and we can be on our way."

"Deal!"

We get to the yoga class a little early and Nirvana is setting up the room with Megan.

"Howdy, Nirvana and Megan! I brought Julian for a yoga session today. Hope you don't mind."

"Of course not, Jim, I have been hoping that someday your lovely wife will join us on a consistent basis."

"Possibly. I am looking forward to this session. I do garden yoga and get in some stretching, too. But gardening as a form of yoga is my passion."

I turn to Megan and ask, "How have you been, Megan? Do you have any new meditations today from Ekam? Isn't that the place you told me about in India?"

"Yes, it is. I was just sharing with Nirvana about the Tapas they offer a few times a year."

Julian asks, "What's Tapas?"

"It's a Hindu practice of inner work or inner cleansing achieved through meditations, processes, and discipline of the mind. If you are receptive to the teachings, you'll go from a suffering state to beautiful state. At Tapas, you are surrounded by as many as six hundred people all in silent meditation to observe, witness, and become aware of special insights of self."

"Have you gone to Tapas yet, Megan?"

"Not yet. It's a journey I would like to do. Maybe we can do it together?"

"We don't know anything about Tapas," I comment. "What would we be getting into? It seems like another theology or philosophy. Ever since you started sharing some of the meditations at Nirvana's class, I have felt like they are a path to finding God within. You spoke of enlightenment when you described your ambitious yearning for 'your truth,' as you mentioned to me once before. I experienced some of that just posing for Molly's sketch class."

Julian pipes in, "I, too, have been searching and get that same sense of 'enlightenment' from reading and applying *The Way of Mastery*, a channeling of Jesus as if he dwells within each of us. So I am finding my way to being an 'enlightened being' and I am not sure what I am exactly looking for."

"What do you know about Tapas, Nirvana?" I bluntly ask her.

"Well, I have devoted my spiritual discovery to Sikhism, so I am committed to meditating upon the Creator, and what is considered truthful living, by this sect, which is living with honesty, compassion, generosity, humility service, and spirituality on a daily basis."

"So who is the Creator?"

"The Supreme Being, the creator of all things, God is one. In this class, we constantly chant Waheguru. We are acknowledging 'God is one.' There's so much more, but that's the crux of the belief. It is not what some might think of as the religion."

"Ekam is sometimes referred to as the Oneness Academy. A place to become one with the universe. Vedic scholars have referenced nature and the earth as a concept to gain knowledge for spiritual rebirth. At Tapas, one is guided by a sect of monks, dressed in white. There is processing of one's personal journey through life. The releasing of the past karmic ties, and the detachment from future thoughts so that one experiences the present moment, an egoless state. You're either in a suffering state or beautiful state." This astute insight comes from Megan.

I am scratching my head. There are so many spiritual paths that all lead in the

same direction! And we haven't even discussed reincarnation that generally comes up in all of these spiritual discussions. Yikes. The thought of going to India on a spiritual quest—or is it an inner journey?—is as daunting as thinking about Joseph's quest and the Medicine Wheel! Frank's quest and the Bible. Julian's quest and channeled teachings. Maggie's quest with Buddhism, Molly's quest through art as therapy. And my quest? Maybe my quest is a smorgasbord of spiritual beliefs and inner work to find the depth of my soul. Maybe I'll write a book and call it *Seeking Nothingness, We're Just Molecular Forms!*

Needless to say, we all end the discussion, do the yoga class, bliss out for a while, and Julian agrees to surprising Sammie with a special massage! So we are on our way in total contemplation mode through the parkway, amongst the trees in nature, when I ask Julian, "How about going to the Hut for a cup of coffee and a donut?"

She humorously responds, "Yeah, I could use an Irish coffee right about now. Do they have a Whiskey Liqueur as a flavor?"

"I don't know, but we'll pass a distillery on the way there!"

"I was just kidding, Jimmy. Most likely we'll see someone else you want me to meet from the group. Joseph's vision of community. He is really a jokester combining all these different mindsets to form a community. I am fortunate that you, my soulmate, has flexibility in your belief systems!"

And as Julian completes her sentence, I pull open the door to the Hut, and let her enter first, being the chivalrous man I am. We order, and believe it or not, there is a Whiskey Liqueur, so Julian gets her Irish coffee to go with the cinnamon donut, and we find a seat in the back.

