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No one under 18 should read this!

GRAIL OF THE HIEROPHANT © Martha Rose Crow
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I

She dreamed that she was in another world somewhere outside of the universe. A strange and peaceful world free of pain and time. She wasn't afraid.

She was with a guide and she knew that he was a citizen of this world. He told her telepathically that it was a spirit world, but she already knew because there was no sun, just light. Light was everywhere. He continued to talk to her with his mind and she asked questions with hers.

Everything moved slowly, but gracefully and purposefully. The people she saw seemed happy. There were no cars, nor electrical gadgets, but people didn't need them. They instantly went where they wanted to go and if they wished for food or anything, it appeared for them.

The colors of this place were in every shade of green and soft yellows. She also saw many colors she had never seen before. The kind voice of the guide told her there were many more colors in this world than on earth. He told her that she was seeing them with her soul's eyes, not her physical ones.

She wanted to know the male's name, but he told her with his mind that his name wasn't important. He told her that she was visiting this world and that she would only remember him as a shadow.

All the buildings of this city were white. She and her spirit guide walked along different streets. Sometimes, they went in to visit persons living in many different types of homes.

All were waiting. Although it was unspoken, she knew that they were waiting for the end of the material universe. Because there was no sense of time, their waiting did not trouble them.

She thought to herself, people on earth are not crushed by gravity, but are crushed by time.

She also thought to herself, on earth, people feel that they are locked between a top and a bottom. Not between a ceiling and a floor. Not between a sky and ground. Not even so much locked between birth and death. But they are locked between a top and a bottom of time. Now I understand what time is.

Suddenly, she felt alone. As she looked around, she found that her guide was gone. She was a little disappointed because she had wanted to ask him why he had come to

greet her instead of someone else. Someone she was trying to remember . . .

The tug of her heart pulled her. As she wandered the streets of this spiritual city, she noticed there were no dust or insects. Everything had a place. Even the grass, trees and shrubs had an exact place.

Finally, her heart brought to a building. It was a big, white, one-floor square building. The door to this place was open. It was large and looked like it was made from heavy wood. She went through the doorway and the door remained open.

She noticed that the outside light that followed her into the inn was no brighter than the light inside the square building. The light remained the same level: whitish with the brightness of fluorescent light minus yellow, blue and orange hues.

As she went deeper inside the building, she found pleasant people. They seemed genuinely happy and contented in each other's company. It was a low-key, festive atmosphere. Without the perception of time, the sensation of pleasantness and contentment of this place seemed very alien to her. The only sounds she heard were inaudible conversation and some laughter. She wished she could hear some music.

She could not remember how long she had been inside this place. She also could not remember what she had talked about with some people there. For some unknown reason, she began to closely examine her surroundings. Her soul sensed something special in the building.

She noticed the consistency of the light throughout the big room and the muffled voices of fifty or so people. She wondered why the tables and chairs were so plain or why there were no decorations on the walls. Looking around some more, she noticed there was no dirt or trash. A wooden-looking bar stood at the back of the room.

A man stood behind the bar. He was short and stocky. His short, cropped hair was dark and his skin was white. The man had a white bar apron on and he stood to the right of the middle. The wall was white behind him. She wondered what kind of bar it was because she could see no liquor bottles, glasses, advertisements or a big mirror. No clock hung on the wall.

As she noticed the "bartender" (this is what he reminded her of), she looked to the right of him and saw a very thick, regular-sized door. It was a dark brown and closed. Overwhelmed by a power she didn't understand, an energy pulled her to the door.

As heavy as the door looked, it opened easily. On the other side of the door was a medium-sized room with about twelve people inside. They stood around the room, talking and visiting with each other. Except the Man. He stood alone in front of her path. He had been waiting for her.

The man was about six feet tall with a medium build and he had a handsome face. He had long, fair hair and deep piercing grey eyes. He was the age of all the people in the room (and in the city)--about thirty years old. The next thing she noticed about him

was his kindness. It showed in his eyes when he looked at her. Her heart told her that he loved her.

His eyes immediately met hers and she stood frozen. His eyes looked deeply into her soul. A feeling of great power and warmth rushed through her.

He walked over to her and put his arms around her. He felt good and familiar as he began to kiss her. She tried to remember why he seemed so familiar, but she could not recall why. She wanted to stay in this man's arms forever.

The longer he held and kissed her, the happier and more loved she felt. After awhile, these feelings increased in intensity. She began to feel the pangs of desire for him. Yearnings of desire started in her heart and moved through her.

He felt her desire for him and responded to it. She felt his response growing against her groin. It was very hard and hot.

She became dizzy and drunk from her desire for the man. The room began to spin and she spun with it. She closed her eyes and held on tight. She knew when she opened her eyes, he would be there.

He is real and not part of a rich story, she told herself.

When she finally opened her eyes, it took her a few moments to get her balance. She noticed it had become quiet in the room. This is when she saw that the other people in the room had left. The only persons left in the room were her and the man who was bestowing love upon her spirit. The door was shut and she knew it would remain shut so she and the man could have their privacy.

Her mind was drawn to look at an old-fashioned looking bed in the dark corner of the room. The frame looked like it was made from a material that looked like iron. It held a clean, bare mattress.

It was dark where the bed stood. She noticed that the bed was the only furniture in the room and she knew it was there for her and this man. Her heart rushed with excitement and passion because she realized that they were going to make love.

As she acknowledged this event, her clothes disappeared. She lay back on the bed and the man came toward her. He, too, was naked and his body was perfect.

He laid on top of her and she became overwhelmed with feelings of love, happiness and passion. Without a word, he looked lovingly into her eyes. After he kissed and touched her many times, he entered her. Her eyes never left his.

He was big and he completely filled her. Slowly and deliberately, he began to thrust inside her. The thrusts made her burn sexually and spiritually for him.

They made love slowly and sweetly for a long time. Although she resisted, she began

to have an orgasm that started outside her body and moved inward. Her last orgasm overwhelmed her and she felt it in every place in her being. She wanted to scream because of the intense pleasure, but she could not find her voice. Her voice was frozen from the pleasure.

She did not want him to leave her body. She wanted to be one with him longer.

He sensed her feelings and did not pull out. Instead, he continued to lay on top of her. Their hearts talked to each other in an ancient dialect of love while their souls drank the wine created from their ecstasy.

During all of the moments they had been together, not one word had crossed each other's lips. They were bound together by feelings and familiarity.

Suddenly, a jolt went through her and she felt dread. Something back on earth was beckoning her. Her surprised and pain-filled eyes looked into the loving eyes of her lover. His eyes revealed sadness and pity.

She felt an invisible tug pulling her away from her lover. She knew that she was going back and that thought made her grieve. She wanted to stay with the man and make more love with him. She tried to remember the ecstatic and euphoric feelings of unconditional love and deep intimacy she had just experienced. The pulling sensation became stronger.

Her lover spoke to her kindly with his mind, "Remember me. Remember that I love you."

Suddenly, before she could savor the loveliness of his words, she was sucked into a black vortex. The vortex had circular white lines inside it. It began to suck her into it. She reached for her lover, but he was gone. Everything turned black.

Farther and farther, she was drawn deeper into the vortex. She was confused because she still felt the man's love deep inside her heart although he was now very far away. She felt greater dread. Although she tried to scream from her pain, she could make no sound. She reached out to find something to hold on to, but there was nothing to grasp. Instead, she was hurled downward. She started to cry and then blacked out.

Suddenly, she found herself back in her own bed, in her own world and in her own reality. She tried to hold on to her dream, but it was beginning to fade. Desperate, she tried to hold on to the good feelings that were still flooding her heart, but they were beginning to fade as well.

Bewildered, she was in a state between sleep and consciousness. Suddenly, she felt a jolt. Her being became filled with terror. Although she was in that place consciousness and sleep, she found her voice to pray.

She desperately prayed, please God! Please God! Please don't let this be happening to me! Please don't let this be what I think it is . . .

Reality hit her. She realized that she was back in her bed that she shared with another man who was opposite of the man she that just dreamed about. He was a shape-changer and a paradox as he could be one person one minute and completely be another person the next minute. Especially if he did not get his way.

Denny was pressing his penis against her back, trying to wake her. She struggled to open her eyes to see what time it was. The red LED numbers on the alarm clock said 2:46 in the morning.

Although Denny had the little white house insulated to the max, it was always chilly. She felt a chill inside the heavy blanket covering her. It is supposed to get very cold tonight she thought to herself, around five degrees below zero. She realized that the chill she had felt probably came from him and not the house.

She was tired and worried. She and Denny had gone to bed late, around midnight. She had tried to get him interested in sex before they went to sleep, but he had wanted to sleep. It seemed to her that he always seemed to want to have sex when she was sleeping deeply and having pleasant dreams.

Denny expected her to wake up immediately to assume her role as a willing and energetic lover. As always, if she didn't immediately come out of her sleepiness, he would become angry and he would start a big argument.

His hand searched for her breast. He cupped it for a moment and stopped. She knew what he was thinking and feeling. He didn't like it that she was still sleepy.

Denny felt that since Brenny did not have a job and he was supporting her, that he could do what he wanted with her anytime he felt like it. It was his right. He didn't care that she was a hard sleeper, let alone care that she needed her sleep.

He knew that when he invaded her sleep like this, that she would feel terrible the next morning. He didn't care. His needs were more important.

It was déjà vu for her. She wondered how often this scene had played before. More dread filled her.

Brenny struggled to wake up. The stress of the situation began shocking her system. It jarred her and made her flesh and head ache from pain. Besides feeling the pain of extreme fatigue, she had the double whammy: she felt the body and psychic pain from stress.

She felt her blood pressure rise from adrenalin. Every time her blood pressure rose, her sugar level did, too. Brenny had been working hard at getting her sugar count down and now he was ruining all her hard work.

More consciousness and dread invaded her. She could feel his body tensing up in beginning spasms of anger. In the back of her mind, she desperately tried to cling on tight to the happy feelings she had experienced in her dream. She tried to remember

her orgasm, but her memories had already faded to black.

Brenny remembered the job interview she had in the morning. She began to secretly panic.

Finally! She thought a real interview for a real job. Not the best job in the world, but at least it is a job to work as a librarian.

Brenny thought for a few, stolen moments longer. She hoped that remembering about the interview would somehow keep her grounded and focused. She thought about the job some more.

It was something she had gone to graduate school for, something she could do and do well. A job she could make a living at. It wasn't a full-time job, but it was better than most jobs in the area. She had prayed hard for this interview and now he was interrupting her sleep . . .

Her body ached from being tired and she worried about the interview. Brenny worried that he would get angry and throw a tantrum. Then he would raise so much hell with her that it would make her feel and look terrible. That could and would bomb the interview.

Brenny desperately needed and wanted the job. Getting the job would give her some economic power and some much needed power in her relationship with her man.

Sadness and confusion filled her. Brenny wanted to let out a big sob. She swallowed it instead. She knew from experience that it would only piss him off more. Brenny knew she was in a no-win situation. Her mind flew in all directions inside trying to think of some idea to get her out of the situation as unscathed as possible.

As she frantically thought, she thought about pretending that she still was asleep. Maybe he will quit bothering me if he thinks I am asleep she thought as she tried to lay as still as possible and breathe in regular breaths. Desperate thoughts flew through her mind at great speed.

He persisted. Brenny could feel the heat coming off his loins. He pushed his penis into her spine. It was her wake-up call or suffer-the-consequences-of-not-waking up call.

Desperate feelings and thoughts crashed inside her. No, he is definitely not going to let me sleep she thought.

Brenny tried to gather her senses together. She struggled to turn around and grope hungrily at his groin. Although the room was dark, she quickly focused on the outlines of the dresser and closet to help her to get her bearings. Brenny knew if she didn't wake up fast that there would be consequences. There always were . . .

She rolled over and grabbed his penis, hot and hard. Brenny tried to kiss his face, but

he quickly turned it away. He had told her too often that she didn't deserve to kiss him or be kissed because she was responsible for his unhappiness. Romance had left the relationship for him a long time ago . . .

Unexpectedly, she felt fatigue and she needed to let out a big yawn. She was too weak to fight it. The power to yawn overwhelmed her and it burst out.

Denny's body stiffened. Her body reacted by stiffening, too. Brenny realized that she was tense because she was bracing for a crisis. More stress and dread filled her.

She began to wish and pray, Oh God . . . Please don't let him be angry.

His body tightened rigidly. This was a bad sign. It told her that he had gathered enough fuel for his anger to fight any need for sleep. Tears moistened her eyes as Brenny could smell and feel the sulphur of the hell fire to come.

II

"Fat, lazy fucking bitch," he hissed through his teeth. Denny's breath was hot with fury. He forcefully pushed her hands away from him with disgust and hate.

How could some one change so fast? she thought. A couple of hours earlier, they had watched TV together and had shared a happy and peaceful communion.

He quickly got out of bed. Brenny watched his silhouette walk to the light switch by the room's door. Denny flipped it on and the room flooded with yellow light. His face was red and twisted with anger. Brenny glanced out the frosted window next to her side of the bed and saw the snow falling heavily outside.

She struggled to sit up in case he might start throwing things at her. Two and a half years ago, late in the middle of a night like this, he had thrown a heavy belt buckle at her. It broke a bone in her hand.

Brenny remembered he had seen her hand and forearm in a cast for six weeks, during the hottest months of the summer. He had seen her suffer and this did not dissuade him not to do it again. She still got hit with objects. He usually chose things that were small and hard that he could throw like a baseball. Sometimes she wondered if she had an invisible bull's eye painted on her.

The time on the clock said 2:50 in the morning. The day hadn't officially begun for her and her problems were mounting up.

"Please Denny, don't get mad. I'll do whatever you want," Brenny tearfully pleaded. She couldn't hold the tears back anymore. A trickle began at the corner of each eye.

Denny saw the waterworks, but decided to capitalize on it later.

Instead, he told her with outrage and disgust, "I work my fucking ass off every day to

keep the bills paid for this place, plus I have to carry you as well. Anyone else would think a woman like you would appreciate it. But no, you can't do something as simple as waking up to be a companion and lover to your man."

The anger rose in Denny's voice and he arrogant and caustically asked her, "Have you looked in the mirror lately? You are too heavy to carry, whether it's financially or otherwise."

Denny's face became more flushed as he spoke. Every word became angrier, bitter and louder than the last. Brenny braced her body and mind as she knew the bitching was just beginning.

Denny walked over to her side of the bed. His hands were still empty, so she was safe for now. She sat rigidly. Her hands squeezed the crumbled bedding.

Denny's nude body stood five feet away from her. Brenny looked at his limp penis for a moment. She caught herself and searched out Denny's eyes.

He continued, "It's not like you are trying to help or anything. I've been supporting you now for several years and you know I am getting sick of it. Have you ever thought of ever trying to help yourself?" Denny's words were getting more rapid and rabid.

"So I work my fucking ass off all day and this is what I get. All I wanted was a little attention and I can't even get that when I need it because you're too busy sleeping."

"People need to sleep," Brenny replied, wishing afterwards that she hadn't said anything.

"You don't work," Denny replied, "So you don't deserve to sleep."

The tears in Brenny's eyes had shifted. Now they were pouring from the middle of Brenny's bottom eyelids, rolling down her cheeks and making small puddles on her chest.

Denny saw that she was crying and his face reflected his disapproval. Brenny knew he should have had compassion for her, but all she saw in his demeanor was contempt and anger.

"What are you crying for?" he asked with sarcasm and callousness. Brenny's mind swirled desperately to find answers that wouldn't anger him. There weren't any. She knew it was a no-win situation.

If she kept silent, she knew he would eventually provoke her to speak. Even if it was a scream from being hit by something. Brenny knew she couldn't speak if she wanted to because he was complaining so fast that she couldn't get a word in edgewise. Worse, he would take anything she said and twist it to change the meaning to use it against her.

She glanced out the window. The night sky was bright from so much falling snow.

Denny looked at her with disgust. He told her repugnantly, "Not only are you a fat, lazy, fucking bitch, but you can't even take it when I tell you the truth about yourself."

Brenny's tears fell faster and wetter. Denny glanced at the floor. He was looking for a shoe he could use to throw at her if he decided to hit her. All he saw were the soft bunny slippers she wore when she was home. Denny glanced at the bed table. Nothing was on it but a prescription bottle and a small paperback book. Soft stuff. Nothing hard enough to get her attention with.

Denny moved suddenly and she flinched. He knew that she was afraid of him. Not only that, she was trapped in the far corner of the bedroom. His side of the bed was closest to the door and she couldn't jump out the window because he was standing in front of it.

Brenny remembered the snow drift outside the window. She knew it must be as high as the window by now.

Anger began doing its dark plastic surgery on Denny's face. The outlines of his face began to turn purple. His face narrowed, making his eyes look smaller and sharper. Big dark bags appeared from nowhere to cast large shadows below each eye.

Brenny's mind shot to an instant thought of how anger can automatically change a person's face into the face of evil. She thought of the movie *The Exorcist* as she saw Denny's face transform in front of her. Brenny had seen his face become contorted many times before. Still, she found it amazing how someone's face could change so much and so fast from anger.

Denny saw her thinking and he remembered that he was the only person in the room allowed to think. Those were the rules. His rules.

He interrupted her thought and told her, "You're not listening to me, you fat, ugly hog. I said I'm getting sick of being the only one carrying any weight around here. I'm getting sick of your daydreams about getting a good job. They don't exist for fat, lazy bitches like you. How many times must I ask: When are you going to wake up and smell the coffee? No one gives a flying fuck that you are educated.

You think you are so good--better than the rest of us who have to get their hands dirty for a living. Smell the fucken coffee. You might be educated, but you are just like the rest of us, Miss High and Mighty. What did your education ever do for you but give you daydreams?

I have to work at that shit hole day in and day out. It's a nigger pile, don't you get it? Only niggers work there. People like me with color in their skin and white men that no one else wants. Still, I go to work day in and day out and this is what I get--a lazy woman who can't wake up to take care of her man."

Denny looked toward the ceiling. He raised his hands and arms up. He asked the ceiling, "Why God? Why God? Why must I have to bear all this suffering?" He suddenly turned his head toward her and she saw daggers in his eyes.

Denny continued the script Brenny had heard so often, "How many times must I repeat myself? A man gets sick of it. A man gets sick of working at a shit hole and then having to come home to a fat, lazy fucking bitch like you who can't even help herself. A fat lazy bitch who can't cook, clean or even wash laundry right.

Shit, you can't even fuck right.

When I think of it, you can't do anything right. The only things you can do are eat, shit and sleep. And take up space.

Why don't you die so someone who is willing to work can live? God, I can't believe you. After all these years, you would figure it out. Instead, you keep on playing with your computer and pretending to look for work. You are always pretending to write and look for work, but I never see any results . . . "

Anger and disgust filled Brenny and she tried to get some words in, "You know I've written a novel and I write articles, I try to show you my writing, but . . . "

Denny cut her off, his voice raised and more critical, "Yeah, yeah, so you wrote a novel. A novel no one read. Only your friends read it.

I see papers around here all the time with typing on them but do they ever produce money?" Denny knew some articles she written had produced some money. He also knew the money was sporadic and unpredictable.

Brenny tried to cut in, but Denny was the master of cutting people off. No one could argue with him and win. That was against the rules.

Denny continued his assault of words, "So all you do is play with your toy, your computer, and produce nothing. A man needs a lot more than you are willing to give. That's for sure."

Anger and disgust was building inside Brenny. Before her emotions overtook her, a red flag went up in Brenny's mind. She remembered the interview that was set for today. Brenny wanted the job so bad. Brenny knew if Denny kept her awake anymore, she would look and feel like hell at the interview. She began to desperately hope that she could try to reason with him and save the night.

Brenny tried to stop the flow of tears. She tried to straighten her body for a more natural look than one that looked like she was on-guard. Brenny searched for his eyes in a face of anger and hatred until she locked onto his big black pupils. She wanted to reason with him. She waited until he finally took a breath.

Brenny told him, "Denny, please, let's not fight. I've got that interview in the

morning--it is just a few hours away--and I really need to look good for it. Please, let's get some sleep and we'll talk about it tomorrow. If I get that . . . "

"Get what?" Denny haughtily asked her, "Get a job?" His tongue was poised and ready to strike more blows. Brenny tried to cut in, but Denny was too fast.

He told her, "That's all I've been hearing from you since the time I met you. That you were going to get a job. I have been with you many years and you still don't have one. Give me a break. You are never going to work until you have to. And until then, I or someone like me is going to have to take care of you.

And to tell you the truth, I don't want the job. I am sick of it. I have too much other things to worry about besides having to worry about taking care of you. All you are is a burden, a BIG burden, and one I don't need or want. I am so sick of you and your pathetic life. You make me sick. Do you hear me? Sick. Sick to my guts. I am so sick of you, I wish you would die. That way, I could have a chance at life without having to carry someone as worthless as you on my back."

His furious words licked salt into the wounds that he had opened in her soul. He saw the look of pain and hurt on her face. He smelled blood. Not the red blood that comes from flesh, but the invisible blood that flows from a wounded person--wounded in mind, heart and spirit. He had her now.

The power of Denny's words jolted her. Brenny knew these words so well and hated them so much. Yet, every time he spewed them forth, the pain from them cut as sharply as the first time he had hurled them at her.

For a brief moment, she thought of how badly his words had hurt and cut her. Brenny compared the pain of his words to the childhood nursery rhyme, "Sticks and stones may break your bones, but names will never hurt you . . . "

Brenny thought to herself, yeah right. If names and words will never hurt you, why do they hurt so bad?

He looked at her eyes and saw her mind reflect the little thought. Denny remembered that she wasn't supposed to have thoughts. She was supposed to be listening to him.

Denny thought to himself, She isn't going to escape. Not even for a brief moment. She caused this, like everything else. She's going to listen if I have to make her listen.

Denny drew a deep breath and his tongue curled for the next set of corrosive words. Somehow, Brenny got some words in. Although her voice was weak with fear and stress, she spoke to him in a kind voice, "Please Denny, it's very late and we both need our sleep. Let's turn the lights off and cuddle until we sleep. If you want to make love, we can. I'll do anything you want me to do. Please, please, let's just try to get along. It's too late and too cold outside . . . "

Denny didn't like the kindness in her voice. There was no room on his battlefield for

kindness. His nostrils flared and he gritted his teeth. He asked her in a deep, angry voice, "Are you trying to patronize me on top of everything else?"

Brenny was surprised at his anger over her kind words.

Before she could open her mouth to defend herself, Denny told her, "Fuck you Brenny! Fuck you and fuck this let's try to resolve this shit later talk. I want to resolve it right now. Now is as good a time as ever. I am sick of your shit, Brenny. You make me sick. Do hear me? You make me sick!"

Denny sucked in his breath. He sucked up liquid from the back of his throat. He clenched his teeth tightly as he pulled his head back. With all his might, he propelled a huge gob of spit into her face. It covered her eyebrows, dripped from her nose and mixed with the tears falling from her chin.

Although he had spit on her countless times, Brenny found herself once again shocked and repulsed. Outrage from betrayal began to fill her, followed by hurt.

"You are unkind," Brenny told him and her tears became larger and more painful.

Denny looked at her with more contempt and replied, "You can't be kind to dumb animals. They don't learn if you are kind to them."

Brenny's spirit fell into a black abyss of hopelessness. He was at the spitting stage and his anger was escalating. She had no where to go or run if she could leave. She knew that she had to hold on because the ride to hell was far from over.

Brenny had wished hundreds and hundreds of times that Denny would quit his abuse. How many times had she prayed to God about this? Like history, this one episode in her life kept repeating itself. Brenny knew there was nothing she could do to stop it.

Brenny thought for a moment about the women's shelter. Then she remembered she couldn't go there. She had been trying to get a job with them for years. Besides being a librarian, Brenny was a social worker. She knew that if she ever went to the women's shelter as an abused woman, her application to work there would be forever null and void. Brenny realized her application and resume were probably already null and void already because she had applied with them too many times and she had never gotten one interview.

Brenny wished she could rent a motel room (if she could get out of the room she was already in). This was impossible because she didn't have any money. A couple of magazines had recently bought stories she had written, but as always, they were slow in paying. She had the \$20 she had earned the previous day from selling some things, but that wasn't enough to pay for a room. Twenty dollars would not get her very far.

Brenny wished she could get in her car and drive somewhere. Twenty dollars didn't buy much gas and she had no where to go. Most of her relatives were dead. The ones that weren't dead didn't know her, didn't want to know her and could care less how her

life fared.

She glanced out the frozen window and thought of the people who lived elsewhere on the block: safe, warm and tucked away in sleep. Brenny wondered about what life was like for women who were not abused by their partners. Frustration filled her because she had no power. She had no economic or any other kind of power in the relationship.

Brenny realized that Denny always picked the worst times to pick arguments. Once started, she knew that he would push the envelop until everything inside her and outside her was broken or shattered.

As she sat on the bed with her face full of splattered spit, Brenny thought about the nursery rhyme Humpty Dumpty. She felt shattered like Humpty. Brenny wondered if "all the kings' horses and all the kings' men" could ever put her back together again.

Brenny wished for something to mop the spit off with. She looked around the area immediately around her, but found nothing she could use.

Brenny was desperate to get the sticky, slimy vomit of his soul off her face. She wished she had slept in a nightgown instead of sleeping nude. Brenny realized that if she had on a nightgown, she could wipe the filth on it.

Brenny instinctively scraped her face with the sides of her hands. The goo dripped off them and her eyes darted around for some place to wipe them. She eyed the blanket, but knew it wasn't a good place to wipe her hands. Denny's eyes revealed delight when she smeared her pillow with the spit. She scraped her face a couple more times.

Brenny wished for something made of cloth to wipe the mess off with. She was too afraid to move much in any direction to look for one. She didn't want to provoke him in any way, but she knew it was inevitable. Brenny was caught in a storm.

The storms of Denny's anger never purged or cleaned. Instead, they destroyed everything they could consume. After each firestorm, the broken remnants of the relationship were harder and harder to resurrect. It was like trying to repair a shattered vase; a vase with a complicated pattern smashed into thousands of pieces. The repairer (always Brenny) had to have nerves of steel and immense patience to try to glue all the little pieces back together. Each time the vase was repaired, it looked worse.

Every time Denny unleashed his anger like this, he tore the relationship apart so badly that it could never go back to what it was or could have been. Instead, the relationship went down a new, even more rocky path.

Denny interrupted Brenny's thoughts.

"What the fuck are you thinking about?" he asked her indignantly. His voice became taunting. He said with mockery, "Let me guess . . . Are you having more day dreams?"

More dreams that you're gonna get a job? More dreams you're gonna write another book and it's going to be a best seller? More dreams that you're gonna set the world on fire?

Wake up and smell the coffee! You are nothing and you will never be anything. The only thing you are, is a chain around my neck. A BIG chain around my neck!"

Brenny was feeling terrible and she wanted to sleep.

She began to plead with him, "Denny, please, please let's end this before it goes too far and the destruction is too great to fix. I love you Denny, but I can't live like this . . ."

Denny's mouth tightened and the skin of his nose pulled back toward his face, making the black, hairy holes of his nostrils double in size. He looked at her with disdain and said, "Can't live like this? Can't live like this?" Denny's breath was so hot with anger that it burned her face. Breath hot and stinky like a bear's. She looked at him to see if he were a bear and this was a bad dream. Brenny knew she wasn't dreaming, but she wished she were.

Denny began stressing each word, "Can't live like what? You have it made."

Brenny was getting more tired. Her body and mind began to hurt more. She began to wish for sleep again. Denny saw how tired she was, but he wasn't ready to make his kills. Not quite yet.

He wanted to wound and hurt her enough so that she would try to defend herself. He thought of an old wound to pick at. Denny looked at her and began to laugh sarcastically to himself. He tried to make his voice sound sincere when he told her, "Everyone who knows you knows you don't want to work."

The hurt and surprised look on Brenny's face showed Denny that he was finally starting to get to her. He knew she had tried her best to get a job and that she hated living off him. Denny knew it was a very sore spot and a very good one to mine if he really wanted to hurt her feelings. Now he felt confident that he could get her to argue back. Arguing stirred the fire that energized his anger, thus feeding the monster.

Denny was a master at manipulating her to react to key words. Brenny knew his game, but his words slashed too deep. The red emergency lights inside her began to flash wildly and her soul tried to break out so it could come forward to defend itself. If she didn't stop it right away, it would say something to Denny that would really piss him off.

She quietly struggled with her spirit, while trying to cope with her emotional and psychic pain. Denny waited patiently for her to succumb to the overwhelming feelings of hurt he had opened inside her with his sharp, scalpel tongue. He knew that once her new wounds soaked in brine of insult for a few moments, that she would react the way he wanted her to.

It was his game. His game of the authority of violence. Since he started it, he controlled it. Only he could stop it. Not her.

Brenny began to sob. This made her head ache more and she almost lost her balance. She caught her self before she tipped over and tried to straighten her broken body as best as she could.

"How can you say these awful things about me?" she asked him in a sobbing voice. "I'm not like you, always thinking the negative about everything. God, how can you think such thoughts? How can you go through a day thinking negative thoughts like that? How can you stand there so smug and not be ashamed of what you just accused me of? You know me better than that! You know I try very hard to help myself, but there are powerful, outside forces that I have no control over.

Why are you doing this to me when this is the lowest part of my life? I have never been so low! Do you want me to do something stupid? Are you trying to push me to suicide? You know how depressed and desperate I am. Why must you do this to me? Why must I be sitting here, in the middle of the night, tired and sick from no sleep, and have to take this from you?

Other women don't have to go through this. Why me? Haven't I always given you my best? After all these years, it seems that you still don't understand me or care about me. If you cared, you wouldn't be abusing me in the middle of the night."

Denny heard what he had been waiting for and cut her off.

He told her belligerently, "There you go again, talking about abuse!"

Brenny had stirred the fire the way he wanted her to. Now Denny had all the fuel he needed to energize his anger for a long time. Same old trap, same old pitfall. Brenny began to feel stupid because she had let him trick her into opening the same old door she had opened too often before. She had let him push her into a corner and she fought back the same old way she had fought back all those times before.

This is very sick, Brenny thought to herself. I am so sick of being sick. When will I realize it will never change?

Denny began to fire his words rapidly at her. He told her, "You always say I am abusing you--physically, mentally and emotionally. Abuse! I get sick of hearing that. I'm the one who is being abused! I'm the one who never gets a break, who has to break their back and be abused at work. Then I come home to be abused by you because you can't do a mutherfucking thing a woman is supposed to do!

You can't do a mutherfucking thing around this house and you can't do a mutherfucking thing about getting and working a job."

He hesitated for a moment to alter his voice.

In a low and acid voice, he told her, "And then if I want a little companionship, you say I am abusing you. No, Brenny. I'm the one who's abused. Not you."

Brenny became more outraged and replied, "Does anyone hit you or threaten to hit you? Do you have to sit here like I am now, afraid of someone because they are unpredictable and are capable of violence?"

Denny looked at her with indignation and surprise.

His voice changed to a mocking one when he asked her, "What violence are you talking about, Miss-to-good-to-get-her-hands-dirty? When have I ever done anything to hurt you that you that you didn't deserve? I don't recall any broken bones or visits to the hospital."

It was hopeless, but Brenny decided to reply anyway. She told him, "You broke my hand, remember?"

Denny didn't want to be reminded of that. New anger flashed like little bolts of lightning in his eyes. He told her the same thing he had told her before when she brought up the topic of the broken hand.

"It is not my fault," He replied. "You should have gotten out of the way. I can't help it you are so fat and slow that the belt buckle caught your hand and broke it. You should have gotten out of the way."

Again, Denny had opened old wounds. Brenny recoiled at the horror of his words. He was blaming her for an injury he had given her. Denny was telling her that it was her fault that he had to punish her.

Angrily, she told him, "You broke my hand with the belt buckle. You threw your belt at me because you were angry with me. You refused to take any blame for my broken hand. Instead, you blamed the belt buckle. You also blamed me for getting hurt because I did not get out of the way faster. Not only did I have to go into the emergency room and lie about how it was broken, my arm rotted in that cast during that hot summer. It itched so bad and I could never scratch where it itched. I was miserable.

And what about the bruises? What about the bruises you put on me when you throw things at me? What about how I feel when you put me down like this or when you spit on me like you just did? How do you think it makes me feel? You are trying to take away the last shred of human dignity and self-worth I have?"

Brenny just said another 'red button' word: Dignity. Denny didn't believe that Brenny deserved to have any dignity. The fuel for violence had been recharged again. Denny looked at her with disapproval and disgust.

He asked her contemptuously, "Does that mean that you are finally going to get a job? That you're finally not too good anymore to do a shit job like the rest of us?"

He took a step closer to her and asked her jeeringly, "And what last shred of human dignity and self-worth are you talking about? I didn't think you had any. Anyone who is as lazy and worthless as you has no dignity and worth."

He locked his red, bloodshot eyes on her red, glassy ones.

When he was sure that he had her attention, he asked her, "Are you listening, hog?"

"Please don't . . ." Brenny tearfully pleaded.

"What, don't call you hog? That's what you are. You are a fat, lazy bastard." Denny made some hog-like sounds. He looked at her with evil in his eyes and a wicked smile as he asked her sarcastically, "Like to hear your own language?"

He made more hog-like sounds. Finally, he asked her, "When people call you to dinner do they call you by your name or do they just yell soooooo-ey?"

Denny realized that he was getting too far off the point, so he self-corrected his posture and thoughts. He began to slow his mind down a little so that he could better focus on his attacks to come.

Brenny used this quiet moment to plead with him. As kind and sweet as she could make her voice, she begged him, "Please Denny, please no more, before it goes too . . ."

Brenny's words interrupted his concentration, but he swiftly cut her words off as he told her hatefully, "Fuck you bitch and your pitiful pleading. You're fat, you're lazy and you're worthless. You are an embarrassment. You are an embarrassment to me and you are an embarrassment to yourself. I told you, you're such a hog. I don't know why I am still with you. You're such a hog that I don't want to be seen in public with you. Who wants to be seen with a hog like you?"

Brenny began to cry again. She asked him with hurt in her voice, "How can you say that to me? I would never say anything like that to you. Why are you doing this to me? Don't you love me anymore?"

Denny laughed as if he had just heard a hilarious joke. It sounded wicked to Brenny. He told her in a scornful voice, "Who could love a hog like you? You make me sick. You make me sick. Sick. Sick. Sick. When are you finally going to get it? All you are is dead weight.

III

The argument was in its middle-phase. Denny was starting to slow a little. His posture and other nonverbal communication cues began to look less threatening.

Brenny's body relaxed a little. During this stage, he was less apt to hit her. Still, she had to stay on guard. Denny's personality could change at any time. Not only that, he

was a dirty fighter and was capable of doing or saying anything at anytime. Brenny's heart sank when she realized how afraid she was of him.

She hoped that since the argument had wound down a little bit that maybe Denny would regain his senses and quit. She hoped if she stopped the tears (she had so far) and sat there without saying something, that he would get tired and quit. Sometimes this strategy worked, but not very often. The little lull in the action was usually the 'tropical storm' phase before the full hurricane.

For a few slow seconds, there was silence between them. Not the peace Brenny wished for, but some quiet. Nevertheless, Brenny held her breath and hoped with all her being he would get tired and quit. She wished sleepiness would embrace Denny with a giant, gentle hug and lure him to sleep.

Brenny looked at Denny's face. It was momentarily frozen. She hoped that sleep was calling to him, beckoning him. He slowly turned his head and looked at her. The pupils in his eyes grew larger, telling her that he was going to stay pissed. The corner of the argument had turned and it had turned in the wrong direction. Brenny now knew that all she could do was hope for the best.

Denny began to collect and build his energy again.

He thought for a moment and then he said, "Now what were we talking about?"

His lips curled in a smirk and his nostrils flared as if they were trying to ferret out some strong and fetid smell somewhere in the room. He looked directly at her. Denny's nostrils expanded more. When he was sure that Brenny got his nonverbal message that she was the origin of some invisible, offensive smell, he began to speak again.

"A man gets real sick of a woman like you real fast," Denny told her as his pupils got even bigger. "You call yourself a woman, but you can't do anything. You can't work, you can't cook, you can't clean and you can't fuck. You can't wake up in the morning and you can't wake up to take care of your man.

Just what can you do, except laze around and live off me? You're a leech. Do you know that? All you do is suck off me. You are the most dysfunctional person I have ever met.

You just don't get it how dysfunctional you really are. I have never met anyone like you before and I don't want to meet anyone ever like you in the future. You are a textbook case for laziness and dysfunction.

Brenny, your whole life is one big failure. God, you're such a loser. I've met some losers in my life and you must be one of the biggest losers I have ever met. When have you ever succeeded at anything?"

Brenny spoke weakly but with some dignity, "I graduated college and I graduated

graduate school."

"Yeah right," Denny responded caustically.

He thought for a moment and then he asked her critically, "And what did it ever do for you? It didn't do shit for you except give you day dreams that you could be like other people and have the American Dream. The American Dream is not for poor, white trash females like you. Degrees or not, you're still white trash."

Brenny began to cry. Denny saw her tears and filled with contempt. Although she was five feet away, Brenny's tears lubricated Denny's temper and his tongue.

Denny put his hands on his hips. His blood-red eyes locked on to her pink, wet ones.

He told Brenny in an authoritative and execrated voice, "Trash is trash, Brenny. Education doesn't paint you a different color other than dirty white.

Education doesn't give your life a new warranty, either. People can clearly look through your education and see the trash that's underneath it.

Didn't anyone ever tell you that white trash doesn't wipe off? That it's on you permanently like a tattoo? That even God can't clean it off?"

The hate in Denny's voice grew as he continued his parlay.

He told her, "You're white trash with an education who thinks they can actually work for a better world while making a decent living. Dream on . . .

And that's all you do--is dream. Someone has to wake you up. Someone has to make you learn the truth."

Without warning, Denny rapped twice on the top of Brenny's head with his knuckles. It hurt and it shocked her. Her mind hurled in a million directions. Oh, no, Brenny thought to herself, he's starting to get physical.

"Did that get your attention?" Denny asked her with righteousness in his voice. "Maybe that will knock some sense in your thick skull." As he mused on that quick thought of violence, his face began to darken. Brenny knew that this was a bad sign.

Hurricane Denny was beginning to gain momentum and could quite possibly destroy what was left of the little town of Brenny. Brenny's life had become a port for Denny's hurricanes. Every time Hurricane Denny would destroy the town of Brenny, her feelings and emotions would be totally leveled. It would take weeks, even months to rebuild. If Humpty Dumpty could be rebuilt. And then Hurricane Denny would brew on the horizon and level her again.

Denny's voice became mordant as he quizzed her, "So are you listening? How many times must I have to tell you these things before you are finally, finally going to

believe them?"

Although Brenny was still reeling from the shock and hurt from the blows to her head, she found an edge to reply. She told Denny, "What you are telling me are destructive things. They don't help build me up but they tear me down and . . ."

Denny's voice cut Brenny's voice off.

He told her caustically, "Here you go again. Boo-doom. Denny is picking on poor Brenny. Like someone really gives a fuck.

Your problem is that you don't want to hear the truth about reality. You also don't want to hear the truth about yourself as well. You're a loser, Brenny. You can't work. You suck off me. You make me sick. Sick, do you hear me? Sick!"

Denny began to cough in the back of his throat for another spit wad. Missile Number Two hit her right in the lips. It stung her soul while her eyes stung with new tears.

She wiped the juicy wad of spit off her face with her forearm, smearing it as she wiped it. Then she wiped her arm on her pillow. She wished again for something else to wipe her face with.

Brenny eyed her T-shirt on the floor by Denny's left foot. She debated in her mind if she could trust him not to kick her if she reached for it. Since Denny rarely kicked her, Brenny figured it was probably safe to try to get it. Brenny reached over, grabbed the shirt, and hastily wiped her face. Brenny wished she could wipe off the lousy feeling from being spit on.

Denny saw that Brenny was starting to cry again and it started to make him madder. Brenny felt his disapproval. She willed with all her might for the tears to stop, but the dike inside her soul had broken. The hot, hurt tears rushed out of her eyes.

Brenny knew that she could not stop her tears and that they were going to seal her doom. They kept flowing and she kept wiping them off her face with the shirt.

"Why are you crying?" he asked her in an angry voice. "Don't you know that I hate that worst of all? You are going to force me to do something you will regret later."

Brenny looked at him. He looked blurry through her swollen, red, wet eyes. She could see well enough to see that his fists were clenched in anger. She glanced at the mirror of the dresser's hutch that stood by Denny's side of the bed. Brenny saw how puffy her face was from crying. Out of the blue, she remembered the job interview at eleven o'clock today.

Brenny began to worry about the interview. She knew if he kept arguing with her much longer that she would look terrible for the interview. She tried to organize her feelings and what was going on around her. For a split second, the scene from the Swedish movie "Wild Strawberries" came to her mind's eye. The scene of the

husband and wife wrecking their car because they were arguing. Brenny remembered another scene of the husband and wife arguing later in the old man's car.

Somehow, Brenny mustered some strength and courage for a few brief seconds, but then she looked into Denny's face and knew she could use this energy to sue for peace. She remembered the interview and she wanted, no needed, to win the interview. Her life literally depended on it.

Through her swollen, red eyes, Brenny sought out Denny's eyes. She found them deeply hidden in his angry face. In a softened, gentle tone, she said to him as sweetly as she could, "Please honey, let's quit arguing and go to bed."

Denny immediately felt insulted and his face showed it. He thought to himself, doesn't she realize that I am telling her the truth about everything, that she is short-changing me and ruining my life? Doesn't she care? All she cares about is keeping her skin alive while sucking off me. Then she is always trying to trick me into believing her dreams, dreams that things will get better.

He felt a hot burst of anger begin to rise within him. The geyser of anger rose high and he looked for something to grab. There was nothing on Brenny's side of the bed to grab. He hastily walked to his side of the bed and grabbed the glass ashtray. During this time, he watched the door to make sure she didn't try to run for freedom, even though she was naked, had no money, it was cold and snowy outside and she had no where to go.

No, he thought, she is responsible for making me this miserable and she's not going to get away with it.

Brenny's eyes followed him as he picked up the heavy ashtray. Brenny knew from experience that it hurt to be hit with it. It had already left two whopper-sized bruises on her in the past; a purple bruise the size of a grapefruit on her right arm, and a red and blue bruise the size of a baseball on her left leg.

Brenny always hoped for the same thing every time she found herself in that situation. She hoped if he hit her that he would at least hit her someplace where she could hide the bruise. She also hoped a bone wouldn't get broken or chipped because she didn't have medical insurance or any money to pay for a big doctor and hospital bill.

Brenny knew her face was safe. He wouldn't hit her there. At least she hoped . . .

She kept thinking about the interview. Brenny wondered how she could save herself. Save herself from the argument. Save herself from the night. Save herself from the ashtray. Save herself from him.

Brenny's nose was red from crying. Her brown eyes were puffy and swollen. The quick look in the mirror had shown her that she had to stop crying. All it was doing was aggravating him and making things--besides her face--worse.

Denny walked back to his former spot and stood like a guard over a prisoner. He towered above her with his weapon. She sat on the bed, feeling small and powerless. Her mind darted to a million different thoughts trying to figure out to end this hostile conflict.

Brenny knew it was hopeless. She couldn't gain control of the situation because she hadn't created it. Denny created it and he was in control. Still, her mind flitted from one idea to another. She had to try something to defuse the situation, to try to defuse him.

Denny had stood silent since he had picked up the ashtray. Brenny took advantage of the silence to soften her voice. She tried to take the pain out of it. She tried to figure out a way to shift the bad energy in the room in another direction. For a moment, she was being hopeful.

Trying to talk without tears, she asked Denny in a wobbly voice, "Are you ready to go to bed now?" After she said it, she immediately thought how stupid that was. He was still pissed off and nothing was going to change that. Not even if God Himself came down from Heaven and tried talking with Denny.

Denny looked at her pretty, tear-stained face and for a second, he felt pity for her. Pity was the last thing he wanted to feel for her, but he felt pity nevertheless. When he realized he was feeling a little compassion for her, it riled him.

Brenny never saw the fleeting moment of pity Denny had felt for her. Instead, she saw a crimson face full of hate and spite.

The ashtray pummeled through the air at a high speed. It hit Brenny with such a jolt, her body jerked and her shoulder buckled. Brenny's whole body became engulfed in pain. Pain from the ashtray, pain from being so startled, pain from being so betrayed, pain from being so powerless. Brenny grabbed at her shoulder and yelped in pain.

"Shut the fuck up Brenny!" Denny hissed at her, "Or I can do it again and again until you finally decide to shut the fuck up." She didn't like the threatening sound in his voice. She knew she needed to be quiet and still or he would become meaner. Her tears and weeping would not stop. She was losing all her battles.

He slapped her across the head. Brenny saw a flash of light that looked like lightning. Her head hurt and smarted. Before he could raise his hand again, she jumped up and ran across the bed and out of the door.

Surprised, Denny froze momentarily. He did not believe she'd actually try to escape from him. Then he realized that she was out of his immediate control.

Brenny ran to the bathroom and locked the door behind her. Trapped. No way out. The only exit was the door and a monster lie waiting for her right behind it.

It was dark and cold in the bathroom. She left it dark because she didn't want to see.

Brenny didn't want to see the blue walls and she didn't want to see her reflection in the mirror above the sink.

She heard Denny on the other side. Brenny hoped that she was temporarily safe. If Denny got mad enough, he could and would kick the door open. He had before.

Brenny wondered if Denny was a shape-changer. A few hours before, he had been a fun and loving man. Now he had totally changed into someone she didn't know. She asked herself how often had this happened? How many hundreds of times? Every time he mutated himself into a monster, it was always the same.

Brenny became afraid, so she rested more weight of her body against the door. Tears streamed down her face. Tears that were hot when they left her eyes only to become cold and clammy by the time they reached the bottom of her cheeks. She felt afraid, betrayed and confused. She was tired, cold and hurt.

Denny began to pound on the door, "Open this fucking door!" he screamed, "Open this fucking door or . . . "

Brenny felt more cold. She remembered that she wouldn't be cold or hurting if it wasn't for Denny. Outrage began to fill her. Although she knew there was only a door between them, she decided to say something.

"Or what?" Brenny asked. She had found her voice and some courage.

"Just leave me alone, okay? Please, pleeease."

Denny's voice was stern and laced with anger.

He told her, "Just open the fucken door."

She replied, "No way, I'm not opening the door. I'm afraid of you. I have this interview in a few hours and I'm worried about it. All these things are heavy on my mind and now you act up. Why? I try to do everything you want me to do. Why are you doing this to me? What have I done now? What have I not done now? For God's sake, Denny, please--let's stop this--I am so tired and I need to get some rest!"

Brenny began to plead in a clear voice instead of one choked with tears.

She asked him, "Can't we find some middle place here so we can at least have peace for what's left of the night? I don't know why you are so mad at me right now. God I wish you weren't. Can we try to put all this behind us and go back to bed?"

He never responded. Brenny waited and listened for awhile longer. She wondered if Denny had started to get tired because she could hear him on the other side of the door, but he wasn't moving much. She knew better. He never got tired of being angry.

She thought, Nah. He must be thinking . . . or ready to pounce. That must be what he

is doing . . .

Brenny held her breath as she continued to listen behind the door. She could faintly hear him breathing but it didn't sound like his body was moving. She began to count seconds: one, two, three . . .

Brenny counted seven minutes and thirty-seven seconds when she heard him turn around and walk away with deliberateness in his steps. Brenny wondered what Denny was thinking and where he was.

She tiptoed in the bathroom looking for a towel to put around her naked body. The towel closet was outside the bathroom in the hall. She thought about one of her favorite towels. It was soft, thick, warm, long and blue. It was sitting in that closet. She wished she had it to put against her freezing flesh.

Her hands fumbled in the darkness around the walls checking the towel racks. Bingo. Brenny's hand stumbled across a towel. Not the biggest, but not the smallest, and it was dry. At least it would give her some cover from the coldness.

Partially clothed, Brenny put her full weight against the door again. Her body ached for sleep and it ached from all the night's activities. Her shoulder hurt while her mind and spirit hurt as well.

Miserable from escalating aches and pains, Brenny sat on the toilet seat and tilted her head back. She wished for sleep for sleep over and over.

Brenny wished for the darkness to come, to envelop her so she could fall into the inky blackness of sleep.

Brenny thought to herself, to not be able to sleep in peace must be one of the most hateful things on this earth . . .

She jumped in the tub as she wished for sleep. The coldness of the porcelain shocked her skin and aggravated her pain. Brenny quickly got out of the tub. Her eyes darted furtively around the bathroom.

Brenny knew that she could not sleep in the bathroom. It was too cold, too uncomfortable. If she tried sleeping on the stool, there was nothing to hold her body once it relaxed.

Thoughts and emotions orbited in her mind. She felt the little breezes of cold air go by her, but could not figure out exactly where they came from. Her feet curled against the bathroom rug. Although the rug was thick, the coldness of the floor seeped through the fibers making her feet feel cold against the nap of the fabric.

Brenny strained to listen for sounds in the house. She needed to know if Denny was moving about, and if so, where? Any sound might give her a clue about what he was doing and what her options (if any) were. She was still very upset and her heart was

beating fast.

Brenny tried to gather her wits about her. She knew that she needed to redirect her energies into one positive direction instead of all the different directions they had been flying.

Brenny thought about a beautiful beach with turquoise water. Bright, white sand and clear light royal blue skies filled the rest of the mental picture. She concentrated on the warm breeze rolling off the waters, filling her hair, her face and her body with warm, happy, peaceful, fuzzy feelings.

She thought of the man she dreamed of. Brenny tried to imagine what it would feel like to be in love again . . .

Then reality set in. A big chill in the bathroom went through her and she wished to get out of there. The hopelessness of her situation dawned upon her. He was out there. As weak as her fortress was, it was something. Something was better than nothing.

Brenny knew Denny well enough to know that he was still awake. He never slept when he was angry. He brooded. He thought ugly, paranoid, venomous and nasty thoughts. Thoughts so black and destructive that they invaded his being, until he believed they were true. Terrible thoughts she would never think. Brenny wondered how someone could think such thoughts and still appear to look normal to the rest of the world.

She became more uncomfortable. She became frustrated when she realized that he was comfortable out there while he waited in the dark for her. It seemed unfair to Brenny that she had to suffer while he didn't have to.

More chills filled the bathroom and the frigid air became unbearable. Brenny knew that she had to get out of there. She began to worry about freezing to death. Her body was so tired and it begged her for sleep. She also needed her sleep so she could present the best person possible at the interview.

As always, she looked around the dark bathroom looking for something she could use as a weapon. Something she could defend herself with in case she opened the door and he was there waiting to put his foot in it.

A sob caught in her throat.

Why, why does he have to do this now when this big day looms ahead? she thought. Brenny caught herself. She knew it was stupid to worry about justice when she needed her energy to find a way to sleep. Brenny decided if Denny was still angry when she crossed the threshold, that she would try again to diffuse the situation. She wished she had help and hoped that maybe God might help her.

Brenny prayed, Please God. Please help me. I am in trouble again! Although I keep trying to stop this problem, I can't. I have no job, no money and no place to go except

farther down into despair.

You know I need that job. It would save my life! Please God. Help me to get some sleep. Help me to look my best in a few hours. Please, please don't let this be happening to me again.

Please help this situation so I can get some sleep. I am going to open this door in a couple of seconds. Please God. Please let me find peace on the other side of it.

Please don't let him hurt me if he is still angry. Please don't let my eyes be red and swollen tomorrow. Please heal the redness of my eye. Oh please God, please help me to get that job. You know I need it so bad. My whole life is depending on it. Please help the course of my life change for the better.

Please don't let me live like this anymore. It is unbearable. I think of suicide all the time. You know my thoughts and you know that I don't want to kill myself, God. I just want to live like a human being should.

A chill went through Brenny and she began to shiver. She continued her prayer, I am so cold, God. The chill in the bathroom is unbearable. I wish I could take a bath to warm up, but the guy didn't come to fix the water heater.

I feel terrible, God. I feel weak, tired and just plain shitty inside. Why did you let me get diabetes? I can feel my blood sugar rising from all this stress.

I need a change, God. A positive change. Please help me to get it. And please don't let him hurt me anymore. I'll do anything or go anywhere You want if you save me tonight. Please help me.

Brenny tiptoed back to the bathroom door. It felt cold, hard and smooth. She tried to listen for noises again, but she couldn't hear a thing but the wind howling wildly outside. She knew she had to muster the courage and strength to open the door. Her body called her to sleep and the call overwhelmed her. Her head hurt and her tears made her face feel cold and greasy as well.

She took a deep breath and quietly unlocked the door. Brenny gripped the metal door knob and turned it. As she slowly and carefully opened the door, darkness from the rest of the house spilled into the doorway.

Round Three.

IV

Brenny cautiously tiptoed out of the bathroom, trying to make as little noise as possible. She glanced to her left. The door to the bedroom was open and she could see the outline of it in the dark. She wished for her bed. Brenny wished for its comfort, warmth and promise of sleep.

She wanted to go to it, but Brenny knew the Piper was waiting. Glancing to her right, she looked into the living room. The smoke of his cigarette hit her nose before she saw the orange coal of it in the dark.

For a moment, she wished for one of her own. Nervous and upset, she craved nicotine and warm smoke to calm her. Brenny saw Denny's silhouette on the couch and watched him as he took slow, deliberate draws off the tobacco.

It was obvious that he was still pissed off because all he was wearing were shorts and a lightweight T-shirt. Anyone else would have been wearing something warmer in the chilly house. His anger was still warming his flesh.

Denny's still shadow on the couch looked almost peaceful. He drew the cigarette to his lips slowly and purposefully. Looks are deceiving and so is this scene, Brenny told herself. She knew his mind was working fast and thinking all kinds of things. He was a predator waiting to pounce . . .

Denny saw Brenny looking at him. He turned his head up as if he were looking at her eye-to-eye. With a hiss in his breath and contempt in his words, he told her, "Get out. Get your shit and get the fuck out."

Brenny felt her stomach drop and her heart pound faster. She forgot to breathe. Her racing pulse pounded loudly inside her ears, making her head feel as if it were about to split in half. Paralyzed from fear and confusion, she stood frozen in the hall. Her body forced her lungs to work, making her to take a breath. With the fresh oxygen, reality hit her.

Big hot tears began to stream from each eye. She tried to make them stop, but they only increased in volume and velocity. The bitter, hot tears raced down her face to spill on her chest. The tears turned cold by the time they fell on her chest and the coldness of the tears plunged her deeper in despair.

Brenny thought to herself, If only Denny knew how I felt, he wouldn't be doing this to me . . . Oh God, what am I going to do? I don't have any money. I don't have a place to go. I have that big interview this morning. Why God, why is this happening to me again? Why can't you help me? What did I ever do to deserve this? I worked so hard . . .

Denny's voice interrupted her prayer.

"I told you," Denny said to Brenny in a warning voice, "Get the fuck out."

Brenny saw that he was almost finished smoking his cigarette. The orange glow was darker and less smoke came from it.

When the cigarette was out, Brenny knew the crisis was going to escalate. She tried to think, but could not gather her thoughts. Her tears kept falling hot and bitter, before turning cold and waxy. Her heart was pounding faster. Feelings and emotions flooded

her, but somehow she found the strength to keep them from overpowering her.

Brenny never saw the orange coal of the cigarette charge through the air toward her. It hit her on her left cheek, two inches from her eye. This missile was a heat-seeker because it had found the only place on her face that was dry enough to burn.

As she screamed, she jumped and turned her face toward the wall. Her reaction made the orange coal crumble. Little amber sparks cascaded down her body, burning all the skin they touched. The skin on Brenny's cheek began to scream that it had been burned. The red lights flashed frantically inside her while her spirit screamed in horror and outrage.

She wondered where Denny had found the energy and skill to burn her so well on the first try. New fear and new pain filled.

Denny sat in the dark without remorse. He felt no repentance for the new wounds he had caused her let alone the old wounds that still festered. The old wounds couldn't heal because he picked on them to keep them raw and infected.

"Now maybe you will believe me when I tell you to get the fuck out," Denny told her callously.

Brenny looked behind the silhouette of his head, through the sheer curtains. She saw the snow falling, falling, falling through the ice-encrusted windows.

She stumbled through the snow to her little VW Bug. Brenny had her briefcase, laptop and a little backpack with her interview clothes crumbled inside. The snow was thick. Brenny didn't want to even try to imagine how much had fallen.

It was very cold. Her flesh screamed for her to get out of the cold and snow fast. Brenny halfheartedly looked toward to the house to see if Denny was looking out.

Brenny began to hope, maybe he will change his mind . . . No, he won't. He is too pissed off. Oh God, why does my life have to keep going on like this? It's not that I haven't worked hard or tried. Why did the relationship have to go this way? Why did it have to happen now when I have no money and no place to go?

She tried to open the driver's side door and it was frozen shut. Her fingers almost froze to the handle, jolting her back to reality. It wasn't a bad dream as she had hoped. Yes, she had a burn on her cheek and smaller ones in other places on her body. Yes, her shoulder was hurt. Yes, it was dark, cold and hopeless. On top of everything else, she couldn't get into her car.

Brenny used her arm to sweep away the foot-high drift on the roof of her car. When it was clear enough, she put her brief case, laptop and backpack on the roof. Starting to freeze, she trudged through the snow to get on the other side of the car. As she

struggled to get through the snow, she felt the electrical cord on her ankle too late. She fell, spilling into the snow.

The cold ice particles immediately found the wound on her face, stinging it. Tears began to flood her eyes. She laid in the freezing snow and wept while the unforgiving wind whipped around her looking for places on her body to cut and hack against.

Brenny was tired and she hurt. She wanted to sleep so badly.

Maybe, just maybe, she thought, I could sleep in the snow for a while.

Brenny knew that if she slept in the snow that she would die, but she didn't care. She had been betrayed too much, too many times. This alone made her not want to live.

Her mind started getting darker and for a few brief seconds, she thought she would finally sleep. Brenny remembered her beautiful dream. She hoped that when her frozen body was found, someone would wonder why she had been forced to sleep in the snow. Maybe the police would ask Denny and he could tell them his grandiose philosophy about sleep and how people who didn't work, didn't deserve to sleep. Then they would understand why she slept in the snow.

She realized that no one would care or ask question. Maybe some of her friends would miss her, but they had lives and problems of their own. Many of these friends were struggling with the same issues of employment and survival like she was. Brenny was so tired. Adam and Karen's name came to her mind before herself completely to the snow and cold.

As she fell completely into the abyss of darkness, she prayed. Well I asked you lots and lots of times to help me and if seems you don't care and you don't want to help. I can't do this anymore. Life is unlivable if you have no possibilities.

I have dried spit on me. He hit me and he burned me. I have one possibility, but I have no time or place to prepare for it. I need to pass that interview.

Since you won't hear or answer my prayers, I think that I will come over and talk to you personally. Besides, I have to sleep . . .

Brenny fell asleep in her bed of cold and ice. Although Brenny's mind welcomed the seduction of the dark cold, her body did not like it. She was asleep for two minutes when her body jerked her awake. She tried to use all her energy to will herself back to sleep, but she became colder instead. Her body began to shiver and her teeth began to chatter. Brenny remembered that some winos had frozen to death the week before in Minneapolis. She wondered how others could do it and not her.

The cold was beginning to make her head pound harder. The pains in her body became unbearable. Brenny weakly got up and fought to keep her balance. She stumbled through the snow to get to the passenger's side of her car. This time, she pulled the arm from her coat down far enough to cover her hand before she tried to

open the door. It would not open. Desperate thoughts leapt through her mind as she tried to open the door one more time. To her surprise, it opened.

Her hand reached across the roof of the car and grabbed the straps of her bags. She dragged them across the short roof of the VW and threw them in the back seat. The cold was beginning to make her whole body numb. Her mind ordered her to get the car started fast. That was the only way she was going to get warm.

Brenny got into the passenger's seat and quickly closed the door. She saw her breath hit the windshield and cloud it. It was colder than she had thought.

She gingerly lifted her ass over the gear shifter. As she did this, accidentally hit her head on the rear-view mirror. The pain made her jump, knocking her tail bone down on the shifter that she had been trying to avoid. The injury to her tail bone sent out a riveting pain that made her see lightning flashes in front of her eyes. Brenny wondered how many times she had seen lightning this night.

She threw her body into the driver's seat and sat still for a minute hoping her new wound would stop pulsing. Everything hurt on her and in her. Brenny wanted to cry, but she was too cold to waste any energy on tears.

Brenny dug deep into her right pocket and felt for her keys. When she pulled them out, she noticed the house key. It was very noticeable because it had a little glow in-the-dark cover. Looking at the key reminded her that she no longer had a home.

Brenny knew Denny would put a new lock on the door in the morning. This wasn't the first time he had thrown her out. It was the second. At least it was summer when he threw her out the first time.

She wished for sleep. Brenny wished she had money for a motel. If she rented a room, she could get a couple of hours sleep. She could also take a hot tub bath, look at the burn on her face and try to figure out how she could hide it.

The Interview! The thought of it made Brenny sit straight. If anything was going to save her, it was that job. Sure, the money wasn't the greatest, but she would be doing professional work that she had trained for.

Hurriedly, she found the ignition key next to the house key and inserted it. Brenny worried that the car wouldn't start, but it was still connected its winter umbilical cord. It cranked once. Twice. Three times. On the fourth crank, it sputtered and slowly began to come to life. She jumped out of the car and unplugged from its lifeline.

Brenny knew that she should not let the car warm up for long. Denny was unpredictable and his last words to her was that he was going to kill her if she didn't leave. Although she hadn't seen his shape or shadow in the windows, she knew that he was probably still awake.

My God, he flipped a cigarette on me, she said to herself in disgust. Brenny knew in

her heart that she needed to get away from the house as quickly as possible.

She pulled the parking brake off. Its grinding ziiuup sound pierced the quietness of the night and made her ears ring for a moment.

As Brenny waited for the car to warm a little, she checked to see how wet she was. She knew she should be wet from all the tears she cried in the snow. Instead, Brenny was mostly dry. Her clothes and hair were barely wet.

She flipped the switch under the dashboard for the gas heater. Although gas heaters were illegal, Brenny was glad she had it. Brenny wondered how much gas was in the car.

Her eyes immediately glanced at the gauges. The car had less than one-third of a tank of gas.

She tried to think if she had any money somewhere, but realized that she only had twenty dollars. Worries about gas and money began to fill her until she realized that she was in imminent danger.

The '65 Bug chugged through the snow as she backed out. She looked at the house and all the lights were off. She swallowed hard and little tears leaked from the corners of her eyes. Brenny hated it that she had to leave her home. Especially in the darkest, loneliest part of a cold and snowy night.

The burn on her cheek began to throb, making Brenny turn her thoughts to the present. Then the pain in her tail bone flared and she stopped the car for a moment until it went away.

A shadow moved in the house and Brenny became afraid. She began to back her little car out of the driveway again. She had no idea where she was going to drive to. Just to somewhere in town where she could sleep for a few hours until sunrise. Someplace where the cops wouldn't poke their flashlight through the window and make her show ID.

Brenny knew she didn't want to tell the police her story. She wondered what she would tell them if they did find her sleeping somewhere in her car. Especially when she looked and felt as bad as she did.

The VW backed into the snow-clogged street. Brenny worried if the Bug would make it down the street, let alone to some place where she could park and sleep. Thank goodness for the gas heater, Brenny thought. The gas heater would keep her warm when her engine was off and not drain her battery. Suddenly, Brenny let out a sob. It came out of her spirit.

Brenny reached over and turned the radio knob on. The tape of the band Fat was in the cassette player.

Their song Numb matched her feelings, as they sang, ". . . I wouldn't wish this on anyone . . . "

By the time she got to the end of the street, she knew it was impossible to try to drive much further. For a fleeting second, she thought of going to the women's shelter again. Brenny knew better: as a professional social worker going to the shelter as a client would kill any future possibility of employment there. She also knew that the thirty days' limit at the shelter did not give someone enough time to heal, let alone find employment or a place to live. She remembered that many single women like her ended up living at the homeless shelter after staying at the women's shelter.

How many times have I applied for a job with them? Brenny wondered. How often in this year and past year alone? Her application had been rejected every time. Hell, she thought, I never even got an interview. I know I was the best qualified applicant at least two of those times. Brenny thought about the women who had gotten those jobs. They were less educated and experienced than her. Not only that, their husbands had exceptionally good jobs and other stature in the community.

Brenny was having a hard time keeping the car from getting stuck in the street. She tried to put all her energies into driving, but she couldn't stop thinking. No, Brenny thought, the women's shelter is out of the question.

It was also matter of pride for her to not want to go there. All Brenny had left in the world was her dignity. Brenny knew that if she walked into the shelter abused and burned, many of her colleagues in the professional community would know right away.

Brenny knew that she would not want to live if her colleagues knew how bad her life was. Especially when they would never understand because their lives were much easier. Brenny thought to herself, my life would have been easier too, if I had a good job right away after graduating college. Years later, I am still waiting for that job . . .

As Brenny struggled to keep her car from getting stuck in the snow, she saw the flashing lights of a snow plow at a nearby strip mall. Someone was out plowing early and they were nearly done. She looked to the back of the mall and saw a garbage dumpster. Brenny figured if she parked there, no one would see her car.

Brenny's car struggled to get into the parking lot, but made it. She found a place to park where the street light was obscured enough to allow enough darkness for sleep. Brenny turned the motor off, left the gas heater running, and fell asleep right away.

It was the noise of the snow plows and sand trucks chugging down the street that woke her. The sun was bright and the sky was clear. The heavy snow reflected the morning light, making the outside world look bleached white.

Brenny's neck hurt from the cramps of having to sleep sitting up. Her cheek felt sore and hot. She tried to unsuccessfully stretch in the cramped quarters. She looked at the stick-on clock on her dashboard. It said 7:45.

Brenny thought about her cheek and looked at it in the rear-view mirror. Her eyes were still heavy with sleep, but she needed to see how much damage Denny had inflicted this time. How much punishment he had meted out because she had "let him down" again.

Squinting, she looked in the mirror and saw a blister about a quarter of an inch long. It looked red and sore. Fortunately, it was closer to her hairline than Brenny had thought and she hoped that she could cover it with her hair.

Brenny thought about the gas. The gas heater was still going and the car was very warm inside. Brenny looked at her gas gauge and the needle was barely above empty. Tears welled up as she remembered that she didn't have any money and she had no place to go. Memories about the interview came back to her.

She didn't know what to do. Brenny knew she looked like hell, felt like hell and was in hell. Brenny thought of her friends and then she thought of Muffin.

Brenny started her car. She hoped that some main city streets had been plowed so she could negotiate her way toward downtown. Muffin lived by the city center. Most of Saint Cloud was still shoveling out. Third Street and Ninth Avenue were slushy messes, but miraculously, the Bug didn't get stuck. Few people were out--that was good. Brenny hoped that schools and businesses would be shut down or open late. If this happened, she could change her interview for another day. A gift of time would let Brenny use what was left of her energy to find a place to rest, sleep and think so she could begin to heal.

Brenny carefully navigated through a couple of snow-clogged streets off Ninth Avenue to get to Muffie's.

Damn, she thought, I hope he isn't there. He, meaning Muffin's husband Enrique. He also went by Rico.

Please God, please help me, Brenny prayed. Please let Muffin be home alone. Please.

When Brenny pulled up to Muffin's house, there was no sign of life. Everything was quiet. Brenny looked for tracks coming out of the dilapidated garage, but there weren't any. Brenny sucked in a hard breath. What the hell, she thought. I might as well go see . . .

Brenny got out of her car and trudged through the snow toward the house. She thought about how much snow there was despite the sunny cold day. Brenny's breath projected long and white into the frigid air.

It is too cold, she thought.

Brenny walked to the back door. Through the ice-encrusted window, she could see a light on in the kitchen. She saw an automatic coffee maker with a blinking red light, but she couldn't smell any coffee through the thick door.

Brenny knocked on the door's glass window. The ice on the window stung and hurt her knuckles. She knocked lightly on the window. When there was no answer, she knocked a little harder. Then she mercifully heard light footsteps coming. Little ones. It was Rico, Jr., six years old, and full of life, mischief and laughter. He saw Auntie Brenny looking through the frozen glass and ran to get his mommy.

Brenny began to get very cold as she waited for Muffin to answer the door. It seemed to Brenny that Rico, Jr. was taking his sweet time to get his mother. Her body began to ache as she waited. Her head and shoulder hurt, her cheek burned, she was too tired and too depressed to think, worries filled her being . . . her list of pain was long. Eventually, Brenny heard the sound of Muffin's familiar footsteps.

Brenny saw Muffin walk through the living room into the kitchen. Muffin didn't look out the window to see who it was. Little Rico said it was Brenny. That was good enough for Muff.

Muffin turned the lock and pulled hard to open the door. It was almost frozen shut. Brenny looked at Muffin. The tears flew from Brenny's eyes.

"Where's your old man?" Brenny asked.

Muffin looked at Brenny with kindness, friendship and concern.

She told Brenny, "He went to Rochester. Remember, he saw that accident last summer? Rico got a subpoena, so he has to testify in court. He left yesterday before the weather turned bad."

Brenny was relieved. She didn't want to hassle with Rico, Sr. Brenny knew that if Rico was there, he would tell her to go home to Denny. He would also chastise Brenny and tell Brenny to stop involving Muffin in her relationship problems.

Muffin looked at Brenny's cheek and disheveled appearance.

"Denny?" she asked.

Brenny sighed deeply.

With a sob in her throat, she replied in a cracking voice, "He threw me out. Oh Muffin, my life should be getting better. Instead, it's getting worse."



Brenny followed Muffin into the kitchen. The dishes from yesterday's meals were piled in the sink and on the counter. The trash overflowed in the garbage can and there were toys all over the floor.

Beyond the kitchen was a small entrance into the living room. Brenny could hear Muffin's little boys playing against the blaring background noise of cartoons.

Muffin's house was old and made of yellow bricks. Although it had been remodeled, it smelled musty. It creaked and groaned when the wind blew through it or when the snow collected on the roof. Brenny noticed that the house was not making its usual noises.

For such a bad snow storm last night, she thought, the house isn't complaining much today. I wonder why?

Brenny pulled out a chair at the kitchen table and sat. Her torso lurched forward and her chin fell into her chest. She looked crumpled.

Muffin became very angry and disgusted. She understood exactly what Brenny was going through. Muffin believed that since the beginning of time, women had been set up for abuse and control by men and their systems. She wondered if women would ever have justice.

She remembered something that she wanted to tell Brenny, but she realized that it wasn't a good time to tell her. Instead, Brenny was broken and needed her help. Muff hoped that she would have a chance to tell her later . . .

Muffin thought about making some coffee. Before Muffin could turn around to the counter to start preparing it, Brenny began to sob.

Between sobs, Brenny told her, "Muffie, I don't know what to do. Denny threw me out of the house last night in the cold and snow. He knows I don't have any money.

I have a job interview for a school librarian in a couple of hours. I am hoping the snowstorm canceled schools and school offices today so I can reschedule my interview. Otherwise, there is no way I am going to make it.

Denny knew that I needed to get a good night's sleep for it, but instead, he woke me up in the middle of the night. Of course after he woke me up, he raised hell with me, and . . . "

Brenny pulled her head out from her chest. She pulled her hair back and turned the left side of her face toward Muffin.

Brenny continued her sentence, "Burned my face with his cigarette. He flicked it right at me and he didn't care where it landed or if I would get hurt."

Brenny began to weep more.

She told Muffin, "I need that job so bad! The people that keep denying me employment don't get it--that my life is on the line. They don't realize that everything in my life is going to hell because I don't have a decent job. Denny is always bitching that I don't have a job, but when I get a chance to get one, look what he does to me!"

"What was he pissed off about this time?" asked Muffin with disgust.

"He was mad because I couldn't pull out of a deep sleep and do the 'Dance of the Seven Veils' for him," Brenny answered with disbelief and horror in her voice.

"What is his problem this time?" Muffin asked.

"I don't know, Muff. Something is deeply wrong with him. Something deep, deep down. We have been together for many years and the last three have been really bad ones. He blames me for everything that goes wrong and he wants everything his way. His patience is getting shorter and his anger is getting worse.

Denny hates his job, but won't quit it. He says no one will pay him what he is making now if he is lucky to get another job. Denny also says no one will hire middle aged men like him when they can hire young workers.

He says I am a 'slacker' because I won't bury my pride and work at McDonald's. Denny says that if I really wanted to work, I would be happy to flip burgers or take a factory job. Of course, he wouldn't flip burgers or take the factory jobs reserved for women.

I keep telling him that work isn't work. That work either lifts you up or keeps you down. Because I am very intelligent, I would go mad doing mindless and repetitious tasks like factory or fast food jobs. It was never about money. I want to do something significant and valuable if I am going to work. I don't want to have to take some kind of ugly job only because I am a woman without social connections to get something better.

I also need to protect my hands, Muffin. They are what I use to write with. I don't want to have to write with a stylus in my mouth because I can't use my hands anymore."

Muffin understood Brenny's desire to protect her hands. She knew that most of the factory jobs available to women eventually ruined their hands, backs or both. Muffin knew that Brenny was a great writer. Brenny's hands were golden, along with her mind and spirit. She realized what a waste it would be if Brenny lost the use of her hands.

When Brenny mentioned "working at McDonald's," a thought came to Muffin's mind.

Muffin quietly told Brenny, "Speaking of McDonald's, Joan is working there."

Brenny looked at Muffin with disappointment and horror.

Brenny told her, "Oh my God, no. Give me some hope, Muff. Is she a manager?"

"No, she works at the drive-through window where everyone can see her."

"She is an MBA," Brenny replied with disbelief. "Do you think they know that?"

Muffin's eyes locked with Brenny's.

She said seriously, "Come on, Brenny. Smart women with educations are threats to male rule. If Joan had told them she had an MBA, she would have never made it to 'fry school'."

Brenny asked, "What has Joan said about this?"

Muffin replied, "She says that it is hopeless. She said that it is all she can do not to cry in the fries because she is so embarrassed and humiliated. Joan says that she feels suicidal."

"I know the feeling," Brenny replied as her being filled with dread. Her eyes slowly fell to the floor. "Why did she do it?"

"For the same reason most adults work there: for the money. The mortgage and other bills were due. Joan couldn't get a job in her profession and consultant jobs dried up. She had to take the only job she could get. It was the only job she could get because she is female and middle-aged. Society doesn't find her beautiful or useful anymore."

"How is Joan holding up?" Brenny asked.

Muffin replied sadly, "Not very well. If Joan wasn't strong in her faith as a Christian, she probably would kill herself. I wish I could have faith like her. It seems that God has abandoned you and Joan. One of these days I want to try to get a job and I am afraid I will have the same problem as you guys."

"It's scary when someone with an MBA can't get work" Brenny told Muffin.

"Tell me about it," Muffin replied. "I thought that the world needed MBA's for the global, testosterone-driven conquest of capitalism and globalism. I guess the world only needs white male MBA's."

Brenny replied critically, "I thought the economy was booming. According to the media and government, there are jobs every where. Every time I ask someone in power where the economic party is, no one seems to know."

She thought for a few moments before she asked Muffin, "Do you think people know about this, I mean what's going on? Do they know that lots of people, good people, are going without decent work?"

"Brenny," Muffin replied, "I think that everyone in this country knows this, but no one will talk about it. Nobody wants to face the truth, especially when there must be fifty college graduates for every good job in this country. If the truth were known, then we would have to ask why class, not education, usually predicts a person's economic fate."

Muffin's words made Brenny remembered Denny's "Trash is Trash" speech. Every

one of Denny's words came back to her.

Muffin told Brenny bitterly, "The 'American Dream' is the 'American Scream' for many. There is no 'American Dream' for you or me. Because we are females, we are not supposed to have any dreams at all. Our dreams are supposed to be the dreams of our men.

If we do find a way to dream, materializing our dreams is forbidden. That sucks, but it's the truth. At least the truth as I see it."

The power of Muffin's words surprised Brenny, although she knew that Muffin was a strong feminist in her thinking. Brenny regretted it that she hadn't visited Muffin more regularly. Then she remembered why: Enrique, Sr. Brenny thought to herself, what an asshole.

Although Muffin wasn't very psychic, she knew what Brenny was thinking about Rico. Muffin realized how hypocritical her life was. Her spirit and her realities were in major conflict. She realized how trapped she was in her marriage with Enrique, Sr.

Rico was good to her, but lately, he had been trying to dominate and control her. Muffin also didn't like his tantrums when Brenny came to visit her. He didn't want her to have friends and this angered her. He wanted her to live only for him and their family.

Muffin decided that she didn't want to talk about women, power and economics anymore. She decided to change the subject and nurture her friend.

Muffie told Brenny, "But let's not talk about this crap before breakfast. Hungry?"

Brenny was lost in thought for a moment as she thought about Denny and about last night. She thought about the other times he had abused her. She thought about how bad his temper had gotten.

Brenny thought to herself, What did I do to deserve this? Is he really that disgusted with me? What can I do to make it stop? Can there be real peace between us and not just temporary truces?

Is Denny capable of feeling any happiness? He's always so unhappy. Doesn't he understand that I feel great unhappiness myself, but that I am trying my best anyway?

Will I ever be able to go home again? Oh God, what about the job interview? What do I do about the burn on my face? I want a cigarette so bad . . . My nerves are so bad.

Although Brenny was lost in thought, she faintly heard Muffin's words. Auto pilot, that part of you that takes control when your world is crashing and you can't concentrate, came on. It energized her and helped her to sit up straighter. The improved posture pulled her chin out of her chest.

Brenny turned her attention to Muffin's words, drowning out her previous thoughts.

She replied, "I don't know if I am hungry or not. I am so upset and so worried that I never thought about food.

I am so overwhelmed. I feel confused and betrayed and I don't know what to do. I also feel like there's no hope."

Muffin interrupted her, "Don't talk like that, Brenny."

Muff had begun to wash a frying pan so she could start cooking. Her hair almost fell in the sink. Lifting the long chestnut braid off her chest, she put the heavy rope of hair on her back.

Brenny continued, "I can't help it. All I know is that I feel like shit and I don't know what to do about it. I am running out of ideas, of options. I never had any options except to try to hope for something better, for a positive change. Even prayer doesn't help. I'm at the end of my rope, Muffin. Things aren't getting any better in my life and they have been free falling for a long time."

Brenny and Muffin were quiet for a few moments. Even the noise in the next room seemed to have stopped.

Muffie finally broke the silence by telling Brenny, "I'll fry some eggs and potatoes. I have some fresh tortillas and salsa to go with them."

Brenny had been running on adrenalin for quite awhile. She realized she needed some fuel for her body.

She told Muffin, "Sounds good, Muff. But you know what I really need? I need a pill. I left my bottle of pills on the dresser. I'll pay you back when some.

I know my sugar is high. I can feel it and I know that I am going to feel more rotten than this if I don't get some medication."

Muffin's face tightened. Her back stiffened as she leaned against the kitchen counter.

She said, "Brenny, I would love to help you, but I'm back on insulin and I don't have any pills left over ."

The word "insulin" surprised Brenny.

She asked Muffie, "When did you start taking insulin? The only times you were on insulin were when you are preg . . ." Thoughts flashed fast through Brenny's mind. "Are you?"

Brenny's spirit told her the answer to her question. Brenny felt a little stupid and awkward for asking.

Tears flew from Muffin's eyes. Brenny realized that Muffin was suffering, too. Brenny got up from her chair and walked over to give Muffin a hug. The sisters held each other for several minutes, trying to hold back tears in fear that if a major dam broke, that they would cry forever in each other's arms.

After their hearts had nurtured each other, their embrace ended. Brenny returned to her chair. Muffin's presence made Brenny feel calmer and warm, but it also fatigued her. The warmth felt good, but it made Brenny wish for sleep.

Brenny also wished for a bath. That and a place to sleep in peace.

When Brenny found some energy, she asked Muffin, "What are you going to do about your pregnancy?"

Muffin replied in a sad, low voice, "I don't know. I thought I was imagining it because I was taking birth control pills. I didn't know about the baby until last week when I went to see the doctor about my diabetes. My sugar was very high so they ran a test on me and yeah, I'm pregnant. Oh God, I don't know what to do. I have more on my plate than I can deal with now."

As Muffin said this, her two little boys in the living room were screaming, jumping and running around. Something fell off the wall and crashed on the floor.

Muffin went into the next room and picked up the picture that had fallen. She told her sons to cool it, to quiet down. Her boys didn't listen. They were too healthy, happy and full of life. They momentarily quieted down to appease their mother so she would go back into the other room.

When Muffin came back into the kitchen, Brenny looked at her and asked her, "Does Mr. Macho know? Are you going to get an abortion?"

The boys in the next room were playing rough again as the noise was as loud as before. Muffin looked helplessly toward the living room and shrugged. She pretended the noise did not exist and thought for a moment on Brenny's question.

Brenny continued, "I mean, you are one year older than me and I am forty-two. Isn't that a little old to be having another baby? I remember when you were pregnant with José three years ago. You worried about his health all the time when you were pregnant because you were very sick."

Muffin's eyes filled with worry and fear.

She told Brenny, "I don't know what to do. I am still thinking about what to do. Yes, Enrique knows about it and he's happy about it. But he forgot how sick I was. He's still young and wants more kids. Rico doesn't seem to care that he's going to have to work harder and longer to pay for an extra child.

I am hoping that God will help me, although I am not sure I trust His help. This is

because He let me get pregnant in the first place.

I don't know how I could get pregnant when I took my pills religiously. Kind of a pun, huh? Taking pills religiously and now having to trust in God now because they didn't work?"

Brenny wondered why Muffin would be one of the 1 percent of the women taking birth control pills who got pregnant. Then she thought of the statue.

Brenny asked, "Where's Oscar, anyway?"

"Still in the living room sitting on the shelf," Muffin replied.

"Have you ever thought of getting rid of him or burning him?" Brenny asked.

"Lots of times, but Cathy gave him to me. I don't want to get rid of him, especially since she's dead. He brings me comfort, believe it or not. When I look at him, I always remember Cathy."

Brenny and Muffin thoughts turned to Cathy. Cathy had been their close friend.

They met Cathy when all of them were graduate students at Saint Cloud State University in the mid-1980's. Cathy died five years ago from cervical cancer. She didn't have health insurance at her retail job, so she waited too long to get a pap smear.

Muffin studied Education, Cathy studied English and Brenny studied Library Science in graduate school. They had met through a shared graduate-level psychology course Interpersonal Relationships. Fate had put all three in the same classroom and they were the sole graduate students who were nontraditional students. They were female, older and single moms.

This was before Muffin met Enrique. Muffin had two daughters, Kelly and Annie. Now Muffin's daughters were grown and living in their own places.

Graduate school was steeped in politics and arrogance. Non-traditional, female students were treated with suspicion and disdain by the faculty and other students. Of course, the faculty and other graduate students treated them nice on the surface, but Brenny, Muffin and Cathy knew that they were outsiders.

All three women helped each other during those difficult years. They babysat for each other when they had exams or papers due. They edited each other's papers. The three friends had beers together at the local bars and they graduated together.

Brenny broke the melancholy stillness in the room.

She asked Muffin, "So do you think it's Oscar?"

"You mean blame this baby on a statue? To be truthful, it has crossed my mind. More than once. Still, I don't want to get rid of the statue. I remember when Cathy gave it to me . . . "

Muffin had been living with Enrique for a couple of years. They had wanted to have a child, but couldn't get pregnant.

Brenny was over that morning visiting Muffin and having coffee. It was a bright sunny day in June. A Saturday.

Cathy always liked garage sales and she went to them. Brenny and Muffin were surprised when Cathy burst in through the door. She didn't knock and she always knocked. Cathy had something in a plastic grocery bag.

She was grinning ear-to-ear. She looked at Muffin and announced, "Your problems are over!" Cathy reached into her paper bag and pulled out an idol.

It was a statute about 15 inches high, carved from a single piece of dark, exotic wood. He had wide-set, almond-shaped eyes. His round face looked almost comical as he had a wide, flat nose and a big, wide grin.

Oscar's arms were folded rigidly against his chest as if he were a genie granting a wish. The chest was wide and his ass was narrow.

His fat, long testicles reached to the knees of his bowed legs, but it was his penis that got everyone's attention. It was long and huge.

When Brenny first saw his huge honker, her first thought was to measure it. She and Muffin eventually measured it and it was six inches long and an inch and a half thick. Pretty big for a two foot high statue.

Everyone always wondered how the statue could stand erect with such a giant erection. It always stood solidly and never toppled over. Even when Muffin 'circumcised' it later . . .

Muffin and Brenny gasped when Cathy took it out of the bag. "Look, Muffin, a fertility statute. I found it at a garage sale. When I saw it, I thought of you."

Brenny took another look and asked Cathy, "Let me guess. You found it in the free box?"

"No," Cathy replied, "I paid a dollar for it. I bought it from some visiting professors who have been teaching at Saint Ben's. They had all kinds of cool things for sale that came from all over the world. "

Brenny interrupted jokingly, "I suppose it worked so well for them that they decided to share their good fortune with someone else? How many kids did they have? Ten?"

Cathy replied, "The professors were single women, unless they were married to each other. That could have been the case. Now that I think about it, they looked like they were together.

Anyway, they said it was a fertility statue. Shit, I forget where they said it came from. Some country with a name that is hard to pronounce. Now I am going to rack my brain all day wondering what country it came from. Anyway, it came from some far-out place."

Muffin eyed it in Cathy's hands and asked her, "Did they give you instructions on how to use it?"

"Oh no, I forgot to ask," Cathy answered. "Now I am going to rack my brain trying to remember where the garage sale was so I can go back and ask them. I went to so many of them today all over town.

I don't know if I could find it again if I wanted to. Come to think of it, the garage sale looked like it was beginning to close when I was there. Garage sales also start looking the same to me after awhile. I was following signs, too, so I can't look in the newspaper and try to remember the address from that. I paid in cash, too, so I can't try to trace them through a canceled check.

She began to laugh as Cathy told Muffin, "Uh-oh." Cathy laughed again as she said, "Well I got you a present anyway."

Cathy's face filled with light and happiness as she told Muffin, "Maybe it will bring you some luck."

Muffin looked at him carefully.

She said, "He looks like my old high school boyfriend Oscar. He had that same evil smile."

Everyone laughed. From that time on, the statue's name was Oscar.

Muffin put him on the bookshelf in the living room. He stood there for a long time and nothing happened. Muff remained barren.

On a cold, dark, autumn night, Enrique had a party. Brenny and Denny attended.

Enrique's two cousins from Texas were also there. Their names were Santos and Pedro. Neither one knew more than ten words of English. They were quiet, reserved and were a little nervous. Even after they several drinks, Santos and Pedro continued to sit stiffly and smile nervously.

Denny and Enrique were talked about cars and motorcycles (their favorite topics when they were together). Santos and Pedro tried to listen with the ten words of English that they knew. Brenny was getting a little drunk and was feeling a little talkative.

Muffin was in the kitchen talking on the phone. Brenny was stuck sitting next to the two quiet Mexicans. After many tries to communicate, it finally dawned on Brenny that these boys didn't speak her lingo. Brenny tried to talk to them using the ten words of Spanish that she knew. This made Santos and Pedro laugh and relax a little.

Brenny was having such a good time with Enrique's cousins that she didn't notice that Muffin had come back into the room. As soon as Muffin was in the living room, Enrique started acting macho, talking arrogantly and demanding to her. He noticed that his cousins' drinks were getting low. He asked them something in Spanish and they nodded, "Si, si."

Rico looked at Muffin and ordered, "Get my cousins some more tequila and do it fast."

Muffin became incensed. She never waited on any man, and she wasn't about to begin to now. She had seen how Enrique's sisters-in-law waited on his brothers and she wasn't about to become a servant like them. Muffin loved Enrique, but he knew how she believed about this. Muff would never be subservient to any man. Rico's arrogance and grab for power hit a nerve. She went into the kitchen and grabbed a big butcher knife.

Muffin walked back toward the living room and stopped in the doorway.

With the knife drawn, she asked her husband, "Excuse me, mutherfucker. What did you just tell me to do?"

Denny and Enrique stopped talking. Rico's cousins gasped. Brenny, feeling a good buzz, noticed that the room became quiet. She looked at Muffin standing in the doorway holding a big knife. Her silhouette looked frightening. Everyone sat frozen. Muffin moved closer to Rico until her bloodshot eyes were locked on his eyes.

In a disbelieving voice, Muffin asked Enrique as she waved the knife in the air, "Did you just tell me to do something asshole? Do I have slave written all over me? Where the hell do you get this idea that I am your servant? You may be helping pay the bills, but you don't own me because of it. No mutherfucker is going to order me around like that. Get it?" Muffin continued to wave the knife in the air.

Enrique was afraid and it was written all over his face. He stammered, "But Muffin, I didn't . . . "

"Fuck you!" Muffin replied in a low, angry voice. She looked at Rico with the same defiance reflected in her voice.

She told him, "If you ever, I mean EVER, talk to me like that again I will . . ." With the knife clenched in her hand, Muffin walked over to Oscar and looked at him.

Muffin turned around and said to Enrique in a grave and warning voice, "If you ever talk to me like that again, I will cut your dick off like this!"

She turned back toward Oscar. With one fell swoop of the knife, Oscar's penis was detached. It flew across the room, bounced off the wall where Brenny and the Mexicans sat. It hit Santos hard on the cheek before it dropped like a rock into his near empty glass.

Muffin still had murder in her eyes. No one said a word and no one moved.

After a few seconds of silence, Muffin noticed Oscar's penis sticking head-up out of the glass. It looked funny to her and she began to laugh. Brenny thought it looked funny too, and began to laugh with her friend. Brenny and Muffin laughed together for a long time before the men began to laugh with them.

Later, Muffin and Brenny tried to glue Oscar's penis back on him, but it never seemed to look right and it fell off periodically.

Right after Oscar was dismembered, Muffin got pregnant. She got pregnant twice and now she was pregnant again. Brenny secretly wondered if Muffin had accidentally figured out how to make the statue work.

Muffin and Brenny sat in the kitchen and silently wondered about Oscar. They wondered privately and collectively if Oscar--with a little help from Rico--was responsible for Muffin's newest pregnancy.

But it was hard for Brenny or Muffin to believe in magick on a cold winter morning in the kitchen of an old house. Especially when the domed kitchen light struggled to quash out the shadows that flickered in the cold spots throughout the room.

Although Oscar seemed magickal, it was difficult for Brenny or Muffin to believe in him. Maybe, they told themselves privately, there isn't any magick left in the world for anyone anymore.

VI

Muffin moved about in the messy kitchen as she tried to clean and make breakfast at the same time. Rico, Jr. and José wrestled, jumped, tumbled and played in the living room next to the kitchen. The cartoons on TV continued to blare. Brenny watched Muffin, feeling numb and confused. A chill came upon her and she realized this one came from her and not the house.

