The Silent Retreat

By James Kozlik

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Introduction

There is a silent retreat that we go to if we are in a conscious state of awareness. If we perceive what we think is true without any self inquiry then our imagined reality is askew with misbeliefs. We need to be witness to our states and be unabashedly true to what is. What am I perceiving about a person or self that I don't even know?

She was on a hike, in the Gallatin National Forest. Up along Golmyer Creek. She found some old logging roads after following the creek for a few miles. At a certain point she, Betsy, decided to come up and over a ridge line. She stopped in her tracks. Below, at the bottom of a deep ravine was a cabin. There was a trail of smoke from a stove pipe. Someone was living there...

Chapter 1

He is sitting on his special rock, waiting for nothing to happen. Waiting to silence his ever active mind. Currently he is questioning his self inflicted exile from what? Loneliness? Max takes four or five deep breaths and stills his mind just enough to hear the babbling brook running below his feet. He looks at the ten inch crevice of mud, rock, watercress and grassy banks. As he focuses on the water movement he comes out of his revere just as he was getting lost in the moment. He suddenly turns and swivels his body away from the brook and towards the treed ridge. He senses something, it feels like he is being watched but by who or what. In his state of fear he is wondering, where are they coming from?

Think Max, think, nobody knows I am here. But they are all over the place and I am alone now. Get off this rock and crawl over to the tall brush. Breathe, slow down that heart rate. Gawd, why did I leave my Ruger back at the cabin. This is bear country, what an idiot - bears that's what has me scared? He chuckles and let's out a sigh of relief. He rolls over onto his back and looks up at the blue sky and white puffy clouds. Then He thinks…*Sheriff, maybe it's the sheriff or forest ranger. Somebody found out that I was up here. Shit, the car, someone reported an abandoned car.* He turns back onto his belly and slowly gets up. He decides to take a route through the taller brush and get up on the ridge, see what has him frightened.

Betsy is fascinated by what she sees. *This is National forest so nobody should be…maybe homeless people live here. How the hell do I always get myself in these weird situations? Wow, how did they get all the materials up here to build this little cabin? I gotta go check this out, I sure hope they are friendly.*

She cautiously makes her way down the slope. She stops half way down and looks around for any movement. It's a beautiful deep draw with the cabin set on the south side of the draw so it gets daylight. She scurries down kicking up some lose rock and cracking some dead tree limbs.

Max stops his hike up the side of the ravine when he hears some commotion. *Sounds like there's two of them…*

Betsy approaches the cabin with ease as if she is visiting a good friend. The door is cracked open, she knocks and says, “hello?” There’s no answer, she unconsciously gives the door a gentle push. She slowly enters and her eyes fall upon a small wood burning camp stove. Something you’d see in a deluxe hunting camp. She scans the small cabin, there’s not much in the way of furnishings. She notices a small table/desk simply constructed with two by four construction and a piece of thin plywood. There are books and a little rock collection on the desk. There is a dirty plate and coffee cup also on the desk. To the right of it tucked into a corner is another small table with a basin and ten gallon water jug with a hand pump. Betsy rest her eyes on a red wooden door. It has two partitions, an upper and lower something you might see in a horse barn. She walks over to it and notices a lock. She slides her hand over a smooth surface of tongue and grove planks. She recognizes the craftsmanship and knows that this is specially made. It’s the best feature of the cabin. It seems thick perhaps two inches thick. She wonders where it leads to since she didn’t see and “kick-out” attached to the cabin. She didn’t see all sides of the cabin. She is still admiring the door when she feels a presence in the room. Her anxiety kicks in and fear along with it. She is afraid to turn and face who might there. It’s happened before, and when she turned nobody was there.

“You’re trespassing, what do you think happens to trespassers where there is no law?”

Betsy’s shoulders drop, her heart is racing and her anxiety is in high mode. “What’s behind the door?”

“You didn’t answer my question.”

Betsy slowly turns and is shocked to see his eyes…one green eye and one brown eye! She swallows and tries to speak but nothing comes out at first, then… “there is a law, you are trespassing on National Forest Land.”

Max let’s out a laugh, “what’s your name?”

“Betsy, Betsy Dolt.”

“You drink whiskey Betsy?”

“Not often, hey I should be going my friends will think I’m lost again. I have a habit of...”

Betsy watches as Max pulls a bottle off of a shelf and two small glasses. “Let’s go out in the sun so I can get a better look at you. Take that chair,” Max points at one of two chairs, “and we’ll go out on the deck.”

Max is a big guy with a piercing look that seems to penetrate one’s being. It demands attention. Betsy takes a deep breath, her chest rises and falls several times. She grabs a chair and does what she’s told. They sit, Max opens the bottle and pours two drinks. He gives a full glass to Betsy who, reluctantly takes it. Max holds his glass up and offers a salute.

“Salute, Betsy.”

She touches glasses and remarks, with a rather shaky voice, “uh, what are we saluting to?”

Max takes a long sip of his whiskey, “to a trusting friendship, I hope. Will you drink to that?”

Betsy quizzically looks at him, slowly nods and takes a small sip, puckers her lips and says, “you did say the word trust, a trusting friendship?”

Max gives a slight nod, “well, I’m not sure what to do with you. You found my hideout. If I let you go, then you might tell people about the crazy guy with one green eye and one brown eye. Or maybe report me as a squatter to the National Forest Service. Or you might get attacked by a grizzly, especially this time of year.”

Nervously Betsy responds, “this is getting creepy. Look, what’s your name? Listen, I won’t tell anybody about this place. Besides I’m lost already and if I don’t get back home in an hour, people will be looking for me.” She takes a long sip of her whisky, thinking what to do or say next.”

“Max, that’s my name.” He takes one more gulp of whiskey. He mumbles to himself, “what am I going to do with you?”

Betsy hears Max's mumbling and downs the rest of her whiskey. "I heard you and this is getting beyond creepy. I want to run, and I bet I can out run you but you'll probably shoot me. Please don't take me captive, you'll be in big trouble, everybody knows me in town. I am sooo sorry for finding your cabin..."

"Shut up, gawd, you are so anxious. I am not going to do anything harmful to you. But you have to promise that you saw nothing or nobody up here. You got that?"

"Yes, yes, of course. Can I go now?"

"Not yet, I want you to do three things for me. I have some books that need to be returned to the library. And I want you to find a couple of books for me too. You have a library card?"

"Yes, what else?"

"I have a truck parked near the trail head. I need you to drive it to an address I will give you."

"I have a woman that is probably worried about my whereabouts. I have a note that I want you to give her. That's where you will be parking the truck. If she's not home leave the note under the windshield wiper."

"Wait, you have a woman, what do you mean by that, a wife, a partner, or a friend?"

"A lover, an estranged lover until I can fix myself."

"What's with the green eye?"

"I lost an eye in the war, a small piece of metal took it out. Got me out of the army. It's a glass eye. You like it?"

"I'm sorry to hear about that, what war?"

"The Iraq non-sense."

Betsy let's out a sigh of relief, suddenly she feels some compassion. "Why don't you seek help?"

"I have been through a lot of therapy, drugs, and alcohol. Just get these three books, bring them back here."

"That's it, you're serious...you're letting me go?"

"I am hoping to see you again, we talked about a trusting relationship. You in? Will you be on my team? Be a supportive companion?"

"I'm not sure what you mean by companion, friend okay, let's give it a try. Look, I am dealing with anxiety and I am guessing you have a high level of anxiety. Maybe we can help each other or we may not be able too, considering the circumstances. I am lost, how do I get back from here? It is getting late."

"Just follow this draw along this small spring fed brook. It will eventually disappear, go under the surface. Just stay in the draw it will come out to a road. The same road you are parked on. Just walk the road until you get back to the actual trail head where you are parked. Mine is the green and beige Chevy Silverado."

"Thank you, Max. I might not get back here until next week end. I have a job and other commitments."

"You keep yourself busy, does the business cause your anxiety or cover it up?"

"I never stop to think about it that way. It comes when it comes, depends on the situation. I gotta go. Thanks again."

Max watches Betsy rise and start towards the draw. He pours one more glass and raises it in her direction. He is recalling the night when all hell broke loose in the village. The ambush, gunfire from all directions. Both sides shooting at unseen targets. Just randomly returning gun fire. Grenades going off, people and children screaming. Max finding shelter, protection, a hand over his left eye. The pain is excruciating, he has to cover that eye. He kicks in a door and ducks into a house. Shoves a woman to the side and grabs a child... He rises out of his seat now and throws the whiskey glass at the distant figure jogging down the draw.

He hears the glass shatter on a rock. He enters the cabin and finds a set of keys in the desk drawer and unlocks and opens the red door.

Chapter 2

He lights the candles, about ten of them. There's a few plush pillows on a Persian carpet. There's a buddha poster on the short wall in the small closet like room. There's various trinkets hanging on string adorning both sides of the poster. He closes the door and arranges the pillows until he is comfortable sitting cross legged, with his boots and socks off. He closes his eyes and starts a self guided process.

He is very aware of his emotional state right now.

I Hate and resent the fact that I still have these recurring thoughts of that day. If all the therapy worked you'd think I'd be back to normal by now. And I resent thinking that I am fighting for my country when in fact I am fighting another man's war. Max screams..."Shiiiit, fucking basturds. Ughhh!" *Okay settle down, easy, this is how you scare them, Hasan and Elena. God I pray for your well being. How have you put up with me all these years? How come I abandoned the group? To come up here with all this anxiety cursing through me like a wild fire. I hope Betsy keeps her promise. Of course she did't promise me anything. She just wanted to get out of here. Okay, settle down buddy, Remember what the doc said, witness the painful incident, allow the replay...what in the hell happened? We were ambushed, how did they know we were coming into that village. None of that matters, what I did matters, to push the mother aside to die, and take her son in the closet with me...my eye was blinded and my thinking non existent. Shove, grab, hide that was all my unconscious thought allowed me to do. I am grateful that Hasan stayed connected with me and I am grateful that the nurse Elena connected with me. Yet now I unconsciously push them away with these recurring thoughts I don't seem to control. Nightmares, screaming and cursing at unknown enemies. I needed to isolate. Then this girl finds me, what's her name? Ah, yes Betsy, can she be trusted? I love her for she said she would take my truck back home and give Elena and Hasan the note. I hate her because I lack trust. I trusted that our USA military was doing the right thing. And we had no clue what we were doing over there. We became the terrorist!*

Max has a kalimba and picks it up. He starts to pluck at the metal tines and a mediative tune resonates. It starts to calm him, he slowly retracts

all thought and succumbs to a transcendent state of meditation. He realizes that he can't keep clinging to the past, it already happened. There is nothing he can do about the past. All he can create is this present moment. His thoughts start to merge with images of purity. The pure white of snow capped peaks. Winter is only a few weeks away, and already the snow has been settling up high. In this transcendental state he recalls the first sighting of the upper elevations with snow capped peaks. He is emerged in white light energy now. Max is sublime and calm he visualizes the site of the distant peaks. He opens his eyes to the Buddha. He knows that the feeling of confusion and regret is still there. He tells himself, *I don't need to be living in a conflicted mind that is created from the past*. *How can I remain in a state of calm the next time these flashbacks reoccur and raises it's ugly head? What is it I fear about the past that seeps into my present moments at any given time? The flashbacks creep into my consciousness and the subconscious reaction is unpredictable. Is that what I fear so much that I feel a need to hide. To isolate myself so nobody has to see what lies beneath the surface of my being.*

Betsy is sweating and doubled over catching her breath, leaning on Max's truck. She got spooked when she heard the glass shatter on a rock, she never looked back. She went from a jog to a full on run, her

imagination was anticipating a shot from a rifle. Probably some military type rifle, was her guess. She slipped and fell a few times, her abrasions drew blood. Finally, she gets some composure and raises her head. *Ugh, I am leaning on his fucking truck. He's crazy and creepy, with two different colored eyes.*

She walks over to her car, reaches in her pocket for her keys and comes out with two sets of keys. *What the hell am I going to do with these. Maybe just put them under the bumper, leave a note on his car seat so he knows where to look for them. I don't want to get involved with this guy's life. I wonder what the deal was with the red door, especially being locked. Did he have a captive in there? Oh, my leg, gosh it looks pretty bad. I need to wash it and dress it. Ah, the note to his estranged lover. That's what he called her. Let's see, I think I'll peek at it since he'll never know. I'll leave it with the keys on his front seat.*

She leans against her car door. Betsy opens the note, a stiff breeze catches the paper and almost rips it from her hands.