"You ready for this Julian?" I ask. "A duo massage for Sammie's sake?"

"I think so. I have a strange feeling of apprehension, maybe jealousy? Yeah, I can visit the jealous feeling for a while. I ask myself why you don't put an end to the relationship. I feel resentment too. How dare Sammie keep pursuing you for a lover. And what's it with you? You seem intrigued by it all. You know, you are only fueling the fire with him. Have you ever told him enough is enough? It brings back that long-ago scene at Stream of Life, at the grand finale. When I witnessed you and Jerod, was that his name? Kissing, and not just him, that other big guy, he grabbed you, too. And of course Joni and the other gal in your group. The carousel of kissers, until I entered! Talk about nervous confusion, that's what I feel now, nervous confusion. You hiding any secrets?"

"It's confusion for me too. I'll be honest with you, there is a physical arousal

that I am still dealing with. What is it? Maybe desire or a need of deep soulful connection or maybe because I crave physical connection of the erogenous zones? That is what I am still dealing with. The discipline of a religious or spiritual life just produces guilt and a forever suffering state, as Megan put it. Just having those thoughts seems wrong. So impure, but they come and go. When I am aware of them, they feel so real.”

“Nicely put, Jim, but it doesn’t help me be comfortable with your honesty.”

“And you don’t ever get thoughts of sexual fantasy?”

“Well, yeah, maybe I do once in a while, but I don’t dwell there.”

“That is the reason for the addiction group. We are meeting after Sammie’s massage. And Sammie is in the group, with Molly, Joni, Sadie, and Jenny, too. You’ll meet them soon enough and know them in the depth of their struggles, our struggles. And now maybe you will benefit too, with an open heart and mind. Are you game, for coming to group with me tonight?

“Yeah, group therapy?!”

“Okay, great, maybe you’ll be our anchor. Or maybe you will discover a hidden, buried personal truth, too.”

“Let’s go get the room ready for Sammie. For now, I will stick with confused apprehension.”

“What about your nerves?”

“Thanks for reminding me. Let’s be quiet for a while. Will that work for you?”

*Jim* - There’s a look between us as we gaze into forlorn eyes. Who is this stranger? How much of me is me and how much of the world is me? That crazy subconscious mind is full of input far beyond what I ever comprehended. And it keeps surfacing. Every means of suppressing the bad for the good is just a temporary means of denial of what really is just part of all of me.

We enter the massage office. I go into the massage room to get the space ready. Julian is searching for nail clippers in my desk. Sammie enters and finds Julian rummaging through my desk. Julian looks up, surprised with a furrowed brow.

“Oh, Julian, um, what are you doing here? Is Jim here?”

We have an appointment.”

“Yeah, he’s getting the room ready.” Julian gestures with a nod towards the massage room door. “So, what am I doing here? I am looking for nail clippers, so I don’t scratch you when we give you a massage! You are going to receive a loving massage from both of us.”

I hear this from the other side of the door. Julian’s response seems terse, with

some sarcasm. I decide to listen, be quiet, see how this plays out. How do we humans put ourselves in such a predicament of claiming another for our personal use? How can we evolve to love one another on equal terms? I listen for Sammie's response.

"Well, this will be a new experience. What will we call this, a he/she massage? What if I just want Jim touching my body?"

Oooo, time for me to make an appearance! "Hi, Sammie."

"Jim, what's going on? You never asked if I wanted a massage from Julian. I didn't ask for this arrangement."

Julian is looking pretty at ease despite the tension in the room. "This does seem kind of awkward, Jim. What am I to do if Sammie doesn't want anything to do with me?"

"It's not that way, Julian. It's just that . . . it's something I look forward to. A physical interaction with Jim. My need for a man's touch."

"Hummm, is it a desire to fulfill a need for your healing or a desire to fulfill a craving?" Julian asks.

"A craving, I know what you're thinking. And what if that craving gives me a sense of healing?"

"And what are you healing from? An old wound? An emotional hurt? Where does your attraction lie? With a man's body or his soul?"

Sammie is stuck in thought.