The chill came out of nowhere and struck through Brenny, filling her with pain and confusion. She quickly fought a quick mental battle to get control of her pain and confusion. Muffin's vibes picked up on Brenny's feelings. Not knowing what to do,

Muffin turned around and smiled at her friend. The warmth of Muffin's smile chased away the cold inside Brenny's spirit.

Brenny secretly thanked the universe for a friend like Muffin. Then she thought of Mario. Brenny knew that Mario knew about what happened between her and Denny. Brenny knew that she had to face her fears about asking Mario for help. She decided to go to Mario's when the highways were plowed.

Snapping out of her thought, Brenny watched Muffin again. She remembered something special about her friend. It was Muffin's beauty. Although Muffin was older than her, Muffin was the most beautiful woman Brenny had ever seen.

The breakfast made Brenny feel warmer and better. She began to worry about the interview until Muffin went into the living room and changed the channel to the news. Announcements for school cancellations scrolled horizontally along the bottom of the TV screen and Muffin soon saw that Saint Cloud Public Schools would be closed. Although her vibes had already told her that the schools were closed, Brenny was glad to hear the good news. Her hope for a better life was saved for the moment.

Brenny's face hurt from the burn from the cigarette and she didn't feel like looking at strangers, let alone talk with them. She wondered how the school could call her to reschedule the interview since Brenny didn't have a home number anymore. Brenny would have to remember to call them from Mario's to reschedule before they tried to call her at Denny's.

Muffin began to clean up the breakfast dishes. Brenny noticed the iridescent colors of light caused by the grease on her plate as Muffin took it away. Brenny marveled that she could see such splendid rainbow colors on a nightmare day in a nightmare life. Her life felt useless to her. She lamented that she was conscripted to perform the role of suffering in some kind of cosmic play.

The little boys in the next room became louder and more animated now that they had eaten. Brenny wondered how Muffin could have so much patience with them.

Muffin finished her breakfast chores as fast as she could. She worried about her friend and wished she could do more to help her. Muffin thought about Mario. Muffin knew that Mario would help her. Although Muffin didn't know him very well, she knew that he loved Brenny and would do anything to help her. Muffie wished that she knew Mario better, but she was too busy with her kids and her husband to make any new friends, especially friends of Brenny. For some reason, Rico did not like Brenny.

With the last dish in the rack, Muffin poured some fresh coffee in her cup and sat at the table with Brenny.

Muff told her, "I have some money saved. You are welcome to it. Maybe you can get a room for the night and buy some food. You need to get some rest. You look like hell."

She caught her words. Muffin's face filled with regret as tears fell from her eyes.

Brenny felt Muffin's regret.

She told Muffin, "Don't feel bad. I feel like hell. Therefore, I must look like it as well. Thanks for the offer of money. I know I need it but I hate to take it. I can't figure out what to do. Yet. And yeah, I need to get some sleep. I guess I could sleep here, but . . ."

Muffin interrupted Brenny, "But the boys are so noisy." Muffin thought for a moment and continued, "And Enrique could come back. There is no court today and probably no court tomorrow because Rochester got more snow than us. Tomorrow is Friday. Rico doesn't like hanging around that city. The roads are snow packed, but that never stopped Rico from driving. No, he is probably on his way back now."

Tears rolled down Brenny's cheeks.

"Muffie, what is wrong with me?" she asked. Why am I so cursed that I can't have a good job? My life is falling apart and my relationship with Denny is hemorrhaging. What terrible thing have I done that I should suffer like this? And why would Denny accuse me of all those ugly things? Who puts these kinds of thoughts in his head? How could Denny be so mean to me after all the years we've been together?"

Brenny continued, "Doesn't Denny realize how destructive his words and actions are? My soul feels like it has a thousand knives in it. I keep seeing him spit in my face last night and I keep seeing the hate and contempt he had for me when he did it. His face was so twisted with contempt and loathing. I don't understand how he could be like that when I have never done any thing against him.

He never used to be like that. He used to be a caring man who cared about what I felt. Denny has become meaner and meaner over the years. But what I miss most of all, is that we used to talk. It seems that I do all the talking anymore. He listens to what he wants to hear and fades the rest out.

More and more, I am afraid to tell him about things that might set him off. So I have to keep the conversation light and happy. I feel like 'Happy Clown', always having to use everything-voice, topic of conversation, even pantomime to entertain him to keep him in a good mood. I am running out of ideas. Scherazad only had 1,001 nights to entertain the sultan. I am way past that many nights."

Muffin asked her, "It must really be nerve-racking to live with someone as volatile as Denny, huh?"

Brenny replied, "It's like walking on eggshells. I never know what will set him off. Muffin, I know he loves me and I love him, but I just can't take it anymore. I am afraid I might do something really, really stupid . . ."

"Like kill yourself?" Muffin asked quietly with worry in her voice.

"That and more," Brenny replied. "When he spits on me or accuses me of evil things, I think about taking a razor blade and cutting myself up. I think about having 'Loser' tattooed across my forehead. I hate myself when he spits on me. I feel dirty and no matter how hard I clean myself inside or out, I still can't get his venom off me."

"Have you ever thought of telling him this?" Muffin asked.

"I did once, when he was mad. He told me that I didn't have enough courage to do something like that. He also told me that he thought that I was nuts and that doing something like that would surely prove it. I asked him if he ever worried if I would do something crazy and stupid like that."

"What did he say?" Muffin asked.

"He said in a very caustic voice, 'You won't do something like that because you are too busy mooching off me, sucking life out of me!'"

Muffin wasn't surprised.

She replied, "He can be real sickening sometimes, huh?"

"Why is he like this Muff? What makes someone this mean? When I first met him, we did things together. He was good to me and he really loved me. He and I went to church together and we were going to get married."

"The years took their toll," Muffin replied.

"I know. Too many years without work. Even the pyramids of Egypt are worn away by sand-by-sand. There have been too many sandstorms in my life. I know I am a good person, a deserving person. When I didn't get a job last year, I went back to all those places where I had interviews. I had to see who was hired . . . "

Brenny caught herself and worried if Muffin might be shocked or think that she was a stalker. To her surprise, Muffin didn't seem surprised or worried.

Muffin replied kindly, "I've done that too, but it seems like it makes you more miserable in the end. Let me guess, they hired some real dumb, un- or under-educated and some un- or under-skilled person for the position?"

"Bingo," Brenny replied. "I shouldn't have done it, but I had to know."

"Know what?" Muffin asked in a surprised voice.

"What was wrong with me," Brenny answered a broken and desperate voice.

"Brenny, there is nothing wrong with you. I've told you that many times. It's the system. We were never supposed to go as far as we did."

Remember graduate school? No one wanted to mentor us and we were all in different majors. That was because we were poor and female trying to get an education they thought we didn't deserve."

Brenny looked straight into Muffin's eyes.

She told Muffin angrily, "I remember the white, middle-class males they mentored in my program. It seemed that professors couldn't do enough to help them."

Muffin replied, "I was in education, so there were more females than males. Only middle-class females were mentored. My professors thought that I had somehow failed as a person only because I was female and poor. They treated me like trash, too."

Brenny said, "They treated us all like trash. The only friends that we had were each other. That is why we are so close: We went through academic hell together."

"Ironically," Brenny said, "The women who were mentored in your program could also fall from grace. They are just one husband away from social downgrading. Without their middle-class man, most of these women would instantly change from a Madonna to a whore. They could easily find themselves prisoners in the Pink Prison, too."

Brenny thought for a moment.

She asked, "Where are people like you and I supposed to work? We have so much potential and no place to use it."

Muffin told Brenny, "It seems like we're being punished for getting an education."

Brenny's body stiffened. She said, "I can't stand it anymore. It is more than I can take. It's more than anyone can take."

"I know Brenny," Muffin answered. "I know. But it's not you or I. Like I said before, it's the system. And you know what? We're not the only ones. There are many people like us."

"How am I going to live without a job?" Brenny asked. "Women die on the streets of America all the time because they don't have enough work to pay for their daily bread."

"Oh Brenny! You'll make it!" Muffin replied. "If anyone deserved a better life, it is you. You are the most extraordinary and talented person I have ever met. You are smart and you can write better than most people. I have never met anyone who tried as hard as you do. When I think of you, I think of so many things."

"What do you think of?"

"I think of so many things. The first thing I think of when I look at you is a garden. You remind me of a garden I always dream about, a garden more beautiful than any I have ever seen in reality.

This garden is green, lush and vibrant with many colored flowers and butterflies. Finches, and every other bird of beauty, live and sing in this garden. It smells good, too, just like you."

Brenny smiled. She never thought that she smelled good to anyone.

Muffin continued, "When I think of you, I think of wisdom gained from pain. I also think of a unique woman who different from everyone else."

"What do you mean?" Brenny asked in a surprised voice.

"Your spirit is always on fire and you are so individualistic. Your thoughts and values are your own. You have a lot of courage, too. Then there are your little idiosyncrasies."

"What are those?" Brenny asked.

Muffin replied, "Like how you have sheets, but never sleep on them. Instead, you sleep on a quilt and sleep with one on top of you. We both know that you prefer the kind of quilts that are made of a zillion pieces of sewn cloth and that you sleep naked between quilts."

Brenny responded, "I like the feel of the many pieces of fabric against my naked body. Someone or many people painstakingly sewed those pieces together to create art. I like sleeping in art. It comforts and warms me."

"What are my other idiosyncrasies?" Brenny asked her friend.

"Your wry and dry humor."

Brenny smiled as she mused on Muffin's words.

"Is it really that dry?" she asked Muffin.

"More wry than dry."

Brenny said to Muffin, "Tell me more about myself. This is interesting to me. I always wondered how others saw me. It's also good to hear nice things about me, especially since Denny never has anything good or interesting to say about me."

Muffin continued, "You dazzle me. You and your spirit are lovely. Your mind is brilliant and you have a deep, understanding heart. Although you are a little cynical and critical, you are one of the most compassionate and kindest persons I have ever met. Your smile is so bright that when you smile, people are compelled to smile back.

That is how shining your spirit is.

You can write better than most people. It is wonderful thing, how you can use words the way you can. You write all kinds of things and you wrote a novel a few years ago. Although few read it, you still did something that most people don't do."

"What else do you know about me?" Brenny asked in surprise.

Muffin replied, "You like to watch cheesy, foreign films and find one-of-a-kind things. You are psychic and that is a big part of you. Too many of your dreams and predictions have come true, especially the ones you've had about me.

Life knocks you down all the time and you always find a way to pick yourself up. I have never seen such a fighter like you."

Brenny asked Muffin, "You've said a lot of nice things about me, but tell me something that you don't like about me."

"Your taste in music is a little far-out."

"I call it an eclectic taste," Brenny answered.

"Call it what you want, some of the stuff you listen to is also one-of-a-kind."

"Muffin, you and I just have different tastes."

"Yeah, but the jackets and inserts of my CD's don't have pictures of artists with blackened eyes that look like they are strung out on heroin."

"Which group is that?" Brenny asked.

"I am not sure, but I remember seeing one of your CD jackets where there were four wasted-looking band members standing together dressed in black. All had dark, hollow eyes. I remember thinking to myself that these guys must be on heroin or something."

Brenny searched her mind, but could not remember what group Muffin was talking about. She told Muffin, "I can't think of which one you mean, but will look through my CD's if I ever get to go back home."

"Oh you'll go back home," Muffin replied. "Denny will pull out of his funkiness in a few days and start looking for you. He isn't going to throw you out forever. You two love each other. You have been together a long time. Denny helped raise your son. You have too much history together. You'll get back together."

"I know he'll get his mind right soon enough," Brenny told her, "But Muffin, I am sick of it. It is sick, this relationship between Denny and me, and it is getting sicker all the time. I am sick of being sick.

Worse, I began to depend on him for more and more things. I hated this because every time I depended on him for something new, I felt like I was forfeiting my future and the rest of my power.

Then there is the fact he is so mean to me. I've got a burn blister on my face because he turned asshole on me in the middle of the night, in the middle of a blizzard. I can't take it anymore. Sometimes I think I am going to lose it and have a nervous breakdown. I start to shake and I can't stop. I start to think really crazy thoughts. One of those thoughts is that reality is really not reality and that I am really in hell, having to relive my life over and over again. That, or suffer over and over again so I will learn something that wasn't worth the price of pain."

"Classic nervous breakdown thoughts," Muffin replied with worry.

"Exactly," Brenny answered, "And it scares the hell out of me. I love Denny, but he is betraying me with his awful temper. His anger is killing me and he doesn't understand this.

I feel sorry for him, but his anger is too destructive. My soul feels like it is being choked to death by it."

Brenny thought for a few more moments and continued, "No, Muffin, I don't think I'm going back this time. I am going to go to Mario's when the roads clear."

"I figured you would go there," Muffin replied.

"Let's face it, I have no other place to go. Mario gets on my nerves all the time, but he's a good friend. I don't know where he gets all his energy. This guy has energy all over the place.

I also like to party with Justin. He's fun to kick back with. At least at Mario's, I will have a place to feel safe, figure stuff out and I will have two girlfriends to talk with."

Muffin chuckled. Although she didn't know Mario and Justin well, she knew that they liked it when Brenny called them her 'girlfriends.'

Muffin mused, Almost all people have a double in the world, but there are no duplicates of Brenny, Mario or Justin.

Brenny interrupted Muffin's thoughts by asking a question. Brenny asked her, "Muffie, do you think this town is under a curse or something? I have always felt it was. I can't understand the reasons why I feel this way, but I feel it deep inside my soul."

"You know Brenny, I have often thought about this myself. Yes, I think it is cursed."

"By whom? What?" Brenny asked.

"I don't know," Muffin replied. "Maybe by the Indians who were forced to give up their land here. Maybe by all the suffering created by the sin of the people who lived here in earlier times. Something bad must have happened. Maybe God has cursed this place. That could be.

I think this place is a crossroads, a psychic type of crossroads. Some place between dark and light, a place between good and bad, a place of many cosmic energies converging on one ground . . . I hope I am making sense . . . "

"I'm following you," Brenny replied. "Someone asked me to describe Saint Cloud and without thinking, I blurted out that this place was a combination of Hotel California, Harper Valley PTA, Stefford Wives and Salem's Lot."

Muffin chuckled, "You have such a way with words. But Salem's Lot--vampires?"

"They say there is a lot of occult stuff going on around here," Brenny replied. "Occult happenings are typical for places mired in religious oppression, sexual repression and greed.

Salem's Lot stays on my list of descriptors for this place. Maybe it is the feel of the movie that makes me feel like this. Life is hopeless and damned in Salem's Lot just like life here in Saint Cloud is hopeless and damned."

Brenny reached for the gold crucifix that hung around her neck. It gave her comfort. She looked to see if Muffin was wearing her necklace. Both women preferred 'raised crucifixes' that portrayed Jesus' body hanging on a cross.

Muffin saw Brenny wrap her hand around the crucifix.

"I do that, too," Muffin told Brenny. "I find comfort in touching Christ's body."

She prayed for Brenny and told her, "I am going to pray hard for you. I will ask God to help you in every way."

"Go ahead," Brenny replied, "I need all the prayers I can get. I need a change, Muffin. Now that I think about it, I have been sensing change lately, too, blowing like light, cool winds through my soul.

I don't know if this coming change is good or bad because I feel dread and also a high degree of excitement. The little winds feel so good, so frightening, so exciting, so seducing, so pleasurable that it makes me feel more alive than I have ever felt.

When I feel these little winds coursing through my spirit, my skin becomes very sensitive and hot. I feel rushes of ecstasy flow like tides through me. Those little winds of change make me see and hear clearer than I ever have. The thing I worry about is that I can't think as clear as I want to because I am overwhelmed by such acute feelings of love and euphoria. I think that's how to describe it."

"What have you been smoking lately?" Muffin asked.

Brenny began to laugh for the first time.

She replied, "Not much of anything. Speaking of which, I wish I had a Cowboy Killer right now. I have been wishing for one since last night."

"Why didn't you ask?" Muffin asked Brenny. "I found a pack on the counter yesterday. They're not Rico's and I have no idea where they came from."

In a wishful voice, Muffin said, "Maybe your guardian angel left them for you."

Muffin opened the cupboard door by the sink and pulled out a pack of Marlboro's. She gave them to Brenny.

Brenny looked at the pack. It had been opened, but all the cigarettes were there: standing quietly and perfectly in their rows. For a quick second, Brenny thought they might actually have come from the ethereal, but when looked at the bottom of the pack, she saw the Minnesota cigarette tax stamp.

The thought that maybe an angel had left those cigarettes for her renewed Brenny's hope. This made her happy. It also made her feel high, although Brenny's spirits were already elevated because she had reminded herself about the Winds of Change inside her soul.

Brenny knew a secret about those winds, but she didn't want to share it with Muffin. She knew that the winds were going to take her away from Saint Cloud and Minnesota. Brenny didn't want Muffin to know that she was going away because Muffin would feel sad and lonely.

She thought of the Moody Blues' song The Voice. Euphoria flooded through her. A taste of things to come? she asked herself. The flood of good feelings overwhelmed her so much that she forgot Denny.

Muffin gave Brenny an ashtray and a pink lighter. Brenny picked up the lighter and lit a cigarette. It tasted good, but it made her a little lightheaded. She fought the dizziness and enjoyed the rest of the cigarette.

"Maybe an angel did leave these for me," Brenny said with a smile.

VII

Brenny and Muffin talked for a little while longer. Fatigue started to overcome her and the great urge for sleep became greater. Both women were the same size, so Muffin lent her a clean change of clothes and big T-shirt that Brenny could use for a nightgown. Muffin also lent Brenny the \$150 she had saved.

Muffin had thought about using the money for an abortion. She was desperate not to be pregnant. She was too old, too sick and too tired to have another child. In her heart of

hearts, she didn't believe that her marriage was going to last.

Her spirit had told her often not to have an abortion. Muffin usually obeyed its voice. Still, having some money gave her a feeling that she still had a choice. Giving the money to Brenny killed the possibility of a way out. Secretly, Muffin hoped that the child was a girl.

Brenny was getting ready to go when Muffin remembered she wanted to ask Brenny something. She asked her, "I know that you are under stress right now Brenny, but would you do something for me?"

"Anything," Brenny replied.

"Tell me the sex of my baby."

"My antennas are down, but I'll try," Brenny answered. She began to concentrate and she was surprised that the answer came so fast.

"Congratulations, it's a girl," Brenny told Muffin.

Muffin was stunned and happy. "You were right about my boys and you have always been right about the sex of friends' babies. You've relieved me and made me happier by telling me this."

The sky was bright and light blue when Brenny left Muffin's house. The snow glistened in the bright sun, blinding her. Brenny found her sunglasses in the glovebox and put them on.

The roads were plowed better. Brenny's little car moved faster, but cautiously through a city beginning to wake up from a heavy snowstorm.

Brenny rented a room at the Forest King Motel. When she opened the door, she saw that it was paneled in pine and that it had green shag carpeting.

Do all the old-fashioned motels around here have to have that woodsy, seventies look? Brenny asked herself as she scanned the room.

After she closed the door and locked it, she walked over to the thermostat and turned the heat up. She sat on the edge of the bed waiting for the room to heat. She was tired, but she realized that she was in too much shock to go to sleep right away.

Brenny turned the TV on and the noise quickly got on her nerves. She turned it off. The quietness was welcoming, but then Brenny began to feel alone. Fighting her feelings of loneliness with all her remaining strength, she prayed for God to take them away. The negative feelings left.

Brenny felt a chill in the room and decided to warm up by taking a bath. She also wanted to wash off the scum of last night. There was other scum she wanted to wash off as well. Scum on her skin from sleeping in her clothes. Scum on her skin from sleeping in her car. Scum in her spirit from being defiled, demeaned and debased.

Brenny took a long hot bath. As the water embraced her, she felt calmer. While she relaxed in the tub, she smoked a couple of cigarettes. Brenny avoided looking at the

orange coals because she didn't want to remember the orange coal that had burned her.

She almost fell asleep in the tub, so she got out. She didn't want to end up sleeping in cold water. Brenny wanted to sleep in a dry, warm bed.

The coldness of the white floor tiles on her warm, wet feet shocked her. Still, the fog of sleepiness felt heavy inside her being. Brenny thought about using Muffin's big T-shirt to sleep in, but decided not to. She preferred to sleep naked.

Brenny snuggled into the covers. The coolness of the sheets against her skin felt alien, but good. See Muffin, I sometimes sleep between sheets, Brenny thought. Secretly, she wished she were home sleeping between her two favorite quilts.

Brenny's feet were cold, so it was hard to sleep. She wondered if the sheets were making them cold? Brenny remembered that Muffin had lent her an extra pair of socks. She put them on and her feet slowly warmed.

Worries tried to pop up in her mind to keep her awake. Brenny fought them by trying to think of something pleasant. She tried to remember the beautiful man in the dream.

What was the dream about, anyway? she thought, Or was it just a wet dream at a bad time? As tired as she was, she pieced it together and replayed it in her mind until she was satisfied it was memorized enough. Brenny wanted to ask Mario about it. He was good at interpreting dreams. Brenny hoped the dream meant something good.

It has been a long time since something good had happened in my life, she thought. She remembered to pray. Brenny prayed as earnestly as she could for help. She remembered the dream one more time and wished that she could dream it one more time . . .

Brenny slept late into the day. When she woke up, she was hungry and ordered a pizza to be delivered. Brenny wanted to eat a meal but she didn't have the energy or desire to go anywhere public. This is because she was very depressed and worried about being homeless and broke. Muffin's money wouldn't last long and Brenny knew that her immediate employment picture working as a professional was not very good.

She thought about Denny and wondered what he must be doing and if he missed her yet. But Brenny knew better; he wouldn't start to look for her until his temper cooled and that usually took a few days.

Once, Denny was mad at her for two weeks. For fourteen days, he wouldn't talk to her or even acknowledge her presence. He would be in the same room and act like she wasn't there. To avoid any kind of intimacy, Denny slept in Adam's old room. He never ate and threw the food she gave him in the trash. Denny lived in cigarettes and pop while he ignored her.

Feeling full from the pizza and warm from the room, Brenny tried to go back to sleep. She tried to sleep for two hours while she thought, worried and watched the red LCD light of the numbers on the alarm clock that sat on the bedside table. Brenny remembered she had looked at a similar clock the night before.

More thoughts and ideas flew and crashed inside her mind. Brenny kept thinking that her life was spinning out of control. She secretly wondered if she were in hell.

Brenny thought of suicide. A red warning light began to flash inside her spirit, telling her that she was depressed and was thinking dangerously. She knew she was depressed, but it didn't hit her how depressed she was until that moment. Tears formed in her eyes. Her nose hurt from the dry, caustic, burning feeling of the mucous building quickly inside it.

Gingerly, she lightly touched the blister on her face. It was still there. It was still sore and still full of fluid. Her tears flowed.

She lay in the bed feeling miserable for a long time and then thought to pray. Brenny asked God to help her sleep.

Brenny asked God to help her and talked to Him for a long time about her problems. She asked him why He didn't help her? Brenny told Him that she didn't know how long she could hang on if He didn't help her now. She reminded Him that she had done everything possible to help herself.

After she ended her prayer, she yawned as she watched the gray and black shadows dance slowly on the ceiling. Wild thoughts cropped up as she wondered how old the universe was and what life was about. Brenny thought about the fate and destiny of mankind. A yawn interrupted those thoughts.

Thinking about patriarchal systems, Brenny remembered to pray for African and Middle-Eastern women. She realized many were being suffocated under a veil and many were being circumcised at that very moment. Brenny realized that her fate as a female in a man's world could have been worse. After more thought, she came to the conclusion she was happy to be a female although it was too hard to be one.

She yawned again and the red LCD numbers on the clock looked blurry. Brenny shut her eyes and yawned more. She willed her soul to leave her body when she was sleeping and told it to find some happy spiritual place to go. Inside her mind, she saw the face of the beautiful man who had made love to her in her dream. Try to find this man, she told her spirit, and make love to him as long and as much as you can. This time, we won't be interrupted.

Brenny fell into a deep, dreamless sleep. Her spirit slept harder than her body.

Brenny woke up to find it was 5:30 in the morning-the regular time she woke up with Denny to fix his coffee and breakfast. She put the extra pillow over her face and willed herself back to sleep.

When she woke up, her cheek was stuck to the pillow. Brenny was sleepy and did not understand why her cheek was stuck. She pulled her head away from the pillow and a bright yellowish-white bolt of pain flashed before her eye. The pain woke her and Brenny sat up straight. The blister on her cheek had broken, and her flesh had dried and stuck to the pillow.

The throb of her wound became worse. Brenny felt something thick and warm begin to flow down her cheek. Her face was bleeding and she began to cry.

Quickly, she ran into the bathroom and grabbed a wash cloth. Brenny thrust it under the facet and soaked it in warm water. She wrung the extra water from it and then put the cloth softly on her face. The wash cloth helped, but the pain from her face made her head begin to pound.

Brenny looked at herself in the mirror holding the red-streaked wash cloth. She looked so pitiful. Her thoughts cried out, How could he do this to me? Why would he want to hurt me like this? Didn't he know that people get burned when they get cigarettes thrown at them?

Brenny cried so hard that the tears began to choke her. Her stomach started to cramp and she became overwhelmed with the urge to heave. She vomited violently in the sink. Some vomit splashed on her wound, causing it to burn worse.

When Brenny's stomach stopped hurting, she sat on the toilet naked, wet and bleeding. She cried with a broken heart and a shattered spirit.

After awhile, Brenny began to feel chills. Cold, she took a shower and let the water splash on her bleeding cheek until it stopped bleeding. When she was sure her cheek had quit bleeding, she took a hot bath. She lay in the tub for a long time with her eyes closed. Brenny tried to rest just a little more . . .

VIII

Brenny rested until the water in the tub began to get cold and she became uncomfortable. She wondered what time it was and correctly guessed the time around to be around ten. Check-out time was eleven, so it was getting close to 'show time'-- time to make her move. She thought about staying another day, but she didn't have much money left. Brenny didn't want to spend the rest of it for one more night of peace.

The school district offices were open, so Brenny called them and arranged for another interview. They had a full schedule with Spring Vacation coming up so they could not interview her until the next month. She hoped that this would be enough time to heal and get herself together.

Brenny thought about Mario.

He already knows, she thought. He's probably called Denny lots of times wanting to know what happened. And watch . . . he will be waiting for me. She checked out of the motel, jumped in her car and headed for Minneapolis.

The day was like the day before, sunny and bright. The roads were clear except for the occasional snow booger (those balls of snow that form behind tires in the wheel well and eventually fall off somewhere, usually in the middle of the road). Brenny had to pay special alert for them because her car was low to the ground and she didn't need any damage to the undercarriage.

A snow booger with a few well-placed rocks in it could inflict much damage to her car. Brenny needed her car. She knew that her life would be much worse than it already was if she lost her car.

Before Brenny realized it, she was already on the street Mario lived on. He lived in an upscale, older neighborhood of Minneapolis. His house was art deco in design and landscaping. It was painted a medium-pink color of rose with white trim. When she

saw the plastic pink flamingoes in the snow, she began to laugh.

Brenny loved the look and feel Mario's place. One thing for sure, she always thought when she saw Mario's house, he sure has good taste.

She parked her car. Brenny was about ten feet from his door when she felt a mixture of relief and sadness. Relief, because Brenny knew that she was safe. Sadness, because Brenny didn't want to be there. Brenny wanted to be home. She wanted things to be good between her and Denny like they used to be.

Then Brenny saw the snowman by a hedge close to the door. He had big, black button eyes and a carrot nose. When Brenny recognized Justin's old scarf wrapped around the neck, she instantly knew that Justin had made it for her. The snowman held a sign that said, "Welcome Brenny."

Something interrupted Brenny's smile at the snowman. It was a premonition and it quickly coursed through her mind and soul. It told her that this was the last time she would be taking refuge at Mario's.

Brenny felt the Winds of Change blow through her. Euphoria rushed through her. Her mind and heart shuddered with curiosity, anticipation and pleasure.

The closer she got to Mario's door, the more relieved Brenny felt. She made a mental note to ask Mario about the change she felt coming. He might know what it might be. Maybe the change was something good like a decent job. If he didn't know what the change was, Brenny hoped that one of the psychics that worked for him might know.

Brenny stopped at the door. She didn't have to reach for the bell. He knew she was there. Instantly, the door opened and Mario stood with his arms open. Brenny fell into them and made his green silk kimono wet and stained with her tears.

Mario held her and gave her a big hug. He still wasn't used to the cold weather and he started to get cold fast. "C' mon, Brenny. Let's go on inside so I can close the door."

Brenny walked into a beehive of activity. Mario's large living room held three people and they were moving in all kinds of directions.

"Good morning, girls," Brenny told them.

Lila, the tall, skinny transvestite sitting at a desk at the back of the room gave Brenny a big, plastic smile.

In her deep, soft, feminine voice she said, "Good afternoon, goddess Brenny. Mario said you would be coming." Lila sat back a little and waited for Brenny to say something.

Brenny didn't feel like talking to Lila. Mario picked up the vibes and put his arm around Brenny. He guided her toward the kitchen. Lila sniffed a little and then went

back to work.

Mario owned his own psychic line and housed the business in his home. Lila was Mario's administrative assistant and Raoul was his accountant. Paul routed calls when the computers broke down. He also answered the phones and helped around the house.

Mario liked working in his home where he could always be close to his kitchen. Gourmet cooking was his passion. Working out of his home allowed him to cook and work simultaneously.

When he wasn't in the kitchen, Mario had another office. It was adjacent from the living room and it had once been a library. Paneled in mahogany, it was elegant and magnificent. It was the most beautiful room in the whole house.

Mario and Brenny walked into the spotless, modern kitchen. It was quiet there. It was also private and they could talk without ears listening everywhere. Mario walked over to the microwave and brought out one of his famous southwestern-style omelets, replete with all types of chilies and peppers, mushrooms and cheeses. He popped two slices of whole wheat bread into the toaster.

Brenny was happy to see Mario, but felt dispirited all the same. Mario felt great pity for her. He never liked Denny because of the way Denny treated Brenny. Mario privately thought that Denny was the king of all the assholes in the world. Then Mario remembered that Denny was a typical abuser, so there was no way he could be king. Only a fool.

"What did he do now, Brenny?" Mario asked her with concern.

She replied with a sob in her throat, "He threw me out, Mario! In the middle of the fucking night in the blizzard we had two nights ago. I don't know why he did it or why he was mad. I was deep in sleep and having this good dream. The next thing I know is that he's trying to wake me up. I have a hard time waking up, especially when I am sleeping that soundly."

"Everyone does," Mario interjected.

"So he gets mad and it escalated from there. He threw my ass out. And oh, before he threw me out, he hurt me. He hit me with a glass ashtray, gave me noogies and he flicked a cigarette in my face. Then he blamed me for getting burned because I didn't get out of the way fast enough." Brenny pulled her hair away from her left cheek and showed him her wound. "He burned me, Mario. He burned me. Why would he do something like this?"

Mario asked her angrily, "Is he still mad because you haven't found a job yet?"

"Yes. Shit, Mario, I've been looking everywhere. I went to an art show a few weeks back and met this guy who has a silver Nobel Peace Prize and he can't get a job. If the economy is booming, where are all the good jobs? Denny hears on the television news that there are all kinds of jobs going unfilled. What and where are these jobs? No one seems to know, but Denny doesn't care. The employment statistics give him ammunition to abuse me. He uses the information about these phantom jobs to accuse me of not trying to get work and then it escalates."

The toast popped up and Mario quickly buttered them. He put the toast on the plate with the omelet and put the food in front of her. He set the utensils around the plate and put a napkin in her lap.

Mario told her in a kind voice, "Both of us are psychics and neither of us knows where these jobs are.

You know you can work for me. The offer still stands, Brenny. You can be a psychic advisor for my line and I will give you top pay. You can live here with Justin and me, or you can get your own place and work from there."

Brenny answered, "Mario, I appreciate your offer, but I don't know if I have the energy. It is so hard to do! I don't like looking into that many people's lives. I don't like telling them bad news when they want to hear good news. I know you and the other psychics don't lie to people, but I know that you guys sometimes omit a few things. Like omitting to tell people they are going to die because no one wants take away hope. Hope is important because it sometimes can change outcomes."

The smell of the food got Brenny's attention for a moment. She took a bite and smiled. It was delicious. Brenny wanted to eat, but she wanted to finish her dialogue with Mario first.

She told him, "You and I can see it all. I don't like watching someone in my mind suffer and die an ugly death. I feel a responsibility for my gift. I feel compelled to tell everyone exactly what I see--no more, no less.

I worked for you before, remember? When you first started your line and was looking for the best psychics to staff it with. I worked the line for you only because you are my friend. Not because I liked it."

Brenny began to eat again. The food tasted good. She remembered eating at breakfast at Muffin's the day before.

Mario told her, "And you were good, Brenny. Very good."

Brenny replied, "I don't know if I were that good. That is your opinion. I would rather find something else to do to make a living. But I am tempted. The pay is good and I need the work. Let me sleep on it. I also need to think about it and pray about it."

Mario asked, "Does the power still grow in you when you use it?"

"In leaps and bounds, Mario. In leaps and bounds."

Brenny finished her breakfast and visited with Mario. He fussed over her and made sure that she had everything she needed to feel honored and comfortable.

"Where's Justin," Brenny asked Mario, "Working?"

Mario replied, "He took the day off from work. He's upstairs sleeping, that weed monkey. We were busy yesterday until late last night. Did you like the snowman?"

When I told him yesterday that you would be here today, he decided to go outside and make you the snowman. He was out there quite a while and it was late when he came back in."

Brenny smiled as she told Mario, "I love it. I knew Justin had made it for me and I appreciate his kindness. Tell him that I will thank him personally when I see him. So why is he still sleeping? How late did he stay up making Frosty?"

"Until ten. Then he came back in and smoked some wacko weed while we watched some classic films on video. He wanted me to wake him early, but I didn't want to disturb him.

Justin looks too beautiful when he sleeps. Like an angel. He sleeps on his left side. His hands lay on the pillow beside his face, joined as if in prayer. He looks so beautiful when he sleeps . . . "

"Weed monkey and wacko weed?" Brenny asked, interrupting Mario's musing about Justin. "Where did you come up with those descriptors?" Brenny paused for a moment and continued, "Better yet, does he have any left?"

Mario said to her, "Brenny, it's still too early in the day. Do you really want to catch a buzz this early?"

Brenny responded, "Why not? I am tired, Mario, and want to sleep. It will help me get sleepy enough to go to dreamland for a while and escape this dreadful existence. I might even have pleasant dreams."

Then Brenny remembered her dream. She told Mario, "I had a dream the night Denny threw me out. A phenomenal dream."

Mario was beginning to worry. His vibes told him that Brenny's dream wasn't a regular one.

Brenny continued, "I keep having these dreams where I and this beautiful spiritual male make love. It is incredibly intense, loving and gratifying. The sex is fantastic and it seems so real. Has this ever happened to you? How would you interpret these dreams?"

Mario looked at Brenny's face for a few minutes and contemplated. He searched his mind and spirit for answers.

He finally told her, "As a psychologist, I would advise you that your dreams are a reaction to the stress Denny puts you under. You are desperately unhappy in your relationship so your psyche manifests symbolic dreams like this. A fantasy lover gives you what your real lover can't. In your case, a fantasy lover gives you kindness, love and compassion."

Mario's voice lowered as he said angrily, "Three things Denny never gave you."

Brenny thought for a moment. She said, "You are probably right about me being unhappy unconsciously."

Still, these dreams feel real, Mario. I can feel him enter me and he feels anatomically correct. His spirit touches mine and it feels lovely. Almost as lovely as the love he gives me."

Brenny tried to remember the remnants of her dreams. When she had gathered enough fragments together, she showed them to Mario telepathically. The rich and elaborate scenes showed Mario that Brenny's dreams were real.

When Brenny's memories became too erotic, Mario became embarrassed and uncomfortable from the instant replays.

Brenny felt Mario's feelings. She started to laugh and said, "Oops," as she turned off her thoughts.

Mario told her wryly, "Thanks for turning off your VCR."

Brenny continued to laugh. Mario continued, "It is too early in the day for porno."

"I would say it was more erotic than pornographic," Brenny answered as she continued to laugh.

Mario worried about her dreams. After a little thought, he told her, "As a psychic, I would say that there's a good chance your experiences could be real."

"Stay here," Mario said as he motioned to Brenny with his hand for her to wait, "I'll be right back."

Mario went into the living room. She heard the muted sounds of him briefly talking with Lila about something. Brenny's vibes told her that Mario was borrowing something from her. He was back in three minutes.

Mario handed Brenny a book titled Cosmic Love. The cover showed two spirits, male and female, embraced against a blue-black canvas of space and stars.

"This book," Mario told Brenny, "Says that your dream sexual encounters could be real, that you could really be knocking boots--I mean souls--with some spiritual entity. Your soul entwined with theirs kind of stuff. Or so Lila says. It's her book. She read it a month ago and talked the other girls into reading it. She and the girls talked about it forever, or so it seemed."

"Where does Lila find the stuff she reads?" Brenny asked Mario. Brenny thought to herself, Lila can read some really weird shit.

Mario heard her thought and smiled. He gently laughed to himself as he thought about Brenny's mental comment.

Mario stopped his musing to answer Brenny's question. He told her, "Lila has been buying many her books at a new age publishing company in the Saint Paul. They have a bookstore and Lila finds her reading treasures there.

Mario continued, "All the girls are finished with it, so Lila says you can borrow it. I am sure reading is the last thing you want to do now At least you will have it to read when you are ready."

Mario took a basket off the top of the shelf. He rummaged in it until he found what he was looking for.

"Here you go, weed monkey," Mario told her. He handed her a joint and a lighter. "Justin figured you'd be wanting one, so he rolled it for you last night. He put it here since he knew this room would be your first stop."

"Tell Justin he is too good to me," Brenny replied with a smile.

Mario remembered something else.

He smiled as he told her, "And since you are here, I have a surprise for you."

His voice became excited as he told her, "I have tickets to the Fantastiks. Front row tickets, too."

Brenny was surprised and pleased.

"When are we going?" Brenny asked.

"Next week. We can stop for drinks after the show at this bar I saw the other day."

Brenny thought for a moment.

She told him, "Mario, I don't have any clothes to wear to a play."

Mario smiled a big smile as he said, "I already thought about that when I bought the tickets. Justin and I went to Grandma's Threads the day before the big snowstorm. We

bought you a vintage black velvet dress from the '30's. It has matching vintage black velvet shoes with little jewels embedded in them. We also got you a funky 40's coat with padded shoulders and a black beaded handbag to match everything."

"In my size?" asked Brenny.

"Brenny, my goddess, you are not the only big lady in the world. There were big ladies back then, too. And those big ladies had good taste. Your 'new-old clothes' are very tasteful and beautiful. We put them in the guest bedroom.

Speaking of the guest bedroom, we set up a desk there in case you get the urge to write. Where is your laptop?"

"It's in the car," Brenny replied. "I guess I should go retrieve it before it gets too cold. I've gotten smarter, now. I always keep it by my purse when I am at home. This way, I can always take it with me in an emergency. God, do I hate living like this. I wish Denny would stop. I wish we could get along. I wish that my life wasn't so shitty. I wish I could get a job so I could have more choices and power in my life.

And speaking of Denny, did he call? I have a feeling he did."

"Yes, he called," Mario replied. "Denny has called here a lot. He talked with Lila because I have been busy. If he calls again, what do we tell him?"

Brenny searched her heart. It told her that she didn't want Denny to know where she was.

Brenny told Mario, "Tell Denny that no one has seen me or heard from me. I don't want to talk to him right now. Especially since he burned my face.

I've got a few weeks until my interview. I need to rest and recuperate. I always feel safe when I am in yours and Justin's arms."

"Brenny, you know you always have a home here . . . "

Brenny began to fill with sadness.

She told Mario, "I know, but I don't know what to do. All the goals I set for my life have turned to shit. I always wonder what I would have done if I had seen my future when I was in college. I wonder if I would have quit or what. I had hope back then. Hope for a good job and a good life. Now I have very little hope.

I see the world for what it really is and I am jaded. Most women in America don't have good jobs. Despite what people want to think, we've never made any real progress. Women do all the jobs that pay so little that they cannot support themselves on the wages.

I see that all around me and I hear it when I talk with other women on the Internet.

Then poor women are punished for getting an education. The only thing that made life bearable was my love for Denny. It's a lost cause, too."

Carefully and sweetly, Mario told Brenny, "There are other men, Brenny. Good ones that would love to be with you. If I wasn't gay, I would marry you. I would marry you in a heartbeat. But I'm gay and I'm married, so that cancels that. But the thought is still there . . . "

Brenny thought about what it would be like to be married to Mario and she began to laugh.

She told him, "Thanks for the compliment Mario. It means a lot to me. At least we are friends. This is the important thing. If Amy ever brought me anything, it brought me a wonderful friendship with you and Justin."

Brenny thought for some moments and continued, "I know there are good men out there somewhere who might want to be with me. Who would love me and treat me well. I know this. It is just that I can't think clearly yet.

Secretly, I wonder if I can get along well with any man. Sometimes, I tell myself I will become a hermit and quit men altogether. But I don't hate men and they have things I like and need."

Brenny began to chuckle, "Besides, I am ad-dick-ted to dick."

Mario eyes filled with lights and he chuckled with her.

He told her, "That's my problem, too. Isn't it wonderful?"

"Wonderful and terrifying. I lived without sex for years and then I got with Denny . . . Wow. He is so good. His skills with the tools God gave him are too good, to say the least. And he knows where to find that hidden, special button inside me. Like a doorbell, he pushes that button. He keeps pushing and pushing that doorbell until it gets too loud. Then all the doors to me--heart, mind, body and soul fling open and capitulate to him."

"Sounds like lust, to me," Mario retorted.

"C'mon Mario. I know you and Justin get that close."

"Yes, we do," Mario said in a kinder voice. He stopped for a moment and thought. Brenny could tell from his demeanor that he was sharpening his tongue.

Brenny braced herself. She knew that Mario was going to try to make a point and she hated it when he did.

Mario said sarcastically, "But Justin doesn't spit on me or throw cigarettes on me, either. He never demanded that I work in a factory or shovel pig shit when financial

times were hard. He never demanded I stop trying to make my dreams come true. Justin has always supported all my endeavors and he was always there for me whether success or failure materialized at the end."

"I've heard this before Mario," Brenny said, feeling dejected. She also felt anger because she felt that Mario was punishing her because she always went back to Denny. Brenny realized that she didn't have the energy to be angry, but she felt it all the same.

Mario felt her anger and knew he had to back off.

He brushed her hair with the palm of his hand and said, "I was wrong, Brenny. I am sorry. I feel your anger and it is justified. This was a bad time. It's just that Justin and I are worried about you and . . . "

The anger left Brenny. She interrupted Mario, "I know you and Justin are worried about me. My other friends are worried about me as well. I don't know what to do.

I love Denny and it was happy between us for many years until he became an unhappy and bitter man. Denny has his side of the story, too."

Brenny's voiced cracked, "Deep down, I don't think we have much time left to be together. He doesn't know how he's destroyed the last of what used to be between us."

"Where do you see yourself, when this happens Brenny?" Mario asked seriously.

Tears began to form in Brenny's eyes.

She told him, "That's what scares me, Mario. I don't know where I see myself. It's all fog or curtains that I can't see behind. What do you see for me, mister and master psychic?"

Mario concentrated for several minutes. He saw and felt nothing. Mario searched harder with his mind and it was revealed to him was that Brenny was going to have a big change in her life.

"It's all fog and curtains for me, too," Mario answered. "It's like the spirits don't want me to see. But I do sense change in your life. A real big change and I sense that some kind of sadness is part of this change. Big changes are like this. They are usually bittersweet."

"That's another thing that I was going to tell you about, Mario," Brenny said. "I feel winds blowing through my spirit. It is hard to describe them. They feel good, but they make me feel lonely. They are bittersweet, so I find it ironic you just used that word.

At first, they were like little breezes that I barely noticed. Now when they come to me, they are very noticeable. They also come to me to me regularly now. I had thought that maybe they were telling me about Denny throwing me out, but they are

still with me. I can feel them go through me right now."

Brenny touched Mario's hand with her hand.

She told him, "Feel them course inside me."

Mario felt the winds blow from her soul through her hand into his. The Winds of Change coursed completely through him. They cycled back to Brenny through the bridge created by their hands. Mario felt a unique combination of energy and feelings. His thoughts flew and crashed while his tongue became tied. Power went through all his nerve endings, making every cell in his body tingle.

Mario felt a cornucopia of feelings and emotions beyond his understanding. He felt euphoria, sweetness and melancholy. He felt love so intense that it made him feel sensual. Then Mario tasted strange tears on his tongue. The bitterness of their taste made him shudder and want to spit.

Euphoria filled his spirit and Mario felt acutely alive. Instantly, Mario got an erection. He became embarrassed, but he realized his hard-on was a reaction to the feelings Brenny had shared with him. Mario wished for the aching would go away, but it wouldn't. Instead, his body and spirit became flush with desire. His woody only got harder.

Mario became alarmed. This was the first time he couldn't control an erection. He began to feel a little uncomfortable, but he didn't want Brenny to feel it. He was afraid if Brenny knew what was happening, it might make her feel awkward.

Mario's mind raced to find a way to exit gracefully.

Mario told her, "Brenny, why don't you just enjoy your joint and make yourself at home? There's something I need to take care of and I know you are sleepy. I want you to know that I and Justin love you. We're here to help you and to be your friend."

Brenny smiled, warming Mario's heart.

She told him, "I know this and I appreciate it, Mario. I think I will take the joint upstairs to the guest room, have a couple tokes and try to get some sleep. Sleep is good for healing. I think I will look at Lila's book, too, but probably tomorrow. Thank you, Mario. Thank you for being good to me. Thank you for getting tickets to the Fantastiks. I know you plan to keep me busy while I am here so I won't feel lonely or sad." A bigger smile crossed Brenny's face.

Yeah, she thought, he'll keep me busy. Probably too busy.

"Have a nice sleep," Mario told her as he exited quickly from the kitchen. He would have hugged her, but his erection was getting bigger. Brenny heard the brief, muffled sounds of the girls trying to talk with him in the other room. She heard him walk upstairs and knew he was going to the master bedroom he and Justin shared.

Brenny cuffed the joint and lighter with her hand and put the book under her arm. She went back into the living room-turned-office. It was a beehive of activity as always. Except for the leather davenport and chair, the room looked like a busy office. Everyone had a desk to work at and acoustic separators to muffle noise. It was noisy, anyway.

Brenny thought to herself, I am glad Mario is so successful.

As Brenny walked by Lila's desk, Lila told her, "Brenny, honey, I forgot to tell you . . ." Brenny didn't want to, but she stopped to listen.

Lila began to fluff her hair. She batted her long, fake eyelashes while she quickly checked her manicured nails.

Satisfied that her appearance was in order, she looked up at Brenny and said, "He's been calling here, but I am sure Mario told you. Your man sure has a deep, sexy voice." Lila rolled her eyes for a moment and then she lightly snapped them.

Her voice got catty as she said, "I think Denny was flirting with me the last time he called."

"You can have him," Brenny replied. "Maybe you're the kind of woman he needs."

"I don't take scraps," Lila retorted. She sniffed the air as if she smelled something bad.

"Oh," Brenny replied matter-of-factly. "I didn't know. I always thought you did."

Lila turned red with anger. Brenny did not feel liking bantering.

She told Lila, "Don't fuck with me, Lila. I'm not in the mood. If you want a cat fight, we can do it later. Just give me time to rest and sharpen my claws."

Lila's eyes grew big with surprise and indignation. Raoul and Paul began to laugh. Lila looked scornfully at them. They continued to laugh, so Lila became frustrated and walked out of the room into the kitchen, fussing under her breath.

Everyone knew that Lila was jealous of Brenny. They knew Lila was being catty because she thought she could get away with it because Mario was not around. Brenny wondered when Lila would bring out her claws again.

Brenny went outside to get her laptop and her other things. It was still very cold and bright outside.

The Good Earth Mother Mario still had his erection when he got to his bedroom. He was uncomfortable and wondered what he should do.

He made himself a cool bath and sat in it for an hour. His boner was still there. He opened the window in the bathroom and let the frigid, arctic air hit his wet body.

Nothing happened, so he went into the bedroom and woke his sleeping angel Justin.

The guest room looked almost the same. Decorated flawlessly in pastel green and pink, it had a queen-size bed, a nice big chest of drawers and a color TV.

Brenny noticed the desk. It hadn't been there last time. She remembered what Mario had said about the desk being in the room. It was no secret that they wanted her to write a sequel to her novel. Brenny knew that they had put the desk in there to encourage her to write if she felt the urge.

She put Lila's book *Cosmic Love* on the bed stand and put her laptop on the desk.

After checking out the desk, Brenny sat in the desk chair and thought for a few moments. Then she lit the joint and took some tugs off it.

Brenny saw something sparkle and looked toward the bed. Mario and Justin had put the vintage dress, shoes and beaded bag on the overstuffed chair by the window. Brenny walked over to look at them better. Absolutely gorgeous, she thought.

Although the dress was black, its crystal beads reflected all the light around them, leaving little rainbows all over the room. Brenny lifted the heavy, flowing dress to make and watch rainbows dance all over the room.

The dress was sewn perfectly and it was made of the highest quality fabric. The black velvet was as clean, soft and smooth as the day it was made. It had no musty or mothball smell to it like other vintage dresses.

The lines of dark dress' neckline had a graceful, but plunging 'V' shape in the front. The bottom of the long sleeves and the hem of the dress were flared. It reminded Brenny of the sexy, feminine dresses that models wore on the front of romance novels.

Big, heavy shoulderpads sharpened the outline of the dress. They made the dress look powerful and more romantic.

After staring at the dress for several minutes, Brenny put it and the shoes away in the closet. She carefully put the beaded bag in the top drawer of the dresser. Brenny yawned and realized how badly she needed to sleep. She took her clothes off and threw them on the desk chair.

Brenny's naked body fell into her bed of quilts. She sighed. Brenny loved the feeling of intricately-made quilts against her body and she savored the gentle roughness. Quilts were chicken soup for her soul. She appreciated the hard work and energy that it took to make one. The energy of the quilts enfolded her and warmed her.

Drowsiness began to consume her, but a quick thought of Denny came into her mind. Brenny fought it until all her thoughts drifted away. Sleep took her.

IX

Brenny wrote her novel a couple of years before she met Mario. It was a dark, beautiful book whose prose haunted readers for a long time after they read it. Like a message in a bottle sent out into the cosmos, Brenny's book found its way into many lives. Mario and Justin were two of those lives.

Mario always believed that it was fate that led him to Brenny's book, especially when so few of them were printed and even so fewer of them were sold. He often surmised what happened to most of them. He figured that they were probably rotting in a landfill somewhere or lying under a ton of dust in a warehouse.

Brenny once told Mario that she suspected that a merchandiser had donated some of her books to eastern US prisons. She surmised this because she was always getting love letters from prisoners who had read her book. Brenny told Mario that she had been tempted to write some of them back and ask where they found her book, but that she knew that Denny would not like it.

Mario and his lover Justin always read together. Almost every night, after dinner, they would cuddle together on their big white sofa and read. Avid readers, they consumed large quantities of books.

Mario and Justin rarely read books on the best-selling list. They usually avoided these books. To them, most best-selling books presented shallow characters with contrived plots. They liked books with depth and character. Books that enabled them to look through the windows of the protagonists' souls.

Finding substantial things to read became their hobby. This hobby took them all over the Los Angeles area where they lived. Mario and Justin looked for books at garage sales and auctions. They haunted little-known and avant-garde book stores.

Almost every Saturday, Mario and Justin went on a 'quest' to find books. Every book hunt was an adventure that usually turned out to be fun. One Saturday, they decided to visit an out-of-the-way bookstore in Venice they had been to once before. The bookstore was housed in a decrepit, old building. Spotted heavily with white seagull feces, the aquamarine paint peeled away in big patches on the building. Inside the shabby bookstore, the linoleum was chipped, yellowed and stained with black spots. The dingy grey-white paint peeled on the interior walls.

This time, the store stank worse. It reeked of mildew with a hint of fish guts. Mario already felt dirty from looking at the building. He felt filthy and nauseated when he entered it. The smell of mildew and dust aggravated his allergies, and Mario began to sneeze uncontrollably.

As he wondered why he was there, Mario's vibes told him that there was treasure to be found. He nodded at Justin to assure him that it was okay to browse a little. To cover the store faster, they separated. Justin went to the right and Mario went to the left.

In the farthest corner of the store, Mario found five brand-new copies of a novel he had never seen, written by an author he had never heard of. The title of the novel was *The De-Evolution of Amy* and the author's name was Brenny Rose White.

The cover of the novel intrigued him. A woman's face dominated. She was beautiful except for her eyes. They were large, black, oval and soulless. Mario's vibes told him that he and Justin would like the book.

"Justin," Mario called across the room, "Come check this out." Justin walked over and Mario showed him the book.

"Far-out," Justin said when looked at the cover. Each man had a copy in his hands and flipped through the pages. Both agreed it looked interesting. They were shocked and surprised to see that the book cost \$1.99. They wondered why it was so cheap until Justin pointed out that the book was written by a female author.

Mario and Justin bought a book. Later, they would buy the other four books to give to their very good friends.

After they read it, Mario and Justin thought *The De-Evolution of Amy* was one of the best books they had ever read. They thought it was brilliant and moving. The narrative probed many unexplored themes that no author had ever dared approach. The story was savage and raw, but it was written intelligently, eloquently and elegantly.

Brenny's prose interested and captivated them. Justin and Mario could not put the book down until they were finished with it. Hours later, they found themselves still weeping from the end.

Mario and Justin became instant fans of Brenny and her book. After they found out that the novel had died on the vine, they lamented that few people had gotten a chance to read it. They believed that if any book deserved to be a bestseller, it was *The De-Evolution of Amy*.

They went back to the bookstore and asked about the book. The manager said that he didn't know much about it, that it had come in a shipment of 'discontinued' books.

The conversation went as follows: No, the manager told them, he didn't know if he would get more copies--the discontinued books came from some warehouse somewhere and he didn't know who decided how books were selected for shipment to stores like his. He paid for the discontinued books by the number of books, not the title. That's all he knew. No, he hadn't looked at the book before. If he looked at every book that ever came into the place, he'd never get his work done. Mario became obsessed with the book. He and Justin had all their friends read it. These friends--both gay and straight--loved the book.

It was Justin's birthday and Mario threw him a party. It had been several months since Mario and Justin had discovered Brenny's book and by this time most of their friends

had read it.

Mario held a beautiful party and after a sumptuous dinner, many chalets and other libations were toasted and consumed. Mario's parties always sparkled and this one sparkled just as brightly as his other parties.

Someone mentioned *The De-Evolution of Amy*. The whole course of the party changed a hundred and eighty degrees. The party went from sparkling and exquisite, to dazzling and profound.

Of the eleven guests, eight had read the novel. When Amy was mentioned, a conversation began that lasted the whole night. All guests found themselves converged in a rare, magick place and time where they could freely talk about the book with others.

Even the three guests who hadn't read the novel were helplessly caught up in the conversation. It was one of the most wonderful times in Mario's life.

Mario often went through his day thinking about Brenny. He always wanted to write her and tell her how about the party and how well he liked her book. He finally wrote her a letter and mailed it to her publisher. The letter came back three weeks later. The ink from the rubber stamp said that the addressee was no longer there and the forwarding address had expired.

Mario called the library and asked if they could find an address for the Raging Mind Press. No, the librarian said. It didn't exist. Before she could hang up, Mario asked if they could find a Brenny White's address and telephone number in Saint Cloud, Minnesota? The librarian found it on the Internet. She asked him if he wanted the e mail address as well? Mario wrote it all down.

Mario sent his letter to Brenny again. When the letter arrived, Brenny looked at the envelop. She was surprised and baffled by the names on the return address label. It said "Mario Keeps Pipe and Justin Zane." Brenny's knew that Mario must be part Indian and that Mario and Justin were either gay or very good roommates.

Brenny felt greatly complimented when she read Mario's letter. She had received several letters through her publisher (before he died), but hadn't received a letter in quite a while. Waiting this long for such a good letter almost makes the wait worthwhile, Brenny thought.

She placed the letter on the table for Denny to find it. Brenny hoped that he would read it. He had been distant to her for a long time. Brenny was hoping that if someone-a complete stranger-found value in something Brenny had done, then maybe Denny would again find value in her.

The letter sat on the table for days. Brenny knew he never touched it because it never moved, except for the times she moved it to wipe the table.

Finally, Brenny asked him, "Denny, did you see the letter I got two weeks ago about my book?"

"That letter on the table?" he asked in an indifferent voice.

Brenny tried to ignore his tone of voice.

"Yes," she replied, trying to sound positive.

She asked him nicely, "Why didn't you read it? I left it out there for you to read. Weren't you even curious about the names on the envelop? I am pretty sure one of the names is an Indian name."

Denny replied caustically, "I kinda hadda feeling it was about your book so I didn't want to read it. You know how I feel about your book. Your book was a waste of time. You never made any money from it and you could have spent your time on me and not it."

Brenny desperately tried to push her disappointment deep into her spirit.

She told Denny, "This man, Mario, wrote me a very nice letter. He says in this letter that he gave a birthday party for his friend and most of the people there had read my book. They talked about it all night and . . . "

Denny's voice became agitated as he told Brenny, "I told you, I don't want to hear about it. I wasted a lot of time and energy on your folly . . . "

Brenny interrupted him, "You never even read the book, how can you say it was a folly?"

"I don't have to read your book," Denny replied smugly and authoritatively. "I've heard about it since you started writing it. I know all about it."

"You don't even know what the book is about," Brenny answered.

"Everyone knows what your book is about you," he told her. "It was an elaborate way for you to get out of working. It was your excuse to try to be someone important when you could never be anyone important. That's what your book is about."

Brenny began to get angry.

Her words were filled with anger and outrage when she asked him, "What do you mean, an elaborate way of getting out of work? I looked for work when I was writing it and I am still looking for work right now."

Denny looked at her with his eyes filled with anger and contempt.

He told her, "You thought you would become some famous novelist so you wouldn't

have to work like the rest of the world. You thought you could just sit on your fat, greasy ass and make money writing about your fantasies."

Denny's words had already begun to cut her. Brenny's eyes began to fill with tears.

She asked him with hurt in her voice, "What's wrong with getting paid for writing? I like to write and I wrote a good book, although you will never know how good it is. I have a master's degree in library science. This alone says that I know what a good novel is."

"I told you, I don't want to hear about it anymore," Denny told her angrily.

"But Denny . . . "

"Shut the fuck up! Just shut the fuck up! Your book never made any money and I don't see any money coming in from it now. If it had any real value, then you would have made some money and you didn't make shit."

More tears welled up in Brenny's eyes. Denny looked at her with disgust and spit on the floor by her feet. Then he spit on the door before he stormed out of the house.

Denny didn't want Brenny to write. Writing was self-fulfilling for Brenny and it gave her happiness and self-value. Any self-esteem was a threat to Denny's power and control over her.

Brenny wrote Mario an e-mail letter. She told him that she enjoyed his letter and thanked him for it.

Mario was overwhelmed when he saw Brenny's letter. He wrote back and asked a few questions about her book. The letter writing continued and they became good friends.

Brenny learned that Mario worked for a psychic line. Because he was a master psychic, he made good money and his clients included some of the richest and most famous people in the world.

She later learned that both of them were born on the same day and year. Although she didn't believe in astrology like Mario did, they were definitely alike in many ways.

Mario told her that he was a Choctaw Indian. Both his parents were Indians with light complexions. All of his siblings had light-complexions like their parents and he turned out to be the only dark one. Mario's mother was fond of Italian names and she gave all her kids Italian names. His sister was named Gina and his older brother was named Luigi.

Brenny told him that her old man was an Indian, too. He was a full-blood Anishinabe from Northern Minnesota. His name was Denny Bear II. Denny was his real name, not a nickname, and that he was named after his uncle who was a medicine man.

Mario asked her how she got the name Brenny? She told him that it was a nickname for Brenda.



As their friendship developed, Mario told Brenny he was gay. She told him that she had figured it out by the address label on the envelop and because she, too, was psychic. When she was a child, she had a religious experience. Since then, she had been psychic.

This time, Mario didn't reply to her e-mail message. He picked up the phone and called. She answered on the first ring.

They talked for hours. Mario could sense that Brenny was more than moderately psychic. He knew that she was in his league, or even in a league above his.

They became fast and good friends. Later, as the friendship blossomed, Mario had Brenny talk with Justin over the phone and they became good friends, too.

All three were phone buddies for a long time and they talked many endless hours together. Mario and Justin flew out to Minnesota and visited her. Denny was in a good mood and was a good host, but Mario and Justin knew that Denny could also be a mean and a hard person. They already knew about his mood swings. Still, Denny somehow remained charming and pleasant to them during the whole time they visited.

Several months after he visited Brenny, Mario felt the chill of the Winds of Change blow through him. He knew what they meant, but decided to forget them. He wasn't ready for a change. His life was too perfect in L.A. He loved the apartment he shared with Justin and both of them shared some very good friends.

Mario knew the change was about his job. He liked his job, but deep down, he suspected that the owners of the psychic line were cheating him. Mario found out later they were.

First, Mario's check came out short. When he saw that it had been shorted, he brought out his notebooks. Mario doodled when he talked to his clients, but among the doodles, he always wrote down when he received a call, who called and when it ended. He confronted the management and won the argument. They cut him a check for the \$150 he was owed.

Six weeks later, Mario looked at his paycheck and saw that his commission had been halved. Instead of getting ninety cents per minute, he received forty-five cents. He called his boss. Eva hedged and hawed until she admitted that his pay had been cut without notifying him. She told him that the new psychics on her line were only getting thirty cents per minute.

Mario instantly asked if she were threatening him? She answered no, but that it wasn't fair that Mario made a lot of money when the new psychics made so much less.

He reminded Eva that his clients were rich and/or famous and that they only asked for him. Eventually, she capitulated and gave him back his regular rate. Mario had forgiven her the first time, but not this time.

Mario began to grow uneasy about working for the line. His gut and psychic feelings told him that the owners were still cheating him. He soon learned how much they were cheating him when he got a call from a dedicated, former client.

In the psychic line business, clients come and go, so he thought nothing when he did not hear from many of his former clients. When Mario answered the call, Bill was surprised that his call had been sent to Mario. Bill was very glad to talk with Mario again. He asked Mario how he had been feeling since the car accident?

Mario began to fill with outrage when he learned that the psychic service had lied to Bill. It took all of his power to stop his anger. When Mario pulled himself together, he told Bill that he hadn't been in a car accident and asked where Bill had heard this? Bill told him that one of the psychic line's managers had told him this last month. Since then, Bill had been encouraged and ushered to talk with other psychics.

Mario instantly realized the psychic line was bypassing calls from his regular customers to the new 'psychics' on the line. He wondered if the owners would catch their mistake of routing Bill to him. By then, Mario didn't care.

Mario was livid. He knew he was one of the best psychics on the line. He knew that he had made the psychic line a lot of money for the ten years he had worked for them. Now he knew that he was being cheated.

Then two dreams came to him. The first one took him to the spirit world. Two spirits told Mario that he was being cheated at work. They also told Mario that the owners were going to fire him. The spirits warned him to watch out for the owners because they wanted him to sign a piece of paper before they let him go. They cautioned Mario not to sign the paper.

In his second dream, Mario's spirit flew through the air above the state of Minnesota. Mario felt the cool wetness of the clouds as he soared through them. He saw a big lake toward the middle of the state and flew toward it. It was Mille Lacs Lake. Once above the lake, Mario's spirit was catapulted into it. He swam with schools of fish and felt indescribable freedom. After he swam for a while, he was airborne again. Euphoria blended with the freedom he felt. He wanted to fly forever.

Being a psychic, Mario knew that his dreams had significance. His vibes told him that his life in L.A. was coming to an end.

Mario weighed his options. If Mario quit the psychic line, he would have to find other work. He didn't want to start at the bottom of another psychic line.

Mario realized that being a professional psychic had its disadvantages. The world of psychic phone services is a small one. Most of them are owned by the same

companies. This system can easily blackball a psychic who is considered 'difficult' so they can't get work anywhere.

Outside of psychic phone services, Mario realized that there weren't many other ways to make a living as a psychic. A professional psychic could hang a Mystic Hand sign in his window and hope it attracted customers, but there were tremendous disadvantages to this.

The first disadvantage to this type of psychic counseling is that a psychic has to deal directly with a client. When counseling on the phone, a psychic can hang up if the client becomes abusive. Psychics can't do this when the client is in their face. Also, most real psychics tell the truth. Some people can't handle the truth and can react badly.

A few clients have much negative baggage inside them. These people can fill a psychic's home with their negative energy. Psychic phone counseling helps to keep negative energy where it originates.

Mario knew his career as a professional psychic was close to ending. He enjoyed working with his clients and he didn't want to quit his profession. Still, he knew that he wouldn't be working for the line much longer.

Other events fell into place. Justin was laid off from his job as a travel scheduler. His company fell prey to a merger and many of the people from the smaller company (Justin's) were let go. Justin did not know if he wanted to find another job around the city. He, too, felt the Winds of Change blow inside him.

Justin liked L.A., but it was a little too big for him. He liked living in a city. An urbanite, he loved museums, plays and all the other arts that cities generously pour out on their people.

He also liked the diversity of people that live in the cities. But deep-down, he knew the real reason why he lived in cities: Because the heartland of America was intolerant to anyone who did not embrace biblical principles, especially bisexuals like him and gays like his lover Mario.

During this time of portended change, Justin started to get sick from the smog. At thirty, he sometimes had a hard time breathing and he felt a tightness in his chest. Justin went to the doctor and all kinds of tests were performed. The doctor told Justin that his heart and lungs were fine, and that his casual use of marijuana was not affecting his lungs, either.

The saw bones told him that he was 100% sure the discomfort Justin suffered from was the smog. He told Justin that many people in L.A. suffered health problems from it. Justin began to wish that he could live in a city where the air was fresher and cleaner.

Mario got into a big argument with Eva and Justin had been out of work for a couple

of months. His check was two weeks overdue. They had bills to pay and Mario didn't want to have to borrow money to cover them. He called Eva and asked her where his check was for the fiftieth time. She feigned ignorance and innocence as she sincerely told Mario that it had been mailed two weeks ago. She knew Mario was a real psychic, so she gave him quite a performance, hoping that it would cover her growing lies. He saw right through her acting.

Mario called Brenny. He tried to sound positive when he asked her, "How are you doing goddess?"

Brenny answered, "Mario, I sense you are in trouble. Someone shorted your money, right?"

Mario replied, "Girl, you are good. Toooo good."

Brenny replied, "But that isn't why you called."

Mario told Brenny breathlessly, "You've got that right! I want you to read for me."

"Mario, I've told you before, I don't like to read for anyone. And besides, Denny hates it."

"Denny hates everything you do," Mario retorted.

Brenny replied, "No, he doesn't, but he doesn't care to hear about psychic stuff. He gets pissed off at me when my predictions don't come true, which happens about 20 percent of the time."

Mario tried to be charming and kind as he told her, "Brenny, we talked about this often. The gift doesn't work like people think it does. All people who have gifts know this. We know our gifts are not always correct or perfect. If our gifts were like that, then we could use them for our own benefit, like win money and things like that. We also know that it is impossible to see much of the future for ourselves because we are too close to it."

Mario's voice changed. It became worried and sincere when he told her, "I really need a reading. Everything is going to hell here."

Brenny thought for a few moments. He had never asked her for a reading like that before.

She answered, "Okay, but for a little while. Denny should be coming back from work soon and when he does, that's the end of it. I don't want him to suspect that I've been doing this. God knows I don't want that man to start bitching and I'm not going to give him a reason to start."

"Does he still bitch about everything else?" asked Mario wryly.

"Yes."

Mario told Brenny, "Denny doesn't like psychic things because he's jealous, not because he doesn't believe in it."

Brenny told him, "Mario, you know that Denny's uncle is a medicine man, so you can't say that. Denny grew up with mysticism. He used to tell me, when things were still good between us, that he saw lots of supernatural things. Stuff that no one would ever believe. He said once that he saw a battle between good and evil fought in a starless, moonless sky.

No, he believes. He believes in all types of mysticism. Denny just doesn't like it."

"Okay, okay," Mario replied, "I don't want to hear about Denny and his problems."

"Don't talk about him like that," Brenny said defensively. "He's the only thing between me and the homeless shelter. He does take care of me . . ."

"Brenny!" Mario replied, "He gives you a place to live, but he isn't good to you. He's abusive to you mentally, psychologically, emotionally and spiritually. He doesn't support your writing, and you have this incredible and rare writing talent. He's . . ."

Brenny interrupted, "Do you want to talk about Denny or do you want a reading? I only have time for one thing before he gets home. Pick your poison."

"The reading," Mario replied in a small, lightly desperate voice. "What are you going to use?"

"What do you mean, what am I going to use?" Brenny asked. "You know how I feel about Tarot cards, crystal balls and the like. Fun to play with, but if I am going to look, I am going to see it with my mind. I don't need any tool but it. Let's start with questions. Ask me what you want to know."

"What do you see about my work?" Mario asked.

Brenny looked inwardly to a center place in her mind. She emptied herself of all thoughts, all worries, all feelings, or anything else that could influence what she saw. Brenny took a couple of deep breaths and listened. She heard it: the familiar sound of a light hum deep within her, around her heart. The hum told her that her power was working.

Brenny told him, "I see two women, one older and one twenty years younger, but not sisters or relatives. They drive Cadillacs. One Cadillac is brown and the other is gold. These women are cheating you."

Mario got excited, "Go on! Go on!"

"They are your bosses," Brenny replied.

"Girl, you are good!" Mario told her, "I never told you who I worked for and now you have described them perfectly, including their cars. So tell me, why are they cheating me?"

"Something about a contract . . . Your contract with them is no longer valid. They are worried that you might take something away from them. Something like clients or money or something. They want you to sign a new contract to protect them and their interests. That is why they are keeping money from you. Your bosses won't give it to you until you sign this contract. But there's a problem right now. Their lawyer is out of the country so they can't get the contract completed until he gets back."

Brenny's mind filled with other images. She told Mario, "I also see that your bosses don't like you. You have all the best clients and the other readers are jealous. The owners are also worried that many of your clients are too dependent on you because they will only talk with you. Your bosses realize that this is not healthy for their business, especially since they plan to let you go. They don't want you, but don't want to lose the big clients, either. "

Mario began to taste the acid of fear and betrayal. He asked her, "But why do they want to let me go? I've worked faithfully for them for over ten years."

"I can only tell you what I see . . . " Brenny replied sadly. "I see more. Your bosses pay you more money than the other readers and they don't like it, although you are making them oodles of money. They are blinded by their greed and they are jealous because they have never had a psychic bone in their body."

"So what do I do, Brenny? "

"Mario, you already know what you are going to do. You are going to tell your bosses to shove the job up their ass. But before you do that, you are going to get even. You are going to get the phone numbers from your best clients and begin to give them personal readings, right? You've already thought about this, huh?"

"Bingo, again, Brenny. Tell me more."

"Mario, why are you unhappy living in L.A.? Justin's not happy, either. He's sick."

Brenny could hear a shriek on the other end of the phone. "Justin doesn't have AIDS, does he? Oh my Godddd . . . "

She answered, "Mario, how could Justin have AIDS when both of you have been faithful to each other since your first kiss? No, but I see him feeling sick. He has a tightness in his chest and he sometimes has a hard time breathing."

"It's probably the weed," Mario interrupted. His voice was laced with fear and concern. "I have told him to quit time and time again . . . "

"No, it's not the weed, Mario, something else. Does Justin have allergies? Something

in the environment where you live is making him feel sick. Ask him."

"So where will Justin and I be in one year?"

"Somewhere in the Central United States."

"Where, Brenny? Which state?"

"The place you saw in your dream."

"Brenny, I saw Minnesota in my dream!"

Brenny was surprised by his answer. Underneath, she hoped that he didn't move to her state, but she felt Mario's fear about Justin and change.

Trying to soften his worries, she told him, "Then I guess I should say, 'welcome neighbor'."

Mario thought about snow and shuddered. He told Brenny, "I can't move to Minnesota. That place is too cold in the winter and Justin is really a baby when it comes to cold weather. He'd never make it."

Brenny replied, "You'll adjust. Everyone does. Most of the population around here looks forward to winter. That's when things become lively. Maybe both of you will enjoy winter, even if you don't move here, but to somewhere else." She secretly hoped that if they did move, that they would stay away from the central part of the United States.

Mario laughed as he told her, "Get real, Brenny. Justin and I will never become the lumberjack-types. Besides, plaid flannel shirts make me look too fat. "

Brenny laughed back. She told him, "Mario, you already know that people around here don't wear lumberjack clothes. Shit, lots of people, me included, wear shorts if the temp is above zero. We also wear heavy, woolen socks with sandals in the winter.

Believe it or not, Minnesota isn't so bad. The Cities are very hip and eclectic. Minneapolis and Saint Paul are cool places for gays to live."

Mario asked her, "Brenny, why are you trying to talk me into moving there when my senses tell me that you don't want me there?"

She told him truthfully, "No, Mario. I love you and Justin dearly, but I don't want you to move this way."

"Why Brenny? Don't you know that you are our goddess and we are your biggest fans?"

"Because you would complicate my life too much." Brenny answered carefully.

"Being around you would compel me to work on my psychic gifts. They are trying to grow, Mario. I can feel them inside me, trying to change, trying to grow."

"Don't you want them to grow and blossom, Brenny? Don't you want to evolve spiritually?"

"Mario," she told him, "I am burned out. I don't have a job and that greatly affects the quality of my life. I live in a world of shit and I am barely getting through it. My nerves are so raw and you want to know if I want to evolve spiritually? I can't even evolve in my own life."

But let's talk about you moving here. I don't know if I have the energy to be around you. You exude energy in every moment of the day. I don't think I could keep up with you."

"You wouldn't have to, Brenny. Justin and I would carry you."

"I'm a big girl, Mario."

"Well Justin and I will have to work out more at the gym."

When Justin came home later that day, Mario was waiting. Justin knew that something was worrying him. Mario asked Justin about his chest and breathing. Justin was shocked that Mario knew. He sadly admitted that he hadn't shared his worries with Mario about his health because he was afraid that Mario would complain about the pot smoking.

Mario's eyes welled with tears. "I love you, Justin," Mario told him with much emotion in his voice. "You can always tell me anything."

Justin walked over to Mario and held him. Mario began to cry. He felt sad when he saw Mario weeping, so Justin wept with him. Worried there was a communication problem between them, they stopped all the activity in their lives so they could talk. They talked for several days until they were satisfied that they had worked out the bugs in their relationship.

In the end, Mario quit his job, but not before he got all his major clients' private phone numbers. Later, he found out that Brenny was right: the psychic line owners were afraid he would steal his clients and this was why they wanted him to sign a contract. He had the State of California go after the withheld pay and he got it.

Mario began to privately consult with the clients he took with him. He established an 800 number for calls and the tattoo shop on the corner let him use their credit card equipment. Len, the tattoo store owner, charged Mario a straight 10 percent for the use of the equipment. Even after being surcharged the 10 percent, Mario was making enormous amounts of money.

Out of the blue, money fell into Mario's lap. His childless aunt had died two years

before and she had been married to a white man who owned property. Her husband had died many years ago. She had left Mario money quite a bit of money in her will. Nobody in his family told Mario this because they didn't like it that he was gay.

Aunt Ola left him enough money to buy a small house and hot dog stand in L.A. That, or he could buy a nice home and start a business somewhere else.

The Winds of Change were blowing harder upon them. Mario and Justin knew it was time to relocate. Neither of them could agree where to move. Mario wanted to move to Santa Fe and Justin wanted to move to Miami.

Finally, both of them decided to make a game out of it to decide where they should move. Mario tore a map of the US out of his atlas and taped it to their dart board. He let Justin do the honors of throwing the dart. Justin threw twice, just missing the bottom of the map. He aimed a little higher and threw. The dart landed on the city of Minneapolis.

Surprised, Mario remembered his dream and Brenny's prediction. He told Justin about this. As he finished, the Winds of Change blew through both of them. They decided that all signs pointed to Minnesota.

They hoped that they would see Brenny regularly. Mario and Justin joked about all the things they could do to stay warm in such a cold place.

Mario began to dream about having his own psychic line. Sixth Sense Psychic Services would hire elite psychics to provide counseling to clients. Mario would charge customers \$1.99 a minute, pay his workers \$1 of that minute, and he could still make lots of money. He would make this dream come true in Minnesota.

XI

Safe and warm at Mario and Justin's house, Brenny began to sleep. As her slumber deepened, she began to dream.

She found herself on the top of a mountain, looking down. Looking right and left, she saw other mountains and they surrounded a valley. Everything was green and blue. Stunned by the beauty of the scene, she wanted to fly from the mountain to the valley below. Just as she began to fly, she felt herself drawn somewhere else.

Brenny was drawn to a beautiful city that came out of nowhere. It was surrounded by short walls made of light beige stone. The city shone with white houses made of the same material. Brenny saw a sky with no sun and she realized that she was in the spirit world.

She felt her soul being pulled into the city, through beautiful streets made of light pink cobblestones. Lovely flowers of all colors grew from rectangle flower boxes as she flew through the city. There were no glass or shutters on the windows of the houses.

Brenny's soul was pulled toward the window on the second floor of a house. She flew through the window and landed gracefully in a sparsely furnished room. The soft, white light of this world shone brightly through the window to light the whole room. She saw every corner of the bare and spare looking room.

An empty chair sat in the back of the room. She saw five, six-inch mattresses to her left. They were stacked on top of each other to form a bed big enough for two persons. The bed had no covers or sheets. A memory came back to her. She remembered the bed in the dream she had the night Denny threw her out.

Her eyes searched for him. He was standing in the middle of the room with his arms tucked together across his chest. When her eyes caught his, his arms dropped and he moved toward her. Love radiated from him as he walked toward her. This was when Brenny remembered that he was her lover.

It was the man in her dreams. The man she had been wished for.

Brenny wanted to say something to him, but he willed her to be quiet. She fought the muteness, but the man had power over her tongue. The man felt her anger over her powerlessness.

He put his right forefinger to his lips and said, "Shhh . . ." He told her sweetly and kindly, "I have a lot to tell and something I want to give you. We do not have many moments, so I must make all of them count."

He looked deeply into Brenny's eyes. His eyes invited her to look inside them. As her eyes searched his, she saw the intense love and compassion he had for her. It filled her with surprise and wonder.

He pulled her close and she put her arms around him. She felt warm, loved and sensual. Jude held her face with his hands and gently tilted it up to look into his face. This time Brenny could see every detail. He was more handsome than she remembered.

"We do not have many moments together," he told her, "So I am keeping you from speaking. My name is Jude.

I have missed you, Brenny. The only thing I look forward to is our visits. We can only 'visit' when your soul travels."

His lips began to kiss her face. After he kissed it, he kissed her lips many times.

Jude told her, "I heard you calling and wishing for me, but you did not travel. You were probably too tired. I know what happened to you, so I wanted to comfort you. I tried to find my way to your world, but I could not find it. Your world is hidden from us and very few of us ever find it. The ones that do find it usually forget where or how they found it. That is the way it is.

"I have many things to tell you and I need you to remember all these things. Do you think you can will yourself to remember everything I tell you?"

Brenny's eyes told him 'yes'.

"Okay, Brenny, close your eyes and will your consciousness to memorize these things."

Brenny closed her eyes and with all the might and energy inside her, willed herself to remember the events to come.

Jude told her, "I want you to remember that I love you. I also want you to remember that I am real and everything you experience with me is real."

Brenny wondered how she met him. She also wondered why he was so familiar to her.

Jude heard her thought.

He told her, "Brenny, you sent a message out through the heavens. You asked if there was anyone out there that would love you."

Brenny remembered. It was right before she met Denny. She was lonely, drunk and feeling sorry for herself. She lived in a second-floor apartment with a veranda.

Brenny had gone to a party at a neighbor's house where she had drunk too many beers and mixed drinks. Brenny partied with the neighbors until midnight and then she stumbled down the hallway to her own place. As soon as she came through the door, she took her clothes off.

It was a warm, spring night and the weather was beautiful. She decided to stand outside on the balcony. As she immersed herself in the blackest of shadows, soft warm breezes caressed her body. She wished someone would touch her like the breezes did. Sadness filled her and she began to sob.

Brenny remembered that she looked into a starry, moonless sky.

She remembered asking with her heart, "Hey, anyone out there? Is there anyone I know out there . . . like maybe someone I knew before I was put in this miserable place? I am suffering. I am suffering from loneliness. I long to be loved. Can you help me to find my soul mate? Please help me."

Jude heard Brenny remember and he smiled.

He put his cheek against hers and whispered into it, "Never send a message out to Creation unless you mean it. It may not get to where you want it to go, but someone will hear it. The person who hears it may be benevolent or malevolent. But someone will hear. For some reason, I heard your voice."

Brenny wondered how he found her since he couldn't find her world. Jude heard her thought.

He told her, "I waited until you came to my side. Most mortals come here to visit and recharge. When my heart felt you in this domain, I followed the energy until I found you."

Brenny began to understand more things. She began to grasp what Jude told her and she began to understand more about the spirit world.

In her mind, Brenny saw two places, one to the left and one to the right. The one on the left was an enormous place filled with many worlds and with countless beings. The place on the right was very small. She knew it was the artificial, material existence of the universe.

Very few lives inhabited the universe as contrasted with the spirit world. Between both places, she saw a fine grey line that divided them.

Brenny understood that spirits could instantly transport themselves to any place within their mammoth realm. She also knew that they kept busy while they were waiting. All were waiting for God to end the material realm and put everything together as He promised. Spirits never talked about the waiting, but everyone knew.

Brenny understood that not all spirits in the spirit world had previously lived in the material realm. Jude was one of them.

Brenny thought about good and evil. He heard her thoughts about this.

"No, Brenny, I am not evil," he told her. "You wonder what I am. I am above your spiritual level and below the spiritual level of angels."

Jude looked sincerely into Brenny's eyes. He told her, "I am the male who loves you and who makes love to you when you come this way. I am your spiritual lover."

Jude drew her closer to him. This is when Brenny noticed that both of them were naked. She felt desire fill her and she wanted to make love with Jude. He heard her thought and smiled at her. Brenny sensed that he wanted her as badly as she wanted him.

Then she felt him fight his desire. Her mind told her that knew he wanted to speak for a little longer.

He told her, "There is so much I want to tell you, but there are never enough moments. I want to remind you of all the places that we have been together. I want to remind you of and all the love that we have made, you and I.

It is your reality that prevents you from remembering much of this. That is the nature of Creation. Just try, Brenny. Just try to remember the things I am telling you. Please

do not let the reality of your world fog my words and actions."

A spark of sadness filled Jude's eyes.

Jude said to her "Brenny, you are going to go through a big change. I feel it when I touch you. I have felt it for awhile. It is a big change and I am worried that you will forget about me."

Brenny remembered the Winds of Change. She wondered what the change was and she wondered if he knew?

Jude's grey eyes pierced hers.

He told her, "No, Brenny, I do not know what the change is and I wish I did. All I know is that the change is coming and I do not want you to forget me."

He continued, "To make sure you remember me and what I've told you, I am going to make love to you and charge it with my spirit."

She wished for him to touch her. Instantly, she found herself on the mattresses with Jude. His member was pressing against her and it was hard and hot. She wanted him to take her immediately, but he nodded 'no' as he smiled at her.

His arms encompassed around her and he began to kiss her lips and face. Jude touched her breasts and belly. He touched her between her legs and then he ran his hands lightly down her back.

Brenny turned to lie on her back, signaling for him to enter her. Her anticipation was becoming more urgent. But he would not enter her. She tried to listen to his thoughts. He felt her probing and stopped it.

Brenny began to become confused and frustrated. Jude felt her feelings and he looked deep in her eyes. This time, his eyes seemed to smile at her, although they remained intense.

He told her, "I want to give you something so you will know I am real and that this is real." Jude began to kiss her neck. Bolts of pleasure and desire ran through her, shocking and teasing her senses. Then Jude began to suck her neck.

Brenny couldn't think, talk or move. It was the most pleasurable thing she had ever felt. It magnified her passion as rushes of desire shot through her like thunderbolts.

She had never been so hot. Her eyes kept begging him to help stop the fire, but he wanted to wait a little longer. Jude was determined to make Brenny remember him. Brenny was frustrated, but there was nothing she could do about it but to get hotter as she waited.

Jude had never meant to go so far with a mortal, but it had already gone too far. He realized why God did not care for such relationships. They caused too much pain.

Jude's love for Brenny caused him to suffer. When he wasn't with her, he missed her. When he was with her, the moments went by too fast.

In the beginning, Jude had only intended to visit with Brenny when she came to the spirit realm. Then something happened. He began to enjoy their visits and he began to look forward to them. By then, something had taken root inside his heart. First, the root was fondness, but as the affection began to grow, the root turned to love. Her sweetness captivated him.

Jude wanted to open his heart to her. He felt change within her and his heart told him that this change would alienate her from him. He wished that he and Brenny could always be together, but he knew how impossible his wish was. At least for the moment.

Brenny was starting to get impatient and it shown in her face. Jude told Brenny in a serious voice, "I want you look at me and memorize who I am. When I think you have looked long and hard enough, then you shall feel me like you never have."

Brenny felt Jude will her look at him. His grey eyes turned dark with severity. "Go on," he told her, "Look at me. Know me."

Brenny's eyes were drawn to look at Jude's beautiful and kind face. He looked like he was about thirty years old. She mentally noted how perfect his light complexion was and how white his teeth were.

Brenny memorized every curve on his face, including the curves of the hair around his face. Jude's golden blond hair shined in the light of the room. It spilled against her head and across her chest.

Satisfied that she had explored his face enough, he told her, "Now remember the rest of me."

She felt her hands and eyes drawn to his loins. Brenny noticed that Jude's pubic hairs were the same color as his golden hair. His large penis was hotter than before.

His perfect body was lean and muscular. It felt smooth and warm.

She felt Jude drawing her eyes back to his.

"Now, Brenny," he told her with love in his voice, "I am going to lock your eyes with mine. You won't be able to move them or close them. This is because I want you to watch me fill you and I want to make sure you know it is me doing this."

The seriousness in Jude's eyes gained in intensity. His seriousness made a cold chill run through Brenny. Jude felt her chill and it pleased him. He smiled. He was glad that he had her attention.

Jude kissed Brenny deeply, never losing eye contact with her eyes. Each of his hands held a breast. Her nipples were between his thumbs and index fingers. He squeezed her nipples. Her back arched back but her eyes never left his. She began to get hotter and she wondered how much hotter she was going to have to get before Jude did something about it.

Brenny's eyes reflected her passion. This pleased him and his eyes reflected his delight. Brenny looked into his eyes and saw his endless and urgent desire for her. Although he was trying to control events, Jude was very aroused. This caught him off guard.

Jude began to feel overwhelmed. He used some of his power to reign in his feelings and get better control.

He told her, "To be sure you remember me, ask me to enter you."

Brenny found that she could move her lips.

She replied, "Please enter me."

"Now say my name," Jude told her.

Brenny was surprised by the seriousness in his voice. Jude saw her surprise.

His voice softened with love and desire as he told her, "Say my name first."

She thought about what was happening to her. Jude heard her thinking that she might be having an erotic dream. Before he could express his displeasure, Brenny blew him a kiss. This instantly melted his sadness and frustration.

Sweetly, Brenny told him, "Jude. Your name is Jude. Please enter me, Jude."

She waited for Jude to enter her, but he didn't. Instead, he told her, "Now beg me, Brenny. Beg me to enter you. I want to know that all your senses are focused on me." Jude's eyes flashed wildly and powerfully. She could feel the energy of his hunger for her. Hot and cold chills shot through her.

Every one of Brenny's senses filled with urgency. She wanted him and she needed him. With all her might, her mind cried out to him.

"Jude. I beg you, Jude. I beg you to enter me. I cannot remember wanting anything more than wanting you."

Her last sentence pleased him but he worried if Brenny would remember saying those

words. A small melancholy hurt cropped up behind his heart. The pain of it almost distracted him.

Brenny was getting hotter and very impatient.

"Please Jude," she begged him, "Become one with me." Jude was surprised at her words. His heart expanded with love for her and he began to enter her.

Her body and spirit burned like a blaze as he entered her. The feeling was overwhelming and he only had half of himself in her. It was the most erotic and loving feeling Brenny ever felt.

Brenny remembered that she knew Jude very well and that they had made love often. Jude heard her thought.

He told her, "Yes, Brenny. We have been lovers since the beginning. I have been waiting for you to remember.

The paradoxical realities we live in will not let you remember these things clearly. But do not think, Brenny. Just feel. Keep looking into my eyes and feel me inside you."

Looking deeply into her eyes, Jude pushed the rest of himself inside her. She wanted to scream from pleasure, but his tongue was coiled around hers. Her silent scream ran from her tongue down his, making him shudder.

Jude pulled out and pushed himself deeper into her. She tried to scream again, only louder, but she still couldn't make a sound. The power of her scream reverberated into his tongue again. This time, the power of her scream echoed and shook all the way through him. Jude's grey eyes reflected his intense arousal.

When she saw Jude's growing desire for her, the brown irises in Brenny's eyes grew large with excitement. The pleasure from his eyes leaped into hers, making her body jump against his.

"Now, Brenny," Jude told her seriously, "Call my name for each stroke." Jude pulled himself back and pushed deeply inside her again. This thrust felt better than the previous. She tried to cry out in pleasure, but he still wouldn't let her.

Jude's eyes burned into hers with more intensity.

"Call my name," he told her. His voice was demanding and compelling.

Brenny's body heaved against him. His name formed on her lips.

She said, "Jude." This deeply pleased him and he plunged inside her again.

He reminded her, "Want more? Say my name."

"Jude!" responded Brenny.

His face filled with pleasure and happiness. He looked at her with love in his eyes and then he thrust inside her again. The pleasure of it raced through her. Brenny wanted to scream his name, but he controlled the level of her voice. Instead, she whispered his name into his lips as she licked and kissed them.

Brenny began to feel Jude's heart fuse with hers. A tremendous outpouring of love began to flow out of his heart into hers. Feelings, emotions and desire became one between them. With every thrust, Jude poured more love into her. Brenny's heart ached for more of this love, while the rest of her ached for Jude to be inside her.

She continued to call Jude by his name and it continued to please him. The love making became more intense and intimate.

As she felt him deeper inside her, he told her with his mind, "I love you, Brenny. Never forget this."

After Jude spoke, the excitement grew between them. He was beginning to have a hard time controlling events. Instead, Jude gave into his feelings. His strokes became faster and harder.

Jude felt Brenny trying to have an orgasm. It took all his power to prevent it. He had something else planned.

Brenny's eyes told Jude's eyes that she was not happy about him slowing the pace. His eyes told her to trust him.

She tried to close her eyes for a few moments, but Jude forbade it. He wanted her to look at him and remember him.