Dear Elena,
I had a visitor, Betsy. You'll get to meet her if she does what she promised to do, give you this note that she is probably reading right now! I'm sorry for leaving you and Hasan, please forgive me. And tell Hasan, it's not about him. I need to figure out this condition. Why the war memories keep coming back. Fifteen years living with this uncontrollable anger that surfaces. Then the depression that follows. The unpredictability must put the both of you on alert. I know that God Love is compassion and compassion also includes forgiveness. But how do I love the saber-rattlers that send young men off to fight their wars. Wars they create should not be fought by innocent young men who don't even know what or who they are fighting for. And with these thoughts of duality, cursing through my mind I could not be with you any longer. At least for now, while I suffer and lose myself in the whiskey. I love you so much, saving me and befriending Hasan. What was it that made you want to love me, a broken man at the time. And you have been my ever present, dedicated support. For this I am grateful. As you can see I will not be back anytime soon...unless a forest ranger, or sheriff finds me and threatens to arrest me for a crime that I did not commit. My crimes are my fears. Up here in the forest of the mountains I have space to contemplate. A place to hide so it is only me that has to wrestle with my demons. I love you and Hasan too much, and I know that my unpredictable behavior caused by my past experiences, scare you and

bring on resentment. I can't help but think that Hasan carries resentment because I unwittingly pushed his mother aside for her to die without her son. That past memory causes me to suffer. Is my missing eye preventing me from seeing the whole picture? Why did you choose green for my glass eye? Was it your joke? Maybe it was because you fell in love with me, a broken soldier who saved an innocent boy and killed his mother. But I didn't kill her? War is so inconsiderate of life. I should have pushed Hasan's mother in the closet with him. How can you love someone who only thought about himself in a moment of panic? Maybe you had a compassionate heart. Do you still? I have been found by this girl Betsy. She's not exactly a girl, but younger than us. I sense your anxiety Betsy as you read this. Will you do as I asked you to do? And you mustn't tell a soul, please. Always Love, Max.

Betsy slides down, and sits on the ground, her back propped up by the truck. She reads the letter again, twice. She folds the letter and puts it in her pocket. She stares out towards the forest up the path leading from the trail head. Absent minded, she lightly brushes her hand over her leg wounds. She reaches for her back pack and water bottle. She pours some water over the blood and accesses the wound and abrasions. She thinks...*this is nothing compared to what Max must have felt, or any soldier injured in war. Well, I guess I am part of this family, at least until I deliver the letter and help get the truck back to their house. Elena can drive it back. Then that's it, I will have done my good will deed.* She stands and get's into her car and drives to the address written on the back of the letter. She drives to the highway, and heads north towards Six Mile Road. When she gets there she follows the gravel a ways and sees an old blue double wide trailer set back near a creek. It's a rather long drive way across a field. About two hundred yards. There's an old silver Chevy Camaro parked next to a Dodge van with a spider web front windshield. She parks next to it and shuts off her engine. She sits with a feeling of hesitation. As she looks at the trailer from one end to the other, she notices a pair of dark eyes peeking through a slit in between the drapes. There's no dogs barking, and she notices her fear of barking dogs, showing their canine. She sighs with a breath of relief that to ease her anxiety. Slowly she gets out of the car and walks to the front deck, climbs up a few steps and stands in front of the door. It opens before she can even knock. A beautiful tall blond lady is looking at her.

Their eyes meet, and Elena ask, "you came to tell me about him, didn't you?"

That's an odd greeting thinks Betsy, she responds, "excuse me, what did you ask?"

"I'm sorry, hello I am Elena. Sometimes I just babble whatever thought comes up. How can I help you?"

Elena looks down at Betsy's leg wound. "Oh, my you need some first aid on your leg. Come in I will help you, I am a medic."

Betsy enters and watches as Hasan enters the room from a long hallway. He is tall, dark brown eyes, black hair that is closely cropped along the sides with a rather tallish mohawk type top. But not a mohawk. Just thick black hair that stands up. His skin is light brown and he has a pleasant smile.

"Hello, I am Hasan. What happened to your leg?"

Betsy looks down at the cut and abrasion, "I was jogging and slipped on some rocks."

In her Swiss accent Elena makes a request, "please, sit down, what is your name?"

"Betsy, I was hiking on the other side of the valley. That's where I meet him, your Max."

"Humm, let's wash this out, Hasan can you get me some peroxide from the medicine chest."

"Yes, mum," he disappears into the hallway."

"So tell me Elena, how did you meet Max?"

Elena cocks her head and pauses as she considers an answer. "There's a story to tell, for now let's just keep it simple. I was with a UN envoy of medics. I was in the ER at the clinic when he entered with a young Iraqi boy at his side. He had a make shift compress over one eye and you could see blood tearing from under the gauze compress. His good eye was talking to me, help me, it said. I saw the pleading, and the stressed eyes of Hasan. Of course I didn't know either of their names. My heart of

compassion must have been open. Usually there is no time to be emotional when you are a medic in ER. I felt that something terrible happened to this man and this boy. I walked over to them and took both of their hands and lead them to a room so I could assess the damage. Beyond the eye I sensed that there was psychological trauma going on. My instincts told me nurturing was going be part of the healing process, for both of them. Eventually I fell in love with Max and Hasan. You see, after my duty I knew I had to meet them again. I gave Max my contact information and told him to contact me when he got resettled and sent home. He contacted me. And here we are. Twelve years later."

Hasan enters the room, "here mum, and I brought out your first aid kit."

"Thank you son."

"Would you like some water, Betsy?" ask Hasan.

Betsy smiles, "Yes please, thank you for thinking of me."

Hasan goes to the kitchen and Elena tends to the wounds.

"There, this should be good for now. You might want to redress it in a couple of days."

"Thanks, you have a European accent..."

"Swiss, I am from southern Switzerland. Now I am an American citizen."

"Hey, I have to get going. Oh, I almost forgot, here's the keys to Max's truck. He wants you to bring it down here. I think he's afraid someone might report it abandoned."

Elena looks at Hasan, then back to Betsy. "Hasan does not drive yet. Can you help me get the truck?"

Betsy thinks... *letter, truck, books. Shit, I am going to get hooked into their lives. I can feel it. God, I have to say yes, that's just my nature. Ugh, well I better respond. I wonder what my body language is telling her.*

"That's alright, you have done enough already. Do you know how I can get to him?"

“I get lost very easily. I found his hideout by getting lost. He had to tell me how to get back to my car and the trail head. Listen, I got the creeps when I was up there. There’s a red door with a lock on it. You know what that might be about?”

Elena looks at Hasan who is standing still as a lamp post. His eyes glass over. Betsy follows Elena’s eyes that are resting on Hasan.

“No, not now.”

“What do you mean, not now?”

“You better leave. Thanks for finding Max and delivering his letter.”

Betsy gets up, she is feeling her anxiety kick in. She does not want to go into panic, not here, not now. “Okay, thanks again Elena and nice meeting you Hasan.”

They look at Betsy, trance like. They seem to be in another place and time. Betsy is feeling insecure. It’s as if she has invaded their privacy. She leaves, gets into her car and takes some deep slow breaths to calm down. She looks at the book list and then decides to drive to the Livingston library.

Chapter 3

Max is fixing himself some dinner. He has some venison and a wild picked salad of greens and berries. He finds a can of baked beans on one of his shelves. He has a fire going in his rocket stove and a pot of coffee brewing. He moves over to his desk and turns on a small solar lamp. He starts to write;

My anxiety arises from an imagined outcome. A recurring dream or thought of what I could have done back then, in the heat of a gun battle. A past experience that already happened, but I can’t seem to let go of. When I sit in meditation and go through the five Buddha steps I blame myself for Hasan’s mother’s death. I am still in fear - just coping - hoping it will all go away. I distract myself with the whiskey temporally loosing awareness and mindfulness not paying attention to my need to forgive myself and accept

another's forgiveness. I still imagine the battle scene, we should have known it was an ambush, everything was too quiet. The village, just a peaceful setting, and yet the villagers being used, unknown to them, as decoys. Damn military, and war, what made me sign up? What were Buddha's lessons, his fears that he had to overcome? What am I imaging right now? I felt Betsy's anxiety, she must have tuned into mine. I just want to hide and yet I know they will find me now. The enemy, they will seek me out. Elena and Hasan, I need to protect them from the ambush. STOP, STOP, I am making up my unreality. It's time for a walk, a mindful walk in the nature that surrounds me. I gotta get out of here, go hunting for my next meal, that will keep me present.

Betsy is parked outside the library, she looks at the books she is returning… The Presence Process by Michael Brown; Emotional Clearing by John Ruskin; Peace is Every Step by Thich Nhat Hanh.

She blows out air and feels her lips vibrating, an old habit when she was exhausted from all her mental processes. She looks at her phone and punches in a phone number in desperation. It rings a few times… "hello Peter here." There is a long pause, "Betsy? You okay, do you need to talk?"

He listens while Betsy cries, "…no, no I am not okay. I am stuck Peter and don't know what to do.

Peter's therapy includes a direct hot line for specific clients. He happens to feel responsible to Betsy in assisting her to overcome the anxiety.

"What's going on Betsy?"

"Thanks for picking up the call. Listen, I was on a hike and got lost as usual. More than lost I found a cabin and walked down to it. Nobody was there, I peeked in and next thing I knew there was a guy behind me. I felt his total presence before I even turned around, and when I did I looked into two eyes a green one and a brown one. Right then high anxiety kicked in. Also, I saw a red door with a lock on it against one wall of this tiny cabin. Then he had me sit out on his little deck and drink whiskey…"

"Whoa, Betsy, slow down, your not physically hurt? He didn't accost you?"

“No, well he showed me how to get back to my car. I think he threw a glass at me while I walked down the draw. I heard it shatter and I started running, eventually I fell and scraped up one leg pretty good.”

“Go ahead, I’m listening…this isn’t one of your bad dreams, right?”

“No, stop it Peter, then I had to deliver a letter to his wife and adopted son. I wasn’t going to read it, but I did, three times and I cried because I knew I was getting emotionally hooked into this guy’s situation. And I am at the library, since he asked me to return three books for him.”

“What are they?”

“Something about emotional clearing, presence processing and peace.”

“Hummm, seems like you might want to dip into them yourself. Seriously I am not being facetious. Did you deliver the letter?”

“Yes, his last request was for me to help move the truck. His wife drives, but the son doesn’t and so even thought I haven’t committed to anything I feel hooked. I feel I should help her out.”

“Alright, let’s look at your position from a neutral state. How is your anxiety not related to imagining any kind of outcome? No matter what it is, for instance your diet, or your desire to find a partner? Anything that you imagine an outcome, even before it happens. Is it any different than how this guy in the cabin and you related. He didn’t accost you, he just was wondering who trespassed into his cabin. He showed you a way back to your car. The red door with the lock, you don’t know where it leads to or why it’s locked, yet. So you imagine what’s behind the door, you are imagining that you are responsible for getting his truck back to his house. What else, your turn to be honest with your true feelings”

“This guy came back from war a broken man, my older brother came back as a folded American flag!”

“That’s not what I asked you. Are you feeling resentment?”

“Yeah, like he’s lucky to be alive.”

“Are you afraid, scared? Maybe the locked door has you fearful?”

“Yes, the thought of going back there, knowing his disposition can be unpredictable, has me worried.”

“What I’d like to do is a quick meditation with you. Something that can be useful for you to calm your mind. Are you willing to experience something new?”

“Okay, what do I do?”

“Let’s start, first sit still with your spine erect. Adjust your car seat if you need to. Now become aware of your breathing, is it shallow, or deep and full? Just settle into your normal breath.

Now take three deep, full abdominal breaths.”

There’s a pause while Betsy closes her eyes and focuses on her breath.

“Now observe your state, what emotion are you feeling right now.”

“Anxiety...”

“You don’t have to tell me just be with it. Now observe the flow of your thinking...are you obsessing over a past that has already happened? Or are you projecting into the unknown future?”

There is a slight pause.

“Now imagine a tiny flame between your eyebrows, and watch that flame move to the middle of your brain. Hold that visual for a few moments.”

There is a twenty second pause.

“Now put a smile on your face and gently open your eyes.”

Betsy, opens her eyes and isn’t smiling. There is something bothering her. A recurring image from the past.

“How was that Betsy?”

“Honestly, Peter, what came to me was being locked in a closet by my older brothers. They thought it was funny to scare me. When we went to the unknown future, I pictured being locked up behind the red door. As for imagining a flame, it didn’t ease my thinking. I was still focused on locked doors.”

“Okay, let’s do it again. Only this time you will chose between an emotion that causes you to suffer, which can be anxiety, or fear, whatever. The other choice will be to choose an emotion that puts you into a non-suffering state. Maybe compassion whatever gives you a sense of calm. As for the flame imagine it as being an insight that might have occurred from a past experience. Then as you watch it travel into the middle of your brain, observe it as being harmless, dissolve the thought and replace it with a new thought that allows you to be in a non-suffering state. Then smile for allowing yourself to be in control of your thoughts, feel your inner knowing. Maybe you’ll smile because...”

Betsy is laughing...

“What’s so funny, Betsy?”

“Oh, sorry, I was doing the meditation...I thought you were leading it already. Anyway, that was different. I visited the past again, only I saw children at play. Maybe my brothers playfulness was at my expense, however I saw my inner child at peace. I knew my mom was going to come to my rescue, and the boys would be in trouble. Yeah, I didn’t want to hang out in fear, so I actually chose joy for an emotion. You didn’t mention observing a flame traveling to the middle of my brain, it didn’t matter, what had me laughing was the silly notion that a flame would be burning in my brain!” Betsy giggles, “what’s with the flame, Peter?”

“I’m glad that you had some fun this time. Your choice of a non-suffering state...joy, over anxiety was monumental. As for the flame, it can be symbolic. It starts as an insight of the past experience that already happened. There was a suffering emotion that you may have been clinging to every time you are reminded of the closet scene. Since you recreated the scene different it’s as if you are reprogramming the mind with a new thought. Replacing fear or anxiety with joy. Make sense?”