"Sammie, you know how I have felt about your seductive advances. I truly felt that we came to a mutual agreement, that to continue our relationship and keep it moving forward you would receive my love in a nonsexual way. Sharing touch with therapeutic massage. Sharing love from our hearts. And realizing that genital arousal is started in our minds. Minds that can be controlled with choice. Who I choose to love physically doesn't diminish the love I desire to have in other relationships. Someday, pure consciousness will prevail and there will be so much God love vibrating between souls that physical sex will be unnecessary." I look at Julian, then Sammie. I feel a cosmic nudge and continue, "This oneness love I feel with Julian, I'll call soulmate love. And I want to share the phenomena with others. We are all soulmates, brothers and sisters. It's such a blessing to connect with another, a smile, a namaste bow. I bow to the light within you. How great is that! So, Sam and Julian, please consider this act as a way to connect and heal each of our souls that beg for connection as one universal consciousness."

Sammie's jaw just dropped and Julian is speechless with bulging eyeballs! So I

continue, “Loving the Supreme Creation, and we are part of the creation, with no attachment to the material plane. The most spiritual people I know talk about the material plane being an illusion and reality being something greater. Maybe I just tapped into that. I don’t know, but it sure sounded good for me to have blind faith ‘as IT is.’” I am looking at both of them. “Okay you two, what did I just say? Because I sure as hell lost track!”

Sammie is first to respond, “Jim, I’ve never heard anybody explain their love like you just did. And no, I can’t repeat a word, but I feel it. You opened my hardened heart, which was full of envy and jealousy just now.”

Julian is taking her time, mauling it over . . . .

*Julian* - I am Julian. I am Jim, I am Sammie. Is that what he’s saying? Is that what I heard him say? Did Jim just visit a higher plane and come back to earth? I close my eyes and take some conscious breaths, digesting what just came out of Jim’s throat chakra. I’m guessing he received the message from some higher source and it came down from his crown chakra. A bolt of pure essence oozed into his heart and was released from the throat.

“What did you say, Julian?”

I open my eyes. My chest is rising and falling fast. I feel disheveled, my mind is in a chaotic spin. “Nothing, I said nothing. I was in thought trying to figure you out, Jim. You sure got in a flow. Wow, ummm, before I lose any kind of connection with you, Sammie, us, I say we get on with the massage.” I get two affirmative nods and Sammie heads for the massage table. I head for Jim’s arms. He holds me tight. And I have to ask, “Will we make physical love again?”

*Jim* - I look into Julian’s wanting eyes. “Probably. What did I read once? Enjoy the sin—a metaphor for sex in this genre—until it is no more.”

“Who’s talking now, you, or are you channeling?”

“Silly, that’s my human form. Maybe a message from my soul?”

“Get out, you’re joking now. Your dry humor goes right over my head sometimes. I don’t have a clue what you’re talking about now!”

“Maybe you’re connecting within a higher realm of beings.”

Julian lets out a yelp of a laugh. “I am going to pinch you and see if I come up with a handful of molecules or human flesh!”

Sammie shouts from the other room, “Ready!”

“You ready for this, Julian?”

*Julian* - I peer into Jim’s eyes and nod, “Yes. Yes, I’m ready to love Sammie with nurturing, healing hands.”

*Sammie* - The warm oil and the four hands sliding all over my body is so soothing and loving. God, I love these two people. It's going to be hard to have a relationship with them because I am beginning to love them both so much. Maybe I need to change the expectations that I need to satisfy my physical urges in order to experience genuine love as it is. What is it in my past relationships that I was missing? The divorce of Mom and Dad? I only know the surface of what that was about. I don't know what happened in their relationship, really. I was too young. Wow, I blocked out a lot of that time. Stuffed all the emotions. Was it that I wanted my dad's love so much that I missed out on the love Mom was actually giving me? What was it? Oooo, I wonder who's doing my legs, feet, buttocks, and who's doing my back, neck, and arms? Wow, time to just enjoy and be receptive of the he/she, or is it she/he loving hands and touch? I know what Jim's touch feels like, but Julian's? I can't tell the difference. What am I missing here? Oh yeah, gratitude for this heavenly moment in time and space. Stop the mind wandering who's doing what to me. It's all good. It's all love! I am grateful. Oh Lord, I am grateful. Here, o universe, I am grateful. I am grateful. I am grateful. I am grateful .

...