Somehow, she broke free of his will. Before Jude could gather his energy to get back in control, Brenny locked his eyes on hers. He tried to move his eyes, but they were frozen with hers. Jude was surprised that Brenny had so much power. It turned him on.

Jude began to kiss Brenny frantically and passionately. Her lips kissed him back as fiercely. She continued to please him by calling him by his name.

Brenny's cheeks became flush and pupils in Brenny's eyes grew large. For a moment, Brenny lost her concentration on Jude's eyes and they broke free of her power. Before Brenny could think, Jude's eyes regained control of hers. This time, Brenny knew she wouldn't be able to break free from them.

Jude felt an orgasm build in her again. He stopped it. Disappointment and frustration showed in Brenny's face. Jude felt her disapproval and it almost made him feel sad until he remembered something. Jude began to focus.

His heart and mind became serious. He stopped his thrusts, but he left himself inside her. Brenny felt the intensity of his seriousness and wondered what he would do next. Although Brenny was more hot than ever, she could do nothing but wait for him.

Brenny had her arms around him and Jude took them off. He gently laid them by her side. Jude became too intoxicated when Brenny put her arms around him. He needed to think clearly.

Jude's face tightened with seriousness. Without warning, he pushed her legs up and pushed deeply inside her. Pleasure raced through her. Brenny tried to hold him, but he willed her not to move. Paralyzed, her eyes filled with questions. He ignored them.

Brenny was getting angry and frustrated. She wanted him to say something or give her a smile, but he would not break his concentration. She tried to call his name, but she couldn't do that, either. He had forbidden it because he didn't want any distractions.

He opened her legs wider. Jude withdrew himself until he was almost out of her. After a moment, he plunged so deeply inside her that her being jumped up. Jude ignored his pleasure and hers. Brenny tried to close her eyes and savor her passion, but he forbid it.

He began to pummel her. An energy began to build inside him.

Jude closed his eyes tight and concentrated. Although Brenny's eyes were no longer under the will of his eyes, she continued to watch his face in fascination.

Brenny tried to come several times and Jude quickly turned it back with his energy. Jude began to rock back and forth inside Brenny. He did this for several moments. As he rocked inside her, Brenny noticed that the room began to fill with light.

The source of the light was Jude. Immense and intense white light glowed from him. He kept his eyes closed as he built the energy of white light inside him.

The light in the room became so bright that Brenny could see nothing else but it. The whole room was wrapped in a blanket of light. Although Brenny could not see Jude anymore, she could still feel him on her and in her.

When Jude had created all the energy he could make, he turned his attention to her. He opened his eyes and they were no longer grey, but a bright violet. These violet eyes were the only things she could see in the light.

He willed her to look at his eyes. Slowly, the features of Jude's face appeared to her amid the brightness. Jude stopped rocking and looked at her.

"This is for you Brenny," Jude told with sincerity. Without warming, he rammed into her with tremendous force and energy. Brenny screamed and grabbed him. Excitement flooded through him and passion overwhelmed them both. He plunged

into her again and her being arched and thrashed. Brenny's legs began to shake. Her body positioned itself to have an orgasm. Again, Jude prevented her from having one.

"No," he told her, "Not yet."

The white light inside Jude made him feel very warm. Brenny liked this feeling and she liked the way his blond hair felt on her breasts. Although Jude had cooled her off, Brenny no longer felt frustration. She felt anticipation.

Jude felt the pressure of the light and of his desire grow larger inside him. He also knew that he had very few moments left with her.

Jude looked at her lovingly and told her, "I love you."

This time, Jude was going to let it build all the way. He let Brenny put her arms around him and he kissed her face one more time. Then he began to push wildly and deeply inside her. Their passion raged as they pushed themselves into each other. Jude held on to Brenny tight, burying his fingers into her back, right below her shoulder blades.

He thrust into her until she was ready to come.

Jude held her orgasm back as he said, "Now Brenny, call me by my name one more time."

His name rose in her throat. She screamed, "Jude!" He released Brenny from his will.

She screamed as the first wave of orgasms hit her. He felt the power of her orgasms flow through him like tidal waves. Jude could not control his desire anymore as he met her energy with great waves of his own energy.

The sheer strength of his orgasm shocked and surprised her. It went through her like a bomb blast, making her own orgasms climb even higher. A couple of moments after his orgasm, the white light flowed out of his soul and into hers. This light filled her with love and happiness fueling her orgasms to climb higher. They were so riveting, that her tongue was frozen. She had orgasm after orgasm as he emptied his spirit into her.

Jude was surprised at the power of their pleasure. Love had been his only motive to be intimate with her. Now he only loved her more.

Brenny bit her lip and rocked wildly with orgasms. He pulled her arms away from his back and looked at her one more time.

"Maybe now you will not forget me, Brenny," he told her and his face began to fade away. She tried to say his name as everything faded to black.

XII

Brenny's eyes flashed open. Startled, her first response was to sit up. She tried to, but she found that she couldn't move her muscles. She was paralyzed because her whole body convulsed with intense orgasms. Brenny realized that they were more gifts from the man in her dream.

He wanted me to have these orgasms when I was awake so I would remember him, Brenny thought. She thought of his name: Jude.

Her orgasms came faster and bigger. Brenny squeezed her eyes shut, bit her lip and dug her hands into the quilts as wave after wave of orgasms riveted her body. Brenny tried to open her eyes so she could see the clock. Squinting, she saw that it said 12:10. Reaching for the book on the bed stand, she pushed it off with her left hand. It tumbled to the floor.

Brenny was breathing deep, fast and hard. She clenched her teeth as the last tidal wave of orgasms hit her and she would have screamed if she could have found her voice. She felt her body lift two feet off the bed. Her body levitated for a few moments before it fell on the bed. Her body burned and it began to heave.

She gave herself to the invisible man that was invading her. With all the power of her heart, Brenny told Jude to thoroughly fill her. Brenny told him that she wanted him more than anything.

Jude's face filled her mind as he told her, "Then you know what you have to do. "

Brenny screamed his name with her mind, "Jude, Jude, Jude!"

The last and biggest orgasm engulfed her. She began to shake uncontrollably. Sensations she had never felt before filled every part of her. Brenny lay paralyzed, unable to move, while she enjoyed the overwhelming power and pleasure that surged through her.

Afterwards, Brenny felt weak and happy. She struggled to see the clock. It said 1:15.

She closed her eyes and took a deep breath. Brenny fell into the black well of deep sleep.

When she woke up, she felt happy, relieved, recharged and loved. Brenny tried to remember her dream and memorize all the details.

As she lay in the bed remembering her experience, she wondered was this real or my imagination? When she thought this, a male's voice invaded her mind. It was Jude's voice.

"I love you," Brenny . . . " he told her as his voice faded.

She sat up in a jolt. Brenny wanted to see what the time was, but could not locate the clock. As she gained her bearings, Brenny realized her head was at the foot of the bed. She wondered how she could have completely turned around and not felt it. Brenny instinctively looked to her right and saw the clock. The time said 3:15. She looked at the floor and saw Lila's book lying by the feet of the bed stand.

"Mario!" Brenny screamed with her mind. "Please come here!"

Brenny sat frozen. She tried to recall everything and memorize it.

Less than two minutes later, Mario raced into the room and turned on the light. "I heard you call for me Brenny," he told her. "I heard and felt the urgency. What's wrong?"

"Something happened to me, Mario. Something supernatural, I think. Either that, or I've just had the world's biggest wet dream . . . "

Brenny pulled her long, brown hair away to the left side of her neck. Her hand brushed against something that felt strange and sensitive on her neck. Brenny reached for her purse on the floor. She dumped it out on the bed and rummaged through the mess looking for her mirror.

The energy of Mario's concern for her clashed against the other energy in the room, making Mario feel uncomfortable. She also knew that her nakedness made him feel more awkward.

Brenny told him, "Mario, this is important! I am sorry about all the energy in the room and I am sorry that I am naked, but you are going to have to overlook these things for a moment."

She pulled and draped the sheet around her before she talked again.

Brenny told Mario, "Something happened to me and I didn't have time to get dressed. Besides, I wanted you to see me sitting here at the end of the bed. It is not the direction I was originally in. I wanted you to be a witness that you found me on the opposite end of the bed."

Brenny found her compact and popped it open. She looked in the mirror. On the left side of her neck, she saw a big, red hickey. It was in the shape of a heart. Brenny's heart began to pound fast.

"Look at this, Mario!" Brenny exclaimed as she turned her neck toward him. "Can erotic dreams leave marks like this?"

Mario saw something on Brenny's back when she turned. He looked at the hickey and then turned his head to look at her back.

"Brenny," Mario told her with the most sincerity and concern, "You've got fingernail

marks on your back, right below your shoulders."

Mario reached out and touched one of them.

He asked her, "Does this hurt?"

Brenny shook her head 'no'. Suddenly, Mario saw the face of a beautiful man flash through his mind. He was blond and had grey eyes.

Mario stopped touching her wound. The face went away.

He counted ten fingernail marks on her back. Mario thought, whatever nailed her must have been human looking.

He looked at Brenny's face. He noticed that something was missing. The cigarette burn was gone. Healed.

"Brenny, the burn on your cheek is gone," he quietly told her.

Brenny turned the mirror to look at where the burn had been. Surprised, Brenny touched her cheek where the burn had been.

For a moment, Brenny felt disappointed. She had wanted Denny to see it or a scar and now it was gone. She wanted Denny to know what he did to her because most of the evidence of the injuries he inflicted on her disappeared within a week or two. Brenny hoped that if Denny knew how badly he was hurting her, that he would feel remorse. She hoped that remorse would be the catalyst for him to change his behavior.

Brenny ignored the fact that Denny would never feel any regret about his violence and abuse. Although she was a trained social worker and knew better, she was trying to forget that most abusive men never feel contrition for their crimes against women.

Brenny was thinking like an abused woman: she was hoping that Denny would be the one abuser who would 'see the light' and change his ways. She knew in her heart that Denny would never change, but she still didn't want to give up hope.

Now Denny was left off the hook again. It seemed like Denny always found a way to get off the hook and not have to answer about his actions. He had hurt her and he had burned her. This time, he had put a wound on her that should and would have healed into a nasty scar. Now the physical evidence of the wound was gone . . . Brenny continued to feel disappointment.

The red lights went off inside her and she caught her negative and destructive thinking. She stopped the thoughts. She stopped them because realized that if Denny had seen the scar from the burn, that he would have made excuses to deny his responsibility for it. Just like the broken hand. And just like the broken hand, he would have blamed her for making him hurt her like that.

Gratitude filled her. Brenny was glad that Jude had healed her with his love. She realized this was the richest gift she had ever received.

Mario's sixth senses were overwhelmed. He felt great supernatural and magickal power in the room. Mario secretly worried that he would get another erection like the last time when he had felt the Winds of Change around Brenny. He held his breath and waited to for her to tell him more details of what had happened to her.

She told him, "Mario, when I woke, I was having orgasms from my dream. I pushed Lila's book on the floor to prove what was happening to me was real and that I was not having a 'dream within a dream'."

Mario saw the book on the floor.

Brenny told him about her dream she put her clothes on. Then she sat on her bed and finished the tale. Mario sat on the desk chair and listened.

Mario's vibes told him that Brenny's story was true. He also knew that her experience was dangerous and forbidden as it was against Cosmic Law.

A magician, Mario knew that some ethereal beings broke this law. Somehow, despite all the barriers, they found their way to this dimension and into human lives. Creative people with strong, wild hearts and magickal ability were very attractive these spirit beings.

Intimate socializing between material and nonmaterial beings was the biggest reason why God sent the Great Flood, Mario thought. Amid his thoughts, Mario understood that Brenny's spirit lover felt true love for her.

Brenny worried that her sexual experience might be sin. Things in her life were bad enough. Sinning against God could only make things worse, she thought. Brenny realized that her relationship with God had been real strained lately.

Despite her worry about sinning, Brenny knew in her heart that wanted to be with Jude again. Although she didn't love Jude, she found that she cared about him very much. Also, Jude gave her what she needed but could not receive in life.

Brenny told Mario about everything that had happened.

When she finished, she asked him, "What do you think?"

He looked at her thoughtfully and told her in a serious voice, "I think it's real and I think it's dangerous. Worse, I think it happened at a bad time. Your life is very hurting and needy right now. People in pain are more easily seduced."

Brenny replied, "According to Jude, I have known him longer than I've known Denny."

Mario's psychic energy told him that Brenny was telling him the truth.

He told her, "You still met him during a hard period in your life."

Brenny thought for a moment. She told Mario, "When I look back at my life, I don't see many times when things were not hurting and needy."

"You are defending your lover," Mario told her seriously.

"Yes," Brenny replied, "I am. But you are also talking about vulnerability. Almost everyone on this planet is a member of the Walking Wounded Club, particularly females. Hurting people are more vulnerable to spiritual predators, but you and I know there are many benevolent persons out there."

She looked at Mario confused and asked him, "And what do you mean seduced? For once, I felt very loved by someone. So what if he is another kind of being? At least someone good cares for me, even if he lives across the universe and deep in the spirit world."

Guilty feelings began to crop up inside her. Brenny didn't know if she should laugh or cry. She chose to laugh.

Brenny told Mario, "For some reason, I feel guilty. I feel like I stepped out on Denny."

"Jude's not a man," Mario warned her.

"I know that, but he's a male," she replied.

Mario didn't approve of supernatural relationships. He didn't like the direction of the conversation and its energy. As he struggled for something to say, he said the wrong thing, "You know Brenny, as for Denny, maybe you were meant to go through your life . . ."

Brenny knew what Mario was about to say and she didn't like it. She interrupted him and said, "Without a decent partner? Go through life without a decent partner? I could probably live with that, except that I would have to live without the other 'fillers' as well. Essential things that sustain and keep you alive. One of those essential things is called a good job."

Mario regretted his words. He knew that they had opened up old and smarting wounds inside her. Mario knew that Brenny was barely coping with her new wounds and emergencies. She didn't need any more stressors.

Brenny replied, "You and Justin make me feel loved, but my being is empty. It has been abused too much and I cannot buffer life's blows like I used to. I am bankrupt in too many ways and I need a miracle to pull me through this time. I worry about my mental health and I worry if I will have a nervous breakdown or hurt myself."

Mario looked at her with worried eyes. He fought for something to say, but before he could speak, she continued.

She told him in a serious voice, "Yes, Mario, I think about killing myself. I try not to think about it, but it often comes to mind. I hate living, but then I don't want to stop doing it, either. I'm not a quitter and I don't want to leave this planet a loser. I also want to do something substantial before I die.

Some days are halfway liveable when Denny treats me decently or shows me a little love. But then I always have to watch my back because I know that he is a snake in the grass. That's because I know he can and will turn on me in an instant. Maybe he's having some kind of nervous breakdown, but what kind, I don't know."

Mario looked at her seriously and told her, "Brenny, it's about power and control. He debases you because he is miserable and you know what they say . . . "

"Misery enjoys company," Brenny answered correctly.

"Precisely," Mario continued. "Denny wants you to be like him--damned. Damned to be miserable and damned to glean no joy from living."

"Why is he so miserable?" Brenny asked.

"Because he made a choice to be miserable. He joined the Defeated Club. The longer he holds membership, the harder it is to break free. Denny has no self-esteem and he is jealous of you. He hates it that you have self-esteem and a positive attitude. He hates it that you get great pleasure and satisfaction out of writing and accomplishing things like your novel. Denny is afraid that you will see who he really is: a shallow, self-defeated, selfish mutherfucker who wants to murder all the beauty in life he can until he dies."

Brenny was shocked at the severity of Mario's last words. In a defensive tone, Brenny told him, "Denny has some good things about him."

"Denny does," Mario replied in an angry voice, "But he doesn't use those good things to weave a better life for himself and you. He has made a choice to give himself completely to defeat. This choice lies so deep within him that he probably doesn't even know it consciously.

Denny is also acting out the extremes of male conditioning that come from a dominant, male, heterosexual culture. Denny was born a minority, so he should know better. He knows what it is like to be a second-class citizen and he should be kinder to other second-class citizens like women. Instead, Denny uses this male system of ownership and control to try to make you a third-class citizen.

And you know what, Brenny? Denny has no remorse. I heard your thoughts about being disappointed that your burn healed. You wanted him to feel guilty from seeing it so that he would change. What about the broken hand? Did Denny ever feel guilty

about it? If he did, what did he do to change things so it wouldn't happen again? No, Brenny, Denny never felt guilty about hurting you in the past and he will never feel guilty in the future."

By this time, Mario's anger had left him. The word 'guilty' triggered something in Brenny's mind and heart. She thought about Jude.

Brenny told Mario, "Back to Jude. I feel a little guilty."

"How guilty?" Mario asked her teasingly. "Like a slut?"

Laughing, she replied, "No, but I feel like I committed adultery . . . "

"How can you commit adultery when you are not married Brenny?"

Brenny replied, "Okay, I'll rephrase what I am trying to say." She thought for a few moments and then continued, "I feel like I betrayed Denny."

Mario asked, "So do you feel bad about it?"

Brenny thought for a moment and told him with a chuckle, "You know, Mario, I don't feel bad about my relationship with Jude. I know I should, but I don't.

Truthfully, I am happy about being with Jude. It's the perfect affair, in a way. I don't have to worry about sexually transmitted diseases and I don't have to worry about personalities. I don't have to worry if Jude will get pissed off over any little thing and flip out. No, I am glad Jude made love to me."

Brenny stopped talking to concentrate on something she was thinking about. She confided to Mario, "If I could find the feelings I get from Jude, I would have an affair in a heartbeat. Honestly, my clothes would be off in a minute and I would give them my heart on a platter. This is what worries me.

Affairs are usually destructive and self-destructive. They always hurt everyone involved, including many innocent people.

A good friend of mine had an affair. I still look back and remember the devastation. By the time it was finished, deeply wounded bodies were lying all over the place. Every affair is messy and hers was a little more messy and devastating than most. I saw a lot of pain with the unraveling of each new lie. To be truthful, it was horrible and incredible to watch."

Brenny laughed to herself before she continued speaking.

She said, "But you know what, Mario? If I could find any kind of love that was close to what I felt with Jude, I would do it. I would risk everything and anything to have it. Even if it destroyed everything I ever worked for.

And I'm not like that, either. I'm not destructive and I don't want to hurt anybody. Hopefully, I'm too smart and too cool to do something like that."

"You talk dangerously, Brenny."

"I'm just telling you how I really feel. I am being crushed in this melodrama called life. I am caught between duty and the need for survival.

Then there is the fact that I am desperate. I've been backed into a corner too long. You're a psychologist, you know what happens when an animal is backed into a corner for too long . . . "

"They fight for their lives."

"Bingo. That is how I feel." Brenny laughed to herself. She continued, "Speaking of feeling good, I feel great right now. I tingle pleasantly all over. Even my hickey tingles in a happy way." Brenny laughed again.

Mario laughed with her. He replied, "That's what happens when you get nailed, but you got more than nailed . . . "

"Yeah, isn't it great?" Brenny said smiling. "I got loved up and it was real. How do you explain the hickey and fingernail marks? Wishful thinking? And my burn is gone.

Shit definitely happened to me. I don't know exactly what it was, but something happened.

I do feel a little uneasy. I worry that I am sinning by participating in a forbidden relationship and I don't want to be on Shit Street with God. My vibes tell me that if I am not on that street now, that I am going to be on it soon. Of course, it isn't what I want to hear, so I have been ignoring them . . . "

Brenny stopped and shuddered. She braced herself as the Winds of Change blew through her with great force. They had come out of nowhere and they had not sent gentle winds first to warn her that they were coming.

Mario's vibes told him that the winds were there. He felt their power and worried that they would jump from her into him. Mario's posture shifted away from her, although he knew there was nothing he could do to prevent them from entering him if they wanted to.

The Winds of Change blew through her briefly, but it felt much longer. It took awhile for Brenny to regain her thoughts and composure.

Mario did not know what to say, so he remained silent. He waited for her to pick up the conversation, but she remained quiet while she thought. Mario began to feel great compassion, and he wanted to reassure and comfort her.

He told her, "Brenny, everything will be okay in the end. My vibes tell me that. Why don't you pray and then try to go back to sleep for a while? It breaks my heart that you have been so unhappy. You know, you never have to feel alone. Justin and I are always here for you."

Brenny smiled at him and replied, "I have been hiding my despair. I put a firewall around my mind, heart and soul because I am ashamed that my life has become this desperate. So desperate that I didn't want anyone to know. I forgot how hard it is to hide things in my life when I am around you."

Brenny thought about something for a moment. She told him, "I'll work the lines for you, Mario. You can give me all the lonelies. I'll talk to them. The psychic power inside me has grown more, Mario. I can feel it and it's stronger, too. I want to exercise my power, but I have been lazy about doing it. Working the lines will force me to use it."

My vibes tell me that I should do this. They tell me that some of my callers will teach me things that I need to know.

But if I work the lines for you, I only want half pay. Apply the other half for my board."

"Brenny, you are a guest here," Mario told her kindly.

She replied, "Yes, but I want to pay my way. Especially since I have been accused thousands of times by Denny of not wanting to pay my way through life. I would feel so much better if I paid my way. Okay?"

Mario nodded and said, "We will talk about it later." To change the subject, he told Brenny, "Dinner is at six. If you're not awake by five, I'll come wake you. Try to rest. If not, try to watch some TV or something. You're welcome to come down, but we're very busy right now and I don't want you to feel lonely caught in the middle of the beehive."

"I am going to stay in my room," Brenny replied

Brenny remembered that she had offered to work for him.

She told him, "Give me a couple of days to rest, think and pray. A little time to get my shit together. Time to rest and polish my antennas. I want to give your clients the best psychic counseling I can give them. Then I will join the beehive. Can I take my calls here where it is quieter?"

Mario nodded 'yes' and smiled. He was pleased that Brenny was going to work for him.

Brenny remembered something that she wanted to tell Mario. She told him, "Before I forget, thank you for the dress and accessories."

Mario was surprised at her last sentence.

"Did you like it?" he asked with curiosity.

"No, Mario, I love it. It is beautiful and it is something I would have worn in the '30's had I been there. Thank Justin for me, too. Both of you have incredible taste."

Mario started to laugh. Brenny looked at him confused.

He saw her confusion and told her, "When I saw it, my vibes told me it was a wedding dress."

Brenny started to laugh with him.

She told him, "It is a beautiful dress, although without the beads, it would be pitch black. Who would wear a dress like that to their wedding? Some vampiress or other mistress of the dark?"

Mario answered, "Maybe it was used in some kind of gothic wedding. You know, one of those kinky, dark weddings where everyone wears black and everything is black. Black clothing, nail polish, lipstick, makeup, flowers, altar. You know what I mean."

Brenny smiled at Mario and said, "I felt the power of a magician when I touched the cloth. Maybe a magician was married in the dress."

Mario replied, "Your talent is getting better, my girl! I felt the residue of a magician in the cloth, too. I was waiting to see if you would also feel the energy."

"But why," Brenny asked, "Why would someone get rid of such a beautiful dress? Especially if they were married in it?"

"I wondered about that myself, Brenny. Then my powers told me that Fate wanted you to have it."

Brenny smiled as she thought about Mario's last words. It made her happy to think that some powerful invisible persons or persons would want her to have such a beautiful thing to wear. For a moment, Brenny felt very special and beautiful. Her spirit filled with euphoric feelings of fear and wonder.

Brenny realized that she was feeling the emotions of a bride. She began to secretly worry if the energy that came off the black wedding dress portended her own future. Brenny quickly built walls of energy so Mario would not hear her thoughts. She did not want to make Mario worry more or think that she did not appreciate the beautiful dress.

She smiled at Mario and said pleasantly, "I love the dress. You and Justin are too good to me."

"That is because we love you, Brenny."

"Even though my life is so fucked up?" she asked Mario.

Mario told her, "Justin and I never see your life the way you do. Brenny, you are a beautiful person. Your soul is stunning and shines with intense light and power. You are intelligent and few people are as creative as you. Almost everything you do is creative, whether you know it or not. "

He began to laugh and Brenny wondered what the personal joke was. Mario heard her thoughts.

He told her, "You are the embodiment of female beauty to many."

Mario's compliment stunned her. She remained silent while she processed his words.

Mario kissed Brenny on the forehead and looked one more time at her 'astral hickey'. It was still there and it was a doozy. He was glad that Brenny had the hickey. It guaranteed that she would be staying at his house as long as it lasted. Mario knew now that she would not be running right back to Denny like she usually did. He smiled to himself as he wondered what Denny would do if he saw that hickey.

After Mario left, Brenny lay on the bed. She tried to sleep, but started to think of Denny and began to sob. Brenny put a pillow over her head to drown out her anguish. She willed her spirit to build another wall around her so Mario wouldn't know how unhappy she was.

She sobbed until her nose became clogged and her head ached. The guest room had a private bathroom. Brenny went into it and rummaged through the medicine cabinet to find some ibuprophen. The bottle of medicine was in the same place she had left it in. The cup had a spider web in it, so she swallowed the tablet with water she collected in her cupped hands.

Brenny's nose was still plugged and she was cold. She decided to take a bath. She hoped that the steam from the water would clear her nose, relax her and help to take away the headache. Brenny lit the three, big white candles and drew the water. She brought in the half-joint, ashtray and lighter, and put them on the shelf by the big, old fashioned tub. Brenny turned the light off.

Her spirit rose as the water embraced and warmed her. The soap and water quickly erased any traces of the tears she had shed. The shadows of the candles' flames flickered against the wall and they looked like silhouettes of dancing people. Although there should have been three shadows, Brenny noticed there was a fourth one.

Before she could try to figure out why there were four shadows, thoughts of Jude filled her mind. Memories of him put Brenny in a better mood and she began to daydream.

Brenny thought about Jude's handsome and kind face. She thought about what he had told her. She thought about how he had created and funneled the white light into her. . Brenny yawned and without noticing it, drifted to sleep.

The coolness of the water woke her. Brenny wondered how long she had been dozing in the tub. She reckoned it must have been quite awhile as the candles had burned down at least two inches.

She let the cold water out and refilled the tub with hot water. This time, she sat straight so she wouldn't fall asleep. After she got warm, she got out of the tub, put on a towel and flipped the light switch on. Then she blew out the candles.

As she walked by the mirror, Brenny looked into it and saw the hickey. She turned her shoulders and saw the fingernail marks and scratches.

For a long time, Brenny had been avoiding mirrors. Brenny didn't like her reflection. Especially since Denny had told her how ugly she was so many times. People, other people, said she was pretty, but Brenny didn't feel like that.

Brenny decided to look at herself. She stared at her face. Her face was lightly wrinkled and she wondered if she was beginning to look old. Brenny's brown eyes looked serious and they had dark circles under them. Her hair was half-brown and half white. She had thought about dyeing it, but Denny told her that it would be stupid to do it because the roots would come back looking funny.

The mirror was big, so Brenny saw more than what she had originally planned to look at. Brenny was tall for a woman and had large breasts. Her figure was full and Brenny wished that she could lose some weight.

Brenny went into the bedroom and saw it was 5:45. She quickly dressed and went downstairs. The beehive was silent.

Raoul was the only one in the room. He sat at his desk working on an accounting ledger, relishing the peace and quiet. She walked through the living room as quietly as possible so she wouldn't disturb him.

Her vibes told her that Mario & Company were in the kitchen. She pushed the swinging door open and saw everyone sitting at the table, except Mario. He scurried about doing small, but important kitchen tasks. The kitchen smelled good with the aromas of fresh coffee, baked bread and pasta.

The girls stopped talking when Brenny walked in. All eyes looked at her neck.

"Mario," Brenny said, "You told them . . . "

"You didn't swear me to secrecy," Mario replied as he shrugged.

She began to laugh as she told him with a little resignation, "Well I guess something

like that is hard to keep secret."

Mario handed Brenny a cup of coffee as he told her, "Sit, drink some coffee. I will get you a plate of pasta. It's ready now."

Lila looked slyly at Brenny.

She told Brenny in a cheeky voice, "Mario told us your story and it sure got hot in this kitchen." Lila began to fan herself with her hand. In a southern accent, she continued, "After I heard the whole story, I swear, I thought I was going to have the vapors."

Lila started to fan herself faster as she said, "Tell me honey, Brenny, goddess. What kind of mushrooms did Mario feed you this morning in your omelet? Do you think that if I ate the same mushrooms and smoked the same dope, that I can get that lucky, too?"

Mario butted in.

He told her, "Lila, sweetheart, you ate the same mushrooms Brenny ate. You had an omelet, too. Remember? You also smoked the same shit as she did, too, because Justin gave you some last night. Quit being so catty."

Lila's feelings were hurt. She sniffed as she whined, "Well I didn't mean it that way, Mario." She looked at Brenny with envy and said, "Honey, you were soooo lucky to get that lucky, you astral slut yooou." Lila began to walk toward the office.

Paul looked at Lila's back and said, "Lila, you are a jealous bitch." Lila froze and turned around.

Brenny suddenly asked Lila, "Why are you jealous? Because I got some?" Brenny lifted her shirt and turned so Lila could see the fingernail marks. Lila gasped.

"Something strange happened," Brenny continued. She quickly looked around the room at each face and asked, "So what? You like weird stuff or you wouldn't be here. How many people have called today who want help removing curses or birthmarks that say 666? You girls know that shit, weird shit, happens all the time.

I don't want to talk about it and I don't want anyone to be jealous about it. Really, I want to forget about it."

Instantly, she saw Jude's face in her mind. Brenny remembered that he wanted her to remember him. She regretted what she had said.

Brenny told them, "But what shall we do about it? Rent the movie *The Entity* and compare it with my dream? Right now, I am overwhelmed. I have been thrown out of my house, my trust has been violated again by the man I love and now I am having an affair with a spirit.

I also have this giant hickey on me and I don't know if or when it will go away because it didn't come from this world. My life is getting too complicated and I just got here."

Brenny began to laugh to herself as she realized how true her words were. Joyfully, she told Mario and the girls, "Let's eat and visit. Mario, intoxicate me with fine food and drink. Afterwards, regale us with tales of the stranger clients you've counseled so far this week. I am sure some of their stories beat mine any day."

Lila slowly edged back to her seat. Her ears were wide open.

XIII

Brenny read Lila's book, *Cosmic Love*, the next day. She began to laugh in her beautiful, sweet and melodic laughter when she saw that Lila had highlighted many sections of the text.

The author spoke of deep, meaningful and sexual relationships with spiritual beings. She said that there were different levels of spiritual development. She listed the different planes of the astral realm: the higher the plane, the closer to God.

The book said that it was natural for all people to astrally project and travel when they sleep. It also told the reader how to astrally project during consciousness and where to go. This gave the traveler more control over their spiritual affairs.

According to the book, when people's souls traveled ethereally, they could meet potential lovers if they knew the spiritual secrets. The book told many of those secrets.

"Physical lovemaking with the spirit body was possible," the author wrote. She said, "The soul body had almost every function, sensation and characteristic the human body had. The full sexual experience of the spirit body felt almost the same as a full sexual experience of the physical body."

The book warned against powerful sexual attractions outweighing other emotions because it could attract the wrong kind of lover. It said, "Not every spirit you meet in your astral journeys is a good or suitable partner." It told the reader to keep focused on spiritual matters and their spiritual lover would come to them.

"Spirit lovers come to you when you least expect them," the book advised.

Brenny reread the Introduction. The author wrote that she had many sexual relationships with spirits and described the relationships in detail.

Cosmic Love's author told the reader how to attract their astral soul mate by sending out messages to the spirit world to find them. When Brenny read this, she remembered what Jude had told her about sending messages out into the cosmos, "Never send a message out to Creation unless you mean it. It may not get to where

you want it to go, but someone will hear it. The person who hears it may be benevolent or malevolent. But someone will hear. For some reason, I heard your call."

Cosmic Love was a long book, but Brenny read it in a few hours. She decided to think about what she had read for awhile before drawing any conclusions. Besides, she wanted to ask Jude some more questions.

For the first few days, Brenny slept. She began to heal and shine.

Brenny called her doctor and had her prescription transferred to a local pharmacy. Mario paid for her pills and for the other things she needed. He and Justin went shopping and bought Brenny some new clothes and a new coat.

Brenny went to see the Fantastiks with Mario and Justin. Brenny looked beautiful in her elegant, vintage, gothic bridal dress. Mario and Justin wore tuxes with top hats. All three had a wonderful evening together.

Brenny loved dressing up and the dress fit her too perfectly. Too perfectly. She never did trust anything that seemed too perfect to her. She knew better.

The energy of the soft, luxurious cloth made Brenny feel very uncomfortable. A premonition came to her. It told her that she would be married in the dress. Brenny did not like this because she always wanted to be married in white, not black. Not wanting to search the premonition further, she put it in the back of her mind until it faded away.

During a love scene in the play, Brenny looked at Mario and Justin. They were holding hands and whispered something as they smiled at each other. Brenny wished that she and Denny could have the kind of relationship Justin and Mario had together. She wished Denny had been affectionate to her like Mario and Justin were to each other.

She continued to watch Mario and Justin. Because they were her friends, she had never really looked at them before. Brenny saw that both men were handsome individually and as a couple.

Mario was thirty-eight and Justin was thirty-one. They had been together six years. Mario was 5'9" tall and Justin was three inches taller. Although both exercised, they were getting a little fat in the middle from too much of Mario's cooking.

Mario had long black hair and a goatee while Justin had long brown hair and little facial hair. Justin had blue-green eyes and Mario had dark-brown eyes.

Although they looked like salt and pepper together, Mario and Justin were a couple in many ways. Both were educated and had the same intellectual and eclectic drives and tastes. They loved each other very much.

Brenny knew that Mario and Justin were Christians, although many Christians had

given them a hard time about being gay. She knew that Mario and Justin struggled with their relationship with God like she did. She knew Mario and Justin prayed because they talked about it and because all three had prayed together. Once, all three had prayed together for Mario and Justin's friend who was dying from AIDS.

The trio went to an elegant bar after the play. The Wild Rose had soft, plush elaborate carpeting. The exquisite furnishings radiated warmth while the brass lamps shined with brilliance. Everything in the bar sparkled and exuded a vibrant, eclectic atmosphere.

It was the painting that hung on the wall by the door that got Brenny's attention. She had never seen anything like it. White roses of different sizes glistened like beautiful stars in a dark-blue, cosmic sky. The painting reminded her of Sophia. Brenny remembered that in Dante's poem, Sophia is the sacred white rose belonging to the Madonna, the ultimate flower of light revealed above the starry night sky.

As she looked at the roses, she felt wind blow from the picture into her face. It was the Winds of Change. They felt pleasant, but the energy was different and much stronger. Brenny's vibes told her why: The energy of the dress was combining with the energy of the winds.

It took all her energy to move her eyes away from the painting. As soon as her eyes stopped looking at the painting, the winds stopped blowing inside her.

Brenny thought to herself, this really must be a magickal dress. That or it is a lightning rod for the ethereal. Maybe it was made for me.

Her eyes searched for Justin and Mario. She saw them across the room. They were already seated and waiting for her. After a quick internal debate, Brenny decided not to tell her friends about this experience. This is because she wanted to forget about it.

Mario drank rum and cokes while Brenny and Justin drank Heinekens. They talked and visited together until closing time. When they left, Brenny was careful not to look at the painting.

Brenny was a little drunk and stoned when she got home. She was tired and did not want to turn the light in her room on. Instead, she put her bag on the desk and got ready to go to sleep in the dark. As she thought about taking the dress off, she noticed that it sparkled in the pitch black room. Not only that, the dress' crystal beads reflected little, white lights everywhere. Remembering her premonition and the painting at the bar, she hurriedly took the dress off and put it in the closet.

Jude came back to Brenny's dreams that night. Although she never told him, Mario knew.

When Brenny wasn't working for Mario, Justin and Mario tried to keep her busy other ways. They went to a Degas exhibit. The three haunted eclectic antique and curiosity shops. They went shopping at the Mall of America, where they shopped until they

dropped, ate at Planet Hollywood and took in a movie.

Brenny was happy living with Mario and Justin, although deep in her heart, she missed Denny. She thought of him all the time.

When Mario bought the house for him and Justin, the whole place needed to be refurbished. An older couple had owned it and Mario was forever critical of their decorating tastes.

Mario would always tell others, "The people who lived here could only have seen saw life through plaid eyes."

Mario loved to tell people what a dive the house was when he and Justin bought it. He would describe in detail what a challenge it had been to restore it back to its former glory. Mario would tell pre-renovation stories as if he were telling horror stories. His eyes would get big and his voice grew in pitch as he excitedly described the terrible decorating faux pas of the previous owners. His favorite story was how the living room was when they first moved in. It had orange carpeting and the wall paper had big black and green triangles.

Brenny would always laugh when she heard this story. She had seen it herself, so she knew how bad (and funny) it really looked.

It took Mario and Justin over a year to renovate the house to their tastes. Mario hired some workers, but did much the restoration himself because he was too picky about details. Also, no carpenters or painters would work for him longer than a week because he would drive them crazy with his perfectionism. Eventually, Mario found two carpenters who had his taste and drive for detail.

Mario and Justin also restored the basement to its former glory. Mario's sixth sense told him that the basement had been an elegant speakeasy for the well-to-do. The telltale signs of this were everywhere: a private entrance in the back, an extra-large parking area next to the house, pieces of expensive floor tile from the Prohibition era and empty, old-fashioned glass bottles found tucked away in a crumbling wall of the basement.

When Mario renovated the basement, he also found other little things that suggested that fine parties had been held there. He found beads that must have fallen from dresses, old coins and spent reeds from saxophones.

Mario crafted the basement into a dazzling party room. He put new flooring in, rebuilt the stage, built a large bar and installed lights and strobe lights. He also hung a large mirror ball in the middle of the ceiling.

Every month, during the full moon, Mario had a party. Sometimes Mario had live bands play for his parties. Other times, a DJ played music from a state-of-the-art stereo system that Mario had installed.

Most of the people who attended Mario's parties were writers, artists, musicians, activists, Wiccans, magicians, oracles or actors. Some actors were famous and they lived in Minnesota or Wisconsin between film projects.

Many party goers were gay, lesbian or bisexual. Mario invited many heterosexuals to his parties, but not many came.

As Mario often said, "Heteros will go to a stag party, but not a fag party."

Brenny's name was always at the top of his party list. She tried to come to as many full-moon parties as she could, but Denny never wanted her to go. He would tell Brenny that Mario's parties were a waste of time. In reality, Denny didn't want Brenny to party with Mario because he knew that Brenny would have a good time. Once, Denny went to one of Mario's parties. He stood alone in the corner most of the time.

Now that Brenny was staying with Mario and Justin, she could attend the full-moon parties because she didn't need Denny's approval. Brenny could party and not have to worry about making Denny unhappy.

Mario's parties always had a theme. The first party he had was an era party to celebrate the history of his house and partyroom. Everyone dressed in vintage clothes from the 1920's and 30's. He hired a jazz band to play and everyone, including Brenny, danced the night away. A good dancer, Brenny worried if she could dance to jazz, but she found that she could dance to it.

Once, the theme of Mario's party was 'Girl Party'. Everyone dressed as females. Mario hired a group that looked and sounded like the Village People. They sang disco hits all night long. Lila fluttered about telling everyone how they should have done their makeup and nails or how they could have accessorized better.

Other themes for full-moon parties included beach parties, Donna Summer Night, costume and masquerade parties, rock and roll themes, and Brenny's favorite, Prom Night.

The full moon party was coming up and the theme for it was 'Rhythm and Blues of the '70's and '80's'.

The invitation said, "Dress comfortably to dance the night away."

Brenny helped Mario, Lila and Justin decorate the party room. Brenny also helped Mario make the hor' deuvres. Ramone stocked the bar and he was going to act as bartender. Paul was going to work in the office in case the computer crashed again and couldn't route calls.

The guests arrived on time with a few straggling in later. People drank and visited for a while until Mario was ready to officially start the party with the first dance. Brenny talking with Julio, a famous visual artist.

Mario walked over to them and said, "Sorry to barge in like this, but goddess Brenny, will you dance with me?" Brenny nodded 'yes'.

Mario signaled the DJ to start the music. Ramone turned off the incandescent lights and turned the party lights on. The DJ began to play "Celebration" by Kool and the Gang. Mario walked over to Brenny and asked her to dance. They danced in the middle of the dance floor until the rest of the party joined in. Brenny began to laugh as she danced. He hadn't seen her laugh in a long time. It felt good to him to see Brenny having such a good time.

He told her, "It's nice to see you having a good time, Brenny!"

"I'm surrounded by men, how can I not enjoy myself?" she answered.

"Sorry, Brenny," Mario teased, "Most of the schlongs here don't get turned on by women."

Brenny's eyes twinkled with mischief, "Oh, I forgot . . ." She danced many dances with Mario.

Brenny continued to have a good time. She smoked a doobie with Justin and had a few beers. As she was catching a good buzz, a dazzling young woman walked over to her.

The woman had long tomato&endash;red hair and piercing blue eyes. Her eyebrows and eyelashes were the same red color. Her lips were shaped like a heart and perfectly painted in crimson. Although she was small and short, she was very shapely in a black, spandex tube top and leather mini skirt. A Celt pentagram was tattooed on her left shoulder. Right above the left breast, Brenny saw a chaos star tattoo.

Brenny wondered if this woman was a she or a he dressed like a she. The woman heard her thoughts. She smiled at Brenny sweetly and said sweetly, "I am a 100 percent woman."

Brenny looked at her and said, "I don't like it when people read my thoughts."

The beautiful woman told her, "Sorry, I won't do it again."

Brenny told her, "How do I know you are a 100 percent woman?"

"I'll show you," the woman said and the woman pulled her shirt up to reveal perfect breasts. Each nipple was pierced.

Brenny was flabbergasted and didn't know how to respond.

Finally, she said, "How do I know those are real?"

Brenny pointed at Lila across the room, "Lila's got tits as nice as yours and she's still a

man."

"Yes, but does Lila have one of these?" asked the beautiful woman as she pulled up her black leather mini skirt. Brenny saw she was definitely female. Brenny looked around the room to see if anyone else was looking. Everyone at the party was busy having a good time and no one noticed.

Brenny was speechless until she started laughing.

She laughed for a long time until she answered, "No, but I bet she wished she did."

Finally Brenny asked, "Why are showing me your body? Are you making a pass at me?"

"Yes I am, Brenny Rose White."

"How do you know my name?"

"I read your book. Mario gave me a photocopy of it. Your book touched me. I am in love with you, Brenny Rose White," the woman told her wistfully. "By the way, my name is Stacy."

Let's go over to the other side of the bar where it's quieter," she told Brenny.

"I don't know, Stacy, I'm not a lesbian and I'm not bi," Brenny replied.

Stacy looked at Brenny with laughing eyes, "Don't worry, I won't touch you unless you want me to. I want to talk to you about your book."

Brenny went over to the other side of the bar and visited with Stacy. Stacy had many questions about Amy. Brenny tried to answer them as best as she could.

Later, Stacy began to talk about herself. She was a psychic for Mario's line and had recently moved to Minneapolis from San Francisco. She was twenty-five and had a master of fine arts degree from San Francisco State University. Stacy came from a family of witches, so she was born with her psychic power. Her family was originally from Europe, but they had left to escape the Nazis.

Stacy searched out Brenny's eyes and locked on them.

She told Brenny is a warm and loving voice, "I'm in love with you Brenny. So in love with you, that if you were a man, I would want to have your baby and I am a lesbian."

Brenny was amazed and began to laugh.

She thought for a few moments and finally asked, "Do you know how old I am? I have a son as old as you. And I'm fat, too."

"I don't care how old you are, Brenny," Stacy purred. "I don't care if you are fat, either. You are a very beautiful woman to me. I was in love with you before I met you tonight."

"How can this be?" Brenny asked Stacy.

Stacy's eyes became large with sincere adoration. She whispered sweetly to Brenny, "The voice of your heart is unspeakably beautiful. I know that your book was written by that ravishing heart. I love your book and I love you. You know about the bittersweet, inner lives of people, and you know how to describe this in the poetic language of the soul. You know about secrets of the heart, Brenny. You also know about the Divine Light in all of us and you know how to help us see it."

Brenny was enchanted. One of the most beautiful women that Brenny had ever seen had just given Brenny the ultimate compliment. Brenny remembered something.

"My book bombed, Stacy," Brenny said.

Stacy replied earnestly, "It doesn't matter. You created something valuable. Something inanimate that was so lovely it has a life of its own. Your novel is alive, Brenny. Once, it might have been words on paper, but somehow your Divine Spark gave it life. Your creation definitely has a soul and a great destiny."

"Just call me Geppetto, huh?"

"I'm serious, Brenny. Feel your spirit. Listen to it. It will tell you that your book is powerful and wonderful. My vibes tell me that although you don't see it clearly yet, your story is changing you. You are becoming more beautiful than your book."

Brenny was flattered by Stacy's words. She replied, "Stacy, you have given me a fine compliment. You are too kind and gracious."

"No, Brenny," Stacy replied, "You are the one who is gracious. You gave the world something priceless."

"Stacy, how can I give the world something so valuable when I struggle with my life every day? When I can't even get a regular job?"

"Everyone struggles with their lives," Stacy told her. "It sounds to me you've had really bad luck. I know a spell that will change this . . ."

Brenny answered, "That's okay, Stacy. I'm a Christian and I am supposed to stay away from that kind of stuff."

Stacy looked at Brenny with disbelief and said, "How can you give your power away like that? Especially to a male-centered religion that supports and benefits from male-centered, misogynistic societies and economies? Take your power back, girlfriend! You need your power so you can use it to design and grow your life into what you

want it to be. Don't depend on anyone to save you. You are the only one who can save yourself."

Stacy's words made Brenny feel uneasy.

Stacy continued, "There are references to magick in the Bible. Did you know that the 'Three Kings' in the Nativity were magicians?"

"I knew that."

"If you use your high psychic power, then why don't you use magick?" Stacy asked.

"Because it is against my religious beliefs," Brenny answered.

"What is against your religious beliefs? Using your psychic power or using the part of it called magick? Both are almost the same and both come from the same realm."

Brenny was becoming annoyed. She looked around the room to see if there was anyone else she wanted to visit with. There wasn't.

Brenny told Stacy in a serious voice, "Let's quit talking about this, okay?"

Stacy smiled as her eyes found Brenny's eyes. Her eyes invited Brenny to look inside her spirit, showing Brenny many lovely things. Bright, beautiful sparks ignited and shown silver light, illuminating all the beautiful things that Brenny saw.

Satisfied, Stacy told Brenny, "I know you're not a lesbian or bi, but would you like to go out with me anyway?" Stacy licked her heart-shaped lips seductively, "I could make you forget men. Besides, it's the quality of the relationship that's important, not the sex of those involved."

Brenny took a drink of her beer and laughed. Stacy was attractive, but she was the wrong sex.

"Stacy, you are a beautiful woman," Brenny told her, "One of the most attractive women I have ever met. I'm sorry, but I prefer my sex from a man."

"I have a dildo," Stacy told her teasingly. "And I know how to use it."

Brenny began to laugh as she told her, "I'm sure you do, Stacy. You are attractive, but I'm still not interested."

Stacy thought for a few moments and searched her heart.

"Okay," Stacy told Brenny, "Let's try it from another angle. I hear you have a boyfriend. I don't like men, but I will join in if I can be with you."

Stacy's words took her totally by surprise and Brenny began to laugh again.

"Don't be offended, Stacy, if I laugh," Brenny told her. "You caught me by surprise and my response is to laugh.

You are so beautiful, Stacy, so lovely. You have made my night complete by giving me so many compliments. The comments and questions about the book were really good for my ego.

When you mentioned my boyfriend, you hit a sore spot. Right now, I don't know what to do about him. I was with him for a long time and I sense it is going to be over soon. I need to mourn this, but I don't know how or when to do this.

I also have a spirit lover who loves me. I don't want to give him up because of the richness he gives to me. My secret life is very busy. I don't have the energy for anyone else."

"Ummm . . ." Stacy purred, "I wouldn't mind joining in with you and your spirit lover. Sex with spirits can be exceptionally pleasurable, although I prefer female spirits. I could teach you lots of things about loving spirits. I could teach you how to find him any time you want."

"Thank you for all your offers, Stacy. You make me feel sexy and beautiful, but I'm just not interested."

Stacy ran her tongue between her teeth and then licked her lips slowly and carefully.

She told Brenny, "Mario's got my number. You can call me anytime you want."

Brenny didn't know what next to say. Stacy heard the beat of a new song playing and asked Brenny, "Will you dance with me?"

Brenny danced with Stacy most of the night, unless the songs were slow and romantic. Brenny didn't feel comfortable slow dancing with Stacy. Instead, they sat those songs out and talked.

Stacy continued her seduction. She flirted with Brenny as both females danced flawlessly. When Stacy went home, she tried to kiss Brenny goodbye.

After the party, Mario walked over and asked Brenny, "What was going on between you and Stacy?"

"Oh, I danced with her and we talked. She's a beautiful woman."

"I mean, Brenny, why did she hike her skirt all the way to her hips? Why was she showing you her double-axe wound?"

"I wish you wouldn't call it that. Remember I have one and your mother had one."

"What do you want me to call it? A cunt?" asked Mario.

Brenny answered, "I don't care for that word, either. Besides, you and your friends call each other cunts. You shouldn't. It's derogatory to females."

"Okay, Brenny . . . I get the picture. So tell me, why did Stacy show you her secrets?"

"She was showing me that she was a '100 percent woman'," Brenny told him.

"Why?" Mario asked.

"Because I told her that Lila's tits were as fine as hers. Stacy wanted to prove to me that she was anatomically correct. She says she's in love with me, Mario. She tried to seduce me all night."

"Were you attracted to her?"

"Who wouldn't be? She is beautiful, intelligent and talented. She's just not my type. Like I always say, I'm ad&endash;dick&endash;ted to dick. It's too bad she isn't a man. I would be with him/her right now."

"What about Denny?" he asked her.

Brenny looked at Mario and asked, "Denny who?"

Mario's next full&endash;moon party was a costume party. Mario went as a nun and Justin was a scarecrow. Brenny went as Dorothy. Justin's pet schnauzer was Toto.

Brenny had been busy working on the psychic line until the time of the party. When she walked in the partyroom and saw Mario nine months pregnant in a nun's habit, she laughed for a long time.

"How do you like my costume, Brenny? I am from the Order of the Immaculate Conception," Mario told her.

She continued to laugh. Mario whispered to Brenny, "Stacy's here and I think she's still hot for you."

"Why do you say that, Mario?"

Mario replied, "Why would any woman come half&endash;undressed to a fag party?" Mario nodded in the direction of the bar.

Brenny saw Stacy in a belly dancing outfit, except that Stacy had no top on and her long, gauzy skirt hung three inches below her belly button. Brenny wondered if Stacy

had anything on under the skirt, but she already knew the answer. Stacy's beautiful and perfect breasts shone with fine, iridescent glitter.

"Mario! It's still winter outside! I can't believe Stacy would dress like that!"

Mario answered, "Especially to a fag party. There's no one here but those two lesbians by the bathroom that would be attracted to her. My vibes and common sense tell me that she still wants you."

Brenny walked over to Stacy. "Aren't you cold, Stacy?" Brenny asked her.

"Not when I'm this hot for somebody," Stacy replied.

"Check out my bellybutton, Brenny. I had it pierced since the last party."

Brenny looked down and saw a ring in Stacy's bellybutton. There was a square bead on it with an initial 'B'.

"B is for Brenny," Stacy told her in a purring voice.

"Wow, Stacy. You have paid me another compliment. What can I say?"

"Say that you will go home with me tonight. Just tonight. I promise you, you will enjoy the things I will do to you," Stacy told her.

"I told you, Stacy, I like sex with a man. Too bad you're not a man."

"Too bad you're not a lesbian," Stacy replied.

"If I were, you and I would be together."

"Brenny, look at me," Stacy told her.

Brenny looked at Stacy. Out of the blue, Brenny felt something good, warm and sweet blow through her soul.

"Did you like that, Brenny?" Stacy whispered with a smile.

"What did you do to me?" Brenny asked in a confused voice.

"I coursed my soul through yours. It feels much better when you combine it with sex."

"How did you do that?" Brenny asked.

"It's a secret. It's one of the secrets of the universe. Some Wiccans and magicians know how, though. I will teach it to you, if you wish."

Brenny told Stacy, "I already told you last time, it is against my religious beliefs to involve myself in magick."

"Soul caressing is not magick, in a sense," Stacy replied. "It is for the spirit. But because it is spiritual, it is in the magickal realm."

Stacy blew her soul through Brenny again. This time, she coursed it through Brenny longer. Brenny could feel Stacy's essence. She could also taste and smell Stacy.

"Quit that Stacy!" Brenny told her. "This is too intimate for me. I know now that you are as lovely inside as you are on the outside, but I'm still not interested in you as a lover or a partner. We can end this here or we can party tonight and have a good time. What'll it be?"

Stacy's face revealed disappointment.

She thought for a little while and told Brenny with a pout, "Okay, Brenny, we'll party together tonight. But if you ever want me, just remember, Mario has my number."

"And I can call you anytime," Brenny said as she finished Stacy's sentence.

A couple of days later, Brenny was resting and thinking. Mario knocked on the door and came in.

"I just put some lasagna in the oven and it should be ready in an hour. Are you hungry?" he asked.

"I'm getting there," Brenny replied. "Mario, I want to ask you about something. It's about what Stacy did to me at your party."

Mario looked at her with friendship and love. He told her, "Go ahead, Brenny. You know you can ask me about anything you want."

"Stacy blew her soul through me. She did it twice. How did she do this to me and what is it called?"

Mario sat on the edge of Brenny's bed. He told her, "Stacy used a light form of sex magick on you. Kind of like foreplay or teasing. She wanted you to feel who she is underneath."

"What is sex magick?" Brenny asked.

Mario replied, "It is a form of magick. It is using the energy from sex for magickal purposes. It is more intense and climatic than regular sex. Magicians use the energy to charge their wish."

Mario knew that Brenny did not know much about magick. He never wanted to tell her about it, but he knew it was time for her to learn a little.

"First, let's talk about magick," Mario told her. "Magick is stealing fire from heaven. It is essentially about the command 'my will be done' versus 'God's Will 'Thy Will be done'.

Magick is the practice of spiritual outlaws and outsiders, and those who would dare bring Heaven down to earth and lift earth up to Heaven. Any magick is risky because it is pure energy.

Sex creates energy by creating a tension released in orgasms. Sex magick creates energy by creating a tension released in the multiple orgasms of the heart, mind, body and soul. This type of magick is a product of the consciousness and is as individual as the persons involved. It consumes a great amount of energy, Brenny, but it also creates enormous energy within and around the persons involved.

One person has to be submissive and the one on the bottom is usually the one who has the power. Before the submissive yields to their lover, he or she must have learned how to submit to themselves.

Sex magick can be a good thing for souls who are really meant for each other, but it creates a lot of negative energy if you are having sex with the wrong person. Also, it can be so pleasurable that it can become addicting."

Brenny interrupted, "Tell me more. I know that you know more about this."

Mario was beginning to feel that Brenny was ignoring the important facts he was trying to stress about magick. This frustrated him a little. Then he had a premonition that Brenny would get into trouble with magick. He began to worry.

"Brenny!" Mario told her. "There are so many things you don't know about and now I am worried that I told you too much. Why do you want to know about these things? Especially when there is no one in your life you want to do these things with? Didn't you read Lila's book?"

"I am sick of being stuck on this planet and going through life ignorant. Maybe someday I will want to put my soul into another's soul. I want to know about this."

"It's dangerous, Brenny!" Mario warned her. "Magick is hard to control, so sex magick is also hard to control. All of it is volatile because it is pure energy."

"Mario," Brenny replied. "My vibes tell me becoming one with another soul is not exactly sex magick. Why do they tell me this?"

Mario answered, "Because it isn't sex magick. It is a beautiful act of love between two spirits. It is the most sincere act of love that exists anywhere, here, the spirit world or Heaven. Becoming one spirit is the ultimate act of love and being loved."

Brenny asked him, "But you can practice sex magick when you become one with another person, right?" She could tell by Mario's eyes that the answer was 'yes'.

He told her in a warning voice, "You are talking about the most powerful and volatile sex magick of all. It is like playing with fire-cosmic fire."

"I liked what Stacy did to me," Brenny replied. "Right touch, wrong person."

Mario replied, "Stacy was caressing you with her soul. Stacy was trying to seduce you. It's a simple magickal exercise. In the future, if anyone does that to you again, you will know that they are trying to seduce you."

"What if someone tries to become one with me?"

"That's quite impossible, Brenny."

"Why?"

"Because there are other elements involved. Both partners have to genuinely and unconditionally be in love with each other," Mario replied.

"Another element?" Brenny asked.

"Both partners have to possess great psychic power."

Mario thought for a moment and remembered something. He told her, "Of course, there are other things that need to happen."

"What's that?"

"It has to happen by accident. You can't decide to do it one day. The power of the love and energy has to become so intense between lovers that it reaches a mystical conjunction."

"What kind of mystical conjunction?" Brenny asked.

"I don't know. This type of thing belongs to the mysterious, unseen, unknown Realm of God."

Brenny replied, "We've already talked about the unknown Realm of God. Let's talk more about this. What other things need to happen?"

"I'm not exactly sure," Mario replied, "But if I remember right, I think that only higher-level souls can do this and once they meld together as one, they are mates forever."

Brenny thought about what Mario had told her. She remembered that she was alone.

Then she wondered why she wanted to know about the mechanics of sex magick and the melding of beings. Her heart felt lonely, but her spirit felt hopeful.

Sadly, she asked Mario, "Do you think that I will have a forever mate someday?"

Mario's eyes filled with tears as he told her, "Brenny, you are so wonderful! God has made a mate for you. You just haven't met him yet."

XIV

Brenny's hickey lasted almost two weeks. It never faded like a regular hickey. Instead, Brenny woke up one day to find that it was gone. The fingernail marks left at the same time. Brenny was glad that they were gone because it was getting closer to her rescheduled interview.

Mario drove Brenny to Saint Cloud for her interview. Brenny thought the interview went well until she was leaving. The personnel director, Dave, saw the next interviewee waiting outside his office. He smiled at him and said, "Hello, Jim. The interviewing committee will be ready to see you in a couple of minutes." Jim nodded to Dave.

As Brenny was wondering if these two men knew each other, Dave continued, "Oh, by the way, the steering committee for the club is going to have a meeting Saturday. I thought I should remind you now before I forget."

Brenny thought that Jim had looked too comfortable as he waited to be inquisitioned. Jim looked at Dave as if they were good friends and said, "Thanks Dave, for telling me. I'll be there."

It was obvious who was going to get the job. Apparently, the interviewing committee knew whom they were going to hire before they interviewed the first person. Brenny had gotten the interview so the school district would look good for affirmative action.

Disappointment, hurt and anger raged inside her. She had poured much time and money into that interview. It cost \$150 for her outfit alone. Although she felt cut in half, Brenny kept her posture straight. She walked out of the school offices with dignity and a poker face.

When Brenny got to Mario's car, she collapsed in the seat and began to cry. Mario tried to cheer her up and brush her tears away.

Mario bought Brenny some lunch at the Radisson. After eating, they went to visit Muffin. Muffin's boys were still as wild as ever, but somehow all three had a good visit, despite the noise and interruptions.

Muffin told Brenny that Denny had been coming over to her house every day wanting to know if she had heard from her. Muffin also told Brenny that Enrique was starting to become angry about Denny's visits.

Brenny worried about Rico's anger. She didn't want Rico upset at Muffin. Muffin assured Brenny that she didn't care if Rico got mad or not. Still, Brenny worried that Muffin would suffer because of her.

"Tell Denny that I'm at Mario's," Brenny told Muffin with resignation. "I'm sure he knows I'm there. I don't have any other place to go and he knows this."

"He probably wants confirmation that you are there before he tries to see you," Mario offered. "But don't worry, Brenny. We'll tell him you're not there. We've been doing it on the telephone since you left."

"Oh God," Brenny said with disappointment and worry. "I suppose Denny will start coming around your house if he is already coming around Muffin's. I guess I knew this was going to happen, but I was hoping it wouldn't."

Mario interjected, "You never stayed away this long."

"True," Brenny replied sadly, "And you know what? I hardly miss him anymore. I still love him, but I don't miss the constant bitching and stress."

Mario was warmed by her words. He hoped that she would not go back to Denny, even if it meant that she would have to go somewhere else. Brenny was welcome to stay at his house, but Mario knew that Brenny needed to get farther away from Saint Cloud. His house in Minneapolis was too close and too easy to get to.

Mario had sensed and felt the Winds of Change circling Brenny's aura many times during the past weeks. They told him what he would dare not think. In his heart of hearts, Mario knew that Brenny was going to go away. Far away. Mario hoped it was far away from Denny.

He turned his face quickly to camouflage a deep breath and the pain in his eyes. He didn't want anyone to see or feel his sadness and worry. When he gained control of his emotions, he turned his head toward the women. No one picked up on his true feelings.

They couldn't stay at Muffin's too long. Mario had to get back to the Cities because he had an appointment at six to interview a man named Philip for the psychic line. Philip lived in Saint Paul and the phone interview had gone well. A professional psychic, he had worked for another psychic line until he discovered that they were cheating him out of money. He quit when he found out.

During his phone interview, Philip told Mario, "Psychic line owners should never try to put one over on the real psychics. We know when they cheat us." Phil's words reminded Mario of his own experience.

Mario already knew Philip was a master psychic because Mario's vibes screamed it. Mario was excited to meet Phil. He also wanted Brenny to meet Philip and tell him what she thought of him. Underneath, Mario had a hidden agenda for wanting Brenny

to meet Philip

Mario and Brenny got stuck in rush-hour traffic on the highway going into the Cities. They got home at 5:45 p.m. The two barely had time to get ready, when the doorbell rang approximately at six.

Philip, or Phil (as he told them to call him) definitely did not look extraordinary in any way. In fact, he was very ugly. He was about 4'9" and weighed over 200 pounds. He was thirty-eight, but he looked like fifty-eight. No one could tell what color his hair was, because it was the color of grease. His dull, oily hair clung to his skin. It was combed because the lines of the comb had left straight lines on his dandruff-drenched scalp.

Dandruff flaked all over him. It flaked on his ears, shoulders and his giant, hooked nose. It also flaked on the short eyelashes of his two small, black eyes. A tiny, stiff ponytail struggled to poke out of the roll of fat bulging at the bottom of his neck.

Phil's blue jeans looked like they had never been washed. They looked black and stiff. Unlike his hair, his jeans shone from grease. Phil wore a button-up, dingy yellow shirt that had once been white. The cuffs and collar were frayed and the elbows had holes in them.

The girls froze with terror when they saw him. After their initial shock, they ran into the kitchen as quickly and quietly as possible. Raoul was busy working until he heard the dead silence of the room. He looked to see what had happened. When he saw Phil, Raoul stopped working and headed for the kitchen, too.

Mario and Brenny gave each other a questioning look. Brenny wanted to laugh. Not at Phil, but at the way Lila looked when Phil walked through the door. Lila's face was comical with her looks of shock and surprise.

Brenny looked at the kitchen door. It was slightly cracked and she could see the tip of one of Lila's long fingernails poking out. Lila was listening.

Mario pretended that he didn't see Lila's purple claw. Instead, he walked toward the couch and told Phil to sit.

Phil sat and Brenny noticed his shoes. He was wearing brown, scuffed up dingo boots with worn heels. When he moved his feet, Brenny could see a big hole in the bottom of the right boot.

Phil smelled bad. He smelled like grease, dandruff, dirty and mildewed clothes, and body odor. His breath smelled as bad as his rust-colored teeth looked.

Mario sat in the living room chair. Brenny didn't want to sit with Phil on the couch, so she grabbed Raoul's desk chair from his workstation and sat on it. She hoped that the circulation of the air in the room didn't change. She didn't want to be downwind from him.

The interview began. Phil was an interesting person and Brenny immediately sensed that he was a real psychic.

The three in the room played a little psychic game. Mario and Brenny sampled and measured Phil's energy and he did the same with them. For appearances, there was an interview going on. Right below the skin, the real interview was taking place.

Phil had an interesting life story. Life stories are very important for psychic work. The more interesting the life, the richer the psychic gifts.

Phil, like Brenny and Mario, also had a religious experience. This happened when he was twelve. He had seen the Stairway to Heaven with angels going up and down it. Although Phil described the vision's beauty and radiance, Mario and Brenny saw it with their psychic powers.

The more Phil talked, the more that Brenny and Mario realized that Phil was better than they thought. Mario had found a great psychic and was pleased. Brenny could sense Mario's pleasure.

The interview continued and everyone maintained their poker face while they continued to probe each other psyches. It was about to conclude when Phil dug into his bulging front left shirt pocket and pulled out a pack of worn, frayed, greasy Tarot cards. Power emanated from the cards, filling the whole room with potent energy.

Phil looked at Brenny and said, "You don't use cards and you don't like them. You're a High Intuitive. Not only that, you are a Unique."

"Very good," Mario replied.

Brenny was surprised and spellbound. She wondered how long it would take for Phil to do his reading.

Phil looked at Mario and told him, "You don't have much time for readings anymore because you run your business and your home. When you read, you use one or a variety of things, including astrology, depending on your mood. You usually read for rich and famous people who won't talk to your other advisors or you read for people who have severe occult problems."

"Touché," answered Mario.

Phil said to Mario, "You want me to read for Brenny. That is why you have me here. You already decided to hire me when I talked to you on the phone."

Brenny looked at Mario's face and saw little lights of shock in his eyes. She knew what Phil said was true.

Mario began to clear the books and junk off his big coffee table. Brenny kept her eyes on Mario so she wouldn't have to look at Phil for the moment.

Phil told Mario matter-of-factly, "I don't mind." Phil ran his dirty, long, yellow, chipped fingernails along the ridges of the cards until he stopped. He pulled out the Queen of Swords and showed it to everyone.

He told her, "This is you, Brenny." Phil put it in the middle of the deck and began shuffling them. He shuffled his cards hard, fast and long like a card dealer in a casino. Then he cut them, right to left, into thirteen piles.

"Now Brenny," Phil told her, "Think about the deck."

Brenny's was drawn to concentrate on the deck. She didn't like cards and didn't want to participate, but she felt compelled to participate in this psychic sport. Brenny could feel Mario's desire for her to have a reading and she could feel the magnetism that flowed from Phil.

Phil told them, "Now I don't read cards like most people, but I figured you already knew this. I tell people what my spirit tells me when I look at the cards." By now, Brenny and Mario were so fascinated with then energy of Phil's presence, they forgot to look at his face when he spoke.

Phil turned over the top card in the seventh pile and laid it down below the thirteen decks. It was the Queen of Swords, the card that represented her. The card that Phil had put in the middle of the deck before he shuffled the cards.

Phil told Brenny, "You have lead a sorrowful life but you are a fighter. You are smart and you have a beautiful spirit."

He pulled the next card off the middle pile and placed under the Queen of Swords. It was the Wheel of Fortune.

"The Wheel of Fortune is here because it means that the Winds of Change blow through you. Your life is going to change greater than you can imagine. I put the Wheel of Fortune under your card because these winds are your Hands of Fate."

Brenny began to worry.

Phil felt her anxiety and told her, "The Winds of Change aren't always bad, Brenny. Change is usually a good thing and we need it to help us grow as individuals. But there is going to be a radical change in your life. Your Winds of Change are the strongest I have ever felt and I have never felt anything like them."

Phil began to laugh. He told her, "The energies of your winds are so strong and spiritually erotic that I am getting a boner. A really good one, too."

Philip laughed some more.

Mario didn't think it was funny at all because was worried that he would get a hard-on, too. It took all of Mario's energy to build walls to keep the Winds of Change from

touching him.

Brenny began to shift uneasily in her seat. She was beginning to feel self-conscious and she didn't like it that Phil was getting turned on from the energy of change around her. Brenny looked at the ceiling as she fought her embarrassment, frustration, confusion and worry. She made a mental note to remember not to look at Phil below his yellow shirt. Otherwise, she knew that she would see his woody straining against the inside of his jeans. That would cap off her totally bad day.

Mario leaned deeply into his chair to distance himself more from her. There was too much energy in the room already and he was fighting an erection. Although Mario tried to hide his thoughts, Brenny heard them. Searching for a way to change the energy in the room, Brenny concentrated on the reading.

Phil flipped the next card off the same deck. It was the Fool turned upside down.

He told Brenny, "Your boyfriend has betrayed you. Believe it or not, he will have to answer for this betrayal."

Phil placed the card to the left of the Queen of Swords.

He continued, "Your boyfriend's name begins with a 'D' and I see an animal, a bear. The bear means his last name."

Mario and Brenny looked at each other with surprise. Phil had described Denny Bear.

"Go on! Keep going!" Mario told Phil excitedly.

"This man chooses to ride the fence," Phil continued. "He chooses to get through life using little effort and energy as possible. He avoids responsibilities of the heart and spirit. This man avoids emotionally close relationships."

"Why?" Brenny asked.

"Because he doesn't want anyone to see the inside his soul. He doesn't like himself. His self-loathing is so great that he has built a wall around himself. Only God can look inside this wall. Your man goes through this world without giving. He takes risks, but not the risks of the heart and soul. He is very lonely inside because of this."

A lump filled Brenny's throat. It was different to think of Denny as a hurting person since he was the one who kept hurting her. Brenny thought for a moment about suffering. Brenny hated it and saw no use for it. If I ever get to meet God, I am going to ask Him about suffering, she thought.

Phil continued, "'D' has separated himself from God. He is angry with God and everyone else. He knows he should follow a better path, but he won't. 'D' was called to be a shaman and he refused."

Brenny sat straight. The spirits had once asked Denny to be a medicineman. His Uncle Denny had wanted to train him, but Denny refused. Right after this, he moved away from the reservation. Denny's cousin Manfred eventually got the job.

'D' has psychic power. That is what attracts him to you. But remember, moths are drawn to flames."

Phil placed the card face-down to the left of the Queen of Swords.

Phil pulled a card from the top of the sixth pile to the left. It was the Knight of Cups. Brenny and Mario knew instantly what it meant: Jude. Phil laid it to the right of the Queen of Swords.

"You have a lover, 'J'," Phil told Brenny, "But he is not of this realm. He loves you and feels that he's losing you. Spirits are not supposed to feel sad, but he does. 'J' and you have been intimate often. You feel guilty and uncomfortable that you can't return the love he feels for you. The relationship is becoming deeper and you are being pulled deeper into it. You know you have to break it off, but you are too lazy and reckless. You also like being with him and don't want to give him up. The longer you wait, the more you will hurt him. But you already know this."

Phil's words sliced Brenny's spirit in many pieces. Her feelings flew in a thousand directions until she quickly gathered them back. She began to hope that it would be a short reading.

Phil pulled the top card off the thirteenth pile, the last pile on the right. It was the Knight of Pentacles. "A fair man will come into your life. He shall love you and show you the devotion you've never had. His spirit is exceptionally good and deep, and he lives across the sea." Phil laid this card at the feet of the Queen of Swords.

Brenny began to worry more. She wished she could be happy about the new guy, but she had too many problems with Jude and Denny.

The vein in Phil's right temple began to twitch. He turned over the top card of the first pile. It was the Magician.

"The fair man," Phil told Brenny and Mario, "Has the power of a Magician."

The purple vein in Phil's temple began to twitch harder when he lifted the top card off the eighth pile. He turned it over slowly and it was the King of Wands. He covered the Queen of Swords with it.

"This is the Dark Man," Phil told Brenny. "This man lives across a larger sea, a cosmic sea, in a world hidden between dimensions. Although you will choose the fair man, this male will be dearer to you. I feel much power coming from this card, but I am forbidden to see the rest."

More worry and fear filled Brenny. She wished for the reading to end.

The energy rose in the room. Phil told Brenny, "The last three cards shall tell you the outcome of your Winds of Change."

Phil squeezed his eyes shut and concentrated. Then he opened his eyes and looked at each pile, right to left and then left to right. His eyes stopped at the fifth pile. He took the top card from it. It was the Hierophant, the fifth card of the Major Arcana. Brenny, Mario and Phil knew what it meant. A Hierophant is someone who interprets ancient, secret or forbidden knowledge.

Phil thought for a moment, and then spoke, "I see the number five everywhere in my mind." He looked at Brenny as he told her seriously, "You've had dreams about the number five for a long time and always wondered what it meant."

Brenny sat straight up. Phil was right about her dreams. During the previous year, she had dreamed often about the number five. She had never told anyone, although she had wanted to ask Mario about them.

Phil continued, "Now you know what the number five means. Although mystically, the number five means the number of man, the number of Christ's wounds and the number of points on the pentagram, your dreams of the number five mean the Hierophant."

He took the next card on the fifth pile and turned it over. It was the Judgement card. He covered the Hierophant with it.

In a compassionate voice, Phil told Brenny, "This card tells me of a terrible judgment, but my power says that the power of everlasting love shall redeem you."

Panic filled Brenny. She felt the pain of the consequences of a judgement and it riveted her to her chair. It took all her will to hold back the tears and keep her poker face.

Phil drew a deep breath and concentrated. Blue veins bulged in his sweaty forehead. He continued, "The next card crowns the Hierophant. It will tell us the outcome of the Hierophant."

Phil passed his right hand over the thirteen decks three times. When his hand passed over the decks for the fourth time, it stopped at the ninth pile.

He pulled the top card and it was the Ace of Cups. He crowned the Hierophant with it.

"This means the Grail," Phil told her. "You are going to go on a long journey to find the truth. This journey is going to test everything inside you. It will be the hardest thing you will ever do."

Brenny was becoming depressed and worried, and Mario and Phil felt her vibes. Mario shifted in his chair nervously as he wondered how he could try to change the energy.

He continued, "You might not get what you want, Brenny, but you will get what you need."

Philip closed his eyes for a few moments and concentrated. The purple vein in Phil's right temple began to twitch again. This time, it quivered wildly. Brenny and Mario knew that he was having a premonition. They tried to look, but they couldn't see anything.

Phil told Brenny with a smile, "You are going to get your wish. You are going to be married forever."

This surprised Brenny, but before she could think about his statement, she felt his two little black eyes on her. They were solemn and full of strange, beguiling energy.

Phil told her in a serious voice, "But before you experience happiness, you must learn what the Grail of the Hierophant is."

His voice became more serious as he told her, "If you ever remember anything, Brenny, remember these words. Remember to never give up. Remember that you will get out of the desert one day. Remember to have faith. "

Then he said something to Brenny that she would never forget, "You can't go on a quest to find the truth without faith. It fuels the journey and faith comforts the seeker."

Brenny was very uncomfortable and this was reflected in her face and demeanor. Thoughts and emotions flew like angry hornets inside her. Unable to get out, they stung her spirit with their invisible stingers.

Brenny looked for Mario. He gave her a reassuring smile and it helped her overcome some of her anxiety.

Phil broke his concentration and gathered up his cards. He put the spongy rubber band back around them. Sweating profusely, he wiped his forehead with his left arm, leaving a long, greasy, grey streak across the yellowed shirt sleeve.

Mario looked at him and told him, "You are going to make a lot of money on the line."

"I know," Phil answered matter-of-factly. "I've got to go now and pick up my old lady."

Mario showed Phil to the door. Brenny had forgotten all about the girls, so she looked over to the kitchen door. It was still cracked open and one of Lila's long talons was slightly visible.

As Phil went through the front door, he turned around and looked at Mario and Brenny.

Phil smiled as he arrogantly said, "Tell your friends in the kitchen that I know I am as ugly as sin, but I've got what they shall never have (Mario and Brenny knew that he meant psychic power). I also have a beautiful woman and a big dick." Then he left.

After Mario closed the door, he and Brenny burst into laughter. "What the hell did he mean by that, Brenny?"

"Maybe he meant that although he is ugly, he has what he needs?" Brenny asked as she laughed.

She remembered something and began to laugh. Mario looked at her with questions in his eyes.

When she saw his bewilderment, she told him, "After he told me that he was getting a boner, I was afraid to look at him. I was afraid that I would see a giant tent in his lap. I am so glad I didn't look."

Brenny laughed more as she said, "I was afraid that I might have nightmares if I looked."

Mario laughed so hard he had tears in his eyes. He said to Brenny, "He sure was ugly, wasn't he, Brenny? He has to be the ugliest person I ever saw, man or woman. Poor Phil could win the world's ugliest man contest."

They laughed harder. "Is that what they mean when they say someone got hit with the ugly stick?" Brenny joked.

Mario struggled through his laughter to say, "Brenny, honey, that man didn't get hit with an ugly stick, he got hit with an ugly club!"

Lila poked her head around the kitchen door. Her eyes furtively darted around the room. When she knew it was safe to come out, she walked hesitantly. Her long fingers clutched a can of disinfectant. Lila's apprehension and aggravation neutralized Brenny and Mario's laughter.

"Is Godzilla gone?" Lila asked Mario in a shaking and flustered voice.

Brenny chastised Lila, "That's not nice to say that about him."

Lila put her hands on her hips. The tremors left her voice as she said, "Brenny, goddess, that man looked like a lizard. The king of lizards. Like Godzilla."

In the back of her mind, Brenny heard the song 'Godzilla' by the Blue Oyster Cult. She smiled.

Raoul and Paul emerged from the kitchen. Raoul went to his work station while Paul raced to the bathroom.

Lila ran to the couch and sprayed it with disinfectant. The aerosol mist filled the air quickly. Brenny's nose began to burn and Mario's eyes began to itch.

"That's enough, Lila," Mario told her sternly. "I think you have just killed all the germs in the house."

"That man was so dreadful," Lila said, fanning herself with her hand.

"That man is one of the best psychics in this country," Mario told Lila.

"So what went on Mario?" Lila asked. "We tried to listen in, but after Quasi Motto said that he was going to read Brenny's future, no one talked after that. We saw movement and facial expression, but some forgot to turn up the volume . . . ?"

Brenny and Mario looked at each other. They knew: Almost all of the interview had been conducted telepathically.

"So what went on, Mario?" Lila asked with intense interest.

"Let's go into the kitchen, girls," Mario told the ladies in the room. "I'll make cappuccino and zucchini stir-fry while I tell you a really good story."

Raoul heard Mario's words trailing behind him as he led the way into the kitchen. He got up and joined the audience in the other room. Everyone gathered around Mario's table to hear another psychic story. They kept getting better all the time. Especially the stories about Brenny.

XV

One day later, Denny showed up at Mario's house. The first time Denny came around, Brenny realized that she wasn't ready to talk to him. She ran to her room to hide while Mario answered the door. Because they were both Indian men, they greeted each other with a nod of acknowledgement. Both men were uneasy, as neither liked each other. Mario didn't like Denny because of the terrible way he treated Brenny. Denny didn't like Mario because he was Brenny's friend and because he was giving her shelter.

Denny wanted Brenny back. He had cooled down a long time ago and Brenny had never been gone this long. She had always come back after a few days. Denny was beginning to think all kinds of thoughts. He wondered how she could go so long without money, clothes or her medicine. He wondered how long she could go without sex. He wondered how she could go so long without him.

Denny's eyes searched furtively across the room behind Mario, searching for any sign of her. He didn't see anything and eventually left.

Hiding in her room, Brenny realized she had made a mistake by telling Muffin it was okay to tell Denny where she was. Brenny realized that the only reason why she had

said it was to lessen the tension between Muffin and Rico.

Mario and Brenny talked for a long time after Denny left. He agreed with her that she wasn't ready to go home. He promised Brenny that he would shield her.

Denny came back the next day. Lila answered the door and told him that Brenny was out shopping with Mario. Denny sat in his car and waited.

Denny began showing up at Mario's almost every day. He stopped knocking on the door. Instead, he sat in his car and watched the house. On weekdays, Denny would come in the evening about seven and stay until ten before going home. On weekends, Denny would arrive early in the afternoon and stay late.

Mario wanted to call the cops and report Denny for stalking, but Brenny told him not to do this. Besides, she told Mario, the cops would make the situation worse. She, nor he, needed the drama or the gossip of the neighbors. Mario realized that Brenny was right.

Deep-down, Brenny wished that Denny would go away and stay away. Underneath, she knew that Denny would never go away forever unless she talked to him.

Brenny felt safe in the arms of her friends, so she rarely went anywhere. If she needed to go somewhere, she went out when Denny wasn't around or she used the back door.

Denny knew he would eventually get Brenny's attention enough to get her to come out and talk to him. The game of waiting started. The ritual of courting commenced.

After awhile, Brenny got sick of hiding. She started to feel like a prisoner at Mario's. Brenny could also feel the tension rise in the house. Denny's stalking was beginning wear on her nerves and everyone else's nerves as well.

Mario and Lila were at the house and Denny had been sitting outside in winter weather. It was Saturday, so everyone knew that he'd be out there most of day.

Brenny announced to Mario and Lila that she was going out to talk to Denny. She put her coat on and walked across the street to his car. She thought Denny had seen her when she came out of Mario's front door, but when she opened the passenger door, Denny jumped. He looked very startled and very surprised. It took him several seconds to collect himself. Brenny stood and let the cold air stream into the car.

Maybe that will wake him up, she thought.

Denny looked happy to see her as he gave her a big, white smile. For a moment, Brenny lost her fear of him. He was the Denny she had first met, first fallen in love with. The man with the sincerest smile. Brenny wondered how long it had been since she had seen Denny smile like that. She knew it had been a long time.

Brenny remembered to be on guard. He is a snake in the grass--he can charm the shit

out of you one second and unexpectedly turn on you the next second, Brenny thought.

Brenny put her guard up even higher, although she knew he was going to be nice. He always was nice to her at the beginning.

"Oh God, Brenny!" Denny told her urgently and emotionally. "I have been looking for you since you left that night."

She got in and slammed the door. She turned the heater fan to high. "You threw me out and before you did, you burned me with a cigarette."

"Oh Brenny! I didn't mean it. You know I didn't mean it. I was mad, I'll admit it, but I didn't mean for the cigarette to burn you."

Brenny answered in an angry and disgusted voice, "What do you expect to happen when someone throws a cigarette at a person? There's a big chance that someone will be burned."

"Okay, okay, Brenny," Denny replied in his sincerest voice. "I'm sorry. I'm sorry for what happened. I can be such an asshole. I just want to talk with you."

Brenny knew that she had Denny's attention. She hoped that she could have it long enough to make a few points.

Brenny told him, "Talk to me about abuse, Denny. That's what I want to talk about. I don't like getting burned. I don't like being terrorized in the middle of the night when I need my sleep to interview for a job the next day.

Wait a minute. I don't like being terrorized in the middle of the night, period. That was rude, hateful, selfish and disrespectful, to name a few.

You know, I could have died. You threw me out in a blizzard, asshole. My car had little gas and I had no money. The roads were bad and I had a hard time keeping my car on the road. I had to sleep in a parking lot, worrying if I had enough gas to keep my heater going.

You were in a warm house while I was miserable in a cramped car in the middle of winter. Not only that, I had a big burn from your cigarette that would not stop throbbing. All of this is called abuse."

Denny replied in a remorseful voice, "I thought of you all the time . . . "

Brenny cut him off, "Yeah, right. When you thought of me, did you think of pig calls?"

Tears misted in Denny's eyes. He told her, "I couldn't believe I said such bad things to you. You know I didn't mean it."

Denny choked as he said, "I prayed. For you. For me. For us. I was so worried about you. I expected you to come back and we'd go to bed, but you never came back."

"You know I'm sorry," Denny told her. "I've suffered so much."

Brenny became outraged. She told him in an angry voice, "You suffered? Don't even go there. Don't even try to go there. So what if you suffered? Yeah, you abused yourself when you abused me, but it was indirect and preventable. You could have stopped it from ever happening. So your suffering is a no-counter."

"I just wish you had come back, Brenny," Denny told her earnestly.

Brenny began to laugh to herself. "I'm sure you do," she told him. "But it's easy to say this now, long after everything happened the way it did."

Brenny's voice became grave as she said, "I begged you on my hands and knees to let me stay, at least until the morning. No, you told me, I had to go. Remember, you said I needed to go out into the cold, cruel world and learn my place? That maybe after I froze my ass off and went hungry enough that I would appreciate you better. You said if I didn't get out of your place, that you might really lose your temper. You had already lost your temper and I wasn't ready to see what other demons you had left."

"You make it sound like I would have hurt you," Denny replied in disbelief.

"You had already hurt me," Brenny replied.

Denny tearfully told her, "You should have come back."

Brenny told him, "Would you come back to a house that someone just beat and burned you in? I mean, wouldn't you think that maybe that person was a little crazy? Wouldn't you be afraid that you could get hurt more? Of course you would never think like that. You have never had a reason to think like that because I have always treated you well.

When have I ever struck you, let alone spit in your face, on your clothes or bedding, or in your food? You've done that and more. Don't you realize how destructive that spitting is? Sticks and stones may break your bones, but spitting carries the power of contempt all the way to the core of your spirit."

Denny interrupted, "Let's don't talk about what happened right now. It was a fight. A fight and nothing more. A fight that got out of hand . . . "

Anger rose through Brenny's soul. She told him, "Fuck you, Denny! It was more than a fight."

Brenny's words were beginning to make Denny uncomfortable. It was written in his face and his body began to shift more.

"Well you seem to have a place to go to," Denny said. "You must be happy here as you haven't called or come back."

Brenny replied, "That's right Denny, I am happy here. Mario gets on my nerves, but I have a comfortable room to sleep in. He and Justin treat me well. Mario cooks delicious food, gives me facials and does my hair."

Denny began to fill with jealousy and his voice began to reflect it. He didn't like it when Brenny said that she was being well-taken care of.

"Okay, okay, Brenny," he told her in a wavering and envious voice. "Let's just talk. Talk like friends. Talk like best friends. We've been best friends for years. Can't you remember that? Let's try to talk like we used to . . ."

"Let's try to talk like we used to?" Brenny asked him in disbelief.

Her voice began to rise as she said, "Define 'talk' to me. We used to always talk when we were first together, but you haven't talked to me in the last few years. Now when I hear your voice, I cringe because you are usually bitching.

When was the last time we ever had a real conversation? One day you stopped talking to me or listening to me. You became bitter and shut yourself off to me. Talking to you was like talking to a wall."

Brenny remembered the first years when she and Denny were together. She remembered how they used to talk all the time and she remembered how close they used to be.

"Remember, we used to be so close," Denny reminded her. "We used to talk all the time?"

He must have sensed my thought, Brenny mused, I think about how close we were and then he reminds me.

"That was a long time ago, Denny."

Denny sincerely replied, "Yeah, but it could happen again. Don't you think I feel badly about everything? Don't you think I'm really sorry? I'm sorry I got mad at you, Brenny. I'm sorry I never married you. I've thought about that a lot, Brenny. I want to marry you and be with you for always. 'Forever' like you used to say. I love you."

Brenny was surprised at Denny's words, but she remembered that he was desperate to get her back. Red sirens in her spirit screamed at her, asking her why would she even consider marrying him?

Her spirit's screaming began to give her a headache. It made her feel nauseous and the sickness reminded her of spinning on a bad carnival ride. Brenny fought hard to push the headache and nauseousness away.

To appease her spirit, Brenny told Denny, "Why do you want to marry me when you can't act kindly and gracefully in a committed relationship? How is marriage going to change anything but make me more tethered to you? How is marriage supposed to stop the abuse?"

Brenny began to laugh at the irony of her life. Already uncomfortable, Denny began to squirm when she laughed. Brenny enjoyed watching him squirm, although she knew it wasn't healthy.

Denny was ready to get to his point. He asked her bluntly, "Will you come home with me?"

"Why?"

"Because I love you and need you. I am sorry for what I did. I didn't mean it. I want to make it up to you. I can't live without you."

"What about my job?" Brenny asked.

"You know how I feel about that kind of work. You know I don't like it."

"That's the only job I can get. If I go back to Saint Cloud, I know I am not going to have any work."

Denny was beginning to become frustrated. He was also becoming very unhappy.

"You might get a good job someday," Denny offered.

Brenny remembered something that Denny had told her often and her eyes flashed with anger. She told him, "You told me that I would never get a good job. You told me thousands of times that I am 'an ugly, fat-slob, trailer-trash-looking-cracker that no one would put behind a desk'.

Denny looked down as he heard his words regurgitated. He didn't like the bitter taste of his own words.

"I didn't mean it," Denny pleaded. "I didn't mean it."

"Bullshit, Denny, you meant it all the times you said it. I can still hear the contempt in your voice."

Denny knew that he would have to eat some crow when he finally got a chance to talk to Brenny, but he could see the situation was going nowhere.

Denny's voice became more desperate, "I'm sorry Brenny! I'm sorry! I didn't mean it. I swear to God, I didn't mean it! I was angry . . . "

Brenny interrupted him, "There. You said it. You were angry.

I have never met anyone as angry as you are. Even my father had a better temper than you do. The kind of anger you have and feed is so unhealthy. It's killing all of us bit by bit and you either don't know or don't care. Anger has to be the most negative thing in the universe and you are soaked with it. Nothing good comes from the kind of anger you have. Yet, these past years, all you have been is angry.

You're rarely happy. Today is the first time I have seen you smile in months. In fact, I can't even remember the last time you were happy. Can you?"

Denny thought for a moment and responded, "The last time I was happy was when I was with you, even though I didn't show it. I have been so miserable all these weeks." Tears began to well in Denny's eyes. Macho, he-man Denny never cried, so Brenny knew that he was sincerely miserable.

"I fucked up," he said. "I know it. I fucked up big time. Things got out of hand because I fucked up. I love you more than anything in the world and I treated you wrong. I want to make it right."

"You treated me like shit, Denny," Brenny replied.

Denny told her, "Okay, I treated you like shit. I admit it. I was frustrated and I took it out on you. I wanted you to at least get a part-time job so we could do more things together like go to Mille Lacs for a weekend or go on a trip.

Don't you ever think that I would like to have some money in my pocket for the weekends? Everything I earn goes to paying bills. I get tired of it, Brenny. I just wish you would help more . . . "

Brenny looked at him with disgust and said, "Don't you think I want to go places, too, Denny? I want to work, but I want to do something substantial. You have to belong to a club to do this and membership is only by pedigree and invitation. Like you've told me many times: I am white trash with an education."

"Brennnny . . . You're not trash. You're beautiful and smart and write better than most people."

"You've called me trash many times."

"I was wrong Brenny! I didn't mean it. I swear to God I didn't mean it. Let's don't talk about this anymore. It isn't getting us anywhere. Can't we just have a nice talk like two adults and put the past behind us?"

"Denny," Brenny said seriously, "We can't be together anymore. I can't deal with the anger and the stress.

You are trying to make me like Amy. You already know you're the one who inspired her."

"Amy is a character in your book," Denny replied, "She's not real."

"Yes, she is. She is all women."

Brenny thought for a moment before she continued, "If I had a brain operation like Amy Cooper and became dull minded, I could get a job anywhere."

Brenny began to laugh in an ironic tone.

She told Denny, "Of course, I wouldn't have all my marbles, so I wouldn't know to have any pride and dignity. I would be a slave and not know it."