“Yeah, I get it. I like your analogy of the flame used to reprogram the mind. It reminds me of something my mom had us do at the start of the new year. We’d write down whatever we wanted to change from the previous year. We’d burn the paper. It seemed silly back then, however I can recall some of the things I would write. Then she’d have us write what we can do to turn any of the negatives into a positive. We’d keep that paper and every so often when we’d do what we always did, mom would have us read the positive or whatever action we said we’d change for the good. She called it right action.”

“You had a brilliant mother Betsy. How is she doing these days?”

“She seems to be at peace, and is very understanding in a non judgmental way about my anxiety. And she is there for me when I need a listening ear while I vent my frustrations with life.”

“Beautiful, seems like she can stay neutral and let you have your own journey, so to speak.”

“Yeah, hey Peter, thanks for answering and going through this process with me. I better deal with these books before the library closes.”

“Do me a favor, there’s two books that you might find valuable. The same one Max wants… Programing and Meta Programing the Human Bio-Computer by John C Lilly. The other is the Four Sacred Secrets by Krishnaji and Preethaji, you’ll find the Serene Mind Mediation in there. That’s what we just did. You might have to order them online.”

“Okay, thanks again Peter, your my man! Huh, The Lilly book, that’s one that Max wants me to pick-up!”

“You’re welcome, stay well and mindful, Betsy. “The Lilly book I read a longtime ago. I like the metaphor using computers, and our mind as a data center.”

Chapter 4

Betsy wakes early in the morning. She’s on the breakfast shift at Chico today. She puts a pot of coffee on her stove and opens her laptop.

She is a little groggy from a long night, talking with her mom. Dad even got on the call and they reminisced about her older brother, Jake. She didn't say anything about finding Max and what she would be doing today. She didn't want to worry them or refer to his war death.

She googled Preethaji and found a link to some utube meditations and videos. Sure enough she found The Serene Mind Meditation and turned it on. It was a simple guided meditation without all of the antidotes that Peter added. Betsy played it three times and she found it to settle her mind. She found it on her phone and saved it to use throughout the day. It was still dark out and she had some time before going to work. So she grabbed a cup of coffee and settled into her couch and started paging through the books that she returned for Max. She checked them out for herself. She came to a realization that even though Max's PTSD might be more acute than her anxiety issues, there are plenty of remedies available to make a change. And it could be drugless! She went back to her lap top and ordered the two books recommended by Peter. It was time to shower and head off to Chico to serve breakfast for the resort guest.

Betsy is getting ready for her waitress shift. She is finishing setting the last of the tables when four men enter, apparently for an early breakfast. The hostess seats them and motions to Betsy to take them, since the other waitresses haven't arrived yet. They are dressed looking like hunters in camo with some orange clothing. She goes to the front and grabs her order book.

When she gets to their table she greets them, "good morning gentlemen, looks like you're getting an early start, elk or deer? What are you hunting?"

Two of them look over at a rather trollish, brawny man, short cropped hair, chiseled face, features with sharp lines, and a broad jaw. He responds. "Elk, we are out to get an Elk today."

"I'll bet the hot spring water feels good after a day of hunting?"

"Yes, that is why we choose Chico."

“Your a little early, Let me get you some coffee for starters, I’ll see if our breakfast cook is ready to start serving. In the meantime you can get some cereal and pastries at the buffet.” Betsy goes to the kitchen.

She ask, “Hey Jeff, we already have some customers, you about ready to get the hot stuff out to the buffet?”

“Soon ‘Bets’, I still have some eggs to scramble and a couple of quiches to get out of the oven, then we’ll be ready. Sam didn’t show today, so I’m a little behind.”

“Come here Jeff, take a look at these guys? Do they look like the hunting type to you?”

Jeff peeks out from the door to the restaurant. “Ummm, I don’t know, pretty clean look for hunting clothing. They look more like clothing models for L.L. Bean. You better get them their coffee. Tell them five more minutes.”

Betsy is feeling a vibe that they aren’t here for hunting. She goes out to the dinning area with a pot of coffee. “Here you go gentlemen, fresh brewed just for you guys. Where you going hunting today?”

They look at each other then one of them says, “where are we going Sarge? We call him Sarge, nickname from old times.”

Sarge raises an eyebrow at the one that asked him. “Up Dry Creek, I have a place I go to every year.”

Betsy nods and says, “Good luck finding a herd up there. Five more minutes and the hot buffet will be ready.” She leaves them with the pot of coffee and retreats to the front of the dining room. She’s tempted to go to the front desk and find out where these guest are from. She is feeling some anxiety. Even though she get’s lost easily, she knows the drainages in the Dry Creek area. About three ridges south of Max’s cabin. Now she is feeling some urgency to see Max and deliver his books. - *So why am I feeling so anxious all of a sudden. Max isn’t any of my business and yet I feel more and more involved. That letter to his lover, and Hasan, what about him. How has he coped all these years after the war and losing his family? There is something about these guys that give me the heebie-jeebies.*

As her shift comes to a close she decides to check the front desk. She connects with Sue.

“Hi Sue, how you doing today?”

“Good, what’s up?”

“Listen, do you have four guys booked…”

“You mean those guys over there reading the newspapers?”

Betsy looks over into the lobby, “yeah, where they from?”

“They checked in with addresses in Quantico, Virginia. I can’t give you the exact addresses.”

“That’s okay, just curious. Have a wonderful day Sue, when do you want to hike next?”

“Maybe next week, but let’s just go up Emigrant Gulch and stay on the road. That way we won’t get lost.”

Betsy hops in her car and before she starts up the engine she calls Peter. He picks up, “Hi Peter, there’s some weird vibes I’m getting and I need to settle down. I am feeling triggered and all I can think of is being locked in a closet, plus there are four guys giving me the creeps, and…”

“Slow down Betsy. The Serene Mind meditation, do you remember how to do it? Whenever your triggered or feeling anxious take those three conscious, deep breaths with a slow exhale. Let’s do it now.”

And so they do it…three conscious breaths, checking what emotion is up, observing if Betsy is in the past that already happened, or in the unknown future imagining something that hasn’t happened. Then Peter leads them into visualizing a small flame between the eyebrows and watch it as it moves to the middle of the brain.

Then he asks Betsy, “let’s just pause for a moment Betsy, and recall where your mind went during these last three minutes.”

There is some time and space then Betsy speaks, “well, I went to Max’s and I was staring at the red door, with the lock. I realized that my emotion of anxiety was connected to the most recent past as I imagined what is behind that red door. I was lingering on the thought and realized that I could not know what was behind the door, since I haven’t looked behind it yet. So remember you mentioned using the flame symbolizing the conscious mind. The part of the brain that I have the power to reprogram whatever comes up from the subconscious. I watched as the flame dissolved my fear of getting involved with Max, Elena, and Hasan.”

“What replaced your fear?”

“Coming back to this present moment. Just observing the flame burn away my anxiety.”

“Nice, you did quite well processing your awareness and witnessing what you don’t know.”

“Yeah, that was pretty cool. So listen the reason I called you was because I decided to help Max and Elena. I want to bring him his books and ask if it’s okay to bring Elena and Hasan up to the cabin. They miss him I can tell. They were really worried about not knowing exactly were he is. The letter I gave Elena shook them up.”

“Wonderful, remember to do the serene mind whenever you get some anxious moments. And you can do it really quick if you have too. Basically just think of it as checking-in with yourself.”

“Okay, I also need some safety. Can you keep my phone on your find my phone app?”

“Sure that’s easy to do, if it gives you a sense of safety.”

“Thanks, it will be good to know that you’ll have my back just in case…”

“Stay present with whatever actions you are taking and be assured that I will check where you are at periodically. You are precious Betsy, remember that.”

“Thanks Peter, you are a life preserver.” They both laugh, say final farewells and are off the phone.

Betsy sits for awhile and is oscillating between visiting Elena and Hasan now or go up into the mountains to give Max his books and a report. She starts her car, backs out of her parking space and leaves Chico. She makes it to Emigrant now and decides to go up to find Max’s hideout. She drives south towards Dry Creek road where she turns west towards the mountains and through the development. She stops at the trail head where she started hiking last time. She looks at a map on her new app that she downloaded offline. It shows trails and roads in the area. She is curious about the development road that dead ends at a ranch property, yet she continues in a broad loop and eventually comes back to the trailhead where she is parked. She was wondering how Max got materials up to the area where he built his small cabin. She starts up her car and follows the road that ends at a gate in an area that got torched by the Fridley Peak fire many years ago. She parks and gets her pack out. She checks her pack for energy bars, water, first aid and rain gear. She puts the books into the pack. She swings it into place on her back, squeezes between barbed wire and is on the road. The road passes through ranch land for about a half mile and turns upwards into state land and then national forest. The whole area is a mix of Burlington Railroad sections, private ranch land and National Forest. She is on an old logging road that is the main road that other logging roads are connected to. She eventually recognizes the draw that she came down from Max’s cabin. She’s not lost this time. As Betsy looks back down the road that meanders through forest, State Land, National Forest Lands and Private blocks of ranch land, she sees a loan rider plodding along the two tracked road, on a horse. The closer he comes she recognizes the figure of a man with a cowboy hate slightly tilted, looking down maybe at her footprints if any are visible? She looks in the other direction, the direction that she followed previously to get back to the trailhead. She realizes then that it is a loop that was probably used by loggers back in the day, and by ranchers when they need to find their wondering, open range cattle. And by Max who seems to know his way around these parts...

The horse and rider halt in front of her, a short distance, about ten feet away.

The rider nods, “hello young lady,” he has a wry smile, “you realize that you crossed private property.”

“Umm, you mean before I got onto the State land?”

“As soon as you parked your car on private land and then crossed the fence onto more private land, yes that’s well before you reached the state land. In fact you are currently on private land where you stand.”

Betsy takes out her phone, “but...”

“The maps aren’t always right.” He turns in his saddle and looks at something behind them. “See that big boulder next to the clump of Aspens?”

“Yeah...”

“Somewhere in that small grove is a corner marker. The other side of it is National Forest. You are on private land. Where were you hiking too?”

“Well I was just curious where this road leads to. My trail maps show all sorts of old logging roads and that helps me because I have a habit of getting lost if I start going cross country.” She looks towards the draw that leads to Max’s cabin.

Ugh, I shouldn’t have done that, think Betsy, think say something.

Her anxiety starts up and hinders her thinking. “Uh, what if I just stay on the road and head back to my car. Would that be okay with you? I promise I’ll not use this road access again.”

“Young lady, what’s your name?”

“Betsy.”

“I’m Chad, listen Betsy, I don’t mind you using the road. We used to have one guy ride his bike on these roads, but he lived up here and always let us know if our cows were up here and he would ask for permission.”

“Okay, I’m sorry, I didn’t know who owned this land my maps just show Burlington Railroad, State, Federal, and private. Quite a checkerboard.”

“Betsy, looks to me like you were getting ready to head up this draw. Seems like you think you are on Federal land.. What are you actually doing up here? You have a pretty big pack for a day hike.”

“I might do an over nighter and set up a camp site, so I have plenty of gear.”

“It doesn’t look like you have what one needs for an overnight camp, miss.”

Betsy is starting to feel her high anxiety, and in her case it effects her emotional state into feeling that she got “caught” doing something wrong. She becomes reactionary, her voice rises, she can get angry and belligerent.

She responds to Chad’s question in a shrill voice, “Are you interrogating me?”

Chad dismounts and silently goes to his saddle bag. He pulls out a book. “Here take this to him.” Chad nods toward the draw.

Betsy looks up the draw and turns toward Chad. “You know Max?”

“Yeah, we go back a ways.”

“How did you guess that I knew about Max being up here?”

“I watched you running down this draw the other day. He scared you, didn’t he?”

Again Betsy responds defensively, “Well yeah, and now you’re beginning to creep me out. Look, all I am doing is a favor for Max. He wanted some books, and his truck parked at his house and for me to give a letter to his wife.”

“That’s the one you read that brought you to tears, is what I am guessing. I saw you slump to the ground against your car.”

“Shit, you followed me?”

“From the confines of my ranch lands. And using my scope.”

Betsy’s body language is that of dejection. She looks spent and ready to cry.

“Darlin’, sit down. We are going to do a little meditation from this book I want you to give to Max.”

Betsy willingly sits on the ground. Chad sits across from her and they are looking into each others eyes. Betsy is crying now, she is beyond tears. Chad gently places both of his hands on her shoulders as a gesture of kindness.

“That’s it Betsy, let your emotions be real. I am your friend now, I am not here to cause harm, or to make you wrong. You have the courage of a Bison, and a heart of gold to help out Max.”

Betsy raises her head and connects eye to eye with Chad. She purses her lips and remains silent not knowing how to respond.

Chad, in all his wisdom knows what she is going through. “Listen Betsy, your anxiety is not different than Max’s, it is no different than mine. We all have our moments of anxiety that might come from flashbacks, or past experiences that we still haven’t learned how to navigate through.”

“Thank you for saying that. What do you know about Max?”

“We go back a ways. Many nights at The Old Saloon, drinking our whiskey and sharing our war stories. He was in Iraq, me I am a vet from Nam. War has it’s similarities. I helped him build his little cabin so he could deescalate when his anxiety was off the charts. He fears that he might hurt Elena some day. Me I get on my horse and look for cows. Now you and me are going to do a Serene Mind meditation from this here book.” Chad hands her the book...