## Chapter 19: Therapy

We let Sammie stay in his state of consciousness. Was it sleep? I think it was deeper than that. I felt he was in a deep state of self-awareness. Brainwave Theta. So Julian and I go into the reception area and quietly go into our own meditative states. I don't know where Julian goes, but I know that I'm connecting with some feeling of oneness. The three of us and beyond that with a stranger. An image of someone I remember from our recent coffee break at the Hut. I like to people watch, and I am beginning to understand that what I am doing is connecting with others in a non-direct way, creating a relationship.

After a while, Sammie is dressed and slowly opens the door from the massage room. I become aware of his presence and slowly open my eyes, as does Julian. We all just stare at each other. I can feel a calmness in the room and our interactions do not need any words. As Julian and I rise from our meditative pose, the three of us are connected to some sort of magnetic field. The field of a great big hug. Heads touching, and arms around each other. Like something we do with family. We create a new family circle. When we finally release from the warmth of our bodily connection, I mention, "Let's go to therapy!" And off we go, this night to Molly's home.

We are all here. All six of us. Molly, Joni, Sammie, Sadie, Jenny, Julian, and me . . . all just kind of fidgeting in our seats. Waiting for Molly to say something, I guess. She's the relationship therapist. Suddenly, Jenny asks, "So why did you leave him?"

Molly straightens up in her chair with a furrowed brow and a contemplative look.

Jenny recognizes this and qualifies whom she is directing it too, "Julian, why did you leave Jim when you did and why did you take him back?"

Julian is a bit startled, she being the newcomer to the group, tagging along because she's with me. Probably not expecting to be a participant in this "sex" therapy group. She answers, "The 'why did you leave him,' as you put it, was really a feeling that I lost us as a unit. And at the time, I did not have the tools to work out the emotions I was feeling. It was a fight-or-flight response. I thought that I desired to find who I was, separate from Jim and family. I guess all I saw was the role I was expected to play in our relationship. The thrill of what we had at one

time wasn't there anymore. The 'why did you take him back' is what I have contemplated for a while. It's as if we were two lost souls, but somehow we sensed that we were meant to work on our personal transformation, together. We found each other wondering around, looking for something outside our relationship to heal our pain."

"Huh? What do you mean?"

"Have you ever sat in an airport and watched people walking in opposite directions? Some running to catch a flight. An intercom blaring messages. Laughter, coughing, and gabbing as part of the noisy background. Kids screaming, parents shouting, others yawning curled up in a corner sleeping in a quite dead space of the airport. I watched once, just observed, and what came to me is Jim's molecular theory. We are just a form, carrying a soul as it continues its transformation through another lifetime. Lost looking for the right connection."

*Julian* - I give my man a raised eyebrow and watch a smile form and his head nod in approval. I am silently acknowledging him, "I hear you, man." I continue with my response to Jenny, but I feel they have all been waiting for my answer.

"I told Jim how many times I saw him skiing the backcountry of the ranch. I knew it was him, but I couldn't go out there. Then the day he showed up, thanks to Frank, I asked myself, why did I leave the man that gave me so much support? The man who understands me enough to have always been willing to continue on a journey with me? When he showed up, I was working on a berm so the spring thaw that was flowing over the sides of the creek wouldn't wipe out the garden plot. When I looked up, I didn't hug him right away. I asked if he could pick up a shovel and help me. He did, no questions asked, and he knew what to do, because that's what we did. Right then, at that moment I knew he forgave me for my dalliance. He never possessed me. I knew I hurt him so bad, yet there he was, he found his copilot. You get the point, Jenny? I guess that's what's meant by soulmate. Not two human forms together, rather, two souls who connected on this earth plane because they were meant to journey together. And we seek the pleasure of sex in relationship as a means to fulfill our need for connection. When what we, or I, really need is heartfelt emotional connection. And I can get that from each of you, strangers, friends, and most of all, I best get it from the soul that is journeying with me."

You could hear a pin drop. The silence is deafening.

*Jim* - In my quiet mind, I say, "Bravo, Julian, my love, my soul connection." And what comes to me is here we are, all somehow connected as a community of souls brought together. A community where our wandering through life alone

suddenly is combined with other energies. And if we can somehow get beyond our self-ego, we can be like atoms that rearrange to form new bonds to make new relationships. Souls supporting and achieving personal transformation together. In the far recesses of my mind, I recall Julian and I spending a night in a Baja alcove, near the water. Tucked in a sleeping bag together. Just chatting getting to know each other. So many years ago, our souls connected. Our foundation for a strong, lasting relationship began that night. Under the stars, the Milky Way. We were meant for each other. So many years passed, so many lessons learned. Somehow, unbeknownst to us, the commitment was really a conviction of faith that we were meant to serve each other for the good of all whom we meet. To serve a higher purpose.