Denny became defensive when he heard the word 'slave'.

He told her, "I work a slave job." Defiance rose in his voice as he continued, "It was good enough to put food on the table and pay bills."

Denny held his hands out as he said, "These slave hands have always worked hard for you, Brenny. These hands have produced slave money."

"Don't try to make points with me, Denny, " Brenny told him. "I'm not up for it. I came out here to ask you in a good way to leave me alone, to get on with your life. I should never have told Muffin to tell you that I was here. I only did it because I didn't want Rico mad at her because you were going over there all the time.

As for you having to work a slave job, I never made fun of it or put it down, but you always accused me of that anyway. This is no win, Denny. I'm getting out of the car."

She continued, "Go home. Stay home. Get that ideal life you always said you could have if I wasn't there leeching and sucking off you. That is what you said a thousand times. Leave me the fuck alone!"

"Please, Brenny. I can't go home without you," Denny's voice cracked, "I love you and I can't stay in that home without you. It's not home without you . . . Wait! I brought your medicine--I know you need it--and I brought you two letters that came. One is from the defunct Raging Mind Press. I think the other letter is a fan letter. Probably from another prisoner who read your book."

Brenny stopped and got back into the car. She shut the door most of the way, but left it slightly cracked to show Denny that she was going to get out of the car soon.

Denny pulled the letters out of the visor. Brenny took them and opened the one on top, the one from the press. Brenny blew a long, white breath. It was getting cold in the car, so she shut the door all the way and read the letter.

"What does it say Brenny?" Denny asked in a voice that almost sounded sincere.

"It says that George's estate is almost settled," Brenny replied. "If I sign the agreement

that came with the letter, they will give me back the rights to my book, plus \$1,000 for my trouble."

Brenny wanted to cry. She couldn't hide her disappointment as she told him, "It is so disheartening that they want to give me so little for something so good. The publisher dies and the business dies with him. My book was never promoted and most of the copies printed were distributed to discount book stores or given to prisoners.

Now they want to give me back my book and I start at square one again trying to find another publisher. Mario bought my book for two bucks! Because Amy was discounted, it is going to be difficult to find someone else to publish me."

Denny looked at Brenny tenderly as he said, "I feel bad about this, I really do. I know you're a good writer and you wrote a good book. Well it's a little far-out, but you know, Brenny, it's a good book. I had a hard time putting it down."

Brenny's eyes could not mask their surprise and pleasure.

She asked Denny, "You read my book? When? I thought you hated it so bad that you would never read it. That's what you said."

Denny looked at her with soulful eyes and said, "I read it the week after you left. I read it two more times. I saw the cryptography, although no one will ever know but you and me. That was very clever."

This caught Brenny off-guard. His words startled and amazed her.

"I should have read your book when you wrote it. I didn't because I was afraid it was about me. Well, it kind of was . . . "

Brenny's eyes searched for Denny's. She found them and locked hers on them. She wondered if he were going to get mad.

Denny knew that she was searching for any sign of anger from him. Under any other set of circumstances, he would have been very pissed off.

He masked his true feelings about the book. He was too desperate to have Brenny back to argue about things that could be argued about at a later date, in a safer place (for him). Underneath, both knew that this would eventually boil to the surface, sometime in the future.

"Brenny," Denny said lovingly, "I know you. I know you better since I read your book. I'm sorry I made you so unhappy that you had to write me messages in your book because I wouldn't listen to you. We've been together for so many years. I've learned the lessons you have been trying to teach me. Come home with me, Brenny. It's time to come home. Oh, and here's your medicine. I was worried that you didn't have it."

"If you were so worried about me not having it, why didn't you mail it to me?"

"Because I kept thinking that you would come home and I didn't want it traveling in the mail when it should be home in case you came back."

Denny's good, Brenny thought, that lame excuse is almost plausible.

"Why didn't you leave it in Mario's mailbox?" Brenny asked him, "You've been stalking me for a while, you could have left it for me if you were that worried."

"I don't know," Denny replied, "I guess I never thought about it, I've been so upset about you leaving. But let's talk more about Amy."

He knew that would get her attention. It did. Denny's mind quickly searched for the parts of the book he liked the best. His eyes lit up when he told her with sincerity, "The sex scenes were really hot."

Denny smiled at Brenny.

"You are one nasty woman," he said. "When I read those parts in your book, I remembered all those hot nights I spent with you. We've had so many good times together. We've spent so many hot nights together. I miss your loving. Let's put what happened behind us and start over."

Denny tried to put his arm around her, but Brenny pushed it away. Denny's face filled with shock and sadness. He looked so lonely . . .

Humility is not one of Denny's better attributes, Brenny thought. For a moment, Brenny felt sorry for him. She was also happy that he had finally read her book. Then she remembered all the hassles, all the fights. Her guard went back up.

"Fuck you Denny, you still don't get it," she told him. "You still don't get it about a lot of things."

Amy was never meant to be erotica. Unless you see the erotica of the spirit, which is much more intimate and deeper than sex. Amy was, and is, a story about women."

Brenny looked at him and said in a low, serious voice, "Look at me." Denny looked at her. She continued, "There is no decent work in Saint Cloud. I can't go back to that."

"Maybe there is no decent work anywhere," Denny interjected.

Brenny looked at Denny with surprise. She told him, "Maybe you are finally figuring it out. Maybe you are finally getting it that others have the same problem I have. Particularly women and/or minorities."

I saw Jean-Pierre again. He's the guy I told you about that has a silver Nobel Peace Prize and two Ph.D's. He still can't get a job. Remember what you said when I told

you about him? You said in an ugly, sarcastic voice, 'sing me another sad song.' How could you say something that ugly? Especially about someone so brilliant?"

Denny replied, "He should have to get his hands dir . . ." Denny caught himself.

Brenny knew what he wanted to say. She had heard it too many times.

Brenny told Denny, "Get his hands dirty? Say it Denny. Cough up the fur ball you just tried to choke down. Say 'he should have to get his hands dirty because that is the real world and life only consists of hard, dirty work'. You don't think that people should have the right to earn a living with their mind and creativity. "

Frustrated, Denny answered, "All I can get is hard, physical work. I'm a Darkie, remember? No white man is going to give me a good job when he can give that job to his white son, nephew or white neighbor. Those fucken laws they enact in Washington don't do a thing to help minorities. The laws sound good and fine and all, but we're still the last to be hired and the first to be fired."

"You could go back to school and finish college," Brenny replied.

Denny became offensive as he told her, "And who would pay the bills, I wonder, if I went back to school?" he asked. "Besides, I've told you a hundred times: Lots of people from my reservation graduated from college and they never got jobs. They ended up going home and living on General Assistance. Their education never got them anything but poorer. Some ended up getting a job with the tribe, but most didn't.

There are three Indians I know with degrees that are porters at the casino. Do you know what porters do, Brenny? They walk around with pooper scoopers and little brooms, sweeping constantly as they walk. All that education and they carry a pooper scooper. Don't sell me your line about education. Education is for the white, middle-class. They're the ones who get the jobs, not us.

Finishing my degree would never get me anywhere but further in debt. Oh, fuck no. It ain't worth it. It ain't worth it in the end when you have this fine sheepskin and nothin' to use it on.

All this time, you're standing there holding it with one hand and scratching your ass with the other hand, looking surprised that no one will give you a job."

Brenny felt anger well up inside her throat.

She told him, "An education empowers you. It empowers your life and it gives your life more quality, depth and texture."

Denny didn't want to continue this line of conversation, so he told her, "Brenny, don't try to sell me your line. I'm not interested. You already sold Adam that line and look how he struggles with Karen and the baby. What are you going to do when he doesn't make it?"

"He's going to be a doctor," Brenny replied.

"Brenny, wake up and smell the coffee. Where is Adam going to get all that money to become that doctor? Borrow it? And what kind of a job is he going to get when he becomes a doctor? Remember, he told us doctors don't make the money they used to because of HMO's and managed care."

"Adam will make it, Denny," Brenny replied with conviction in her voice. "He will make it."

"Brenny, I didn't come here to argue. Can't we just go somewhere and talk? I miss you. I miss the brightness you bring to my life and I miss the love you used to give me. I miss holding you close every night. I miss not plugging in with you. Can't you remember that?"

Brenny remembered. Their sex life had always been extremely good. Sex with Denny was like a drug to her.

Denny continued, "Can't you remember all the good times, too?"

Brenny replied, "But we've had a lot of bad ones, too, Denny. Ones where I got hurt. You've always had your bad temper, but when we first got together, you kept it in check. Back then, you only ruined holidays and birthdays. Adam and I could always count on that.

Now you get angry all the time. I am afraid of you and I can't trust you.

I can't trust you because I never know if something is going to tick you off and you'll get pissed. I can't live like that anymore. It's too stressful. The stress is killing me and you won't stop.

Then you say very bad things about me. You do this to destroy my self-esteem. You want me to hate myself.

What kind of a man are you, Denny? What kind of a man are you that you want to see me die than shine? To see me broken than walk upright?"

Denny replied, "Okay! Okay! I won't pressure you about a job. You can come home and write. Just talk to me Brenny. Talk to me. I miss you. I love you. I want to be a better man.

I don't want to hurt you anymore because I want to spend the rest of my life with you. I will change, Brenny. I swear to God. I swear to God, as God is my Witness, I will never, ever hit you again."

"What about the spitting?"

"I swear to God I will never do that again. I will try to keep my temper in check. I

have a strong mind. I promise you, I will stop abusing you."

Brenny looked at him hard and asked him, "But you never answered my question: What kind of a man are you?"

Denny's eyes softened and filled with emotion as he replied, "I am the man who adores you. I am the man who loves you. I've learned my lesson--I can't live without you. You are my soul mate. Please, please, Brenny. Let's just go and talk somewhere."

"No, Denny. I don't want to go anywhere with you. Your love is a dangerous love. I used to feel safe with you and now I am afraid of you. Sorry, Denny."

Brenny's eyes filled with tears as she said, "I can't trust you." She got out of the car and went back inside the house.

She went to her room and threw the letters on the nightstand. She knew she should never have talked with Denny. Brenny wished Denny would go away forever.

Denny wouldn't go away. He started calling her from his cell phone while he sat in his car outside Mario's house. He started writing letters and sending cards. Once, when he thought she was alone at the house, he sent her a pizza, hoping that Brenny would answer the door when it arrived.

Finally, in a moment of weakness, Brenny talked with Denny. He convinced her to a restaurant to eat and visit. While they waited for their food, Denny cried real tears and begged her to come back to him. She shook her head 'no'.

Denny stood up and clapped his hands very loud. In a booming voice, he said to the other diners, "Can I have everyone's attention?"

The place became quiet. Brenny put her head down in embarrassment.

Denny continued, "I love this woman. Her name is Brenny and she is one of a kind. She is very, very special."

Afterwards, with her head still bent low, Brenny whispered to him, "Why did you do that, Denny?"

He answered, "Because you're not listening to me, Brenny. I love you. I need you. I want you to come home. There is no other woman in the world for me but you, Brenny. I have never been with another woman since you. I feel like I am dying inside without you and I have never been so lonely. I lay in the dark and can't sleep. All I do is think of you.

Time at work goes slow because I know that when I get home, you're not going to be there for me. I hate myself for what I did to you to make you leave me like this."

Floods of tears rolled down his cheeks.

In a weak and pitiful voice, he told her, "People can change, Brenny, they can. I can. I am from the Bear Clan and because of this, I have a strong spirit. I have made up my mind to be a better man to you. I'll put the past behind me, if you will put the past behind you, too."

XVI

It was only a matter of time before Denny talked Brenny into coming to visit their home in Saint Cloud. Brenny drove down on a Friday evening. Denny cooked steak and potatoes. She was surprised at how good it tasted.

Denny rented some movies and rolled a couple joints. Although she knew she was being courted, Brenny was surprised at what a good time she was having. Every time she tried to go home, Denny begged her to stay a little longer. The weed was good and it made her lazy.

Soon, it became too late to go home and Denny suggested that she sleep there. A hard, cold rain fell outside and Brenny didn't want to drive back in it. She agreed to spend the night as long as she slept on the couch. Denny didn't like this, but he went along with it because he was glad that Brenny was home. He slept on the floor by her.

Brenny slept late. She opened her eyes and saw Denny sitting in the chair watching her, waiting for her to wake.

Denny took her to Embers for breakfast where she had a hot turkey sandwich and french fries with ketchup. The day was clear and the air smelled sweet. Brenny wanted to go back to Mario's, but Denny persuaded her to go to the flea market in Monticello, Minnesota.

Denny and Brenny walked through the long, connecting buildings. They looked at all the unique items for sale. He bought Brenny everything she wanted and he bought a 'Free Leonard Peltier' shirt for his uncle. He was happy and laughed a lot.

The polka band played in the indoor beer garden. They bought some food and sat in a booth listening to the music. People, young and old, danced the polka beside them.

Brenny liked to watch people dance the polka because their faces always lit up with smiles when they danced. She felt that the polka was one of the happiest of all dances.

Denny never liked the polka. To him, it was a white man's dance. But since Brenny's face was full of happiness from watching the dancers, he was content to sit with her and watch people move and twirl.

Denny bought \$10 worth of pull tabs and hit a \$250 winner. He cashed it in and asked Brenny if she would like to go to a movie. Brenny briefly thought about going home to Mario's, but she realized that she wasn't ready to go back.

By the time they back got to Denny's, it was almost eleven and it had begun to rain

like the night before. Denny insisted that Brenny stay the night again. He told her she shouldn't be driving in that type of weather so late in such an old beater. He reassured her that she could sleep on the couch without any hassles from him. When Brenny saw how dark it was outside and how badly it was raining, she decided to stay. Her spirit began to scream, but she ignored it.

Denny made Brenny a nice bed on the couch. Like the night before, he lay on the floor beside her. A couple of minutes later, he moaned that the floor was very cold and that the coldness was going to seep through his sleeping bag. Brenny knew the floor was frigid because it had felt cold to her feet and she had been wearing heavy socks.

Denny turned the light off and laid down. Denny started to talk as he shifted around. He told Brenny about how happy he was because she was there and how it was almost like old times. In his sincerest voice, he told her that he loved her and how his life had lost all its color when she had gone away.

He talked for a long time. Brenny listened, but continued to keep her guard up. Denny had violated her trust too many times. She loved him, but she was sick of the bullshit. The power of her silenced, spirit's screams echoed mutely in the back of her mind.

He told her, "Good night" and asked her for a kiss, just one kiss. It wouldn't hurt, he told her. How many thousands of times had they kissed? Brenny told him 'no' and turned away.

Denny lay there for several minutes trying to think. He wanted to sleep with her. He hadn't had sex since she had left and he had been feeling horny lately, horny for her. She still turned him on after all these years.

Denny thought about the first time he saw Brenny since their breakup. Although he had been almost asleep, she opened the car door and woke him. Although she had startled him, Denny remembered that when he saw her, he got a hard-on. Denny's body ached for her and he wanted to plug into her. Desire filled him as he wished he could lay naked with her. Tension filled his loins as he thought about how her breasts felt against his chest and how her lips felt on his. His arms longed to hold her.

Denny rolled over and moaned loud enough for Brenny to hear.

"What's the matter, Denny?"

He replied in a voice laced in faked pain, "I think I just pulled something in my back when I rolled over. The floor is really cold and as desperate as I am to be near you, I think I am going to sleep in our bed. That is, if I can get up. The ache in my back is pretty bad. Can you help me?"

Brenny got off the couch and helped him. He stood for a minute in the darkness, waiting.

"Well I guess I will go lay in our bed now," he told her.

Brenny told him, "Okay. Good night." Brenny hoped that he would go to sleep, but she knew better. She had seen his hard-on when she had helped him get off of the floor. It made her horny thinking about it.

Denny walked down the little hallway to their bedroom. He left the door open and got in bed. Not a minute later, he yelled for her, "Brenny, I've still got a cramp in my back. Can you come in here and rub it a little? Please? It hurts and if it doesn't stop hurting soon, I'll be awake all night. Just come in and rub it a little, please?"

Brenny yelled back, "What do you really want me to rub, your back or your dick?"

Denny replied timidly but clearly, "Both."

Brenny replied, "No thanks. That is how you get inside and under my skin. You do it with the power of the sex you create. I've given it a lot of thought and sex with you is too dangerous."

She heard Denny get out of bed and walk to the living room. He stood in the buff.

His voice pierced the darkness as he told her, "Brenny, I love you, I miss you, I need you. I don't beg anyone for anything. Indians don't do that, but I'm begging you. I am begging you to come back. How many times do I have to tell you that I know I did the wrong thing; I know I fucked up."

"You fucked up real bad, Denny."

"I know, Brenny, I know! I'm sorry, Brenny, I'm sorry! My heart is breaking in a thousand pieces." Brenny could hear the emotion in his voice as it began to crack.

He told her, "I'm so lonely without you." His voice became agonized as he said, "I love you so much, Brenny."

He began to cry. "Please don't make me suffer like this anymore," he pleaded pitifully. "I can't live without you. I love you too much."

Denny continued, "Just lie with me like we used to do. I figured it out, and we slept together as man and woman almost five thousand times. That's a lot of nights, Brenny. That's a lot of time, a lot of history."

Brenny interrupted, "Yes, Denny, that is a lot of experience with someone. Most of them were happy, but some of them were hell. Not for you, but for me."

Denny's tearful voice muffled into a strained voice. "I know what hell is now," he told her. "It is a life without you. There is no one like you."

He sincerely said, "I told you before: if you take me back, I will marry you. I'll buy

you a ring tomorrow and I'll buy you a nice ring. I'll buy you one with a big diamond that will tell everyone that 'Denny loves Brenny.'"

"I can't trust you, Denny," Brenny sorrowfully told him, "If my being here is going to cause you so much distress, then maybe I had better leave."

The desperation in Denny's voice became pitched. "No Brenny!" he exclaimed. "Please stay. I'll stop. Please. Just don't go."

"Then go back to your room," Brenny told him.

"Brenny, it's our room," he replied. "It is our little place to rest and to fuse our hearts together."

Denny's shadow walked slowly and dejectedly back to his room.

Brenny was almost asleep when she felt kisses on her face. For a moment, she thought she was dreaming and tried to think of Jude's face. Then she remembered these kisses were not as sweet as Jude's.

She opened her eyes and saw the silhouette of Denny's face close to hers. He quickly began to close them by kissing her eyes back and forth.

This caught her entirely off guard and Brenny was stunned. Brenny's spirit screamed at her and this made her feel very uncomfortable.

Brenny realized that she and Denny had never been separated this long before. She and Denny were bumping around in the dark of an entirely new territory. In the middle of her thoughts, she heard a line from the last act of Eugene O'Neill's play *Look Homeward, Angel*. The line was, "You can never go home again."

Denny continued to kiss her face and whispered into her lips, "Why can't you lay with me? I just want to hold you in my arms again. I miss holding you every night."

Brenny had been so angry with Denny that she had forgotten the good things. Like how he used to hold her. She remembered that he always held her close when they slept together. The floodgates opened inside her and thoughts of all the happy times she had spent with Denny drowned out her soul's weeping. Denny is right, Brenny thought, we do have a lot of history together.

For the first time since she had fled that terrible night, Brenny began to fill with compassion and love for him. A jolt from her heart awakened feelings she had hidden deep inside her. She felt the old, strong, familiar love come back.

Denny sensed the change in her demeanor. This pleased him as he knew he was getting closer to wooing her back. His breath got hotter against her neck.

He seductively told her, "Just lay with me and let me hold you. I won't bother you, I

promise. Of course, if you ask for something, I will most certainly give it to you. Any way you want it and all night long, too."

Brenny felt a shiver go through her. Denny knew where all her secret buttons were, and he knew how and when to press them. He is definitely the best lover I have ever had, she mused, at least on planet earth. Brenny remembered Jude. She didn't want to compare Denny with Jude, so she banished any more thoughts of her spirit lover.

But Brenny compared them anyway. Denny was real and she shared the same reality as he did. Brenny could see Denny and touch him any time she wanted. No wonder Jude gave me that dream, Brenny thought, he has some serious disadvantages that men don't have.

Denny whispered more words into her lips. He said, "Let's lay down together like we used to, Brenny. In our bed, in our home together."

Denny's words sounded so sincere. She wondered how sincere they really were.

Her hands instinctively reached for his penis. His loins were hot, but his dick was soft. Brenny was surprised and a little disappointed.

"It's been soft since you left, Brenny and you know I'm a walking hard-on when I'm around you."

Brenny knew what he meant. His dick was always hard for her when she was with him unless he was under great emotional distress like anger. He would have a hard on for her when they got into bed, when he held her at night and when he woke the next morning.

She gave him hard-ons in places like the grocery store and at the movie theater. Something as simple as a smile from her would set it off. Denny always had to wear loose-fitting pants so he could cover the erections she gave him.

Brenny felt his member instantly harden. It arched in her hand.

He told her in a deep-felt voice, "I guess he must have missed you because he's happy now. You've still got the magick touch. You've healed him."

Denny began to kiss Brenny's lips harder. He slipped his tongue through her lips and it darted deep into her mouth, exploring and tasting.

He slipped his hand up under her nightgown and touched her public hair. He fondled her genitalia with energetic and exploring fingers. His tongue inside her mouth became more invading as he held her box firmly with his hand.

Brenny felt desire course through her. She was getting very hot for him and she knew they were at the point of no return.

"Okay, Denny," she said, "We'll go lay down in your room."

"Our room, Brenny, our room."

"Okay Denny, our room." Denny got off the edge of the couch and Brenny sat. Denny walked to the hallway and waited for her.

Brenny walked to him. Quietly, they stood close to each other in the dark. He was waiting for her to enter the bedroom first.

The ritual was almost complete. There was one last card Brenny had left to play.

She asked Denny, "What about the cryptograms in the book? Are you going to get mad about this later on and throw it up in my face?"

Denny put his arm out and pulled her into him. She felt his hot breath against her face.

"No, I won't. But don't write about me in your next novel," he told her, as he guided her gently toward the door of the bedroom.

Brenny took her nightgown off and tossed it on the couch. She walked down the rest of the hallway and turned toward the bedroom. Brenny surrendered. She knew her world was going to instantly change back to its former one. Brenny hoped that this time it would be better.

A chill ran through Brenny as she entered her bedroom. Although the room looked the same, it seemed foreign. At first, she thought the room seemed distant because she had been away for so long and because it was a little dirty. Then she realized the true reason of her feelings.

She had a premonition that soon this room that she knew so well, would become a faded memory. A bigger chill ran through her. This chill woke something deep inside her. The Winds of Change begin to flutter and blow within her.

Shaky and cold, Brenny raced toward the bed and got under the covers. Denny followed her, only stopping to turn the light off. The stereo was playing, but it was barely audible.

Denny put his arms around her and cuddled her. He felt her tremble as he kissed her. Brenny wondered if he would ask her why she was shuddering, but he didn't. Instead, Denny thought Brenny was shaking for him.

He held her tighter and the heat from his body began to warm her body. Brenny remembered all the thousands of times he had held her like that. It felt familiar, warm and good. He kissed her more and the kisses began to warm her soul.

Brenny remembered her premonition. Her eyes were closed and she envisioned the whole room. She willed all bad thoughts and feelings in the room to go away. She

said a quick prayer to God to ask Him to help her. By this time, Brenny was dizzy from passion and almost forgot to say, 'Amen' to her prayer.

Denny kissed her deeply with his tongue. He kissed her face and neck. Then he licked her ears and blew hot breath in them. Brenny became dizzier when Denny licked her neck, sucking it slowly and deliberately as he worked toward her torso.

His fevered tongue dragged itself down her chest to her breasts. After adoring each one with long, hot licks, he began to suck her right nipple while caressing her left breast. By this time, Brenny forgot about the chills and the premonition.

His tongue slowly crawled toward her Place of Secrets. His fingers went up and down her body: fluttering, touching, caressing. Denny's lips kissed her body as his hot tongue searched and devoured her. Years together had taught him where all her hot spots were. He personally visited each place.

He kissed her pubic hair and the inside of her legs. A jolt of pleasure made her jump as he passionately licked her. Denny's probing tongue made Brenny's senses become acute.

He slowed himself down a couple of times to keep her from coming. Denny was getting Brenny where he wanted her: He wanted her to completely open herself to him. Once through that door, he would be comfortably home in the mansions of Brenny's life.

Brenny's body flushed with warmth and desire. She began to breathe fast and her heart cried out for his heart to seal them together. Deep, in the darkest part of her, Brenny's spirit mourned and wept.

Denny got on top of her and rubbed her clitoris in a circling motion with the head of his member. It was hot and wet, and it made her skin burn. After circling her hood several times, he knew it was time to enter her and at the same time, mark his territory.

He entered her on the first try. Denny felt familiar and good inside her. Although it was dark in the room, Brenny saw Denny's big, happy smile.

Brenny had forgotten how powerful and skilled Denny was at making love. His deep, deliberate, probing thrusts rammed at the door of her heart until it finally flung open. Hanging tightly on to Denny, Brenny succumbed to tidal waves of pleasure.

Sticky and sweaty, Denny held her in his arms for several minutes. Brenny's heart swelled with love for him. She realized that she still loved him in spite of his offenses in the past.

Denny sat and pulled the rubber band tighter around his long, black ponytail. As he was doing this, a song came on the radio that reminded him of Brenny. He looked at her and noticed that she had already started to sleep.

Denny gently nudged Brenny awake.

"Brenny, wake up," he told her. Brenny struggled to open her eyes. Denny turned up the radio. "Listen, Brenny. This song is about how I feel about you." Brenny heard I'm Burnin' for You by Blue Oyster Cult.

They listened to the song as they held each other. The lovers kissed each other one more time, then Brenny rolled on her side to sleep. Denny took his position beside her; his body curled into hers with his genitals pressing tightly into her body. His flesh and energy cocooned Brenny in a blanket of warmth.

On the next day, Sunday, they made love all day. Brenny watched him in the mirror of the dresser that faced the bed. She watched his lean and fit body do sensual things to her. Denny liked it when she watched them make love. This assured him that she was concentrating on him and not daydreaming about someone else.

Brenny's old life and memories came back to her. She wrote during the day. She also worked on a book of poems she began at Mario's she called The Treasure Book.

Denny went to work every day at the recycling plant and came home every day after work. At \$10.00 an hour, Denny made more money an hour than the majority of people in Saint Cloud. Still, they struggled to make ends meet for the necessities of life. Like other couples, they worked together to make the best of it.

Sometimes, Brenny wished that she hadn't quit working the psychic line. She had quit because Denny didn't like that kind of work. He also didn't want her to work nights and weekends, the peak times when people needed psychic counseling. Denny wanted her to spend those hours with him and Brenny realized that he had a reasonable request.

Brenny knew that if they were to encourage and nurture their relationship, they needed to spend a lot of time together. Mario offered her special daytime hours, but Brenny declined his offer. She knew that calls would be slow most of the time and she would rather invest her time in writing. When Brenny wrote, she didn't like being interrupted by anything, including phone calls.

Brenny was also burned out. She was sick of hearing about all the evil things people do to each other. Her heart was tired of hearing about husbands who left, about terminal illnesses and about unimaginable bad luck. Working on the line constantly reminded Brenny about how much people suffer in the world and she was tired of hearing about it.

Psychic advising took too much energy from her. It left her too drained to do anything else, including writing. Because her writing was important to her, Brenny did not mind quitting the job.

Denny was good to her. He tried hard to be a partner, friend and lover to her. Most of the time, he was able to keep his temper in check.

It was Spring and they began to fish together in the evenings after Denny got off work. They went to Warner Lake by Saint Augusta to catch Northerns and big crappies. They fished under the Sauk River bridge in Cold Spring and caught catfish and perch.

Brenny visited Muffin and her noisy bunch of boys. She talked with Mario on the phone every day. Mario had bad vibes about Brenny going back to Saint Cloud. He called Brenny at least three times a day to check on her.

Brenny was happy living with Denny. Still, Brenny felt the Winds of Change continue to stir their cold, breezy wings inside her. Many times, she would wonder what changes these winds really heralded.

She snooped around and found out that Jim got the job. Although she knew at the time of the interview that she wouldn't get the job, she still felt disappointment. Brenny also felt used, dirty and outraged that the school district had given her the 'pity interview' so that they would look good for Affirmative Action laws. Not only that, they had used the interview process to camouflage the fact that they were going to hire their friend. The irony of it was that the school district kept its respectability and credibility. They interviewed a crone so they would appear enlightened and so they could legally hire the prince.

Brenny remembered how much money she had spent for the interview. She wondered how much money the other interviewees had wasted to play in a fixed game. She wondered how the people on the interviewing committee could be so cavalier and careless with others' lives. Then she realized that these people didn't care. Their lives were too insulated and isolated to care about others who didn't have access to privilege like them.

She applied for jobs in Saint Cloud and never got an interview. Brenny applied for jobs in the Twin Cities and got an interview, but she didn't get the job.

Brenny thought a lot about Jude. When she thought of him, she played the song Strange Dreams by Frank Marino on the stereo.

She worried about Jude's presence in her life. Brenny talked to Muffin about Jude and Muffin told her to pray about it. She was afraid Muffin would say that. Secretly, she didn't want to talk to God about Jude.

Brenny did not want to admit to God that she kept Jude around in her life because she enjoyed the sex with him. The longer she kept Jude in her life, the harder it was to break it off with him. Especially since Jude loved her more all the time.

Her secret life was beginning to worry her. She wondered what Denny would think or say if he knew about Jude. Denny was faithful to her and faithfulness was important

to her and to her relationship. She decided to take Muffin's advice and pray.

Dear Father, she prayed, You know everything, so I won't try to hide it or pretend it doesn't exist. You know why I am praying. I am praying about Jude. I don't know where this prayer is going, so bear with me.

Father, everything in my life is hemorrhaged around me. I don't know what to do about it, either. All the solutions I've tried to solve my problems with don't work. In the midst of this chaos, I am loved by Jude. I don't love Jude, but I like the attention, caring and intimacy.

Faithfulness is very important to me, Father. Denny is always faithful to me and I want to be faithful to Denny. Still, I don't know if Denny and I are going to make it. I want us to make it. You know that.

So what should I do about Jude? Brenny hesitated for a moment, but she knew what she had to do. Brenny continued her prayer, My heart tells me to quit seeing him because I don't love him back. Please intercede and stop it.

As soon as Brenny prayed this, she heard Jude's voice clearly and emphatically plead, "No! Brenny!" Then it trailed away.

Hearing Jude's voice made Brenny feel guilty and sad. She began to miss him. Still, Brenny was relieved and glad that she was out of the relationship.

God interceded. He cleaned up another one of her messes. For a moment, she wished that God would help her with Denny, that God would make him be a better partner to her. Brenny caught herself daydreaming. Inside her heart, Brenny knew that Denny had free will. She knew that God could not make Denny do something that Denny didn't want to do.

XVII

Sometimes, while Denny was working and she didn't feel like writing or reading, Brenny would drive her old VW Bug around and look for garage sales. She usually stayed on the northside (where she lived), but sometimes she would drive to another area to get out of the neighborhood and look around.

It was late spring and an urge came upon Brenny to go to some sales. Her morning had been a slow one. It seemed like a good idea, so she fired up her clunky, metal beast and headed out. She followed her vibes and she found herself on the east side before she realized it.

Brenny found a couple of sales close to the fairgrounds. She drove to the Sauk Rapids' part of the neighborhood and found another sale, but she didn't buy anything.

The east side is older than most parts of Saint Cloud. In the spring and summer it is lush with grass and trees.

Brenny thought of the river and how beautiful it must be. She decided to drive by the Mississippi River and take a look.

When Brenny went to turn her Bug around, she when she noticed a homemade garage sale made from a cardboard box. Her vibes were overcome with an urge to check it out. The address was close by and she drove to it.

An urgent feeling came over her to go to that place and she was baffled by the feeling. She wondered what she would find and she tried to feel inside her soul for some kind of a premonition or explanation. Her vibes told her nothing, so Brenny followed her heart.

When Brenny got to the house, she noticed that it had no garage. She saw another homemade sign that said 'Sale Inside' with an arrow that pointed to a door of the first floor of a house.

Brenny never did like going inside peoples' homes for sales. It was too personal and sometimes she saw things that she didn't like. She remembered the last time she had gone into someone's house for a sale. The place was greasy with filth and there was dog shit on the floor. The memories of this made her decide to pass the 'sale' up.

As she was about to leave, a warm, sweet feeling flowed through her from her forehead to her heart. She stopped for a moment and tried to figure out what had just happened. Her heart told her to go into the house, to check it out. Brenny tried to connect to her vibes and see why her heart was telling her this, but she felt nothing.

She studied the two-story house and it looked harmless. It was made of yellow bricks, so Brenny knew it was one of the older houses in Saint Cloud. Most yellow brick houses in Saint Cloud are at least a hundred years old.

Brenny never trusted old houses. They made noises and the history of their human occupation was imprinted into their essence. Saint Cloud has more than its share of bones buried in the closets of these old houses, Brenny thought. I wonder what is buried in there?

She thought again about leaving, but her brain couldn't command her hands to hold the steering wheel or turn the key. She felt the warm sun flood into her window and she felt joy. Something was stopping her from leaving, but she couldn't figure out what it was.

The yellow brick house was rundown. It was shaded by big, mature trees. It had a large picture window on the first floor next to the entrance door. Because it had no curtains or other covering, Brenny figured that no one lived in the flat.

Brenny felt another urge to go into the house. She checked the voice inside her spirit, but it gave her no answers.

Brenny got out of the car. As soon as she crossed over the curb and stepped onto the

sidewalk, she stopped. A wind from nowhere blew through her. It felt like the Winds of Change, but Brenny saw the branches and leaves blow from the gusts. This made her wonder.

She looked to her left and then to her right. The trees in either direction did not blow in the wind. Only the trees ahead of her, the ones standing sentry around the house, moved to the wind.

She wasn't afraid. Euphoria coursed through her soul for a moment, surprising her and making her smile. Something powerful pulled Brenny to the house.

As Brenny came closer to the house, she noticed that it was more ancient than she thought. The four wooden steps that lead to the porch sagged and the wooden boards of the porch looked cracked and rotten. A small paper was taped on the screen door. It said, "Come in."

The entrance door was open and she noticed the beautiful, beveled glass in the door. Roses were artistically etched around the edges. Brenny mused, the first owner of this house must have had money to pay for something like this.

She walked through the threshold and looked inside. She saw a large living room of a downstairs duplex apartment. It was empty except for three long tables.

The air smelled old and musty. The floors rolled from the shifting of the house's foundation.

Brenny noticed a coat closet to her immediate right as she entered the room. The door was open and she saw a full-length, beveled mirror looking out into the living room. It was fastened to the wall of the closet.

A hanging yellow light bulb hung over the mirror and swayed slightly. Brenny wondered if a draft was making it rock like that.

In front of Brenny, a little girl of about five sat at an easel making a picture on a big piece of paper. Using magic markers, the little girl was drawing a heart with a rainbow around it. Her magic marker case was sitting safely on the edge of a table near her.

Brenny's vibes told her to make a note of where and how the case was placed. A man sat to Brenny's left and a TV table with a cigar box on it (for making change and storing money) sat in front of him.

Her vibes told her that these two were a father and daughter who lived in the upstairs apartment. She also knew that he owned the house and rented the bottom part of it. When she wondered where the little girl's mother was, Brenny's vibes told her that the mother had left them a long time ago.

The three tables held mostly household goods and little girl's clothing. There was

nothing that Brenny wanted or needed.

On her way out the door, Brenny stopped to look at the little girl's picture. Brenny's eyes were pulled to look at the marker case sitting securely on the table. Suddenly, it flipped up in the air and all the markers flew in every direction.

Brenny was surprised and speechless. The little girl looked frustrated and the man looked scared. The girl and her father exchanged worried glances that this lady (Brenny) saw what happened and would learn their big secret.

"Dorothy!" the man told his daughter, "I told you to be more careful with your markers. Now they are everywhere . . . "

"But Daddy," the child told her father, "I didn't knock them over. He did."

"Dottie, there's no one here but us and the lady," the man said, gesturing to acknowledge Brenny's presence.

Brenny looked at him and said, "The little girl is telling you the truth. She didn't knock the markers over."

The daughter and father exchanged looks of surprise. Their eyes told each other that the lady there knew the truth.

Brenny continued, "I told you. She didn't knock them over. Something or someone did. Is your house haunted?"

The owner of the house told her 'no'.

Brenny could tell that he wasn't going to talk about it. He gave looks of warning to his daughter not to say anything. Brenny didn't feel comfortable and she knew it was time to leave.

As Brenny walked by the closet with the mirror, she felt happiness. A beautiful and kind male voice said to her, "Brenny. I like your name, Brenny. Please come back and visit me sometime."

Brenny spun around and saw no one but the man and girl. "Who was that?" she asked them.

"Who was what?" the man asked as he kept exchanging nervous glances with his daughter, telling her with his eyes not to say anything.

Brenny shuddered.

"I distinctly heard a man's voice say my name," Brenny told them, "And it wasn't your voice."

The man shrugged, but he wouldn't look at her. Her common sense vibes told her that the man and his daughter knew more than what they were letting on. Now it was really time for her to leave.

Brenny walked to the front door. She was about to go through the threshold when heard his voice again.

He told her, "Brenny, don't forget. I am here and would like to visit with you." His voice was still beautiful and she had never heard so much love and kindness in a voice.

"Who are you?" Brenny asked him telepathically.

"I am the one whom you seek."

"God?" she asked, but felt stupid after asking because she knew that he wasn't God.

"Go back and look in the mirror," he told her kindly.

She automatically turned around and walked to the mirror in the closet. Brenny looked in the mirror and saw her reflection. The light bulb turned above the mirror began to burn bright and the mirror filled with light.

It took Brenny a little while to focus her eyes. When she could see clearly, Brenny saw the face of a beautiful man on the other side of the mirror.

He told her sincerely, "Come back to me when you are ready." Brenny stood speechless.

She looked at him until his face faded. Afterwards, she hurriedly left the house.

Before she knew it, she was in her car with the keys in the ignition. Brenny looked at the house and she saw the opaque faces of the man and girl looking out the picture window.

Brenny looked at the house for several minutes. The daughter and father never moved. Confused and surprised, Brenny finally got enough energy to leave. She went home so she could think about and process what happened. Mario was out of town and Brenny hoped that he would call her.

During this time, things were getting stressful at Denny's job. The boss had fired some of the workers and hadn't hired any new ones. Denny was expected to pick up the slack and do the work of the missing workers.

The stress was beginning to follow him home. He began to take out his stress on her. Worse, he began to blame her for things beyond her control.

Denny's temper began to come back. It came back so slowly that Brenny didn't notice

until it started their first fight after getting back together.

She had cooked him a pork chop for lunch and it was tough. It was so tough that a steak knife barely went through it. Brenny felt bad and she tried to explain to

Denny that it was a better cut and that it should not have been tough. She looked around for something else to feed him, but he was beginning to get too angry to eat. Denny threw his dinner in the trash--plate, utensils and all--and he stormed to the bedroom.

Tears flew from Brenny's eyes. She retrieved the plate and utensils out of the trash, and washed them. Brenny sat in the living room's dark shadows and thought. Brenny thought about his face twisted with anger and she thought about how many times she had seen that face before.

Memories came back and she thought about all the times Denny had hit and kicked her. She thought about all the angry words. Words that cut her to her soul. Brenny thought about the cigarette he threw in her face and how she was afraid of him when he was angry.

Then something happened. Something snapped in her. She realized that she had done her best and that she had given Denny her best. She realized that just because she was alive, she had rights. Maybe these rights did not exist on paper, but she knew that they existed.

Brenny realized how selfish and destructive Denny was and she began to feel her love for him slip away.

He emerged from the bedroom. Denny looked for her and saw her sitting in the living room thinking to herself. He didn't want her to think because he was afraid that she might be thinking about him.

Denny was on his guard now. He had just gotten her back and he didn't want her to leave him again. Denny tried not to be angry, but when she asked him, "Denny, are you still mad?" his tongue burned to complain.

"What do you think?" he asked her sarcastically, "A man works his ass off at work all day and the least he expects is something decent to eat on his day off. What you gave me was inedible."

"Denny, I didn't know it was going to be tough. It looked okay through the wrapper and I can take it and get the money back. I still have the receipt."

Denny's voice became angrier as he said, "There you go again, making excuses. I am sick of hearing your excuses."

"What excuses?" Brenny asked him. She did not like the tone of his voice and it made her angry. She told him, "I am explaining that I did not deliberately give you tough

meat. I am giving you a reason, not an excuse."

"No, Brenny, what you are giving me is an excuse." Denny replied. His voice was beginning to get caustic. "Ever since I've known you, all you have given me are excuses. Like I've told you a thousand times, your whole life is an excuse."

Brenny could feel things escalate between them. She remembered when the last time he got mad, he threw her out, but not before he burned her with his cigarette.

Brenny could feel his hot breath fuel his words five feet away.

His voiced became more pitched as he said, "I try and I try. I work my ass off for you. And what do I get? A piece of shoe leather to eat. I need help, but I never ask for it. Things would be a lot easier around here if you helped out."

Brenny knew what was next. She had heard it so many times, that it was like a broken record.

He continued, "You have given me every excuse why you can't work, why you can't get a shit job like me. But it's okay to send me out there every day to do a shit job. Then you don't even want to feed me. You're the white trash princess, but you can't even feed your slave."

She couldn't hide the disappointment in her voice when she said, "Denny, you promised me that you wouldn't argue with me like this again. You promised me that you would keep your temper."

Denny's face became distorted again with anger.

He told her, "Brenny, I am killing myself, I am working myself to death. You are a burden to me and you have forced me to become a supporter of the arts. Your arts.

I can barely pay the bills, let alone support you and your habits. Do you have to be so lazy, Brenny?"

"Denny, you know that I've been applying for work."

"For picky-princess work," he replied. "Work that you will never get. When are you going to wake up and smell the coffee? You are never going to get a good job. You are too old, too ugly and too fat to get a job behind a desk. Those jobs are for the pretty young blondes who just graduated college."

Brenny knew the situation was going to get worse. She began to feel sick. Sick in her stomach and sick in her soul. She was sick of his anger, of his accusations, of him always having the advantage of physical and economic strength. It was déjà vu: the cycle of anger and violence was completing its ugly course in favor of its instigator: Denny.

She looked at her purse standing by the door. Before Denny could catch his breath and move in closer, she made her move. Brenny bolted for the door, grabbing her purse as she went through the threshold.

Brenny blinked as she ran into the bright, warm sunshine. Brenny raced for her car and quickly locked both doors.

Denny followed her, but he wasn't fast enough to open the passenger's door before she locked it. He immediately sensed that something had changed in Brenny's heart and his vibes told him that she was capable of doing something unpredictable. Something that would forever change her love for him.

Denny looked at her eyes and they were full of rebuke for him. They also looked distant. This confirmed his suspicion. He felt desperate, but didn't know what to do.

Brenny started her car and backed out with a jolt. Denny's feet jumped out of the way to keep from being run over. He had his hand on the door handle. She yelled at him to let go, but he refused. She told him again to let the handle go.

He desperately told her, "No, not until you talk to me Brenny. Not until we talk this out."

"No, Denny," she yelled to him, "I don't want to talk to you anymore. I can't trust you. Oh God, I wanted to trust you, but every time I trust you, you eventually go back to your old ways. I can't believe that I let myself love you again because you are becoming destructive again."

"Okay Brenny!" Denny told her, "I will stop hassling you about getting a job."

"No, Denny, I've had enough. Now, let go of the door!"

Denny felt a shock go through his hand and it forced him to take his hand off the door. He knew the shock was not normal or coincidental and he wondered who shocked him. His hand burned and felt like a thousand needles were pricking it all at once.

Brenny left him standing in the driveway as he held his hurt hand. She didn't look back. Sad, hot tears began to roll down her face.

Wishing to talk to Muffin, she drove by Muffin's house and saw Enrique, Sr. mowing the lawn. He saw her and gave her an unfriendly look.

She drove to Lake George in downtown Saint Cloud. Brenny parked and let the hot sun warm her through the windows. She cried and wondered what she should do. Brenny prayed for a couple of hours, thought and cried some more.

Eventually, she became thirsty and hungry. Brenny looked in her wallet and saw she had thirty dollars. She went downtown and bought some taco burgers at a Mexican

food stand.

Afterwards, she drove back to Lake George. As she ate, she watched the people in the park. Lovers walked around the manicured lake. She cried some more. Her heart cried for change. Her tears of sadness and betrayal turned into the bitter ones of regret. She regretted being born and wished she had never been born.

After awhile, Brenny grew restless and drove to the east side. Brenny wondered about the strange, yellow-brick house. Wanting to see it again, she thought that she would drive by it and see if anyone had moved into the empty bottom duplex. It was empty and Brenny's vibes told her that the man and girl who lived upstairs were gone.

She got out of her car and walked toward the house.

The long shadows of late afternoon made the empty, curtainless, picture window look pitch black. This time, the house looked haunted to her. As she wondered if this man was a ghost, Brenny's vibes told her that the mirror was a porthole to another reality, maybe to another dimension.

Brenny wished she had told Mario about the house. She had meant to, but he was still out of town. This house could eat me and no one would ever know, Brenny thought, I wish I could have talked to Mario about this.

Out of nowhere, Brenny heard the kind man's voice tell her, "Brenny, I can feel your presence." She turned around to see if someone was behind her, but no one was.

"Brenny, come inside and visit with me," the man said, "I mean you no harm. Come visit me and talk with me for a while."

Feelings of awe and wonder, of beauty and fear, of happiness and sadness came upon her. Her flesh was goose pimpled and she could hear her heart beating strongly. Brenny walked toward her destiny. She wasn't afraid.

XVIII

The house still looked old and decrepit. There was nothing mystical about its looks. Still, Brenny felt the power of the house pulling her toward it. The power of her curiosity and psychic feelings, and the power of the man compelled her to enter the house.

The four wooden steps creaked as she climbed them and the rotting, old, wooden boards of the porch moaned as she walked across them. It was windy and the big, green, heavy screen-door was not latched. Still, it did not blow back and forth like it should have. Brenny could hear the wind blow louder and more fiercely the nearer her hand got to the door handle.

She pulled the screen door back two feet and noticed that the entrance door was open a small margin. Her vibes told her that someone had left it open just for her.

Brenny looked cautiously through the beveled glass window on the door and through the crack in the door. She didn't see anyone inside. The place was empty except for the big gas heater in the living room. The room looked quiet and desolate.

Brenny had an epiphany. She knew that her life was about to change forever. A small chill went down her back. Thoughts of leaving flashed through her mind but she knew that she wanted to go inside the house.

She looked at the old, battered door knob. It looked like any other door knob, but it radiated strange energy. Brenny decided not to touch it until she processed her thoughts and feelings.

Her mind tried to talk logically to her. It told her that she was in uncharted territory and that it would be better if she came back with Mario. Brenny's spirit told her to trust and to go through the threshold. She paused and thought, her eyes never leaving the knob.

The door knob was the point of no return. She knew that when she touched it, her fate would be forever changed.

Her hand barely touched the door knob when energy surged from it into her. The door opened by itself and she walked inside.

Smells of must filled her nose in the old and cold room. She felt a little unbalanced standing on the rolling floors in the darkened room. Catching her balance, she walked to the closet door. It opened and a bright light came from the long, antique mirror, filling the closet.

The light was beautiful and it invited her to walk into it. Curious, she stopped about a foot and a half before the mirror. When she looked into the mirror, she could not see her reflection. Brenny felt intoxicated and all her senses became acute.

Her left hand reached out to the mirror. It fell through to the emptiness on the other side. Startled, she quickly pulled her hand out, but could not take her eyes off the emanating light.

She thought for a few moments and decided to put her hand through the mirror again. Her hand felt the atmosphere on the other side. Her vibes told her that the place beyond the mirror was some kind of other dimension. Brenny's spirit assured her that she would be safe if she went through the threshold. When she withdrew her hand, she heard a little 'pop' sound.

Brenny was ready to go through the light when she remembered something. Laughing to herself, she put her right leg through the mirror to search with the toes of her shoes for a floor.

Brenny felt a floor instantly. A solid one. Just as she was about to bring her leg back through the mirror, she was pulled through the mirror.

As she went through the mirror, everything turned to white light. Things that looked like stars flew by her and heard a light hum. Everything went black for a second and then she found herself in a room that served as the man's home.

Peace and calmness surrounded her. She instantly liked this place.

Before she could look around and interpret her surroundings, she looked ahead of her. There, about five feet ahead of her was a man half-sitting, half-leaning on the top of a small couch of some kind. Brenny caught her breath: he was the most beautiful looking man she had ever seen. He looked much better in person than through the mirror.

All the features on his oval face were handsome and kind. His light brown complexion was clear and flawless. He watched her with his penetrating green eyes. Brenny had never seen eyes that color and they enchanted her.

His hair, shiny, black and smooth, hung six inches past his shoulders. Lean and muscular, his body looked perfect.

He was almost naked. The only clothing that he had on was a fine, white linen cloth tied around his waist and it covered his loins and thighs. Brenny noticed that he wore a ring whose sole jewel shone the color of his eyes. A white fire inside the jewel constantly moved and flashed like small bolts of lightning when it hit the edges of the ring.

The ring reminded her of one of those lightning displays that are sold in novelty shops. The kind where lightning is created and trapped inside some kind of sphere. Only this ring did not have to be plugged in to make fire.

Brenny wondered if she were in a dream. She closed her eyes and opened them, expecting to find herself sleeping beside Denny or trying to sleep at Mario's. Instead, she saw the same astral place, lodged in a dimension somewhere between time and space. This pleased her.

Her vibes told her that something wonderful and fearful was about to happen. Secrets were going to be revealed. She and this man were going to learn them together. For a moment, she saw the Hierophant card from the Tarot in her mind.

He smiled at her and his teeth were perfect. His smile melted away the last vestiges of apprehension and premonitions about Hierophant cards. Joy flooded through her and she started to laugh happily as she smiled back at him.

"Hello, Brenny," he said in his golden, kind voice. "I am glad that you came to see me. My name is Adrian."

"Hi, Adrian," she replied nervously as she tried to look at him better.

Adrian smiled again as he told her, "You have a beautiful voice."

Brenny replied, "It is you who has the beautiful voice."

Adrian told her, "I have never heard a voice like yours."

"It is a woman's voice," Brenny responded. She thought for a moment and continued, "I have a feeling that you have never heard a woman's voice before."

Adrian laughed and replied, "That is true. You have much intuitive power for a mortal. I am impressed."

While he spoke, the room changed. Another couch appeared beside the one he was on. He straightened up and walked around the couch. He sat. His demeanor invited Brenny to sit with him awhile and talk. She sat on the other couch. It was comfortable.

Brenny looked at this Adrian. He was beautiful to behold and he shined with inner light that glowed around him. She was more comfortable in this new place and she felt at home.

Brenny worried if he were connected to anything evil. Adrian heard her thoughts. No, he told her with his mind, he was not in any trouble with God. He said that he would tell her more about it later. He told her that he lived the way he did was because he wanted to.

"Why are you so unhappy, Brenny?" he asked her. "I can see your world through reflections. Many times, when I see your reflection, you are sad and drops of water fall from your eyes. I have seen others do this, too. I do not understand what it is, except that it is a reaction to your sadness."

"We call it crying. You've never done that, huh?"

"I have never been sad," Adrian replied shaking his head slightly back and forth.

"You are shut away. Doesn't that make you sad?"

"No," he replied, "I am here because I want to be."

"Does time pass quickly here? What do you do here?"

Adrian replied, "The thing you call and know as time does not affect me like it does you. I keep myself busy by praying and by watching your world. I am always learning."

Adrian's eyes locked on to Brenny's and she felt his intense power.

He asked her in a sincere voice, "So why are you so sad?"

Brenny didn't want to think about her world, but she felt compelled to answer his

question. Her mind stumbled for words to say.

She replied, "Because everything is so f. . . ." The words "fucked up" would not form in her mouth or mind. Brenny knew instantly that Adrian's home was not a place for negative words. The power of the place did not allow it.

"Because I suffer too much failure in my life. Everything fell apart because I could not find work. Do you understand what work is?" Adrian nodded 'yes'.

"What kind of work do you do?" He asked.

"I can do anything and everything. I also write and I have written some things, including a book. They say the book was very good. So good that I even have a small group of fans."

Brenny thought for a moment and realized that Adrian did not know what fans were.

She told him, "Fans are people who are moved by something you have done with your talents. Really, I shouldn't have any fans because the book did not prosper."

Brenny knew she should answer Adrian's question better.

She told him, "Back to your question. It is a difficult question to answer it, but I will try.

I cry because I've never had enough. Enough work, enough money, enough unconditional and understanding love from a man. I have been so hungry for those things and other things for so long. My life on earth is probably two-thirds over and most of it has been a bitter struggle. Many people on the planet are angry. This anger negatively affects all of us and it affects me.

I cry because as a woman, I was born to be a slave. But no matter how they try, they cannot make me wear slave shackles. Still, it causes friction and frustration in my life. When I get too frustrated, hurt or afraid, I also cry."

"How do you feel now?" Adrian asked.

Brenny laughed and said, "I feel fine. I like it here. All the things that once mattered to me aren't important anymore. You know that I like you."

Adrian started to laugh. Brenny wondered if she had embarrassed him, but her vibes told her 'no'.

Adrian saw her confusion and told her, "I am laughing because your words gave me so much joy. I like you and I like your spirit."

Brenny looked seriously into Adrian's eyes.

She told him, "I know you have seen me with Denny, so we might as well talk about him right at the beginning.

I have been with him for a long time. Denny has saved me many times because I am so pitiful, but he has also been mean to me. He is a very angry person and blames me for his own unhappiness.

People don't realize it, but all the small things add up. After it finally gets as high as it's going to get, you finally change inside. You get sick of being sick. All that negativity is not healthy and everyone gets infected.

One day, you realize how much the anger makes you sick. You have to face the truth about yourself and the relationship.

I can't be with Denny anymore. There was a lot of love between us, but all the negative energy killed it."

Brenny watched Adrian as she spoke. She noticed that he listened intently. Brenny asked him, "Why did you want me to come here?"

Adrian replied, "I saw you through the mirror and the beauty of your soul stunned me. I have never seen anything like it, Brenny. It is full of fire, intelligence and creativity. I feel it right now and it makes me very happy."

Brenny thought for a moment.

She laughed as she said, "You make me happy, too. How can this be when we are such different beings? Do we know each other from before? Like before I got my ticket to the fun house?"

Adrian nodded his head 'no'. He told her sincerely, "If we knew each other from the past, you would know."

Adrian smiled at her as he said, "My heart tells me you are the mate that the Father made for me."

Brenny didn't know what to say. She was surprised and flattered. In her heart of hearts, she knew that his words were true.

Brenny wondered if she were good enough for him. He was too perfect compared to her scarred-up, ragged life. Embarrassment began to fill her. As she fought her embarrassment, his presence filled her with compassion and understanding. This is when she knew that he didn't care about her past.

Adrian continued, "Ever since I saw you, all I wanted to do was meet you and talk with you. I have never felt this way, so all of this is new to me."

He began to laugh and his laughter was infectious and happy. With a big smile, he

told her, "I think I am love struck."

This made Brenny laugh. They laughed together and their happiness fueled more laughter. Brenny was beginning to realize that she really liked this guy more than she thought.

He smiled at her, "I am glad that you trust me enough to come see me. Trust is a nice thing to build a relationship on."

"Why would you like me when you are perfect and I am the opposite?" Brenny asked Adrian.

Adrian did not like her question and his face showed it. He looked at her sadly as he answered, "You keep thinking that you are not good enough for me and this hurts my feelings. You are good enough for me, Brenny. You will always be good enough for me. Please try not to think bad thoughts about yourself. I feel it and it hurts me."

After Adrian was satisfied that Brenny understood what he had told her, he thought of something.

He sincerely told her, "I am not perfect. Just because the Father created my kind first, does not mean we are perfect. I am unique and distinct, just like you. I, too, am chiseled by individuality and freewill. Strip everything away, and we are the same. We are naked fire and we come from the same Place."

Brenny wondered how much older he was than her. She realized that they were very compatible, even though they came from different realities. Brenny wished that she could be beside Adrian. The room instantly changed around her and she found herself sitting beside him. The other couch had disappeared. Adrian's smile showed his pleasure and surprise. Brenny smiled back.

Small rainbow lights lit up the invisible walls. The sight was stunning and the ambience of the room glowed with warmth. Sitting so close to Adrian in such a beautiful environment overwhelmed Brenny's senses and thoughts.

She began to feel more at ease and enjoyed his company until she realized that she was horny. This began to make her feel uncomfortable. Especially since she couldn't hide it from him.

Brenny didn't know what to do about her budding desire. She tried to mask her thoughts and feelings and quickly build walls.

Before she had one brick in place, Adrian sensed that Brenny was trying to build walls.

He looked at her with curiosity and asked, "Why are you trying to hide something?"

Brenny replied, "I want privacy to process some thoughts and feelings."

Adrian did not understand and it showed on his face. She reached over and touched his hand with hers.

As she looked into his vibrant green eyes, she told him, "It is always my desire to understand myself and the things around me. If others know my thoughts and feelings, I become distracted."

Adrian nodded in acknowledgement that he understood what she meant. Brenny thought for a few moments and realized she didn't want to waste any more energy on building walls. She had also seen his erection, so she knew that there was that kind of mutual attraction between them as well. Brenny decided to save her energy

She already knew that she was getting too close to him, but she decided to let things go their natural course. Brenny trusted Adrian and she knew something good was going to happen between them. This thought pleased her and it must have pleased Adrian because he smiled at her.

The sexual tension rose between them. Brenny wondered if he was a sexual being, but she already knew the answer.

His eyes followed hers to his erection. He began to smile. Adrian's infectious laugh sounded like a melody.

"This never happened to me until I saw you," Adrian told her. His eyes sought hers and he told her, "Yes, I am innocent, but I know what that means."

Her heart told her that he was telling the truth. She began to worry because she realized he was too innocent for her. Brenny looked at Adrian for a few moments and wondered what she should do. Without warning, she kissed him. It was an experiment to see what would happen.

To her surprise, Adrian kissed her back and it was no innocent kiss. His kiss had fire in it. It was the most passionate kiss Brenny had ever experienced and it made her hot.

Adrian heard her thoughts about wanting him and he was pleased. His face lit up with another smile for her. He put his face against hers and the room whirled around her. Brenny began to change it with her mind. He felt her do this and it pleased him. His lips smiled across hers as he kissed her. It was full of power and love.

The electricity of the kiss went through her, followed by feelings of sweetness and goodness. It filled her heart with love and even more desire for him.

The next kiss was more passionate. It was so powerful that it made Brenny feel weak. A fever began to grow inside her. All she could do was let it burn where it wanted to.

"For a virgin," she told him with her mind, "You sure know how to start the right kind of fires between us."

"I am just following my heart," his mind told hers.

He held her tighter. His outpouring of love and desire shocked her as it flowed through her. Brenny wanted him to make love to her.

Adrian heard her thought and he was pleased. But then he began to think.

Brenny felt him thinking that he should slow down and this made her feel disappointed. She wanted to seduce him away from his thought. Brenny pushed her heart closer to his and touched his hands with hers.

This worked as Adrian began to kiss her sweetly and lovingly. The power of his kisses overtook her and she went limp.

When Brenny came to her senses, she found herself laying down with Adrian. He was looking at her with love in his eyes. She felt the heat and hardness of his member pressing against her. Brenny was hotter than ever.

Again, she heard him thinking that he must slow down, that he must do things in the right way. It was then that she knew he was going to slow things down.

Brenny began to feel sad. Right away, he sensed her feelings. He looked at her with eyes filled with love and told her, "Brenny! Do not feel sad! I love you, Brenny. I have loved you since I saw you walk into the house.

You are my mate. You can live here with me if you want to. Forever, if you want."

Brenny was disappointed and it was written all over her face. She also worried that he was going to tell her to leave.

"What are you trying to tell me Adrian? " Brenny asked as she tried to hold back the tears. "Are you going to tell me to leave?"

Adrian sensed her feelings and he felt bad. He did not like this new feeling of sadness. His hands held her face while he kissed it.

"Please, Brenny, do not feel sad," Adrian told her. "It makes me hurt when you hurt."

Brenny felt Adrian's love for her and it melted her sadness for the moment.

Adrian told Brenny, "I want you to go back to your world for a while. Look around one last time and then come back to me. I helped you to come here this time, but next time, you have to come here completely on your own free will.

You will also have to leave your world for mine. When you give yourself completely to me, you will never be able to go back to your world.

Go back to your world. Look around and see it clearly. Talk and visit with your

friends. Have the fun you always wanted to have.

So that you can have this fun, I have restored your health. "

Brenny instantly knew that Adrian had healed her of her diabetes.

Adrian continued, "I will give you whatever material thing your heart wishes for. Just ask for it with your spirit and your mind. When your heart wishes for me more than anything else, I will call for you. The next time I see you, I will show you and tell you everything. I will answer all your questions."

Adrian's green eyes looked deeply into Brenny's brown eyes. She knew it was time to slow things down. Adrian took away most of her sexual desire for him. Brenny tried to fight this, but he was too strong for her.

Out of curiosity, Brenny looked down and saw that he still had an erection. Even though he was taking away her desire for him, he was not taking his away.

"Do I have to go right now?" Brenny asked Adrian.

"No, you can stay awhile. I would like that."

"I want to stay for a while," Brenny told him quietly. She laid in his arms happy and contented. They talked and visited for a very long time.

Finally, Adrian knew that it was time to send her back. He caused a great sleepiness to come upon her. Brenny began to yawn as she pulled closer to him. He kissed her closed eyes while she was spinning and falling into darkness. She promised him repeatedly that she would come back to him right away. Blackness engulfed her.

Adrian watched thought while he watched her sleep. He knew that life in Brenny's world was complicated and chaotic. Adrian also knew that all kinds of things could come along to distract her from him.

Thoughts of Brenny's boyfriend came to his mind. Adrian knew that Denny loved Brenny and Adrian also knew that Denny would fight for her.

An ache filled his spirit. It was an incredibly sad feeling that he had never felt before and Adrian knew that this pain was called loneliness. He hoped that Brenny really would come back to him.

IX

Brenny woke to find herself sleeping in her bed. She thought about Adrian and wished for him to hold her, but she knew that he wasn't close by. Brenny wondered about her car, but was too tired to look for it. She fell back asleep.

Brenny felt a nudge, but couldn't wake up. She felt a harder one and tried to open her

eyes. When she could finally focus, she saw Denny standing, looking down at her. It was dark in the room, but she could see his silhouette. She could sense his fear, grief, relief and anger even if she couldn't see it in his eyes.

"Where the hell have you been, Brenny?" he asked her. "When the police found your abandoned car a couple of days ago, I thought for sure that you had been murdered or that you had committed suicide."

Denny's voice began to sound more relieved.

"I was so scared, Brenny," he told her. "I was so scared. Especially since you left in such bad terms."

Brenny clumsily used all her strength to pull herself up. Denny saw this and smelled her breath to see if she were or had been drunk. Her breath smelled clean.

"What about my car?" Brenny asked him sleepily. "Did you just say it was found abandoned? How can that be? I was just in it today."

"No you weren't just in it," Denny replied. "Not for a long fucking while. The people who reported it abandoned said that it had been sitting there for a week."

"Where did they find my car?"

"On the east side. In an old neighborhood."

"How long have I been gone?" Brenny asked as she regained more of her strength.

"What a fucking question to ask--how long have I been gone?" Denny answered in disbelief. "God, Brenny, don't you know? Where have you been? You just disappeared off the earth for ten days, I guess."

Denny's voice became strained, sarcastic and urgent when he asked her, "So where have you been?"

Brenny answered in a weak voice, "To tell you the truth, Denny, I don't know. I can't remember."

She remembered where she had been. She had been with Adrian in another dimension within the yellow brick house. Brenny knew that she that couldn't tell Denny because he would find a way to stop her from seeing Adrian again. His uncle was a medicineman and Brenny knew didn't want Uncle Denny to get involved.

Brenny thought of Adrian and her desire to be with him. She decided at that moment not to tell anyone about him but Muffin and Mario. Besides, they were the only ones who'd believe her.

Denny said to her, "You can't remember? C'mon Brenny, I'm not going to buy that."

You're too smart to not know where you've been. I know you better."

"I told you Denny," Brenny replied, "I don't know where I was. I can't remember."

She realized that she was telling him lies that a cheating partner tells their mate. She liked it.

Brenny continued, "I was sitting by Lake George and was thinking about going home when I must have blacked out."

Denny didn't believe her. Still, he knew that she had a right to go anywhere she wanted and it was obvious that she did.

He asked her, "Are you sure you didn't go to one of those beatnik, hippie hangouts and maybe ate some mushrooms and went tripping somewhere?"

"Where did you come up with that one, Denny?" Brenny asked. "You have a better imagination than I do. You're the one who should be the writer. No, Denny, I did not go hang out with some freaky people and partake of an intense, organic, hallucinogenic drug. I quit that when I was a teenager. You know that."

"Maybe you had a flashback?" Denny asked.

"No, Denny, I didn't have a flashback," Brenny replied. "I must have blacked out. Maybe I had a nervous breakdown. Living with assholes will do that to a person.

Maybe I was kidnaped by aliens."

Denny's heart began to suspect another man. Tears stung his eyes and he was glad that she could not see his eyes.

"Is there another man, Brenny?" he asked her in a panic-laced voice. "I want to know."

He stopped speaking for a moment so he could reel in his emotions better. When he felt that they were under better control, he continued.

Denny told her, "The police told me that they thought you might be having an affair because most disappearances like yours usually means one. They thought you might be with your lover in the neighborhood where they found your car. I knocked on the doors of all the houses in the area and asked if anyone had seen you, but no one had."

Anger and hurt rose in his throat. She knew what he was going to ask and braced for it.

He asked her, "Is there another man?"

"There is no other man," she said, lying to him.

Denny's gut feelings told him differently, but he was too upset to pursue any more dialogue with her. He was close to losing his temper and he didn't want to do that. He had already alienated her enough from him because of his temper and he didn't want to drive her farther from him. Especially after she had disappeared for so long.

Denny didn't know what he would do if there was another man. Denny knew that he would fight for her. Even if he never showed it often enough, he loved Brenny and he wasn't going to let some interloper take her from him. He wanted to hold her, but was repelled of the thought of another man holding her, so he continued to stand.

"I'm going to call the police and tell them you have arrived home alive," he told her sarcastically and angrily.

"I filed a missing person's report on you and I imagine they are going to come over and ask you where you've been. If you tell them that you don't remember, they will probably tell Stearns County Social Services to give you a 'rubber room vacation' at the state hospital. Maybe that is what you need to get your memory back."

Brenny yawned.

Denny saw how tired she looked.

He took pity on her and told her, "Go back to sleep. We'll talk after you've slept."

Brenny slept all night and the next day as well. Denny stayed by her side, sitting in a chair beside her. As he watched her as she slept, he worried.

Denny thought about his years growing up on the reservation. His uncle Denny had raised him and because his uncle was a medicine man, 'Little Denny' (as his relatives called him) saw many supernatural things in the company of Uncle Denny. 'Little Denny' sensed something supernatural had happened to Brenny. He just couldn't figure out what.

When Brenny stopped sleeping, Denny brought her food but she wasn't hungry. A little thirsty and nothing more.

"Who is Adrian?" Denny asked her.

Brenny was surprised. She checked inside her heart, mind and soul to see if he had been probing. She knew that he had been very psychic when he was a child, but for some reason unknown to her, he had put it away. Her vibes told her that he hadn't been probing.

"Who's who?" Brenny asked innocently. Her new-found power to lie to him made her sound innocent. Brenny liked it.

"I asked you, who is Adrian?" Denny replied. "You said his name many times while you slept."

Brenny answered, "I must have been dreaming and talking in my sleep as I don't know an Adrian. You know everyone I know and you know I don't know anyone by the name of Adrian."

Denny remembered that she always told him about her friends and people she met. She had never mentioned an Adrian to him. Still, Denny's heart told him differently. His heart told him there was another male in her life and his name was Adrian.

He had already checked Brenny's body while she slept and her body revealed no clues of another man. Denny was determined to find the evidence.

As Brenny began to wake more, she began to think of Adrian. She knew that she couldn't go back to him until she did what he told her to: visit friends and realize dreams. Deep-down, Denny knew that Brenny was thinking of another man.

Brenny noticed that she had lost a lot of weight and that she was looking younger. Denny noticed this, too. More and more, he began to suspect the supernatural.

When he was a young man, Denny decided to leave the supernatural alone. Now that all kinds of supernatural things were happening around Brenny, he began to search for answers. After much thought, Denny realized that some supernatural things could not be avoided. He knew that he would have to go back to the things of his past if he was going to fight for her.

He constantly asked Brenny where she had been and she pretended that she didn't know. Sometimes, Denny cried. For the first time, Brenny felt no pity for him. Brenny only thought about Adrian and finding her way back to him. She knew that he was the one she wanted to be with.

Denny began to sleep with her again, but he did not feel like touching her. Brenny was glad because she did not want him. She was worried that he would pressure her for sex, but it never happened. She thought about staying Mario's again, but she didn't want to be too far from the house Adrian lived in.

Meanwhile, Denny decided to rekindle the psychic power he had put away a long time ago. He wasn't sure how he was going to do it because he had deeply buried his psychic abilities inside himself. Still, Denny decided to bring them back and his power returned slowly. This frustrated him because he wanted to know what was going on with Brenny and he knew that he needed a lot of power to find out.

He went back to work after a few days. Denny knew that he couldn't stand guard over her forever. He prayed and asked God to help him, to help him to get Brenny to love him again like she used to before he destroyed it with his anger and his sharp tongue. Denny promised God that he would be a good man if God would grant him this, but Denny could feel in his heart that it was too late . . .

Denny's suspicions that something supernatural had happened to Brenny were confirmed when she began to win money. Lots of it. Denny had been with Brenny for

years and he knew that she was not a lucky person.

They were at a convenience store the first time she won money. He gave her a twenty to pay for gas and the gas cost \$14.50. She came out of the store with fifty cents and five scratch-off, \$1 tickets.

Brenny never bought them, so Denny was very surprised. He was more surprised when all were winners. Big winners. Denny wanted her to drive with him to Brainerd so she could collect the \$7,700.00, but Brenny wanted to stay close to home. She told Denny to claim and keep the money.

Every day, Brenny wanted to lie in bed and think about Adrian. Denny didn't like her laying in bed like this and decided to take her to bingo. She won both jackpots. Brenny won the last jackpot, a coverall, in thirty-eight numbers. The odds of winning this game in thirty-eight numbers were astronomical.

Denny remembered Brenny's face when she won the money. She didn't look happy when she won. Like the scratch-off tickets, she knew she would win.

Brenny asked Denny to take her to the Grand Casino in Mille Lacs. Denny hoped that Brenny was on a lucky streak, but he knew differently. Still, he hoped he was wrong.

The casino was crowded, so they each went a different way. Brenny found her way to some slot machines that had elves, mushrooms and princesses. Brenny wanted to have some fun and make the night last, so she willed herself not to win until she wanted too.

She was playing slots, when she noticed the woman sitting to her left. The woman was in her fifties. She wore nice clothing and had many diamond rings, some of these rings were stacked on each other. The woman was winning, but she looked a little ticked off.

"Why are you so unhappy?" Brenny asked her.

The woman replied in a haughty voice, "Because I'm not winning like I usually do."

Brenny looked at the woman's machine and saw that the woman had over two hundred dollar's worth of credits on it.

"That's a lot of credits," Brenny told her.

The woman became more haughty and arrogant, "Not really. I've already spent \$40 and I should have more credits than this."

Brenny's senses told her that this was one of those rare persons who always won at everything. This made Brenny wonder about many things.

As she watched the woman, Brenny saw that she wasn't using a plastic membership

card. The card collected points electronically each time a bet was made.

Brenny asked her, "How come you don't have a membership card? You could be collecting points."

The woman told her, "Oh, I have one, but it's in the RV and I don't feel like going out to get it."

Brenny wondered why God would let bitter, greedy people like this woman always win while nice people always seemed to lose.

The woman didn't appreciate her good fortune, but Brenny was going to give her one more chance to be a nicer person. Brenny collected her winnings and took her card out of the slot.

She held her card toward the woman and told her in a pleasant voice, "I'm going home. You can use my card if you want. This way, someone can get the points you are losing forever."

The woman looked at her with surprise. She asked bitterly, "Why should I? What would I get out of it?" The woman pushed the play button and won 100 coins.

Brenny thought about the irony she saw in this. She told Adrian her thoughts although he did not talk back to her. He never did, but Brenny knew that he was listening.

The woman collected her winnings and moved to another machine around the corner. She began to play a new machine.

Brenny sat at the machine the woman had vacated. Brenny bet the max and told the machine to give her the jackpot. It hit the big one. Bells and sirens shrieked. She won \$30,000.

The woman heard all the noise and looked over at her old machine. She was livid. Brenny was waiting for her to look.

Brenny yelled through the bells and sirens to the woman, "I'm glad I changed my mind about leaving!" A big smile crossed Brenny's lips as people congratulated her for winning so much money.

The woman glared and Brenny smiled again. Brenny knew that the woman would never know anything but a life of greed, selfishness and good luck. She knew that the woman would always think about the big one that should have been hers. More smiles crossed Brenny's face.

Denny was across the casino when he heard the jackpot's noise. He knew the winner was Brenny. He didn't try to get around the crowd to see if Brenny won. Denny already knew.

It was just another piece of evidence in his growing collection that something unnatural was afoot. His resolve grew to find and confront the boogie man that was coming between him and Brenny.

Brenny told Mario and Muffin what happened inside the yellow brick house and she swore them to secrecy about it. They promised not to tell Denny anything.

Mario's vibes told him that the mirror was a doorway to another dimension. He saw Adrian's face in his mind and Mario knew that Adrian wasn't evil. Still, Mario knew that Brenny was fooling around with unknown things and Mario worried about this.

Mario tried to make Brenny promise that she wouldn't go back to that house and Brenny refused. She told him she was going back soon, when it was time.

He felt great loss because he felt that he was going to lose Brenny forever. Mario knew she was going to go away and nothing was going to stop it. Justin and Mario prayed constantly for her.

Brenny continued to win money. She started a checking account and put the money in it. She used Mario's address so Denny wouldn't know about it.

Of course, Brenny knew why she was winning money: it was Adrian. He had given her the power to have what she wished for and she wanted to win money. Brenny didn't know why she was wanted it because all she could think about was going back to Adrian. She knew that she didn't need money there. But under the surface, something told her that the money had a purpose in her life.

Muffin called Brenny to tell her about a job. By this time, Brenny had lost all interest in working. She was lovesick for Adrian. Brenny thanked Muffin for thinking about her, but she was going to go away so she didn't want to make any commitments.

Muffie knew that Brenny was waiting to go back to Adrian. She was worried about Brenny, but she knew that Brenny had been unhappy for a long time and Muffin felt it was time for Brenny to be happy. Muffin believed that Brenny belonged to God and she knew that He would never let Brenny get lost.

Brenny became a stranger to Denny. They no longer talked, but were civil to each other. They shared the same space, but Brenny was no longer the same person that he had once known.

During this time, Denny worked on strengthening his psychic powers. They gradually came back and they felt the same. A little rusty and dusty, but they came back.

He tried to use his psychic abilities to get inside her mind and see what she was thinking, but something always blocked his attempts. His power told him that Adrian was doing this.

Brenny tried to stay busy to make the time go by faster. She wrote poetry and she

visited her friends. She played more games of chance and won. Although she had a lot of money, she never spent it.

All her life, Brenny had wanted enough money to live on. Now that she had more than what she needed, it had no value to her. She gave a lot of her money to Denny, but by then, the money had no value to him, either.

XX

The man who lived in the upstairs duplex of the yellow brick house woke up and lay in bed thinking about beginning his regular waking routine. His little girl was still sleeping across the room in her twin bed. He wondered if he should wake her up, but decided to let her sleep a little longer.

The man was tired. The ghost downstairs had made noises all night, keeping him awake until the darkest part of the night. Afterwards, he finally got a couple of hours' rest.

He hated the house, but it was all he could afford. His house needed all kinds of repairs and he didn't have the money to make them. He would have more money if he could find tenants for the downstairs who would stay, but no one stayed longer than a month.

As the man got up and sat on the edge of the bed, he glanced into the mirror of the dresser next to the bed. Something caught his attention, so he got off the bed and moved closer to the mirror. He saw a stack of a hundred dollar bills bound together by a rubber band.

The man went to pick it up, but he felt something--a hand--grasp his hand. He looked down and saw a man's hand coming out of the mirror. He looked into the mirror and did not see his face. Instead, he saw Adrian's face and the man froze in fright.

Adrian looked into the man's eyes and told him, "Here is a stack of the thing you mortals value so much that you kill and hurt for it." Adrian released the man's hand and put four more stacks on the dresser. The man wanted to run. Adrian heard his thoughts and willed the man to stay where he was. The man could not move.

"Is this enough paper for you to go somewhere else for a while?" he asked.

The kindness in Adrian's voice calmed the man's fears and it helped the man to think clearly. He estimated how much money was in front of him. It had to be over \$140,000. The man began to think of all the possibilities that he money could bring him and his little girl.

The man nodded 'yes'.

"Good," Adrian said, "I want you to go away today. Immediately."

The man was curious why Adrian wanted the house to himself. Adrian heard the man's thought and because Adrian was very happy, he told the man, "Because my bride comes to me today."

Adrian's hands set a small, old, metal chest on the dresser. He told the man, "The things inside this box are known to your people as treasure. Take this, too, so that I will know you are fully compensated."

The man looked in the chest. Gold coins and precious stones glittered. He looked up and Adrian was still looking at him from the mirror.

"When can I come back?" the man asked before it sunk in that he was a wealthy man. He had asked a moot question.

"I will tell you when," Adrian responded, "I will find you."

"You don't have to find me," the man told Adrian. "I'm not coming back. Not to this house and not to this town. You can have the house as you just bought it."

"Then go," Adrian told him. Adrian's image faded until the man saw only himself in the mirror.

The man blinked a couple of times, wondering if Adrian was an hallucination. He looked down and saw the treasure chest in his hands. He saw the stacks of bills on the dresser. No, he told himself. It was no hallucination. This is my lucky day. Today, we break free of this yellow brick hell hole and this hell hole town.

He dressed hastily. Then he woke Dorothy and dressed her. Grabbing two suitcases out of the closet, he threw their best clothes in them. The man grabbed a couple bills from one of the stacks of money. Then he threw the rest of the money and the metal chest in the larger suitcase.

Looking around at his apartment for things to take with him, he saw that almost all of the furniture was used or broken. The only good thing he owned was a new TV, but he didn't feel like carrying it out. Besides, he had money to buy a better one. He took his daughter and left.

As they backed out of the driveway, the little girl looked at the house. Dorothy saw a man's reflection in the window of the door. He had the greenest eyes.

Denny was already at work when Brenny heard Adrian call her.

"Brenny, are you ready to come back?" he asked her.

She told him telepathically, "Yes and you know this." Brenny felt his pleasure at her words. She turned her computer off, unplugged it and put the lid down.

She turned off all the lights and made sure the house was locked up. Brenny thought about looking around one more time and the thought made her laugh to herself. Denny, the house, her old life, her car and the other things she had known so well held no value for her anymore.

Brenny walked to a convenience store five blocks away and called a cab. The cab took her to Muffin's house where Brenny left her purse and her laptop for safekeeping. Brenny told Muffin where she was going and Muffin hugged her and wished her well.

Afterwards, Brenny had the taxi take her to the bakery on the east side of town. She got out there and walked to the yellow house.

The closer she got to the house, the happier and more excited she got. When she got to the house, she flew up the steps. The screen door and front door were open wide for her and she walked through the threshold. The light coming from the coat closet was more powerful and brighter than the time before. She was blinded as she walked into the light, but she trusted her heart to guide her. Her heart beat fast with anticipation.

On the other side of the mirror, Adrian stood waiting for her. They walked toward each other and held each other without speaking for a long time. Brenny felt their hearts melt into each other. The feeling was the happiest feeling she had ever felt, and she savored every moment of it. This pleased Adrian.

Brenny found herself on the sofa with Adrian. He kissed her and she kissed him back. She began to feel aroused, so her kisses became empowered and more skilled. Adrian returned her kisses of passion with ones of his own, but he soon caught himself and stopped. He pulled Brenny's face away from his face and put it next to his cheek.

Adrian told her, "No Brenny, not yet." He willed her passion for him to lessen and it did. Like the time first time she had visited him, he kept his passion for her. Adrian liked the feeling of having his heart on fire and he believed that he could control the volatility.

Brenny was confused. She looked at Adrian with frustration and disappointment. His heart mourned from her unhappiness. Worries began to sprout. His heart told him to share his worries with Brenny, but he was afraid to.

Adrian searched for something to divert him from his fears. At the same time, he searched for a decent explanation of why he was cooling things down again.

He told her, "Brenny, we have forever to make love. Let us visit first. There are so many things I have to tell you. Let me tell you about them so you can choose if you want to be with me."

"Adrian," Brenny told him earnestly, "I have already chosen. I want to be with you. You make me happy, happier than I have ever been. I want to live here and be with you. Your heart already knows this. It also knows that I love you and this love is only

going to grow."

Adrian's filled with happiness. Her words of love, spoken and unspoken, pierced him with joy.

Brenny continued, "I tell you this because I have done a lot of searching, thinking and processing since I saw you last. Everything tells me that I am your mate. I know this with all my being. Although I am still processing a few things, I know I want to be with you."

He smiled a big, white smile at her.

He told her, "You have given me good news."

Brenny began to laugh.

She told him, "You are my destiny, Adrian. There is no doubt about it."

"Is your business finished over there?" he asked her.

"Yes and no," Brenny replied. "I did as you told me and visited with my friends."

She thought for a moment before she continued, "You gave me what I thought was my heart's desire: money. But I didn't want it after I had it. There is a saying where I come from, 'Be careful what you wish for, you just might get it'."

"Maybe the material wealth came too late for you?" Adrian asked her.

"I thought about it," Brenny replied, "And the answer is yes and no. I went without money so long, that when I got it, most things were too broken to be fixed. Maybe God could have fixed them before things reached a critical state, but He chose not to. Maybe He didn't fix anything because things had to reach a crisis where I would seek change."

After she thought carefully, Brenny told him sincerely, "The money brought me little happiness. Thank you for the blessings, but I wish for the blessings of the heart." She smiled at him when she said, "It is the real treasure."

Adrian was humbled by the power of her words. He knew that Brenny was special, but he was beginning to find out how special she really was. Her inner and outer beauty filled him with wonder and he was spellbound. He began to comprehend how deep and rich his life was going to be with her. This overwhelmed him with joy.

Brenny wondered why someone as fine as Adrian wanted her. She thought about all the losers she had in her life, including Denny and Adam's dad. Then she remembered Jude. Brenny knew that Adrian already knew about him and the others. She worried that she wasn't good enough for him.

Adrian heard her thoughts and felt her feelings.

"Brenny, " he told her, "What you did in your world with other males does not matter to me. None of that is important. All that matters is that you are here with me."

He smiled at her and she tried to smile back. His arms held her close and she felt him take her negative feelings of embarrassment, unworthiness and shame away. Adrian replaced those feelings with positive ones of unconditional love and acceptance.

Brenny thought of Jude again.

She told Adrian, "I have also been with someone from the ethereal . . . "

Adrian interrupted her, "I already know about him." He looked deeply and lovingly into Brenny's eyes, "I know everything about you and it is not a problem. I love you for whom you are and nothing more."

A line of a poem she wrote came to her mind. She recited it to Adrian, "Love, forged with the fires of compassion and kindness, is the only thing that matters."

After she said those words, she realized that they were epiphanic. She wondered what it meant, but she was too distracted to use her energy to look for answers. Besides, she was going to stay with Adrian, so she had nothing to worry about.

They held each other for a long time. Brenny knew that he still felt passion for her as she could see his arousal through the cloth tied at his waist. She tried to regain her passion for him, but he prevented it. Determined, she wondered what his body looked like under his cloth.

Adrian heard her thought and began to laugh.

"You will know soon enough," he told her. Brenny felt embarrassed. Adrian put his hands around her face and covered her face with kisses. He whispered into her cheek, "I belong to you, Brenny. Try not to have bad feelings around me because it makes me feel sad. Sadness is a new feeling for me and I do not like it."

Adrian's words made her heart ache because she knew that he had never suffered much. Brenny felt bad that she had made him feel sad.

The room began to turn gray. Adrian told her, "These sad feelings are beginning to ricochet back and forth. Let us stop the negativity."

To cheer her up, he told her, "Do not worry, Brenny. We are going to make love countless times, more times than there are stars in the sky. Forever . . ." He began to laugh, "Is forever. There is no end and there is no end for the feelings I have for you."

He willed the negative thoughts and feelings to leave the room. It returned to its original colors.

They held each other until he had nurtured and buoyed her spirits. They began to talk about many things. Their conversation was lively and interesting and Brenny and Adrian found that they were very compatible.

After awhile, he told Brenny, "I need you to learn about me." Adrian told her his story. It was lengthy and it took a long time. Brenny listened with great interest.

After he told her his story, Adrian made a giant screen of invisible energy appear. Brenny thought of it as a celestial television. He showed her marvelous things with it, including how to watch her world with it.

She saw what the universe really looked like. The galaxies looked like diamonds spread out on a dark blue carpet.

Adrian showed her places of unspeakable beauty and places of unspeakable suffering. He showed her the future and the end of the world. To show off, he showed her where hidden treasure was in her world.

Adrian put the screen away with his mind. As he was doing this, he saw the crucifix on Brenny's neck. It showed a man nailed to two boards.

Holding the crucifix in his hand, he asked Brenny, "I have seen this symbol a lot. What does it mean?"

Brenny told Adrian about Christ.

Adrian told her, "I think I know who he is. I remember hearing a discussion about someone sacrificing their life to bring the world a message."

"You don't know for sure?" Brenny asked.

He answered, "I do not always watch human history. I do other things, including a lot of thinking. Then I read and sometimes I sleep. 'Time' as you call it, goes by fast here, so when I tune back into what is going on in your world, I miss many things."

Brenny looked at Adrian's ring. She watched the fire dance inside the square emerald. The color of Adrian's eyes exactly matched the jewel. Her vibes told her that it was special and she asked Adrian to tell her about it.

He told her, "The Father gave it to me a long, long time ago."

Brenny touched the jewel. A feeling of absolute power surged through her finger.

They visited more. Her resolve to stay with him grew with every moment she spent with him.

Adrian made a table and two chairs with his mind. Bowls full of fruits, nuts and bread sat on the table. A pitcher made of thin, clay-like material held sparkling, clear water.

Two cups made from the same material stood next to the pitcher. They ate and drank.

Just as Adrian and Brenny finished eating, he sensed something. He looked at Brenny and told her, "Someone is coming."

Brenny knew that she was the first visitor to Adrian's home and that he had been there a very long time. Before she wondered what Adrian meant, she saw Jude.

Jude looked better in person than in dreams. He was as beautiful as Adrian. Brenny and Adrian stood. Jude walked up to Brenny. His arms opened to hold her, but Adrian prevented him from getting any closer to her.

"Not fair!" Jude told him.

"That's the way it is," Adrian told him, "I love Brenny, too."

Jude's face filled with hurt.

He told Adrian, "I was going to marry her. You are ruining my plans because you have the vantage. You know that I do not have the power that you have."

Brenny had never seen two ethereal beings together and she was fascinated by their interaction, especially since they were rivals. Because they looked like men, she almost expected them to act unpredictably like men do. Instead, they talked to each other peacefully and respectfully. She knew that Adrian pitied Jude, but she also knew that Adrian was determined to be with her.

Adrian told Jude, "I am fair. If Brenny wants you, you can live in this world. I will make both of you a private place where you can be alone until the End of the Tribulation."

Brenny knew what 'End of the Tribulation' meant. It was when God ended the universe. After God ended the material, He was going to gather everyone together. To cool everyone off and heal them, God was going to make everyone sleep. Brenny always called it 'The Big Sleep'. Afterwards, every living spirit was going to live together in peace and happiness. There would be a review of what had happened and this was called the Judgement of the Tribulation.

Jude's grey eyes looked into Brenny's eyes.

He told her in a loving voice, "I am not the only one who sees your inner beauty or you would not be here. I love you and I want to be with you for all eternity. I will give you all the love you can stand and more." His eyes filled with love for her.

Suddenly, Brenny remembered how well she knew Jude. She knew him better than she wanted to remember. She had spent hundreds of moments with him. He had taken her all over the spirit world and they had made love in many beautiful places and worlds. She remembered each and every time. Brenny remembered the last time she

had seen him, when filled her with the light of his love. Warm feelings for him bubbled up.

Jude smiled. He knew that she remembered everything and he was pleased. Adrian knew what was going between them. Jude and Brenny felt Adrian's displeasure.

Adrian's eyes quickly flashed angrily when he asked Jude, "Did you tell Brenny why you met her?"

Brenny was surprised. She had expected everyone to continue remaining calm and mellow.

Adrian continued to look at Jude harshly.

With a stern voice said he said, "You tell her or I will."

Jude glared at Adrian and replied defensively, "It could have been worse. Her voice went out to the universe and beyond. An incubus could have heard and then she would have been in trouble."

Brenny knew what Jude meant. An incubus was a diabolic spirit: a sexually hungry entity from the lower astral realms.

She looked at Jude and his heart filled with love for her. He knew he had to tell her the truth. She was going to know anyway because Adrian would make sure of this. Jude looked at her with sincerity in his eyes as he told her, "When I heard your message, well, I wasn't looking for love or a mate, I was . . ."

Brenny saw the rest with her mind.

She finished Jude's sentence, "looking for sex." Brenny learned that some spirits liked to have sex with the spirits of mortals. Jude was one of them and he thought of it as a game that was fun for him. Although it happened in the dream realm, it wasn't rape because it was.

"Brenny," Jude told her in a heartfelt voice, "I know what I did was wrong. I took advantage of you when you were hurting, I will admit that. I will also admit that I was thinking of my own pleasure at first. I did this with other females before you and it was wrong.

I did not mean to love you. It just happened. I was in love with you the moment I saw you. You are so beautiful, Brenny. I love you and I want to be with you forever."

Brenny felt his love for her and it felt familiar and good. Jude was not a stranger to her. He had been her lover and teacher. Brenny cared for him, but she knew that she didn't love him.

Kindly, she told him, "I don't love you, Jude, although I have good feelings for you."

Brenny smiled as she said, "You are so lovely."

She continued speaking as she touched his cheek with her hand, "I am so flattered that you love me."

Jude looked very sad and Brenny wanted to cry.

He told her, "It is my own fault. I knew that you did not love me. I should never have been so intimate with you. All it did was make me love you more."

Brenny looked at Jude with sadness.