“What? Wait, this is so synchronistic . How’d you know, my therapist had me buy this on Amazon? He did an intense Serene Mind with me when I went to the library to get the books for Max!”

Chad starts to laugh, “oh man, yeah they talk about it in the book. Preethaji and Krishnaji. They talk about how when you surrender to your divine is what they call it. I call it God, doesn’t matter, when you surrender miracles happen. Come young lady let’s do this meditation so you can get on your way. You have made my day, I think we have some kind of connection.” He laughs again and slaps his thigh.”

And so they do the Serene Mind together, then quietly and sincerely, stand hug and go their separate ways, connected by a thread that holds the three of them together, knowing that a powerful force, a conscious energy is at work. There are three people united by a common denominator. And together there is a wisdom that they are about to share.

Chapter 5

Betsy is slowly taking a mindful walk up the draw. She notices a deer and stops to look for more. There they are about six females and a big buck.At that moment she realizes that she has slowed down her walking and is going slow, observing her surroundings. She is aware that her walk to this point was a brisk hike and she never saw an animal, and never saw her surroundings. Hmmm, all of a sudden she hears a rifle shot. It sounded powerful. However, she is fearless, because she knew it was probably Max hunting for food. She has a thought, fear is only an imagination it is not based on reality. Betsy continues her walk this way until she finally sees the cabin. She pauses and takes in the scene. It seems tranquil. She notices a deer carcass hanging from a tree limb that is quite away from the cabin. Then she sees Max, his back is towards her. He is stooping over a fire pit. Quietly she moves towards him, hoping to sneak up on him. She’s about ten feet away when Max says, “did you get them?”

“How’d you know it was me?”

“Because you said you’d do it. And you delivered my letter, and parked my truck.” He turns and faces her with a wry smile. “Hello Betsy, it was brave of you to sneak up on me.”

“That’s a compliment, it took a lot of consideration, and coaxing by others for me to come back. I read your letter to Elena and Hasan. I read it three times and cried. They miss you and want to see you, but don’t know how to find you. Their expressions when I left them were of grief. They are grief stricken and want to know you are okay. Maybe, they are concerned you might be suicidal? Are you?”

“Whoa, Betsy, you are the brave one to be so blunt.”

She slumps her shoulders which were scrunched up to her ears, she was so full of stress.

“No, I am at peace right now. Come I want to show you something.”

They go into the cabin and Max goes to his small desk to retrieve a key. He looks at Betsy, then unlocks the red door and opens it. He lights a candle then several more. The picture of a sitting Buddha is visible, there is a small altar with some wild flowers, trinkets and candles. There is a sitting pillow on a small Persian carpet. The room is about the size of a four by eight walk in closet.

“This is where I have been isolating myself. I spend a lot of time here wondering what it would be like to rid myself of this inner turmoil, the residue of war.”

“I meet Chad on my way up.” She takes off her pack and hands Max his two books. Then she hands him The Four Sacred Secrets. Chad wants you to read this one too.”

“Next time you see him, tell him I am running low on whiskey. He’ll know what I mean.”

“That you are doing the work as they say. Not blocking it out of your mind, you know, the flashbacks?”

“Yeah, here, you sit and enjoy the moment with Buddha. I’ll fix us some venison steaks.”

Betsy sits cross legged on the pillow, facing Buddha. Then she momentarily closes her eyes, just as she hears the door shut and a click of the lock. *Oh shit, he locked me in here. Now what, is he playing games, or am I an enemy informant, luring him into a trap. Oh shit, no, no, no this can't be happening. I am getting triggered, memories of older brothers locking me in a closet until mom or dad come home.*

She screams, "MAX, MAX!!"

No answer. She feels sweaty, nervous now. She closes her eyes and takes three deep breaths, then feels her emotion of fear, her past with the brothers, she's back in the closet at home. *Settle down, breath, again, breath she looks at the Buddha, so calm, so wise. What made him wise? What is my emotion right now? Fear, stress, I don't want that. It's the past experience that has me triggered. I have no clue what happens next so go to calm Betsy, no thought. No past, no future just now with Buddha. Close the eyes, relax, relax. Breathe deep and long feel the breath inhale, exhale, one two inhale, exhale one, two, three, four. Inhale one, two three. Exhale, one, two, three, four, five, six. Betsy does this up to eight and slowly she is in a sleep state. A state of theta. From Beta to Alpha to Theta.*

There is a click and the sound of metal like a latch being opened. There is light pouring in as the top half of the door opens and Betsy looks into the eyes of Max. One green eye and one brown eye.

"The steaks are ready, you hungry?"

"Betsy takes a deep breath, first I was scared shitless. Then I got calm and I transcended from my high anxiety to a state of calm."

"That's great, you hungry?"

Betsy laughs, "yeah I'm hungry, I have the appetite of a bear!"

Max opens the rest of the door and enters the small room and extends his hand to help her up. They quietly go out onto the front deck. There are two plates of food and two glasses of spring water. They sit to eat. After a few bites Max starts the conversation.

“So, I dipped into the John C Lilly book, Programing and Meta Programing the Human Bio Computer. I was intrigued by the Four Scared Secrets that Chad sent this time. In it he inscribed a note; simple, profound and there’s no secrets when you ask yourself “are you suffering or not suffering”.

“Max, you locked me into that closet and I noticed how I had to choose fear or calm and I used breath to get to calm. Is that what you do in there?”

“Lilly did experiments to alter his state of consciousness. He used sensory deprivation. It takes awhile to drop into deep states of consciousness. Beta to Delta. When I skipped through the book of Four Sacred Secrets, I got the sense that it takes one there quickly. That Serene Mind is only about three minutes and it’s a direct path to an altered state. Two states suffering or non suffering.”

“Chad said we all have different levels of anxiety triggered by past experiences, in your cases, war. In my case being locked in a closet.”

They sit in silence for awhile eating their venison. There’s a racket going on and they look over yonder at the tree with the deer carcass is hanging from the limb. A grizzly rips it from the tree, tree limb and all, and is busy savagely devouring the carcass. Calmly they rise and throw their unfinished steaks into the fire and move inside the cabin. First Max locks the outside window shudder made of rough cut two by eight wood. Once inside he lights a lamp and motions for Betsy to sit. He goes to the far corner of the room and loads his custom military stock rifle with some 44 hollow point bullets. They wait in silence. When all of a sudden they hear heavy thudding noises. Max instinctively looks up.

“They’re here, they found me.”

“Who Max? Stay calm, breathe.”

He looks at Betsy with a disgruntled expression. He points the rifle, upward.

“Don’t shoot Max, they passed over. They are not landing.”

He looks at her and blinks. He lowers the rifle. He is sitting as if in a trance.

“Where’d you go Max? Where are you now?”

He looks at Betsy, takes a deep breath and his expression shows some relief then a smile starts to cross his face. He laughs uncontrollably, “what would they want with me anyway? The war is over!”

“Yeah Max, the war ended several years ago. You are only at war with yourself, just like the rest of us, only your triggers are different. You saw death, so maybe you need safety? I don’t know I’m not a therapist.”

“Girl, you are doing a pretty good job at it. Let’s see if the Grizzly left.”

They go out and sure enough the carcass is gone along with the tree limb, They smile at each other.

“You better get back, I’m sure your people are looking for you. Thanks for the books. Wait.”

He disappears into the cabin and retrieves his 40 mag gun. He comes back out.

“Here, just in case you need it on the way down.” He hands the gun to Betsy.

“Gun use lesson, how...”

“Here’s the safety, I already have a bullet in the chamber. Extend it out using both hands. Look through the site at that tree over yonder as the target. Now keep your trigger finger on the outside of the trigger, use your thumb push down the safety. Now slowly slip your trigger finger gently onto the trigger. As your hand wavers, when you feel your site pass over the target pull the trigger...

POW...

“Uh, okay, you got a shot off before I could tell you to watch for the recoil.”

“I noticed, my daddy took me out to target practice a few times. Some of us gals shoot. I’ll put it into your truck when I get back. Listen, you mind if I bring Elena and Hasan up here?”

“I think I am ready for them.”

“I take that as a yes.”

Max nods his head. “You better git.”

And with that they part their ways. Max shouts out “Thanks Betsy”

She gives a hand wave and slowly goes into a jog. When she is back at her car, she looks around, and sure enough there is a horseman high on a distant ridge. Eventually, she is heading down Dry Creek road when she passes a black Yukon heading up Dry Creek, she gets a quick glimpse at the two in the front seats. It’s them, the hunters she served at breakfast. It’s too late to be hunting now, the official time for dusk has passed and it’s starting to get dark. She drives wondering who was in that chopper, Yellowstone Biologist or military?
Where to now girl, is it too late to pay Elena a visit. I better let Peter know I’m alright. At least he is tracking me.

Betsy dials up Peter’s hot line, “hello, Peter? You there?”

“Hi Betsy, yes I am here and I know about where you are, in the South Glastonbury development?”

“Yes, coming down Dry Creek.”

“Okay, so what happened?”

“I got locked into the closet, behind the red door! But even before that there was some synchronicity happening. I meet the rancher whose land I had to trespass in order to get to the cabin. I wanted to see how the logging roads looped back to the trail head and figure out how Max got the materials up to where he built the cabin. Anyway, the rancher is a friend of Max and they have PSTD as a commonality. And I saw how my high anxiety is a common trait to their PSTD. It’s just that our past trauma’s were different.”

“Whoa, slow down Betsy. Tell me about the closet. How did you manage that scene? Skip the story part, you can fill me in on that later.”

“Okay, so he shows me the closet, behind the red door. I go in and there are candles lit, and a big poster of a sitting Buddha, a golden statue. There are some pillows on a meditation carpet. The room is about six foot wide and eight foot long and slopes from whatever the roof line is to about six feet tall. So it’s small. He goes to cook some....”

“Story, you are getting into story Betsy. Feelings, were you scared, did the anxiety manifest into a state of fear?”

“Yes, as soon as I heard the door close and lock snap shut. At least it wasn’t dark inside. Something happened, I went from being anxious to feeling safe. I looked at the Buddha with it’s eyes shut and a serene smile. So I went into a personal process and recalled my childhood, being locked in a closet by my brothers. During that process I recalled at one point knowing as a child that my parents would come to the rescue. In all these years my recall was centered on the fear of helplessness rather than knowing that I was safe, in the comfort of being rescued by my parents. You had me read the Four Scared Secrets, well I haven’t read the whole thing but enough to be introduced to my Divine and also, I did the serene mind meditation that we did. I was able to delve into that past trauma experience deeper than I ever did before. I felt myself getting calm. And since I didn’t know how the situation at hand was going to end, I surrendered to the outcome, especially since I wasn’t scared of Max. I realized that what creeped me out was his reactionary self. I saw a man in transformation. He knew what he had to work on. Just as I realized, in a lessor way, what I needed to discover.”

Peter chuckles, “I might have to hire you as a therapist! Well said, Betsy, you observed, you were aware and witnessed everything that was present for you. Where are you headed now?”

“I am going to go over to visit Elena and Hasan. Max is ready to see them. He wants me to bring them up to the cabin. My sense is that they can all benefit from what he has built as a silent retreat.”

“Very good Betsy, you are special. Talk about synchronicity it’s not only happening for you, you are also a conduit for Max, Elena, and Hasan. You want me to keep tracking you?”

“Yes, there’s another creepy thing going on. I served four guys at breakfast that looked different to me. They said that they were hunting, but I passed them just awhile ago, and it is past dusk.”

“Listen, I don’t want to alarm you, there are some ICE agents in the area since some of the resorts in the valley hire internationals, they might be…”

“Oh no, Hasan…I hope he is legal.”

“I was just letting you know. What are you feeling now?”

“Honestly, anxiety!”

“Ok, you have serene mind in your “tool box” now. And listen to your intuition. Really feel it. If you feel in a calm state then your intuition is giving a green light. If your are nervous, maybe proceed with caution. If you are in a state of duality, demonization or waging war, us against them. Stop and consider how the situation might enfold “as it is” you know, the old sayings, what’s meant to happen will happen. It’s in God’s hands or it is in divine order. Better yet look in the Four Scared Secrets book and find a soul sync mediation and set an intention. See it manifesting and know that the outcome has already happened. You might be surprised how it all unfolds.”

“Well, you are so encouraging Peter. Hey, I am in Elena’s drive way. There are lights on. I want to go now. Thanks a billion times for you being part of my life.”

Chapter 6

Betsy emerges from her car and as she starts towards the front door, she sees Hasan peeking between the curtains of his room. She continues up the steps and knocks. It takes awhile before the door is opened.

“Ah, Elena, hi I came with some news.”

Elena hesitates, “oh, hello Betsy.” She looks over her shoulder then beyond Betsy. “Okay, come on inside.”

Now it's Betsy who hesitates wondering what might be the issue. "Thank you." She acknowledges Hasan who just entered the living room. "Hello Hasan, how are you?"

There is not a verbal answer, just a nod.

Elena closes the door. "What is it you want to tell me?"

Betsy is struck by her expression. It's the same blank stare that she felt when she left them with the letter. "I'm sorry, maybe I shouldn't be getting involved with a family matter?" She is searching for a clue why they seem so reserved, by ending as if her statement was a question.

"Please have a seat Betsy. Hasan can you get us some tea, please. Or do you prefer coffee?"

"Tea is fine. Thank you."