I look around and search the eyes of my fellow soulmates. Sadie, who started the night out with a defiant expression was now full of compassionate love. Jenny's strained expression eased into softness. Joni raises her bowed head with tears streaming down her cheeks. Sammie has his hands tougher in a symbol of gratitude. If I am reading his lips correctly, I see a "thank you" forming. And Molly has a look like she just got caught with her hands in the cookie jar full of denial!

Sammie looks across the circle and asks, "What's going on, Molly?"

Molly takes one look at Joni and crumples to the floor sobbing. Giant heaves of pain emanating from her depths. Joni, who is sitting beside Molly, is suddenly kneeling beside her, arms draped over Molly's back, the right side of her head gently laying on Molly's back. Now they are both racked with pain and hurt. What did I read one time in the Bhagavad-Gita? Something about enjoying the suffering and pain until there is no more. I recall my five years of suffering when I lost Julian. And it was this group that was there for me. Molly was so devoted to my well-being. How many times did Molly lift me off the floor when I was in total submission to the suffering? I am so grateful, and I place my hand on Molly's shoulder. Julian has Joni in her arms. Sadie and Sammie and Jenny move in closer. We form a tight circle and wet each other with a sea of joy. This loosely formed sex therapy group has moved on from addiction to a deeper meaning of being present for each other. For the whole of human existence. Devotion to serve each other in a most profound way. Our search for human love became a search for Divine Love. A community of oneness.

## Chapter 20: Early Snow

We've had some early snow and it's deep on the mountain already. The fall harvest ended a month ago. Julian and I completed the winter greenhouse at the Grizzly cabin. She'll stay with me permanently this winter. We'll see what we can grow through the winter. An experiment, gardening is all about experimenting. That's the fun of it all. We'll stay cozy by the fires as we plan the vision quest set forth by Joseph. Everybody is committed to the task ahead to form a community. Julian and I had dinner with Deloris and Faye that night after our session with the addiction therapy support group. Sadie contacted Stephanie, and Steph was excited about the whole shebang. Arthur and Molly set up the sculpture before the snows started in earnest. Frank and Maggie got busy with the plans about where and how a co-housing community might fit in with the existing ranch matrix. Blue Cloud persuaded Jerry to give it a try and he conditionally joined. I say conditionally because he is still dealing with fear of commitment. Nobody knows of Joseph's whereabouts since he went on his vision quest. We all pray for his well-being. Walking Stick is ever so close to becoming a medicine woman. It is agreed that our meeting place will be the Yellow Room to plan community by laws and documents.

Today, I am trekking up the slope. It's a slow pace that I set. No rush, plenty of pauses to take in the surroundings. I have my sights far up on the mountain. A longer ascent than usual. I promise Julian to stay out of harm's way of avalanche danger. We have cell phone connection. The snow is floating down and glistening as the sun comes out of the clouds and the natural lighting offers a sight that pauses me in my tracks. With the dark gray clouds like you'd see with a threat of a June thunderstorm as a background, the glistening huge white flakes populate the scene. It is a surreal landscape created by sun, wind, and water. It's a calm day with six new inches of snow on a solid base. Exceptional for this early in the season. As I observe, I can't help but be grateful for this creation. All of it, the beauty of it all, nature, mankind with all of its garbage, our personal inner workings, just everything that we see and know of. What is the biblical description? As above so below. God is everything, not some figure we draw up. And I picture it all, like a tree of life with roots and branches entangled. What's it say in the Bhagavad-Gita? "The tree of this material world is the perverted reflection of the spiritual world. One who is attached to this tree of illusion has no chance of liberation, but one who understands this tree

can get free of it by cutting it down with the weapon of detachment.”

My reverie is disturbed by the ring of my cell phone. I take off my gloves, zip open the jacket, and reach in for the phone, just in time before the last ring. “Hello? Are you there?”

“Yeah, it’s me. Where you at, Jim?” It’s Julian calling. Her voice is like the distant voice of a soft siren.

“I’m still up on the hill, why?”

“Ohhhh . . .”

“What’s up? You sound a little disappointed.”