She told him, "Two played the intimacy game, Jude. Not only did I play, but I was a willing player. I wanted the intimacy as much as you did. I should have called it off, but I didn't want to. My heart tells me that I need to accept responsibility for my participation in this destructive affair."

Brenny kissed Jude on the lips sweetly as she said to him, "Please forgive me."

Jude's face darkened with sadness and defeat. Still, he accepted her apology and said, "Please forgive me, too." Her head nodded her answer.

Brenny looked at Adrian squarely in the eyes and said, "I want to be with you. You say that I am good enough to be with you, but I am not sure. My power tells me that I could get you in a lot of trouble. Still, I feel your love for me and I want it. I love you."

She thought for a moment and continued, "You already know I am not a perfect person and I am not comfortable with this because you are so perfect."

Brenny began to laugh to herself.

She told Adrian, "You know that Jude and I know each other very well. Much better than we know each other. I guess I should be embarrassed, but what can I say?"

Brenny shrugged as she continued, "I kind of feel like a cosmic slut . . ."

Instantly, she regretted her words as she felt the disapproving looks of Adrian and Jude. I guess both of them know what a slut is, Brenny thought to herself as she laughed some more. The energy of their disapproval made her feel very uncomfortable. Adrian's love rescued her as it changed the somber energy. He cushioned her and she liked it. Still, Adrian made it known to her that he did not approve of the negative word she had said about herself. Jude was his steadfast ally in this.

She began to feel uncomfortable again.

She shook her head in disbelief and said, "You guys are too serious. Lighten up. I was

once too serious and it made me miserable. So miserable, I was ready to commit suicide . . . "

Brenny stopped. She saw the looks of Jude and Adrian's faces. The expressions of horror and disapproval on their faces told her that suicide was a bad thing. A real bad thing.

Everyone was silent. Jude lingered around to stay in Brenny's presence a little longer. She felt Adrian's displeasure at this and he willed Jude to leave.

Jude looked sadder because he knew that he was beaten. He wanted to hold her, but he knew that he couldn't.

"I won't forget you," Brenny told Jude. "And I won't forget the moments we spent together. I will pray that you find your true mate."

Jude's hurt eyes revealed his broken heart.

He told her, "If I did not know better, I would think I was being punished. It is my own fault. I took risks I should not have and I got hurt. If I had it to do all over, I would still do it again."

Jude began to laugh to himself.

He said to her, "It is ironic that heartbreak is not limited only to your world."

Love and kindness filled his words as he told her, "Moments with you, Brenny, are worth the pain that follows. Pray for me that God heals my broken heart because I cannot foresee a time where I will ever want anyone but you. I love you, Brenny. I will always love you and I will always be there for you."

He could feel Adrian's impatience and knew that if he didn't leave on his own soon, that Adrian would make him leave. He thought about his last words and realized that Brenny needed a way to find him now that Adrian was going to close the dream doors.

"Use magick, Brenny," he told her. "If you ever want to find me, use magick and it will lead you to me."

Adrian was not pleased that Jude had given her directions how to find him. Before Adrian could voice his disapproval, Jude disappeared.

Brenny grieved that Jude was gone forever from her life. Adrian held her and used his power to chase away her sad feelings.

They sat on the sofa and Adrian held her some more. The longer Adrian held Brenny, the more love he felt for her. He wanted to kiss her and take her, but he held back. Worries cropped up again, and he decided that he had to wait.

This really worried him because he knew that he was taking big chances if he waited. Anything could go awry and he could end up waiting until the end of time to be with her. Before the worries could grow, he stopped them. He did not want to ruin his time with Brenny.

Adrian stood up and told her, "You make me want to dance for you."

Brenny asked him, "How do beings like you dance?"

Adrian laughed infectiously as he answered, "Probably the same way people do. Where do you think music and dance came from? Man did not create it. He learned it from the same place I learned it. Men only improvised so they could make their own distinct music and dance."

Adrian willed music to fill the room. It was beautiful music and unlike anything Brenny had ever heard before. She recognized the sounds of some instruments, but not all of them. The melody was beautiful and it made her want to dance.

Adrian danced for her. He was a talented dancer as he moved his beautiful body perfectly to the music. Brenny was enchanted and Adrian felt her pleasure.

When Adrian finished dancing, he motioned for her to stand. He put his arms around Brenny. She put her head on Adrian's chest and closed her eyes while they slowly danced together.

Brenny tried to memorize the beautiful music and she tried to memorize how he felt against her cheek. This pleased him.

They danced together for a long time and then they rested. Afterwards, they talked for a long time until they fell asleep in each other's arms.

When they woke, they ate and drank again. Adrian filled the room with music so Brenny would have something beautiful to listen to while she sat with him at the table.

After they finished eating, they talked some more.

Before Brenny could wonder what was going to happen next, Adrian told her with a twinkle in his eye, "Let's have some fun." The room grew bigger as it turned into a sky with stars.

"Let us fly through the universe," he told her. "I have never done this, but I want to do this with you."

Adrian took Brenny's hand and they flew through the starry sky. They played as they flew. They aimed for certain stars to fly to. Before they got all the way to it, they would find a new star and change directions.

Once, they flew through a star. It was beautiful and exhilarating. The fire was white and furious and Brenny was amazed at the power of it.

They flew for a very long time. Then Brenny found herself back in Adrian's house. Rainbow lights lit the room and Brenny laid down with Adrian to rest.

After they rested, Brenny looked deeply into Adrian's eyes.

She asked him, "Why have you stopped me from feeling passion for you? Why won't you touch me? When I look down or you hold me close, I know you want me." Brenny looked down at the cloth tied around his waist and saw that he still wanted her.

"Oh Brenny," Adrian replied, "I want you! I want you more than anything but I have to do something before it goes too far. I knew this the moment I saw you again, but I did not want to have to face the truth."

"What do you have to do?" she asked.

Adrian told her he needed to take care of some personal matters with God. He told her what most of them were.

Brenny wanted to say something, but Adrian put his finger to her lips and told her, "Shhh . . . Here, I have something to give you." He pulled a diamond necklace out of the air and willed it to clasp around her neck. Brenny was surprised at its heaviness. The diamonds in the necklace sparkled brilliantly. The centerpiece was a giant diamond of at least fifty karats. It was clear and perfect.

She knew that back in her world, the necklace would be worth a fortune. She wondered where came from.

"How does it look?" she asked Adrian.

"It looks beautiful, but pales to your beauty," Adrian told her.

The necklace filled the room with prisms of bright, white light.

Adrian continued, "An empress once owned it. I found it in some hidden treasure. It comes from your world, but it has been long forgotten."

Brenny wanted to think on her own without Adrian's influence. Brenny definitely did not want to go back. She willed herself to be free of Adrian's control. This pleased Adrian. He liked Brenny's independent, strong and determined spirit. What he did not know was that Brenny's powerful and stubborn spirit usually got her into some kind of trouble.

Adrian sensed that they were going to have some visitors soon. He knew that he did not have much time left. He kissed her several times, memorizing every moment.

Adrian took the ring off his finger and put it on Brenny's wedding ring finger. The ring shrank to fit her. Brenny knew how special the ring was and she felt that she had no right to it, especially since God had given it to him.

Adrian covered her hands with his as he told her, "Brenny, as long as you have this ring, you will always be able to find your way back to me. It might take a long time, but you will find me . . . "

Brenny interrupted him, "Are you saying that we are going to be separated now?" He answered her question by remaining silent. She began to feel panic. Although she knew it was useless, she tried to gather her energy up to fight his will one more time.

Blinking back tears, she begged him, "Promise me. Promise me that we will find each other again." Adrian nodded yes.

Wanting more, she said to him, "Promise me that when you find me that you will never leave me again and that you will make me your wife."

That was his intention, so he answered, "I promise."

Adrian looked into her eyes and said, "Promise me that you will wait for me."

That was her intention, so she answered, "I promise."

XXI

Denny was at work when Brenny left. A feeling of dread filled him and he told his boss that he was going home.

His boss looked at Denny and said, "You look really rough. Take all the time you need."

Denny hurried home, but he knew she was gone. He went inside the house. It still smelled of her. All her things were there but her purse and computer.

He buckled over to his knees as he screamed, "No, Brenny! No!"

Then he began to sob.

A big, sharp pain went through him when he began to understand the truth. He realized how badly he had behaved toward her. She had never been his enemy; she had always given him her best. He realized how very special Brenny was and how she didn't deserve the way he treated her just because he was miserable. In one brief half second, he saw his life with her and saw how very selfish and cruel he had been.

Denny felt ashamed and he wished that he could go back in time and change things. But those days were gone. Wasted. They could have been happy times, but he made them most of them miserable.

He knew that Brenny had been unhappy for a long, long time. Why? Why? Why did I do this? he asked himself. Denny didn't like himself and wanted to make himself miserable. He finally got his wish for misery and it was more painful than anything he could have ever imagined. He laid face-down and his broken heart cried into the living room floor.

Uncle Denny knocked on the door, but no one answered. He peeked in and saw Denny lying on the floor. By now, his sobs had lessened but Denny was still in so much pain that he couldn't hear anything but his heart break. Denny didn't hear the knock at the door and he didn't hear his Uncle and Manfred walk in.

Someone shook Denny's shoulder and for a moment, he thought it might be Brenny. His hopes dashed fast as he knew that she was gone. He didn't have the strength or curiosity to wonder who it was shaking him. He was defeated and his life without Brenny was going to be a miserable one.

"Denny!" Uncle Denny told him, "I'm here. I brought Manfred with me. The spirits told me that you are in trouble. If I can, I will try to help you."

Denny's heart lightened. Uncle Denny was a tough, old medicine man. If there was a way to find Brenny and bring her back, Uncle Denny would find it.

Denny told his uncle what had happened. His uncle listened intently and silently, thinking as Denny explained everything.

Manfred sat farther away. He was hungry and listened as he crunched into some potato chips.

The light in the room began to fade. Uncle Denny rose and went to look for the light switch. Before he could find it on the wall, the lights came on.

Uncle Denny looked at his namesake for a while and said to him, "So you got it back?"

Denny looked at his uncle and told him, "It never went anywhere. I always had it, I just put it away. I put it away so deep, I had to look for awhile. But it was there. And you know what? It's more powerful than ever. It seems like it grew while I made it sleep."

Uncle Denny replied, "You were born special. I still have the caul you were born with. I saved it for you in a medicine bag.

When I first saw you, I saw light in you. I remember the miraculous things you could do as a child. Every time I saw you do something of a mysterious nature, my faith in the mystical grew."

"Uncle Denny," he said, "I never wanted it and I don't want it now. I only brought it back to try to find a way to keep Brenny."

Uncle Denny's lines on his face became furrowed.

He looked seriously at his nephew and said, "The voices in the walls tell me that you treated her very bad. What are you going to do if you get her back?"

The younger Denny gulped. Tears formed in his eyes.

He looked at his uncle and said, "I am going to be a better man."

"How?" Uncle Denny asked.

Denny lifted up his tear-stained face and said remorsefully, "I will treat her right and I will learn to respect and honor women. I also have a problem with my temper and self-esteem. With all my power, I am going to learn how to control it. It is destructive and self-destructive. It has to stop, whether I get Brenny back or not."

Uncle Denny heard enough. He had planned to help his nephew, but he wanted to try to make a few points before he did. His old heart was heavy because he liked Brenny and wanted her to be happy. He also knew that his nephew had been abusing her for a long time. The elder Denny also knew that Brenny's new man made her very happy.

Denny quickly explained to his uncle what had been going on with Brenny. He told his uncle that he thought an entity by the name of Adrian was involved.

His uncle asked him, "So you already know she's involved in something very powerful and not of this world?"

Denny told his uncle with his mind, "It occurred to me right at the very beginning."

Manfred continued to munch on his bag of chips.

"Does Brenny have any friends that might know where the house is?" Uncle Denny asked him.

"Her friend Muffin might know."

"Let's go over there, then."

All three left in Uncle Denny's pickup. Denny sat in the passenger seat and they made Manfred sit in the back. Denny worried if Manfred might be too fat to hoist himself over the side of the pickup, but Manfred was strong, agile and quick.

They drove over to Muffin's house. Her three wild boys played in the yard. Everyone got out of the pickup and walked to the door. Uncle Denny knocked. Muffin answered the door and became angry when she saw Denny.

"Muffin," Denny told her, "Brenny left. I know she's mixed up in with something supernatural and mixed up with another man. I want you to tell me what you know

about this."

"Why should I?" she asked him with contempt. "You were mean to her for a long time and blamed her for shit she had no control over. Brenny deserves to be happy and I sincerely hope she is happy where she's at. She certainly wasn't here."

Denny could not mask his desperation when he told Muffin, "This isn't the time to talk about what happened. I just want to find her and bring her back. She's flesh and blood, she's not supposed to be in the place she went, wherever it is. She has to be with a powerful spirit or entity for him to be able to keep her there. I need to know how she finds him."

Enrique, Sr., heard male voices at the door. Instinctively, he walked up to Muffin and looked over her shoulder. Three brown Indian men stood in front of her. Denny with his long dark brown hair in a ponytail. An old man with a heavily-lined face and two long, skinny white braids. A tall, big man with thick, wide, black braids flowing down his chest and large belly.

Muffin froze. She didn't want Enrique to hear what was going on. She didn't want to hear him bitch later about her getting involved with Brenny's relationship problems. Enrique had his pet peeves and this was one of them. Rico had told her many times that people should keep to their own business and stay out of the relationships of other people.

"Hello, Denny," Enrique said as he nodded to him and then nodded to the other two men.

Rico asked, "Why are you here?"

Denny put his hand over his brow so he could better see Enrique standing over Muffin.

"Brenny is involved in something that is dangerous," Denny told Rico. "Muffin knows about it."

Enrique looked down and Muffin looked up. Their eyes met and Muffin could see the disapproval in his eyes. She turned her head back toward Denny and company.

Muffin felt the heat of Enrique's angry glare on the back of her neck and shoulders.

Rico asked Denny, "What do you want Muffin to tell you? I am sure she will tell you everything she knows."

Enrique's hardened his glare so he could burn her long enough with it to make her talk.

"Right, Muffin?" Rico asked in a demanding voice.

The heat of Enrique's glare was beginning to make Muffin uncomfortable. This started making her angry. The pupils of Muffin's eyes narrowed as she looked turned her head to look at her husband.

Muffin told him defiantly, "Brenny's my friend. I'm not telling anyone anything. This man," and she pointed at Denny with her right index finger, "is an asshole, a predator and a dangerous person. He's beat her, kicked her, spit on her, burned her, broken things on her and more."

Muffin looked at Denny with disgust and said, "You don't deserve to get her back." She turned around and pushed Enrique out of her personal space. The heat on her neck and shoulders instantly stopped.

She told him in an angry voice, "As for you, Enrique, I don't want to hear one fucking thing about this now or later. If you even start to say one thing, I will call the cops and have them drag your ass away. I am tired of you trying to control my relationships with my friends. That shit is over."

"But Muffin . . ." he whined.

"Get the fuck out of here!" Muffin demanded. Rico sheepishly went back into the house.

Muffin turned around to face Denny.

She told him in a stern and angry voice, "You get the fuck out of here, too, and don't ever come back."

She looked at uncle Denny and Manfred.

In an apologetic voice, she said to them, "Excuse my bad manners, but I don't want this asshole . . ." Muffin looked angrily at Denny, "To ever darken my doorstep again." Muffin went in her house and slammed the door. The three men heard her yell at Enrique.

Both Dennys sat in the front seat and thought. Manfred stood outside, leaning against the truck and munching a candy bar.

After awhile, Uncle Denny asked his nephew, "Where did they find her car?"

Denny replied, "The east side. I have a receipt in my car that has the address. They gave me the receipt when I got it out of the towing yard. The idiot cops could have called me and I would have come after it, but no, they had to have it towed."

They drove back to Denny's house and he retrieved the receipt from his car. It was beginning to get dark when they found the house. They instantly knew that the house had something to do with the supernatural because it exuded great power. It stood dark, severe and menacing in the long shadows of the evening.

Denny walked to the door. When he put his hand on the handle of the screen door, he got a shock. It was the same kind of shock he had gotten when he had his hand on Brenny's car door handle. Goosebumps raised all over his body.

"I was afraid of that, nephew," Uncle Denny told him, "I can feel the power of this place. Whatever's inside isn't going to let us in."

"What is it? Who is he?" Denny asked his uncle.

Uncle Denny scratched his chin as he thought.

He finally answered, "Well it's not the spirit world and it's not of this world. Some kind of world between those places, I reckon. The door to it is in there," and Uncle Denny pointed at the window of the door. "He is a powerful spirit. He is not evil, but intends to keep Brenny with him."

Jealousy filled Denny and anger rose inside him.

Denny told his uncle, "I don't care how powerful he is or how good his intentions are, I am at least going to try to get her back."

"This is going to be hard," Uncle Denny told him. "We'll have to go over to his world and get her. It's going to be tough to get in that house and even tougher, closing that door once we get back through it."

"So where do we start, Uncle?" Denny asked.

"I'd like to go back home to the reservation and prepare, but that would take time and we should try to get her out soon."

Denny and Manfred agreed. They got back in the truck and drove to a fabric shop. Then they drove to a tobacco shop. Afterwards, they went back to Denny's house to prepare.

After they prepared the material things, they prepared themselves. All of them drove to a house in the country by Saint Joseph. Uncle Denny had already called ahead, so the sweatlodge was almost ready when the three men got there. As they sweated, they prayed and sang in their native tongue. They cleansed their bodies, minds and spirits to ready themselves on a journey into the unknown.

It was the darkest part of night when the three men came back to the yellow brick house. The black, starless, moonless night blended into the old neighborhood, eliminating any border between the intersection of earth and sky. The atmosphere was eery, old and sinister.

Denny, Manfred and Uncle Denny stumbled in the inky-black air until their eyes

adjusted to the dim nightscape. All of them wished that they could use flashlights, but someone might see the beams and call the cops.

Uncle Denny placed four clothbound bundles at each corner of the house. He lit some sage and sweet grass on a tray. Circling the house counterclockwise four times, he smudged it with the smoke.

All three men held hands and prayed. Energy began to flow through them and every time it made a complete circle, the charge of it increased. Denny thought of it as electricity that didn't burn. He could feel each cycle of electricity jolt the obscure, mystical part of him that dwelt deep inside his soul. The energy currents fleshed out his psychic powers.

They prayed in the Anishinabe language for a long time. Afterwards, they helped each other not to stumble as they approached the house. It got darker as they got closer to the house. They were almost completely blind by the time they approached the steps to the porch. Completely blind when they got to the porch.

Uncle Denny turned around and whispered to the two men, "Once we get in the house, concentrate on the energy source and walk into it."

All three carefully made their way up the stairs to the porch.

The older Denny expected to feel a shock when he put his hand on the doorknob of the screen door. Instead, it felt cool. He opened it and then put his hand on the knob of the front door. It felt cold. He twisted it and the door opened.

Adrian forgot to lock the door, Uncle Denny thought, maybe he doesn't understand that people lock their doors down here. Another thought came to him, or maybe he is letting us in.

Each man could feel the tremendous energy emanating from the coat closet and they walked slowly toward it. Uncle Denny and Manfred were filled with curiosity, amazement and a little fear. Denny was filled with determination.

Panic seized Brenny. Her throat froze as she tried to say words but couldn't. She grabbed her throat only to scratch her hands on the diamonds in the necklace. Tears of frustration and sadness began to flow. Adrian felt a big, sad blow to his heart. He felt like weeping with her.

This feeling called sadness is terrible, Adrian thought, it is so powerful and so empty. He felt incredibly lonely.

Adrian held back his pain and looked deep into her eyes. She felt the strength of his profound love for her.

He spoke with his heart, "Brenny, the heart always finds its way home. Remember that."

Brenny instinctively knew they were no longer alone. She looked and saw Denny with his uncle and Manfred. Manfred quickly grabbed her from the couch and before any one realized it, he had disappeared with her through the underbelly of the mirror. For a big man who was always eating, Manfred was strong and fast.

Denny and his uncle knew that they should get out of there, too. Still, Denny wanted to say something to Adrian. Uncle Denny sensed this and pulled the younger Denny toward the mirror. They went back through it.

Uncle Denny bolted for the front door. Denny was not ready to leave. He pulled a hammer from the back pocket of his jeans and walked toward the mirror.

Denny tried to touch the mirror's face with the hammer, but the probe did not touch anything. He realized that the mirror was still a portal.

The edges around the mirror felt solid. When he pushed the edges, the mirror moved freely. Denny pushed it back and forth a couple of times. He tried to pull it off, but it would not budge. It was then that he realized that a single nail at the top of the mirror must be holding it up.

Careful to stand at the side of the mirror so he wouldn't fall through the portal, he struck the wall above the mirror with his hammer. Plaster flew everywhere. The hammer struck several times in the same place.

He moved to the other side of the mirror and assailed the wall above the mirror on that side. The wall shook at each blow. Then it groaned as the nail began to give way. Denny jumped out of the closet and toward the front door. The mirror fell and crashed into a thousand pieces. Pieces of it flew in all directions.

He made it safely to the porch where he found Uncle Denny waiting for him.

Together, they looked inside the picture window. Their vibes told them that something was going to happen.

Suddenly, the mirror pieces on the floor began to fill with small lights. They began to fly and rotate clockwise around the room together. As the small lights grew bigger and brighter, they flew faster. They gained momentum until all the lights from the mirror pieces conjoined into one light of rotating energy. The light pulsed and grew as it cycled around the room. Bright, white light illuminated the room until it filled the whole house.

The dark neighborhood began to light up. Denny and his uncle left the porch and walked toward the truck. Brenny sat in the cab of the truck and cried. Manfred had his arm around her to make sure that she didn't try to bolt out of the truck.

A large hiss filled the air and everyone looked toward the house. Radiant light shone out of every window and door. The house began to heave in and out. Blood red cracks formed on the house and red light came out of them. The ground began to tremble

hard.

Denny and his uncle looked at each other and read each other's minds: the house was going to blow up! They ran toward the truck until the power of the blast threw them into the ground. Denny turned around to see the house implode into nothing.

Brenny screamed Adrian's name several times before Manfred put his hand over her mouth to keep her quiet. She knew the mirror--the door to Adrian's world--was gone. Brenny worried that the door to Adrian had been closed forever and she worried that she would never see him again until the end of time. She began to grieve.

The sirens brought everyone back to reality. Uncle Denny started the truck and Denny jumped in the back. They took off through an adjacent alley as the fire truck got to where the house used to stand. As they drive over the East Side Bridge, they saw many police cars and an ambulance race in the direction of the explosion.

XXII

The sun was beginning to rise by the time they reached Denny's house. They hustled Brenny into the living room and Denny stood guard at the front door. Uncle Denny went into the kitchen to make coffee and Manfred started peeling and frying potatoes.

The first thing Denny noticed when they brought Brenny into the house was that she had lost more weight. She was at her ideal weight and he wondered how someone could lose 50 pounds in a day. He also wondered why her skin didn't sag from such a dramatic loss.

Brenny sat on the sofa and cried. She refused to look or talk to any of the three men. Her heart was broken and she was afraid that she might be damned to live in that house with Denny for all eternity.

Brenny kept thinking of Adrian and memorized the things he had shown her and told her. She rubbed the outside of her right jeans pocket to feel for the edges of Adrian's ring.

When Manfred carried her out of the house, she slipped it in her pocket. The ring brought her comfort as she touched it through the fabric.

Brenny sent messages to Mario with her mind. She told him to come quick and fast.

Denny heard parts of some of the messages she sent to Mario. He knew that Mario would come. Denny also knew that Mario that would know that he was one of them: gifted. Tired from being up all night, he needed his reserve energy to guard her. He decided to save his strength and worry about Mario when he got there.

Denny was upset because Brenny was grieving for the other man. He knew that she would grieve for Adrian, but he wasn't expecting her to feel this much pain. Jealousy rose from his stomach to this throat. Regret filled him as he wished that she still cared

for him like she did for Adrian. His heart began to break.

Brenny looked at him. Her face was soaked and streaked with tears.

With anger and hate in her voice, she asked him, "Why don't you go visit with your relatives? You don't have to worry, I won't go. You don't have to keep watching the door. When I am ready to leave, not only are you going to let me go, you are going to open the door for me."

Denny stopped and panicked. Deep-down, he knew that her words would prove true. He fought his dread of the future as her words burned through his soul.

Tears began to run down his cheeks. He turned his head away from her and went outside. He stayed there for a long time. When he came in, his eyes were red. Denny went into the kitchen to visit and eat with his uncle and Manfred. Brenny heard Uncle Denny and Manfred talk about what had happened as they went over a blow-by-blow account of last night's events. Brenny could not hear Denny's voice. She knew that he did not have the desire to talk about what happened.

Manfred saw the house implode after both Dennys had been blown to the ground. He became excited when he told them what he saw. Uncle Denny wondered what the authorities would call it since there was no debris.

Uncle Denny teased Denny, "Did you have to break the mirror in that many pieces?"

The men laughed nervously as the smell of fried potatoes and bacon filled the air.

Denny tried to tease his uncle back, "Why, did you have another plan to close the hole?"

Uncle Denny looked at him and with his most stoic face replied, "No."

"How were you planning to close it, Uncle?" Manfred asked.

Uncle Denny shrugged and said, "I didn't know."

Manfred's eyes filled with surprise as he said, "You didn't know?"

He told Manfred, "Sometimes you have to trust. Especially when family members are in trouble."

Uncle Denny hesitated for a few moments and thought. He wondered why it had been so easy to get Brenny out of the mirror. It had been too easy and this bothered him. In the back of his mind, he knew that Adrian would eventually find her.

Brenny began to sleep. She dreamt of swirling colors. In a distance, she heard men talking. Men that she knew. She willed herself not to hear the words.

Mario arrived an hour later. As he drove, he saw images of a yellow brick house.

Denny looked through the window and saw Mario walking hurriedly to the door. He opened the door the moment Mario turned the knob. This surprised Mario, but he quickly recovered. Brenny was sitting on the couch. She had just woken from her sleep. Her face showed devastation as she looked at Mario with red, swollen eyes.

Mario heard and saw Uncle Denny and Manfred in the kitchen.

He gave Denny a mean look and said to him, "I want to talk to Brenny. I want to talk to her privately."

Denny gave him a nasty look back as he looked into Mario's eyes. The front door was still open and Denny willed it to shut with his mind. It slammed so loud that it made Brenny jump. Mario remained calm and looked defiantly at Denny. Denny willed the lights to come on in the room and they did. Denny continued looking at Mario's eyes and willed the lights off. He willed the front door opened and it opened. He willed it shut and it shut itself. Just to make a point, Denny opened and shut it several more times.

Mario told him, "Pretty good, Denny. I always knew you were one of us and I always told Brenny that. It's a shame that an asshole like you can have such great powers while someone who is good and deserving doesn't have them. What a waste. Are you finished showing off? I hope so, because I want to talk to Brenny."

Denny looked at him for a moment and realized Mario didn't pose any threat to him.

He told Mario, "Okay. In the bedroom."

Mario and Brenny went into the bedroom. Both could feel Denny's presence on the other side of the door. They knew that he would try to listen.

He told her with a worried voice, "Okay, Brenny. I want to know what's going on. I know you've been through a magickal door, I see it in your aura and feel it in your mien. What happened? Why are you so upset?"

Brenny put her head on Mario's shoulder and told him what happened. He listened intently and didn't ask questions. After Brenny told him the story, she dug in her pocket and pulled out Adrian's ring. She gave it to Mario. He was speechless as he watched the fire move inside the emerald.

She whispered to him, "Adrian wanted me to keep it for him. I am afraid that Denny or his uncle will sniff it out and try to get rid of it. Please take it and guard it with your life."

Mario kept looking at the magnificent ring. His eyes followed the white fire as it moved, flowed, darted and splashed inside the ring. He reckoned that the fire looked like of some kind of celestial lightning. Watching the fire was almost hypnotic.

Power emanated from the ring. Mario realized that one of the Indian men in the other room would be drawn to its power and would eventually discover it. He wondered why no one had found it already, but he realized that the men were tired and distracted. All three (four, including Brenny) had gone on a very long trip to another dimension that left them exhausted.

Brenny whispered to Mario, "I don't think Denny can hurt it or lose it, but I prefer that you keep it anyway. Also, I want you to keep my passport. I have a bad feeling that it might disappear."

She dug under the bed and pulled out her passport. She gave it to Mario. Mario pushed the ring and passport deep into the inner pocket of his coat.

Brenny and Mario felt Denny using more of his power to listen to them. Denny knew that they were doing something behind his back and he didn't like it. Both quickly built stronger walls of energy around them to block Denny, although they knew it would anger him. They knew that they only had a short time left to talk before Denny's patience wore out.

Mario was getting upset and Brenny knew this. Mario didn't like it that Denny was trying to invade their privacy. He didn't like being controlled and he felt like Denny was trying to control him.

Brenny didn't want a scene and she knew that Mario was ready to pull out his scalpel tongue. She had already been part of a big scene that should never have happened. Brenny didn't have the energy for any more negative energy. Mario felt her feelings and reined in his anger.

They waited for Denny to walk in and he did. He asked Brenny to come with him, but she refused. She told Mario with her mind that she wanted to stay close to St. Cloud in case Adrian came looking for her.

Mario left and Brenny remained silent. She prayed, she thought, she reflected. Brenny built psychic barriers so Denny couldn't know her thoughts. Brenny was surprised to find out how powerful he had become. It was a constant and rigorous challenge to keep him from delving into her psyche. Her love for Adrian gave her the power to keep her secrets.

Manfred and Uncle Denny stayed and visited at Denny's house for two days. Uncle Denny tried to talk to Brenny twice, but her mind told him to back off, that she didn't want to talk. The elder Denny was surprised at how powerful her mind and spirit were becoming. He wanted to say something to Denny about this, but he knew that Denny didn't want to talk about it.

The three men visited and prayed. They cooked, ate and played cards. They talked of relatives and of times when they were young. The three recanted the story of the yellow brick house, hoping that Brenny might join the conversation and fill in details. Brenny ignored them.

Uncle Denny suspected that Brenny had brought something with her from Adrian's house. He told Denny of his suspicion. Denny searched Brenny, her possessions and the house. As he was searching through her personal papers in a box under the bed, he remembered her passport. He couldn't find it.

Brenny didn't feel like talking to anyone. She cared about Uncle Denny and Manfred very much, but she was not happy about them getting involved with her personal affairs. She knew that they had good hearts and were trying to help, but they didn't understand how she felt.

Denny quit his job to stand guard over her. He tried to talk to Brenny many times, but she wouldn't talk to him. Brenny didn't love Denny any more and it was over between them. It was only a matter of time before the truth of this sank into his heart.

A week after Brenny had been gone through the mirror, Denny started talking about getting married. He asked her if she wanted to go to Las Vegas and get married. Brenny did not want to hear any more of this talk.

"Why do you want to get married when you have lost me?" Brenny asked him. "You could have married me during all those other years, but you didn't want to. You always said I wasn't good enough to marry you."

Tears sprouted in Denny's eyes.

"Brenny," he pleaded, "I didn't mean it. I have given a lot of thought to how I treated you and what I said to you. I was stupid and ugly to treat you like that.

"Look at me," Denny motioned for Brenny to look at his eyes. Her hurt and swollen eyes found his. He told her, "I mean this with my whole heart: I am very, very sorry. I will never, ever do anything to hurt you again."

"I heard that before. It's too late. I want out."

"Nooo . . ." Denny replied pleadingly, "You don't mean that."

"Yes I do. I have to get out. For a long time, I have been choking and suffocating on my own life and you made it worse by pouring salt into the wounds.

You don't know me and you've never tried to learn about me. I know everything about you and you know nothing of me. You weren't around in those early years, those long, early years when I first started going to college. I had high hopes. I knew I was bright and I thought that if I had a degree, that I would get some kind of work doing something tolerable and possibly interesting.

All my life I have struggled for decent employment. You have no idea how frustrating, degrading and devastating it is to never get a good job. This is the sorest area of my life and you always had to dig until the wounds festered."

Brenny thought for a moment and said with disgust, "You lied to me when you got with me, too. You told me that you were a feminist. That is what attracted me to you."

She thought for a moment and continued, "I remember exactly what you said to me about this. You said that women suffered the same oppression that Indians suffered from, so it would be hypocritical for any minority male not to be a feminist.

What happened to the old Denny I used to know? You got so destructive and self-destructive."

Her eyes looked squarely in his as she told him, "I am so sick of destruction. And you know what? I don't know how it started.

Maybe it started with names. I remember the first time you called me a 'cracker'. I didn't know what it meant, so you got the dictionary and found the word in it. You read the meaning to me. I couldn't understand why you were insulting me like that. It steadily got worse.

Don't you understand how sick this is? We are talking about destruction here. Not just destruction, but its twin brother self-destruction as well. We're both sick from this, too. And I am sick of being sick. It is going to end. Someone has to pull the plug."

Denny was shocked at the severity and sincerity of her words. He began to shake inside.

Brenny continued, "You already know why I wrote Amy. I wrote it to tell you how you made me feel. How very miserable you made me.

So I poured my heart into Amy. I thought that you would at least have enough respect for me to read it. I knew that you would see the symbolism I hid into the manuscript. But you never did read it. Not until it was too late . . . "

"Brenny!" Denny tearfully implored, "Please! Please don't say that!"

"It is too late. It was too late a long time ago."

"No, I won't let it be too late," Denny told her.

"Well it is too late," Brenny replied.

Brenny continued, "And I wrote other things, too, to tell you how I felt. I wrote a lot of poetry? You wouldn't read it, either.

I wrote a poem about your betrayal. It is called 'One of Them'."

She walked to her little desk and her hands dug through papers until she found what she was looking for.

"The world turned against me," she told him. "Instead of standing with me, you turned against me, too."

He listened quietly as she read the poem.

ONE OF THEM By Brenny Rose White

I stood naked

In front of the angry crowd.

They called for my blood

In a roar that was loud.

My eyes swept the scene

Looking for you.

And once I saw you

What did you do?

You joined the voices

That said I must atone.

The world was against me

And I was alone.

Broken, hurt and bleeding

You knew I was innocent.

But the mob found me guilty

And judged me to repent.

When they tied me down
To the stake and pyre,
I shouted you loved me
And you called me a liar.

My life could have easily
Been saved and redeemed.
But I saw blood-lust and murder
In your eyes gleam.

I trusted you and believed
You were my friend.
But when times got hard
You became one of them.

Denny began to feel her pain in the poem. Then he remembered that he didn't like poetry. Denny always hated it when she wrote him poetry or letters. He never read any of them. Instead, he preferred to tear them into little pieces and throw them away.

Brenny continued, "You chose to look like a friend when you were really my enemy. For some reason, it became your solemn duty to destroy who I was.

You are self-destructive and you want me to self-destruct with you. This is sick, Denny. Sick. It infects me and makes me sick. I can't live like that. I was sick for a long time and it was over between us before I met Adrian."

"Why didn't you leave?" he asked. He already knew the answer but he wanted to feign ignorance and innocence.

"Because I never had any money to go somewhere else. You knew this. You took advantage of it, too, all because you wanted my power and I wouldn't give it to you any more."

Denny had eaten enough humble pie. Brenny's words were beginning to upset him.

His eyes filled with anger as he told her, "You could have helped me."

Denny's voice filled with spite as he said, "You could have gotten dirt under your fingernails, too."

Brenny wasn't afraid of him anymore. She instantly pulled out a wad of anger she had been saving behind her soul and hawked it into his face. Denny's face changed from anger to surprise and then back to anger.

"Fuck you, Denny Bear the Second. Fuck you," she told him with contempt. It was never about work. You wanted me to join your pity and defeat party. All you care about is getting your way."

Brenny thought for a moment before she continued, "I was ready to leave you a long time ago. Amy was going to be your last warning or your 'Farewell to Arms'."

Denny replied, "You should have left if you were so unhappy."

She began to laugh in disbelief as she said, "I did leave. I was happy where I was at. Why didn't you leave me alone?"

Denny knew that he was defeated. He knew that he had lost Brenny forever and he knew it was his own fault. This realization struck his heart with bolts of sadness and the tears began to fall. The silence was paralyzing between them.

After many minutes of heavy and painful silence, Denny spoke to Brenny with the voice of a broken heart, "You can go. I will pray God keeps you safe in His Hands. But before you go, just tell me one thing: Was it all that bad? What about the good times?"

Brenny thought for a moment before she replied, "Ninety-eight percent of it was great. It was the other 2 percent that made the 98% unbearable. The abuse had that much negative power.

I know there will be another woman. I just hope that you treat her with dignity, respect and understanding. I waited a long time for this and you would never give it to me.

My fear is that you will abuse your next woman like you did me. Abusers usually never learn their lesson. They are predators who move on to their next victim."

Brenny choked with a sob, "The only time you were kind to me was at the beginning. Once you possessed my heart, the kindness stopped. You terrorized me for years and you know it."

Denny stood and walked toward the northeast corner of the room where it was dark

with the shadows of late afternoon. He crossed his arms and faced the corner. The big tears rolled fast and hot down his cheeks.

"Go!" he told her.

He opened the front door with his mind.

"Go now and go fast. This long moment has to be a fast goodbye."

Brenny gathered a change of clothes, her purse and computer. She walked fast to her car. It started on the first try and she left. She felt sad, but she felt free. She felt like she had just been released from prison.

Realizing that she was still tired from crossing dimensions, she thought about renting a room. Brenny found one at the Radisson and she slept for four days.

On the fifth day, Brenny got her energy back. She visited Mario and got Adrian's ring and her passport back. Mario was happy because his power told him that she was finally free of Denny. He worried and wondered about Adrian, but Mario's heart told him that Adrian would be a good mate for Brenny. If Adrian came back . . .

Mario still felt the Winds of Change around Brenny, so he knew that her breakup with Denny was not the change they heralded. His vibes told him that Brenny's change would be much, much bigger.

Brenny supported herself with money she won at bingo and pull tabs. She also went to the casino a few times and won there.

Brenny remained at the Radisson. She didn't know if she wanted to rent an apartment because she didn't know when Adrian would come for her. She felt it wasn't worth the hassle and she didn't feel like shopping for furniture and decorating.

Once, Brenny was sitting in a local hippie coffee shop, thinking about Adrian when she heard a song that reminded her of her mood. It was called No Good by Depeche Mode. Brenny found out the name of the song, bought the CD and she played it all the time. Brenny also listened a lot to a song called I Know You're Out There by the Moody Blues.

After awhile, Brenny got tired of winning small jackpots and put all her power behind winning the lottery. She won it.

Brenny gave the diamond necklace to Muffin. She wanted Muffin to have something valuable to rely on if Enrique ever failed her, her boys and the baby.

She waited for a long time for Adrian, but he never came back. Remembering that he could see through shiny surfaces, she developed a habit. Brenny touched every mirror she saw. To her disappointment, they were always hard and cold.

Brenny became very lonely and bored. Time wore on. Muffin told Brenny that Denny had put his house up for sale and moved back to the reservation. She thought about driving by the house, but she never got around to doing it.

Impatience set in and Brenny began to lose faith in Adrian, even though she had his magickal ring. She watched the dancing fire in his ring for many hours each day. Brenny became more restless.

Brenny was sleeping when she felt the Winds of Change blow through her. They were cold and woke her. They told her to go on a journey.

At first, Brenny didn't want to go anywhere because she was afraid that Adrian wouldn't know where she was. After she thought about it, Brenny realized that Adrian had a lot of power and that he could find her anywhere.

As she packed her duffle bags, Brenny wondered where she was going to go. All she knew was that she was going to follow her heart. She tried to call Muffin several times, but the line was always busy.

Brenny checked out of the hotel and put her suitcase in her car. As she was driving down Ninth Avenue toward Roosevelt Road, the engine of her little car stopped. She coasted it into the parking lot of Lake George. Brenny tried to start the car several times, but it refused to start.

A man tried to help her get it started, but it was no use. The man's girlfriend waited patiently in their car while he played mechanic. When she realized that the car wasn't going to start, she wondered how she was going to get to the airport.

She noticed that the man's car old and dented car had Illinois license plates. The rumpled, folded atlas on the front seat, the overflowing ashtray and the sea of fast food papers and pop cans on the floor told Brenny that they were traveling.

Brenny's vibes told her that they were traveling east and that were going to go through the Twin Cities. Brenny asked them if they were traveling and to where. They told her that they were going home to Chicago before they moved to Massachusetts. She offered them \$250 for a ride to the airport in Minneapolis and they were very happy to give her one.

She wondered what she should do about the car. It was junk and she decided to leave it where it was. As she was taking her duffle bags out of the car, her nose began to bleed. Before Brenny could figure out why it had started bleeding, it stopped as suddenly as it started. Her shirt and bra were bloody, so she changed her clothes. Brenny threw the bloody clothing and her car keys in the trunk.

The ride to Minneapolis was a little crowded, but Brenny had fun. Hank and Charlotte were friendly and nice people. Charlotte rolled a joint and they smoked it as they rolled down the road.

When Brenny walked into the airport, she felt the Winds of Change blow through her. She didn't know what they portended, but she felt happy and free.

A bulletin board displayed the names of international cities. Amsterdam stood out among the names. Not because it was the first name listed, but because it shined to Brenny's spirit.

She bought a one-way ticket.

XXIII

It was early afternoon when Brenny arrived at Schiphol Airport. When Brenny got off the plane, the Winds of Change blew through her. They felt warm and welcoming. She felt at home in this new place and she wasn't afraid.

Brenny wondered why she wasn't afraid. She worried if she were crazy to be going to Amsterdam. Brenny had done some crazy and spectacular things in her life, but this had to be the best one so far.

Mario had told her once that he had been to Amsterdam. He told her that it was a perfect place for her and that she would like it there. His words came back to her after she had gotten on the plane.

When Brenny noticed how comfortable she felt in Holland, she wondered why. Worries began to pull her spirit down until she caught herself and remembered that she worried too much. Then she thought about Adrian. She knew that he worried about things, too, because she could feel him worry a lot when she was with him.

Brenny took the tram and headed for the city. She found a nice hotel and rented a room for the night. Afterwards, Brenny began to party. She found a little Dutch bar where no one spoke English. Three beers later and two joints later, Brenny had everyone dancing.

The next day, Brenny rented a room from someone she met in the bar the night before. It was on the third floor in an ancient building that overlooked a canal. It was very small, but it was her own space. Brenny bought a bed, desk and chair. She put her desk and chair by the window so she could watch the boats go up and down the water while she wrote.

Although Brenny began to make friends and learned to live in Amsterdam, she felt lonely. She worried that she was losing faith that she would see Adrian soon.

One time, when it was very grey and dark out, she was walking along the street feeling lonely and thinking about Adrian. She heard the wafts of the song *Is This Love?* by Whitesnake and it brought tears to her. The words of the song perfectly fit her thoughts and mood.

Sometimes, Brenny would wake in the morning and wonder what she was doing in a

foreign land. Brenny would do a self-check and find that she liked being there. Every day, she grew longer roots in her new home and she began to have a regular routine.

The clock would wake Brenny at eight in the morning. After she dressed, she went out to buy some bread and cheese for breakfast. After she ate, she would write, think, pray and talk to Adrian. Although she had never heard from him since that night, she still talked to him. She hoped that he heard her.

Later in the day, Brenny would go to a coffee shop about two in the afternoon and stay until about six. Sometimes she smoked dope and wrote, sometimes she would drink tea and watched out the big window. When she left the coffee shop in the evening, she would find a place to eat and then go back to her room.

There were over two thousand coffee shops in Amsterdam. Brenny visited a few until she found one that she really liked. It had an occult name and theme. Located in an old neighborhood, Brenny found it by accident one day. She took the wrong tram and then she couldn't find the tram stop she needed. As she walked down a busy street, she saw the coffee shop.

Brenny liked to sit by to the big window and watch the hustle and bustle of people going by. The neighborhood had all kinds of nationalities and she enjoyed watching them safely on her side of the glass. Brenny often compared her pastime with that of Adrian's. He had told her that he had watched people through his window.

She thought of Adrian every day and wondered when she was going to see him again. She always thought about what he told her.

Adrian had told her once to, "look around." Brenny tried to look around. Still, she felt numb and cloudy. The magick of life seemed distant and mute to her. Brenny wondered if she would ever feel alive inside again.

After a few days, Brenny began to recognize some of the people who walked by the coffee shop. Some of the people worked in surrounding shops. Some lived close by. Others used the sidewalk as a shortcut to somewhere else.

Every evening during the work week, right after five o'clock, the same man would walk by Brenny's window. He was tall, about 6'4", and he had a fit body. His light blonde hair hung in a long ponytail down his back. Brenny thought he was one of the best looking men that she had seen.

She knew that he was walking home from work. His jeans, T-shirt and occasional jacket were always full of dust and dirt. Her vibes told her he was a carpenter. His jeans looked like they were painted on. Brenny wondered how any one could work in such tight jeans.

Before Brenny realized it, he became her favorite person to watch from her window. At the five o'clock every day, Brenny would look through the window, searching for him. The sun was always behind him, so it would be hard to spot him at first. By the

time she saw him, he was usually walking right past her. He walked so fast, that she barely got a good glimpse of him.

She watched him walk by a few times. One day, as he walked by, he stopped suddenly, turned and looked at Brenny. When he looked at her, his face showed great surprise. Then he looked at her with wonder for a moment. His face filled with happiness and he smiled.

Brenny was surprised and mesmerized. His smile was white and warm and it enchanted her. She smiled back. Happy energy flowed between them. When Brenny felt the energy, she realized how close he really was. Suddenly, the big pane of glass did not feel so secure while it held out the world from her.

The man saw her uncomfortableness. He smiled at her one more time, then he turned and left. Brenny felt disappointment. She worried that she had scared him away. Her vibes told her that he knew that she had been watching him. She felt a little guilty, but she blamed in on the blue jeans. He looked too sexy in them.

Brenny smoked the rest of her joint while she drank her tea and thought. Brenny realized if she didn't see the man again, that she would be better off. He made her wish and that wasn't fair to Adrian. Still, she enjoyed watching him and was going to miss watching him walk by the window.

He was beautiful to look at, but there was something else attractive about him. Brenny searched her vibes but she could not find out what it was.

She daydreamed about Adrian. She knew that he wouldn't be too pleased if he found her sitting in the coffee shop with such a good buzz. And he wouldn't particularly like it that she was attracted to someone else. Especially someone who reminded her of him.

She smiled to herself. Brenny knew that Adrian loved her and that he would forgive her for anything.

Brenny mused about how Adrian looked through his window one time and saw her. Now she was looking at someone through a window and this person wasn't Adrian. This thought made her feel nervous.

Brenny dug through her purse and pulled out a cigarette. She was trying to quit and was down to five a day. As she began to light it, she heard someone speak to her in English with a Dutch accent.

He told her, "Those things will kill you."

Her head swung around and she saw it was the man from the window. He was talking to her.

Very surprised, she stammered, "I . . . I . . . know, but I've been trying to quit . . .

sometimes."

She began to laugh as she told him, "You really surprised me!"

Worries filled her as she wondered if he was going to say anything about her staring at him. Then she realized that he liked it that she had been looking at him. His voice broke up her thoughts.

"I know who you are," he told her as he smiled. His smile was more dazzling close-up.

"You are one of my favorite authors. You are Brenny Rose White."

The man's powerful smile energized her and she was very surprised at his words. She wondered how one of her books had found its way to Holland.

Brenny looked at him closer. His hair was wet, so she figured that he must have gone home and showered fast before coming to the coffee shop. She knew that it hadn't been very long since he had walked by, so she knew that he lived in the neighborhood.

Brenny looked to see what he was wearing. He wore a tied-dyed T-shirt, a black cloth jacket and had his work boots on. His jeans were clean and clung to him perfectly like his work jeans. He wore a gold crucifix that looked like hers.

Before Brenny could think any more, he began to talk.

He told her, "I read your book, *The De-Evolution of Amy*. Every time I read it, I get new meanings.

I love it! The wit, cynicism, deep thought, hard truth, prophecy, secret messages, the use of imagery and symbolism--I love it all."

Brenny was pleasantly surprised. This Dutch guy was giving her the best compliment of her life.

The man continued, "What can I say? I am a fan, Brenny White." He took a copy of her book out of his jacket.

She was speechless for a moment when she saw the book. It was another pleasant surprise.

The man told her, "When I saw the cover, I knew it would be a good book. "Then, when I touched it, I felt electricity in my hands. After I read your book, I felt electricity in my spirit. It still affects me the same way."

She wondered what his name was.

He held out his hand to shake hands with her.

He said, "My name is Hans."

Brenny wondered if he had heard her thought. She waited to find out.

Her hand shook his hand. It was big and heat radiated from the center. He has the hands of a healer, she told herself. She looked down, he had very big feet, too.

Hans looked better at closer range. He had long yellow eyelashes and dark blue eyes that sparkled with little diamonds of light. Deep and meaningful, they were the most beautiful eyes she had ever seen. This man is gorgeous, Brenny thought.

The man smiled at her. She knew now that he could hear her thoughts.

"Thank you," he said at her. Now she knew for sure.

Brenny was spellbound and she wondered if his eyes were hypnotizing her. By the time Brenny could think of something to say, Hans had already sat beside her. As he sat across the table from her, she felt the intense energy of his spirit and she liked it. Now she knew what the mysterious attraction was. His energy fit well with her energy.

"What are you doing in Amsterdam?" Hans asked her.

Brenny smiled at him as she said, "Trying to buy a good pair of wooden shoes."

He smiled at her. Brenny wondered if she had insulted him by saying something stereotypical of his country.

"It's okay," he told her, "The Netherlands are famous for wooden shoes and windmills. Some Dutch still wear them, but tourists buy most of the shoes. I have a couple of cousins who wear them. They live in the country."

She wanted to visit with Hans, but she was feeling a little uncomfortable.

She told him, "I know you have gifts. I have them, too, but we both know this. Please don't read my mind unless I ask you, too, okay? I don't want to use my energy to build walls. I would rather use my energy to have a nice visit with you."

She smiled at him and he nodded in agreement. Then he smiled at her again.

Brenny started to laugh as she told him, "To be truthful, Hans, the Winds of Change brought me here. I was restless and they led me here."

"What do you think of Holland so far?" asked Hans.

"I really like this place," Brenny answered and started to laugh again happily. "It agrees with me. I like the water and I like the people, even though it is crowded, polluted and old.

I have never been to a place where so many people have passed through the same space. Their imprints are in the air and I like that energy.

I also like the climate. Rain never bothered me and I am kind of a dark person. I guess I'm a Gothic Girl who likes Gothic places."

Brenny thought about Hans reading her book. This gave her great pleasure and she wanted to know more.

Brenny asked him, "I am dying to know, where did you find your copy of my book?"

Hans' eyes got big with happiness. It was the question he had been waiting for. He replied with a fresh smile, "In New York City. I went there on holiday a year ago and saw it in a small shop."

Brenny asked him, "How much did you pay for it?"

"About five American dollars," Hans replied, "Why do you ask?"

"I have a couple of friends that paid two dollars for their copy. Two dollars or five dollars, that still is kind of cheap. I guess you can see that my book didn't do too well."

"Why?" Hans asked.

"The publisher died as soon as it was published. His name was George and he believed in the book. But then he died and his family didn't believe in the book. Or the other books that he published. Instead, they sold his publishing business. Someone liquidated all the inventory to a merchandiser who in turn sold the books to discount book stores."

"What do you mean by the word 'liquidate'?" Hans asked her.

"Liquidate means to remove, to take away," Brenny told him. "They wanted to get rid of the books, but make a little money on them, so they sold them for almost nothing."

Hans nodded, "I understand now. I still think your book was a work of genius. I loved it and I cried at the end."

Hans' beautiful eyes were full of emotion when he said, "I cried for a long time. It touched my heart so deeply. I didn't want the book to end. I was hoping someday there would be a sequel."

Brenny filled with pride. Even though it had flopped commercially, she knew she had

written a good book. When Hans told her that he cried at the ending, Brenny knew that her writing was valuable. If I can make a beautiful, masculine man like this cry, then I did my job, Brenny thought.

Hans asked Brenny many questions about her book. She tried to answer all of them. Brenny soon found out Hans knew almost as much about her book as she did.

"Why did you let Amy have the operation in the end?" he asked.

"It was a cryptogram for my old boyfriend," Brenny replied. "He would never listen to me when I talked with him, so I thought I would tell him symbolically. It didn't work, either. He wouldn't read my book."

Hans looked at her with surprise, "Why? Didn't he give you any support when you wrote it?"

Brenny shook her head, "No. He hated my writing and always tried to make me stop."

"My intuition tells me that he read it," Hans said.

Brenny started to laugh.

She told him, "You are very good, Hans. My spirit tells me that you have a lot of power. Yes, he read it. He didn't read it until he felt threatened that I would break up with him. By then it was too late.

My old boyfriend has power. I like guys with power. I always did and that is what usually gets me in trouble.

As for Amy, I let her have the operation so she could become what society demanded from her because of her low social and marital status: a drone for the factory. She became the subservient wife her husband wanted her to be and the subservient worker society wanted her to be.

I had her memories taken away because I didn't want her to remember her potential and because I didn't want her to know the truth of what she had become. She died a symbolic death."

"But what happened to her soul, Brenny?" Hans asked in a sincere voice. "Did it stay in her body or did it leave because its sisters, the mind and heart, were no longer connected to it?"

This guy is a poet, too, Brenny thought. This guy really knows how to get my attention.

"It left her, Hans," Brenny said. " She became a shell of living tissue that was nothing but functional for others. She became a soulless beast of the machine."

Hans replied, "It wasn't fair that the others got to keep their intelligence, personality and all the other things that makes people individuals."

Brenny thought for a minute and then replied, "I know it wasn't fair. In a way, her life and soul were sacrificed so they could keep theirs. Amy wasn't allowed to be an individual. The writing was on the wall and she knew that nothing could save her. So she chose not to know."

Amy left her body to them, but not her soul. They thought they won, but they didn't. They thought they had 'saved' her, but in reality, she saved herself. She saved herself in a tragic way, but she saved herself. Hopefully, most of the people who read the book got this message."

Hans had been thinking about Brenny's character Amy and his eyes got a little watery. Brenny knew at that moment how much Hans really cared about her character. This told her that Hans was a feminist and this pleased her.

Brenny thought to herself, wow . . . This guy is too perfect.

Hans told her, "I got the message, but I also got many more. What did your other readers tell you?"

Brenny laughed as she told Hans, "Most of the people who read the book were prisoners and you would not believe the letters they wrote me. Somehow, they all saw themselves as Amy. It was really weird. They compared and contrasted their lives with hers and found many common threads. Many of the prisoners who wrote me described some startling analogies to her. I have some gay friends and they also discovered analogies."

Hans asked Brenny, "I know the book was meant to be dark and beautiful, but did the ending have to be so sad?"

Brenny thought for a moment and then replied, "To be truthful, I never did like the ending, Hans. I have thought many times about writing another book. Maybe some day when my life becomes stable, I will resurrect her."

Brenny started to laugh and said, "Of course, she will need a new operation or will need to bump her head or be healed by God or an angel or something. Something that will help her to bring her mind back so she can will her spirit back. Believe it or not, that will be the easy part. The hard part will be finding a way for her to live as a vibrant individual. Especially after she reawakens and finds that nothing has changed."

"Maybe Amy should come to Amsterdam," Hans said as his dark blue eyes sparkled brightly. "Lots of cool, Dutch guys would like her."

Brenny began to laugh again and she laughed for a long time in the melodious and happy way she usually laughed in. He laughed with her.

Finally, Brenny replied with a smile, "Maybe she should go to Amsterdam." She studied Hans' face and said, "Amy would like the cool, Dutch guys. Especially Dutch guys like you."

Brenny told him teasingly, "Maybe I can call one of them Hans. Would you like that?"

This pleased him and Hans began to laugh.

When he stopped laughing, he told her, "You know that I would love it. But only on one condition: Hans is the one that Amy stays with forever. He is the one who is her true soul mate."

Hans looked at Brenny with a smile and said, "Amy will always be happy with him because he will always treat her well. Hans will never hurt or betray her in any way. He will always give her compassion, kindness, friendship, understanding and love."

His' words mesmerized Brenny and she began to feel ecstasy. Hans' heart began to secretly talk with her heart. Little buds of emotion begin to bloom within her. He smiled with happiness.

Brenny felt her heart talking with Hans' heart. They fit together and talked together too well. She began to panic.

Hans felt her worry and he wanted to divert to her attention away from it.

He asked her, "So are you going to write a sequel?" Then he smiled and it melted her apprehension.

She told him, "Maybe I will start writing the sequel soon. After I figure out what I am going to do."

"What do you mean?" Hans asked Brenny with interest. "Are you saying that you might stay here for a while?"

"Well," Brenny replied, "I am in the middle of a big life change. For a while, I thought I was going to be moving somewhere else, but it didn't happen. Now I am thinking about living here permanently. Life is too short. You should live it where you want to."

Brenny smiled as she told Hans, "If I live here, then I am going to have to learn the language. I want to learn to speak Dutch, but I worry I am too old to learn a new language."

"I will teach you, if you want," Hans replied. "I know other languages, too. I will teach those to you, too, if you like."

Brenny knew that Hans was trying to invite himself into her life for longer than the

evening. This made her happy, but it also made her worry.

Hans felt her worry. He decided to change the energy.

"Is Minnesota really as beautiful as you describe it in the book?" Hans asked. "I had planned to go there."

Brenny smiled and laughed.

"Yes," she said, "It really is beautiful there. There are so many trees, lakes and rivers, plus all kinds of wildlife." Brenny continued to worry in the back of her mind.

"Were you really going to go to Minnesota?" Brenny asked him.

"Ja, I was."

"When?"

"Next month."

"For holiday?" Brenny asked him.

"To try to visit you," Hans replied.

She was very surprised. Her vibes told her Hans was telling her the truth. The world began to seem a little small and very strange to her. She started to worry again and caught herself. She was having too much fun now and she wasn't going to let anything ruin it. Besides, she cunningly told herself, I won't see him again after tonight.

Brenny thought about New York. She had never been there, and she had never wanted to go there. Brenny wondered why he would want to go there and she wondered how he liked it.

"Why, of all places, did you go to New York?" Brenny asked.

Hans smiled at Brenny again and told her, "I went to New York City because a dream told me to go. After the dream, my power told me to go, too."

"I know why I had the dream. If I hadn't gone to New York City, I would never have found your book."

"Did you like it there?"

"I thought New York had too much energy for me," Hans replied. He began to blush, "I also didn't like it because everyone wanted to sleep with me."

Brenny could see why everyone in New York wanted to sleep with him. She

remembered that she had been watching him herself. Brenny began to fill with embarrassment. She began to blush.

Hans saw her blush and he blushed with her.

He asked her, "Why are you blushing?"

She laughed as she said, "I was watching you. We both know it. I am as bad as those New Yorkers, except I didn't think about sleeping with you. I just liked watching you."

Brenny thought for a moment before she continued.

She told him, "Yes, was attracted to you and now I know why. I like your energy."

Hans smiled back. He told her, "I like your energy, too, although I already knew what it would be like. Your book told me beautiful things about who you are."

"Thank you," Brenny told him.

"No," Hans replied, "Thank you."

"Thank you for what?" Brenny asked.

"Thank you for writing something so wonderful. Thank you for coming to Holland. Thank you for watching me."

Brenny was surprised at his words. He wanted me to watch him, she said to herself.

"You know you look great," she told him.

Brenny began to blush and this made her laugh.

"Don't worry about it," Hans told her. "I am used to it. People have been looking at me since I was a baby. I guess I was a real beautiful baby. People think I have an easy life because of my looks, but I don't. I am lonely.

I don't socialize much because I don't know if people like me for myself or what I look like.

I should tell you, I feel people looking at me all the time. I've got my regulars. They wait for me to go or come back from work. They wait along my little path that I take every day."

Brenny remembered that she was one of those people. She blushed more.

"It's okay that you saw me," Hans told her. "When I felt you looking at me, well . . .

ah . . . it felt different. Ja, it did. I'm happy that you were watching me."

Brenny told herself, bingo. I was right about that . . .

Hans' head nodded up and down a couple of times and he smiled at her.

He told her, "I felt your presence before when I walked by this coffee shop. It felt warm and good and familiar. Today, my curiosity was too great and I had to look. I saw you and I was very surprised and happy. Then I became afraid."

"Afraid of what?" Brenny asked him.

"That I wouldn't know what to say to you or that I would say the wrong thing and make an ass of myself," Hans replied. "I thought about going into the coffee shop to meet you earlier, but I realized that I wanted to get my book first. When I got home, I realized that I wanted to clean up a little. Then I became afraid that you might not be at the coffee shop when I got back."

Brenny had a feeling that he would have found her. She also saw that Hans was very smart. He knew that he would score more points with me if he had a copy of my book with him, Brenny mused. Brenny also knew that he had showered to look better to her.

Hans continued, "I love your writing. I am crazy about it. I am not a shy person, but I feel shy around you."

Brenny laughed. "Why do you feel shy around me?" she asked.

"Because you are so beautiful to me."

Brenny started to laugh again. She told him, "You have given me another compliment. Thank you. I wish you wouldn't be shy around me."

"Be careful what you wish for, you might just get it."

That was one of Brenny's favorite sayings and she wondered if he knew.

Hans told her, "It is one of my favorite sayings."

Brenny wanted to know more about how Hans got a copy of her book.

She asked him, "So you had this feeling to go to New York and didn't know why? There are better places to go than New York. You must have had powerful feelings to go that far. But then again, here I am, sitting in Amsterdam . . . "

Hans laughed as he told her, "I had a feeling and the feeling was too strong to resist. My soul was beckoned to go. The feeling was indescribable and I was restless until I found your book in New York.

Before I got on the plane, I worried about being squeezed in with that many people for so long. I was really sweating when I got on the plane and sweating worse after I got off of it in New York. My clothes were soaked through."

Hans laughed again and continued, "Sometimes we have to face our own fears. I also worried if I were doing something crazy."

Brenny remembered her own worry about being crazy because she went to Holland.

Hans continued his story, "I took a cab from the airport. I didn't know where I wanted to go, so I got off at a subway station. I rode the subway for a couple of hours until my heart told me where to get off.

I walked for a few blocks in an old, rundown neighborhood. As I walked by a book store, I felt an urge to go in. The first thing I saw was your book. The moment I saw it, I knew that was meant to find it. It radiated light. I bought the book before I ever looked inside it. As soon as the book was paid for, I got back on the subway, went to the airport and came home."

"Where was your suitcase?" Brenny asked. "Did you carry it around with you?"

"I didn't have one."

"Why?"

"I have psychic power and I knew that it would help me find what I was looking for right away."

Hans began to laugh.

Brenny asked him, "Did you know it was a book you were looking for?"

He answered honestly, "No, my heart told me it was my mate."

His words startled her and she didn't know what to think.

"Did you feel bad that you got a book instead of a woman?" Brenny asked.

"No," Hans answered, "Because the Winds of Change brought me to your book and now they have brought you to me."

Hans' presence made Brenny feel happy and alive. His presence was comfortable, engaging and intoxicating. Hans fit into Brenny's life-space and he fit into it a little too well. The red flags went up in her soul and mind.

The red flags tried to warn her. They tried to tell her that she was letting herself be tempted.

A vision of a bright and colorful puzzle piece came into Brenny's mind. It floated from left to right in a light blue sky sprinkled with white puffy clouds. When the puzzle piece fell to earth, it fit exactly into the puzzle. She saw an open place for another puzzle piece. It was next to the place where the puzzle piece fit into. Brenny knew this open space belonged to Adrian.

Brenny ignored the red flags. She had already rolled another joint. After she lit it and took a tug, she offered some to Hans.

He nodded 'no' and told her, "I don't smoke and I rarely drink."

Brenny looked at him with question marks in her eyes. She knew that he was a little eccentric. There were all kinds of clues to this. One clue was his hair. It was longer than hers as it hung past his ass. Brenny also knew that he was a magician or had been one. It was written all over him.

The red flags went up again. Brenny ignored them again. Instead, she began to imagine what he must have looked like when he got off the plane. She realized that even if Hans was bathed in sweat, that he would still look better than anyone else in New York City.

Brenny smiled at her thought and smiled at him.

"Hans," she told him, "You are so fine and I am having such a good time visiting with you. Just tell me one thing: Is there anything not perfect about you?"

Hans laughed and teased, "Let me think . . . "

She studied him as he laughed. She wondered how he would answer this question.

Hans knew that Brenny was waiting.

He looked at her and said, "I have fillings in my teeth, I have hairy toes and I when I love, I love forever."

Oh shit! Brenny thought, this is too fucken perfect. I know better and I shouldn't be here with him like this, but I can't quit. I'm just too happy and I'm having too much fun. I don't want to go through life wondering what would have happened if I stopped this right now. I'll wait awhile and see what happens. Brenny knew that she was lying when she told herself, I can always stop it later . . .

Brenny caught herself and she became worried. She didn't need any more complications. Her plate was full with trying to figure out what she was going to do next. She didn't know when Adrian was going to come back. Brenny missed him, but was becoming confused about her feelings and Hans was adding to the confusion.

Hans made her very happy. As happy as Adrian made her feel. She worried that she was already falling in love. Brenny knew that she didn't need those kinds of problems

and complications. Brenny also knew that Hans sensed Adrian.

In her mind, she saw the fine grey line between the universe and the spirit world. The fine grey line seemed larger than what she remembered. It no longer seemed narrow and close. More than ever, Brenny wished that Adrian had come back.

Brenny realized how complicated everything was. She wondered how God could keep track of it all. She wanted Adrian, but he wasn't around and she had her chance to be with Hans. Hans is making it perfectly clear he wants to be with me, she told herself.

Her heart replied, "I know."

Brenny began to worry again.

Hans saw her worrying.

He put his big hand on hers and told her, "You don't have to worry when you are with me."

Brenny went to reply, but he put his index finger to her lips and said, "Shhhh . . ."

She was surprised. Hans had invaded her personal space and had touched her lips. It felt electrifying. She liked it so well that she didn't protest.

Hans' eyes lit up and sparkled with the bright, little lights.

"I knew it was you when I saw you," he told her, "But I was expecting someone who looked older and bigger."

"Something happened to me," she told him, "Something magikcal."

He smiled at her and said, "I believe in magick, Brenny. I believe everything around us is magick."

Brenny returned his smile and replied, "Maybe someday I will tell you about what happened to me." She caught herself, but it was too late. Her words had just invited him into her life for longer than a day.

Hans knew this and it deeply pleased him. This was what he had been waiting for. The rest was going to be easy.

Brenny knew what he was thinking and felt nervous. She took another tug of the joint.

Hans bought himself a bottle of fruit juice and another cup of tea for her. As he drank his juice, Brenny looked at his big hand holding the little bottle. She knew that they were artist's hands. Brenny wondered what kind of art he made and she had a feeling that she would eventually find out.

She reached for a cigarette. Hans' arm reached across the table and he grabbed the lighter. He lit her cigarette for her. Brenny smiled. Brenny liked it that she had his complete attention.

They listened to music as they enjoyed each other's company. She noticed that many of the songs were for lovers. This is way too fucken perfect, Brenny mused.

Brenny looked at Hans and asked him, "Where did you get all your psychic power? My vibes tell me that you are like me. My friend in the US calls people like us Uniques."

Now Hans knew the English word for it. He already knew that he and Brenny were alike psychically. He knew that when he read her book.

"Mario knows Uniques who can start fires with their minds, stop time, make inanimate things come alive, you name it. I met some of these people through him. They are really talented people. Mario says that most Uniques are also magicians."

Hans told her, "I was born with a caul on my face. Many cultures believe that people who are born with cauls on their faces are born psychic."

Brenny remembered that Denny had been born with a shroud on his face, too. This made her uncomfortable.

"Let me guess," Brenny told him, "I suppose you were born under the sign of Ophiculus, too?"

Hans' face lit up with a smile, "The thirteenth sign. How did you know?"

"I had a feeling," Brenny replied, "Which day?"

"The 25th," Hans replied. "Twenty-five is . . ."

Brenny finished his sentence, "Five to the second power."

She could not mask her worry from Hans. He felt it and changed the energy.

"Psychic ability runs in my family," Hans told Brenny. "As far as I know, it always has. This ability saved a lot of lives in my family. It saved my grandfather and great uncles from being killed by the Nazis."

"Go ahead," Brenny told him, "You know I want to hear this story."

"When the Germans occupied the Netherlands," Hans said, "They killed a lot of Dutch people and they took men from age eighteen to forty to work in slave labor camps. A lot of them never came back.

The Germans planned to raid the houses where my ancestors lived. My grandmother

had a dream and saw all of this. She also saw that German soldiers were going to search her house and pull up the floorboards.

My grandfather and grandmother had so many children that the Germans let him stay in Holland. Everyone knew that his status could change anytime.

They were hiding two of my grandmother's brothers. Both of them were old enough to be taken away to the slave camps. They would hide under the floorboards when the Germans searched the house.

After her dream, my grandmother woke everyone in the middle of the night and told her husband and her brothers to leave. She told them to hide in the forest for three days. It was cold and raining outside, so no one wanted to go. They wanted to wait until sunlight, but my grandmother insisted that they go right away.

She had baked bread the day before, so she filled a basket with the bread, some cheese and some bottles of water. All three men left late in the night and hid in the forest. Less than an hour later, before the sun rose, the Germans were pounding on the door.

My grandmother opened the door. The Germans had dogs with them this time and the dogs sniffed out the hiding place. They ripped up the floor, but found no one."

Brenny was surprised to hear this story. She was glad to hear that Hans' male relatives had been spared.

"Back to my psychic abilities," Hans told her. "I was born with great power and I practiced using it when I was a child. My parents always thought I was a little strange. Later, I found others who had strong powers and they taught me things . . . Things I decided one day I didn't need anymore.

On that day, I bought my crucifix and returned to my original religion. I work hard on my faith because I don't want to be like those Christians you wrote about in your book. I try to be kind and compassionate and I pray all the time."

Brenny already knew that Hans was a good man and now he had validated it. She touched the gold crucifix on her neck and thought how Hans' was the same kind.

"I wear this kind of crucifix," Brenny told Hans, "Because I want to be reminded of Christ's suffering. When I feel or see his body around my neck, I remember Him and what He tried to teach the world before His messages lost their original meaning.

It's strange that I wear it, though, because I have so little faith. I also like to remember Him because He gave Mary Magdalene the Keys to Heaven, although very few people know about this."

"I know about it," Hans replied.

"I figured that you did."

Brenny thought about what Heaven must have been like those billions or trillions of years ago. She thought about Adrian.

Hans looked at her and told her, "I feel you thinking about another man. I guess I should ask: Are you married? You are very attractive to me, but I guess you already know that."

Hans' words her feel so happy that she reflected her happiness back in laughter. Hans was making her too happy and it overshadowed her thoughts and feelings about Adrian. Brenny started to worry.

Hans face looked puzzled. His heart told him that his words had pleased her, but he also felt her worry under her laughter.

Brenny felt Hans' concern.

To make him more comfortable, she told him, "Your compliment is so pleasing to me that I had to laugh. I shouldn't be this pleased, but I am. You have flattered me very much."

She began to think of Adrian again and started to worry. Hans sat quietly as he waited for her to answer his question. Brenny stopped laughing.

She told Hans, "I am not married."

Brenny smiled as she said, "You are very attractive to me, Hans. Not because you are very nice to look at--and you are--but because you are beautiful inside. I can tell already that we are very compatible. You feel too comfortable to me and this worries me."

He put his index finger back on her lips, "Shhh . . ." he told her. "You already answered my question. I don't want to know more."

"Would it have changed things if I were married?"

"No," he said as he shook his head, "I would still be attracted to you."

"Is there a Mrs. Hans?" Brenny asked him.

"No."

"A girlfriend?"

"Once."

"What happened?"

"She was married and in the end, dumped me for her husband. He was ugly, too. So you see, my looks don't get me what I want."

"So you were the 'other man'?" Brenny asked him.

"Ja, you could say that. I knew I was doing wrong, but I couldn't help myself. I loved her too much to stop."

Hans' words sounded prophetic to Brenny. A chill began to go through her, but it left as suddenly as it appeared.

Brenny asked him, "Were you waiting for her to leave her husband for you?"

Hans shook his head side to side, "No. I was happy to have the few moments I could have with her. I knew the rules. Since then, I have never been with anyone else."

"Why?" Brenny asked.

"Because I have been looking for someone special," he replied.

Brenny knew that he was talking about her.

Struggling to change the direction and meaning of what he had just said, she told him, "Hans, you are beautiful to look at. I know you are intelligent and I know you are an artist. Lots of women and men would want you. It is hard for me to imagine someone like you is having a hard time finding someone special. You must get asked out a lot."

Hans looked at her with teasing, beautiful eyes and told Brenny, "Ja, I get asked out a lot, but my heart has to be on fire for me to be with someone."

"Don't you get lonely?" Brenny asked him.

"Sure, I do. But I make myself happy. I work, have my art and I pray. My day job is carpentry and my night job is sculpting. In between, I pray.

Brenny asked him, "Are you any good at sculpting?" She regretted her question because she already knew the answer. She knew he was better than good.

Hans eyes twinkled at hers.

"You already know I am very good," he told her. "You will fall in love with my art like I have fallen in love with your writing. We are very special people, you and I. We are made from the same cosmic cloth, the same energy. My soul tells me this."

Brenny laughed, "You understand poetry to say 'cosmic cloth'."

He told her, "I learned it from a line in your book."

Brenny had forgotten she had written that in Amy. She felt a little embarrassed. She remembered what Hans had told her about being careful about what she wished for. Brenny wondered if this was coincidence or if she had written this in the book, too. After searching her heart, Brenny was absolutely sure that her favorite saying about wishing was not in the novel.

"It's been a long time since I wrote Amy," she told him. "I forgot some of the things I wrote. Sometimes I have to read it again just to see exactly what I wrote."

Brenny began to laugh happily.

She told Hans, "There are some parts of the book that I don't remember writing. Oh I know I wrote them, but my spirit was so on fire that I got lost in the rapture."

He smiled at her, "I could tell." His smile became bigger.

"Why are you a carpenter if you are such a good artist?" Brenny asked him.

"Because I like to work, plus I would never sell my art," he replied. "Working keeps me in shape and it gives me a steady income so I can pay my rent.

I work for a company that restores or replaces the old buildings of the city. We try to restore them first, but sometimes they are too old and crumbling. When they must be replaced, my company draws and measures everything in the building. This way, after the building is demolished, it is rebuilt, looking exactly like it did when it was new."

The longer Brenny spent with Hans, the more she liked him. The evening kept getting better and her memories of Adrian kept getting worse.

"Brenny," Hans told her, "I have something to show you." He pulled up the right sleeve of his T-shirt. Brenny saw his tattoo and it looked familiar. It was the tattoo that she had written about in Amy: a bottle of liquor that said "MN 13" on the label with a marijuana leaf in the background.

Bootlegging was a key industry for the local St. Cloud economy during Prohibition. The usual mash featured a hybrid corn called Minnesota 13, developed by the University of Minnesota. Most Minnesota moonshine was called Minnesota 13, whether this type of corn was used or not. Minnesota 13 was one of the most popular drinks in speakeasies all around the nation.

Brenny was surprised and she laughed.

"I guess you really are a fan of the book," Brenny told him.

Hans' eyes became serious as he told her, "No, Brenny, I am more than a fan of the book. I am a fan of Brenny White."

Brenny began to silently worry if he were a lunatic or something. She wondered why someone like him, that looked like him, would show any interest in her at all. Now he was paying her the highest compliment of all. He had decorated his perfect body with a symbol from her book.

Brenny began to feel very good about herself and the doubts faded away. She always knew that she had written a good book. Now someone in a small, remote country had just validated her belief. Brenny was delighted and she began to laugh happily again.

He told her, "I have another tattoo."

It was on the top of his left arm. It was a dragon in the form of a 'V'. Brenny knew exactly what it meant.

"So you like the number five, huh?" she asked.

"Do you know what it means?" he asked her.

"Yes," she replied, "You know I do. It is the number of man, the number of points on the pentagram, the number of Christ's wounds and it is the number of the Hierophant."

When Brenny said the word 'hierophant', a chill went through her. It went through him, too. Both pretended that it did not happen.

He told her, "It is also the magickal key to the universe, if you know how to use it."

Hans told Brenny more about himself. He was educated like Brenny. After he attended the university in Amsterdam, he went to one in Berlin. When he went to the universities, he supported himself with carpenter jobs. He earned degrees in music, theology and art.

Brenny asked him why he didn't have a bicycle or car. This is when she learned that he liked to walk. Hans told her that he preferred walking to other ways of transportation. Hans told her that he liked to pray for others and when he walked, he always found many people to pray for.

Many times, these were homeless people. Hans told Brenny that he had a special place in his heart for homeless people because he had once been homeless himself.

Brenny was surprised at what he had just told her.

She told him, "I am glad that you are such a good man and have so much faith."

Her eyes searched his eyes out when she told him, "You already know this, but I want it out on the table. I don't have a lot of faith. I have compassion and kindness, but I just don't have the faith I think that I should have. I consider myself a theologian, too, so I don't know if this is tragic or ironic. I prefer to think of it as ironic."

XXIV

Brenny's evening with Hans gave way to a night of magick. Brenny found herself caught up in one of the most fascinating conversations of her life. She and Hans talked through the evening until the coffee shop closed at midnight.

Afterwards, they walked along the canals and Hans told her about the history of Amsterdam. He also pointed out different types of Dutch architecture and explained it to her. They visited until both of them became very tired. Brenny was happy.

Hans took Brenny to his flat. It was an efficiency apartment on the second floor. Ironically, it was above a coffee shop. Although the building Hans lived in was old, Brenny was surprised at how modern Hans' apartment was. She had been expecting his flat to look as old as the room she rented. Instead, his flat gleamed with remodeling.

Brenny stood at the entrance and quickly scanned his room. Along the wall to her right, she saw two doors, about three feet away from each other. She knew the first door was a door to a closet and the second door was the door to a small bathroom. Sitting against the wall, just beyond the bathroom door, was his dresser. Clothes were piled on top of it. Two of the four deep drawers were open and the contents hung out.

His new, double-sized bed was also against the right wall, past the dresser. Brenny saw immediately that it had quilts on it. A poster of the Hierophant tarot card hung on the wall. The same tarot card Phil had pulled when he had given Brenny her reading. Worries began to pop up in Brenny's spirit.

Six feet beyond his bed, were two big windows that looked out into a busy street. A big, comfortable red upholstered chair sat by the window. Her vibes immediately told her that Hans sat in it a lot. Another smaller chair sat by the red one. It looked new like the bed.

Brenny began to wonder if Hans had gotten new furniture because he was expecting someone. Someone like her. Brenny began to worry again. Then she wondered if he really was expecting anyone because the place was so messy. Her worries stopped.

To the left of the entrance was a small kitchen with a sink, counter and a few cupboards. A small gas-heated stove sat on top of a small refrigerator. A front-load washer sat in the corner. Between the kitchen area and the living/sleeping area, there was a small wooden table and two chairs.

Hans' sculpture took up much of the rest of the space in the room, except the farthest left-hand corner. Four tall bookcases stood there. The first two bookcases were crammed with books. A librarian, Brenny could tell that some books were very old. She also saw that some books were written in Latin.

The third bookcase held his stereo. It was a nice one with four big speakers and a pair of woofers. The CD player held 200 CD's and the rest of the shelves were packed with at least 400 more CD's. Most of the titles were rhythm and blues, reggae or rock 'n roll.

On the bookshelf, closest to the window on the left, she saw pictures in frames of him and his family. There were also papers and letters written in Dutch shoved into corners. Two cases of musical instruments sat on a lower shelf. One case was for a trumpet and one case was for a saxophone. Two guitar cases and a keyboard instrument were propped up against the book case.

Hans saw her looking at the instrument cases and the keyboard.

He told her, "I am a musician. I told you that I studied music at the university."

Hans was right about his art. Brenny immediately fell in love with it. He worked with clay and stone. Most of it was covered with canvas and he uncovered his art for her.

She marveled at the beautiful pieces of art he made. Two of his statues had hands and the hands were perfect and lifelike. Brenny knew that only a master artist could make such flawless hands.

Brenny looked again at the Hierophant poster. The red flags went up in her mind and soul.

Hans saw Brenny look at the poster and he felt her worry.

He told her, "Ja, I bought it at the coffee shop a long time ago. If it is bothering you, I can take it down."

"Do you know what it means?" Brenny asked.

"You know I do. It means a person who interprets ancient, secret or hidden knowledge."

Hans and Brenny were getting more tired. Brenny felt at home in his flat, so when he asked her if she wanted to stay and sleep, she accepted. There was no place to sleep but on the floor or on his bed, so she decided to sleep with him. She told him that she felt very comfortable with him, but she made it clear to him that she had no intention of having sex with him.

Hans smiled told her, "You know I want you, but I won't bother you. I am just glad you are here with me."

Hans had the next two days off and they spent this time together. Their conversations were always interesting and deep. He showed Brenny places in Amsterdam that she never knew existed.

They went to the Van Gogh Museum later that day and walked by many homeless people on the way. Hans always stopped to give them some money. Brenny knew that he prayed for each one and she was amazed at his generosity and goodness. It fascinated her that Hans' soul was more beautiful than he was.

When Hans went back to work, Brenny found herself still living at Hans' house. She liked living there and he wanted her to stay.

Brenny thought about her laptop sitting in her room. She walked several blocks to her room and got it.

When Hans got home from work, he found her typing away on her computer. She smiled at him.

"I guess you are my muse," she told him and she typed some more. After he showered, he found that she was still typing.

"You've had your time to work," Hans told her.

He turned to Brenny and said, "Let's eat. Afterwards, we'll go for a walk."

Hans fixed a quick vegetarian meal. After they ate, Brenny got ready to walk with Hans.

They walked along the canals. Brenny never got tired of Amsterdam's old architecture and canals. Hans knew this, so he always took her to the most beautiful parts of the city.

While they were out, Brenny remembered that she wanted to pay the rent for her room. She had tried to pay it when she had gotten her laptop, but the owner hadn't been home.

She told Hans that she needed to walk by her room and give the super the money.

He looked at her sweetly with his beautiful eyes and said, "Brenny, come live with me. It would save you money and it would make me happy. Besides, my place is nicer."

Brenny wanted to stay with him, but she thought about Adrian and her mixed feelings about everything. She thought about Hans and realized that she was having too good of a time with Hans to stop.

For once, Brenny had someone she could talk to. Someone that treated her well and with respect. Brenny loved being with him. Brenny wondered if he would expect to have sex with her if she moved in.

Hans heard her thoughts and told her, "No, Brenny, you don't have to have sex with me. I should tell you the truth--I want more than sex with you. I want to make love to

you.

I will never bother you for sex or love or both. I am happy to have you near me and to be with you. But if you ever want me, you can have me anyway you want me."

Brenny thought about his words for a few moments.

Then she told him, "Hans, I am thirteen years older than you. I know I don't look like it, but I used to be fat, too . . . "

Hans looked into her eyes and told her with his heart, "Brenny, what you talk about is a shell. I see inside you and I see the most beautiful woman I have ever seen. You could look like an old lady tomorrow-a real fat, old lady-and it would not change my feelings."

"But you are so beautiful to look at . . . "Brenny replied.

Hans told her, "My good looks have always been a problem for me, but I am glad I am good looking to you, though. If that's what it takes to win your heart . . . "

Brenny fears began to grow. In her heart of hearts, she knew that she wanted to live with Hans.

She told him, "Yes, you are beautiful man, but it is your heart, mind and soul that are attractive to me. Like a moth to a flame." Brenny laughed nervously.

Hans understood what she meant, but he remained serious.

"Will you move in with me?" he asked.

Her impetuous heart told him that she would.

Brenny gave the super her key and the furniture in her room. Hans helped Brenny carry her duffle bags to his house. Brenny put her clothes in Hans' dresser. She looked up and saw that this pleased him.

She found her passport in the bottom of one of her duffle bags. Brenny put it in a side compartment of her duffle bag and zipped it up. Hans put it and the other bags in his closet.

The next morning, when Hans was leaving to go to work, he quietly opened the door to the closet and found the empty duffle bag with the passport in it. He quickly unzipped the compartment and took out the passport. Hans put it in his coat pocket and silently left. On his way to work, he threw it away in a public trash can.

Later that day, Brenny walked by a mirror sitting on the table. She habitually touched it and then she stopped. Brenny remembered Adrian and wondered about him.

She took his ring from where she hid it in the carrying case of her laptop. Her fingers touched his ring and she tried to listen for him with her spirit, but heard nothing. She wanted to look at the dancing fire inside the jewel, but she didn't have the courage.

Brenny felt ashamed. Her mind reminded her that things were going too far and fast with Hans. Her mind knew it was wrong to be with Hans when she loved Adrian, but she could not help herself. Hans was too magickal and too appealing. He was also there. There with her in their reality. Although she would not admit it, she knew that she was beginning to love Hans.

Still, Brenny knew that if Adrian was there, it would be no contest: She would go with him. A cold shiver of shame and fear ran up her. Brenny put Adrian's ring back.

Brenny thought about Adrian. He was becoming more distant to her. She wondered if her thoughts about him would ever go away.

They wore shorts and T-shirts when they slept together. Hans always held her close. She slept well with him, although it was always hard for her to go to sleep because she wanted him so bad. Brenny knew that Hans still wanted her because his erection pressed hard into her as he held her.

Thoughts of Adrian were always in the back of Brenny's mind. She was becoming very confused because she was falling in love with Hans. Although she kept lying to herself, Brenny knew deep-down that it was only a matter of time and circumstance before she and Hans made love.

Brenny lived with Hans for a week, when he brought out a dusty karaoke machine from the closet one evening. He also brought out a shoe box of cassette tapes and song sheets that went with the machine.

As Hans took the things from the closet, he remembered something and pulled out another box. Hans rifled through it for a few moments until he found what he was looking for. It was a fantasy magazine and it looked familiar to Brenny. Hans opened the magazine and stopped on page 68. He showed Brenny the page. It was a poem written by Brenny. Then she remembered why the magazine looked so familiar.

Brenny was speechless. She could barely squeak, "Where did . . . "

Hans grinned at her with said, "I told you that I was a fan."

"No, really, Hans. Where did you find this? Especially since you live on the other side of the world? I am exceptionally flattered and surprised. I am speechless."

"For someone speechless, you haven't lost your words," Hans replied, still smiling.

"I've got to know: Where did you find this?"

Hans laughed. "Okay, okay, Brenny. I'll tell you--I found out about it on the Internet.

My friend Erik has a computer and has Internet. I wanted to see if you had written any more books, so we looked for your name on an engine . . . "

Brenny interrupted, "Search engine?"

"Ja, one of those. We looked for a while, but we finally found your name. We found your name twice. The first place gave your address and phone number, and the second place mentioned your poem in this magazine."

"This magazine is over three years old," Brenny told him, "How did you get it?"

Hans radiated with happiness as he told her, "I wrote the magazine company and sent them money for a copy and postage."

Brenny wondered about something. "Hans," she said to him, "If you knew my address, how come you never wrote me? I really wish you had."

She was thinking of Adrian again. She secretly wished that she had met Hans before she had met Adrian. Things would have been a lot simpler, she told herself.

Hans looked at her and told her, "Brenny, I forgot to tell you, but I did write you. I sent you a picture of me with it. I went to a camera place and had a passport photo made."

Brenny thought for a while before she told Hans, "I must never have gotten it as I would have remembered. Maybe my ex-boyfriend kept it from me. He was pretty psychic and jealous. He might have pocketed the letter."

Her thoughts turned to the poem. She remembered how deep it was and she blushed. Hans saw her blushing. He put his curled index finger under her chin and steered her head toward his face.

"Brenny," he whispered, "It is a beautiful poem. I loved it and I still love it."

Hans smiled at her as he told her, "I am sorry I forgot to tell you that I had this poem. I know it by heart." He recited The Hierophant to her in his clearest English. Brenny was amazed.

Brenny forgot to worry and she forgot about what the poem really meant. She forgot about Phil's reading or the Hierophant poster on the wall or all the other signs.

He looked at her with a twinkle in his eye and asked her, "Now would you like to hear it in my language?" Before Brenny could respond, he recited it to her in Dutch.

THE HIEROPHANT

Brenny Rose White

My lover comes for me in the late, black, lacquered night

She follows the narrow beacon of my being's light

Soon, Sophia tells me, I shall know her mystery

The power of her words makes white roses grow in me

The house is dark and desolate as the others sleep

Mute echoes fill the hallowed halls with melancholy

Prisms of my spirit reflect minute, rainbow balls

On the cold, amber candlelight canvas of the walls

Staring through a mirror, I search for the pentagram

My heart deciphers the cryptograms of who I am

Statues of stone guide me to the secret sacrament

Writing in the book of life, I give my testament

The holy table is set with fruit and manna cakes

I hold on to my divine self as my temple breaks

The wind and lightning announce that she has come for me

It's time to learn the truth as I choose my destiny

We fly across the twilight to the ethereal

Comets shower in the cosmos as we fix our seal

Spinning chaos stars unmask a world that is hidden

Intimacies with the gods create the unforgiven

We sip a grail of apple wine made from eden's tree

I become a hierophant, learning profoundly

Lying in a poppy field, I think in ancient tongues

Songs of heaven lilt through the air, sung by winged ones

The petals of my soul open wide from ecstasy

While gentle arms embrace, redeem and enrapture me

Brenny was so spellbound that she couldn't speak. Thoughts of Adrian tried to sprout in her mind, but her heart wouldn't let them.

After Hans recited the poem, Brenny watched him as he began to set up the karaoke machine. She wondered what he was going to do with it.

"Where did you get a karaoke machine?" Brenny asked him.

Hans responded, "Someone threw it out. You've seen how the Dutch people throw good things away here: they pile them on the sidewalk for others to take until the garbage man takes it away. We call it grofhuisvuil."

Brenny knew what he was talking about. She had seen some very nice things piled on the sidewalks in some of the neighborhoods in Amsterdam. Brenny had taken a few things off of the heaps herself.

Hans continued his story, "I was walking home from work one day and saw it on a pile. My power told me it worked and that I would use it some day." Hans showed her the box with the cassette tapes and song sheets. He smiled as he told her, "I found these with it."

"Did you ever use it?" Brenny asked him.

Hans winked at her and said, "Only tonight, so it had better work." He laughed.

He moved some of his art and the chairs to create a little stage. The tall windows that opened to the street were the background for the stage. Brenny watched him as he tested the mike. Hans looked through the tapes until he found the ones he was looking for.

Hans put the tape in slot A and cued it up. He pulled another tape from his shirt pocket and put it into slot B. After adjusting the lights, he took his fair, blonde hair out its pony tail and let it spill upon his chest and back. Brenny's heart leapt with excitement.

He saw her watching him and shook his head at her, teasing her with his tousled hair. He smiled at her and she returned it.