"I'm sorry, I sense that we can trust you. Listen, there's a couple of things you need to know. First off, the reason that Max has isolated himself is because he is afraid of hurting us. I'm going to show you something then tell you the story behind it."

Elena unfastens her pants and slowly pulls them just past her hips. She turns so that Betsy can see a pretty good size bruise.

Betsy is somewhat shocked, and uncomfortable.

"Hasan has a bruise on his arm where Max grab him. It was a night where we relived a traumatic past experience, not only for Max but also for Hasan. I was an innocent bystander."

Hasan comes back into the living room with a tea tray that includes sugar, honey and some cookies. He places it on the coffee table. Hasan sits across from Betsy and keeps his eyes fixed on her.

"Maybe this is none of my business, I should go. I just wanted to let you know that Max wants to see you two."

“Don’t leave yet. Let me finish, then you can leave. You need to know what it is that you got yourself involved with. In Iraq Max’s unit was told to go into a village where no recognizance was done prior to their order. It turned out to be an ambush, Max had entered a home, Hasan’s home, he was ten at the time. He ran for cover and as he did so his instincts had him grab Hasan, a child at the time. Without realizing what he was doing. He was acting with a lot of adrenaline. Max unwittingly knocked over Hasan’s mother, and pulled Hasan into a closet to escape the gunfire. Hasan’s mother died. Max had shrapnel in his left eye. When the shooting stopped Hasan released himself from Max’s grip and ran to his mother who laid there, dead. Max made a quick compress and wrapped a makeshift head band to cover his eye. When he came out of the closet, he saw Hasan hugging his mother and that’s when he saw what he had done. He blamed himself for her death. The night he relived that experience, it triggered something in him that had him in combat mode. All hell broke loose in this house. I was knocked down with a force that was so harsh, I screamed, Hasan came running out of his room and saw Max bolting past me with his rifle in one hand. Max grabbed Hasan despite Hasan’s size, and he dragged him into the hallway closet.”

“Oh, um…”

“There’s more, we have been told that there are ICE agents in the area looking for “illegals”, Elena looks over at Hasan, “we both fit in that category I helped get him into this country when he was still ten. How we got here is a whole other story I don’t need to get into.”

There is a pause.

“Betsy, have some tea, I too want to speak with you.”

Betsy gives a sigh, “hummm, ok thank you Hasan. Please go ahead and tell me your story.”

He pours her a cup of tea and places the cookie tray in front of Betsy. An offering of his good will.

“When Max grabbed me, I knew what was going on. I too get flashbacks. Sometimes I get upset with Max and will hit him with my fist. Hard, I hit him hard and start to scream, “let me go”, in Arabic. He is big

and strong and he will wrap his arms around me and whisper in my ears, it's over Hasan, I am your friend, I love you, please forgive me. That is when I stop resisting him. We will sit in silence afterwards and he will lead me through deep breathing. Then he hugs me like a son."

Betsy - Whew, now what. I have to get them to Max. I sense that those guys, the hunters must be ICE. I wonder if Max is in trouble too for harboring illegals?

"Do you have a green card or anything like that, Elena?"

She looks at Betsy with a blank expression that has guilty 'written all over it'.

"None of my business, sorry. Listen, I will take you to Max."

"When do you plan on doing that?" Ask Elena.

"In a couple of days. I have to work the next three days. Then I have two days off. We can go on Tuesday if the works for you."

Hasan looks at Elena, then Betsy. "I am employed at The Lodge. I know some international co workers that have not showed up to work. I think they feared the ICE agents. They heard of a raid in Gardiner. They were Mexican. I'm afraid that they might know where we live. Maybe we should go tomorrow."

"Maybe you can stay at my house until I can go. I have seen four men staying at Chico where I work. I serve them breakfast in the restaurant. I suspected that they aren't who they say they are."

Elena responds, "if you don't mind it might be best to leave our home. I am a bit concerned, there was a census a few years ago. I didn't know who the census taker was when I answered the door. She saw the three of us, so that is what is on record. I'm not sure how ICE tracks people and if they even know about us since we entered the country twelve years ago."

"Okay, I have an extra room with a bed and some camping gear, an air mattress and sleeping bag. Do you have any back packs so you can take whatever you need when we go up to Max's cabin?"

“Yes, yes of course. Thank you Betsy for befriending us strangers and taking a risk. Just to be clear, you will be harboring undocumented aliens.”

“Yes, I know that now. I am not sure how this will all turn out. I met the rancher who owns the land that Max is on. He knows Max, he helped him build his cabin. He is also ex-military and has dealt with PSTD, he is a good influence. I’ll admit that I have some trepidation getting involved, however there is a part of me that for whatever reason, I want to help. Please, let’s start packing, it’s getting late and I start work early tomorrow.”

They get packed up and decide to leave together in Betsy’s vehicle. On the way to her house they exchange some background with each other. They bond a little, an effort is made to form a relationship. Betsy can feel the love that is strong between Elena, Hasan and Max. When they arrive and settle in Betsy notices a message from Peter. He wants to check in. Once Elena and Hasan are settled into the spare room for the night, she goes out to the back deck and calls Peter.

“Hello, Betsy, I just wanted to get an update. How are you doing? Do I still need to tract you, or are you done helping Max?”

“I am definitely feeling anxiety, but it’s a different kind of fear. It’s not based on past trauma. I am more involved with Max and his family than I ever thought I would be. I am feeling compassion that requires me to take action.”

“How so, you can give someone compassion and not have to feel like you need to be part of their life.”

“Peter, even though you are my therapist your compassion doesn’t stop after our sessions. Like right now, you took the time to connect with me. I can feel your concern for my well being. My compassion or love for another has always been just a moment in time. Beyond that I have never taken the time to stay connected with whomever I felt compassion for. It’s time that I start doing that, I have always feared getting involved with someone else’s predicament. It’s like sitting at a stop light and looking at the homeless person holding their sign, ‘every little bit helps’. I have compassion for them and I am judging them at the

same time. I can take action and hand them a dollar or I can judge them that maybe they are a drug addict or need if for their next bottle of alcohol. Or even a friend, or and acquaintance at work, I can listen to their story, give them compassion and be on my merry way or I can take action and help them however that may be. Just like you helping me after work hours. You have a hot line for your clients, that's compassion with action. Does that make sense Peter?"

With a choked voice Peter feels acknowledged, "thank you Betsy, I have never thought of myself as a therapist giving compassion. It seemed like I gave advice."

"No Peter, you are involved with my situation beyond your normal business hours. Right now, I feel your heartfelt friendship. It has impacted me to reach out to these strangers I feel compassion for."

Peter is shaken with gratitude and with a broken voice he responds whole heartedly, "thank you Betsy, thank you for thinking of me as a friend. I will continue to tract you. Send me a text when you head up to Max's cabin."

Chapter 7

Betsy awakes early to get ready for her morning breakfast shift at Chico. Elena is already up and sitting crosslegged, on the couch, in a meditative pose. Her hands clasped in her lap, eyes closed. Betsy did not notice her in the darkness of the room, until she turned on the kitchen light above the cooking range to make come coffee. She decides not to greet her, yet. She gets the coffee brewing and goes to brush her teeth and get ready for work. As she quietly passes through the living room Elena greets her.

In a quiet voice, "good morning Betsy. I want to thank you for accommodating us and for your generosity to help our family. Let us know what we can do for you around here. We are willing to clean, anything you might need."

Betsy is not sure how to respond, "ah, well thank you. I am not sure how helpful I can be..."

"You are going out of your way to assist us, and also taking a chance by getting involved in our situation. You have a big heart doing what you are intending to do."

"Thank you for acknowledging that. Just so you know I have been dealing with anxiety for a long time. I even see a therapist, so some how in a small way I am able to connect with what it must be like for Max and actually all of you. I can feel the discomfort of others whenever my high anxiety kicks in. Being able to help, well it's weird, I am feeling a sense of calm. I think of my situation and now all of a sudden I get to experience what you three are going through on a much larger scale, it sort of humbles me that all I consider is me, me, me. So to be able to immerse myself into your lives helps me recognize my own behavior or how I react to my surroundings. If that makes sense."

"It makes a lot of sense. When I was a doctor and serving with the Red Cross, all of my concerns and worries of self were non existent since I

was so immersed (as you say) in what was happening around me, with severely wounded patients."

They pause for a bit, neither ready to say anything more. A mutual understanding is felt, a knowing that their lives are inter connected in this space and time for a reason.

"Betsy, do you ever get to recognize the difference when life is just flowing in a direction, and things happen beyond your control. How you just follow the direction of the flow and observe how it unravels. It's like being part of a story. It's like just 'getting out of the way' so to speak."

"Yes, that is what is happening to me now. It's actually kind of exciting, this drama. You know, you asked what you can do around here today, there's a garden out back, maybe you can tend to it, you know, water what might need watering, just enjoy nature...there's a hiking path that I created that leads to the forest behind me. You two can enjoy a hike. Make yourself at home. There's some leftovers in the refrigerator and other food help yourself. I have to get ready for work."

"Thank you again Betsy."

"No problem, I am already enjoying your company. By the way, how old is Hasan?"

"Twenty-two, why?"

"Well I'm twenty-seven, he is quite handsome." Betsy smiles.

Elena smiles back, "he get's along with the female energy. I'm sure he appreciates what you are doing too. I see his eyes and the way he looks at you."

Betsy blushes..."I have to get to work now. Make yourselves at home."

She is running a little late. When she gets to the restaurant the four hunters are already seated and drinking their coffee waiting for the rest of the breakfast buffet to materialize. She goes into the kitchen to check the food offerings and grab something to eat, too. She see's Jeff who is the main cook this morning and goes over to him as he is loading the scrambled eggs into a hot bin.

“Jeff, you hunt, right?”

“Yeah, when I get a chance.”

“Isn’t one of the best times early at first light?”

“Yeah, it usually is, why?”

“Well, there’s four guys out there claim to be hunters. Yet they show up here every morning for breakfast and really don’t get out of here until nine or nine thirty. Don’t you think that they might be missing the elk in the feeding meadows?”

“They might, usually by then they are moving to high ground and steep slopes. When I go out I hunt first, then eat a late breakfast or lunch.”

“Hey, you know about ICE in the area, or is it just a rumor?”

“I think it is a possibility, we lost a few people in house cleaning the other day. Just no shows is what I have heard.”

“Yum, this is good, what you put in this burrito?”

“It’s the spices, and actually processed elk sausage from Mike’s Meats in Livingston.”

“It is yummy, thanks for the hunting tips.”

“Yeah, you’re welcome, want to go hunting one of these days?”

“You asking me on a date?”

Jeff chuckles, “sort of, you seem to have an interest. And I heard you shoot.”

“Oh, from who?”

“Jen at the general store. She knows your dad.”

“Let me think about it. I better get out on the floor.”

Betsy comes through the door and just about bumps into Sarge, the guy she suspects as being the guy in charge of his group.

“Oops, sorry sir. You enjoying your time in the valley? Have you guys gotten anything yet? Elk, didn’t you say you’re elk hunters?”

He looks at Betsy and his expression seems to say, non of your business. Then it softens, “Yes we are enjoying the valley. No, to have gotten an Elk yet. We’ve only seen cows, we want a rack.”

Betsy just nods, “enjoy your breakfast. Try the burrito, it has elk sausage in it.”

She heads to the front greeting area where the hostess is and picks up a table.

When her shift ends she decides to look up Chad, to see if he is home. She drives over to the Fridley Ranch. When she gets there she see’s a truck parked and it looks one of the horses in the corral is the one Chad was riding when she meet him a few days ago. She gets out of her car and ascends the stairs leading up to a large porch. Just as she is ready to knock she hears Chad’s greeting from behind her. She abruptly swings around a bit startled, and gives a quick smile. She sees Chad down by the corral. She hesitates then walks over to the coral.

“Good morning young lady. How can I help you?”

As she approaches him she reminds him who she is, “hi, Betsy here, do you remember me? I gave Max the book you wanted me to give him.”

“Of course, yes, so how can I help you?”

“I’m not sure, I have Max’s wife and his adopted son staying at my house until I get a couple of days off, this weekend. Then I am going to take them to Max. He wants to see them and they don’t know where he is.”

“So, you asking for permission to cross my ranch lands?”

“Well, yes, but I also have a concern.”

Chad takes his time to respond while he is putting a halter on his horse. "What's your concern, Betsy, Betsy is it?"

"Yes, Betsy, you remember! Listen there is rumor about ICE agents nosing around. I suspect that I have been serving them breakfast at Chico, four guys say they are hunting, but they have some weird hours for being real hunters, if you know what I mean."

"Yeah, I have heard the rumors too. My fence crew disappeared."

"Sooo, what do you think? Can I get your permission to..."

Chad gives her a smile, then chuckles, "well you didn't need my permission the last time...yeah Betsy, bring them to Max. I visited him and he wants them with him. I told him about ICE."

"Ok, thanks, it might be in a day or too, by the time we pack some supplies."

"Over there, next to the barn, you can use that little four by, it'll fit all of you and your supplies. I will be riding the ridges and draws looking for cows. I'll keep my eye out for any lookers. If you hear a shot, that is a warning that they are coming."

"Chad, I'm scared and I am..."

"Have you read any of the book that I gave you to give to Max?"

"Honestly...no I haven't read it."

"I've got one in the house," Chad finishes haltering his horse, "come with me Betsy."