Yeah, I need your warmth. I need you to warm me up.” Julian plays with her voice.

It’s playful and alluring . . . . “Warm me up.” I have to chuckle.

“How soon before you come down?”

I look up towards my planned destination. I shake my head. “I’ll start heading down now, my love.”

“Oh, yippee, you can be so sweet. You heard me!” Julian giggles with joy.

I recall the time with Julian in the Baja, the warm soul connection. I pack up the phone. I rip the skins off each ski, take in some water, and slide the boots into the bindings. I get my pack on, dry my hands best I can, and insert them into the warm mittens. I gaze down at the basin in front of me, down below. Across, in the westerly distance, is Ramshorn Peak and other peaks whose names I don’t remember. There’s Buffalo Pass, Canary Peak? Whatever. To the north beyond this upper basin is the floor of Paradise Valley and the meandering turns of the great Yellowstone River. Far to the north are the Crazy Mountains! I sense it’s time for this crazy dude to go home to the woman of the north, where wisdom subsides. I push off and start the perpetual motion of the ski turn. The pure ski turn is always in the present moment. I am in the presence of no thought. I am in the presence of love. I am detached from the process. All I know is I am going—home.

It’s a few days later. I am relaxing in the reception area of the massage office. I had just finished the last massage of four clients today. Hands-on connection with four different human form energy fields. That’s the way I like to recognize us these days. Fields of energy, sometimes erratic and volatile, sometimes calm and serene, but always changeable. Kneading dough, and letting it take its own shape and form. Ha ha (yoga).

With eyes closed, some relaxing brainwave music still playing from the last massage, I hear the gentle opening of the entry door. I crack open my eyes to take a

peek. And looming over me is a figure in flowing robes and a turbine on her beautiful, smiling dark-skinned face. Teeth as white as a bright white cloud against a light blue sky! It's Nirvana! I open my eyes in surprise and return the smile. "Oh, hi, Nirvana, gosh, did I forget about our appointment?"

She gives a hearty laugh. "No, no, sorry to disturb you. You looked so peaceful. I'd ask you where you've been, but I think I know by now! Oh, I was passing by, just finished a yoga class and saw the light on in the massage room window. I decided to pay a quick visit. How are you doing?"

"I am doing good. So many things happening in my life right now that has opened my heart and mind to the possibilities of how I might contribute to society."

"Jim, I think you and all of us contribute to each other just by being. But isn't it wonderful to have the Kundalini rising?"

I give a quick chuckle and nod. "Yes, it is. That must be what's happening. Your yoga sessions and meditations are having an effect, eh?"

"Well, I'm sure they help, but it's the participant that makes the difference on how and what you receive as knowledge or personal wisdom. At least that's what I think."

"You are so humble and are a special connection for me and my personal growth. I feel fortunate that our paths have crossed."

"So, Jim, Megan tells me that you and Julian have committed to doing the Tapas program in India. True?"

"Sort of true. I am going with Julie Anne."

"Huh? Julie Anne? Who? You mean Julian!"

"My real soulmate is Julie Anne."

"Wait awhile Jim, you are confusing me. Is Julian's real name Julie Anne?"

"Julian was my perception of Julie Anne. Some of whom I know her to be is true to me. Then there's the perception of who I think her to be or who I want her to be. And that can really get in the way of our connecting in relationship with each other."

"Jim . . . did I wake you from a dream? Are you here right now or floating above the clouds?"

I close my eyes and wonder that myself. What's the next part of this journey, and with whom?! I was blessed with a peek of what is, and told I wasn't finished yet. In time travel, I am back at my home, alone today. The wind howling outside, the fire burning, the view of the basin, which got some new snow yesterday and my

thoughts. I look around and see the projects that still need to be finished in the house. I cherish what we have here, expectations of Woofers showing up this spring and summer. The beautiful couple who helped finish the studio above the garage, where they live waiting for their special child to be born. The excitement of a friend who has to move her garden and will move some of it onto this property and stay in the hut when need be. The forming of a small type of open community. And as my heart opens up and resist less of the fear of the unknown, I am ready. I am ready to know Julie Anne like I never knew her before. I am ready to know friends and strangers, like I never knew them before. I am ready for more personal transformation, like I have never experienced before. I am ready for Tapas and a visit to India, which I never had a desire to do . . . before.

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