His face became serious and stood up straight with the microphone in his hand. Hans looked directly at Brenny as he spoke into the mike, "Brenny, you know how I feel about you. I wanted to show you what is in my heart, so I thought I would sing for you . . . "

Hans started the tape and Brenny recognized the song immediately. It was The Rhythm of Love by the Scorpions.

The background music sounded sexy and Brenny was surprised to find that Hans could not only sing, but that he had a great voice.

Brenny thought about how desirable Hans was. She thought about his beautiful face and smile. She thought about his fit, muscular body. Brenny thought about his intelligence and splendid artistic talent. On top of everything else, he was a decent, compassionate man who was a feminist.

She thought about Hans' beautiful spirit. His beautiful spirit radiated through him and shone all around him. That was the most attractive thing about him to Brenny.

She was captured as he continued to sing. Adrian's name tried to appear in her mind, but she quickly stopped it because of her complete attention was on Hans. Hans' eyes sought hers out and locked on to them. He danced gracefully and sexily as he sang

only for her.

The song came to an end and Hans stopped the tape in slot A. The room was quiet and intense in energy. Neither said a word. Hans started the tape in slot B. It was Truly, Madly, Deeply by Savage Garden.

The difference in tempo between the two songs made Brenny feel a little off balance. Before she could catch her balance, she began to watch Hans with more fascination. He sang with the song and swayed gracefully to the music as he slowly and playfully began to take off one piece of clothing at a time.

Brenny was very pleased and it shone in her face.

Hans was nearly naked when the song finished. Brenny eyes feasted on his body. She knew that he had a fine body but she had never tried to look at it until that moment. It was masculine and perfect. Hans had no fat anywhere, only graceful, curving lines of muscle. The only thing imperfections on his body were the tattoos.

He stood in front of her in black bikini underwear. Brenny could feel the heat of his body as he came toward her. Her eyes followed the twinkling lights on the crucifix around his neck. Hans motioned for her to stand up and she automatically rose. He looked at her and then he looked at his black bikini.

He told her in a sincere voice from his heart, "You take this one off."

Hans held her face in his two big hands. His eyes searched furiously for hers and when he found them, he locked on to them. Hans looked into them and energy flowed from his eyes. The energy completely filled her. Brenny knew that he was coursing his soul and his love in her.

She remembered that Stacy had done this, but Hans had much more power. Not only was Hans' energy was more intense, it was the most intimate thing she had ever felt. It was also the most pleasant thing she had ever felt. She felt loved and her spirit felt beloved.

In her mind, Brenny saw a small, beautiful bird flying recklessly inside her. Hans saw her thought.

It was getting too late in the game and neither wanted to stop. Brenny wondered if she were hypnotized, but she realized that she was in love with Hans.

The threshold of great and powerful change loomed even closer. Brenny knew she was hopelessly seduced. Hans' energy intoxicated her and she was being pulled into him. The closer he came to her, the hotter his energy burned into her.

As he whispered into her lips, he told her, "I can't hide how I feel about you, Brenny." He began to kiss her lips with deep kisses. Brenny returned them.

He whispered into her lips again and said, "Let go, Brenny. Put your guard down and give yourself to me. Feel my love flowing through you. Feel my heart giving energy to yours."

The room began to whirl around. Brenny found herself naked in bed with Hans. She didn't remember Hans taking her clothes off.

Hans was hungrily kissing her as his big, gentle hands searched hungrily for her. Her hands reached out for him. One touched the bikini. He looked at her and his eyes told her to take it off. She sat up and pulled it off.

Her eyes looked at his loins. His penis was large and pink. Long, bushy light blond pubic hair surrounded it. It pleased Hans that she was looking at him.

He pulled her to him and began to kiss her deeply. Brenny became lost in a tempest-tossed sea of desire and happiness. Her body and soul bobbed helplessly and willingly to the emotional power of his love.

Hans climbed on top of her. He was ready to begin his descent into her being. His legs nudged hers open and they began to let him in. She felt the heat radiate from him and she felt the hardness of the head of his penis as it he guided it toward her.

Their souls were about to collide into each other and Brenny braced for impact. She closed her eyes and got ready to savor the moment when he was completely inside her.

Suddenly, without any warning, Brenny heard Adrian's voice clearly and crisply in her mind. His voice was full of surprise and shock as he said, "Brenny, please do not . . ."

Hans heard it, too. He looked at Brenny and power flowed from his eyes. She felt paralyzed and didn't know what to do. Hans' thoughts invaded hers and they pushed out all other thoughts.

"Open up for me," Hans commanded telepathically with his will. Her legs opened wide for him.

Hans had planned to be gentle with her, but he heard her try to think about Adrian. Instinctively, he thrust all of him into her on the first try. He was big and Brenny was filled with pleasure and pain. After the initial shock, her body became flush with passion and turned its full attention to the burning inside her. Thoughts of Adrian faded from her mind as Hans pummeled deep inside her.

Brenny was getting hotter for Hans. He wanted to slow the momentum, but her responses to him became more desperate and wanting with his every thrust. Hans thought about Adrian and then he readily gave her what she wanted and more.

Hans felt her begin to climax. He pushed his face away from hers and he pushed his

chest up, away from hers. Hans closed his eyes and felt her orgasm around him. It took a lot of power to keep himself from coming with her.

Brenny could feel him holding back. Before she could wonder why, Hans' thoughts invaded hers, I want to make my first time last a long time. I have been waiting forever for you.

He waited for her to stop coming. He opened his eyes and looked into hers. The energy of his love and passion flowed from them into her. She felt her body and soul warm to his body and soul. Brenny was getting hot again.

Slowly, he began to rock his body in her. This was a new sensation and Brenny found that she liked it very much.

Brenny felt the level of his sexual energy increase. She fed his fire with fire of her own. He kept pushing deeper into her, meshing their beings into one.

Hans felt Brenny's orgasm build up inside her. He knew that he would not be able to resist this one.

He passionately kissed her and whispered into her lips, "I love you."

She whispered back, "Faster. Harder."

Hans stopped rocking and began to push hard inside her. Brenny tried to grab his ass.

Hans felt her body surrender to him as she began to come. Her vagina tightened so much around his dick that it almost pushed him out of her. He closed his eyes tightly and willed himself into her. Brenny's eyes flashed open and she held him tighter. He pushed himself into her one more time. Pleasure overtook him and he exploded inside her. She screamed as she felt his strong orgasm surge through her. Both of them came violently and powerfully together.

Hans collapsed into her. She felt his hot breath pant into her neck. When he caught his breath sufficiently, he began to kiss her. His kisses were sweet, warm and full of love.

Brenny was about to nod off to sleep when she heard the pounding on the ceiling. The neighbors had heard her scream and they were pounding to tell them to cool it. Brenny and Hans looked at each other and laughed.

Brenny laid in Hans' arms and rested. Before she could go to sleep, Hans was arousing her and she gave herself to him again. They made love all night. As the night wore on, their lovemaking became more passionate, intimate and powerful.

Hans was supposed to go to work the next morning, but he didn't want to get out of bed. He was too tired and too much in love with Brenny to want to go anywhere. He also didn't want to leave her alone in case Adrian's voice came back.

Hans didn't have a phone, so he couldn't call in (love) sick from his house. He didn't want to leave his house and use the pay phone down the street, either, so he didn't call in.

That evening, someone knocked on the door. Hans tied a towel around his waist and answered it. It was Pieter, a friend of his from work.

Pieter and Hans talked in Dutch, but she understood why Pieter was there. Pieter got worried when Hans didn't show up for work and didn't call in, so he was checking on him. Ja, Pieter would tell their boss that Hans was taking tomorrow off. Ja, Pieter would tell their boss the truth about Hans' absence. Ja, Pieter would tell his boss that Hans was taking holiday. Pieter looked around one more time and left.

Hans took a week off from work and spent every moment with Brenny. They made love all the time. Their hearts consummated the covenant of the beginning of their absolute love for each other.

Brenny and Hans lived happily in Hans' flat. When he wasn't working, they spent all their time together. They always went on long walks every day because Hans wanted Brenny to get some exercise. He didn't want her cooped up in the little flat all the time.

They walked everywhere together. Sometimes, when they found they had walked too far and it was getting late or the weather was getting too bad, they would take the tram home.

Many times, they would stop at a food stand and get something to eat. Hans always got something without meat and Brenny always got something with meat. Hans was a vegetarian, and although he didn't like it when she ate meat, he didn't say anything to her about this. Brenny still smoked a few cigarettes and dope once in a while. Hans didn't like it, either. There were other things he didn't like as well, but Hans loved Brenny so much, that he let her do whatever she wanted and he never said anything.

When Hans did say something, he said it so politely and nicely that his words lost their meaning. Underneath, Brenny knew what he really meant, but she ignored him. Under the skin, Hans knew how Brenny was and knew that it wasn't worth the energy to try to make her to do anything she didn't want to do.

Brenny knew how Hans felt about eating meat, even though he never told her. She respected his beliefs about not eating meat and never brought any meat into their little flat when she went shopping. If she wanted to eat meat, she would stop at a food stand or restaurant and get a hamburger or sausage when she went out.

She was also careful not to smoke in the flat. Instead, she would usually smoke in the coffee shop downstairs. Hans didn't like her to go into coffee shops, either, but Brenny did what she wanted.

Sometimes Brenny would go into a new coffee shop that Hans didn't know about. She

would wait there until he found her and he always found her, too. He would walk in and look for her. Brenny would feel his presence and their eyes would immediately find each other.

Then she would get up, say goodbye to whoever she had been talking with and go home with Hans. He would try to hide his disapproval, but Brenny would feel it anyway. When she felt it, she would smile at him. Her smile would melt all his displeasure.

As their relationship matured, Hans and Brenny became so close that she began to lose much of her desire to visit coffee shops. Brenny preferred to spend her time at home or with Hans. Also, she began to feel that Adrian was getting closer. Brenny didn't want to let any of her defenses down and she worried that getting stoned might do that.

She wasn't ready to face Adrian and she wasn't going to let Hans go. Her mind was always busy searching for answers to solve these problems. Answers were hard to find because she loved Hans and Adrian the same, although she denied Adrian.

Hans ate a lot of bread, cheese, cereal, fruit, tofu and vegetables. Because Brenny never could cook very well and because she didn't know how to cook vegetarian food, Hans usually did the cooking. He was a good cook and Brenny didn't miss meat too much when she ate the meals that he prepared.

Hans and Brenny stayed home a lot. They listened to his stereo, read together and he played his guitar. He had a regular guitar and a classical one. He played both flawlessly.

When Hans played his guitar and sang, he filled the room with beautiful music. Brenny was struck by how beautiful, full and clear his singing voice was. Hans could have been the ugliest man in the world and he would have still been attractive to her by his voice alone.

Hans wrote songs for Brenny. After he wrote a song for her, he would make a pretend stage like he did when he seduced her. Then he would sing it personally for her. They would make love afterwards and he would sing her new song while she lay in his arms as it reinforced the bond between them.

He used song to express his feelings. Hans sang songs in English, Dutch, or whatever language struck him at the moment. An English song would be playing on the stereo, and by the time the song was over, Hans might have sung it perfectly in five or more languages, switching back and forth between them.

Hans sculpted. Brenny watched his big, beautiful hands create people and animals from blocks of clay or marble. He told her that he liked to use two art mediums so he wouldn't get bored. His art was magickal to Brenny and she marveled how Hans could make cold stone feel warm and alive.

They talked all the time. She told him about Mario, Justin, Muffin and her other friends. They laughed together as she told Hans about Mario's parties and about how Mario came to his party dressed as a pregnant nun.

The street outside the flat was a busy one. There were many shops on the street level and apartments on the floors above the shops. Hans would sit in his red chair and watch the people move about below.

There was a flower shop directly across the street and Brenny could always feel Hans praying as he watched the people come and go out of this shop. One day, she decided to ask him about this.

"Why do you pray for the people who go in and out of the flower shop?" she asked him.

"Because a lot of the people who go in there to buy flowers for the sick or for funerals," he replied, "I know they need prayer."

Brenny thought for a moment and told him, "People buy flowers for happy occasions, too. They buy them for birthdays, weddings, Valentine's Day and other happy events as well."

Hans answered her, "Ja, I know this. These people need prayer, too. I pray for them so their happy occasion will be happier."

Brenny had never thought about praying for the people who went into the shop and she knew Hans was right about praying for these people. After this, she sat with Hans at the window and prayed with him for the people who went into the shop.

Hans and Brenny made love all the time. Their love, desire and passion for each other grew in intensity and conviction. The love and sex between them produced enormous energy. They became addicted the power of this energy and to each other.

They were together two months when Hans came home from work with a bag in his arms. He sat the bag on the little kitchen counter. Brenny wondered what he was up to because he was half an hour late and he never came home late.

Hans made a vegetable stew for supper and they ate it with bread and cheese. Hans drank fruit juice and Brenny drank a beer. Brenny had begun to notice that Hans did not drink much beer, even though he brought beer home for her to drink. Hans preferred to drink water or juice.

After they ate, it began to get dark outside.

Brenny asked Hans, "Are we going to walk today?"

Hans shook his head and said, "Nee, I would rather stay home tonight. Is this okay with you?"

She heard the sound of rain.

"That's fine with me," she answered. Secretly, she was glad that Hans wanted to stay in because it was cold and wet outside.

Hans looked at her with a twinkle in his eyes, "Good, I have something else I wanted to do."

Brenny wondered what he was planning. As she was wondering about this, Hans got up and grabbed his sack from the counter. He took out several large candles.

He placed them around a makeshift stage and lit them. He turned the lights off and sat on the stage and tuned his guitar. When he felt ready to sing, he looked at Brenny and told her, "I love you." He sang On the Wings of Love.

When he finished his song, he put his guitar down in its case and dug in his jeans pocket. He pulled out two gold wedding bands and held them toward Brenny.

"Will you marry me Brenny?" he asked in a sincere and loving voice.

Brenny's eyes got wide with surprise and she didn't know what to think. She knew that Hans was thinking about getting married because he was always hinting at it. Now she knew how serious he was.

Brenny didn't know what to say. She loved Hans with all her heart, but she thought about Adrian. Brenny remembered that she was supposed to marry Adrian. She wanted to marry Hans, but in her heart, she knew that she couldn't.

Brenny knew that she was hurting Adrian already and she knew she couldn't do something that meant to hurt him. She also realized how much she loved Adrian and that bothered her.

Hans read her thoughts. His anger and frustration burned through her.

"Who is Adrian, Brenny?" Hans asked in a serious voice. "I guess I should ask, although I hate to. I have tried to use my power to find out, but he is blocking my search. This tells me that he has a lot of power. Also, when I try to search, he tells me to tell you that he wants to talk to you, that he wants you to remove the walls."

Hans remembered something that he kept wanting to ask her about. When he searched his heart, he finally remembered.

His eyebrows furrowed and his eyes searched hers as he told her, "Adrian says that I should worry because you have too much power. Enough power to build walls strong enough to keep him out. He worries that you will hurt yourself and he wants to know

where you got it from?"

This was something that Brenny did not want to talk about. Her power jumped through the bridge between their eyes and it confused him until he forgot his question.

Hans struggled to regain his memory, but he could not get clarity. Then he remembered Adrian.

Brenny knew that someday Hans would ask about Adrian. She just didn't know when. Hans was too smart and too clairvoyant not to know. Before she think anymore about this, Hans asked her another question he had been wanting to ask her.

"Was it his voice I heard when we made love for the first time?" Hans asked.

He immediately saw the answer in her eyes.

Brenny had already made her mind up to tell Hans the truth if he ever asked. Brenny took a big breath and thought for a moment.

She told him, "His name is Adrian. He is a male, not a man."

Hans began to feel very uneasy and his face became serious.

"What is he?" Hans asked.

"An angel. A high-ranking one, or was."

Hans eyes narrowed as he listened and thought intensely.

"Where does he live?" Hans asked.

"Kinda like in his own dimension," Brenny replied, "Between the spirit world and here. He has much power and created his own special place. I was there twice."

"Why does he live there?"

She replied, "Because he is a person of conscience and is demonstrating that."

"Is he on bad terms with God?"

"No, but God is unhappy that Adrian has removed himself from His presence. God is also unhappy that Adrian won't listen to Him when He wants to talk to him."

Hans asked her, "Why does he refuse to listen to God?"

"It has something to do with the resolve Adrian had when he went into exile. Adrian began to regret this after he met me. He said that he had to take care of some spiritual

matters and then he would come back for me."

Brenny talked of powerful things. Hans felt shock and dread fill his soul.

"God respects Adrian's self-exile and principles," Brenny told him as her voice lowered. She continued, "Adrian was one of five leaders of a group of angelic beings who opposed creating a material universe. They self-exiled themselves in protest when it was decided that one would be created."

"Why were they so opposed to a material universe?" Hans asked as his voice became even more serious.

"Because they thought suffering was too cruel," Brenny replied. "They didn't want to be a part of an intellectual and philosophical war on moral ideology. Especially when the potential for suffering was too volatile." Brenny realized she was throwing out some pretty complicated English words to him.

"Hans, you do understand the words I am telling you?" she asked.

"I don't have my English dictionary out, but I am listening with my mind and it tells me exactly what you are saying," Hans replied. His voice became tense as he told her, "Go on. I want to know the rest. No, wait . . . I don't want to know the rest. I just want to know the highlights. I just want to know about Adrian.

My feelings tell me that you will try to take me all over the place with this. I am hurt and going on a long, melodramatic road trip about this will hurt me more."

Brenny was uncomfortable and she shifted her body. She felt sad because Hans was hurting. She never wanted to hurt him in anyway, but she knew that he needed to know the truth.

Her mind grabbed for clarity, but wound up more confused. She wanted to buy some time, so she could quickly weave an invisible curtain to hide some things behind it.

Brenny's words came out slowly, "What do you want to know about him?"

Hans eyes searched for hers and locked on them. Their beauty had been replaced by the darkness of seriousness and this made Brenny panic. He put his hand on her upper arm and gently pulled her closer to him. His eyes never blinked as he kept her eyes locked to his.

He replied in a grave tone, "Don't play games with me Brenny. You know I want to know everything that I need to know."

Brenny took a deep breath. She struggled to break her eyes free of Hans' command, but could not free them. Hans felt her resist him and it displeased him, darkening his eyes more. His face became more serious.

Brenny felt compelled to tell him everything about Adrian. Things about Adrian that she never had intended to tell another person. She told Hans what he needed to know and as Hans predicted, she told him some things that he didn't want to know.

When Hans heard enough and he put his index finger on Brenny's lips and said, "Shhh . . . "

This made her more upset and confused. Hans sensed this and backed off. He lowered the power of his presence, but radiated enough energy in the room to remind her that she had his full attention.

Hans was not happy. He knew that her heart was defending Adrian. He also knew that she would use treachery and deceit to defend Adrian if she had to. As the bile rose slowly in his throat, Hans tasted the fear of a condemned man sentenced to die. And upset or not, he knew that he was going to hear the story about Adrian the way Brenny wanted to tell it. He nodded for Brenny to continue her story.

Brenny said, "Adrian and his friends will stay self-exiled until the material universe ends. That is how great their resolve is. When it ends, they will come out of exile.

Well that is how Adrian thought it would happen. Now that he loves me, I imagine his plans have changed."

"He's not human," Hans told Brenny in a low voice.

Brenny thought for a moment and replied, "All of us are made in God's image. We are alike in many ways and all of us have free will.

They are a little different, though. Angels have deep and sensitive feelings and I think that they take everything too seriously."

"What about his exile?" asked Hans.

Brenny replied, "He has been in exile a long time. Can you imagine how many years he and the four others have been alone? This stuff happened before the universe was born and many scientists say the universe is seven billion years old."

Hans thought to himself that Adrian was too old for someone like Brenny and she heard his thoughts.

"I asked him about that, Hans," Brenny told him.

"What did he say?" Hans asked.

"Nobody gets old in Heaven. Everyone stays the same age."

"I still say he was too old for you," Hans replied.

Brenny could sense Hans' jealousy.

Hans asked, "What does he want with you?"

"He wants me to marry him and stay with him."

"In his world?" Hans asked.

"Yes," Brenny replied. "Adrian lives in a beautiful place and he constantly changes it with his mind. It is a pleasant place. I told you, I was there."

"He can do this when you are made of flesh and bone?" Hans asked.

"Hans, he can do whatever he wants. He has much power."

"Why didn't you stay with Adrian?"

"Because my old boyfriend came into his world and took me back to this one. He destroyed the mirror I used to get to Adrian's world."

The bile rose to the back of Hans' tongue and he almost choked. His eyes stung from wanting to cry. Hans knew that he could easily compete with any man, but he wondered if he could compete with an angel.

"Can we stop talking about this now?" Brenny asked.

Hans quickly gained control of himself and continued to hold Brenny's eyes captive.

"Nee, Brenny," he told her, "It's not fair to me if we stop talking about him now. He is too close. I can feel his presence close by. I heard his voice, Brenny, I heard his voice. I want to know more. I deserve to know more."

Brenny told Hans about the yellow brick house and about the two times she had visited Adrian. She also told Hans about Adrian's disappearance and about other things until Hans heard enough.

He asked her to get her coat and shoes on and they went for a walk. When they got back to the flat, Hans' resolute heart made fierce love to her all night until he was satisfied that he had filled her with every measure of his love. They locked Adrian away in the back of their minds.

XXV

Brenny was happy living with Hans. They never talked about Adrian again. Talk of him only brought pain, so they denied Adrian and put him in the back of their minds. They denied Adrian to themselves and they denied him to each other.

Brenny was awed by Hans' presence and he was awed by hers. She was so overwhelmed by him and the life they put together that she had little time to think about anything else. He became the center of her life.

One time, Brenny and Hans returned home from a walk. They found a note posted on his door and it was written in German. Hans read it and then looked at Brenny.

He told her, "My old band is in town tonight playing at a club and they want me to come visit them. Would you like to go out tonight?"

Hans knew Brenny very well by now and he knew that she would want to go out.

Brenny smiled at him and asked, "You used to be in a band?"

"Ja," Hans answered, "I started it when I lived in Germany."

"What is the name of the band?" Brenny asked.

"Die Gruppe Ohne Name," he answered.

"What does that mean?"

"It means 'The Group Without a Name'. I named the band."

"Where did you come up with this name?" she asked.

Hans shrugged and said, "I don't know. It just came to mind and no one else had any suggestions."

"How come you quit the band if you started it?"

"I liked playing music, but I didn't care for the lifestyle."

"What kind of music does this band play?"

"Everything. Old soul music, rhythm and blues, rock and roll, reggae, you name it," answered Hans.

Hans and Brenny took a tram to the other side of town. When they got to the club, Brenny could feel the vibration of music in the air. They weaved in and out through the people standing outside the building until they got to the entrance.

Hans held Brenny's hand as they entered the building and passed many people bunched together. Hans saw a table toward the stage and instinctively knew to go to it. Brenny followed closely behind him.

By this time, the lead singer saw Hans in the crowd and waved to him. Hans waved

back. As Hans and Brenny got to the table, the band ended its song and left the stage to take a break. There were five members of the band, four male and one female. Brenny looked at the woman and noticed that she was very beautiful, young and shapely. Brenny's vibes told her that this woman wanted Hans.

The band members sat at the table and they were very happy to see Hans. They were also very surprised to see Hans because this was the first time that Hans had come to see them when they were in town. They had invited him many times before, but he never came.

The man who played bass guitar said something to Hans in German. Hans replied in German. Brenny didn't understand everything, but she knew that Hans was telling them to talk in English so she could understand what they were saying. Everyone started talking in German-accented English and they laughed and smiled.

Hans introduced his friends. Gunther played the guitar and was lead male singer, Yarl played bass, Anna was the lead singer, Max played the keyboard and Johann played the drums. Everyone called him Wolf.

Hans' friends were about his age, except for Anna who looked like she was twenty-five. All of them had long hair and they were a rowdy bunch. Anna sat by Wolf and Brenny's vibes told her that Anna was Wolf's girlfriend, although Anna didn't act like it. Right away, Anna began flirting with Hans. He tried to be polite and pretend it didn't exist, but Anna's flirting was desperate and bold.

Brenny's vibes told her that Anna was in love with Hans. She also knew that Anna had been in love with him for a long time, but Hans was not interested in her.

Hans got up and began to walk to the bathroom. Anna jumped up and followed him. Brenny looked at Wolf's eyes. They showed anger and jealousy.

The club was dark and Brenny had a hard time seeing through the strobe lights. She finally focused on Hans. Brenny saw Hans talking to Anna by the men's bathroom door. Anna tried to grab him around the waist. Hans pushed Anna's hands off him and walked away from her, going into the men's toilet. Slowly, Anna moved her way back to the table. After she sat, she sulked. Wolf gave her a warning look to tell her to cool it.

Brenny waited for Hans to come back. Then she went to the bathroom. As she came out of the stall, Brenny saw Anna waiting for her. Brenny had a feeling that Anna would follow her to the bathroom.

Anna looked at Brenny critically and asked her, "How old were you when you started menstruating?"

Brenny gave Anna a mean look as she replied, "Why do you ask?"

"Because I want to know if you are old enough to be Hans' mother."

"Fuck you. Get out of my way."

"Fuck you, Brenny. Hans just told Wolf and the others that he wants to marry you. I hate your guts."

Anna looked in the mirror. Although her face reflected back pain, it was still very beautiful. She sought out Brenny's face in the mirror and compared her face to Brenny's. Brenny did not like this game and turned away from the mirror.

"Are you afraid to look at us together?" Anna asked. "Are you afraid that you will see that I am more beautiful than you? Look at you. You are a hag compared to me."

Anna's voice filled with pain and self-pity when she said, "And he wants you over me."

Brenny didn't feel like a cat fight, although she could feel her black-painted claws trying to grow. She knew that fighting over a man was stupid. It was also negative energy. Brenny decided that she wanted to end the confrontation, but at the same time, give Anna a message.

She told her, "Shut the fuck up, Anna and get the fuck out of my way. Hans is waiting for me."

"You know," Anna replied, as she pretended that she didn't hear what Brenny said, "When Hans was with the band, he would never have me. We never saw him with a woman and sometimes we wondered if he were gay. But we never saw with a man, either. Now we see him with you. How did you get him?"

"He loves me," Brenny replied and she pushed Anna out of her way.

Brenny sat with Hans. It took several minutes for Anna to come back to the table. Brenny looked at Hans and he smiled at her.

Gunther looked at his watch.

He told Hans and Brenny, "Break's over." He looked at Hans and asked him, "Do you want to 'Cruise on the inner tubes'?"

"Nee," said Hans.

"Oh come on, Hans, play with us for a while! It will be like old times," Gunther told him. Gunther smiled at Brenny and then at Hans, "You can show off for your girlfriend."

Brenny smiled at Hans and he knew that she wanted him to perform.

Hans looked at Brenny and told her, "I'll do this for you and only for you."

Hans got on the stage with the other members. Wolf handed Hans a saxophone that was stored behind the drums.

Brenny had never heard Hans play the saxophone, although she remembered that he owned one. This will be interesting and fun, Brenny thought. Hans positioned himself behind a microphone.

The band began to play Pink Cadillac and the music sounded great. Brenny started to laugh and have a good time. She looked at Hans and saw him looking back at her. His eyes smiled at her.

Anna was a great singer. She had a soulful and smoky voice.

Brenny saw that Hans could play the saxophone well. He sang backup to Anna's vocals. Hans' voice and Anna's voice blended beautifully together.

Brenny wondered when Anna would try her moves on Hans again. It happened during the second song. They were playing Roll the Bones and Anna started moving her microphone and body closer to Hans. Hans tried to avoid her, but the stage was small and he didn't have much room to out maneuver her with.

Hans looked uncomfortable as Anna flirted with him on stage. Brenny got a feeling the next song was going to be his last one with the band. She looked at Wolf and she could tell that he was angry and jealous again.

The third song was Slow Hand and that's when Anna became more aggressive. Anna began to rub her body seductively against Hans' body. Hans would pull away from her and she would move closer to him. Finally, he ran out of room to move. As Anna sang sexily, she moved her body slowly over Hans' right side and back. He stood rigid and miserable while Anna slowly and erotically rubbed her body all over him.

Brenny thought for a few moments about what she wanted to do about Anna rubbing herself all over Hans. She didn't know exactly how she felt about Anna's show. Brenny knew that Hans did not like Anna's moves and that was good enough for her. It was obvious to everyone who Hans loved and who Hans was going home with. She knew that Anna was being self-destructive and the only person who was going to suffer was Anna. And poor Wolf.

Wolf was suffering already. He was being publicly embarrassed in front of many people. Sure, he probably would never see any of those people again, but Wolf would always be around the band members. They would always remember.

Anna's beauty and beautiful voice drew in big crowds. They were a good band without her, but she helped the band to get better and bigger gigs. The other band members knew this, so Wolf knew that they would not say anything about Anna's desperate and disgraceful behavior with Hans. At least not in front of his face. Still, they would always remember.

Hans looked relieved when the song was over. He took the saxophone off and gave it to Wolf. Wolf grabbed it from him and gave Hans a dirty look. Hans got down from the stage and visited with Brenny while they listened to the rest of the set of songs. Wolf looked hurt and angrier as time wore on.

Hans was ready to go home, but he knew that Brenny was not ready. Brenny knew what he was thinking and told him, "We'll go home when I finish my beer. Okay?"

He was surprised and pleased. He nodded 'okay' to her.

Brenny was almost finished drinking her beer when the band quit for another break. This time Wolf and Anna went somewhere. Brenny knew that Wolf was probably bitching Anna out. Hans visited with his friends.

Max told Hans, "Wolf is really pissed. I guess he forgot what the canals smell like around here." Everyone but Brenny laughed. She wondered what was so funny?

Max saw her questioning look and told her, "One time Wolf was jealous of Hans and tried to fight him. Hans threw him in a canal. Wolf smelled bad for a long time and he was worried if he was going to get a disease from the old and dirty water."

Everyone laughed again and Brenny laughed with them this time.

After the laughter subsided, Max told Brenny the rest of the story, "Wolf lost his wallet in the canal and it had a lot of money in it. He looked for it in the water, but all he found was an old shoe, a box of used surgical gloves and a broken bicycle."

Everybody laughed again.

After they stopped laughing, Brenny asked Hans, "Why were used surgical gloves in the canal?"

Hans shrugged and said, "Who knows. People throw everything in the water. It's just the way it is around here."

Brenny finished her beer and was ready to leave. Hans was talking with Gunther, so she decided to wait until Hans was finished talking.

As Brenny was waiting, a song came on. It was No Good by Depeche Mode. She remembered it and it reminded her of Adrian. She started to think about Adrian.

Hans immediately heard her thoughts. Although he wasn't finished with his conversation, he stopped it. He looked at Brenny and asked her, "Are you ready to go?"

"Just a minute, Hans," Brenny told him, "I want to hear this song."

Hans saw she was lost in thought and he knew she was still thinking of Adrian. He

wondered what he should do. He stood up and grabbed Brenny's hand to pull her up.

"Let's go, Brenny," he told her.

Brenny stood and put her coat on. Hans held her hand as they left the club and he held it all the way home.

"Did you have a good time?" Hans asked Brenny as they rode the tram home.

Brenny smiled at him and said, "Yes, Hans, I had a very good time. Thank you for taking me, especially since you knew beforehand that you wouldn't have a good time."

Hans nodded and smiled at her.

He told her, "It wasn't so bad. It was nice to see my friends and play with them again."

It was an early Saturday afternoon and Brenny and Hans had returned from a walk. They made some soup and sandwiches. Afterwards, they sat by the window and watched the street below while Hans played the guitar.

Brenny watched him as he strummed. He looked so beautiful to her as he sat in the sunlight. The sun lit his light hair and skin, making him look illuminated. She wanted him to make love to her. He heard her thought, looked at her and smiled.

"All you have to do is ask," he told her. He stood and put his guitar away, then he held out his hand and escorted her to the bed.

They took off their clothes and got in bed. Hans started kissing her, but she wanted to deviate from their regular routine. His mind heard her thoughts about this. "What do you want to do, Brenny?" Hans asked.

Brenny thought for a while and told him, "I don't know. I was hoping that we could make love differently for once. Is there anything different you'd like to do?"

Brenny was expecting his answer.

"No," he told her, "I like things the way they are."

"C'mon, Hans, haven't you ever had any fantasies?"

"The only fantasy I ever had was to be with you, Brenny. So right now, I am living it."

"Seriously, Hans, you must have had one fantasy in your life. What was it?"

"No, Brenny, I never did. I am just happy to be with you. I hope I don't sound too boring, but I don't need any other stimulation. I just need and want you."

Hans knew that the conversation was going no where. He knew that Brenny wasn't going to stop pestering him until he told her something or changed the direction of the conversation. His thought about how he wanted to how to handle this.

Hans looked at her and told her, "Brenny, I am not like most men. I am telling you the truth when I tell you I have never had any sexual fantasies. Sex and relationships have always been unimportant to me. I've had only one girlfriend before you. I told you: she was married and she dumped me."

"Why did she dump you?"

"Because I loved her and she didn't love me. I was a virgin and a university student when this happened. I didn't know anything about love or relationships or sex."

Hans voice filled with sadness as he told Brenny, "She only wanted me for my looks and my body. I was a thing to her, but I didn't understand this at the time. It broke my heart when I learned that she didn't love me. It made me crazy with grief."

"Wait a minute, are you saying that you've only had sex with one other woman besides me?"

"Yes. I told you this when I met you."

"How can this be? You are so good in bed. The love between us is the best I have ever had. What have you been doing for sex all these years?"

"Thank you for telling me I am good in bed," Hans told her as he laughed. "This is very good for my ego. If you are wondering if I were beating off all these years, believe it or not . . . yes." Hans and Brenny began to laugh.

Hans shrugged, "What can I say? I am a healthy man with a good imagination. I get horny like everyone else does."

"What did you imagine, Hans?"

"I imagined being completely in love with someone."

Brenny asked him, "Did she have a face? What did she look like?"

"I never thought of a person. I thought about what it must be like to deeply love someone and what it must be like for her to love me back in the same way. That was erotic enough for me. Now that I think about it, the person I imagined is you. I always believed in my heart that my mate had a personality and soul like yours."

"You always know what to say, Hans."

"No, Brenny, I am telling you the truth. With all my heart, I am telling you the truth. Everyone is different and I am different."

Hans looked down at his penis as he told her, "I cannot get hard if there is no love. For me, sex has to be about love or there is no fire." Brenny knew that Hans was speaking the truth about himself.

"Tell me about how you used to beat off."

"Why?" Hans asked.

"I want to learn about you."

"You don't need to learn about that."

"Will you beat off for me so I can watch?" Brenny asked. "I'm serious."

"Why, Brenny?"

"Why not?"

"You are here with me Brenny, I don't need or want to beat off. I want to make love to you and nothing else."

Hans didn't like the way the conversation was going, so he decided to change it. "Did you ever beat off, Brenny?" he asked as he raised his eyebrows up and down.

Brenny started laughing. She knew that she deserved the question. "Yes, lots of times. There have been long periods of time in my life when I was without a man and I had to do something to take the edge off."

"Will you beat off for me so I can watch?" Hans asked her. "I'm serious."

Brenny and Hans started to laugh again.

She decided to ask him something else.

"How come you have only been with two women?" she asked. Privately, she wondered if he had been with men. You never know, she thought.

Hans knew what she was thinking.

He told her, "First of all, Brenny, let's get something absolutely straight: I'm not gay and I'm not a bisexual. I have never been attracted to men although many have been attracted to me. It may seem odd that I have not been with many women. There are reasons for this."

I have high standards. I always wanted love first, then sex."

"Did you love me before you made love to me?" Brenny asked Hans.

Hans replied, "Don't be ridiculous, Brenny! I loved you the first moment I saw you. You are the love of my life."

Hans thought for a moment and then continued, "Because I am pleasant to look at, lots of people wanted me only for my looks. They didn't care about me as a person, so I kept my body to myself.

My life has been pretty busy, too. I was a university student for many years like you. When I wasn't studying, I was working to support myself so I could study.

I also played in the band and I was busy with that. I had fun playing in the band, but I didn't care for the lifestyle. Everyone but me was having wild parties and lots of sex. They tried to pressure me into joining their lifestyle, but I didn't want to live like that. I didn't want to have sex with women I didn't know or love. I got tired of this craziness and that is why I quit the band.

Like I have told you before, I have high standards. I wanted real love. I don't want to have sex, I want to make love and only love. I want to give love and to be loved. You know who I am. I always made sure that you knew. You know that I only care about deeper and more meaningful things.

I also did not have sex with others because I felt it was self-destructive to have sex with someone you didn't love. I guess you could say that I thought of it as a sin. A sin against God besides a sin against myself. I was raised by my parents to be a good man. That is another reason I am a little innocent."

"Aren't you sinning by lying next to me?" Brenny asked Hans. "You and I know that we are going to join our bodies and spirits together. Because we have already wished for it, we are guilty of doing it, whether we do it or not."

Hans replied, "It is not a sin to me, but I don't feel comfortable, either. You know this, Brenny. I don't have to tell you. You can feel it in my demeanor.

I wish you would marry me, Brenny. I wish you would marry me right now. I know someone who can marry us . . . "

"Hans, you promised not say anything else about marriage."

"I know, but I love you and I want to marry you. I want to marry you forever. I believe in my heart people can marry forever."

Brenny didn't want to think about getting married because she knew that she would start thinking about Adrian. She decided to change the subject.

She told him, "I used to have a fantasy."

Hans' curiosity piqued and he asked her, "Ja?"

"I always wanted my hands to be tied up and to be blindfolded. Then I wanted to get teased and made incredibly hot. When I couldn't take it anymore, I would get untied and have incredible sex . . ."

Brenny caught herself. She remembered Hans didn't like the term 'sex' and he had told her so too many times.

"I mean make incredible love," she told him.

Hans frowned at her. Brenny could tell that he didn't like her previous words and she could tell he didn't like this bondage topic.

"Did you ever do it?" he asked her seriously.

"No way. I could never trust who I was with. You have to trust someone completely to do something like that."

Hans laughed as he said, "And you've got to know someone isn't going to die on you after they tie you up. I read Stephen King's book Gerald's Game."

Brenny had also read it. Hans saw the look on her face and knew that she had read it, too. Both of them began to laugh.

He looked at her with mischief in his eyes, "Want me to tie you up and turn you on?" he asked her. "We'll call this game 'Trust'."

Brenny's began to feel uncomfortable. She loved Hans, but it was hard for her to trust any man. Especially with her personal history of disastrous relationships.

Hans felt her feelings instantly. His eyes searched hers out and he looked deeply into them.

He told her, "Brenny! When are you going to trust me completely? I trust you. I put my whole life in your hands."

Brenny felt ashamed and turned her eyes down. She put her head against Hans' chest and held him silently.

Hans didn't say anything for a while. He wondered what other men had done to her to make her like this. He wished he had met her years before, but he realized how impossible this was. Hans realized how lucky he was to meet her at all, especially since she was from the other side of the world.

Hans mused for a while until he thought of an idea.

"Brenny," he whispered into the top of her head. Brenny's head moved and she looked at him.

"Yes, Sweetie," she answered.

He told her, "I will play a game of 'Trust' with you. You can tie me up. But we've got to have some rules."

Brenny didn't like the idea.

"That's okay, Hans, I don't want to," she told him.

"Why not?" asked Hans. "Maybe I will like it. But that doesn't matter. I want to show you that I trust you and I can think of no other way to do this at the moment."

"I told you, I don't want to," Brenny replied. She searched for a way to change the subject, but had a feeling that Hans was not going to let the subject go away that easily. He was too smart and too savvy for that and Brenny knew this.

"But I want to, Brenny. I want to show you how much I love you. How much I trust you."

"No, Hans . . ." Brenny replied. Hans stood and opened the closet. He rummaged around in it and brought out a piece of rope. He took his kitchen knife and cut the rope in half.

Hans rummaged through his dresser until he pulled out a shirt with long sleeves.

He took the shirt and the pieces of rope over to the bed. Hans looked at Brenny and told her, "Tie my hands to the bed post, but first, I'll tie this shirt around my eyes."

Brenny was speechless and surprised. She wished that things hadn't gone so far. Hans' eyes became earnest as he told her, "I told you, I am serious about this. Just do this to please me, okay? But I want two rules.

Rule Number One: You don't let it go too far. I finish making love in you.

Rule Number Two: You untie me when I ask you to.

Do you understand the rules?"

Brenny nodded as she spoke, "Yes."

"Good, let me cover my eyes and fix this pillow so I am comfortable."

Hans tied the shirt around his eyes and head. He plumped the pillow and wiggled his head into it until he felt comfortable.

"Tie my hands now," he told her.

Brenny didn't know what to think. The more she thought about it, the more she thought it might be interesting and fun.

Her hands quickly tied his hands to the bed posts. He told her to tie them tight, but she kept the ropes a little loose.

"Okay, Brenny," he told her, "You can tease me."

Brenny looked at his beautiful body and wondered what she wanted to do first. She decided to start with his neck and work her way down.

She started to lick his neck with slow, deliberate strokes of her tongue. He immediately got hard.

When she got to his chest, her tongue licked it with little swirls and she sucked his nipples. He began to moan and she began to like this little game. She realized that she liked being on top. Brenny liked the power that she had over him.

Slowly, she inched her tongue down his torso until it reached his groin. Her tongue danced all over the bottom of his flat belly, but she wouldn't touch his penis, although she knew he was very hot and he wanted her to.

Instead, she moved down and started to lick and suck his toes. Then she licked his ankles. His body jerked all kinds of ways, so she knew that he liked what her tongue and mouth were doing to him. Slowly, she licked the insides of his legs until she found her way back to his loins.

By this time Hans was very turned on. He wanted out of his restraints so he could hold her and make her feel his passion for her.

He told her between pants, "Untie me now. I've had enough."

"Not yet," she told him. Before he could say another word, she had him in her mouth.

Hans was stunned by how good it felt. She had done this to him before, but not like this. Her tongue searched out every groove and while her hot mouth inhaled him.

Brenny knew he was getting restless and he wanted untied, but she was having too much fun giving him pleasure. She began to anticipate when he was going to ask to be freed and before he could say anything, she would find some new sensuous thing to do to him with her tongue. She loved the taste of him and didn't want to stop. It also made her happy that he was enjoying the erotica.

Hans began to fight a war of emotions inside him. He was getting angry that Brenny wouldn't untie him and angry she might make him come. Still, he liked the sensation of her mouth on him and the desire of his flesh was beginning to win the tug-of-war.

going on inside him.

His member became tauter in her mouth as her head bobbed furiously around it. His hands formed fists and they strained against the ropes. Hans' back arched until he exploded into her mouth. Then his body fell back into the bed.

Hans was still breathing in heavy pants when she untied his hands. He instantly pushed the blindfold away from his eyes. She looked at his eyes and his beautiful eyes reflected unhappiness.

Brenny was sitting on the edge of the bed and she smiled at him. His dark blue eyes snapped black flashes of anger. He sat straight and rubbed his wrists. Then he jumped out of bed.

He stood by her and looked down as he asked, "Why did you do that to me? You said that you would stop when I told you to. I am very upset about this, Brenny. What good is a game of 'Trust' when I can't trust you?"

Brenny knew that he was upset and she didn't understand why.

She looked at him with question marks in her eyes when she asked him, "Didn't you enjoy it? I thought you did."

Hans asked her in an angry voice, "Why didn't you stop? You knew that I wanted you to stop and you knew that I didn't want to come in your mouth. You knew that I wanted to come inside you. Why didn't you stop?"

"I didn't stop because I enjoyed giving you pleasure," she told him. "I love you and I wanted to give you pleasure. Lighten up, Hans. All the sex between us is so serious . . . so deep and meaningful. I understand that is how you are and I respect this.

I enjoy the love we make, but I am creative and wanted to do something else. Besides, I wanted to experience you like that. I wanted you to come in my mouth. In the past, you always made me stop and we would finish the same way we always do, missionary style.

I love you and I wanted all of you. I was tired of getting little tastes and I wanted the whole banquet. Why is that so bad?"

Hans looked at her angrily and told her, "I feel like a piece of meat. If I just wanted a blow job, I could walk out the door and find lots of people who would be happy to give me one. In fact, there are people who would pay me for the privilege."

Hans' words were intended to strike Brenny's heart like a dagger. They found their mark. Brenny's eyes flashed with outrage.

"Fuck you," she told him with disgust.

Brenny dug around in her purse and pulled out a wad of money out her wallet. She threw her unsnapped wallet back in her purse.

"Do you want me to pay for the privilege of sucking your dick? Where do you want me to put the money, on the dresser?"

Most of this money is American, but you can exchange it for guildens." Brenny angrily threw the money on the dresser. Then she started to put on her clothes.

"I know you are beautiful, Hans," Brenny told him with growing anger in her voice. "Beautiful inside and out. I know everyone wants to fuck you. We can't go anywhere without people looking at you.

I see how people look at you and I see how people look at me. I am much older than you and although I am fairly decent looking, my looks pale to yours. When I see the stares and read people's thoughts, it makes me self-conscious and sometimes I wonder why you are with me.

You keep telling me and showing me that you love me, but then you say this fucken shit to me? All because I wanted to show you how I feel about you?"

Hans was shocked and surprised. He had never heard Brenny say the 'F' word before. Now he was beginning to understand exactly how mad she really was. He began to worry that Brenny would try to leave. Sure enough, he was right.

Brenny opened the closet and grabbed her biggest duffle bag. She began to start gathering her things in the room, throwing them on the bed. Hans' heart sank fast and he began to panic.

He grabbed the bag from her and she grabbed it back. She threw some things into it and remembered something. She unzipped the side of the bag and didn't find what she was looking for. Brenny stopped and searched her thoughts for a moment. Her hands and eyes inspected the whole bag. They found nothing.

Hans stood rigidly as he watched Brenny. Glimpses of her beating eyes revealed that she was thinking fast and hard. His worries began to grow.

Brenny got her purse and dug through it. When she didn't find what she was looking for, she dumped the purse's contents in the middle of the floor. Computer disks, pens, little notebooks and pieces of paper with notes fell out of it. Her wallet, still open from when she grabbed the cash from it, tumbled out. Its contents flew all over. Brenny's Minnesota driver's license, platinum credit card, social security card, pictures and checkbook lay on the floor.

Brenny frantically felt through the things, although she knew that it wasn't there. Brenny pushed the purse's contents in a pile before she scooped them up and put them in her purse.

She turned her duffle bag upside down and dumped the little pieces of junk on the floor. Her hands felt inside the bag over and over. Brenny couldn't find what she was looking for.

She threw the duffle bag on top of her purse and kicked at the pile.

"Great," she said, "Now my passport is missing. I have overstayed in this country and now I can't leave when I want to."

Hans stood more rigid, terrified that she would actually leave her. He began to panic worse. Racing around the room, he found and put his clothes on. He wanted to be ready to go outside and follow her if she made it that far. Hans had never begged anyone for anything, but he was ready to beg. He was willing to do anything to get her to stay.

"Have you seen my passport, Hans?" Brenny asked him. She thought of going to the American Consulate and wondered where it was.

Hans knew that she was going to ask him about her passport, so he waited to pull his T-shirt over his head when she asked him. This way he could tell her, "No," and not have to look at her when he said it.

His lie felt ugly and sticky in his mouth. Still, Hans was desperate for her not to leave him.

Brenny wondered if her driver's license would be enough identification to get another passport. She also wondered what kind of story she would have to tell the consulate.

Hans heard her thoughts and his heart froze with fear.

He began blinking back tears and told her, "Please, Brenny, don't leave me. I know what you are thinking! I am sorry for what I said. I am sorry for how I reacted! I didn't mean it! Please, please don't go. Oh God . . . I am so sorry! I'm begging you, Brenny, please don't leave me. I love you too much and it would break my heart to pieces."

Brenny was still angry.

She looked at him with eyes of fire and told him, "No mutherfucking man is ever going to treat me like shit again or make me feel like shit again. I don't care if it's you or . . ." Brenny caught herself. She almost said Adrian's name.

She saw Hans look at her with hurt. I reminded him about Adrian, she thought, oh no. I would never want to hurt Hans like that and now I've just done it.

Brenny sat at the table and put her head in her hands. Dread filled her and she didn't know what to do. Adrian was the last thing she wanted to think about at the moment.

Hans came over to her and got on his knees. He put his arms around her and started to kiss her chest and body.

"I love you too much, Brenny. Please don't go. Please . . . let's put this argument behind us." He continued to kiss her.

She felt his love pour into her and her head lowered itself to kiss him. He put his tongue in her mouth and then he sucked her tongue. She wondered if her mouth still tasted of him. Hans heard her thought and he told her with his mind, I taste us.

His hand went up her shirt and he felt her breasts. Her nipples became hard to his touch and she could feel his pleasure about this. His kisses became hotter and more passionate. She began to feel dizzy.

He put his head under her shirt. Hans kissed her stomach and licked and sucked her breasts. He unbuttoned the top of her jeans and then unzipped them. Hans gently put his hand inside her jeans until his hand found the doorway.

By this time, Brenny had forgotten her anger and her thoughts about Adrian. All she could think about was being with Hans. All she could think about was how much she wanted him and how much she loved him.

When he knew that she was burning for him, he took his head out of her shirt and kissed her some more. Without a word, he led her to the bed. Standing by the bed, he took off her shirt and then she took off his. He took off her jeans and she took off his. Hans' jeans got stuck at his knees and she bent down to pull them off, one leg at a time.

Her cheek brushed his penis and she pulled away from it.

He cupped her face with his hands and said, "It's okay, Brenny. You can touch it with your face, your lips, your tongue or anything else. You can have me anyway you want me, but we have to finish heart-to-heart.

I love you so much that I have to feel your heart beating with mine at the end. Please understand . . . "

Brenny was struck by Hans' words and love for her. She looked at him with love in her eyes and told him with her mind, Okay Hans. You can have my heart the way you need it.

She could feel his pleasure of her unspoken words. Brenny kissed his legs and groin as he stood. A few short moments later, she found herself in bed with him and he was inside her. He made love to her deeply and intimately.

Hans rocked in her and he thrust in her. He kissed her and sucked her neck. She returned the passion of his heart back to him. In Dutch and in English, Hans told her how much he loved her and that she meant everything to him. She returned his words

of love with words of her own.

Their love and passion for each other bathed them in emotions of joy and desire. Hans began to cry tears of happiness from the love he felt from her. Brenny was deeply moved by his tears. She felt very humbled because he loved her so completely. Her love for him ballooned in her heart and soul.

They made love for a long time and when they climaxed, they climaxed together. Brenny felt the love from his heart pour into her and she began to weep tears of joy with him.

Hans wasn't ready to leave her, so he stayed in her and savored the ecstasy between them. He kissed words of love into her face and hair.

Brenny listened as his heart beat into hers. Our hearts are beating as one, she thought, he is right to want to end the lovemaking with our hearts touching. I see the value in this.

Hans was kissing her when he heard her thought. He smiled into her lips.

Adrian wept as he watched them. He saw how much Brenny loved Hans and he knew that she was drifting farther away from him. Adrian had hoped that the fire would go out between her and Hans. Now he realized the fire was growing and it seemed that it was unstoppable.

Desperately lonely feelings for her filled his broken heart. Adrian loved her more than ever and although she was with Hans, his love for her had grown. He began to think of ways to get her back . . .

XXVI

One time, Brenny and Hans went on a walk and saw a street vendor selling cheap jewelry. Brenny saw a bracelet with a heart charm on it. Although it was cheap and it would turn her wrist green when the paint started to rub off, she decided to buy it.

Hans told her, "Don't buy that, Brenny. You deserve something nicer. I will get you something nicer just like it."

Brenny didn't buy the bracelet.

A couple of days later, Hans gave her a bracelet that looked like the cheap one. Only it was made of gold and it looked a lot better.

Hans continued to take Brenny out occasionally. One time, he took her to a bar. Brenny was sitting with Hans when someone came up behind her.

"Brenny? Brenny White?" a man asked. His voice sounded like he was an American.

Brenny turned around and saw an Indian. She had to think for a moment to figure out who it was, before she realized that it was Joe White Feather, Denny's first cousin. Brenny filled with dread. She knew someday Joe would go home and tell Denny that he had seen her in Amsterdam.

Joe's long hair was in two braids that spilled down his chest. He had on a bone choker, a navy T-shirt and faded jeans. He wore an earring. It was a round, shiny, light pink, disk shell hanging from an ear wire.

"Wa . . . wa . . . what are you doing here, Joe? You're a long way from home," Brenny stammered.

"So are you," he replied.

"This is my home now," Brenny replied. "So why are you here?"

"I came over with a dance troupe. We were giving exhibitions of powwow dancing. The night before we were going to go home, I went out and found a party. I had such a good time, I missed the plane.

I've been here ever since and it's been a party ever since. Europeans love Indians, too. It's nice to be liked, especially when no one likes you in your own country."

"When are you going back?" Brenny asked.

"Whenever I get there," Joe answered. "I've got a girlfriend here, so I'm not ready to go back yet."

Brenny told Joe, "I've got a boyfriend here, too."

She looked at Hans and said to Joe, "This is my boyfriend. His name is Hans."

Joe shook hands with Hans.

He told Hans, "My name is Joe White Feather and I know Brenny from Minnesota. I am related to her old boyfriend. He's my first cousin."

Hans didn't like the sound of that and Brenny felt his disapproval.

Joe continued, "Small world, huh?"

"No shit, Joe," Brenny replied. Hans never liked it when Brenny swore and she could feel his disapproval about this. Hans believed that negative words brought negative energy. It also hurt his feelings when she cursed. Because he loved her so much, he didn't want anything like profanity to sully her. He always tried to protect her even if it was protecting her from herself.

Brenny fought her worry about Hans' growing disapproval of the evening.

She told Joe, "Will you do me a favor, please? Please don't tell Denny that I'm here. Okay?"

"On one condition," Joe replied.

"You let me take a picture," Joe told her as he began rummaging in his backpack. He pulled out a disposable flash camera. "I have to take a picture of you. This is too ironic and I have to have a picture of this."

Brenny didn't feel good about this, but she could feel Hans' displeasure and she wanted Joe to go away.

"Okay," she told him, "One."

"No, Brenny, I've got to have two. One of you and your boyfriend, and one with you and me in it."

"Why can't you just take one?" Brenny asked.

"Because I can't," Joe answered.

Brenny wanted him to go away, so she looked at Hans. He nodded his approval. She agreed to Joe's terms so he would go away. She didn't know Joe very well and this wasn't the place to know him better.

Hans took Brenny and Joe's picture. Joe took one of Brenny and Hans.

Brenny knew that Joe wanted to ask her more questions and she knew that Joe would want to talk about him. Hans had never asked her about Denny because he didn't want to hear anything about that part of her former life. Especially from her old boyfriend's first cousin.

Brenny looked at Hans and then looked at Joe. "I'd like to visit with you," Brenny lied to him, "But Hans and I were going to leave. We have something to do."

Hans and Brenny got ready to leave.

"Do you come to this bar often, Joe?" Brenny asked him.

"This is my favorite bar," Joe replied, "I come here as often as I can."

"Great," Brenny lied, "I'll try to come back here again and we'll talk."

"Oh Brenny," Joe told her, "It really is nice to see you! Lots of people in the family like you and I'm one of them. You know that."

"Thanks, Joe," Brenny told him, "That makes me happy. Talk to ya later."

"Later, Brenny," Joe replied.

As Brenny and Hans walked into the street, Brenny told him, "I lied to him. I never want to come here again."

"I know," Hans answered.

Brenny and Hans tried to put Adrian in the back of their minds, but they knew that he was close. They knew he was watching them on occasion. Brenny figured that Adrian didn't watch them all the time because the few glimpses he took hurt him enough. Of course, these thoughts were quickly locked away in the deepest parts of her mind.

Hans knew that Adrian was watching them, too. At first, Hans and Brenny had hoped that Adrian would go away. Now Hans was beginning to realize that Adrian was never going to leave them alone. Deep-down, Hans knew why, but he refused to think any more about it, especially since Adrian was starting to piss him off.

Adrian would wait until Hans or Brenny had a quiet and private moment. In his own distinct voice, he would tell them kindly he loved Brenny and wanted Brenny to come home. This was not only unsettling Hans, but it was unsettling for Brenny.

Adrian would also try to appeal to their consciences. Adrian would tell Hans that Brenny was his forever mate, the one that God had made for him.

He would ask Hans, "Why are you interfering? Why are you hurting me?"

This would make Hans' conscience bother him. When Brenny felt Hans' conscience bother him, she would become angry with Adrian.

Adrian usually told Brenny the same things.

He would also tell her in a kind and forgiving voice, "I love you, Brenny." Then he would tell her how badly he missed her. Sometimes, when he remembered, he would ask her where she got all the power to wall him out like she was.

He would also plead with her, "Please stop what you are doing and come home to me. You are hurting me, but I forgive you. Please come home so we can put this behind us." Brenny would feel guilt, embarrassment and shame. When Hans felt her negative emotions, he became angry with Adrian.

The angel Adrian was starting to get on their nerves. Adrian knew this when they started to cover their mirrors and shiny surfaces. He knew that they were trying to stop him from watching them, although they knew that he could see them anyway. Like Brenny suspected, he was connected to her and all he had to do was wish for her

and he would instantly see her. She and Hans could wall out his voice, but they couldn't wall out his eyes. He took advantage of this and chipped on their nerves more.

Hans and Brenny were laying in bed when she asked him, "I want to learn deeper sex magick. The dark, powerful forbidden stuff. Don't tell me that you don't know how to do sex magick because I know you do a little of it with me when we are making love."

Hans was surprised at her words.

He told her, "What you want to know is kind of secret. It's a technique of sex magick, but I think you already know this. I never wanted to try it until I met you."

Hans' eyes smiled at hers as he continued, "Of course, I never had a reason why I wanted to try it until I met you."

"How did you learn to do it?" Brenny asked.

"Some mages told me how to do it, plus I have a book on about it. It's somewhere on one of the book shelves and it's written in English."

"I saw it already."

"And?"

"I read it."

"Really?"

"Yes."

Hans was surprised. He wondered how many other books she had read.

"I knew that you had been a mage," Brenny told him. "I'm cool about magick. Lots of witches and magicians used to come to Mario's parties. I know magick is kind of outlaw stuff, but I am open-minded about it."

"What you want me to teach you requires a lot of energy," Hans told her. Dread began to fill Hans' spirit. He began to worry as his spirit realized that she had a lot of power for this.

Hans told her, "My heart tells me that I shouldn't teach you. My heart tells me it might get you in some kind of trouble in the future. I have a bad feeling about this"

Brenny answered, "How can it get me in trouble? I am with you and want to do this with you. It feels good when you do this to me. Too good."

She smiled sweetly at him as she said, "Wouldn't you like me to return the energy back to you? I know that you would like it." Brenny studied Hans' worried face.

She told him, "It would make us closer. I know you want deeper intimacy with me. Your heart told my heart that."

Hans was surprised at what Brenny had said. She had just told him the truth about his desire for greater intimacy. Hans wondered if Brenny knew why he wanted deeper intimacy with her. He hoped that if they could have the deepest kinds of intimacy, that no one would be able to separate them. Not even a stubborn, interfering angel named Adrian would be able to come between them.

Dread still filled Hans' spirit. He knew that it was a warning signal.

He told her apprehensively, "I'll think about it."

Hans never got a chance to think about it. Brenny constantly asked him to teach her what he knew. Because he gave her almost everything she asked for, he taught her. What he didn't know, they learned together. Hans showed Brenny how to use her mind and energy to command her spirit when they made love.

Besides wanting deeper intimacy with her, Hans also had another reason for teaching Brenny sex magick. Hans secretly knew that Adrian was never going to leave them alone. He knew that Adrian was watching and he wanted to make Adrian angry.

Hans wanted to find and experience the most profound and deepest love of all with Brenny. Intimacy fueled by intense magick would do this. The deeper he and Brenny loved each other, the more they would wound Adrian.

Brenny was a fast learner. When she coursed her soul through Hans for the first time, he gritted his teeth because he enjoyed it so well. Brenny was right, Hans thought to himself, I really enjoy this.

He began to worry as he thought I enjoy this too much. Hans was surprised at the energy Brenny had for sex magick. He secretly wondered and worried where she got the capacity for it.

Adrian would watch Brenny and Hans at different times in the day, but he would stop watching if they were going to make love. It was something he didn't want to look at because he knew it would hurt him, particularly if Brenny told Hans she loved him. Adrian knew that he didn't have to watch them to know that she did this. His broken heart told him.

Adrian was in his home thinking of Brenny when his heart told him Brenny had learned how to propel her soul into Hans' soul. He closed his eyes and saw Brenny and Hans coursing each other's souls together. It shattered his heart more, knowing that his beloved and Hans were becoming closer to each other. Adrian knew that as long as they practiced sex magick, they would be able to build higher walls to keep

him out.

Brenny was a willing partner in sex magick because she wanted to hurt Adrian. She hoped that when Adrian saw her do this with Hans, that he would finally leave her alone. Deep in her heart, she knew that she loved Adrian and that she would go home with him if he ever got to talk with her alone. She didn't want to go with Adrian because she knew that he would never let her see Hans again.

Brenny couldn't bear to let go of Hans. She loved him too much and did not have the strength to hurt him. Brenny was having the party of her life with him until Adrian started bothering them. She didn't like it that Adrian was invading her privacy and this was beginning to anger her.

Adrian felt the anger in her heart against him. It made him wept. He couldn't understand why she was so mean to him when he knew absolutely that she loved him. He tried to comprehend everything, but he couldn't find any logical reason why Brenny would be ignoring him like she was or why she was getting herself involved in secrets of the cosmos. When he realized that Brenny was practicing sex magick with Hans as a weapon against him, Adrian was devastated.

For the first time in his life, Adrian was beginning to feel anger from his frustration and jealousy. He wanted to know her spirit intimately. He wanted to experience emotional and spiritual ecstasy with her.

When anger from frustration and jealousy began to take root in his heart, Adrian began to watch them all the time. Brenny and Hans had no privacy anymore when they made love. They did not like this.

Brenny and Hans were sitting at the window, looking out. Brenny thought about how old the buildings were on their street. Her thoughts turned to wondering about Hans' flat.

"Do you ever wonder who lived here before, Hans?" Brenny asked him.

"Ja, I do, and I get some images," he told her. He thought for a moment and told her, "I have some pictures of some people who lived in this flat."

Hans went to the closet and dug through things for a long time until he saw what he was looking for. He brought out an old metal box about eighteen inches long, ten inches wide and four inches deep. It had chipped black paint and looked a little rusty.

"I found this in the floorboards of the bathroom," he told her. "One of the floorboards was loose and when I went to fix it, I saw the edge of this box. I knew the box was important, so I pulled up some other floorboards to get it."

Brenny looked at the box and her vibes told her it was from World War II. She knew

it held something very personal and valuable to the people who hid it there.

Hans opened the box and it had old-fashioned family photographs in it. It also contained a blonde lock of baby's hair tied with a fading blue ribbon, a marriage license, three white birthday candles that were flaking and falling apart, letters (Brenny knew these were love letters), a round gold bracelet, a Star of David necklace, two diamond rings and personal papers.

When Brenny saw the necklace, she knew that Jews had once lived there. She also knew that the Germans had rounded up Dutch Jews and had sent them to concentration camps.

Hans handed the box to Brenny to look through. At first, Brenny didn't want to touch the things because she knew the people who put their valuables in the box were dead. She felt like an intruder but then it occurred to her that the people who hid the box would probably want someone to see their treasures and to know that they had once lived and loved.

Hans walked to the bookcase that held his papers, photographs and other things. He reached for a little pottery cup on the top shelf. As he took it down, he shook it in a circular motion to check if something he had put in the cup was still there. He heard the rattling and felt the vibration.

Hans brought the cup over to Brenny and dumped out the contents in his hand. A button rolled out.

"When I moved in here, I put in a new floor," he told her. "I found this button between the floorboards behind the refrigerator." Hans handed her the button.

Brenny automatically knew that the button had come off a soldier's uniform.

"Is it German?" she asked.

"Ja, it's German. From World War II. I have always wondered how it got there and why no one else found it. There's been lots of floors put in this place."

Brenny replied, "Maybe you were meant to find it."

She looked at the button for a while and knew that it was connected to the box. Brenny asked, "I wonder what this button means, Hans? Have you used your power to see why it is here?"

"Ja, I did," he told her, "But all I could see was a German soldier and a crying child. The German soldier was in this flat to take the family away."

Her eyes looked carefully at the photographs and papers. She concentrated so she could use her power to understand more. She already knew that the family's name was Stein because this name was on some of the letters and the address matched Hans'

address.

Brenny looked through some more old photographs and saw one of a man, a woman and a boy about three years old. The whole family had fair hair and skin. They stood in front of Hans' apartment building. Back then, the coffee shop downstairs used to be a millinery.

The man was about thirty-two years old, skinny and had a kind face. He wore a white shirt, dark pants and a Star of David necklace. The same necklace in the box.

His wife woman was of medium build, was almost as tall as her husband and had small, sharp eyes. She wore a typical dress of that era. It was polka-dot with shoulder pads and three big white buttons.

The little boy stood in front of his parents holding a blanket. He wore a white shirt, dark pants and dark suspenders. He stared into the camera with big, haunting eyes.

Brenny looked at the necklace and asked Hans, "I wonder why he would leave his necklace?" Brenny touched her crucifix around her neck and said, "Although I don't have a lot of faith, my necklace gives me comfort. If I had to take everything off my body, my necklace would be the last to go."

Hans shrugged and said thoughtfully, "Maybe he wanted to make sure someone knew that he was a Jood. Maybe he was making a statement. If you look at this one paper . . ." Hans looked through the pile of papers until he found what he was looking for.

He continued, "It says that they were to be removed and sent to a relocation camp."

Brenny looked at the paper. It had a swastika in the letterhead. She held a real holocaust document in her hand and the official letter felt terrible and powerful.

"Do you think that he knew that he and his family were going to go on a one-way train ride?" Brenny asked Hans.

Hans answered, "Maybe he did and maybe that is why he left the necklace. I am sure there were many people back then who knew what was going to happen to them. Maybe they knew by rumors or common sense. Maybe from a dream or psychic feelings.

The Nazis killed a hundred and two thousand Dutch Joods. They also killed a lot of Dutch people who were not Joods."

Brenny looked at the family picture again.

"The whole family died, didn't they?" she asked.

Hans nodded, "Ja, they did. My energies tell me this."

"What are you going to do with these things?" Brenny asked. "Do you think they might have some relatives who might still be alive somewhere?"

Hans shrugged, "I don't know. I know I should give this to someone, but I don't know who."

Brenny thought for a few moments.

"Maybe some day we can look this up on the Internet," she said. That, or contact a local synagogue.

She asked Hans, "I wonder how many boxes like this are buried elsewhere in Europe?"

Brenny never seemed to find the time to go to a place get on the Internet. She knew that her friends had probably e-mailed her, but she was too busy with her life with Hans. She never went out much when he was at work because she was comfortable in the flat. The flat felt like Hans and she liked this feeling.

When Hans was home, she knew going to a cyber cafe to look on the Internet or doing anything with computers was not his idea of having a good time. This didn't make sense because Brenny knew that Hans was computer literate. This is because she once saw him look through her computer.

The night this happened, Brenny had been sleeping. She woke to find Hans gone from the bed. It was dark in the flat, but she could see the gray glow of her screen and Hans' silhouette looking into it. She wondered why he was interested in the contents of her computer, although she really didn't care. Brenny trusted Hans.

She knew that he was reading old letters, stories and her diary. After a while, Hans yawned, turned it off and came back to bed. Brenny pretended to be sleeping when he snuggled close and put his arm around her.

Later, when it got darker in the flat, she woke Hans up to play. As she woke him, she felt her vibes to see if Adrian was watching. Brenny could feel him clearly, but she pretended that she didn't feel him. Frustrated and angry, she started to kiss and touch Hans.

Adrian watched and thought. He knew that she had used her power to feel for him and he wondered why she wouldn't use it to talk to him. Tears of frustration fell from his eyes. *If I could just talk to her, he told himself, this would stop . . .*

XXVII

The day finally came when Brenny knew that she had to face Adrian. Adrian's appeals to her conscience had finally started to wear her down and she couldn't take

the misery any longer. Deep-down, she always knew this day was going to come. She dreaded facing him, but at the same time, she felt relieved.

Brenny missed Adrian. She hated to admit it, but she missed him too much. Although she was relieved, she knew that she was going to cry when she looked in his face and saw all of the hurt that she had caused him.

Brenny thought of all the things she had done to hurt him. The list was long and she was ashamed. She wondered if he would throw these things in her face, but Brenny knew that he would never mention the past. Brenny wondered if she could forgive herself, especially for hurting Hans. Brenny prayed and asked God to help all of them.

It was a Friday. She would leave Hans in the early morning of Saturday. Brenny thought about leaving him while he was at work, but she felt that Hans deserved to be treated better than that. Brenny would tell him. Her vibes and common sense told her that Hans would be inconsolable and try to prevent her from leaving. She didn't know how she would handle it, but she knew that she would have to find a way.

Worries filled her, making her feel regret and sadness. Mostly, she was worried about Hans. She wanted to do something to help him, but didn't know what she should do. After much thought, she decided to give him money and property. She knew that Hans wouldn't want either, but they were the only things that she could think of to give him.

Hans had already left for work, so Brenny went downtown to do her business. It took most of her day and she got home after Hans did. Brenny had always been home when Hans came home from work. She wondered if he would connect the change in routine and be suspicious. Secretly, Brenny already knew that his heart had already begun warning him about the heartache straight ahead. It took all her power not to weep.

"I have been home for a while, Brenny. Where have you been?" Hans asked her with worry in his voice. She already knew that he suspected something. She also knew that Hans was tired of fighting with Adrian, too.

"I had to go to the bank," she replied slowly, trying to disguise her worry and sadness.

"Why? If you needed money, I would have given it to you," he told her. Hans' eyes searched for hers. When he looked into her eyes, he saw terrible pain. He wanted to cry, but he knew he had to be strong. His mind told his spirit to find a way to get her to stay. Hans started thinking about using magick to keep her with him. Then he remembered that he had used too much of it already.

In desperation, he began to pray. He asked God to keep Brenny with him. Hans told God that he would do anything if God would find a way for them to stay together. He asked God to help all of them.

"I wanted to send my son some money," Brenny told him. She had never lied to him

before. The bitter taste the lie left in her mouth made her choke and want to vomit.

Hans did not trust her answer. His heart kept telling him that something was wrong. He tried to listen to Brenny's mind, but she had already built walls to keep out his probes. This displeased him, but he pretended like nothing was happening on the inside of both of them.

"What do you want to do tonight, Brenny?" Hans asked her.

She looked at him and told him, "I would like to make some sandwiches and stay home with you."

"Are you sure?" he asked. "There are some good movies playing downtown."

"I love you and I want to spend some time with you, Hans. This is more important than a movie."

Hans was uncomfortable with her words and he hoped for the best. He knew that she loved going to the movies, so he knew that something was very wrong. His heart told him that he was in terrible trouble. He prayed again and he asked God for help for everybody. Hans also asked God to convince Brenny to marry him and to bless the relationship.

Brenny was also praying. She asked God to help her, Hans and Adrian.

Adrian sat on the couch in his home. He had tried everything he could think of to get to Brenny's world, but all doors had been closed to him. He wondered what good his power was when he couldn't use it for what he needed. Devastation filled him. Adrian knew that if he could just talk to Brenny, everything would be resolved between them . . . He began to pray. Adrian asked God to help all of them.

Brenny was sad, but she tried to keep things happy and pleasant between her and Hans. Finally, she looked at him and told him, "Hans, I want you to know something. I really love you. I love you with my whole soul and heart. I want you to always know this."

Dread filled Hans. He wanted to speak the unspeakable and ask her if she were going to leave him, but he didn't have the courage to. Instead, he began to pray again.

Brenny sat at the window and looked out into the street below.

I am really going to miss sitting here, she told herself. I am going to miss this home that I love so much. I am going to miss Hans . . . Tears began to form in her eyes and she had to use all her will to push them back.

Hans walked over to the window and sat by her. He put his arms around her and held her. He stroked her hair and kissed her. She kissed him back and willed the love she had in her heart for him into his.

Hans felt her love course through him. It felt so warm and good that it buoyed him. Brenny wondered what she could do to make him happy one last time. She wished that she could marry him, but she knew that she was going to marry Adrian. This gave her an idea . . .

Brenny told Hans, "You know that I can't marry you, but I would like to pretend just tonight that we are married. Will you do this with me?"

Hans was stunned. He didn't know what to say. His heart was breaking all over the place, but he knew he had this last night and he didn't want it to be unbearable.

"You know I want to be married to you for more than one night, Brenny," he told her.

"I know," she told him with a little sadness in her voice. "I just want to know what it would feel like. Will you give me that?" Brenny wanted to cry. She struggled to hide her emotions behind her heart.

Hans had always given her almost anything that she wanted. They both knew that he would give her this, too.

"If I give you this, will you think about marrying me for real?" he asked her.

"You know I can't promise this," Brenny replied. "I want to marry you, but I can't. You know why and I don't want to talk about it. Let's don't talk about it or it will ruin the night."

Neither wanted to talk about Adrian, so they used their all their power to concentrate on the time they had left together. Brenny and Hans felt like they were in a living nightmare. Hans was beginning to feel very desperate.

"Okay, Brenny, I will marry you for this night. But in my heart, I will always be married to you. Can you live with this?" Hans asked her.

"It will be hard, but I will try," she replied still trying not to cry.

"I want a ceremony between us first," he told her.

"We can do that," Brenny answered.

They made a nice supper and ate together at the table.

After they ate, Brenny told him, "Let's dress up. I have this dress Mario and Justin bought me. I know it is going to be big on me, but I want to wear it while we exchange our vows. Besides, it's the only dress I have. Why don't you put on your

tuxedo T-shirt, the one you wore when you took me to see the No Name Band?"

Hans fished through his shirts in the dresser and put it on. Brenny smiled. She liked the T-shirt and she liked the memories of when they had gone to the club that night. She put on her dress and some stockings.

Hans went to the cupboard and got out all the candles he could find. He made a little altar on the chair. He placed a cloth down on it and put the candles on it. Hans lit the candles and turned the lights out. Rainbow balls of light from her dress danced on the amber candlelight canvas of the walls. Brenny saw this and remembered her poem.

He looked at her face in the glow of the candles and thought to himself, she is the most beautiful woman in the world. She will always be beautiful to me. Little sprays of tears tried to sprout in the bottom of Hans' eyes. It took all his strength to stop them from becoming bigger tears.

Adrian had been praying and thinking. He looked out his window into Hans' flat. He saw Hans making the little altar and he wondered what Hans was doing.

"Come, Brenny, let's kneel here," Hans told her. Brenny got on her knees in front of the makeshift altar with Hans.

Hans looked at her with eyes full of love.

"I love you, Brenny," he told her, "You start the vows."

Hans dug around in his pocket. Brenny wondered what he was doing until he pulled out the wedding rings he had bought several months before. He laid the rings on their little altar.

Brenny hadn't anticipated going this far. Using rings hadn't been considered in her pretend wedding plans. Still, Brenny wanted to be married to Hans and she wanted to make him happy. At least for their last night together.

Brenny took his ring off the cloth and put it on his wedding finger.

As she put the ring on his finger, she told him, "I take you, Hans, as my husband."

Hans smiled at her. He knew it wasn't real, but it still felt good.

Brenny looked at him and told him, "I love you, Hans. Please take me as your wife. I will always love you."

Hans was hoping that she would promise to be married to him forever, but he knew she wouldn't make that kind of promise. He tried to be happy.

Maybe she will like the feeling of being married, he thought. Maybe her heart will tell her to marry me for real. Hans knew that he was lying to himself, but the thought

warmed him.

He took her ring from the cloth and put it on her wedding finger.

"From this day on, I marry you forever," he told her.

Hans looked at the ceiling and addressed an invisible God.

He told God, "I love this woman and I love her forever. Please keep us together. Please help us in any way that You can so we can always be together."

Brenny wished that Hans hadn't prayed like that. Her heart was breaking and his prayer made her feel more pain and desperation.

Adrian watched in horror. He couldn't believe what he was seeing. He didn't know if they were really getting married or not. Adrian searched his power for knowledge to understand what they were doing, but because he was so hurt and confused, he could not find the answer. The answer was lost under the waves of his emotions.

Hans kissed Brenny and she kissed him back. He liked the feel of the wedding band on his finger and he liked the feel of being her husband, even if it was for one night.

Smiling into her lips, he told her, "Now we get to consummate the marriage."

She laughed into his lips, "We can do that, too."

They kissed as they slowly undressed each other. Brenny remembered that she was going to leave him in the morning. Her heart began to break again. It told her that she loved Hans more than she realized. Brenny wished that there was a way to show Hans how much he meant to her.

An idea came to her. She decided to do something she swore that she would never do with anyone. That was how great her need was to prove her love.

She lowered the walls in her mind.

Brenny asked him telepathically, "Remember when we played that game of 'Trust' that one time? I want to play it again. This time I want to be tied up. I trust you, Hans. I've never trusted a man until now, but I trust you. With my heart, my body, my mind and my soul."

Hans remembered the first and only time they had played that game. He didn't like it then and he didn't like the idea of playing it now. His spirit filled with apprehension and warned him not to play 'Trust' with her.

He told her, "I don't want to play any games. This is my honeymoon."

Brenny knew that she wanted to do this with Hans. He felt her determination, but fought against it. The red flags in his spirit began to warn him.

"No, Hans. I want to give all of myself to you. Please do this with me first. Then we will do everything you want to do."

"But this is our honeymoon, Brenny," he said to her. "People don't do this kind of thing the first time they make love after they get married."

"How do you know?" she asked him

"We both know this. People don't do kinky things when they consummate their marriage, Brenny."

"I don't want to do something kinky, Hans," she replied, "I want to show you how much I really care. Do you know how scary this is for me? It is important for me to show you. Please do this for me. You never know, you might like it."

Hans knew that he would give her what she wanted. He hoped that if he gave her what she wanted that maybe she would see how much he loved her and that she would stay.

Hans asked her, "Same rules apply as before?" He remembered that she didn't go by them the last time they played 'Trust' and he remembered how they fought afterwards.

"Only the second one: you finish in me," she told him. This pleased Hans. She could feel his pleasure that she remembered the rules and respected how he felt about making love.

"But you untie me when you want to. I want to fully submit to you. I put my heart, body, mind and spirit completely in your hands. Both of us know that I have always held back a piece of myself from you. Tonight, I want you to have all of me. Besides, you are my husband now and I have to trust you, right?"

Hans still had his misgivings and he didn't want to do it. He liked it she that wanted to give all of herself to him and he liked it when she called him 'my husband'. In the back of his heart, he continued to feel fear and dread. It took a lot of energy for him to bury his uneasy feelings.

Maybe, Hans thought, if I give her what she wants, she will see how much I truly love her. Maybe, just maybe, she will marry me and forget about Adrian.

Hans remembered that he had thrown the pieces of rope away after the last time they played this game. Brenny heard his thoughts.

"I have an old shirt I don't want," she told him. "Let's get the scissors and make strips."

We can make a blindfold out of it, too."

She dug around in the drawer of his dresser and pulled out a shirt she never liked or wore. They cut it into long pieces.

Brenny plumped the pillow and made it comfortable for her head. She tied a thick strip of cloth over her eyes. She tried to look through the cloth and saw very dark shadows. Brenny knew in the dark that she wouldn't be able to see anything through it.

"How's your heart?" she asked him.

Both started laughing. They remembered about talking about Stephen King's novel *Gerald's Game* the last time they did this.

She made herself comfortable on the bed.

"Now tie me up," she told him.

Hans looked at her on the bed and the strips of cloth in his hands. He wondered if he really wanted to do this. He felt committed because he had let it go this far.

Gently, he tied her hands to the bedpost.

"Are you comfortable, my wife?" Hans asked her. He loved how the word 'wife' felt on his tongue when he said it. His tongue silently spoke the word again and he savored its pleasing flavor. Although she didn't hear the quiet word, Adrian did.

Brenny replied, "Yes. I am not used to this, but I still want to do it. This is important to me to do this."

"What do you want me to do to you first?" he asked her.

"You're a healthy man with a good imagination, figure it out. Just stop talking and start doing something."

Hans looked at her body and didn't know where to begin. He ran his fingers lightly down her torso. Her body tensed. His hands touched her breasts and her nipples got hard. He was beginning to enjoy touching her like that.

Hans lay on top of her and he began to kiss her neck. He was going to slowly kiss down her body when he sensed someone in the room with them. It was Adrian's presence and before Hans could figure out what to do, Adrian possessed his body and threw Hans' soul out.

Hans found himself looking down at his body with Adrian in it. Hans quickly built walls with his mind so he could talk to Adrian without Brenny hearing. Adrian knew what Hans was doing and built walls with his mind, too. Adrian wanted to talk to

Hans privately as well.

Brenny wondered why Hans had quit touching her. She felt him on her so she decided to trust him and wait.

"You're not supposed to be here, Adrian," Hans told him. "Get out of my body and let me back in. Go home."

"No," Adrian told him. "I want to talk to Brenny and I am going to. I do not like doing this and I did not want to do this, but it was the only way I could find. I am going to talk to her. She is my wife, not yours."

Hans realized that Adrian thought that he and Brenny were really married. Hans also knew that Adrian didn't know that Brenny was planning to go back to him.

"No," Hans told Adrian, "She is my wife."

Hans' words made Adrian very angry and jealous.

"It does not matter," Adrian replied. "She is still mine. Like I said, I want to talk with her."

Hans did not want Adrian to talk to her. Adrian already knew his thoughts.

"All right," Adrian said to Hans, "Both of us will ask her who she wants to be with."

Hans did not want this.

Angrily, he told Adrian, "You have sinned by possessing my body and interfering with free will. You know this. Go home before you get into more trouble with God."

"No, I love her and I want to talk to her."

"You have no right to be here," Hans replied. "This is our world, not yours. Go home, Adrian. Stop trying to interfere."

Brenny was beginning to get restless.

"Hans, what's going on?" she asked.

Hans knew that Adrian wasn't going to leave until he had talked with Brenny. He wished that Adrian would leave them alone. He wished that something would happen to save his relationship. His mind quickly searched for a way so Adrian would never come back and bother them again.

An idea came to him. Using all his will, Hans wished for his body to enter Brenny's body. Before Adrian knew what was happening, he had sexually entered Brenny's

body through Hans' body.

Fear seized him because Adrian knew that he was breaking cosmic laws. Then he became angry with Hans' trickery. Quickly, he sent Hans' soul to the farthest and oldest end of the universe.

Brenny instantly knew that Adrian was inside her. She didn't care why he was there. All she knew was that their hearts fit perfectly together. She heard Adrian thinking about getting out and she didn't want him to leave her. Brenny willed her soul to course through him. Adrian froze as he filled with wonder.

Her spirit felt astonishingly beautiful to him. He felt ecstasy beyond anything he could ever dream of. Brenny knew that she had his attention, so she coursed her soul through him again. This time, it was stronger and longer. Brenny also put her legs around him and moved her body under him. Adrian froze with the shock of sheer happiness.

She told him, "I love you, Adrian." Her words were the most beautiful music he had ever heard. Adrian felt the heat coming from her loins and it made him burn. He was beginning to become dizzy from confusion, love and desire. Adrian tried to rein in his emotions so he could concentrate to talk with her.

"Please untie my hands so I can hold you," she told him.

His mind instantly willed for her hands to be freed. The pieces of cloth came loose from the bed's headboard. Brenny took off the blindfold. Adrian didn't want her to see him in Hans' body, so he willed Hans' body look like his.

She touched Adrian's hair and smiled at him. He saw her smile and he smiled back. She lifted her head to kiss him and he kissed her back. She moved under him again and this time, he instinctively pushed himself into her. The feeling he received from pushing into her was pleasurable and he pushed himself into her again. Passion began to fill him. It was a new feeling to him and he found that he liked it very much.

Brenny felt him wishing to talk, so she pushed her tongue inside his mouth. He tasted her and his senses became overwhelmed. Instinctively, he put his tongue in her mouth and she curled her tongue around it as she sucked it.

While she kept Adrian's tongue busy, Brenny put his right hand on her breast. He touched it and he felt his erection burn harder inside her. Adrian knew that he was getting beyond the point of no return and he tried to stop. Brenny sensed this and squeezed her vagina around him. This made Adrian push deeper inside her.

She pushed back as Adrian was thinking about getting out of Hans' body. Her push made him want to thrust harder into her. When he did this, Brenny coursed her spirit through him again. He was completely seduced.

Brenny began to kiss him passionately with her tongue inside his mouth. She opened

her legs wider for him. She put her hands on his ass to help push him farther into her.

Adrian liked these sensations. They gave him more energy to plunge harder into her. Brenny probed the edges of his tongue with her tongue. Then she ran her tongue down his neck. It gave Adrian goose bumps and made him hotter.

Adrian's ardor surprised Brenny. She had always wondered what he would be like, but she never imagined that he would be this passionate. He fiercely poured his heart into hers as the energy of their intimacy escalated.

Brenny poured her heart into his with the same energy. She told him how much that she loved him and how much she had missed him. His heart overflowed with joy. He told her over and over how much he loved her as he went deeper and deeper into her.

Their passion for each other continued to climb. Finally, Brenny couldn't hold back anymore. Her body tensed and she began to have wave after wave of violent orgasms. Hans' body responded and began to orgasm with her. Somewhere in this mix, Adrian climaxed as well. He released enormous energy of love and passion into her.

Brenny filtered this energy through her and charged it with her love for him. Then she sent it back to him. As it went through him, he came again. Adrian began to weep with joy and happiness.

He told her with all his heart, "I love you."

She saw and felt his tears. This reminded her that Hans would shed tears the same way when they made love. Brenny wondered where Hans' soul was? Her vibes told her that Adrian had sent it somewhere far away. Although she was enjoying being coupled with Adrian, she worried about Hans. Brenny felt sad when she thought about how badly she was going to miss Hans.

Adrian heard her thoughts. Before she could think any more about Hans, Adrian began to move inside her again. He began kissing her and she kissed him back. She felt great love bloom in her heart for him. His heart felt it and he was pleased.

Brenny put her arms around Adrian and kissed his face. He kissed her several times and then he thrust deep inside her. She reacted by sucking his neck. Adrian liked it and he began to plunge deeper into the sweet candy of her body again.

Adrian's passion began to grow. He pummeled very hard inside her. Although she tried to hold it off, she came. Adrian felt her orgasm and it triggered him to come with her. This time he sent even more energy into her and she was overwhelmed by the enormity of it. She let the energy flow through her, then charged it with her own before she sent it back to him. He was electrified.

Brenny wondered if they were finished making love. She waited for him to pull out, but he didn't. Adrian started to move inside her again. Her eyes filled with confusion.

He looked at her with love in his eyes and told her kindly, "I cannot help myself. I love you so much that I cannot bear to break away from you. This intimacy makes me feel closer to you. I never imagined that something like this could bring so much joy and love."

Brenny looked into his eyes as she told him with her mind, "I am happy we are together like this Adrian, but we should talk now. Everything is screwed up and we need to figure things out. I know most of it is my fault, too, and I am willing to accept responsibility for what I did. My heart wants to resolve the problems between us."

He moved inside her.

Adrian told her, "Not now. I have too much love in my being for you and I need to convey it." His deep thrust caught her by surprise and she forgot about wanting to talk.

When Hans saw the sparsely sprinkled, dim stars, he instantly knew where he was. He had been there before when his soul traveled. For a moment, he thought that he was dreaming, but then he remembered Adrian.

Adrian's power was keeping him there. He knew that this power would eventually weaken.

Hans waited and thought. He knew that Adrian intended to take Brenny home with him. This hurt him, and he became very angry and frustrated. He was also angry that Adrian was using his body to make love to Brenny.

Hans knew that Adrian was breaking serious laws of the universe and he knew that Adrian would have to answer for it. Hans wanted to get back to his body. He was desperate to confront Adrian and to try to find some way to keep Brenny with him.

After awhile, Hans felt Adrian's power over him begin to wane. Hans waited a few moments before he willed himself back to his body. It didn't work. He waited a little longer and tried again. This time, Hans found himself inside his body.

Adrian didn't feel Hans come back into his body. Adrian was too busy with Brenny to notice any changes.

Right away, Hans knew that he shouldn't be there. When he felt the love between Adrian and Brenny, he knew that he had made a mistake. As angry and hurt as he was, Hans wanted to give them their privacy.

Hans tried to will himself out of his body, but he couldn't do it. He tried harder to get out, but Hans' soul remained locked in.

Some kind of energy was keeping him there. He struggled to fight the energy, but he his power was too weak. Hans wondered he should do next.

All of the sudden, Hans felt Brenny's spirit go through him. It felt familiar and good to him. His heart filled with love for her and sexual desire began to bloom inside him. Because he was connected back to his body, he felt the same sensations as Adrian did.

Hans knew that he shouldn't be enjoying the same feelings that were flowing between Adrian and Brenny. Again, he tried to break away. He used all the power he could find to will himself out of his body, but he still couldn't break free.

Worried, Hans tried to tell Adrian that he was there, but Adrian could not hear him. As much as he didn't want to, he tried to talk to Brenny. She didn't respond.

Something, maybe the energy between them, is keeping me from contacting them, he thought. He used his power to see if he were touching Adrian's soul in any way. He was.

Brenny propelled her spirit through Hans again. This time, the energy was greater than anything he had ever felt with her. The power of her spirit felt like the lightning of the gods going through him. Reacting to the love and pleasure she gave him, he charged the energy with his own and sent it back to her. When he did this, he became completely connected to her sexually and emotionally.

Secretly, he wondered where Brenny got the power to do this to him. Before he could worry about enchantment, Hans felt her course her soul through him again. Passion begin to rage in him. His heart, mind, body and soul were seduced.

Then Hans remembered something that he wished he could forget. He knew that this was his last time he was going to be with her. Hans knew that he would never love any one else and he knew that he would never be intimate with another person again.

As Hans tried to think, Brenny kept seducing him, making him hotter. The power of the sex began to climb and his thoughts became lost in the energy. His soul was electrified and he liked it. Although Hans didn't like Adrian, Hans joined in.

After he put his energy into the communal pool, Hans found himself caught up as badly as Adrian was. Like Adrian, Hans could not stop if he wanted to.

Adrian used Hans' body to stay in her most of the night. The power of the sex and love filled the flat and strange things began to happen. Although they noticed, the three were too intoxicated and too addicted to care.

The last time Adrian, Hans, and Brenny made love, they collectively created immense energy. When the energy was released, it left everyone so weak that they instantly fell asleep together.

XXVIII

A ray of sunlight shone brightly on Adrian's face. It felt heavy, dull, greasy and unfamiliar. The color and heat of yellow burned into his closed eyes. He was tired and

wanted to sleep some more, but the light persisted to bother him until he woke up.

He found himself still in Hans' body and it was still in Brenny. Before he could think about how beautiful she looked sleeping under him, he felt Hans' soul sleeping next to his.