They remain quiet, Betsy is following Chad back to the house. As they enter she is enthralled by the racks on the walls. The cabin has the flavor of a man who does not have a woman in his life. She observes Chad's slow movement as he goes into a room. Not sure whether to follow him or not, she decides to keep walking to where he is going. They enter what appears to be a reading room with a desk and a couch. From the couch one can view Fridley Peak and the other peaks behind it. Chad goes to one of the bookcases up against the wall. As he is

pulling a book (The Four Scared Secrets) she asks, “have you ever been married Chad?”

He turns with book in hand and squeezes it as if a memory has surfaced in his thoughts. He bows his head slightly, “yes, what separated us was my battle with PTSD. I told her to go, that she’d be safer with another man. By then, despite our love for each other, she had been seeing someone else. It really wasn’t much of a secret. I’d observe their friendship from a distance.”

“I’m sorry to have probed...”

“No, no Betsy, nothing to worry about. It happened so that I have the strength and wisdom to help Max. So far he has been receptive of my counsel, what little I can give him. You see, in the end we all have to come to grips with our inner turmoil. Otherwise, we are incapable of relating to anyone. We are incapable to give compassion. I see Mary-Belle once in awhile now, she is doing well, aging in grace as a beautiful woman with a lot of heart. Her friend is long gone, maybe someday we can live together again. That is what I hope for.”

He walks over to the couch and sits. He pats the sofa and invites Betsy to sit. “Come and sit, I want to show you something that I do whenever I get scared of myself. To this day I still get the flashbacks. My unit was in a village massacre in Nam. Mary-Belle was the rock who kept our relationship together with our adopted Vietnamese daughter. She’s grown now, doing well. She moved years ago to get on with her personal journey. She’s in Seattle where she lives in a Vietnamese community. She’s a successful business person.”

“Do you ever see her?”

Chad opens the book, “let’s do this mediation.” He opens the book to a page and at the bottom is instructions for doing the Serene Mind.

“This is no coincidence, my therapist did this same meditation with me while I was sitting in my car, deciding if I want to get involved with this whole situation.”

“Oh, well that is so magical and I am guessing that something from that synchronistic connection with your therapist, made you have a change of heart?”

“Well, what he did was dissect each part, my current emotion, my past thoughts, creating positive future thoughts and feeling a new emotion. We went through all of the steps and took some time to delve into each thought that created the emotion, then we changed the thought, what thought do we want to bring into our future. And with a positive future thought, the present emotion changed. In fact I can’t remember what caused me to laugh, but I was giggling at how simple this mediation seems and yet how powerful the impact can be.”

“Betsy, I am beginning to like who you are. In such a short time, you have shown me the depth of your being. Your willingness to be involved in our lives. Listen, with ICE involved I can sure use a Serene Mind right now. I have some stinkin’ thinkin’ going on that I need to change. You “in”?”

“Let’s do it, you lead.”

And so they do the meditation, and take time to recognize their fears and choose to change their thoughts into a positive outcome.

Chapter 8

“Okay, Betsy, if I’m not here when you all come back to the ranch I will leave the keys under the driver seat. I will also leave a map so you’ll know what trail intersects with the State Land. From there you know where to go...correct?”

“Yes, thank you Chad. I feel privileged to have your trust and to have met you. I’m beginning to see how or why certain lives intersect or connect with each other even if it’s for a short time.”

“Remember, once you start this little mission, you will be an adversary so it’s up to you. There is no ill feeling if you...’

“I am committed Chad.”

“Alright then, I need to find a few more cows. We’ll meet again.”

And with that Betsy drives back home. On the way she dials up her mother.

“Hello mom!”

“Well, what a nice surprise, how are you dear?”

“Whew, I’m doing good, getting a better understanding about my anxiety. I’ve been working with Peter, you know, my therapist. And I’m not sure how to describe the progress, one thing for sure is I have a better awareness of what my triggers are. Also, how subtle nuances can bring up my anxiety.”

“Like what for instance.”

“Is dad there?”

“Yes...he is listening. We are sitting out in the sun room.”

“HI DARLING!”

“Hi dad, okay I will try to keep this short. I have gotten into a situation where all my buttons are being tested. Just so you know Peter, my therapist, is tracking me...”

“Whoa, slow down and back up a little. Why would your therapist need to track you? And what is the situation, maybe start there.”

“I was on a hike, and walked into a cabin that turns out to be on a private ranch. I opened the door and entered. Nobody seemed to be there the odd thing was a double hinged red door. It was like an art piece, when I turned to leave he, Max, was quietly standing behind me. The door had a locked latch and I wasn’t reading his expression correctly. My first thought was that I would be locked behind the door. Like when my brothers would lock me in a closet, you remember that?”

“Yes of course, however, you were safe, you had to trust that Dad and I would come to the rescue.”

“Well, maybe that’s why I’m calling. Hold on, I am going to pull over to the side of the road.”

“Where are you now?” Asks her dad.

“Dry Creek road. There this is better. Where were we, oh yea, so yes eventually as I got older I understood that. I felt safer, but I always had a hard time recognizing socio clues like body language, or even verbal tones. Anyway, my fears were triggered and Max did the best he could to keep me at ease. The only problem is that his anxiety seems greater than mine, PTSD...”

Her dad interrupts, “now I am getting anxiety, what in the hell have you gotten yourself into Betsy?”

“Harry...let’s just listen to Betsy.”

“Okay, sorry darling, go ahead.”

“Okay, so long story short, the second time I went to see Max, he asked me to pick up some books at the library...”

Betsy’s mom, “sorry for interrupting, are you getting ahead of yourself with the details?”

“Yeah, I am getting a little excited I want to get back to the red door. Okay, so I went to the library, for Max to get some emotional self help books. I was confused of why I wanted to get involved. I called Peter on his 24/7 hot line and he guided me through my anxiety attack. I made a decision based on how Peter guided me through my past thought patterns, and the impact they had concerning the red door, even though I didn’t know anything about the reason for the door. That’s when I decided I could do this.”

Harry asks, “do what?”

“Go back to give Max his books. I went up to the cabin on a different route and was stopped by the rancher who owned the property and is a friend of Max. That’s when I found out what Max and Chad, his friend, had in common PSTD. I got to the cabin and Max showed me what was behind the red door, it is his meditation room. He is doing a twelve step

Buddha program. He invited me to experience the room while he grilled us venison steaks. He closed the door and locked me in…"

"HE WHAT…I'D HAVE ANXIETY TOO!" screamed Harry.

"Dad, it was challenging for me, and what happened is I realized that back when the boys locked me in a closet after awhile I knew and trusted you'd get me out. My emotional ambiguity changed and I became calm and meditated as if I was in a spiritual cocoon. After this experience, the door opened and Max had a smile on his face and asked how was my experience. We ate and discussed one of the books by John Lilly, about reprogramming the mind."

"Oh my, what an unusual connection you have made," responds mom.

"Now here's what is happening. I meet his Swiss wife and Arab son. They are not documented. There's more to the story. I am about to get involved helping these people to reunite as a family. ICE is in the area, flushing out undocumented immigrants. There's an issue with being an accomplice, is that you'd call it?"

Harry takes a big sigh, "Betsy, as much as I want to caution you, I know how much you appreciate the freedom to direct your course in life. The flow, isn't that what you like to call it? It seems that as you are doing this you are also getting a grasp on your high anxiety condition and for that I must commend your bravery. I don't condone what you are embarking on. When all is said and done we will be here to support you anyway we can."

"Wow dad, I didn't expect that from you? Thank you."

"I feel the same, how can we keep track of you?" adds her mother.

"Call Peter, he has a special app with GPS coordinates. Gosh, I really feel a sense of calm. Elena and Hassan are staying with me right now. We'll probably be leaving sometime tomorrow. Thank you both for listening and being here for me, in a positive way."

"It's not easy for either one of us to not judge and be concerned for your well being. Even though it's your journey now, we still have a parental

connection that runs deep and sometimes it is hard to let go. May you travel with angels of protection and feel our love."

Betsy is in tears, she sniffles, "thank you both for the support and blessing, that's what I feel, your blessings."

Betsy starts up her vehicle and just as she is ready to get back on the road, the black Yukon is roaring around the turn towing a four seater ATV up Dry Creek Road. There's four men in the Yukon and she knows who they are. They aren't hunting that's for sure. She wonders if they will be at Chico for breakfast tomorrow or if her efforts will be too late to help Max.

She picks up some groceries in Emigrant and heads to her house.

In the Yukon Sarge says, "we have passed that vehicle several times now, you guys get a look at the driver?"

"Maybe she lives in this development, Sarge. The face looked a bit familiar, at least with the glimpse I had. Not placing it right now."

Chapter 9

Betsy gets home and finds Elena preparing an unexpected dinner. Hassan is on the couch reading. There is soft jazz in the background. Her house feels cozy and lived in as if she were back home with her family, growing up. It comforts her.

"Well, hello Elena, whatever you are cooking smells so good. I picked up some groceries. Maybe I can put a salad together?"

Elena looks at her and smiles, "Hassan has already made a salad dish. We thought you might enjoy a meal ready to eat. It seems like you had a long day. Working?"

"Yes and no. I started the morning working, then I decided to pay a visit to Chad the rancher friend of Max."

"Nice, how did that go?"

“We connected, and he has a four person ATV that we can use to get to Max’s cabin. So we can haul some food and things up there for you. If you want to stay awhile. At least until ICE leaves town.”

Hasan comes over to the kitchen area of the open floor plan. “Hello Betsy, thank you for letting us stay here. We explored this canyon behind your house today, it is beautiful.”

“That’s great Hasan. How’d you learn to speak such clear English?”

“From my translation app on the phone and reading books. Elena started me early, with English lessons. So I was able to communicate with Max.”

“How have you been able to get into schools? As a foreign student? Are there regulations that might expose you as an illegal?”

“Ah, you mean I am not considered a national, since I haven’t come here through the immigration laws?”

“Yeah, just curious. You might be on ICE’s list of suspected illegals in the area.”

“I think that is why we are here, with you. We need to avoid them. The schooling system was easy enough to get into. Of course Elena and Max did all of the work.”

“Do you have any fears or anxiety about ICE being in the area?”

Hasan looks over at Elena who has placed down the cooking utensils and turned off the burners. She seems contemplative.

“There’s something else you need to know Betsy. About five years ago, we were living back east. Hasan was going to a small school in a rural town. Max went to pick him up and had a serious flashback. He lost it, thought he heard enemy fire, next thing you know he was frantically directing kids into the cloak room. The teacher began to scream. It was chaotic, Max grabbed Hassan and they fled out of the school. They hurried home, calmed down enough to tell me what happened. We figured we had to leave right away before the sheriff came knocking. That’s how we ended up here. We knew eventually they might find us.

So our life has been a beautiful journey, at times, and a constant state of anxiety."

"Gosh, that's awful, so sad. Max seems like such a nice gentle man."

"He is, deep down he is. And he is so close to finding his way back to normalcy. He knows those flashbacks are just a recurring pattern of a past event. He is so close to letting go of that day and time in his life. He loves Hassan like a biological son."

"I love him too. I forgave him long ago for my mother's death. We all talk about how everything might have been different, yet it has all happened for a reason beyond our control."

Elena wraps her arm around Hassan and lays her head on his shoulder. "Let's eat before it gets cold. We can talk some more after diner."

Everyone is hungry and so they start to dig in when Hassan pauses and looks up from his plate and says, "I want to give gratitude!"

Elena and Betsy slows down their chewing. Both nod their heads in agreement. Elena has a smile and Betsy is feeling sheepish. *She is thinking to herself...of course why didn't I think of that. Gratitude...* Hassan waits until all of the chewing has stopped and all eyes are on him. "I want to give my gratitude to Max and 'mum' for being willing to take me here, to this country. For Max saving my life, for 'mum' being willing to take me across borders and embracing me as her child. And Betsy, thank you for doing what you are doing. I want us to be family, so thank you Betsy for taking a risk."

"You are welcome Hassan. And thanks for this gratitude prayer. I'm not sure if you are religious or not, maybe spiritual...anyway thanks, and I want to thank all who contributed to this meal, including farmers and mother earth. I am grateful for my parents and my therapist who knows what I am doing and their willingness to not interfere with my life. And for Chad, who is willing to be a best friend for Max and your family. And I thank my God."

Elena smiles, she notices Hassan's eyes make contact with Betsy. As Betsy looks over towards him, she see's more than gratitude. She recognizes a connection. They continue to eat in silence.

As diner is winding down Betsy is starting to feel the weight of what is about to transpire. She hadn't felt it before, and now she realizes her position is aiding and abiding whom some might consider fugitives - a family on the run.

Hassan clears the table and volunteers to do the dishes. Once he is busy washing them, Betsy turns to Elena who has a quizzical expression that's turning into a smile.

"Elena, how did you ever make the decision to get involved with Max and Hasan. I mean what motivated you to help them, who decided to bring Hassan to this country?"

"When I started a career in the Red Cross I had been doing some inner work, you might say. Every so often I would get depressed or frustrated and think that what caused my emotions was out of my control. I started reading a lot of self help articles and books. I was never very spiritual, one day a friend gave me a book 'A Year of Forgiveness'. In one of the chapters I wrote down this statement." She reaches into her vest pocket, and reads, '*Despite all outer circumstances choose to extend into your world the beautiful gifts we have been given. Choose Health, Choose life, Choose love, and Calm courage.'* I would read it quite a bit and keep this saying close to my heart. So when I first administered first aid and treatment to Max and found out what happened, I searched for Hassan. Max had asked me too. I didn't think twice I felt his confusion and compassion for Hassan." She nods her head in his direction.

Betsy and Elena are surprised to hear a, "Thank you mum," he looks over at them, "it's a small room, I listen to what you two are talking about. No problem, I like the story, it is a huge part of my life now. Some day I tell it to my children. They will need to know."

Betsy flaps her lips as she exhales, "whew, you all have been through a lot. Listen I have to make a private call. I am going outside for a little bit, take a short walk along the river. Maybe you can come out and join me in a few minutes, yes?"

"Of course, that will be beautiful with the new moon," is the response from Hassan.

As Betsy stands to leave the table and grab her coat, Elena wraps a hand around her arm. Betsy looks at her as Elena silently lips a thank you.

When Betsy is out the door she slumps against the outside wall, mentally exhausted and dials Peter's hot line. He answers, "I have been expecting a call from you. You are home, that's good. What's up?"

"I am not only physically involved with this family, I am emotionally involved and I keep getting in deeper and deeper, it is getting overwhelming, Peter."

"Remember your safety comes first. You do not have to do what you are doing. So ask yourself, whom am I doing this for? Even if your answer is 'for the other' your emotions are connected with the other. There's an old saying 'I and my _____ (fill in the blank) are one."

"I am kind of following you Peter, I'm just not connecting all of the dots right now."

Let's do a Serene Mind, and direct your thoughts to the recent past (if you choose to go there), and the unknown future (with all of your projections). So we will start with the emotion, then past and future and when we come to the present ask yourself, whom am I doing this for."

"Okay I'm ready...three deep conscious breaths..."

Betsy recognizes two emotions, fear and confusion...she rapidly sees all of the people she has connected with concerning her current situation. And feelings are attached to each person, with Max there is trepidation, with Chad there is calm, with Elena there is love, with Hassan there is compassion and something else she can't place, (she senses an attraction), with the four hunters it is fear, with her mom and dad it is gratefulness and with Peter it is comfort. She moves to the future and she just wants to block out the anxiety, she can't as she gets to the present moment she has anxiety of the future. The Flame is ever present in between her eyebrows. What some call the third eye, she has heard that expression. It now moves to the middle of her brain, there are flashes of J. C. Lilly-reprograming the mind, a thought of Peter's last guided serene mind. She hears Chad's soft voice guiding a serene mind meditation. Betsy takes a deep breath just as Peter

instructs her to open her eyes. She is still seated on the deck where she had slumped against the wall, staring at the moon.

"Where did you go Betsy?"

"I'm here, I know that's not what you meant. I had lots of thoughts all of my most recent connections and I had an emotion for each one, each person, I... I, was stuck on anxiety for my present moment emotion."

"And now?"

"Well, when I was focused on the flame I experienced a flash of one of the books Max requested, then I heard your voice from our last guided serene mind, how you dissected each element, and Chads soft voice."

"Now, who are you doing this for, you don't need to answer right now. Take your time to digest what you just did. Maybe take a walk ."

Just then the door opens and it's Hassan, he looks down at Betsy, "excuse me..."

Betsy, looks at her phone and realizes that Peter already ended the call. "Hey," is her only response. Hassan continues out the door and offers a hand to help her up. She involuntarily smiles and has a feeling of kindness from another. Elena follows and they start their walk.

"Did you get a chance to complete your call Betsy?"

"Yes, I did."

They walk in silence for about ten minutes.

"Elena, I have a question for you, or are you enjoying the silence right now?"

"Actually the silence is refreshing right now. There's a lot of thoughts floating around, in my head. The stillness of the night is quieting my mind down, especially the sound of the river."

"Hum, okay..." *So okay I wonder if Elena ever asked herself whom she was doing this for? I definitely had a lot of unexpected emotions during the*

meditation. I wasn't feeling totally serene. Actually, now that I think of it I was, especially connected with all the people that weren't ICE agents in disguise.

She looks over at Elena and Hassan walking arm in arm.

"I'm going to head back. I have another phone call to make."

They look at her and nod. "We'll see you soon, it's nice for us to have some time alone right now," is Elena's response.

They part their ways and Betsy is back on the phone with Peter. "Help me figure this out Peter. Here's what I have so far. When I exhibit kindness to some stranger without any kind of connection, that's different than watching someone struggling with a package for instance at the grocery store and it falls as they open a door. Groceries everywhere, maybe a broken bottle and I feel for them. It could be me who dropped the groceries. So I immediately connect with the individual and help. I flag down a store attendant. And maybe I even get their name and there's some kind of synergy happening..."

"Betsy, you just hit a home run."

"What, what do you mean."

"In this scene you're describing, you feel a synergy, a real connection. So who are you picking up the groceries for? If you reverse roles, a kind soul is picking up the groceries for you."

"This is some kind of riddle, isn't it?"

Peter laughs, "fill in the blank, "I and my ... "

"Brother are one. Isn't that a biblical saying?"

"It doesn't matter, when true connection happens we are all one. I think you might be feeling that with Max, Elena, Hassan, and Chad. And others that you know or don't know as long as you connect. God Love is compassion. I keep that saying close to my heart."

"Gosh, Peter your are the best. How did you figure all of this out?"

“Always go within, deep inner work Betsy and the layers of fear that cause you anxiety, will eventually be reprogrammed until they are dissolved.”

“Always gaining insight, taking the time to contemplate and make changes along the way. Is that what you’re saying?”

“Yes, the subconscious mind can be the influencer of your thoughts, if you let it. Or you can train your conscious mind to have dominion over all thought that does not serve you.”

“Yeah, I see that now how Max and Chad are taking control of their PSTD. And how Elena connected heart to heart with Max and Chad when they needed someone in their sphere. The concept of oneness is an easier concept to grasp when we see it as an ongoing flow of connection.”

“Alright Betsy, listen one of these days, when this is all over maybe you can handle this hot line.”

“You’re kidding, right Peter?”

“It’d be more insightful than waiting tables.”

“I’ll let you know when I complete my task. You have me feeling like a superwoman!”

“You are Betsy.”

The next morning Betsy has the early shift agin. When she enters the living area of the main house she notices Elena up and making coffee.

“Good morning Elena, your up early.”

“Yes, I just want you to know that you do not have to do what you are doing. Just a map might be good enough...”

“Stop right there Elena. I am already involved in a way that is hard to describe. It’s probably similar to when you knew of Max and Hassan’s situation. You got involved and just flowed with it. What started out as treating another patient turned into a life changing dynamic. True?”

“Yes, you have a point. Listen, the difference is that I had no family to be concerned about. No brothers, no sisters, my parents died in a car crash when I was in my twenties. You on the other hand have family, you have a future ahead of you. Why take the chance of disrupting your life should ICE find you helping us?”

“Let’s just say I would love to be part of your clan. I am drawn to your situation for reasons that I don’t even know or understand. All I have to go on is my intuition. I have gained so much more calm courage in the last couple of weeks, than I have ever known in my life. I feel connected to you guys, like a best friend.”

Elena looks at Betsy, she nods as if she understands Betsy’s position. “Okay then, can I get you a cup of coffee?”

“No, Elena, what I need is a hug from you.”

They embrace, both with tears streaming down their checks. Two women feeling the other, as they cry and feel each others warmth.

Chapter 10

They are at their customary table, sipping coffee and waiting for the breakfast buffet. Betsy is peaking from the kitchen. She knows they are not hunting.

The other waitress comes in the kitchen, “Betsy, table four is one of your tables today. Looks like those guys need a refill.”

“Okay, thanks, I’ll get on it.”

Whew, wouldn’t you know, of course they don’t know that I know about Max. How would they, it’s not local news! Alright Betsy, calm yourself, get their coffee.

“Well, good morning gentlemen. I’m surprised to see you’re still here. Did you ever get your Elk yet?” She starts topping off coffee cups.

Sarge looks at her, “no luck, they seem to be hiding from us.”

“Did hunting season for over the counter tags end a couple of days ago?”

“Actually it did, we’re checking out some land, maybe up high where the Elk hang out. Do you have any recommendations?”

“Uh, no, have you checked any realtors?”

One of the other men finally recognizes her face. “Hey, we’ve passed you a few times along Dry Creek, you live in the development?”

Ugh, now what? Me and my big mouth, always striking up a conversation. I figured they must have seen me driving we passed each other several times. What should I say, oh gawd here comes the anxiety...come on Betsy calm courage, serene mind. “I have a relative that lives on Leo Drive. Sometimes I watch her children.”

“You okay? You look a little flushed.”

“Yeah, yeah, I am okay. I’ll go check on the breakfast buffet.” She abruptly turns and heads back to the kitchen.

They all raise their eyebrows looking at each other. One of the other men remarks, “I think we found our pigeon.”

Sarge, “John, you stay back in the rental car. Wait for her to get off of work and follow her. Set up surveillance, let me know if you notice anything suspicious. We’ll get the Jeep ready for our log road excursion. I think we found them.”

The buffet is served and they get their breakfast. Betsy is beside herself. The men have left and Betsy is near the end of her shift. Her high anxiety has kicked in. Jeff, the breakfast cook has been watching her all morning. He motions for her to come over, and check an order.

“Betsy, I have been watching you all morning and something is off. You have an expression of shock, we’ve had to correct several of your orders and and you are obviously not all here. What is going on?”

Betsy looks up an Jeff, “I’m sorry Jeff. I have a personal issue going on that involves people I love. I’m concerned for their safety, and mine. I don’t feel like sharing all of the details.”

“You only have another hour on shift. It’s a light day, why don’t you go take care of business. Maybe that will calm you down.”

“You sure? I can finish my shift, get my focus back.”

“No, it’s all good Betsy, I’ll cover for you if anyone says anything. Just take care of your self.”

“Thank you Jeff, thanks for your compassion.”

“I can feel your anxiety, I have a relative that’s borderline. When his symptoms start to flare up high anxiety is the first trait that is noticeable.”

“Well, I’m not borderline, I do see a therapist for my anxiety. I’m doing pretty good, it’s just that I’m trying to help out a family and I’m in over my head. I just need sometime to chill. Thanks again, Jeff, you are a sweetheart.”

Once out the door, Betsy looks around to see if there is a black Yukon in the parking lot. There’s three of them. Haha, a popular color! She goes home, as she gets to Hwy 89 S there’s a white Chevy sedan pulling out from the garbage dumpsters where people take their garbage in this part of the valley. She turns left and notices the sedan taking the same turn. No worries, she is thinking, unless it pulls into her driveway.

Oh man, I am getting schizophrenic! Shit, I better do a Serene Mind when I get home. Calm courage, where did I hear that, or think that recently? Stay calm, man how did those guys do it in war zones? I wonder how many years it took Peter to become such a knowledgeable therapist. Does all his knowledge come from his studies and workshops, and seminars he must do to keep up with his practice? Let’s see we gain knowledge, then either believe it to be absolutely true or we experiment with the knowledge,

maybe tweak it a little, then experience our experiments and walla, presto we have our wisdom, just for us to live with our truth? What works for us?

Betsy, turns right, into her driveway east of the river and north of the highway. She looks in her mirror and sees the white sedan continue on. She turns off the engine and sits staring at the front door.

Okay, ahhh, serene mind time. Gently close your eyes, Betsy and take those three precious conscious breaths... what is my emotion? Is it joy, calm, strength? I feel a genuine full smile, and it keeps growing - wow - it feels too good to think about past thoughts right now? The unknown future? Hummm, a future with Max, Elena, Hassan, and Chad feels so good. Okay, the small flame between the eyes, insight...there it goes into the middle of my brain...calm, stay calm Betsy. I'm ready...gently open my eyes.

The front door opens, Elena and Hassan have warm smiles on their faces. A beautiful greeting she can't wait to get the show on the road.

Meantime, the sedan pulls into the fishing access along the river south of the highway. The driver circles the end of the turnaround and faces Betsy's house. He pulls out his spotting scope and sees the three of them entering the house. He waits, eyes on the front door. About twenty minutes pass and they come back out and pile into Betsy's car. There's a backpack and some grocery bags. The car backs around and pulls down the drive. It takes a left and starts back towards Chico. He watches for a bit, then follows their route far behind. They turn right at the stop sign and go south down East River road finally turning on a gravel road towards Daily Lake. A dust plume kicks up behind Betsy's car. He has the dust plume as cover and follows a ways back. Once the plume of dust dissipates he slows down and pulls over. He watches as Betsy's car disappears behind a grove of aspens. Then he proceeds slowly, and eventually passes the driveway and continues a ways and pulls over up the road a ways. He makes a U-turn and has a small vantage point so that he can use his scope and sees the car parked in front of a double wide trailer. There's the truck that they first saw at the trail head the first days that they where in the area. About a half hour later he watches as Betsy, Elena and Hassan come out and load Betsy's car with some backpacks and other belongings. He watches as they pull out of the driveway and head back towards the highway. He phones Sarge.

"Sarge?"

“Yeah, what do you have for us?”

“Location, the family lives up Six Mile Road towards the lake. They packed some stuff into the girls car and are headed back towards town. They all have back packs. Also, that truck we saw parked at the trailhead when we first started looking, it’s his truck. It’s parked here were they live.”