Adrian was startled and he did not know what to do. He realized that he should go to his home and think. Adrian also knew that he needed to pray. For the first time in his life, Adrian was afraid to pray.

The angel Adrian didn't want to leave Hans' body inside her, so he made it go lay on the floor. He did this quietly and carefully so Hans wouldn't wake. He did not have the heart or energy for a confrontation. Adrian was also ashamed, worried and confused. Besides the obvious, Adrian knew that something else had happened the previous night. As hard as he searched, Adrian could not remember.

As Adrian left Hans' body on the floor, Adrian willed for Brenny to forget what had happened the night before. He changed his mind and he willed her to forget not only the night, but the whole day as well.

Adrian thought about doing this with Hans, too, but he thought, Hans tricked me so I'll let him remember. He can be ashamed with me.

Hans started to wake up when he felt his naked body lying on the floor. He heard Adrian wish for Brenny not to remember anything and he also heard Adrian's thoughts about him. Hans didn't feel like a confrontation, either, so he pretended to be asleep. Quietly, he waited for Adrian leave his body.

As soon as Hans was sure that Adrian was gone, he climbed back in Brenny. He covered both of them with blankets, even though the room was very warm. Brenny rolled over and put her arm around him.

Deep in sleep, she told him, "I love you Adrian."

Brenny's words stung him. He knew that she loved Adrian, too, but it still hurt. Hans was tired and wanted to sleep. He held her close for a long time, but sleep would not embrace him. His mind was too full of memories and worries.

Hans decided to go for a walk to think things out. Hans knew that he wanted to pray, but he was afraid to. He did not know what to tell God because he was ashamed and embarrassed.

Worries filled him that Adrian might come back and get her, but after a quick search of his heart, Hans knew that Adrian would not do this. The walls were starting to close in on him and he knew that he needed to get out of the flat for a while.

"Brenny," Hans told her, "I am going to go for a walk. I'll be back soon. Okay?"

Brenny's eyelashes flickered softly.

"What, Hans?" she asked him in a very sleepy voice.

Hans was happy that she knew it was him. His happiness faded when he saw the hickey on her neck and remembered that Adrian had put that one on her.

"I am going to go for a walk," he told her, "I need to get out and get some fresh air. I'll be back in a little while."

"Okay Hans. I love you," she told him as she went back to sleep.

Hans had never seen her sleep so hard. For a moment, he became worried about leaving her while she slept like that. He thought to himself, if the building caught on fire, she wouldn't be able to wake up and get out.

Hans was getting more upset and he wanted to go outside more. He remembered that his building was very old and that it had never caught fire in the past. Although he dreaded praying, Hans asked God to watch over her while he was gone.

Hans found his clothes on the floor and put them on. He looked at the wedding ring on his finger. His fingers reverently touched it as he thought about the night before and his vow to her.

When he made his vow to her, he had made a vow to himself. He vowed that he would love her forever and wear the ring forever. His feelings about this were the same.

Hans looked at the wedding ring on Brenny's finger. He gently lifted her hand and kissed the ring as she continued to sleep.

Hans walked all over Amsterdam that day. He didn't plan to stay out so long, but he needed time to think. When it began to get dark, he started to become worried about Brenny. By this time, he was on the other side of town, so he took a tram back to his house.

Hans walked into the flat and it was dark inside. For a moment, he didn't see Brenny and he panicked. His heart jumped as he thought that Adrian had come for her. Then Hans saw her sleeping in the bed and he felt relieved.

Hans went over to her and told her, "I'm back, Brenny. Are you hungry? Thirsty? Do you want anything?"

Brenny did not answer. She continued to sleep.

He took his clothes off and got in beside her. As he held her, he wanted to sleep, but the pain of his conscience hurt him too much to let him have any kind of escape. Every time he tried to think, he wanted to cry. His eyes began to get watery and burn

as he stared into the dark ceiling.

Night passed too slowly. Brenny slept heavily, never waking once. A couple of times, she lay so still that Hans thought that she had quit breathing. This always happened when he was almost asleep. Afraid, he would lay paralyzed and miserable until he was sure that she was breathing. After that, it would take forever for him to get sleepy again.

It was Sunday and Hans continued to lay with her. Brenny still couldn't pull out of sleep, not even to go to the bathroom. It was obvious that she was sick. That evening, he decided to try to wake her.

"Brenny," he whispered to her, "You have been sleeping for a long time and I am beginning to worry about you. Please wake up." She didn't stir.

Fear began to set in.

He told her in a louder voice, "Brenny! Wake up! I am afraid you are sick and this is scaring me!" This time she moved a little, but could not wake. Hans wished that she would say something. He didn't care if she spoke Adrian's name as long as she spoke something.

Hans sat Brenny's body up and shook her a little. Slowly, her eyes tried to open, but they fell shut. His stomach began to knot as fright filled him.

Please God! Hans prayed. Please don't let Brenny be sleeping like this! I am more worried for her than I am afraid to talk to You. Please wake her up! Please. My heart tells me that she is sick because of what happened Friday night. Please don't punish her for that. Punish me instead, but please don't let her be sick. Please God, help her. Let her wake up.

Hans' spirit told him that God had heard his prayer. It told him that God would answer his prayer. Brenny began to open her eyes. She smiled at him and he returned her smile.

"Brenny! Are you okay? You've slept for almost two days!"

"What is today?" she groggily asked him. She tried to raise her head, but it wouldn't move.

"It is Sunday. Sunday evening."

"I'm so sleepy, Hans. I kind of don't feel too well, either. I feel so tired. I feel like I have a hangover or something. Did we drink together? If so, what did we drink that would make me feel like this?"

"No, Brenny, we didn't drink. We never did drink much together, don't you remember? Are you sick? Do you want me to take you to a doctor? I couldn't wake

you, so I prayed for you. God answered my prayer because you are at least half awake. This is much better than earlier."

Brenny could feel the fear in his voice and she willed herself to wake more.

"Help me up, Hans, so I can try to walk, okay?"

Hans got out of bed and extended his hand to her. She saw the wedding ring on his finger. She looked down at her hands and saw the ring on her finger.

"Did we get married?" she asked as she yawned.

"No," he told her. "We were pretending. Don't you remember?"

"No, Hans," she replied, "I don't remember. But I like the feeling of this ring, so I am going to keep it on." Brenny began to feel sleepy and started to sleep on her feet. He caught her before she fell down.

Hans did not know what to do or say to wake her. A voice inside him told him to tell her something. He didn't want to, but he felt compelled.

"Adrian was here," he told her.

She barely heard Hans' words, but they jarred her awake.

"Oh no," she mumbled in pain.

Tears formed in her eyes as he asked him, "What are we going to do, Hans?"

"I don't know, Brenny. I don't know," he told her.

Hans helped Brenny to sit. He held her for a long time. Slowly, she started to rouse. He turned the stereo on, but neither felt like listening to music.

Hans made Brenny some soup and she tried to eat some. All she could eat was a couple of spoonfuls and she began to get sicker. She vomited the soup all over her. Then she got the dry heaves and threw up bile in the toilet.

A great sleepiness began to pull her away from her surroundings. Brenny became so sleepy that her face fell into the water. It stayed in the water until Hans pulled it out. He knew that she would have drowned if he had not been there.

Hans started to shake as he remembered that he had left her alone all day Saturday. Quick prayers of thanksgiving were offered as he tried to keep her on her feet. It was a golden moment for him. Although everything was still hazy to him, he decided at that moment that he was going to get sober spiritually. Hans knew that this was going to be a very long and hard road. He was afraid, but his resolution to stop the destruction had already begun to take root in him.

A small voice from very far away agreed with him. It was the voice of Adrian's self. A strange feeling filled Hans. His vibes told him that he and Adrian were connected. He wondered what the connection was, but then he realized that their mutual love for her was probably it. He wanted to think more about this, but he had his hands full with Brenny and her sickness.

As Hans helped Brenny to feebly stand, he wondered if Adrian knew that Brenny was sick. Hans realized that Adrian knew and he felt Adrian's fear about it.

This terrified Hans and his heart began to fill with regret. He knew that Brenny was sick from the things that happened on Friday night. Then he remembered something else. It was Friday the 13th, and it was a full and a blood moon. Hans recalled that those rare, mystical nights were favored by many magicians because they energized enchantments. His heart told him that this was not a good sign.

His heart was sick of fighting and he knew that Brenny was sick from all the bad energy. Seeing her so sick reminded Hans that he had forgotten the most important thing of all: That he wanted Brenny to be well above everything else. Even if it meant that she went with Adrian and not him. Hans never realized how much that he loved her until he saw her so terribly sick. He began to worry and feel regret again.

Adrian felt Hans' regret and he began to regret. Adrian wished he had done things differently. Hans felt Adrian's regret. Then they thought of Brenny. This made them wonder collectively if Brenny could feel their regrets and they instantly realized that she could. They knew that their negative feelings would only make her sicker. Together, they fought to push back these feelings for her sake.

Brenny began to sleep on her feet and she fell. Her head would have crashed into the sink if Hans hadn't caught her. She didn't wake up, either.

Great fear swept through him. Its scalpel cut him savagely. Hans began to feel sick and dizzy from the pain. It took all his strength to pull himself together so he could concentrate on helping her. He asked Adrian to come and help him with her.

Brenny began to stir a little. She tried to open her eyes, but the curtains would not open. Hans pulled her eyelids up so she could see.

Her eyelids were so weak that they did not fight against Hans' fingers to blink. More terror him. He manually blinked her eyes several times until she gained enough strength to do it herself.

Brenny knew that she was very sick and she knew that Hans was very worried about her. Hans and Adrian felt her worry and they felt her weakness as she struggled to gain control of her body. They were more afraid.

After Brenny's eyes had adjusted to the light, they searched for Hans' eyes. She saw a frightened look in his face and although he wasn't physically there, she knew that Adrian had that same look. She felt their growing fear and she knew they were afraid

because she was so sick.

When Hans looked into her eyes, they looked almost lifeless. They did not reflect light of any kind. They did not reflect any signs of the laughter, intelligence, intensity or goodness that were usually found in them.

Hans and Adrian's eyes became one as they searched for a long time to find any kind of life in them. It was a tiny spark and nothing else. His legs wanted to buckle under him and he had to use all his strength to hold himself and her up. Adrian felt the same terror as Hans.

Brenny struggled to speak, "I don't feel well. "I feel so . . . so . . . sick. Now I've thrown up all over myself." Her head fell forward and it took all her strength to lift it up.

Some how finding the words and the power to say them, she told Hans, "I want to shower. I feel so greasy and dirty, but I don't have the strength to."

Hans turned the water on in the shower and undressed Brenny and himself. The water ran over their bodies as he washed her face, body and hair. She fell asleep twice and he caught her. The last time she fell asleep, he began to weep.

Brenny could feel his worry and heart break. It struck through her spirit so violently, that she woke. She looked at him confused and dazed. Hans forced his tears to go back into his spirit and he could feel Adrian doing the same thing.

Brenny tried to speak, but Hans put his finger to her lips and said, "Nee, Brenny. Do not try to speak. You need to save all your energy so you can get well. I'm here for you and I am taking care of you."

Hans held her close as the rain of the shower beat upon their naked bodies. He closed his eyes and clenched his teeth as he wished that the water would wash away his sins. Sadness filled him when he realized that it was not going to be that easy.

The shower seemed to help her feel better. Brenny started to wake. She sat with Hans for a couple of hours and then she began to yawn. Hans knew that it was impossible to keep her awake any longer, so he let her sleep. He tried to sleep and when he did, his sleep was restless.

For most of the night, he prayed for Brenny to get better. Hans wanted to pray about the other things that were bothering him, but he didn't have the heart or the strength to. He was too worried about Brenny's health and he kept thinking about that night.

About an hour after she went back to sleep, Hans checked her forehead for a sign of fever. Brenny hadn't been hot, but he thought he would check anyway. Instead of being hot, she was very cold. He panicked and thought she was dead until he finally saw that she was breathing.

Hans put more blankets on her and held her close. Nothing would warm her.

Hans put socks on her feet and massaged her. She remained cold.

He wished that Adrian were there to help him.

This is so ironic, Hans thought. I wanted Adrian to go away permanently. Now it has happened and now I am desperate to see him.

Hans did not go to work the next day as he was too afraid to leave her alone. She awakened early in the morning and threw up all over the bed. With Hans' help, she made it to the toilet so she could finish vomiting. This time, she was more awake than the previous day and her face did not fall forward into the water. Hans washed her and cleaned up her mess.

She vomited several more times that day, but she stayed awake. Hans wondered how she could be throwing up so much when she didn't eat or drink anything. Brenny was so miserable. She lay on the bed, on her side, and Hans sat by her on the edge of the bed.

By afternoon, she started to feel better and drank some water. To their surprise, it stayed down. Hans made her some soup. She was able to eat half a bowl and it stayed down, too.

When the evening came, she started to look and feel better. Brenny stayed up late and Hans stayed with her. He thanked God for helping Brenny to feel better and he continued to pray for her. At the same time, he knew that Adrian was praying for her, too.

Hans stayed home from work on Tuesday. Brenny was getting better, but Hans decided that he was not going to take any chances until he knew for sure that she was well enough to be left alone. The day went by slower than the previous one. Hans wondered why. He could feel Adrian worrying about this, too.

That night, Hans worried if he should go to work the next day. He missed his routine and he knew that he needed to get some exercise and fresh air. Brenny heard his thoughts.

She told him, "I'm feeling better, Hans. You can go to work."

Brenny assured him, "You should go to work. You've been stuck here for too many days with me. You should get out and do something you like to do. This would make me happy."

"What if Adrian comes back?" he asked her.

"I won't go anywhere," she told him. "I am still kind of weak, but when I feel stronger, all three of us are going to have to talk. I know this now. I can't take all the

bad feelings anymore and I know that you and Adrian can't, either. My vibes tell me that God is very displeased with us."

Brenny tried to hide her foreboding feeling from him, but she didn't have the power. Adrian and Hans froze with fear as they felt her feelings of worry and looming sadness.

She told Hans, "I keep searching my spirit, heart and mind, trying to find out why and how we let things go this far. All of us are too good, too smart for this.

Yawning, she said, "I think I'm going to go to sleep now. Don't worry, Hans. I'm feeling better now. Maybe I've had the flu or something. All of us have been under a lot of stress. Maybe all the tension, worry and general unhappiness from the stress made me sick. The worst thing about being that sick is that I can't remember anything. I really hate it when I can't remember a day. It's terrible to lose a day and I've lost a couple."

"I am glad that you are feeling better," Hans told her. "I was very worried." He held her close to him. A small smile lit his lips as he realized how grateful he was that Adrian had taken her memory from her.

Hans lay beside Brenny and tried to sleep. Again, he couldn't sleep or his sleep was restless. Rising early, he knew that he wanted to go to work, but he decided that he wasn't going to go unless he was absolutely sure that she could be left alone. He tried to wake her and she woke right away. Brenny looked stronger and better. Her eyes had more lights in them. Hans waited to see if she would vomit, but she didn't.

She threw up after he went to work. Somehow, she found enough power to hide it from Hans and Adrian. If Hans knew, he would come home immediately. If Adrian knew, he would tell Hans.

Brenny also hid her sickness because she needed to be alone so she could think privately. She was worried as she knew that all of them were in a lot of trouble.

XXIX

Brenny had finished throwing up when she felt the Winds of Change blow through her. They came from nowhere and caught her by surprise. This time, the Winds of Change were strong and coarse.

Their coldness was riveting as they shocked her body, heart, mind and soul. Brenny stood helpless as they invaded her with great force. She wanted to cry out, but she was too paralyzed. She wanted to scream, but her voice would not work. All she could do was endure the pain as thoughts and prayers froze on her lips.

The winds blew through her as if they were searching for something. After they completely coursed through her, they left as suddenly as they came. Brenny felt unbearably lonely and cold. Tears flew from her eyes. Brenny shuddered. She ran for

the bed and buried herself under all the blankets.

The bed did not give her any relief. It was as cold as she was. As she shuddered in the bed, Brenny kept thinking of a dream that she had the night before. It was about Adrian and Hans. Her mind was foggy as she tried to remember the details.

Brenny took a hot shower, but it did not warm or comfort her. As the water fell on her, she tried to pray but she could not find any words. This confused and terrified her. Brenny stayed in the shower for a long time until the water turned cold.

After she got out of the shower, she tried to pray again.

She tried to form words for the prayer, but could barely mutter the word "Help." She suddenly felt sick and vomited. It took all her power to hide this from Adrian and Hans.

When she felt well enough, Brenny began to pace back and forth. She hoped it would take the chill out of her. Deep-down, she knew that pacing would not warm her. Thoughts raced through her mind. Her heart, mind and soul ached to remember something that remained hidden from her.

Getting hungry, she made herself some hot soup and sat at the table. The bottom of the silver spoon shone. Her eyes felt compelled to look at the shiny surface of the spoon. She began to play with the spoon and noticed how it shined differently as she tilted it in different directions.

Then the light on the spoon changed. She saw Adrian's face reflected in it. Startled, she gasped. At first, she was happy to see him but then her happiness turned to fear and dread because his face was full of worry and concern. She became filled with shame and guilt. Panicked, she threw the spoon down.

Brenny ran about the flat covering anything that shined. She lay in the bed and pulled the covers over her head. Light tears fell from her eyes as her heart broke. Her being filled with fear, sadness and regret.

Adrian's voice, filled with pain, whispered into her ear.

He said, "Do not hide from me, Brenny. I need to talk with you. It is very important that we talk."

The sound of his voice filled her with guilt. Sadness paralyzed her and jabbed its sharp needles of pain into her spirit. A silent scream from the pain froze deep in her throat and Brenny wondered if she were going to choke.

Thoughts rose and crashed inside. Her mind was a world of chaos. The powerful undercurrent of this world swept her around and around in circles. She had no power inside to fight what was happening to her.

Brenny closed her eyes as negative emotions pelted her naked soul like fireballs, each one hurting worse than the last one. She cried for a long time.

After awhile, Brenny finally stopped crying and tried to get herself together. She sat on the edge of the bed. Brenny noticed that the room was quiet and she savored the stillness.

Taking a deep breath, she closed her eyes and willed her mind to begin to clear. Brenny willed her powers of self-healing to come forward and begin to do their dirty work of picking up the pieces of her broken heart and trying to put them back together. She wondered if anything could fix a broken heart as shattered as hers.

As Brenny's mind was about to open the door of the room where she kept her powers of self-healing in, she heard Adrian's voice again.

There was great sadness in his voice as he told her with kindness and sincerity, "We have to talk. The Winds of Change blew through Hans and I when they blew through you. We have to talk and we have to . . ."

His voice was cut off as she quickly built a wall around her, hoping to heal herself a little before she was ready to speak with Adrian. She didn't want him to see her the way she was.

Instead of healing, sadness engulfed her and she lay sorrowfully in a fetal position and cried. Her naked and helpless soul lay exposed to the universe and beyond.

Loneliness enveloped her. It stabbed spontaneously and unevenly throughout her soul. Guilt and shame crept in and took root in the raw wounds. Then the moment of truth came. The golden moment that she had been avoiding for so long.

Brenny realized how badly she had behaved. She loved Adrian and Hans and had hurt them both. Brenny felt dirty and ugly, and she wondered what either of them saw in her. Dread, sorrow and regret spread its darkness inside her as she struggled to get off the bed.

A bright, flash of hurt came from nowhere and struck her spirit. The terror and pain made her feel dizzy. Her stomach tightened and her legs dropped from under her. Brenny found herself sitting on the floor, hoping that she would not throw up again. Hot, acidic tears began to fly from her eyes. Her nose stung and her head began to ache. Her heart began to beat fast and fitfully. The mixture of all those feelings was unbearable.

Brenny tried to scream again, but it stopped in her throat. Her mind spun around in one direction and her soul spun in the other direction. She became dizzier and an acidic taste began to rise in the back of her mouth. Brenny barely got to the toilet when bitter, yellow bile gushed from her stomach and out her mouth.

Afterwards, Brenny closed her eyes and gritted her teeth as she rode through the

tempestuous waves of sickness that kept hitting her. She wanted to cry, but had to use all her energy to brace against the tidal waves that kept tossing her helplessly around inside. They wouldn't go away, but kept increasing in size and power making her so seasick that he couldn't stop throwing up.

Finally, she stopped being so nauseated. Coldness and weakness filled her as she was left a broken heap on the floor in the bathroom.

Brenny lay on the cold linoleum for a long time. She wanted to sleep, but she knew that she needed to think. Her thoughts brought new tears and her heart broke in a new place for each new tear. They were the bitterest tears Brenny ever cried.

Confused and worried, Brenny thought of Adrian. She kept thinking about him and the terrible things she had done against him. Brenny searched for some energy to talk to him, but there was none. She dreaded having to face him, but she knew that she had to. Brenny continued to lay on the floor, feeling powerless and helpless for a long time.

As her thoughts began to build, Brenny began to gather the shattered pieces of her heart and soul that were scattered inside her. It took her a long time, but she was able to put enough pieces together to find the energy to talk to God.

She began to pray, Please God, I need help. All of us need help and we know it. I have committed more sins than I can count and I know they are very bad. I also know that I have committed sins that I don't know about. I accept responsibility for all the negative, destructive and self-destructive things I did. Please forgive me. I am very sorry for what I've done. Please help me to never do anything like this again.

Please, God, give me the courage to talk with Adrian. I have really sinned against him and Hans and we both know it.

I am afraid to talk to Hans, too, but I will when he comes home. Please forgive me for hurting him and sinning with him. I will ask him to forgive me . . .

Coldness filled Brenny. She looked to see if her breath was frosty. It wasn't, but it felt that way.

She took a big, cold breath and continued to pray, I feel the coldness of my sins. I know this feeling is coming from You. I acknowledge this. What else can I say? Please, please forgive me. I am sorry and I hope I never do anything this bad again. Please help Hans, Adrian and me.

Brenny got up from the floor. She found the shiny spoon and looked into it's empty light.

She touched the mirror by the entrance door. It felt dark and cold like her spirit.

Fighting her fears, she looked into the glass. Her face reflected incredible beauty

etched in pain. She shut her swollen eyes and willed all thought and pain out of her. Emptied, Brenny began to think of Adrian. She envisioned his face. She remembered what his home looked like and she remembered how happy she had been with him.

The Winds of Change blew through her lightly. They were warmer, but they were still unsettling.

Brenny began to wish for her walls to go down. She looked in the mirror and saw no sign of him, although she knew that wouldn't find any. Not wanting to see her own reflection, she closed her eyes.

With dread, pain and sorrow in her voice, she told him, "I am sorry, Adrian. I am really sorry. I am so sorry that I hurt you. My heart is full of regret. It amazes me how badly I acted."

Brenny opened her eyes and noticed that the flat had gotten dark. The rain began to pour outside and she felt colder. She looked into the mirror but only saw her reflection. Regret filled her as she sighed and wished for Adrian.

She stared into the mirror, but found nothing, so she kissed it sadly. As she pulled her face away from the glass, a tear splashed on it. It caused a black spot to appear. The black spot began to grow until the mirror's surface was completely pitch.

She looked into the blackness and told him, "It is hard to talk to you because I am ashamed. I am also humbled because I know that underneath all of this mess, you still love me. This humility makes me more ashamed.

I am sorry for betraying you. I am sorry for not having more faith in you. I am sorry about these things and everything else. Please forgive me.

You were gone too long and I began to doubt. Still, I had your ring. It gave me solid proof that you existed. You gave me everything I ever wanted, and I still turned my back on you.

You loved me and you never gave up on me. Even when I ignored you. Even when I was with another male and flaunted him in your face.

I did some really bad things. Bad things to you, bad things to Hans, bad things to myself, and bad things to God.

I guess I could say that I didn't know it would go that far with Hans, but that would be lying. I wanted it to go as far as it did. You know my heart and you know what I wanted. I was tempted and I betrayed you. Deep-down inside me I knew what I was doing. I also knew that I was going to hurt you and I did it anyway. I behaved recklessly and now everyone is shipwrecked.

In my heart of hearts, I knew that you would come back. It was inevitable because you promised that you would.

But I kept lying to myself and to Hans. I helped Hans to lie to himself and he helped me to lie to myself. We were willing partners in this game of lies.

I wonder how it all got so destructive. I wonder how everything got so crazy.

I miss you, Adrian. I want to see you. My desire to see you is greater than my fear of the future.

I also want you to know something. I love you. You know my heart and you know how much I love you. I love you with all my heart, mind, body and soul. I know I have no right to say this, but that is how I feel.

From now on, I am going to be truthful and always face the truth. No matter how bad it hurts. No matter what happens.

I should have faced you and talked with you a long time ago. Not doing that was reckless and foolish of me."

Chills of shame flowed through Brenny. The darkness in the mirror began to lighten. As it lightened, she saw Adrian's face. It was full of love and worry for her.

He told her, "The walls you built took away a lot of my energy because I kept trying to get through them. I will talk with you when I have more energy. Where did you get power like that? I know it is not from the sickness because you had it before. We will talk soon. I love you and I forgive you."

Before loss and loneliness could fill her, Brenny felt sick again. She lay down on the bed and it took all her will to resist throwing up. Sleep eventually took her.

When she woke, Brenny looked at the clock and saw that Hans would soon be home. She felt something flutter inside her and thought how strange and good it felt. Brenny sat at the table and waited for him.

Hans came home from work and smiled at her as he tried to hide the pain and worry he felt. He was glad to see her awake and he brought her some white roses. Brenny smiled at him. She put the flowers in a vase and set them on the table.

Brenny wanted to talk to Hans right away. He knew this when he entered the room and he was glad because he wanted to talk to her. Before either one could speak, the Winds of Change blew through them.

Paralyzed, Hans and Brenny felt transparent and helpless as the savage winds ripped through them. They knew that Adrian felt them, too. Hans' heart skipped a beat and Brenny's raced. Time became slow-motion as all of them began to walk through the last act of a Greek Tragedy they had written together.

Hans, shaken, sat down. Brenny's eyes never left his. Sadness began to move into the room like a dark, slow-rolling fog. Hans felt sick and put his head in his hands. He

began to weep.

Brenny filled with shame and guilt.

The power of this is too great, she thought, this is unbearable and it is more than I can take. She grabbed her coat and ran for the door. Brenny ran down the stairs and into the dark, narrow, busy street.

Sobbing, Brenny ran until she could no longer run. Breathless, she walked fast as she prayed for help.

The pain and tears stopped for a moment and Brenny looked around her. An old church loomed in front of her. Brenny walked up the steps and checked the big, wooden doors. They were unlocked. The pain of her sadness came back and her body began to heave with sobs.

As she walked in, she saw a large crucifix at the altar. A large statue of Christ writhing in agony was nailed upon it. Brenny raced toward it and laid before it. She wept tears into the floor until she couldn't weep anymore. Then she began to pray. She prayed for a long time until God answered her.

Hans continued to weep after Brenny left. He sat in the dark and thought. After awhile, he got his coat and walked to the liquor store. Hans walked fast and kept his head down. He bought two bottles of Geneva, a Dutch liquor, and carried each one home by its neck.

Hans hurried home and got a Geneva glass from the cupboard. Little, ornate, silver roses were painstaking painted on the clear, green glass.

He sat at the table and poured some liquor into the glass. His eyes watched the clear liquor fill the glass pedestal. Slowly, the alcohol rose until it passed the roses and reached the silver edging at the top.

Hans drank the Geneva in two gulps. The 40% liquor burned his mouth and throat, but he did not feel it. He poured himself another drink and drank it almost as fast as the first one. Hans began to drink slower after the fourth drink. Especially when he found it did not numb him like he wanted it to.

Once in awhile, tears would run out of his eyes uncontrollably. Then he would reach for the glass. He never imagined such terrible pain existed. It was intolerable.

Hans began to pace back and forth in the dark as he worried and prayed. He put his arms up and pressed his body into the wall and prayed face forward into it.

Hans paced some more. His flat became smaller and smaller as he paced. The walls began to suffocate him, but he didn't want to go out into the night. He couldn't face people. Hans couldn't face himself and his tears would not stop. He was too guilty and ashamed.

He got on his knees in the middle of the floor. With his head and shoulders bent over, he began to pray.

It was past midnight when Brenny quietly opened the door and found Hans sitting at the table. She saw the half-bottle of spirits and the glass, so she knew that he had been drinking. His face was red from crying. A big tear ran down the whole span of his nose and splashed on the table. They both froze, not knowing what to do next, what to say to each other.

Brenny tried to gather her courage, but it took some time.

She cleared her throat and told Hans, "I am sorry Hans. Please forgive me. I have hurt everyone . . . "

Hans' voice cracked and he said, "No, Brenny, everyone hurt each other and themselves."

Hans began to sob uncontrollably. He held his head with his hands while his body shook with each sob. Brenny cried with him.

After they stopped weeping, Brenny told him, "You know Hans, we knew this was going to happen. I know this doesn't make anyone feel any better, but let's at least put the truth on the table."

Hans became defensive as he said, "I don't know what you mean." The lie felt sticky and acidic inside his mouth.

"C'mon, Hans," she told him. "We're both Uniques. We saw all the signs and both of us had premonitions, but we ignored them. We knew that we were being mean to Adrian and all of us knew that we were pushing things too far."

Hans' head lowered more at her words.

Brenny continued, "Look at you! You are drinking because you knew this terrible moment would come. All of us knew that it would come. We did this to ourselves. We lied to ourselves and each other."

Hans knew that all of Brenny's words were true. They cut worse than the Winds of Change had. His spirits sank lower.

Sadness filled the air like thick, rolling smoke. No one spoke.

Hans finally broke the tension.

He stared at the table and asked her, "So what's going to happen now?"

Brenny sighed.

In a low, sad, serious voice, she told him, "I am going to have a child."

Hans sat up straight in shock and disbelief. His heart told him that it was true.

Brenny continued, "Our daughter was conceived last Friday and that is one of the reasons why I have been so sick. God told me this."

Hans knew that Adrian had heard her words in his world.

A crack of happiness invaded Hans. He knew this child came from God. He loved Brenny with all his heart and he knew that this child was conceived in love. Still, he knew they were in serious trouble.

Hans asked Brenny in a serious tone, "Did He tell you what is going to happen?"

"He said that we have to wait."

Hans got up and put his hand on Brenny's belly. His hand felt a small Light of Life glowing inside her. This pleased him. He was surprised at the pleasure it brought him despite the fact that he had such a broken heart.

Then Hans began to worry. He wondered why God would give them such a wonderful thing when they had been so destructive. Then he remembered that he had never wanted a child before and he became frightened.

Brenny got sick and vomited. Hans stayed by her. Afterwards, she tried to sleep, but she could find none. She lay miserably in the bed and kept touching her stomach wondering how she could be pregnant.

She tried to remember everything that happened Friday, but she couldn't. She wanted to ask Hans about it, but she knew in her heart that he did not want to talk about it. Her vibes told her that Hans was hiding something from her.

Time seemed to go by slower. Hans stayed up most of the night and prayed. He went to work the next day, but had no heart and energy for it. He only went to work so he could stay busy and not have time to think. Hans also knew that Brenny wanted her space to think.

Brenny got sick and vomited for a long time. Afterwards, she sat at the table and tried to eat some crackers. She barely choked a couple of them down.

As she got up from the table, Brenny thought about Adrian and wished for him. She prayed for him and asked God to let her see him. Brenny was worrying about being pregnant when she heard Adrian's voice. It surprised her and made her jump.

"We have to talk, Brenny," Adrian told her. "There is not much time and I think you

know this, too."

She felt his hand on her arm. Her head turned around and saw him. Brenny gasped and tears flooded her eyes. Adrian put his arms around her and held her.

They held each other silently for a long time. Brenny wept into his cheeks and hair. Love flowed between them, but their sadness overwhelmed any happiness the love could have brought them.

Adrian was barefoot and dressed in a simple, sleeveless tunic of white that came to his knees. A white rope tied at his waist. Brenny wondered why he wasn't wearing his usual cloth tied around his waist.

Adrian heard her thought and told her with his mind, because I wish to wear something more modest.

She worked up her courage to tell him, "I'm so sorry Adrian. I am so sorry." She began to cry into his shoulder. Unbearable sadness, guilt, regret and shame filled her. "I love you," Brenny sobbed. "I am so sorry for all those terrible things I did to you. I know what I did and it was terrible. I know I don't deserve it, but I hope that you will forgive me. Please forgive me."

Adrian told her kindly, "I told you that I forgave you. I forgave you a long time ago. I am also responsible for unkind and destructive behavior. Will you forgive me?"

Brenny weakly, but sincerely told him, "I forgive you. I am so sorry Adrian."

Adrian cried with her as his heart broke with hers. He felt the guilt and evil of his own sin rise inside him. He couldn't believe how ugly it felt every time it rose to the surface. The pain was unbearable and his tears kept flowing. The distress of his pain made him want to pray.

Tears fell like rivers as he held Brenny closer. He turned his face away from her. Adrian began to pray Father, forgive me. I have sinned.

Brenny knew that Adrian was praying. It radiated off his spirit and filled the room with power and bright light.

Brenny heard him tell God, Let her and Hans hear my confession as well. Brenny began to hear Adrian's prayer. Although Hans was in another part of Amsterdam, he heard Adrian's prayer, too.

Father, I have sinned against you. I have sinned against Brenny and Hans.

I gave into the sins of anger, envy, jealousy, frustration, desire and abuse of power. Worst of all, I gave into the sin of hate. Now I feel the sins of sadness, shame, guilt and regret. These things do not come from You and yet I let them in my heart.

I wished for suffering. I wanted Brenny and Hans to suffer. Although I love her, I wanted her to suffer. This does not make sense and it is impoverished and negative thinking.

I fed my anger and this led to abuse of power. I should never have tried to interfere and I did. I also abused my power by possessing Hans' body.

In my heart, I know that there are other sins I committed, but I do not know the names for . . . yet. But I am sure that You will let me know what they are.

Father, with an honest heart, I forgive Brenny and Hans.

The child is a gift. Help us to be responsible for her.

His heart filled with sadness when he thought of the destructive and self destructive things that they had done to each other and themselves.

Silence filled the room and the stillness made them afraid. They sat together and wondered what they should do. Finally, Adrian wrapped his legs and arms around her. He kissed her face and touched her hair. His tears would not stop flowing as he radiated his love for her into her being.

Brenny gathered her strength and put her arms and legs around him. This pleased and comforted him. Adrian and Brenny held each other silently until the tears stopped and they could talk. They knew that time was running out.

Adrian put his hand on her belly and warmth flowed from his hands into it.

"The child is very beautiful," Adrian told her.

"I know," Brenny replied. "I can see her with my mind. She looks like Hans."

Adrian told her, "I am filled with wonder about this new life. It is hard to imagine something so good can come from something so bad."

"It really changes things, doesn't it?" Brenny asked sadly. Guilt and shame began to possess her.

Adrian kindly told her, "Brenny, my spirit tells me all us are responsible for the health and life of this child. I do not care if this child belongs to Hans. I am not jealous anymore. I am too worried about what is going to happen next to worry about the past. We are in serious trouble with the Father. All of us know this."

Brenny knew that Adrian spoke the truth. She was afraid and held him tighter.

Brenny was relieved that Adrian was not unhappy about the child. He heard her thought and smiled in her hair. His smile warmed her heart.

Adrian told her, "The baby is innocent and she should not have to suffer because of us. All of us know this is a special baby. Children come from the Father and it is obvious that He is trying to tell us something. We have to accept the consequences of what we did."

Adrian's words made Brenny tremble. She was afraid and she could sense that he was also afraid.

His lips sweetly kissed hers and told her, "We do not have much time left to be alone. There is so much I need to say. I want you to know that I am sorry for what happened and that I love you. I am worried that the Father is going to separate us. If we this happens, remember that sometime in the future we will be together and the next time we will never be separated again."

Sadness flowed from her heart and rained from Brenny's eyes. There was so much that she wanted to tell him and there was so little time left. She wondered if Adrian still wanted her after all the betrayal and grief she had caused him. Adrian heard her thought. He pulled his face away from hers and he frantically searched for her eyes. She didn't want to look at him, but his eyes searched for hers until he found them and locked onto them.

Adrian felt her embarrassment, shame and guilt. He willed her to look deeply in his eyes and she saw he had the same feelings. Her vibes told her it was harder for him to acknowledge his negative feelings than it was for her to acknowledge hers.

"Yes, Brenny, I still want you," Adrian told her. "Despite the things that have happened, I have only love for you. My love is unconditional and grows within me all the time."

Adrian's voice became more loving and sincere as he said, "My feelings of love for you are forever and they will never change. Please, Brenny," Adrian pleaded with her, "Never forget this."

Brenny felt Adrian's love fill her. Despite the ugly emotions she was feeling inside, her love began to radiate into him.

Brenny whispered into his ear, "I love you, too." This cheered Adrian's breaking heart.

A vision filled her mind. In it, she saw a dark land with a long, black road. There was no sun and a low, strange, orange light illuminated the country. Twisted dead trees littered the still and sullen landscape. Three stones lay on the road and they formed a triangle. A lonely crow flew in the horizon with its wings stretched out. It tried to cry out, but its voice was silent.

Adrian saw it as clearly as she did. Although Hans was not there with them, he and Brenny knew that Hans had seen the vision, too.

Brenny looked at Adrian with fear in her eyes.

"I saw it," he told her. Brenny's simple vision validated the fear and dread they felt inside. They held each other tighter.

"Time is getting short," Adrian told her. "I want my last private words I tell you to be of weight and value. I love you."

Brenny looked at Adrian with sad eyes, "My last private words to you are: I am very sorry for every hurt I caused you. I will never hurt you again, ever. If I can, I will make it up to you somehow."

Adrian and Brenny felt Hans' presence in the building. They pulled apart and stood away from each other. Neither wanted to hurt Hans by touching in front of him.

Hans felt Adrian's presence as he entered the building. Hans ran up the stairs and opened the door.

He looked at Adrian and told him, "I prayed that you would come." Tears flooded his eyes and Hans head fell into his chest, "I am sorry, Adrian. I am so sorry. Please forgive me."

Hans stood slumped and broken. He wept silently but intensely. His body shook as he wept.

"I forgive you," Adrian replied. "You know this. I have sinned against you, too. I ask you to forgive me." Hot tears began to fall down Adrian's cheeks.

Adrian remembered how he felt when he saw Brenny with Hans. He remembered how hurt and angry he was. The pain was still there, fresh and raw. Still, Adrian knew that it was time to begin the long journey of healing. Adrian hoped that Hans would forgive him. Hans continued to weep.

He told Adrian between sobs, "I forgive you. I am so sorry I sinned against you. I don't know why I did it because I knew better. I used to be a good man who tried to obey God. I never thought I was capable of so much evil. I had no right to hurt you. I made you hate me and I did it on purpose."

Hans became inconsolable and his pain became contagious.

Sadness filled the room and everyone sat on the floor. All of them wept together in the dark. When they stopped crying, they began to think. Thoughts of the baby entered their minds at the same time.

Adrian told Brenny and Hans, "Our sin and your baby are connected. I can feel this. We have to put the child ahead ourselves."

The power of Adrian's words rang true inside Brenny's and Hans' souls.

"How do we do this?" Hans asked with worry and fear in his voice.

"We have to pray together," Adrian replied. "I think that is what He is waiting for."

"Do you think God will take this curse of slow-motion time off us?" Brenny asked.

Adrian shook his head as he said, "We will not get off that easy. I know this because time in my world became as slow as it is here. The slow time showed me what I already knew: I was an equal partner in this."

His words made all of them worry. Despair became so heavy in the room that it began to drown them. All three looked at each other and somehow they found the courage to push it away so they could pray together. Fresh tears poured from all of them as they prayed.

As they sat together on the floor, they confessed to God that they had done some very bad things to each other. They asked God to forgive them and to help them learn from their mistakes. They asked Him to help them forgive each other and themselves. Brenny, Adrian and Hans asked the Father to bless the baby and to keep her well.

All three surrendered together. They surrendered unconditionally and they offered to accept the consequences.

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They barely finished praying when Adrian felt something.

He told Brenny and Hans, "Someone is coming."

As Adrian finished saying this, the three saw an angel hovering in midair. He was beautiful to look at and wore the same type of clothing as Adrian. His wings were large and white.

He told Adrian, "I have come for you and these two people."

Adrian replied, "It is good to see you, Raziel. I am glad He sent you."

The Angel Raziel told Hans and Brenny, "Uncover your feet." Brenny kicked off her slippers and Hans nervously took off his boots and socks.

Raziel looked at Adrian and told him, "You are to bring your ring with you."

Adrian looked at her and Brenny hurriedly walked over to the carrying case of her laptop computer. She took the ring out of the pocket she had kept it in and gave it to Adrian. He put it on.

In a moment, Brenny, Hans and Adrian were transported to a strange world. Raziel sternly told them, "Stay here until I come for you." The three knew in their hearts that

Raziel would eventually take them to see God.

They found themselves sitting on the hard, flat ground of this world. The place was gray, dreary, misty and steeped in sadness. They tried to adjust their eyes so they could see better.

Brenny shuddered.

She whispered to Adrian, "Do you know where this place is?"

Adrian nodded his head knowingly as he told Brenny and Hans, "Someplace in Heaven. Someplace I have never been to."

A voice came out the mist.

It asked, "Adrian, is that you?"

Adrian stood up.

He replied, "I recognize your voice Brother Danel. You sound the same, although it has been a long time."

"A long time for both of us," Danel replied kindly and sadly.

Hans and Brenny's eyes followed the voice through the mist and saw someone emerging. It was an angel. He was about Adrian's size and had wings. They were white, retracted and about as long as Danel was tall.

Danel wore the same kind of tunic Adrian and Raziel wore. Brenny strained her eyes to see what Danel looked like, but her eyes were too swollen from crying to focus them. Also, her eyes had not yet adjusted to this dismal place. Still, she looked at Danel's wings with wonder and awe. The whiteness of them shone through the gray mist.

Brenny began to wonder why Adrian didn't have wings. Her heart told her to look at Adrian. Brenny's mouth dropped open from surprise and awe when she saw Adrian's wings.

He does have wings, after all, she thought. Makes sense. Heaven is his domain and he would have to be his real self here.

Hans saw Adrian's wings, too. He was as surprised as Brenny was. Hans knew Adrian was an angel, but had never visualized Adrian any wings.

Adrian felt Brenny's and Hans' confusion. He felt bad because he had lied to them by hiding his true appearance. Adrian turned around and walked toward Brenny and Hans.

Adrian told Hans and Brenny, "I feel that I have lied to you because I disguised my appearance. Yes, I really am an angel in every way. Forgive me for this deceit."

He looked at Brenny and told her, "I do not know why I hid them from you. I guess I did not want to be conspicuous or seem too far out of reach to you. From the moment I saw you, I loved you and wanted to be with you. In my heart, I was afraid that if you saw the wings you might find me too overwhelming and that you might reject me."

Brenny felt her heart crack. Adrian had worried about her rejecting him over something so trivial as his appearance. She realized that she had rejected him, but not because of the way he looked. Her tears flowed hot, greasy and bitter when she realized how badly she had rejected him and why. She had rejected him for ugly reasons like self-gratification and another male.

Adrian's wings were beautiful to her and she wished that she could touch them. Adrian heard her thought and smiled at her. His eyes filled with tears of heartbreak and love for her.

He let her touch his wings and Brenny was surprised at how soft they felt. She was also surprised that they were sensitive to touch.

Danel drew closer to Adrian and put his hand on Adrian's shoulder. Adrian turned around and they hugged each other sadly and warmly.

Danel told Adrian, "I am sorry we have to meet in such a place."

Adrian responded with sadness, "So am I Brother. So am I."

"At least it is good to see you" Danel replied. I still count you as one of my closest friends."

"You are still one of my closest friends, too," Adrian told him. "Why are there two hundred here? I already know who is here and I know all of you so well. I am surprised."

Danel answered, "We are here because we agreed together to sin a group and we did. Worse, we took a vow to do this."

Adrian looked at Danel with surprise and asked, "Did you not remember that once an angel takes a vow he always keeps it?"

"That is why we took the vow together."

"What is wrong with that?" Adrian asked.

"It stated our independence and our intention to use our free will," Danel replied. "The Father did not like it, especially when we used our free will on earth."

Hans drew his knees up into his chest and buried his head in them. He began to pray and weep.

Brenny sat slumped. She felt the child moving inside her, but it did not bring her any comfort. She was too sad to pray or even think. Brenny listened to Adrian and Danel. She knew that Adrian was very worried and melancholy. Brenny was glad that Adrian had a friend and fellow angel to talk with.

Adrian asked Danel, "Where is this place?"

Danel answered, "It is a place of contemplation and penance on the Third Level of Heaven. I do not know where the other Brothers who commit big sins are put."

Adrian gave Danel a surprised look and asked him, "You mean that there are more errant angels than us?"

"I imagine there are quite a few," Danel said to him. "Anytime you have free will, there is a chance you will make mistakes. Sometimes, those mistakes are very big. I guess we are not as perfect as we thought."

Another angel walked out of the mist. He knew that Adrian was there and he wanted to visit with him, too. Brenny heard Adrian's thoughts and she knew that this angel was named Semjaza.

Adrian and Semjaza hugged. Three more angels appeared. Their names were Sariel, Armaros and Kokabel. Because of his intense sadness, Armaros was very noticeable. He took a place on the floor by the other angels and held a cloth over his face.

Adrian had never seen one of his brothers in such terrible emotional condition. He became afraid as he asked Danel, "Why is Armaros so sad? Why does he put a cloth on his face?"

Danel answered, "Because he is mourning. We are all mourning."

Adrian became more afraid. He was beginning to worry that he might have to live permanently in this place of sadness. Then he thought of Brenny and the baby and he forgot his worries about himself.

"How long have you been here, Brother?" Adrian asked Danel.

"I do not know," Danel answered. "None of us know. But we have been here for a long, long time."

The Father put us here for seventy generations. We do not know how long a generation is to Him. Then He will talk to us. So you see, we are in a lot of trouble with Him. You are the first visitors to come here since we were confined. I feel Raziel's essence on you, so I know that he brought you here."

Kokablel looked at Adrian and asked him, "Brother Adrian, what have you done that is so bad that the Father would have Raziel bring you here? Who are these mortals? I can see this woman has a child within her. I wonder why the Father would bring these mortals here, unless He is going to talk to all of you . . . "

"Or confine you here like us," Sariel said, finishing Kokablel's sentence.

Great sadness swept through Adrian. Tears began to run down his face. "Brothers," Adrian told them, "I sinned. I committed great sins. At first, they were small sins, but then they began to add up into big sins.

I sinned with these mortals. Our hearts tell us that the Father is going to talk to all of us about what we did. I think He has put us here to see or learn something. He will talk to us when He is ready to, so I imagine that we are going to be here for quite a while."

Semjaza asked Adrian, "What kind of sins are you guilty of?"

Adrian shook his head and said, "Many sins in the realms of destruction and self destruction."

Semjaza looked at him and said, "I feel your spirit, Adrian. It is heavy from sadness. This does not seem like the Adrian we know. You were always so good. You pleased the Father so much, He raised you above most of us.

What happened?"

Adrian replied, "I do not know. I still do not have it all figured out, but I am working on it."

Semjaza remembered that Adrian was with people and this was really phenomenal because flesh was not supposed to mix with spirit (Heaven). Even better, the angels never had any visitors and they were happy to meet and talk to anyone new, including humans.

He asked the question all the other angels wanted to ask, "Who are these Sons of Clay?"

"The people I corrupted," Adrian told his Brothers.

The angels looked at Adrian with pity and kindness.

"Are they witnesses against you?" Danel asked.

Adrian answered, "I wish. I want to take responsibility for everything that happened, but I already know that this is impossible. The Father is going to hold all of us responsible for what happened between us. We did some bad things individually and collectively."

Danel told Adrian, "Maybe you three are here so you can rest and heal enough to see the Father."

Brenny and Hans heard Danel's words and they felt the truth in them. None of them were in very good emotional and spiritual shape.

Danel continued, "I imagine that all of you are here to think and pray, too."

By now the angels knew that Adrian loved the woman who sat sadly on the ground. They knew that she had caused Adrian much pain, but that he loved her any way.

Adrian knew that he needed to tell his brothers about what happened. He needed to see if they could give him some advice and counsel. Adrian wasn't worried about himself, but he wanted to see if he could petition God for mercy for Brenny and Hans.

Adrian fought his sadness and worry to clear his thoughts. The other angels drew around him in a circle to bring him comfort and support.

"First of all, the woman here is named Brenny," Adrian told his brothers. "I love her. I love her with all my spirit." Emotion overwhelmed him as he thought of how much he loved her.

Pushing the sadness back, he continued, "But I think I should start at the beginning," Adrian continued, "When I and the other four self-exiled ourselves."

"You were always the idealist, Adrian," Danel answered. "You always had the conviction to stand up for what you believed. All the Brothers respected you and the others for your sincere beliefs. We missed you and the others when you left. We marveled at your self-power to believe in something so deeply.

And you were right, Adrian. Suffering is terrible. Many of the Brothers remembered what you and the others said and did."

Adrian told Danel, "I missed everyone at first. I will admit to that. I missed the fellowship and happiness I felt in our home."

"I kept myself busy by praying, thinking, learning. I looked out into the universe and watched the activities. When time got too slow for me, I sped it up or I slept for a while. I never wanted anything for myself and I tried to be content.

Then, one time, I felt the Winds of Fate blow through me.

I wondered, Why they would blow through me? I followed them with my heart to this old house on earth. There was a mirror in one of its closets and I was attracted to it. Once in a while, I would look through it, but I never saw anything interesting.

One time, when I was least expecting it, my heart told me to look through the mirror. I looked through it and I saw Brenny. I instantly knew that she was my mate and I

was instantly in love with her. I never wanted anything like I wanted her.

I bid her to come to my world and she did twice. She loved me, too, and wanted to always be with me. When she came to see me the second time, I knew there were things I needed to do so I could be a good husband for her.

I needed to see the Father and fix some spiritual matters with him. I had been refusing to listen to His Words to me, even though I had been praying to the Father all the time I had been gone. I knew that I needed to seek His forgiveness about this and listen to Him.

So I sent her back to her world. She did not want to go, but I made her go back, anyway. I had a bad feeling about doing this. It was a hard choice, but my need to make things right with the Father won out."

Hans' head was still buried in his knees, but he heard all of Adrian's words and it made him suffer. Guilt pounded in his breast and the tears flowed down his jeans into his lap.

Brenny was too sad to move. She sat with her head down.

"The Father and I talked. We got things straightened out and He did not care if Brenny stayed with me. He felt that Brenny deserved some happiness."

Brenny's heart broke at Adrian's words. It hurt her to know that God had been concerned about her happiness. For years, she had wondered if most of her prayers to God had ended up in a dead-end letter pile because her life had continued to spiral down. She knew at that moment that God had heard every one of her prayers. Regret and tears filled her. Brenny wished that she could have done things differently.

Hans felt the same way. He wished that he could go back in time and change things. Waves of guilt and shame crashed within him. Hans blamed himself for seducing Brenny when he knew that she loved someone else.

Adrian continued his story, "But I took too long to get back to her. I also did not clearly communicate my plans to her. She should have understood better why she had to go back to her reality until I had things ready."

Semjaza asked Adrian, "Did she know that you were an angel?"

"I told her," Adrian answered, "But I do not think that she really understood. I hid my wings from her, like I hid my worries from her. This was wrong and it is one of my biggest regrets. I gave her my ring, but she lost faith in me, anyway. I should have known better, too, because I knew that she did not have a lot of faith."

Danel said, "Humans are like that. You can show them every magickal thing you can think of and most of them still will not believe. That, or they forget the next day."

Semjaza nodded at Adrian to continue his story.

Adrian told them, "In the meantime, she grew weary of waiting for me. She was sad and lonely and then she met this man. " Adrian looked over at Hans.

Hans could feel Adrian and the other angels looking at him. He felt guilty and dirty because he had caused Adrian so much pain and grief. He looked up at Adrian and told him, "I am so sorry for the suffering I caused you, Adrian. Please forgive me . . . "

Danel told Adrian, "He looks like one of us."

"I know," Adrian replied sadly. "He is a very good man and still is one, even though things got out of control."

Hans looked at Adrian with surprise. He was shocked that Adrian had said such a nice thing about him, especially since Hans had been so mean and cruel to Adrian. Adrian picked up on Hans' feelings.

Adrian told Hans, "Hans, I told you that I forgave you and you know I mean it with all of my spirit. I wish I could take away your sadness, but I cannot."

Hans wished that Adrian wouldn't be so kind to him and that Adrian would hate him again. Even though Adrian had forgiven him, Hans wondered if he would ever be able to forgive himself.

Adrian began to tell his story again.

He told his Brothers, "So my beloved got with this man Hans and she began to love him. This broke my heart, although I knew that she was destined to be mine eventually. I thought that if I could reason with both of them . . .

"It did not work, did it?" asked Sariel.

Adrian shook his head 'no'.

He told Sariel, "I did not understand humans or their nature. I knew that Brenny and Hans were good persons and I thought that they would stop their affair if I spoke to their hearts about it. Instead, they reacted the opposite of what I expected."

Kokablel chuckled. Adrian wondered how someone could laugh in such a place. Kokablel looked at Adrian and said, "Poor Adrian! You are still so innocent! Forgive me for laughing, Brother, but I am laughing about humans. It seems to me that they have not changed since we knew them so long ago."

Adrian was confused and he waited until his brothers stopped laughing to continue his story.

He told them, "My beloved and this man Hans became angry with me. They began to defile themselves in front of me."

Brenny and Hans cringed. They remembered . . .

"I should have left them alone," Adrian sad with sadness, "But Brothers, I was so in love with this woman that I could not stop wanting her."

I wanted to talk with her. I knew that once I talked with her, that she would come home with me. All three of us knew this.

I also knew that Hans was keeping secrets from her. I wanted her to know what these secrets were, but I could not find a way to tell her."

Semjaza asked, "What secrets were these?"

Armaros, sitting sad on the ground, sat straighter to hear what Adrian was going to say.

Hans' head sank lower and he wrapped his arms around his legs and wept.

"Hans has power," Adrian told his Brothers, "He has more power than most humans. Brenny knew that he had a lot of power, but he did not tell her or show her the real extent of that power."

Semjaza looked ashen and sad.

Adrian asked him, "Why do you look so sad, Brother?"

Danel replied, "Semjaza is the one who taught our clay brothers magick. That is one of the many reasons we are imprisoned here."

The place became quiet. Everyone was listening as Adrian continued his story.

"Hans is a chaos magician with great power," Adrian told them. "He gave most of it up when he went back to his faith in the Father. But Hans is a hypocrite because he still practices magick."

I saw him make a stone bird come alive. Hans opened the window and let it fly out. It flew for a while, then he wished for it and it came back. When it returned, Hans turned it back into stone. This happened one night when Brenny was sleeping."

Brenny knew what stone bird Adrian was talking about. It was a raven that Hans had sculpted out of rock. The raven was still in his flat, covered up with a piece of canvas. Brenny never knew that Hans had the power to make it come alive. This worried her. She wondered how many secrets each of them had and how many of these secrets all of them were going to learn.

Adrian continued, "I saw Hans turn things into a metal that humans value called gold. The bracelet Brenny has on is one of the things he turned into this metal."

Brenny touched the bracelet.

"Did he use his magick to make your woman love him and want to be with him?" Danel asked.

Adrian's shook his head sorrowfully and slowly as he told Danel, "He used magick to make her come to him, but she loved him on her own. It does not matter anymore. Hans loves her as much as I do and love made us do stupid things. Then I did something really drastic and desperate."

Hans buried his head farther into his knees and wept harder. Brenny began to wonder what kind of magick Hans had used on her and when.

Pitiful Armaros looked up from under his cloth and asked Adrian, ""What was this desperate thing you did, Adrian?"

"I was so desperate to talk to Brenny so bad that I possessed Hans' body to do it," Adrian told them.

The angels became quiet.

Brenny gasped in shock. It was then that she knew the dream she had was true. She began to fitfully piece the parts of her dream together in her mind.

Adrian looked at her with mournful eyes and told her, "I am very sorry Brenny! I did not mean for those things to happen."

His voice filled with pain as he told her, "Forgive me."

Adrian's breaking heart made hers break. She could feel his embarrassment and humiliation as he sank to the ground. The other angels sat with him and they still kept their little circle.

Brenny looked across the little circle of angels and told Adrian with a heartfelt voice, "I forgive you, Adrian. Deep down, I wondered the dream was true because I could feel the essence of you in my spirit. Please forgive me for asking you to stay.

I would never have asked you if I had known it would get you in this much trouble. I just love you so much and I missed you so bad. But I was selfish and impatience, too. I wanted to know you intimately then when I could have and should have waited."

Adrian's head dropped down with sadness and shame.

Hans filled with so much shame that he turned his back from the others and buried his weeping face in his hands. He wished that he had a cloth to cover his face like

Armaros.

Everyone heard Hans' wish. Armarios shifted uneasily. It tragic enough that he and some of the other angels should feel such great despair that they kept cloths on their faces. He and the other angels felt pity for Hans.

Brenny's mind began to remember that night, a night that seemed to happen so long ago. She continued to feel Adrian's shame and recoiled in dread because she helped to cause it.

"Brenny, things are not what they seemed to be," Adrian told her. "First of all, I never had any intentions of using Hans' body to make love to you."

Adrian put his face in his hands and cried. The other angels felt sadness from watching him and the two humans suffer so much. He cried for a long time. Brenny and Hans wept with him.

It took a while before Adrian could pull himself together to tell the rest of the story.

Finally, he told his brothers, "I tried everything I could think of to get to Brenny's world, but I was prevented. I thought that we could enter this world if we wanted to, and the one time I wish to do this, I could not."

Adrian's Brothers moved around as if they were uncomfortable. Adrian's heart told him that they knew why he had been unable to get to earth. They heard Adrian's thought and they filled with sadness.

Finally, Armarios spoke from under the cloth hiding his face, "Adrian, because we sinned so much on the earth, angels are banned from earth unless they are on official business from the Father."

Adrian sat and thought. Now he knew why finding a way to earth had been so hard. After a few moments, he shrugged and smiled at Armarios. Although Armarios had not seen the smile, he could feel it. Armarios smiled underneath his cloth and although Adrian did not see it, he felt the warmth and good wishes of it.

Adrian continued, "When I first possessed Hans, I argued with him and while I argued with him, I let him trick me. Brothers, I underestimated how cunning and powerful he is."

Danel asked Adrian, "What do you mean that he tricked you?"

Shame and wonder filled Adrian's voice when he told them, "When I was arguing with him, Hans willed his body into hers. It never entered my mind that he would do something like this.

He did this to put me in serious trouble. Hans already knew that I had broken cosmic laws by possessing him, but he knew that I would be in worse trouble if I were

intimate with her in his body. Hans thought that if I got in enough trouble, I would be sent to a place like this and would be out of his way.

I was so angry that he tricked me, I sent his soul to the oldest part of the universe to stay there until I could gather my thoughts and figure out what to do.

It is my fault. I should never have possessed him and I possessed him at a bad time. Hans and Brenny were getting ready to make love. I should have waited until they were finished, but I was so desperate to talk to Brenny that I would not wait."

Adrian's voice reflected introspection as he said, "I never thought that he would trick me like that. Especially when he was so desperate for so long to keep her all to himself."

"So I found myself in her and she knew it was me," Adrian said with a sigh. "She called me by my name and before I could take myself out of her, I felt her soul go through me. I was overcome by its power of love. She also moved her body under me and I began to feel this powerful and wonderful desire for her.

Then she asked me to untie her hands and take off the blindfold so she could hold and see me."

The angels were surprised at what Adrian had just told them. The cloth fell from Armaros's face as he listened in astonishment."

Danel asked Adrian, "Untie her hands and take off her blindfold?" Semjaza began to laugh and Danel laughed with him. Armaros was too miserable to laugh.

Adrian was confused at their laughter.

He told them, "They played some kind of game that they called 'Trust'. I told you, they were always defiling themselves in front of me, hoping that I would eventually quit trying to appeal to their consciences."

After he stopped laughing, Danel asked Adrian, "What happened after you freed her?"

Adrian replied, "I made Hans' body look like my body. But she knew it was both of us. Her psychic senses told her what was going on. I wanted to get out of her but something unexpected happened.

She willed for her soul go through me again. My instincts reacted and I tried to push myself deeper in her. After that, I could not stop wanting to be inside her, my spirit touching her spirit. I did not know anything about intimacy, but I learned fast."

"What were you thinking, Adrian?" Danel asked.

"I was not thinking about anything except love." Adrian replied. "Our hearts and souls were meshed as one through flesh and the feeling was overwhelming. I could not

think. Neither one of us could think. We were overwhelmed by the love that we had for each other and the exchange of energy between us.

If I could have thought, I would have left Hans' body. I just could not think. I was too happy to be with her and I was too happy because she wanted to be with me."

Adrian's words struck a sharp pain through Brenny as she realized how much Adrian loved her. Her conscience became heavier. She hated herself for being so evil to him. Brenny put her face in her hands and cried. Adrian felt sadness for her and wept with her.

After awhile, Danel said to Adrian, "You want counsel from us. We know that. You must tell us the rest of the story so we can understand your problems better."

Adrian willed himself to stop crying, although Brenny continued to. It took him several moments to compose himself.

Then Adrian said, "Being inside this woman was the most pleasurable thing I ever felt. Our passion and love increased for each other and we could not stop building up and releasing energy between us. In the back of my mind, I knew I was committing sin on sin, but I was willing to pay for it because I was so happy being there with her.

Hans came back. I was so caught up being with Brenny, I did not feel him sneak back in his body. I told you, he is very powerful and I underestimated him. He found his way home fast."

"Why did he enter his body when you were in it?" asked Kokablel.

"Because he wanted to enjoy the sex with us," Adrian answered. "Hans felt the power of the love between Brenny and me and it was appealing to him. Hans also knew that she would choose to be with me, so he wanted to be with her one more time. Even though I was there, too."

Adrian filled with guilt, shame and disgust. He did not know how to process his thoughts or words to tell the angels that he and Hans had been intimate with Brenny at the same time. He looked at Brenny and wished that she would look at him.

She heard his thoughts and looked at Adrian with swollen eyes and a weak spirit.

He told her, "Brenny, I am telling you the truth. I did not know he was there until it was too late. Worse, after I knew that he was there, I forgot that he was there until the end. I still do not understand how I could forget. It must have been all that magick."

She frantically tried to remember that night better. Adrian heard her thoughts and unmasked the memory. She began to remember everything now . . .

Brenny felt dirty, ashamed and she began to hate herself more. She wished that she had waited for Adrian so all this misery would never have happened.

The baby fluttered inside her. Brenny wondered if she and Hans would be allowed to raise their child. Brenny worried if God was going to keep all of them in this dismal place forever.

"There were three of us in that room and all of us were having sex," Adrian tearfully told Brenny. "Not only that, all of us were practicing sex magick. You and Hans started doing it and then I started doing it, too.

I did not want you to know so I took your memories away. I took your memories away because I did not want you to know the truth and I wanted to avoid it.

He tried to organize his thoughts, while searching for the highlights.

Adrian continued, "Hans and I let things go too far and we knew it. He and I had faith and we could have used the power from it to stop the destruction before things became critical. The pedestal of power is belief.

We knew that Brenny did not have much faith. We ignored this and we were careless. Persons without faith are usually more wounded in psychic wars than those who have it. Not only that, both of us put her in an impossible situation."

He stopped for a moment while he searched his mind and heart.

Adrian told his brothers, "We neglected her, too. We knew that she was not as strong as we were and instead of trying to help her, we thought only of our selves, completely forgetting about what she needed or wanted.

Something came to Adrian's mind as he told them, "My heart keeps telling that we did something else, but I still cannot put it all the pieces together. Something remains hidden from me."

Hans sat up. Adrian's words reminded him of similar thoughts and feelings.

Hans told Adrian telepathically, We need to explore these thoughts and feelings together, but we need to do it privately. Remember this time. Every time we think of it, something happens to distract us.

Brenny wished that they would forget again. She wasn't ready for them to know the truth.

Her wish distracted Adrian and Hans. They wondered why she would wish that. Their minds filled with many questions and they too confused to worry.

Adrian's brothers knew why he and Hans were confused, but they knew that it was useless to tell them.

Semjaza asked Adrian, "Do you want to stop talking?"

Bewildered, Adrian thought for a moment and his worries came back. He tried to sort out why he was worried until he remembered that night.

Adrian replied, "No, I want to finish the story." He hoped that if he finished his story, that he would remember something that he and Hans kept forgetting.

Adrian continued his story, "When I woke up the next day, I was still inside Hans' body and his soul was also inside his body. I remembered that he had been with us. It upset me."

Danel was a little confused. He asked Adrian, "How did all of you sleep?"

"Intimately and together," Adrian told Danel. "All of us slept inside each other. In a way, it was more intimate than the love making."

Adrian told Kokablel, "I blame myself for everything that happened. Things would not have escalated like they did if I had not interfered. Brenny would have come to me eventually. My spirit tells me that my recklessness contributed to the conception of their child."

"Their child?" Danel asked. "We thought the child was yours, too,"

Adrian gave Danel a confused look and asked him, "What do you mean?"

"Exactly what I told you," Danel answered.

"Why do you ask this when you know we do not have children?" Adrian asked.

Adrian's Brothers became quiet. Each one wondered who would tell Adrian. Adrian sensed their thoughts and asked them, "What are you debating in your thoughts? What is it you wish to tell me?"

Armaros finally decided to speak.

He told Adrian through his shroud, "We can have children. It is against the Father's wishes, but we can have them because we have free will. We are imprisoned here for many crimes and one of them is for having children."

Adrian, Brenny and Hans realized who fathered the child. Now Adrian knew why he had felt an instant, intimate connection to the baby when he heard Brenny tell Hans that she was pregnant. Now Adrian understood why he felt so responsible for the child. He had believed that he was responsible for the baby because he had been with Brenny and Hans at the moment of the child's creation. Now all of them knew the truth about this.

All three already knew the child was a miracle child because Brenny was sterile. When Adrian had restored her health, he had left that part of her untouched because he saw no need to fix it.

Now Adrian knew how miraculous the child was. He was happy the child was part of him, but this made him worry more. Brenny and Hans worried with him and all of them were embarrassed.

Secretly, Brenny was happy that Adrian was also a father to the child, but she was ashamed about how the child was created. Her baby kicked hard as if she had heard her mother's thought. Adrian and Hans knew what had happened and they gave Brenny disapproving looks. Their eyes urged her to stop thinking negative thoughts about the baby.

When he checked his spirit, Hans knew that the child was Adrian's as well as his. Hans felt sad. He wanted the child to be only his and Brenny's. His first thoughts were that God was punishing him, but he caught himself thinking the negative thought and chose to reverse it.

He also realized that the child was no punishment. His spirit told him that the child held the keys to everyone's salvation.

Hans knew that he had to move past his regret about the parentage of the child. He prayed to God and asked Him to help him stop any negative thought that might try to crop up about the child. Hans' spirit told him that his prayer would be granted. The answer to his prayer buoyed him. Hans had been worried that God could not hear anyone's prayers from such a desolate place.

The angels felt God's answer to Hans' prayer. They looked at each other with hope and caution.

The angels gave Adrian some time to collect his thoughts.

Adrian finally continued, "The dull, heavy, yellow light that illuminates their world burned into my face and it woke me up. I knew immediately that I had to get out of Hans' body. Before I got out of it, I erased Brenny's memory of what happened.

I did not want her to remember this sin we committed together. I was going to ask the Father to let me take responsibility for all our sins, even Hans'. I blamed myself for what happened and I wanted to protect her.

I thought about erasing Hans' memory, but I thought that he should remember. I wanted him to share my guilt and shame. That was terrible thinking! It was destructive and there had already been enough destruction."

Danel told Adrian, "I still do not understand how you could not feel his spirit next to yours in his body."

Adrian shook his head as he said, "Brother, I still do not know why I could not sense him right away. I was so overwhelmed by being with this woman that I did not think to watch for intruders, either. But at the same time, I was an intruder."

Danel replied, "Adrian, you are still so innocent! This crafty human was already an intruder. He had intruded in your relationship."

Hans felt all the males looking at him through the mistiness of the place. He knew that he should turn around and face Adrian. Hans slowly turned his body around and saw many faces. He fought to find enough courage to speak.

Weakly, Hans told Adrian, "I only went into my body to try to throw you out, even though I knew that it was impossible. This is because you are more powerful and would have sent my soul farther away the next time.

The moment I reentered my body, I knew it was wrong. I tried to will my soul out, but for some reason I became trapped and could not get out. I think the energy created between you and Brenny trapped me in."

Adrian was surprised. He hadn't thought of that. Adrian felt ashamed that he had thought the worst of Hans.

Hans heard Adrian's thought and felt another kind of shame.

He looked at Adrian and told him, "I knew that I was stuck with both of you. I also knew that it would be my last chance to be with her. I joined in. I knew what I was doing and I liked it. It appealed to my dark side."

Hans searched his heart before he said, "There is a dark part of myself that likes dangerous, forbidden things. That is why I became a magician. For the last few years, I tried to change my attraction to dark things, but now I see that I did not want to change it as badly as I thought I did.

I did not have to contribute to the energy of what was going on, but I wanted to. Not only did I contribute to the energy, I fueled it with my own dark desire. This alone makes me responsible for all our sins. When I see God, I am going to ask Him to punish only me.

Adrian told Hans, "All of us fueled the energy that night, not just you."

Adrian looked at his brothers and told them, "Now that you know my story. What I want to know is: How bad are these sins and can I take full responsibility for them? Also, what kind of punishment do you think the Father might give me or us?"

The angels sat and thought for a while.

Danel spoke, "Your sins are pretty bad, Adrian, especially since you committed sins in confederation with others, particularly with humans. The Father charged us with protecting them, remember?"

You can ask the Father to take full responsibility for these sins, but I do not think that He will agree to do it. This is evidenced by the presence of the two humans."

Adrian nodded. He knew that Danel's words were true.

Danel continued, "The Father must be very displeased because he brought them here with you. As miserable as this place of regret is, it is still part of Heaven. Heaven is not a place for flesh. You know this.

It is obvious that He is going to hold them accountable for their deeds."

A chill of dread and fear ran through Adrian, Hans and Brenny. Their spirits reminded them that Danel's words were true.

Danel continued, "As for punishment, I cannot even begin to think of what He will do. We did not think the Father would imprison us like this, but He did. We are still waiting for His judgement, so in reality, He has not penalized us yet. It feels like it and seems like it. Instead, we have been penalizing ourselves.

There is a child between you, so we know that this baby has significance. It is obvious the Father created her, so your child will have something to do with the Father's plans for you.

I wish I could give you greater words of comfort, but I cannot. I just hope that He does not let you go to Hell."

Adrian began to shake when he heard Danel's last words.

"You mean there is a place worse than this?" Adrian asked Danel unbelievably.

"Believe it or not, there is. It is one place no one should go to," Danel replied. "It is a place of complete darkness and despair and it is a place you put yourself. We do not know if anyone comes back from there."

Adrian was quiet for a while, but then he thought of another question to ask Danel.

"Brother, what kind of marks are these on me?" Adrian asked him as he pointed to several long, red scratches on his arms. "I have them all over me. They are on my chest, neck, shoulders, back, and legs. I even have them on my feet. Brenny and Hans have them too."

Danel and the other angels looked at Adrian's arms and feet, and saw scratch marks.

Brenny and Hans recoiled in embarrassment and humiliation. Their reactions made Adrian confused.

Adrian asked his Brothers, "Are these the marks of sin?"

Danel and the other angels began to laugh. Even Armaros laughed under his crying towel.

Danel fought his laughter as he replied, "Yes, Adrian, they are the marks of sin." The angels continued to laugh. Then Danel told Adrian what the marks were.

Adrian felt very embarrassed from his ignorance.

Danel felt Adrian's embarrassment and replied, "If we had not gone to earth and taken women as wives, we would still be innocent and not know about these things, either."

Adrian began to laugh with his Brothers.

"Thank you for making me laugh," Danel told him. "Laughter has lifted my spirit a little. I am glad to see you again, Brother, even if it is under these pitiful circumstances."

Later, the three sat quietly in the twilight darkness for a long time and reflected. Adrian, Hans and Brenny felt great sadness. Each one prayed until they could find no more words to pray. They tried to rest, but found none. The angels offered them food, but the three of them did not feel like eating.

Each one blamed themselves for their sins and the sins of the others. Each one wished that they could take the punishment for the others.

Brenny wondered about something and Adrian felt her curiosity. "Tell me your thoughts, Brenny," he told her.

"These thoughts are minor compared to my other ones," she replied.

"Tell me anyway," Adrian told her.

Adrian was so kind to her that she felt compelled to tell him what she had been thinking about.

Brenny told Adrian, "I wonder why Hans has lost his Dutch accent. I also wonder why all of us speak the same language."

Adrian smiled at her and told her, "In Heaven, everyone speaks the same language. Some people on earth call it the 'language of angels' but you and Hans speak it fine and are not angels, so I guess the language is universal."

In the stillness, Hans began to sing. He sang to try to find comfort and express his feelings. He sang 'Down in a Hole' by Alice in Chains.

All the angels listened to Hans sing.

Kokabel whispered to Adrian, "This human not only looks like us, he sings as well as we do. What kind of song is this?"

"It is a type of music called 'rock and roll,'" Adrian whispered back to Kokabel. "I did not know if I liked this music when I first heard it, but I have heard enough of it now to know that I like it. I heard a lot of it because Hans' home was always full of music when I watched him and Brenny."

Hans continued to sing. His song brought comfort to the angels and many other angels came forward from the mist to hear his song. Later, he taught some of them the words and they sang the song with him.

Brenny frantically tried to recall scripture that she knew. She wanted to find a key in the scriptures that might give her and the others hope. Jesus' words in The Secret Book of James, Chapter 9, verse 7, kept finding their way to her mind. Jesus said, "I tell you the truth: whoever receives life and believes in the kingdom will never leave the kingdom, not even if the Father wishes to cast such a person out."

She recited this scripture over and over in her mind. The other angels heard her. They did not recognize it because it had been written after their confinement. Nevertheless, they knew it was scripture and it gave them hope.

Adrian's Brothers asked Brenny to tell them about other scripture they did not know about. She told them what she could remember. She told them scripture from The Old Testament, The New Testament, The Secret Teachings of Jesus, and some of the books of The Lost and Forgotten Books of the Bible.

Hans remembered scripture, too, and he recanted what he remembered.

After a long while, the three began to get hungry and tired. They ate and slept. Because they were afraid, they slept close to each other with Brenny in the middle. They slept for a long time and the sleep renewed their energy.

They were still sorry for what they had done and asked each other again for forgiveness. Hans, Brenny and Adrian prayed individually and collectively. They reflected and waited.

The angels wished to hear news of the earth. They had missed a lot of history. Brenny and Hans told them what could remember. Everyone ate together and they visited together.

Because they were confined to a place of reflection, the angels and mortals were respectful to each other and their invisible landlord. They were careful to balance the time they spent visiting with the time they spent for retrospection.

Hans became good friends with Kokabel. They talked and sang together many times. Kokabel gave Hans a stringed instrument to play. It looked a little like a mandolin and it sounded like a cross between a mandolin and a guitar.

Hans quickly taught himself how to play it. The angels were impressed with Hans' musical ability. He played and sang flawlessly. Everyone enjoyed listening to him.

Later, Adrian worriedly asked Hans, "How can you sing and play an instrument in this place?"

"Why not?" Hans replied. "No one has told me not to. I think, pray and do my time here like everyone else here. Singing and playing gives me comfort. I am sure that God likes music and I do not think that He is offended as long as I am respectful of Him, others and myself."

Adrian thought about Hans' answer and said nothing.

Hans continued to sing with the angels. They taught him some of their songs and he taught them some of his.

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Brenny, Hans and Adrian stayed with the Watchers for a long time. There was no sense of time in this place of rest and contemplation, so none of them knew how long they had been there. They did not know how far along the pregnancy was because it was hidden from them. Every time they tried to fathom time, they became confused.

Brenny felt the child grow within her. She, Hans and Adrian prayed constantly for the baby. They constantly worried if the child would be born there because they did not want the child to be born in such grayness.

Adrian and Hans knew something was troubling Brenny, but she kept her thoughts from them. They finally asked her to tell them about what was bothering her, but she refused to tell them. This worried Adrian and Hans. Brenny felt bad that she put more worries on them, but she couldn't tell them . . . not yet.

All of them had so many worries. They worried about each other, about the baby, and about what the Father would say to them.

Eventually, the time came for them to see God. They tried to wait patiently for Raziel to come and get them.

The angels knew that the three would be leaving soon. They went to visit them and wished them well.

Kokablel hugged Adrian. Adrian felt Kokablel's love and concern for him.

He told Adrian, "The Brothers and I have been praying for all of you. We know that your time with us is growing short.

I wish circumstances were better and all of us were with the Father, together as a family. Angels and mortals gathered under the same sky. This will come true someday."

Adrian knew that Kokablel and the other brothers were worried if the Father would

ever forgive him and the other angels. It was a worry that they carried heavy in their hearts all the time. Adrian also knew that they worried if the Father still loved them despite their transgressions against Him.

Right after Adrian's conversation with Kokabel, the Angel Raziel came for them.

Raziel told them to take their clothes and jewelry off. The only things they had to leave on were their rings. They obeyed, but they felt very uncomfortable about being naked in front of each other and Raziel. Naked and ashamed, they instantly found themselves in the throne room of the Omnipotent.

Adrian, Brenny and Hans stood before the Lord of Hosts, naked and pitiful. They wanted to cover themselves with their hands, but it was forbidden. They were cold and very uncomfortable.

A bright light radiated from the throne and it forced their eyes to look down. Brenny and Hans were astonished by the peace and beauty they felt.

God began to speak and his voice was full of love, kindness and concern for them. This surprised Brenny and Hans. They hadn't known what to expect, but they didn't expect Him to be so loving and kind to them. This heartened them.

He told them collectively, "You have sinned against Me, against each other and against yourselves. I am interested in what you have to say about this. Each one of you will confess to me.

Hans, you will tell Me your story first."

Hans was full of fear and dread. He was worried if he would even be able to find the courage to speak. All of Hans' life, he had wished to see God. Now that Hans finally had his wish, he did not want it.

Hans knew the Father was waiting and he knew that he had to speak. Somehow, he found some courage.

Hans walked two steps forward and bowed his head.

With sincerity and regret, Hans told God, "First of all, I ask for mercy for the baby. Please keep her well and shield her from all suffering. Thank you for giving her to us.

Second, "I ask for Your forgiveness. I have sinned against You, Brenny , Adrian and myself. I am sorry for what I did and I am ashamed."

Tears rolled down Hans' face as he said, "Father, you gave me everything and I abused it. Most people receive some blessings and there are others who receive little, if any, blessings. But you gave almost every blessing. You made me handsome,

smart, talented and healthy. You gave me great psychic power when most people have little, if any. Yet, I took those things for granted and then I abused them.

I used my blessings to seduce two women who belonged to others. I could have had anyone I wanted, but I always wanted someone who could not belong to me. We both know there is a dark side to my personality that makes me impetuous and we both know how destructive this is. I should have learned my lesson the first time when I almost destroyed Elsie's life, marriage and family.

I was repentant for what I did, You know this, but I went out and did it again. You also know that this time I loved Brenny more than I loved Elsie. I never imagined love like I feel for Brenny. I knew I was committing sin, but I would not stop.

When I became involved with Brenny, I stopped praying for myself or Your counsel. This was a serious error. I stopped praying for myself because I knew that You would speak to my heart and tell me to stop my destructive behavior. Although my love for Brenny is different from my love for You, I put my love for Brenny first. I was wrong for doing this, too."

Brenny and Adrian's hearts sank. They remembered that they had put their own desires before everything else, including God. Their heads nodded in agreement with Hans' words.

"I was jealous of Adrian," Hans said sadly. "My psychic power told me about him the moment I saw Brenny. Still, I coveted her.

You and I know that I loved Brenny the moment I saw her picture in the book jacket of her book. I saw her beautiful face and my heart saw such loveliness radiating from her soul.

Then I read her book and I was moved by such a deep and moving story. I tasted the sweet honey of her mind, heart and spirit. I began to love her and I wanted her although she did not know anything about me. Although I lived on the other side of the world."

Brenny was surprised that her book could affect Hans like that. Especially since it had died on the vine so mercilessly.

Hans continued, "Brenny is the most beautiful woman in the world to me. I didn't care about what she looked like or how old she was. I didn't care about what her life's circumstances were, or if she belonged to someone else. Somehow, I was determined to find her and have her. I wrote her a letter and when she never wrote back, I brought out things that I had put away. Things I had put away because You had told me to do when I quit my membership in the secret society."

Brenny wondered what Hans meant by 'secret society'. Her heart told her that some day in the distant future, she was going to learn.

"I used magick and my psychic powers to bring Brenny to me," Hans told everyone. He turned around to look Adrian and Brenny in the eye.

Then Hans turned toward God and said, "I never once consulted You about this. We both know I am reckless when I want something and I never thought once about the consequences.

You also know that if the magick had not worked, I would have gone to Minnesota to find her and seduce her. Really, I hoped that the magick would work. I didn't want to go on another plane ride and I don't care for the US.

Instead, she found her way to me. At first, I thought the magick had brought her, but now I realize it was a combination of things. It was Fate."

Hans sighed sadly as he said, "Underneath, I knew my love for Brenny was doomed, but I tried to hang on to her as long as I could. I became desperate and reckless and I began to act and react badly.

I was jealous. My jealousy for Adrian induced me to do bad things that I would never have done if I had not been selfish or had not submitted to negative feelings and motives.

I was angry, too. Angry with myself, angry with Adrian and angry with You because she wanted him more than me.

I fed my anger and tried to hurt Adrian every way I could. All of us know that I did cruel and evil things to hurt him.

I did not mean to, but I fed my anger until I ended up hating Adrian. Hate is the most destructive thing that exists and I gave into it. Hating Adrian is one of my bigger regrets.

Because I hated Adrian, I tricked him. I wanted him to get him into great trouble with You. After I did this, I realized how evil it was. I am horrified and ashamed that I would give the woman I love to another male. Not only that, she was helpless and she trusted me. The game was called 'Trust' but there was nothing trustworthy about it.

I abused her trust by trying to get Adrian in serious trouble. I manipulated events, and his innocence and naiveness to trick him. All of this was negative and destructive. It was also mean and selfish."

Tearfully, Hans looked at Brenny and said, "I am so sorry for this, Brenny. I regret this with all of my being. I was only thinking about myself."

Brenny looked at him and said, "You know I forgive you. Please do not let it hurt you like it does."

Brenny's words to Hans could not take away any of his hurt. Hans closed his eyes and

tried to will his tears to stop. Hans looked at Adrian. Adrian tearfully nodded to him with looks of empathy. Hans sighed sadly and painfully. It took him a few more moments before he was ready to speak again.

Hans told the Father, "All of us knew that once Adrian and Brenny talked or touched, that I was out of the picture. I knew that it would eventually happen, but I had no intentions of helping them.

Once Adrian and Brenny touched together that night, I knew my love affair with Brenny was over. Although I had caused it, I did not want Adrian to make love with her with my body. I felt insulted. It was ironic that I felt so insulted because I had insulted him hundreds of times. I guess I deserved to be insulted, but I did not see it that way at the time. That is because I was still very jealous and angry.

I knew that Adrian had more power than me, but I went back into my body to make a feeble effort to reclaim it. I knew that he would probably feel me and send my soul farther away this time. To my surprise, he did not notice me.

When I realized that he did not know that I was in my body with him, I knew that I should leave. I tried to exit, but something prevented me and I was trapped. I still do not know what trapped me in.

Now that I look back, it does not matter that I was trapped in because I am still responsible for my actions for what happened afterward.

I tried to give them privacy, but I was not very good at it because I was obsessed with thoughts of her. I tried to close my eyes and heart to their emotions, but they were too seducing. When I realized that there was nothing I could do about being locked with them, I decided to make the best of it.

Like I said, I am attracted to dangerous and forbidden things. I was attracted to the lovemaking that night."

Hans tried to look into the Bright Light of God as he told Him sincerely, "You know that I never had that kind of exotic tastes and that I have never fantasized about something like this, either. You know that I have only been with two women in my entire life, so I am pretty inexperienced sexually. I still do not know why that I gave in to such lust.

I know that I wanted to feel Brenny's essence one more time. I could not let go. I knew that I was going to be devastated when she left with Adrian and I wanted to know her intimately one more time. Because I contributed my energy to the lovemaking, I escalated their passion and my own.

I wish I could say I did not enjoy the sex, but Father, you know I would be lying. I feel ashamed that I intruded, but I feel even more shame because I enjoyed the sex too much. I would never do it again, but that is hindsight, not foresight.

Besides being stupid, I committed the sins of deceit, jealousy, covetous, lust, anger, hate, misuse of power and invasion of privacy.

As I said before, I stopped praying for myself and I stopped listening to You. This is because I knew that You would tell me I was doing wrong and I didn't want to hear it. This is because I wanted to continue doing what I was doing, even though I knew it was self-destructive and destructive. Although I knew my actions were creating large amounts of negative energy. This energy made me sick and it infected the others.

I know I committed sins I am unaware of. Sins only You know of. I know You will show them to me and even though I am afraid to look at them, I will look and learn from them.

Brenny and Adrian have forgiven me, but I cannot forgive myself. I am sorry that I hurt them and that I am sorry I hurt You. I am also sorry I hurt myself. I wish You would forgive me and help me to be a better man.

Again, I am worried about our daughter. Please bless her and not make her suffer because of the sins of her parents. Please do not let her be born in such a dismal and sad place as where we just were. Please let her be born into light and happiness.

Please, Father God, let me take responsibility for all the negative behavior that transpired between all three of us. My heart tells me that You are going to hold us all accountable, but I ask you to let me shoulder the burden of these terrible sins and the suffering they caused.

Hans' big tears of remorse rolled down his cheeks and splattered on the floor. He wondered how many others had shed tears like his in front of the Father. Then Hans wondered if he, Adrian and Brenny were the first to weep in that place. He regretted it that he had to stand in such sadness. He finally got to see God and it should have been a happy occasion instead of a sad one.

The room remained quiet and Brenny, Hans and Adrian reflected on Hans' words. They enjoyed the Light of God in spite of their sorrow.

God finally spoke to Adrian, "It is time for your confession."

With a heavy heart, Adrian stepped forward. Hans stepped back and stood by Brenny.

Adrian began, "Like Hans, I wish to pray for the child first. I know that You want to hear my confession, but the life of the baby is more important to me than the outcome of my confession. Thank you for giving us the child. With a sincere heart, I ask You to bless her and protect her. She is innocent of our sins and I beg you to not let her suffer because of us.

Although they have forgiven me, I want to apologize to Brenny and Hans again. I regret my unacceptable behavior. Forgive me as well.

I am an angel whom You favored very much. You gave me great power and lifted me above most of my Brothers, even though I did not . . . "

Adrian's voice cracked, "I did not deserve it." Adrian began to weep violently. Brenny and Hans could feel Adrian's pain and they wept as furiously as he did.

Adrian fought his sadness, but he could not control it. A bright ray of yellow light came from the Throne of God and embraced him. It warmed and strengthened Adrian's spirit. Although the light did not embrace Hans and Brenny, they felt the same calming power.

The warmth helped Adrian gain control of his feelings of pain and regret.

He continued his confession, "I was opinionated and truly opposed suffering of any kind. I could not embrace Your Divine Plans. I remember that time because I was in this room when we talked about it. Because You loved me so much, You granted my request to remain separate from the things to come. You granted this request to my other four Brothers as well.

As a Son of Fire, it was my responsibility to pray for, protect, encourage, love and help my human brothers and sisters. Even though I was separated from You, I tried to do what I could at a distance. I know the hearts of my other Brothers and know they are doing this from their homes away from You.

You know my heart, and You know it was never my intention to come into personal contact with the children of the world. Somehow, I was led to look through a window and I saw her face. Instantly, I was filled with intense, unconditional love for her and this love continues to grow. There are no words to describe my gratitude for this love I have for her. I know that anything this good comes from You."

Adrian's beautiful words about his love for her made Brenny feel even more miserable. She regretted all the hateful things she had done to him. She began to hate herself when she realized how hurt Adrian was going to be when he heard her side of the story. Then she realized that Hans was going to be very hurt, too. Her spirits sank lower.

Adrian continued, "When I first saw her, all I could do was think about her and wish for her. I led her to my home. Hans is not the only person who used their powers to lead Brenny to them.

When I was first with her, I wanted to keep her with me for always. It was hard to let her go back to her world, but I wanted her to look around it one more time and come to me on her own free will.

I blessed her so that she could have anything and everything that she wanted. I also restored her health. I did not restore her womb because I saw no use in restoring something that she did not need. I did not think that angels could have children.

Sending Brenny back the second time was one of the hardest things that I ever had to do. But after much internal conflict, I realized that I wanted to be completely healthy when she committed to me. It had been a long time since I had seen you or listened to You and all of this was negatively affecting me."

Adrian sadly shook his head as he told God, "When I saw You last time, it was a much happier time. You were glad that I was going to marry her.

I rushed back to collect her, but when I tried to tell her the good news, I saw her with this man. They were about to have sex. You know my heart and You know I was not jealous over something so unimportant and little as sex.

I was afraid that the intimacy would lead into deep love between them and it did. It filled me with hurt because she loved him and wanted to be with him and not me.

At first, I could not comprehend her betrayal and I sank into despair. The pain was so great that I could not think. For the first time in my existence, I felt the negative feeling of desperate loneliness and it was unbearable.

I also felt regret because I wished that I had not left her alone and because I thought that I had miscommunicated my plans to her. This regret grew as time passed. Another negative feeling.

I began to miss Brenny so much that I began to watch her. Watching her brought comfort to my troubled and lonely heart, but it also brought me misery as well. Misery does not come from You, so this is another self-destructive mechanism.

I also watched Hans. Expecting to find a terrible person, I found an excellent person instead.

Still, this is called intrusion and I should have left them alone. Instead, I became impatient and missed Brenny, so I erred and did stupid things. Intruding, impatience and not thinking clearly are other things that I should not have let happen."

Adrian began to laugh to himself.

He told God, "I tried to appeal to Brenny's and Hans' consciences. You know how I am, Father. I was always one who tried to appeal to the individual and collective conscience. I am also stubborn. I know now that I have been too stubborn and idealistic."

Tears rained from Adrian's eyes and his voice became choked.

He tearfully told the Father, "Thank you for not being angry with me because of my idealism. Thank you for letting me demonstrate my conscience.

My brothers told me that individuals will do unwise things when they are in love. That is why they now live on the Third Level. Love does not justify their terrible

mistakes, but it does explain them better.

When all three of our hearts went to war against each other, I should have backed off. Instead, I would not let go. Another mistake I should not have made.