“Okay, get your ass back to Chico, take the cutoff, I think it’s Collins Rd. We’ll be ready with the jeep. He is up there somewhere, I have mapped out a different route.”

Betsy continues towards Emigrant, past her house, then cross the bridge and heads south on the highway towards Fridley Rd and Chads ranch house. When they get there Chad is waiting for them.

“Hello, Betsy,” he tips his hat, “Elena, Hassan, it’s been awhile since we have seen each other. How ya’ll doing?”

Elena smiles, “Hi Chad, we are doing good, considering the circumstances.” She looks in the direction of Betsy, “she doesn’t know that we know you.” She smiles, “she wants to be part of our clan.”

Hassan goes over to the corral to visit with the horses.

“How’s the boy holding up?”

“Good, he is anxious to be with Max. We have talked about different scenarios if ICE shows up. He knows what might happen, he is keeping a brave demeanor despite his fears.”

Betsy has been loading up the four seater ATV. She comes back to the car. “Okay, it’s loaded. I think we might want to get started. I think we have been followed. I have felt that all day, the four guys who have been here for two weeks. I told you about them Chad.”

Hassan comes back to join them. He is looking rather serious.

“Ok, listen, let’s go in the house for a bit. I want to share something with all of you. And I have something I want you to give to Max.”

They quietly go into the house. Chad has them sit on the couch and chairs. He goes to his gun safe and opens it. He places something in his pocket. Then he sits.

“Betsy, you know about the book Four Sacred Secrets, I found another mediation in there. It’s called Soul Sync. There is six phases. I’ll lead us through it. You’ll count on your fingers eight times when I give the instruction. Your minds will probably be like popping corn. Just come back to breath when that happens. Always focus on slow calm breathing.”

They all nod and are ready.

We will be aware of taking a deep conscious breath. Eight times, let’s begin. They start counting touching the index finger and thumb. Inhaling, filling the abdomen, then the lungs. Followed by a longer, slow exhale.

Next Chad says, “now on the exhale hum like a bee, feel the vibration perhaps on the roof of your mouth.” They all are pretty close on the exhale and the hum has a harmony.

Now just observe the slight pause between your inhale and exhale. Don’t force the pause, just notice it.

After the eight count Chad has another instruction. “This time on the exhale silently say to yourself, ‘Ah Hum’ which means I am limitless conscious.

It’s quiet and peaceful, “Touch your index finger with your thumb, this is a mudra, keep your palms facing up on you lap. Visualize all form including the self dissolving into light energy.”

After a pause Chad says, “now while in this expanded state set an intention for yourself or another and see it as if it has manifested itself, as if it has already happened.” There’s a pause, then, “now with a smile on your face, gently open your eyes.”

They are all sitting, no words, no need to express anything.

“Okay, it’s time for your rendezvous with Max. I will be keeping watch. Tell Max that if he hears a shot, then that is a warning that they are coming.” Chad reaches in his pocket, “Elena, place this around Max’s neck if you hear a warning shot.” He hands her a familiar necklace, Max’s military ‘dog tag’. She embraces it, wrapping her hand around it and instinctively brings it to her heart.

They go outside, “Betsy, you know how to get on the trail from here? You have the instructions I gave you?”

“Yes, we’ll find it.”

“Good, I will see you all again. I am going to find some cows now. Stay safe, God Bless you all.” And with that Chad goes to the corral and saddles up. He takes a Sharps long rifle and places it over his lap as he gets up on his horse.

Betsy, Hassan, and Elena are done packing the four seater and are on their way.

Chapter 11

The Yukon with jeep in tow is racing up to the trail head. They get to the trail head and park the Yukon, and load up the jeep with their guns and ‘body armor’. Sarge has a look around before they hop into the jeep and spots a horseman on top of a distant ridge. Perhaps a hunter with a special tag. Wearing their ICE uniforms they drive the jeep further down the road to where the development road ends at a gate. The road continues onto ranch land. The same place that Betsy had found in one of her last trips. Sarge mapped out the route and figures that the jeep will be able to handle the old logging roads and possibly make it up the ravine. He received optics from the helicopter that flew overhead a while ago. They cut through the lock.

Everyone is in motion, except for Max. He is in front of the Buddha poster in the closet, behind the red door. Candles are lit and he is feeling very serene after a meditation. He had just finished a “mindful walk” and with each step he projected peace. Peace in his heart and at peace with his thoughts. He is reprograming his mind and continues to forgive the past. This is huge and he knows it is time for this major

transition if he wants his family back. He wants to get to a place in his being so that when a flashback occurs, he has the tools to redirect the energy. He is becoming a peaceful warrior instead of remaining as a wounded warrior.

Time and space passes, Betsy finds the ravine and slows the ATV. She starts the climb up the ravine. Chad is slowly riding up to a vantage point, atop the ridge line that is the northwest side of the deep ravine. He hears an engine in the distance, it's not Betsy's ATV. He instinctively knows that the ICE agents are taking the two track that intersects his ranch land. The same road that Betsy had previously taken. He puts his horse into a faster pace.

Max hears a motor, slowly he comes out of his meditation and is acute to whatever might be happening now. He stands and exits the closet closing the bottom half of the red door behind him. He walks outside, onto the small deck. He remembers that Betsy was going to bring Elena and Hassan to him. A reconnection, a time of union. He catches the first glimpse of the ATV as it comes around the Aspen grove lining the upper part of the ravine. Here they are. Max smiles, he feels joy and gratitude. He waves as they slow down and pull up to him. Betsy cuts the engine and it is quiet, except for the gentle breeze rustling the leaves of the trees.

Max lets out a whoop, "yahoo! It's great to see you!"

The ladies giggle, and Hassan is the first out to hug Max with a big smile on his face. "Oh yeah, dad so good to see you!"

Elena is next, it's a warm, passionate hug and a kiss as if nobody else is present. Betsy observes Hassan during this passionate moment and wonders to herself, how it must feel to be in a relationship with such deep love that nothing can separate the lovers, not even death!

When Max and Elena have completed their heartfelt physical connection she pulls out the 'dog tags'. "Here, Max, Chad said I needed to place these around your neck."

"Why? Is there something I need to know? Why the tags?"

“There are ICE agents and we think we have been followed. Chad will let out a warning shot if it’s necessary.”

“We are not running this time. We will make a stand.”

“No violence, please Max, we don’t need that.”

“No violence, I promise, just Divine Justice.”

She looks at him and has more love for him. She is beginning to witness a transformation not just in Max, also for their relationship. The meditation with Chad, her intention coming into fruition, it’s happening.

Betsy moves closer to Hassan, she is feeling so much love energy observing this exchange, that she has a need to hug someone. She wraps an arm around Hassan’s waist. He looks down at her, smiles and wraps his arm around Betsy’s shoulder.

Max’s eyebrows raise, he looks around and smiles again, “alright then, I’ll help you unpack. We’ll start dinner prep. I have some Elk steaks that have been waiting for this occasion.”

Sarge slows the jeep so it’s not so loud. There’s a fork in the road and Sarge takes it, his thoughts are wandering and he stopped looking for Betsy’s track. They go about a mile before he realizes they are off track. They turn around and eventually the are back on track. As they approach the ravine, Sarge is still in a mindless funk and as he passes the ravine, the agent sitting next to him speaks up, “Sarge you missed the ravine. There’s tracts back there going right up the ravine.”

“Yeah, good eyes.” He backs up, they slowly start up the ravine.

The steaks are on the grill, there is good cheer and other food is being prepped. Hassan and Betsy are working on a salad in the tiny kitchen and talking, getting to know each other. Elena is with Max wrapping veggies in foil for the fire. Max has the steaks on the cooking rack a feast is being manifested.

Chad points his long range, single shot Sharps upwards into the distant sky...BOOM!

Sarge is startled and stops the jeep, and looks up in the direction of the gunfire. He sees the lone horseman sitting in saddle, with a long barrel still pointing skyward.

Everybody stops, they know what it means. Betsy and Hassan come out of the cabin and look at Max for direction.

Max... "everybody, back into the cabin. We will go behind the red door. Betsy, you light the candles and a stick of incense. Hassan, arrange the pillows in the far corner so we all have a place to sit."

They hustle into the cabin and go into the closet. Max pulls the door shut and they huddle in the corner. He pulls out his tags and they wait in silence. He has his arm around Elena and Betsy feels Hassan's arm around her.

The jeep swings around the aspen grove and drives to Chad's ATV. Sarge gives an instruction, "everybody take a direction and spread out see if you can pick up tracks, anything, broken tree limbs, anything. I'll check the cabin."

Sarge pounds on the front door with force, a typical ICE tactic to promote fear. He enters, there's nobody here. He lowers his gun and looks at the food prep on the counter. He gets a whiff of the elk steaks grilling. With a sigh, he goes over to the red door and pushes the top half open. First thing he sees is the Buddha poster. He flashes his flashlight to the back of the room and sees them huddled. Max has his tags in one hand holding them at face level. Sarge's flash light illuminates the back corner of the room. The tags send off a glaring message.

"Anybody in there Sarge?"

Sarge just stares, "no, no, the coast is clear"

He hesitates before closing the door, "you'll be okay soldier."

He comes out of the cabin, "let's get out of here."

“Sarge, they couldn’t have gone far, the ATV is still here.”

“They had help, this is a set up. We’d be wondering in these hills forever. They are gone. Let’s go! Now!”

They take the loop and end up along Golmyer Creek and eventually to the private trail head.

“You guys take the Yukon back. I’m going to be a while. Sam, you drive the rental back to the airport. We’ll meet you there, then we’ll head onto Missoula, see who we find there.”

The agents leave with an empty trailer, a bit perplexed at Sarge’s demeanor, and why he is not in the Yukon with them. The two agents ask each other why he is abandoning this mission? One of them says, “seems like Sarge was not himself once we got to the ravine. You think the gunfire scared him?”

Sarge pulls out a cigarette and leans against the Jeep. He senses somebody coming down along Golmyer Creek. He looks up as he hears hooves on rock. It’s the gunman.

Chad gives a nod and tips his hat, “Howdy, you don’t look like your from these parts.”

Sarge chuckles, “no, thanks for the warning.”

Chad looks at him, “you found them, you did the right action, they are good people.”

“He had a Iraq boy, when he pulled his tag it brought back a memory. I was in Afghanistan, kids being used as cover, human shields. Lots of death, young lives lost for what?”

“I hear you, Nam, village massacre, I ended up adopting a Vietnamese girl so she could have a life away from war. After war us soldiers need to remain as brothers. You did the right thing back there. Max is one of us.”

Just then a Subaru pulls up and parks behind the Jeep. The driver gets out with a limp comes up to Chad and Sarge. They look at him. Sarge notices the prosthetic foot.

“Did I come late for the party?”

“Who you looking for?” Asks Chad.

“A young gal named Betsy, she tends to get lost on hikes. I have a tracker, she’s up there some where...”

“She’s safe, no need to worry,” says Chad.

“Listen, there’s another access to where my GPS has her marked...”

“That crosses my ranch land. I don’t want anybody else going up there.”

“You have seen her then? She’s a good friend.”

Sarge is still staring at the prosthetic foot. “What’s your name?”

“Peter.”

“You plan on hiking to find Betsy?”

“War injury, if you are wondering. Stepped on a mine in Croatia, trying to save a girl in a mine field.”

Sarge and Chad look at each other. Sarge remarks, “you came to the right party.”

THE END

Acknowledgements

...are appropriate to all those soldiers - any we personally know, any we have ever connected with and any whom we don’t know personally.

How many times do we actually think about our brothers and sisters who are sent off to never ending, mindless wars. Let alone think of them or get involved in their lives when they return.

And my heart goes out to all the mental illness related to anxiety. Sometimes we all have high anxiety about situations that are external circumstances. No matter how great or small our anxiety is, there are remedies that work.

It was back in the late seventies that I was introduce to the John C. Lilly experiences of reprogramming the mind. Neurolinguistics has come a long way since those days. And now I have had the opportunity to comprehend and put to use a simple means to reprogram my never ending thoughts.

I suggest that you check out that book from the story...The Four Sacred Secrets you'll find it on Amazon. You might think it's too simple, just thinking about two states either a beautiful state or a suffering state. It's not as easy as one might think. Especially if you are honest with yourself. Especially if you are serious in changing the patterns that we all get stuck in. Especially if you want to experience what God Love is in the way of compassion. Especially if you can forgive yourself so much that you can love yourself and be the creation that we are all meant to be.

Peace, brothers and sisters, peace - peace on earth, peace in our hearts, and peace in our lives.

Some notes:

Betsy returns meets up with Rancher

Betsy takes Elena and Hasan to cabin

Four ATF guys appear at Chico - Helicopter - ICE

The Closet scene - dog tags - ICE is called off "Nothing here"

Rancher meets up the ATF guys

Peter and Betsy have the find my phone app so Peter knows where Betsy is at all times

Touch on the relationship between Hasan (now 22) Elena the Swiss born red cross nurse that emotionally and physically supported Max and Hasan.

The PTSD of not only Max but also Hasan (his trauma, losing his mother and father to war) (Parent Traumatic Syndrome Disorder)

Elena's full compassion for both and her attraction for entering Max's life and raising Hasan through his adolescence and teen years.

Peter's therapy session with the Betsy, Max, Elena and Hasan

Epilogue - the sarge meets Peter at his car