I let myself become so desperate that I abused my power and possessed Hans' body. It was the only thing left that I could think of to try to reach Brenny. I should have pulled out of her when Hans tricked me into her body, but I wanted to stay inside her.

I love her and I do not regret the intimacy, although my heart tells me that it went darker than what I think it did. It is no secret that I enjoyed the intimacy as much as they did."

Adrian looked into the very high ceiling for a few moments while he tried to pull himself together better. He carefully composed his next words.

With heartfelt sincerity, Adrian told the Father, "Because I am an angel, I am charged with comforting and helping humans, not sinning with them. Because of this crime alone, I wish to accept responsibility for everything that happened."

XXXII

It was Brenny's turn to confess before God and the others. She had already picked her words, but she feared saying them. She had selected her words while contemplating with the others on the Third Level. Her heart was heavy and the words were heavier when she began to speak.

Brenny tried to brace herself as she got ready to tell the truth as she knew it. She knew that telling God the truth was going to be a lot easier than telling it to Hans and Adrian. Brenny worried how they were going to react when they found out how much that she had betrayed them.

Brenny took a deep breath and tried to clear her head.

When she was ready, she told God, "Thank you for our child you have given us. This is a wonderful gift. All of us are bewildered that You would give us something so valuable when we do not deserve her. Everyone is confused and afraid about the baby.

We know that You are going to tell us about her in Your own good time. No matter what happens to us, we really are grateful for the child. Please, God, bless her and protect her. Please do not let her suffer in any way because of what we did."

She thought for a moment and searched within.

Then she said to God, "Although we try to mask our fears from each other, all of us are worried and afraid. We are worried about the baby and each other.

We are afraid of what we did to each other and ourselves. We are afraid of what You are going to say to us after our confessions.

Still, in our heart of hearts, we are happy to be here."

She tried to laugh through her tears.

Brenny said, "You know me, I will always speak of the secrets of the heart when no one else will. I once wrote a book about its hidden worlds.

But the more I learn about the heart, the more I realize how ignorant I am of it. The heart is a large and dark domain. Only You know its true geography and climate, and the geography and climate are different for each person."

Brenny stopped and thought for a while. The room was full of peace, but she did not feel any of it. She worried if God would be impatient with her, but she felt His Spirit urging her to take as much time as she needed.

Brenny finally continued. "Please forgive me for my sins, Father. I am truly sorry that I offended You and that I hurt the two persons that I love the most. Not only that, I was very self-destructive. I have learned from my offenses, but that does not justify what I did. Or guarantee that I will not do it again. I know better not to make promises to You because I always break them."

Brenny's heart became heavier.

With a weaker voice, she asked God, "Please give me the strength to tell Adrian and Hans the truth about everything. They deserve to know the truth and I am afraid to tell them, although You already know it.

Hans and Adrian's hearts told them that she was going to tell them something secret, something hidden from them. They nervously glanced at each other, scanning each other's eyes futilely for clues. When they understood that neither knew her secret, they became worried and this fear ricocheted back and forth between them.

She could feel their confusion and worry. Dread filled her and it took all her strength to continue speaking.

Adrian and Hans felt her dread. Their spirits told them that she was going to tell them some things that were going to hurt them. They began to exchange glances to encourage each other.

She addressed God, "Even though I am one who likes to speak of the secrets of the heart, I do not want to speak of my own. That is because mine are so dark. As you know, I am very afraid to tell Adrian and Hans the truth."

Adrian and Hans felt her great sadness and fear. They began to worry more and wondered what it was that she was so afraid of telling them. Her sadness made each

of them pray silently for her. She felt their prayers and a few moments later, her heart became lighter.

Brenny turned around and smiled at both of them. Neither had seen her smile in a long time. They smiled back at her.

Just when they thought that she was feeling better, Brenny began to shake from fear and dread. Adrian and Hans felt her feelings and they knew it was going to be a bad surprise.

Brenny heard their thoughts and felt their fear. She began to feel overwhelmed but she knew that she had to pull herself together so she could tell her confession. She fought for strength as she readied herself to speak.

With a sad and weak voice, she bowed her head and said, "Let me look at Adrian and Hans as I confess to them. They deserve that much." Her spirit felt God's silent approval.

Brenny told the Omnipotent, "Thank you."

Turning toward Adrian and Hans, she addressed them, "I am guilty of deceit, lust, anger, selfishness and for the sin of hurting others. I also practiced magick, including sex magick.

My greatest sin is not obeying God, especially when He specifically told me to leave Hans immediately and go home to Adrian."

She turned around and told God, "If I had obeyed You, then this good man and angel would not have been hurt by my transgressions. Neither would be in trouble with You.

Painfully, Brenny turned around to face Adrian and Hans. She tried to look in their eyes, but filled with shame and stopped. Her eyes and head dropped into her chest. Somehow, she found some courage to pull her head up and energize her tongue.

She looked at Adrian and said, "God heard your prayers, Adrian You asked Him to intercede, and He interceded because He was concerned that all of us would get very hurt. He talked to me the day after Hans and I made love the first time.

God was clear that He wanted me to stop my love affair with Hans. I always obeyed God before, but this time I did not.

I did not obey because I loved Hans at first sight and because I did not want to let him go. All of us know that I love both of you. To say otherwise would be to lie. I never realized that people can love more than one person, but they can, and I do. My love for both of you is very strong and profound. Although my love is different for each of you, it is very equal.

To describe how I feel about both of you would be trying to use tangible words for intangible feelings."

Brenny looked at Hans and said, "I did not tell you about God speaking with me because I was afraid. I was afraid that you would have told me to leave. You are such a good man . . . "

Hans shook his head from left to right several times before he told her, "Nee, Brenny. You thought wrong."

He paused for a moment and looked at her with shame and sadness.

Hans told her, "I knew that God had told you to leave me, Brenny. That is because God talked to me first. I made myself forget it because it was not what I wanted to hear.

I would not have let you leave. I was willing to do anything to keep you with me. I would have begged and crawled on my hands and knees for you to stay, and Dutchmen have too much pride to do things like do that.

Secretly, I knew that God would speak to you and I was worried that you would obey. I was so afraid that you would leave me, that I took your passport and threw it away. I stole it because I thought Adrian was human and elsewhere in the world. I wanted to prevent you from going to him until I could talk you out of it.

I lied to you and told you that I had not seen it. I am very sorry for lying to you and for throwing it away."

Hans looked at the Throne of God, "I disobeyed You and I am sorry for this. But You know my heart and You know that I am not sorry for being with her. You know that I would do it again. I love her that much."

Hans turned around and told her, "Remember when I took a week of holiday to be with you? I wanted to spend as much time as I could with you to keep you from listening to God. So you would love me and not leave. If my employer had refused to grant me the holiday, I would have quit my job to be with you. I was that desperate for you to stay with me.

And there is more . . . I looked in your computer from time to time to see if you wrote anything that might reflect thoughts of leaving me.

I let you have your way about everything, even when I opposed some things. I hoped that if I gave you everything you wanted and if I let you do what you wanted to do, that you would stay."

Hans' voice cracked as he told her, "I love you too much. Without you there is only darkness. I loved you before I met you and I love you more all the time."

Brenny sadly answered him back, "I know. I love you like this, too."

She looked at Adrian and told him, "You communicated perfectly to me why I had to leave the second time I was with you. Instead of understanding and being supportive, I did not show you any respect."

Brenny shook her head and said sadly, "Instead, I made you feel so badly about making me go back that you vowed to never leave me again. I wanted you to do it, too. I wanted you to always be with me."

She thought for a moment. Brenny realized that although they were pitiful at the moment, she was glad that she was with Hans and Adrian. Even there. She realized how sweet her life was when they were close to her.

Adrian and Hans heard her thought. They wanted to smile at her, but their energy was drained from their constant worrying. Instead, they looked at her with kindness, thanking her with their hearts for thinking such a nice thought.

Brenny's eyes looked deep into Adrian's eyes as she told him, ""I tried to enjoy the blessings you gave me, but the money and things did not bring me happiness. I was lonely for you and could think of nothing but you and how badly I wanted to be with you. I knew your reality of time was different from mine, so I told myself it would take you longer to come back. But you never came back."

Tears began to flow from Adrian's eyes as he told her, "Nothing would have prevented me from coming back."

Brenny tearfully told Adrian, "I know. I should have waited. Your love for me deeply humbles me."

Then she turned toward Hans and told him, "Your love for me also humbles me." She told both of them, "I do not deserve to be loved by either of you."

Hans and Adrian stood erect at her words. Both of them looked at her with question marks in their eyes. Brenny could not bear to look at them, so she turned her eyes away. Adrian and Hans began to worry more.

Brenny felt their worry and she knew that she needed to tell them the whole story.

With sadness in her voice, she told both of them as she began to weep uncontrollably, "Listen to the rest of my confession and you will see how much I do not deserve to be loved by either of you."

Hans and Adrian kept wondering what she meant. They had never seen her weep that hard, so they knew that she was going to tell them something really bad. They kept exchanging glances, asking each other with their eyes if either knew what the terrible thing was that she was going to tell them. Both shook their head 'no'.

Brenny looked at the white marble floor as she tried to gain some composure. When her tears lessened, she began to speak again.

She told Adrian, "I asked Mario to give me a reading to tell me where you were, but he could not see anything. I tried to look myself, but I could see nothing, either. I guess Heaven is off limits for mortal seekers."

Brenny turned her head to look at both males.

She told them, "I got tired of waiting and became discouraged. I decided I would travel. I knew that if I told my friends Mario and Justin, that they would try to talk me out of it. They wouldn't want me to go because they would miss me and worry about me. I hate to say it because they are good friends, but they are also controlling. They would have given me drama and I did not need it.

Saint Cloud was getting me depressed and I decided to leave it forever. I was thinking about going to Germany, but when I looked at the destination signs on at the airport, I saw a sign that said 'Amsterdam'.

The Winds of Change blew through me and I knew that I wanted to go there. I do not think it was Hans' magick that brought me there as much as it was Fate."

Brenny nodded at Hans. He nodded back to her, but his face showed his disagreement. Hans still believed that it was his enchantment that had brought Brenny to Amsterdam.

Brenny's voice filled with sincerity as she told Adrian, "I never intended to be with another man. I just wanted to go somewhere else because I had been never been anywhere. I had always been too poor to go anywhere. Poor because I was a university student. Poor because I could never find decent work.

Yes, I wanted to party and I did. I like to dance and listen to music. I have always been like that."

She looked at them and said with a wry smile, "You guys know what I am like."

Adrian and Hans shrugged. They knew what she was talking about.

"I made new friends and had some fun times," she said. "Living in Amsterdam was fun and I began to make a life for myself. I also started writing again. Then I saw Hans..."

Brenny's eyes looked at Hans with love and said, "Hans, you were a bright light in the sea of humanity that walked along that sidewalk every day. You were beautiful to look at and your spirit was even more beautiful. It was love at first sight, just like it was with Adrian.

When you first talked to me, I knew that I wanted to be with you as badly as you

wanted to be with me. When I found out that you had read my book and had been moved by it, I could not believe my good luck."

Hans told Brenny, "I knew about Adrian the first moment I saw you in the coffee shop, and I knew that he was going to come back. My psychic powers told me this. I kept this from you because I was hoping to make you love me and want me more than him."

Brenny struggled to smile at Hans through her tears.

She told him, "It is not your fault, Hans. Sure, you might have known about Adrian, but you knew that I wanted you. The fire started the moment I met you."

Brenny looked at Adrian and told him, "I love Hans and I had a happy life with him. A fire began between us and the enormity engulfed us. Even God's own Words could not keep me from not wanting the flames of this love to consume me.

But you know what? Hans knew that I loved you as much as I loved him and it was never a problem for him.

We never talked about it, but Hans was okay with my feelings about you. His values about relationship are different from others' values. Even though his feelings were faithful to me, in his heart of hearts, he did not care if I loved you, too.

Yes, I knew Hans had been a magician. He never said anything about it, but I knew and he knew that I knew. More importantly, he is a Unique like me. It brought me infinite comfort to be with someone like myself. You cannot imagine what it is like to be so different from other people. I had finally found someone like myself who I wanted to be with."

Brenny looked at Hans and he shrugged.

Then she looked at Adrian again and told him, "Hans did not hate you or anything like that. Well at least not in the beginning. Hans just did not want me to leave him and I did not want to, either.

She told Hans, "I was hoping the fire between us would burn out, but it only grew."

She said to Adrian, "And you know what? Even though I did not act like it at the time, I missed you. I missed you all the time. That's because I love you, too. There is a fire in my heart for you as big as the one I have for Hans. I wanted both of you and I knew this was not fair to either of you. I am sorry for this, but I could not help myself.

My spirit became miserable and desperate because I had disobeyed God and because we had been so mean to each other. One day, I became so miserable and desperate that I finally decided to obey God."

Her eyes filled with pain and sadness as she told Hans, "Somehow, I finally got the

strength and the will to leave you."

Brenny and Adrian felt Hans' heart break. He started to cry from shock and hurt. His legs became weak under him and he sat on the floor. He wept violently and inconsolably in his hands for a long time. Adrian pitied him and put his hand on Hans' shoulder to comfort him. This act of compassion took away Hans' pain.

Brenny waited for Hans to feel better before she continued.

When he was ready, she looked at Hans and told him, "That Friday, I bought your apartment building and put it in your name."

She looked at Adrian and told him, "Your blessings to me helped me to win a lot of money before I went on my trip. This is the money I used to buy Hans the property."

Brenny looked at Hans and told him, "After I bought the apartment building, I had twenty-five million dollars left, so I put one-third of the money into an account for you. I also gave one-third to my son and one-third to homeless shelter in the next neighborhood. The one we always walked by many times when we went out for our walks."

She told him with sadness, "I know that the money and property would not have brought you happiness, but I was worried about you. I know that you did not want those things, but I wanted you to know that in my pitiful way, that I was worried about your physical needs. That I was sharing my earthly goods with you . . ."

Brenny looked at both of them and said, "Even though I knew that I was going back to you, Adrian, I wanted to be with Hans one more time. I wanted to give him all the love I had in my heart for him. I had always withheld some of my emotions and I knew that it was unfair to him. That night, I wanted to give him everything in my heart.

I also wasn't ready to let go. I don't know if I will ever be able to. Still, I wanted to say goodbye in my own way. I knew I had to say goodbye because I didn't think you would let me come back and visit Hans."

Brenny told Adrian, "I think we all know that."

"It's dangerous for people to go between worlds," Adrian replied.

"Dangerous for whom?" she asked.

Adrian did not like her question and she instantly felt his disapproval.

"That was disrespectful," Adrian told her in a very unhappy voice. "I have never talked to you like that. Why did you talk to me with such rudeness?"

Brenny felt sorrow for the way that she had talked to Adrian.

"I'm sorry," she weakly told him. "You deserve better. I was being defensive. I will never talk to you like that again. I promise."

Adrian knew that she was sorry and his heart lightened. His heart warned him that she might do it again, despite her promise, but his thoughts about this were interrupted.

"I love you," she told him softly and with sincerity. Her three beautiful words made Adrian's heart begin to fill with love for her.

"But I love Hans, too," she told Adrian. Pain filled Adrian's heart, then confusion. Adrian forgot about what he was thinking about.

Brenny told the angel Adrian, "I wish I could go back and forth between both of you, but I know that you would not let me, even if Hans and I did not touch. I know that you want a private relationship with me and I respect this. I wanted a private relationship with you, too, until I met Hans."

"Now I find myself caught between both of you," Brenny told them. "One of you should have sent me on my way a long time ago, but neither one of you will let me go and I can't let either of you go."

She looked at Adrian with love in her eyes as she told him, "I love you, Adrian. I love being with you, and I would have been happy living with you in your home. I know you wonder about this, so I will tell you: I would never have missed my world. I would never have been bored and I would have been completely happy with you."

Adrian was surprised at her words. She really does know the secret things of the heart, he mused, Brenny has told me of the things I was secretly worrying about. Now I know . . .

Brenny continued, "You have been so good to me, Adrian. It is you who gave me hope and happiness when I had none. You gave me back my health and the desire to live. I know this and I appreciate it.

Although you do not know this, I promised my heart that I would stay with you forever. I just wanted . . . No, needed . . . some time with Hans."

Hans continued to weep. Brenny and Adrian waited a long for him to stop.

She was getting more nervous. Adrian and Hans sensed her anxiety and worry and wondered why she was feeling like that.

Brenny looked at Hans and spoke to him lovingly, "I was glad that you wanted to play our little game 'Trust'. It seemed like a good theme to end everything between us on. But things got a little crazy after that . . . "

Hans started to weep again and both males could feel the cutting edge of truth coming at them.

Brenny searched for her words and asked God to give her the power to say them. She knew that her next words would hurt both of them.

"It was I who held Hans together with us," she told Adrian.

Brenny could feel the power of Adrian and Hans' disbelief. Their hearts told them that what she had told them was true.

They became very angry, shocked and outraged. Hans' tears stopped and he shook his head in disbelief. Adrian turned away from her and put his left hand to his forehead signaling great horror and grief.

Adrian began to sob from hurt. Hans kept shaking his head in disgust. Eventually, Hans' eyes tried to seek out Brenny's to ask her, 'Why?' and 'How could you do this to us?'

Adrian, with his back still turned away from Brenny, sobbed into his hands. He sobbed for a long time and his sobs echoed loudly in a room meant for peace and quiet.

Brenny had already seen Adrian cry many times, but never like this. She hated herself for hurting him like that. She also hated herself for hurting Hans and she hated herself for disobeying God.

Her head dropped in shame and regret. She wanted to reach over and touch Adrian to try to comfort him, but she was too paralyzed from fear and sadness. Adrian heard her thought and it angered him that she would want to comfort him when she was the one who had caused this much pain.

Adrian turned around. His green eyes, angry and hurt, willed her eyes to look at his. Brenny's head was dropped and her eyes were closed, but the power of Adrian's will lifted her head and opened her eyes. His eyes locked on to them and he looked deeply within them.

In an angry and disgusted voice, he commanded her, "Tell me why you did this."

Brenny had never heard anger in Adrian's voice before. She knew that it was the first time he had ever felt anger like this and she knew that she was the cause of it. Her heart began to break again.

Before Brenny could think, she blurted out, "I told you: I wanted both of you."

Adrian looked at her with shock, anger and hurt for a long time. He never let her eyes leave his. A lump came to his throat and his eyes filled with tears until they began to overflow. He blinked hard to clear his eyes and the tears splashed on her face. The feel of his tears on her face shattered what was left of her broken heart.

Adrian felt her hurt and it was so great that his anger left him. She felt the anger leave

him and she was grateful for this. Still, she knew that he felt very betrayed.

Brenny wanted to cry, but to do this, she needed to break Adrian's lock on her eyes. Adrian knew that she was trying to break free of his will. He was not willing or ready to release her just yet. He willed her tongue to be tied and her attention to be focused on him.

Hans kept recoiling in shock and surprise. He was trying to think, trying to process what Brenny had told him and Adrian.

With great hurt in his voice, Adrian told Brenny, "I gave you everything you wanted, Brenny. Everything. I never asked for anything back and you know what? You never gave me anything back. Instead, you made me suffer. I never suffered before, but I was willing to do this for you.

I loved . . . " Adrian caught his word and corrected it, "I love you so much that I risked going to a place called hell for you. Then you would do this to me? To Hans, too? This is too cruel. I never thought that you were capable of doing this.

You had to keep Hans with us that night because you were not ready to let go? Why would you do this terrible thing to Hans and I?

I gave you everything you wanted, Brenny! Everything. And you would deny me one little thing--a little thing called privacy--the first time we made love? I was a virgin and I poured my whole heart and spirit into you. You have tarnished this act of love I gave to you. This act of love I risked everything to give you.

Adrian released his eyes from hers and he turned his head away from her. She looked at Hans. Brenny could tell that Hans was more hurt than angry.

His eyes kept asking her pitifully, "Why? Why? Why?"

Adrian paced for a few moments before he locked his eyes on hers again. Then he willed his feelings of hurt and betrayal into her. The powerful feelings overcame her and she fell to the floor. Adrian's hurt and angry eyes never left hers. Brenny felt dizzy and although she could not break Adrian's gaze to look at Hans, she could feel Hans' angry eyes still on her. Brenny wanted to throw up, but she knew that this was not the place to do it and the feeling left her. She understood that God had healed her upset stomach.

Her heart began to break again and even though her eyes could not leave Adrian's eyes, she could finally cry and she began to sob. She cried for a long time. When Adrian realized how pitiful she looked sitting in a heap of brokenness on the floor, he began to feel compassion for her. His love for her broke through his angry feeling and his anger began to ebb away. As his anger left, the atmosphere in the room lightened a little.

Adrian reached down and helped Brenny to her feet. Tearfully, he told her, "I forgive

you. I am very hurt, but my love for you is greater than my hurt. He pulled her close to him. Adrian wrapped his arms and wings around her and he held her. He willed his love into her to take away some of her pain.

Hans was glad that Adrian had forgiven Brenny. He was also glad Adrian was giving her comfort.

Adrian held Brenny several moments until she could regain her strength. It was then that Brenny and Adrian realized that they were touching and they pulled apart. Neither wanted to hurt Hans by any display of affection.

Hans understood immediately what they were doing.

He looked at both of them and said, "Do not be afraid to touch on my sake."

Hans looked at Adrian and said, "I am glad you have given forgiven her. It does not bother me to see both of you touch. I was only jealous of you because I did not want you to take her so far away from me that I would never be able to see her again."

Tears began to form in Hans' eyes, "I felt so powerless. It fueled the negative things I did."

The mood of the room became reflective and quiet. Brenny wondered how the room would stay like that after she told them her next words. She began to shake with fear and dread.

Hans and Adrian felt her fear. Although they had calmed down some, they braced for her next revelation.

Trembling with sadness and fear, she again faced Adrian and Hans.

Weakly, she told them, "I also restored my womb. I wanted to have a child . . . "

Before she could finish her sentence, Brenny felt Hans and Adrian become angry again. This time, their anger was greater and the power of it made her too afraid to continue telling them the rest of her confession.

Adrian and Hans also reeled in disbelief because they knew that she was telling the truth. They knew that no one could knowingly tell lies before the Throne of God.

Hans blurted out angrily, "That is great, Brenny. You wanted to have a child with both of us and you never once thought about consulting us, the fathers?"

He asked her caustically, "So what else are you going to drop on us? What other surprises do you have for us?"

XXXIII

Hans was very angry and he although he tried, he could not mask his anger or reel it in. He began to pace back and forth as he thought. Finally, he was ready to talk to Brenny.

He told her in disbelief, "I am so shocked, Brenny . . . My mind is going in a thousand directions. And I am very angry, too. Why would you want to do something like that? Do you not realize that it is unnatural to conceive a child with two fathers, no matter how much you love them? Wait a minute . . . how could you do something like this in the first place?"

There was so much pain in Hans' eyes that it hurt Brenny to look at him. Somehow, she found the courage to look at him as he spoke to her.

Brenny fought through her tears and replied meekly, "I only wanted to have a baby with you, Hans, not Adrian. That is what I was trying to tell both of you before your anger froze my tongue."

Her words stunned Adrian and Hans. They didn't know what to think and they became even more startled and confused.

Adrian's feelings were hurt, too. He was not happy about being a father, but he did not like it that she wanted to give Hans something special, but did not want to give him the same gift. Brenny wanted to address Adrian's hurt at that moment, but she knew that her reasons for this were coming up.

Hans became angrier as he asked her, "What kind of man do you think I am that I would want an illegitimate child? I never thought about having a child before, but I do know one thing for sure: it would never be illegitimate. I come from good people and no one in my family has ever had an illegitimate child. Maybe some of you Americans do not have them, but this Dutchman has deep values on things like this."

As unhappy as Brenny was, her eyes flashed anger as she asked him, "What has more sin to it: An illegitimate child or giving the woman you love to someone else?"

"You wanted him," Hans replied as he looked at Adrian.

"Yes, I did, but I wanted you, too," she replied.

Adrian didn't like Hans and Brenny's exchange of ugly words. He wanted to tell them this and tell them how disrespectful they were, but he remembered something. He realized that something did not make sense to him. Adrian tried to ignore Brenny and Hans' arguing as he thought, but it was impossible because he could hear their thoughts clearly before they spoke them.

Finally, Adrian asked her, "Brenny, why did you want a child with Hans? Especially when you were going to go back to me? Did you not know that any child between

both of you would also involve me, too? That is because whatever affects you, affects me.

To my surprise, I am a father. You have felt my worry about this. I have never seen a child, although I know what one is. I never imagined this could happen to me because I am an angel."

Brenny interrupted Adrian when she said, "Your Brothers had children."

"They were an exception and you see what happened to them, " Adrian replied. "I know nothing of children and I do not know what to do about this except to be glad about it and to trust. This child is from the Father and He has a reason for giving her to us."

Adrian's words helped Hans put his fears in order about the child.

Hans told her, "I never thought of having a child, either. I had only one relationship before you and having a child with her was out of the question. I knew that you were sterile, so I never worried about pregnancy. I am as afraid about this as Adrian is.

The relationship between all of us has been too negative and destructive. Now we have a child to worry about. This is very sobering and also very frightening."

Brenny pleaded with Hans, "Please, give me a chance to give my confession. As you can see, my confession is long and this is the hardest thing I have ever done. My confession should answer your questions by the end of it."

Brenny began to shake harder.

She looked at Hans as she struggled to tell him, "I wanted to have a child for you. I knew that I was going to leave you and I wanted to leave something of me behind to comfort you. I tried and tried to conceive with you, but I would not happen."

She turned her head toward God as she said, "He would not let me."

Adrian and Hans knew what she meant. They knew that the conception of children depended on God's approval. Both males reeled and recoiled in shock, disbelief and disapproval. Before they could catch their balance, Brenny continued her confession.

"You see," Brenny told Hans quietly and tearfully, "I looked into your future and saw you broken and lonely . . . "

A vision filled Hans' and Adrian's minds. It filled both of them with great sadness. The vision showed Hans living in a complete world of loneliness and despair. A world where he gave up his music, art and love of life. They saw him sitting at his window uselessly waiting for someone who was never going to come back. He looked out into the world, but he could not see it through his suffering. It was obvious that he was waiting to die. The pain of Hans in the vision filled Adrian and Hans. It instantly

crippled their spirits and they felt very weak.

Adrian looked at Hans with great pity and sadness.

He asked Hans, "How did we let it go this far? I wanted to hurt you, but not like this."

They both began to weep and Brenny wept with them.

After awhile, Brenny looked at Hans and told him in an aching voice, "I love you, Hans. I will always love you. I love you so much that I could not bear to leave you with a broken heart as great as that.

I hoped that a child would save you from that terrible future. That a child would fill your life with enough work and love, that you would not give up on living. I love you so much that I was willing to give you a child so you would not be alone. A child I would have always missed."

Tears poured from Hans' eyes. Hans had tried to avoid thinking about what would happen to him if he had lost her. Now he knew for sure. His heart broke in pieces and he began to sob. Losing Brenny would have been too much for him.

Great feelings of loss filled him and he slumped to the floor. Hans covered his face with his arms and wept into them. When he remembered that Brenny loved him so much that she was willing to leave him a child, it made him weep more.

Adrian had never thought to what would happen to Hans because he had only thought about Brenny and himself. He began to feel regret that he had forgotten about Hans, the other partner in their triangle. He also felt great compassion for Hans and Adrian wept for him.

Adrian realized how devastating it would be to lose someone as special as Brenny. He put his hand on Hans' shoulder and told Hans with heartfelt sincerity, "I am sorry that I was so selfish. All I could think about was Brenny and being with her. I never gave one thought about you. This was very wrong. This is another sin I committed against you. Please forgive me."

Hans continued to be inconsolable. Brenny walked over and sat by him. She put her arms around him and cried with him. Slowly, he put his arms around her and held her tightly. They wept together for many moments until her rain soaked face pulled away from his.

Gently, she began to kiss each of Hans' tears. A tear ran on his lips and she kissed it before it had a chance to get colder. Hans was so weak from pain, that he sat still while she kissed him.

Adrian was glad that Brenny's kisses had comforted Hans a little. He found that he cared about Hans. He liked being in Hans' company on the Third Level and he liked who Hans was as a person. When he remembered he used to hate Hans, Adrian filled

with shame and sadness.

Hans did not stop weeping for a long time. Every time he tried to stop, memories of Brenny's vision kept coming back to his mind. Hans kept seeing himself sitting by the window with his spirit shattered. The truth had shown him such a terrible fate that he could not face it.

Although the present situation Hans found himself in was less than ideal, he was secretly grateful that he was there instead of being in Amsterdam, broken and alone. At least he was with the woman he loved and their unborn child. That was much better than Brenny's vision.

Adrian heard Hans' thoughts and he agreed with them. He gave Hans a wobbly smile through his tear-soaked face. Hans pain-filled eyes tried to acknowledge it with a weak smile of his own.

Brenny gave up on trying to kiss Hans' tears away. There were too many of them and she was running out of energy. She held him for a long time and she used her hair to wipe away the wetness on his face. Her hair got sticky and greasy from tears and snot, but she didn't care. Adrian was touched by this poignant act of love. He checked himself and realized that he felt no jealousy.

As Hans' tears began to dissipate, she put his hand on her stomach and whispered, "Please don't be so sad, Hans. Remember this child is yours, too, and she is something we all should be happy about. And no matter what happens, Hans, I love you and always will. My love for you will always grow, too. My heart will never abandon yours."

As Adrian waited for Hans to stop crying and gather himself together, Adrian continuously prayed for Hans. Adrian asked God to fill Hans with His Spirit and love. God was pleased with Adrian's prayer and He blew His Spirit through Hans. It brought Hans peace and good feelings. The peace and happiness spread to Brenny and Adrian. For many moments, there was tranquility. Hans stopped crying and Adrian helped both of them feet. For a moment, they formed a perfect triangle and they saw and felt it.

It was time for Brenny to continue her confession. She turned to address Hans and Adrian.

She was calmer as she told them, "I did not want to have a child for myself and I did not like the idea of losing another child. Still, I was so worried about you, Hans."

Her voice began to crack, "So I tried to have a child with you, for you. I knew that Adrian would not like this, but I knew that he would forgive me.

Then the sands in the hourglass wound down and I knew that I had to leave."

Brenny became quiet and she felt her womb. The baby was moving.

"I had to be with Hans one more time," Brenny said as she looked at Adrian. "Then I felt you inside me. I felt your heart touch mine and our hearts fit perfectly together. Do you remember?"

Adrian remembered. He remembered the rush of ecstasy that he felt when he felt his heart touch hers. This memory reminded him of how much he love he felt for Brenny then and how much more love he felt for her now.

Brenny told Adrian, "I knew that you were with me. I could feel Hans' essence and yours, so I knew that you had to be in his body.

I was so happy to touch you like that. I heard your thoughts about getting out of me and I could not bear to let you go. I knew that all I had to do was put my arms around you and you would stay. That is because you love me too much.

But my hands were tied up, so I seduced you another way: I blew my spirit through you and then I put my legs around you. Then I blew my spirit through you again.

After that, I could not think of anything but you and being with you and in you and me in you. I was swept away.

You were swept away, too. So swept away, that you did not feel Hans come back into his body. But I felt him. I felt him the moment he came back. I also heard Hans' thoughts about giving us our time together. I did not want Hans to leave, so I used my power to keep him there. And it worked."

Hans and Adrian began to get angry. They wanted to say something to Brenny, but they were too surprised and horrified to talk. Brenny sensed this and knew that she should keep talking before Hans and Adrian found their voices to verbalize and vocalize their outrage and questions. She quickly looked at the floor to avoid their eyes.

Brenny continued, "So I willed Hans to feel the love that I have for him and this made him want to stay. He also knew that this was his last time to ever be with me because he knew that I was going to leave him. Hans knew that staying with us was not right, but he wanted to be with me, so he agreed to be my partner in this. Besides, Hans and I knew that you would be angry, but we also knew that you would forgive me. You might not understand, but you would forgive me."

Adrian was speechless. He didn't know how he should feel except betrayed by both Brenny and Hans.

Cunning humans, Adrian thought. I never thought that they could be so cunning.

Hans heard Adrian's thoughts.

He looked at Adrian sorrowfully and said, "I am sorry I did this, Adrian. I just love Brenny so much that I wanted to be there with her."

Before Adrian could think of a response, Brenny continued to confess.

She told them, "I wanted to keep everything separate from both of you. I have this power and I used it to split my spirit in two. That way, I kept both of you separate from each other.

One-half of my spirit went into each of your spirits. Of course, there were two human bodies involved, but they were insignificant because most of the activities that happened were underneath, in the emotional and spiritual realms.

Adrian and Hans wanted to say something, but they were beginning to get so upset that they could not think to find words. Brenny saw the devastation on their faces and felt their fear and confusion. She wanted to stop, but she knew she needed to finish what she needed to tell them.

"Are worried if you had sex together when all of us were together? I know the answer to this."

Hans and Adrian didn't want to know because they were too upset. Before, they had wondered privately about what Brenny had just asked, but from that moment on, they didn't care. Brenny didn't hear their thoughts or feel their emotions. She was too busy trying to stay focused.

"No and yes," Brenny told them. "Both of you did not touch until the last time, then we all touched together. Somehow our souls fused for a few moments. I think this is when our child was created.

But something happened right before this. I do not know what exactly what, but something happened that frightened me very much. It frightened me so bad that it is hard to talk about it."

Hans and Adrian sensed something awful.

Brenny hesitated for a moment and then she said, "When I first split my spirit, I knew it was wrong."

Her voice lowered to a worried whisper as she said, "I had this dreadful feeling that I should put it back together right away, but then I felt so much love from both of you . . . Well, I thought I would stay like that for a little while longer . . ."

Hans and Adrian recoiled in horror and fear. They were paralyzed.

Brenny continued, "You guys were so insatiable! I underestimated how much love both of you have for me and I could not get either of you to stop. You kept feeding so much love and energy into my split spirits, that I could not stop returning it. There was a lot of energy between us and it kept multiplying and multiplying. I remember the fire raining down and I remember all the energy building up in the room."

Adrian's and Hans' minds were frantically racing to remember that night clearly. Time seemed to be in slow motion as more fear, dread and horror filled them. They telepathically helped each other remember what they needed to know.

Brenny saw the horror on their faces and thought to herself, they look sick. She worried if they were going to get angry again and she wondered if they would forgive her. Adrian and Hans wanted to say something, but their thoughts and emotions were locked in turmoil. Each male started to shake with fear.

This confused Brenny and she wondered if she should stop. She felt the urging of God for her to continue.

"I lost control of my split spirit," she told them.

Hans' and Adrian's legs became weak and they sank to their knees. Thoughts, emotions and disbelief flooded them. Tears of fear slowly and painfully bubbled to the surface. These tears were cold, heavy and so acidic, that they burned every place that they touched.

Brenny saw these new tears and knew that they were different.

Somehow, she found her words as she meekly said, "I tried to will my split spirit back into one, but they would not go back together. My mind was beginning to fade, too. For a few brief seconds, I was more frightened than I have ever been in my life, but my fear began to fade, too. I felt like I was losing myself. Somehow, I found a tiny, fading voice and asked God to help me . . . "

Hans and Adrian remembered . . . Without thinking, they began to pray with their eyes closed. Tears streamed from their closed eyes and they trembled as they prayed.

Brenny did not know how to react. She could not sense anger from them, only fear. Brenny tried to listen to their prayers, but they were so powerful and coming so fast from both of them, that she could not hear them. Brenny sat between Hans and Adrian as she waited and thought.

Hans and Adrian prayed for a long time. They were frozen in prayer and never moved, not even to shift a limb. The only things that moved on them were the tears freefalling from their eyes down their very sad, but relieved faces.

When Adrian and Hans finally stopped praying, they immediately sensed her between them. Both of them instinctively put their arms around her and they held her collectively. They kissed her face on each side as they wept into it and her hair.

Brenny did not understand why they were doing this. She also wondered why they were weeping so hard. She wondered if they were mad at her. They heard her thoughts, but were so overcome with emotion that it took them awhile before they could tell her anything.

When they were finally able to speak, Adrian looked at Hans and asked him, "You want to tell her?"

Hans shuddered as he shook his head 'yes'.

He looked at her and told her with fear in his voice, "What you did was wrong, Brenny."

Brenny looked at him with sincerity and told him, "I know. That is what I wanted to tell you. I am truly sorry for this."

Adrian gently turned her head to look at him and his face was full of concern, disbelief and fear. When she saw how upset that he still was, she became confused.

He was about to say something when she said to him, "I told you. I know that it was wrong to bi-locate and trick both of you like that. I knew that it was wrong when I did it and I wish that I never did it."

Adrian sincerely told her, "I wish you had never done that, either."

Brenny looked at both of their wet, worried faces and said, "It is all right if both of you do not forgive me for this." She began to weep in her hands because she was afraid that neither would forgive her.

Adrian remembered what he had wanted to say to her before she had cut him off.

He told her in a voice full of fear, "You do not understand the gravity of what you did. Hans means that you could have destroyed yourself. Bi-location is very dangerous and it should never have been done.

You have really frightened us, Brenny. You have frightened us so bad that nothing will ever matter to us again but our relationship with the Father, you and the baby."

Hans nodded in agreement. He began to speak and she turned his head toward him.

Hans told her, "We do not care about what happened that night. We do not need to hear any more of your confession. You have shown us what is really important to us. You have also shown us what is not important."

She still didn't understand what they were trying to tell her.

Adrian told her, "Brenny, listen to us. We are sorry that we made you so miserable that you would do something as foolish as you did."

Hans told her, "That is neglect, Brenny. It is also inexcusable. Instead of trying to help you, we almost destroyed you and ourselves."

Adrian told her, "Now that we know how close we were to losing you, we realize that

we behaved worse than we thought."

Hans told her, "You were right: We should have tried to sit together and worked things out."

Brenny was still confused and unsure of what they were talking of. Neither Adrian or Hans wanted to explain the unspeakable to her in larger detail.

He shuddered as he told her in a painful voice, "Brenny, you should have died when you split your spirit for that long."

"All I did was split my spirit in two," she told him. "I did not split my body."

"No, Brenny, you do not get it," Adrian replied. "You should have died, not just your body, but your spirit as well."

Brenny didn't believe him.

"How can this be when the spirit lives forever?" she asked.

Adrian and Hans began to shake. It took them awhile to quiet the tremors. Adrian bowed his head as he told her quietly, "Your spirit halves would have lived, but they would have been someone else. This is the paradox of what happens when someone's spirit permanently splits. Of course, it was theory until now."

Brenny still did not understand.

"Brenny," Adrian whispered, "Every moment of your existence forms who you are. Half of whom you are is not the whole of you. Each half would have developed into someone else. Some of your essence would have been retained in each new spirit, but the Brenny we love would have stopped existing."

Brenny was beginning to understand.

"God could have put me back together, right?" she asked Adrian.

"He did, Brenny," Adrian replied, "That is why Hans and I prayed so hard. We are very, very thankful that you are all right and we made sure our Father knew our gratitude. But we know it could have gone the other way . . . It really frightens us and it needs to frighten us. If anything got our minds right, this did."

"Maybe would have God have put me back together later on?" she asked.

Hans shook his head from fear and dread.

Adrian told her with fear in his voice, "I do not know and I do not want to ask Him. He did not bring us here to ask Him this, either."

All of us thought that He brought us here because of the baby and the bad energy between us. Hans and I know differently now."

Adrian looked at the Bright White Light of God and said, "He brought us here to show us that He saved us and for us to realize what is really important in our lives.

He saved you and by saving you, he saved us. The Father saved us because if we had lost you, the vision you had of Hans would have included me in it. But we would have felt much greater despair. Losing you would have destroyed us. Hans and I would have been worse off than all the angels on the Third Level. The suffering would have been beyond endurance. The Father saved all of us that night. "

Adrian held her tightly and willed his love into her. It felt warm and good.

"I am so grateful you are all right," he told her. "Hans and I will always be grateful for this. We will forever thank the Father about this."

Hans nodded in agreement. He thanked God again for sparing Brenny.

After Adrian thought for a few moments, he asked her seriously, "Where did you get all that power, Brenny? How come Hans and I did not know about this power?"

Brenny turned and looked at Adrian.

She told him, "You gave me this power. You blessed me to have anything I wanted, so I asked for power so I could try to see you. When you and Hans sensed it, I used it to confuse you and make you forget."

Brenny had surprised Adrian and Hans again. Their nerves were still raw from hearing about how she her spirit. Waves of fear and relief coursed through them again. These waves weren't as big as the last ones, but they were still unpleasant. Once again, Adrian and Hans fell to their knees and thanked God for sparing her life.

Brenny knew why they were praying: what she had done was dangerous and it had almost killed her. She prayed with them and thanked God again for sparing her.

She pleaded for God to have mercy on Adrian. It wasn't Adrian's fault that she had abused his blessings to her. It wasn't Adrian's fault that she had abused the power that she had wished for.

It took a long time for them to stop praying. When everyone had finished, Adrian looked at Brenny with serious and worried eyes.

He told her in a shaky, but relieved and kind voice, "Go ahead, Brenny, tell us the rest of the story about this power."

Brenny looked deeply into his eyes and told him, "I am sorry, Adrian! I know it was very wrong! But I did not know this at the time I wished for it.

When you did not come back for such a long time, I tried to use my power to see where you were and what was going on. But I could see nothing.

I asked Mario to look and he could not see anything, either. So I wished for a little power, hoping I could use it to look. But it did not work, so I wished for a little more power. When I could not find you it, I wished for a tenth of the power you had."

Adrian and Hans filled with fear again. The room spun around them as they wondered how she was still alive. They began to pray while they listened to her.

"The moment I did this," Brenny told them, "I knew that I had made a big mistake. That much power made my body and soul very sick. I felt like I was poisoned and I wondered if I were going to die. I laid in bed for two months.

At first, I could not eat or sleep. Strange things happened to me, like I could hear the voices of everyone in town thinking or talking. It sounded like tens of thousands of tiny whispers. I could hear every single one and then I could hear them collectively. Together, they sounded like a deafening roar.

I could see ghosts and once they knew that I saw them, more ghosts came. They tried to talk to me, but I was too sick to listen.

I was staying in a hotel room and I saw the entire history of the room. I saw the carpenters making it. I saw carpet layers laying out the carpet in the new room. I saw everyone who stayed in the room and what they did there. I saw all of the things people did in the bed I was too sick to leave.

Light hurt my eyes, so I kept the room dark. But then the colors of everything became vibrant in the darkness. The colors moved, tumbling and melting into each other. It was like having a terrible nightmare that I could not wake from.

There was a television in the room and I never turned it on. I did not need to; the picture became alive on its own and I could see what was on every channel. I asked for the hotel to take the television away, but that did not help. I still saw television programs exactly where the television had sat.

The hotel insisted that a maid clean the room at least once a week. I did not want to see any people because I would instantly know their whole history and future. Her movements would have made me dizzy. When the maid would come, I would pay her to leave me alone.

Looking at water made me the sickest of all. I could see every individual drop of it. When each drop of it flowed into each other, it seemed like the new drop became alive with color. The water also found and held light. Looking at the light made my head hurt worse.

I knew things. Like I knew what lottery numbers were going to come up each time there was a drawing on the invisible television. That is how I won all that money."

Brenny looked sadly at Adrian and told him, "When I first got sick, I did not care if I died because I would then be free to look for you. I knew that I would find Jude and that he would help me find you."

Hans looked at Adrian with surprise and asked him, "Who is Jude?"

"Her old lover--he's a spirit," Adrian replied. "He loves Brenny so much that he came to my home once to see her. I will tell you about him another time. I am glad that she does not love him or he would probably be here with us, too."

Hans was glad that Adrian wasn't going to tell him about this new guy. Hans had more surprises than he could count already and he didn't need anymore.

Brenny continued her story, "Deep down, I knew it was not God's Will for me to die, so I asked Him to help me and make me well. I felt Him help me immediately. As my body got stronger, I tried to wish the power away, but it would not leave."

"The power never left you because once you have it, you always have it, unless the Father takes it away," Adrian told her.

Adrian looked at God and said, "I appreciate it, Father, that the power that she wished for did not kill her. You, I and Hans know it should have."

Hans prayed, "Thank you for sparing her life this time, too. And thank you again for sparing her life when she split her spirit."

Brenny looked at God and said, "I am sorry I asked for this power as I did not have the capacity, knowledge, wisdom or the faith for it. You know that I only wanted it as a tool to find Adrian. I am sorry that I did not ask You to take the power away. I was not thinking . . . Please take it away from me now." Brenny felt the Holy Spirit go through her and take the power from her.

"Brenny," Adrian told her with a worried voice, "I hope that you understand why people should not have so much power. You were not ready for that kind of power and you should have died. Not only that, great harm and chaos could have come to others. I am glad that you did not misuse the power any more than you did."

I am also very sorry that I did not see that you had this power. I never thought that you would do something like this, so I never thought to look."

Brenny and Hans realized at that moment Adrian could really be in a lot of trouble because Brenny had wished for something forbidden like power. When he had given her his blessings, Adrian had thought that she would use his blessings for money and material things.

Adrian told God, "I see I am only in more trouble with you. I am sorry that I gave Brenny power, even though I did not know about this until now. Still, there is no excuse for this. I see how much that You have been watching over us and I really

appreciate it."

Hans told God, "I also appreciate it that You have taken such good care of us. Thank you very much. And again, thank you very much for keeping Brenny from destroying herself."

Brenny began to feel a little sick after the power was taken from her. She was glad she was sitting on the floor because she felt weak and dizzy.

Adrian could feel Brenny and Hans worry about him. He could hear them thinking that his sins were adding up faster than theirs. He didn't care. All that mattered to him was that Brenny was alive and whole. Adrian realized that Brenny's life and their baby was more important to him than anything else. Hans heard Adrian's thoughts and nodded in agreement.

XXXIV

Brenny sat on the floor until her sickness subsided. After she felt well enough to stand, Adrian offered his hand to her. She took it and he helped her to stand. Brenny was surprised at how strong he was. He heard her thought and smiled at her.

Now Brenny and the others knew the answers to the things that they had been wondering about.

She thought to herself, back on earth, this would make a good soap opera with all these affairs of the heart, misunderstandings, mistakes and misjudgments.

Hans and Adrian heard her thoughts. Hans began to laugh and Brenny laughed with him. Adrian didn't understand what they were laughing about.

Brenny felt and saw Adrian's bewilderment. She told him, "This is not the place, but someday I will tell you about what we are laughing about." She and Hans continued to laugh.

Their laughter lightened the somber mood of the atmosphere around them. Brenny wondered if God appreciated their primitive humor. Brenny always believed God had a sense of humor. An ironic sense of humor.

After the laughter subsided, she turned around to Adrian and said, "What can I say? I did not know that wishing for power was forbidden to me. With all of my heart, I am so very sorry for all the things I have done against you. I am sorry for the things I did with evil intentions and the other things I did without knowing or thinking."

She turned around and faced the Heavenly Father, "I am sorry that I abused Adrian's gifts to me. I ask Your forgiveness about this. Even though I was ignorant about the power I had and its use, I still desired negative things that could have destroyed all of us.

I am guilty of being selfish. I wanted both of them." Brenny began to weep sad, warm tears.

She told God, "I knew in my heart that I should never have wanted both of them at the same time, but I did and I made it happen. Not only that, I did it with power that was forbidden to me. Because the power was so great, it was easy to disguise and hide."

Brenny thought for a few moments.

She sighed deeply and sadly as she told God, "I had to make an impossible choice where everyone lost. Instead, I put it off until the pain was too great for everyone and things got out of hand.

I abused these wonderful males. These guys loved me so much and trusted me so much and I still treated them badly. I did this to get what I wanted, without regard to their wants or needs. I exploited them and events by capitalizing on their love for me. This is manipulation and abuse."

Brenny stopped for a few moments and thought. She turned around and looked at Hans and Adrian.

She told them in a soft voice, "But there is more abuse. Deceit is an abuse that comes to mind. I lied to each of you, hid the truth from you or confused you."

Brenny searched her mind for the rest of the things that she wanted to say.

Quietly, she told Hans and Adrian, "It is my fault about the child, too. I secretly made myself well because I wanted to get pregnant. This was mean, deceitful and abusive."

Her voice became sadder when she told Adrian and Hans, "Neither one of you ever abused me, but I abused you and I knew better. I knew better because I had been abused before. Sure, maybe this was not physically hurting someone, but it all counts. It was negative and it hurt all of us, including our unborn child. She does not deserve to suffer, but she suffers nonetheless because we suffer and she feels it.

There. It is said. The unspeakable that none of us would talk about, but what we knew with all our hearts.

Yes, our child suffers because we suffer. Secretly, we know that all of us are sick. We are sick of being sick and we know that we need to get well so our child will be well."

Brenny spoke the sincerest words in her life when she told Adrian and Hans, "I am very sorry. I have never been so sorry for anything in my life like I am now. Hurting you, using you, betraying you and abusing you are terrible things. You kept telling me that you forgave me for my sins against you. Now that you know the truth as I know it, do you still want to forgive me?"

Hans looked at Brenny and told her, "We still forgive you."

Adrian told her, "I told you before: We do not care any more about what happened. All that matters to us is that you and our child are safe."

She forced herself to turn around and she told God, "If it had not been for my selfishness, laziness, deceit and abuse of power, Adrian and Hans would not have done the destructive and self-destructive things that they did. I manipulated them and they did not know it. I abused them. For these reasons alone, I ask You to judge only me for what happened between all three of us."

Peace enshrouded them and all of them faced the Father.

God's kind and loving voice told them, "Stand equally before me." Hans and Adrian stepped forward until all of them stood perpendicular.

God asked them, "Do you forgive each other?" All nodded 'yes'.

He told them, "Because you have forgiven each other and because you have compassion for each other, I will have mercy. All of you are very fine persons and it hurts Me that all of you were so reckless and destructive.

I think you need to go on a journey. An inward journey of the heart, mind and spirit. A journey not so much of penance, but of discovery. You will learn about destruction, self-destruction and yourselves.

It will be a difficult journey and you will have to help each other every step of the way. You will suffer individually and collectively. There are rules to this journey that you must obey completely.

All three of you must agree to go on the journey or all three of you shall have your forgiveness and freedom, but lose your child. If one of you changes your mind later, you lose your child."

Brenny, Hans and Adrian were paralyzed with fear and tears of fear formed in everyone's eyes. They wanted their child.

The Father spoke to Hans, "You be first. What do you chose?"

Hans did not hesitate as he told God, "I chose the life of our child. I love our baby and I want her to live."

"Adrian," God's voice asked kindly, "What is your choice?"

"I love our child, too, and I want her to live," Adrian replied in a sincere voice.

God asked Brenny, "Do you choose the same as the others?"

"Yes. I love this baby very much. I want her to live, too."

"I thought all of you would choose your child," God told them, "This pleases Me."

"These are the rules," He told them, "First, all of you shall be made equal."

Adrian felt his wings leave and his form change. Pain filled him as he slowly became flesh and blood. He was afraid and wanted God to stop, but he thought of the baby and suffered.

Brenny and Hans saw Adrian's pain and began to pray for him. God heard their prayers and was pleased.

He told them, "Your prayers for Adrian please me. You are already learning about your journey. Each of you must pray for the others and you cannot pray for yourself.

I have put a block on any outside prayer so no one else can pray for you. Only your prayers for each other can save each other.

You cannot pray for anyone else. This will be a struggle because all of you have always prayed for others and I am glad you did this. The power of your prayer shall be equal, so I am taking Adrian's larger power of prayer away to make him equal with you in that way, too.

All of you need to learn to think better, so I am going to give you plenty of time to do this. Your thoughts are no longer private. Until now, you have been able to hear the others' thoughts and prayers by choice or accident. From now on, you shall always hear each others' thoughts and prayers whether you want to hear them or not. You shall also see through each others' eyes as well.

Because I want you to pray, think and learn, I forbid you to communicate to each other, except with your faces.

You shall be mute so you cannot talk, even if you need your voices to save your lives." Brenny and Adrian felt God take their voice.

God continued, "Hans will keep his voice until he makes business arrangements to take care of his building. These arrangements are important because all of you shall stay in Hans' home and I do not want anyone disturbing you for anything. As soon as these arrangements are made, I will take his voice, too."

Hans nodded silently.

God continued His instructions, "To make you completely humble before Me and each other, you will stay naked. You must keep your hair back and off your chest. You cannot try to hide anything on your body, so you must watch how you sit or stand."

This made the three feel very uncomfortable and embarrassed. Still, they knew in their hearts that they must do this.

"Because all of you wanted to be married," God told them, "All of you shall wear the marriage symbols of man." Adrian felt his ring change and it looked like Hans and Brenny's wedding bands.

"Because all of you are equal, Adrian's ring is made equal. When you look at your rings, you will think about marriage. You can also think about what real intimacy and relationship means."

Brenny felt the Holy Spirit go through her belly and she felt the baby begin to grow within her. Sharp pains engulfed her as her belly grew until she looked like she was nine months' pregnant. Adrian and Hans knew that she was hurting and they began to pray for her.

Before they could wonder why this had happened, the Omnipotent told them, "Your child is fully formed now. She shall stay this way until she is born. I am doing this so that you cannot gauge how much time you have journeyed.

Time shall be of no value to you. You shall not know when your penance is over until I tell you. If you see any date or time, the memory of it shall be taken from you. I have already slowed time for you. You will have to endure long days, alone together with your thoughts and prayers. Even when your journey is over, you will never know how long I kept you away from the world.

You must stay in a close triangle at all times, but you are to refrain from touching each other unless it is time to pray for your baby.

Pull the curtains to the windows tight. I do not want you to have any distractions of any kind, such as the sights, sounds or lights of the world outside. You must live in an internal world.

You will sleep when the room becomes dark and you will dream of each other. You must sleep on the floor in a triangle, naked without covering.

I shall provide your food. When it is time to eat, one of you shall eat while the others wait. Put a bowl on the table as soon as you return to your home. It shall always be filled.

Because all of you are equal, all shall drink from the same glass. Put a cup by the bowl on the table. It will always be full. Like eating, each of you shall take turns drinking from it.

Every day, the pattern of drinking shall change so that no one drinks after the same person on the second day.

Clean your house because you will be there for a very long time.

My Spirit will tell to you to go on the errands. When I instruct you to go on one of these errands, you shall wear what I will give you. You are not allowed to wear

anything else."

God told Hans and Adrian, "When it is time to pray for your child, you shall stand on each side of Brenny and you will put your hands on her womb and pray."

God told Hans, "When I send you back, go see the man across the street who lives above the clothing store next to the flower shop. His name is Berend and he is an accountant. Tell him that you want him to take care of all your property and financial affairs as you cannot be bothered with them.

Tell him why you cannot be bothered. He is a good man and he will help you with your obedience to Me. Ask him how much he will charge and tell him that you will give him double the amount. Sign papers with him so he can take care of your property and money.

Tell him to give the surplus money from the rent he collects to charity. Berend is to choose which charity to give this money to.

Also tell Berend that he is not to renew any leases on your property when tenants move out. He is not to rent to any new tenants, either.

I will charge Kether to guard the door to your home. He will keep friends and relatives from interrupting you."

Brenny, Hans and Adrian began to worry.

God asked all of them, "Do you still want to do this?"

Brenny, Adrian and Hans nodded 'yes'. They were very afraid and they were uncomfortable and worried, but they knew what they had to do. Each one silently thanked God for His mercy.

Hans thought about his books of magick on the bookshelves. He wanted permission to get rid of them. They were powerful books and he didn't think the energy from them should be in the room with them and the baby.

"Give Kether the books and he will take them," God told Hans.

God told Brenny, Hans and Adrian, "Before I send you home, I will send you back to Adrian's brothers. I will allow you to temporarily speak to the angels and each other with your minds.

Tell my angels this: I am a Loving and Merciful Father. Of course, one-half and yes.

Instantly, Brenny, Hans and Adrian found themselves on the Third Level of Heaven. They sat quietly for awhile until Adrian's Brothers appeared. This time, all two hundred appeared out of the mists.

The angels tread quietly and slowly toward the three. The only sound that filled the air was the quiet murmuring of some angels talking to each other and the soft rustling of their wings. When they saw that the three were naked, they stopped and turned around.

Danel felt great pity for Adrian because he was now human.

Adrian felt Danel's compassion and told him with his mind, "The Father has made me mute, but he has allowed me to speak with my mind. Please do not feel sorry for me, Brother. The Father has granted much mercy on me, Brenny and Hans, especially since our sins were much greater than we thought. Mine were really bad, and I will tell you about this later.

Danel offered Adrian, Hans and Brenny clothes, but Adrian told him, "Thank you, but we are not allowed to cover ourselves. The Father has told us that we must be pitiful before Him and ourselves. I guess this means that we must be pitiful before you, too."

The angels began to walk back into the mists when Adrian remembered God's message to them.

"Wait, Brothers!" Adrian told them, "Our Father has given me a message to give to you." A great hush came upon the angels.

Adrian told them, "He says that he is a loving and merciful Father. Of course, one-half and yes."

The air was filled with sighs and sobs. All two hundred angels prayed prayers of thanksgiving for a long time. Brenny, Hans and Adrian watched in awe, although they did not understand what was going on. They wanted to pray with the angels, but they knew it was forbidden. The only persons they were allowed to pray for was for each other and the baby.

After some time, the angels stopped praying and most went back into the mists. Danel's back was still turned as he asked Adrian, "Could I turn around? I would like to look at you to tell you something good. I will avoid looking at your nakedness."

Adrian told him, "Please. My desire for your company is greater than my embarrassment."

Danel walked over to Adrian and gestured for him to stand up. When he did, he put his arms around Adrian and hugged him hard for a long time.

"Adrian, you have brought us great news!" Danel told him. "When we knew that you were going to see the Father, we held a council and debated if we should ask you to ask Him some questions for us. Because you were in so much trouble yourself, we did not wish to burden you. So we prayed that He would let you be our messenger. We knew that the Father would answer our questions through you if He were going to answer them."

Danel began to laugh and Adrian weakly smiled as they saw the irony. As angels, they were God's messengers. Adrian had unknowingly been a messenger for his messenger brothers.

Danel continued, "We wanted to ask Him five questions in a certain order, but we decided we should be humble and ask Him only three. Your message answered all five of them!"

Adrian asked Danel with his mind, "What do you mean?"

Danel replied, "When He said that He is a Loving and Merciful Father, He told us that He still loved us and that He would forgive us. When He said 'of course', He told us He hears our prayers for the intercession of humanity. 'One-half' means that we have one-half of a generation left before we are judged. 'Yes' meant that we will see our wives and children again.

Thank you, Adrian. You have brought us hope. Now tell me what happened to you and the other two."

Adrian did not know how much time they had left to visit in this world, but he told Danel as quickly as he could.

After thinking for a few moments, Danel asked him, "How does it feel to be a Son of Clay?"

"I wish you would not use that term, Brother," Adrian told him. "I never did. All of us have the Divine Light burning within us."

Adrian continued with a shudder, "It feels terrible. The weight of flesh is heavy and uncomfortable. Still, I am glad to suffer this. I keep thinking about how worse things could have been. Brenny could have destroyed herself and that would have destroyed me.

Danel, I have been thinking a lot about how there is not much difference between all of us. Angels and mortals both have free will and it seems to me that many of us behave or react in the same way if we find ourselves in the very same circumstances. It seems to me many of us have the same needs and wants. Have you given much thought about this?

"All the time, Adrian, all the time."

"What else have you thought about?" Adrian asked.

Danel replied, "I think about how it was when all of us lived in Heaven. Things were simple and happy, but there was no depth to our existence. We were all so innocent. Children who never grew up because everything was given to us.

Then Creation came and it all changed. We changed, too, and some of us started using

our free will."

Danel shook his head as he laughed ironically, "Free will put me here."

He said seriously, "I never wanted to hurt the Father. None of us did. We knew sin separates us from Him, but we sinned anyway. It started out so small and grew until it got very big--just like what happened to you, Hans and Brenny.

There is a flipside to sin, though. You can learn from it and if you do, it makes you wiser. Wisdom and suffering chisel the individual."

"Would you have committed sin if you knew you would be imprisoned like this?" Adrian asked.

Danel answered, "I have thought about this countless times: Yes. That is how deeply I love my wife and children.

But I always wish I had come to earth, did my job and went back, though. If I had just done my job, I would never have gotten into any trouble.

But no, I and the other brothers had to look around and before we knew it, we things happened.

It started out so innocent."

Danel laughed ironically again as he continued, "We some people walking to a big party and we talked to them. They invited us to the party and it was a very joyous one.

We drank with humans, ate with them, sang with them, danced with them and had a lot of with them. The party went on for eight days.

We became too close to our human brothers. We liked them and we saw their potential. Then we began to wish for love, companionship, intimacy and children like they had. One thing led to another and we began to permanently live with our new friends.

We taught people forbidden things because we wanted to help them. We also taught them because some of us were still angry about what happened in the Garden of Eden.

The Brothers and I were happy living with people. We lived with them for a long time and we were sleeping when they came to get us. We never got a chance to say goodbye to our wives and children."

"I think about the baby constantly," Adrian said, "What does it feel like to have a child, Danel?"

Danel's face lit up and he told Adrian, "It is wonderful, Adrian! There are no words to describe what it is like to hold your own child in your arms. You will love this

feeling."

"If I get through this journey He is sending us on," Adrian replied.

Danel smiled as he told Adrian kindly, "You will get through your journey. I know you, Adrian. You were always the one who had more courage than the rest of us. I saw you stand up many times alone to voice your opinion when no else would."

"I worry if all of us have enough courage," Adrian answered.

"Hans is a good man and I have seen great courage inside him. If Brenny has the energy and conviction to love both of you, she will find the courage she needs."

"Brother," Adrian said to Danel, "I was wondering about something else."

"What is that, Adrian?"

"Well I was wondering if any of the Brothers had the same kind of problem with a woman like I have? When I spent a lot of time with her before, she only wanted to be with me. Now she wants me and Hans. Relationships are new to me and I do not understand why she is like this."

Danel replied, "She loves both of you, Adrian. She does not like it and you do not like it, but this is how she feels. Hans does not seem to care if she loves both of you, but he is not like most of the humans I remember.

When we lived on the earth, most of us were in monogamous relationships, but Azrael and Ouza shared a wife. They loved the same woman and she loved both of them. Her name was Naamah and she was extraordinary like your woman.

Azrael and Ouza are the most pitiful of all of us. They are inconsolable. All they do is sit together and mourn because they miss her so much.

Dread filled Adrian as he saw a picture in his mind of him and Hans sitting together mourning for Brenny forever.

Adrian told Danel, "If Brenny had destroyed herself, Hans and I would be much worse off than Ouza and Azrael. At least Ouza and Azrael's wife is alive somewhere. I am still frightened because she split her soul like that. Sometimes I think about what if things had gone the other way and it is too terrible to look at. If anything got Hans' and my mind right, it was that."

"She must be really creative to think of something like that," Danel replied with a little chuckle.

Adrian replied seriously, "Yes, she is very creative. That is one of the most attractive things about her besides her fiery spirit and her intelligence.

Then there are the unattractive things. She has hurt me a lot. Most of that hurt comes from betrayal. Not her betrayal with Hans, but the betrayal that she deceived me. Even though I have forgiven her, it still hurts.

Brenny spoke disrespectfully to me in front of the Father. She was sorry for it and promised never to do it again, but it hurts.

Danel asked Adrian, "Have you thought about letting her go, Adrian?"

Adrian shook his head as he replied, "I promised to find her, never leave her again and make her my wife.

She asked me to pledge these things and I did. You know what it means when an angel takes a vow."

"They keep it forever," Danel replied.

"I do not think humans take vows seriously," Adrian told his brother. "She promised to wait for me and she did not do it.

If you are wondering, is she worth all the pain and problems? My answer would be the same answer that you would give if I asked you the same question about your wife: yes. I would rather know her and love her, than to never have known her. Even if I have to suffer for it."

"What are you going to do about Hans once your penance is complete?" Danel asked.

"I do not know, Danel, but I am thinking about it," Adrian replied. "I know that we have a child together and this changes everything. The Father gave us this child because He wants us to learn something together.

Before, I wanted to put Hans as far behind me and Brenny as I could. Now, he is connected to me, whether I like it or not. "

Adrian sighed as he said, "I do know one thing: the Father is going to give me plenty of time to think about what to do. I feel very uncomfortable that my thoughts are not private."

"When do you think this will begin?" asked Danel.

"It has already begun. I can hear Hans and Brenny's thoughts right now if I stop talking to you. I can also see through their eyes if I want."

"Are they listening right now?"

"No, they are talking together," Adrian replied. "They are saying goodbye to each other before we become totally silent. They know that time here is becoming short."

"We like Hans," Daniel told Adrian, "His singing and sense of humor have brought our spirits up."

"I like him, too," Adrian told Danel with his mind.

Adrian was hoping that he could talk to Brenny and Hans before Raziel or Kether came for them. Danel heard Adrian's thoughts, so he wanted to give Adrian his space and privacy. Both gave each other a hug.

"See you at the End of Days," Danel told Adrian.

"See you there," Adrian replied. "Tell our Brothers goodbye for me and tell them that I love them, although they already know. Whenever, or if ever, this ban of prayer is lifted from me, I am going to constantly pray for all of you, and especially for Ouza and Azrael.

Danel felt sad that he could not pray for Adrian and the others. Adrian heard Danel's regrets. He asked Danel and the Brothers to pray for the baby instead. Danel said they would.

Adrian walked over to where Hans and Brenny were sitting and sat down by them.

"Time is short and there is something that I want to say," he told them telepathically. "I think that . . . "

Adrian never got to finish his sentence. He and the others saw Kether. Instantly, they found themselves in Hans' flat.

XXXV

Hans and Brenny could tell by the shadows in the flat that it was late afternoon. The weather outside gave Hans' flat a murky ambience that made their spirits feel sadder and more alone. The rain fell loud and hard outside, making the shadows seem longer, deeper, darker. Hans instinctively reached for the light switch to turn on a light, but it did not come on. Brenny and Adrian saw this.

Brenny told herself, This is like being in a film noir movie or some kind of gothic story. Adrian did not understand what Brenny meant. Hans shook his head 'no', trying to tell her to not to think those kinds of thoughts.

Instantly, Brenny's mind was filled with a vision of a surrealistic world with shadows and fog. It was the same place that Brenny had seen in her vision so long ago when Adrian first came to earth. Only this time, the place was darker, more desolate and mysterious than before. And there was no crow or other sign of life.

Adrian and Hans saw Brenny's vision. Chills of fear went through all of them. Adrian's eyes searched Hans' eyes for an answer. They had no answer but fear and worry. Although Adrian had been trying to avoid looking at Brenny, his eyes

automatically found her.

Adrian had been trying to avoid looking at her because he didn't want to be reminded of how much he loved her and wanted her. He worried how he would be able to look at her for so long. His heart told him that he would be just as miserable as Hans. Neither of them would be able to talk to her, hold her, kiss her, nor do all the other things that they would want to do with her.

He caught himself. Adrian realized that he was wishing for intimacy and that he was just about to be plunged into great intimacy. Great intimacy with someone he desperately loved and great intimacy with a stranger. Although he felt friendship for Hans, Hans was still a stranger and still a man.

Adrian felt the sculptures rub and scratch his skin as he helped Hans move them into a corner. This is when Adrian remembered that he was just a man, too, and he became afraid again. Then he remembered his thoughts about intimacy and his fear made him freeze for a moment.

Worries filled Adrian as he wondered if he had the strength for the immediate future. His heart was heavy and breaking. Then Adrian remembered the baby and he realized that he had to find the strength to move forward with the journey. Their child's life depended on it and her not only to live, but to be well. If anything had gotten him sober, it was the baby. Not only was Adrian sober, he was serious.

Hans felt Adrian's worries and feelings. They matched his own and Adrian knew that Hans was as sober and serious as he was. Adrian was beginning to understand that he and Hans had many things in common. They looked at her and felt to see how sober and serious she was. She didn't like this invasion, but she knew that could not hide anything from them.

Hans and Adrian saw how very weak she was. Brenny felt their feelings of fear and worry about her. She looked at both of them lovingly and sadly. Both males tried to smile at her. Hans remembered how much he loved Brenny and he vowed in his heart that he would help her any way that he could. Adrian knew what Hans did and this pleased him. Adrian made the same vow in his heart and to his surprise, he heard an echo. He wondered if this was a sign.

Everyone began to worry and they began wish that they were back on the Third Level of Heaven. They realized that they had just traded a dark place for a much darker one. Worse, they were going to have to live at the scene of their crimes: their crimes against each other and against themselves. They felt humiliated and embarrassed.

They started to sink into despair when they remembered what they had to do.

Silently, quickly and sadly, Hans, Brenny and Adrian set about to make the room ready.

Brenny quickly washed the dishes and put them away. She cleared the table and

wiped it. She put out a brown and dull pottery bowl. Brenny thought about looking at it for a long time and quickly replaced it with a colorful bowl with a rainbow design.

Looking through the cupboard, Brenny found a large, light-green glass and she put it by the sink. It had never been something she liked, but it had a brighter color to it than the other glasses.

Color was important. All of them appreciated color more after living in grey mists for so long on the Third Level of Heaven.

Now they were preparing a home of shadows. A dark, quiet, profound and private place that they were going to dwell in for a very long time. Any kind of color that might shine through the shadows was going to be welcome.

Adrian and Hans quickly moved the sculptures to the other side of the room. Hans checked to make sure his stereo was unplugged and he covered it with a muslin cloth.

Brenny opened the refrigerator and threw away everything in it. She also threw away the leftover bottle of Geneva that Hans had bought so long ago. Thoughts cropped in her mind and she wondered how long they had been away from earth. Her thoughts about time left her as quickly as she thought them.

Hans and Adrian stopped for a moment and looked at each other. They completely understood what God had meant about time. Adrian and Hans began to worry, but then they remembered that they had tasks to finish. As badly as they dreaded the future, they knew that they had to face it. Hans and Adrian continued getting the room ready.

Brenny wiped the table clean, but forgot to take the roses out of the vase and dump them. She told herself that she would do it after she did some other chores.

Time was getting shorter for them to prepare the room. Adrian and Hans worked harder and she grabbed the broom and began to sweep fast. Brenny knew that they would have to sleep on the floor and the floor was dusty from Hans' art.

She hurriedly threw clothes in dresser drawers and made the bed. For a moment, she thought about how all three had shared that bed. Brenny felt Adrian and Hans' eyes staring at her and she felt their disapproval of her thought. They didn't want her to think about that night and they wanted her to work faster. Adrian and Hans were anxious to begin the journey. Brenny didn't see why she had to hurry. She wanted to savor her freedom a few more moments.

Immediately, Brenny felt Hans and Adrian's disapproval. The seriousness in their eyes told her to stop wishing for a few more moments of freedom and to work with them so everyone could start the journey. Brenny saw the worry in their eyes and she became afraid. She began to work faster.

Hans pulled the curtains. When he did this, the light in the room went out and the

room became very black. The only thing that they could see clearly was each other. They became very afraid.

They were ready to see Berend. The three looked for the clothing that God had promised to give them, but could not find anything. All three wondered if they were going to have to walk naked across the street.

Urgency filled them and they knew that Hans had to take care of this business with Berend. They also knew that they had to stay together. With a sigh, Hans opened the door of his apartment and motioned for the others to follow. Brenny began to feel very uncomfortable and embarrassed.

Adrian nodded at her, trying to tell her not to give in to negative feelings because all of them had to do something difficult. The bad energy would only make things harder. Brenny understood and willed the negative feelings to leave her. She also wished for courage. In the background, Brenny could hear Adrian and Hans praying for her. This reminded her to pray for them.

Brenny saw the thermostat on the wall and turned up the heat. This was the last thing she would do as an independent person.

They walked out of the building and Hans put the trash bag on the sidewalk. They wished that it was still raining so they could hide their nakedness in it. Everyone took a deep breath as they began to walk across the street. The street was busy as usual, but no one seemed to notice them. Someone had broken a beer bottle outside the coffee shop. Hans and Brenny walked around it, but Adrian did not know that he should avoid. He stepped a big piece of glass and it went into his foot.

Adrian instantly stopped and looked at the bottom of his foot. He winced and tears sprang from his eyes as blood and pain gushed from it. Instinctively, he felt around the blood and pulled the piece of glass out. Brenny and Hans stood close by and began to pray for Adrian. They asked God to make Adrian's foot to stop bleeding and to take away his pain. They also asked God to help Adrian understand what pain was and how to avoid it.

Everyone was getting cold and Adrian knew that he had to walk on his sore foot. He painfully hobbled behind Hans and Brenny, leaving bloody footprints on the brick sidewalk and street.

Hans ran the doorbell to the flat on the third floor. It took several moments before someone answered on the speaker, "Who is it?"

"My name is Hans van der Pallen," Hans told him. "I live across the street. I own the building that has the coffee shop. The Lord has told me to seek you. He is sending me and two others on a retreat and He does not want us to be disturbed. He says that you are to take care of my personal business and property for me."

Berend buzzed open the entrance door. Hans, Brenny and Adrian climbed up the three

flights of stairs to Berend's flat. Hans knocked on the door.

Berend opened the door and told them, "Come in!" The three walked into the flat.

Adrian's foot bled on Berend's carpet. Berend saw Brenny and Hans looking worriedly at Adrian's foot.

He went to his cupboard and pulled out some bandages and medicine with antibiotics. Berend treated Adrian's cut with the medicine and wrapped his foot.

As he tried to dress Adrian's wound, he told all of them, "The Lord told me that you were coming, but He didn't tell me you would come here naked."

Hans answered, "We have to be humble before Him and ourselves. Now I guess we are supposed to be humble before you, too. God said that He would provide us with some clothing, but He didn't."

Berend responded, "He was probably testing you to see if you would obey Him. He'll give your clothing when He's ready to."

"Where did you walk from?" Berend asked.

"From my flat," Hans answered.

Berend started to laugh.

He told Hans, "Don't tell me...ja, tell me...All three of you streaked across the busy street outside?"

Hans replied quietly, "We walked. We did not run because it was forbidden."

"God is really testing you," Berend told him and laughed again. Hans gave Berend an unhappy and serious look.

Berend saw the look and told Hans, "Maybe it is not funny to you, but it is funny to me. God has His own ironic sense of humor." Hans gave Berend another serious look.

Berend stopped laughing and replied, "I know you need to hurry, so tell me what you need and want me to do . . . "

Hans gave Berend God's instructions regarding the property and money. Berend called a friend who was an Advocaat and he quickly came over to Berend's flat. Hans signed all necessary documents and waited for the lawyer to leave. Everyone wondered what the lawyer was thinking when he saw three naked adults in Berend's flat, but he didn't say a word. He looked. He looked at them a lot, but he never said anything.

After the lawyer left, Hans, Brenny and Adrian got ready to walk home. They looked

outside Berend's window and were relieved to see it was getting dark outside. None relished the thought of walking home naked, and they wished they were already home, although they knew that they were going to get tired of living there.

They were leaving Berend's flat when Hans felt God take his voice.

"Hey, Hans," Berend told him, "Would you like me to invest some of your money while you are gone? I have a couple of good investment ideas."

Hans could not talk, so he shrugged as they went out the door. Berend understood that Hans did not care.

They walked home with their heads up and their eyes looking forward. All three were not allowed to see if anyone was looking at them on that dark, busy and crowded street.

As they entered the flat, all of them began to worry.

Everyone picked their spot. Brenny picked her spot by the bed as she knew that she could use the bed frame to help pull herself up. She knew that Adrian and Hans could no longer offer their hand to her to help her stand.

Adrian decided to sit by the red chair and Hans chose to sit by the table.

Brenny began to pray, Thank you for our child. Please God, bless her and keep her safe. Please help us to keep her safe. We are surrendered here to do our penance and to learn. Please bless Hans and Adrian as they do this with me. Please help them. Hans and Adrian said similar prayers.

Adrian started to become sad. He hated being human and he hated being naked and humiliated. He had tried to hide this all day, but the tears began to fall.

Brenny and Hans felt his sadness and became as sad as Adrian was.

Brenny continued praying, Please, God, we are already starting to sink in a lake of sadness. Please help Hans and Adrian. Please give them the strength to go on this journey together. Thank you. Amen.

Brenny began to cry with Adrian and Hans. Misery was infectious and Hans blamed himself for Adrian's misery. She began to blame herself for making Hans and Adrian suffer. The level of misery rose fast in the room and they wept many tears together.

After a long time of weeping, they noticed that it was dark. They knew that they had to sleep because it was part of the rules. All knew that if anyone was going to sleep, they had to stop the self-blaming and the weeping.

Brenny searched her mind for a solution and she immediately began to pray. She prayed for the others and asked God to take away their misery so they could sleep.

The Spirit of God told everyone to pray for the baby. As sad as everyone was, they knew they had to be strong for her. Hans and Adrian put their hands on her womb and they all prayed together. As they prayed, the sadness lifted.

It was late when they finally went to sleep. The floor was cold, hard and uncomfortable. Adrian wasn't used to being uncomfortable and cold. He shivered all night and he slept miserably.

As God promised, they dreamt of each other. Their first dream together was colorful and surreal. They were alone together in a beautiful garden. They forgot that they were in a dream and tried to talk, but found themselves mute.

Brenny woke up first. Her morning sickness was back and she knew that she was going to throw up. Hans' and Adrian's eyes opened and they could hear her thought. They followed her to the water closet, keeping themselves in a triangle.

She threw up for a long time. When she was finished, they used the toilet. She and Hans were careful to show Adrian how to do it. He learned from watching them.

Brenny was the first to wash and she was careful to show Adrian how to turn the water on and balance the cold water with the hot water. He watched with dread and fascination.

Surprise and shock flooded her when the water came out smelling like Adrian. She was glad for the scented water.

Adrian and Hans knew that their water was going to be scented as well. Forced to look at each other, each male's eyes revealed embarrassment and sadness.

Brenny showed Adrian how to wash his body and hair. Afterwards, she taught Adrian how to dry his body with a towel. They were expected to use the same towel every day. The same towel that touched the others' bodies.

When Hans turned the water on, it smelled like her. It was pleasant, but he felt very uncomfortable. He took his shower as quickly as he could.

Adrian had no problem figuring out how to make the water come out, although it came out a little cold at first, making him jump. It smelled like Hans and Adrian showered as fast as he could. The towel smelled like Brenny and Hans as he dried his body off.

None of them were hungry, but they wondered if they should eat. The baby kicked as if she could hear them thinking about eating. All three knew that the baby was hungry.

They looked at the table and saw an extra chair that looked like the other two wooden chairs. They sat together.

The bowl was full of that same beautiful looking fruit and manna cakes that she had on the Third Level of Heaven. Brenny rolled some strawberries up in a cake and ate them. The others waited for her to eat. While they waited, they looked at each other.

Hans ate after her, then Adrian. Afterwards, they knew that they should drink. Brenny took the first drink and it tasted and smelled like Adrian. She passed the cup to Hans. He smelled and tasted Brenny in the water when he took his drink. Everyone knew that Adrian's drink was going to taste like Hans. Adrian wished that he wasn't so thirsty, but he was. He was uncomfortable as he drank for a long time.

They sat together in their assigned spots. They began to pray and think.

Everyone felt the slowness of the day and tried to put it in the back of their minds. They concentrated on praying and thinking. When the day seemed like it would never end, they became depressed. This depression cycled around the room until they were trapped in its sticky webs.

They began to weep and wept together for a long time. As they wept, they had to look at each other.

Their heads and backs began to ache, so they stood up and stretched. When they got tired of standing, they laid down.

Although it was quiet in the room, there was constant sound from thoughts and prayers. When one of them thought or prayed, the others had to listen to them. If they thought about something they didn't want to think about and tried to stop the thoughts, they found that they could not stop the thoughts.

They were very tired, but they could not rest. They tried to rest by closing their eyes, but their eyes would stay closed for a few moments and then would automatically open so they were forced to look at the others.

Brenny got sick again. The Spirit of God told them to pray for the baby with their hands on her belly. As soon as Brenny was finished throwing up, they prayed for the baby. The prayer took away her morning sickness.

After this, when Brenny started to get sick, Hans and Adrian would always pray the baby. This always took her sickness away.

Their first, full day together never seemed to end. It was full of anxiety, prayer, worry, thinking, sadness and regret. They shed many tears together.

All of them were relieved when they felt the night drawing close. They were ready for the relief that sleep brought. Adrian continued to shiver in his fitful sleep and the others felt his coldness. Like the night before, they dreamed together.

The second full day was longer than the first one. This time, Adrian drank from the cup first, followed by Hans, followed by Brenny. The water continued to taste and

smell like the last drinker. Hans did not like tasting Adrian, but he swallowed just the same. Adrian got to taste Brenny and this pleased him.

All three were emotional and spiritual wrecks and the second day began to show them this. The room quickly turned to despair and it stayed that way all day.

It was God's Holy Spirit who called them to pray for their child. They were so sad, they could barely concentrate to pray. Somehow, they found the strength to pray and the prayer took away their pain.

After the pain left, they tried to smile at each other with tear-streaked faces.

Their thoughts and memories made them go through all kinds emotional and spiritual pain together. Each wondered how much more suffering they could take. Everyone heard the others' worries about this and it escalated the despair.

The only tool they had to fight against negative thoughts and emotions were prayer. Praying was getting harder to do. Negative thoughts and emotions would drain them of their energy. They would have to fight hard to find a spark of energy left to start a prayer. Once a prayer was started, it gained its own momentum despite the low-level energy of the person who started it. Eventually, the momentum grew large enough to take away the negative energy out of the room. At least for a while . . .

Days took forever to pass and Brenny and Hans and Adrian continued to live in a dense world of thought and prayer. They had to learn about each other, whether they wanted to or not. Nothing was private between anyone and it took a long time for them to become acclimated to their new existence.

Once in awhile, one of them would get a little too far away from the others. When this happened, an invisible power drew them back to the group. For example, if someone moved in their sleep away from the group, the invisible force would put them back within the allowable perimeter.

It was this invisible force that made them look at each other. Sometimes they might have their eyes closed in prayer or thought, or they were avoiding looking at the others. The power would force their eyes open and make them look at the others.

At first, everyone tried to count how many days they had been together, but they were not allowed to remember. They were only allowed to remember what they heard, saw and learned.

Their life together became a routine of boredom, despair and intense intimacy. They woke up at dawn and the first thing they did was pray for the baby. This way, Brenny would not be so sick. Afterwards, they got ready to live through a very long day. Then they thought and prayed while they waited for night to come.

God provided for all their needs. The shampoo bottle was always full, the soap never wore down and there was always a full roll of toilet paper. The razor was always

sharp and this was not good because Adrian was always cutting himself.

Hans missed his music and when he tried to remember songs in his head, it was forbidden to him. This made him very sad. The others prayed for him so that he could remember songs, but it was denied.

Brenny always felt miserable. Her body felt bloated and was full of big, red stretch marks that hurt. Everything: sitting, standing and laying down became uncomfortable to her after a few minutes. Hans and Adrian prayed constantly for her to feel better.

Adrian was forever cold. He was always covered in goose bumps and was usually shivering as well. Adrian had a hard time adapting to being a human.

Adrian's foot had been healed for a while when it was time for their first outing. Hans and Brenny were happy about going out, but Adrian was worried. He had never been out in the world before and did not know what to expect.

Brenny wondered if they were going to have to go outside naked when she saw the clothing on the table. She looked at Hans and Adrian and they followed her eyes to the table.

Quickly and quietly, they put their simple black cloaks and stockings on. Hans led them out of the flat. The voice inside their spirits told them to walk, so they walked across the city. When they got to the harbor, they turned around and walked back to the flat.

Time returned to normal when they were outside, so they were always happy to be in fresh air. Except when their trips took them to dark, sinister places.

Adrian still had a hard time getting used to having a body and he was forever tripping and getting hurt. Still, he was always happiest when it was time to go outside. He was always glad to breathe fresh air and look around inside the alien world he found himself in.

After awhile, they began to walk every day, sometimes for short walks, sometimes for longer ones. Sometimes they were told to stop and watch something.

After being together in the little room for a very long time, Hans, Brenny and Adrian woke up one day and knew that there was something wrong. Everyone looked at each other and wondered what was different. Hans was the first to discover the problem.

Hans had pressure in his groin area and he thought it was from the need to urinate. His mind told him what the problem was before he looked down and saw that he had an erection. He hadn't had an erection since the night their child was conceived. Sex was the last thing on his mind and now he had the worst boner of his life. It hurt from being so hard.

Adrian saw Hans looking at his erection and Adrian instantly knew that he had the

same problem. Adrian squeezed his eyes half-shut and looked down. He did not understand what was going on.

Hans lay on his back and tried to think of what to do. He already had a gut feeling his erection wasn't going to go away unless he made it go away. His mind searched for every unpleasant thing he could think of to make his erection go away, but it got worse and it began to burn.

All three prayed for the baby. They went to use the bathroom, but Hans and Adrian couldn't urinate because of their hard-ons. Because everyone was equal and pitiful, Brenny couldn't urinate, either.

Hans took his shower as cold as he could stand it, plus the water smelled and tasted like Adrian. Hans was hoping a cold shower and smelling Adrian in the water would take his erection away. It didn't go away. Instead, it got worse and he could tell that Adrian's erection was as miserable as his was.

Adrian wanted to eat and drink, but Brenny and Hans nodded 'no'. Adrian didn't understand why but he knew that they had a good reason.

The three took their designated spots and began to think and pray. Brenny was already beginning to become uncomfortable from not urinating and was starting to feel sick. Everyone began to pray for the others so they could urinate. They prayed for a long time and nothing happened. Hans and Adrian still had erections.

Hans' right side began to hurt him and he knew it was hurting because he needed to pee. Adrian was starting to realize how uncomfortable he was, but he still didn't understand why.

Hans got up and began to pace. The others stood while he paced.

I can't believe this is happening! Hans thought to himself. This is the worst boner of my life, it won't go away and if I don't pee pretty soon I am going to go mad or drop over! My side hurts, Brenny is getting sick and I think Adrian is probably figuring it out by now . . .

Adrian heard Hans' thoughts and finally understood what was going on. He looked at Hans with serious, questioning eyes.

Hans thought to himself as he paced, Adrian doesn't know what to do and now I suppose I am going to have to show him what to do . . . How depressing. How humiliating. Is nothing private? I wouldn't even do this for Brenny and I gave her everything that she asked for. Except this . . .

Hans shook his head and laughed to himself. He walked over to the kitchen cupboard and pulled out two dish towels, one red and one blue. He put the red one on his shoulder and threw the blue one to Adrian. Adrian caught it.

He sat and Brenny and Adrian sat with him.

Hans closed his eyes and tilted his head back. Hans took three long breaths. He got on his stomach and did twenty pushups. Afterwards, he sat and took some more deep breaths. Hans stretched out his right arm and drew it toward him until rounded muscles popped out in his upper arm.

Oh no! Brenny thought, He's actually going to do it. He's limbering up and trying to be humorous at the same time. Hans looked at her, shrugged, shook his head and smiled slightly.

Brenny shook her head and ran her hand through her hair. She wondered why they had to go through this, too.

Adrian didn't understand Brenny's thought and worried that Hans was going to go mad or drop over. Hans heard this thought and nodded 'no'.

Hans flexed his muscles one more time in his right arm and did the same thing with his left arm. Adrian watched and wondered what Hans was about to do.

The blonde Dutchman sat up as straight as he could and rolled his head around his neck counterclockwise several times and then clockwise many times.

Hans stretched his arms forward and splayed his fingers. He drew his hands in toward him and made fists. He lifted his elbows up and let them down.

He started to crack his knuckles, but thought, I had better not show Adrian this as he might end up hurting himself. Brenny began to laugh at Hans' thought and Hans began to laugh with her. Adrian was confused and worried.

Hans put his head back one more time and closed his eyes. He drew several deep breaths, sat and looked at Adrian. He held his right hand out to Adrian and spread out his fingers, then drew his fingers together and turned his hand toward his mouth.

Hans breathed in and out a couple of times before he spit into his hand. He turned his hand around so Adrian could see the big wad of spit in his palm.

Hans reached down with his hand and rubbed the spit on his penis. Hans spit in his hand again and lubricated himself some more.

He took another deep breath and started to concentrate. He put his hand around his erection and began to jack himself off.

I can't believe I am beating off! Hans told himself. It's been so long I can't remember how I used to do it. What did I use to think of when I did this before?

Hans hand began to rub faster. Brenny was embarrassed for him and tried not to look, but the invisible power made her watch anyway.

Adrian was forced to watch, too. The angel Adrian was curious and he didn't know if he was supposed to be embarrassed and humiliated with Hans, too.

Hans concentrated with all his might as he continued to masturbate. He wished that he could close his eyes, but it was not allowed. Adrian and Brenny's eyes watched him.

Although he still had his erection, he didn't feel excited. This made Hans worry. His mind searched for erotic thoughts to make him hot. After a few moments, Hans thought about loving and being loved--the things he once told Brenny that he used to think about when beat off. He became happy and this happiness made him horny. Then a picture of Brenny popped into his mind, the picture of her in her book. Hans caught himself.

Ooops! Hans thought and he smiled at her.

He began to concentrate harder. Hans began to think about being with Brenny. He remembered clearly what it was like to be with her and it got him more excited. His breathing and pounding on himself became faster and harder until he finally came.

He took the red towel off his shoulder to catch his spilled seed. Hans' erection went away and he felt very relieved. Adrian watched everything with fascination and interest.

Hans and Brenny looked at Adrian. He looked at his erection for a few moments and spit in his hand. Adrian began to rub himself carefully and slowly. He smiled to himself as he concentrated.

I can't believe this, Hans thought to himself, he's actually enjoying this. Doesn't he know we are supposed to be humbled and humiliated?

Adrian heard Hans' thoughts, but he didn't feel humiliation or shame. If I have to do this, he thought to himself, I might as well enjoy it because this feels very good. It is also a nice change. Adrian took his time as he explored his sexuality.

Brenny and Hans watched Adrian for a long time. Both had to urinate and both became impatient.

I wish he would think of something erotic so he would come, Hans thought.

Brenny thought, I wish he would hurry up so I could go to the bathroom.

Hans racked his mind to think of something to speed things along with Adrian. He knew that Adrian was sexually inexperienced. Hans realized that Adrian didn't know that he should think of something erotic to enhance his lust.

Hans thought of the time Brenny had given him the blow job when his hands were tied up. He thought about it in every detail and Adrian began listening to his thoughts. Hans knew that Adrian was getting excited because he was pumping on himself

faster.

Do I have to teach him everything? Hans thought and then he continued to rehash the day of the blow job with his thoughts. Adrian's hand became a blur as he beat off faster. His face showed that he was about to come when Hans sat back. He held his little towel out in front of him so Adrian didn't splash him.

Adrian came violently and his semen flew all over. Hans was surprised that Adrian came so much. A big drop of it landed on Brenny's arm.

Rookie, Hans thought. Just like a teenage boy! He doesn't even care where it goes. Hans shook his head and laughed ironically to himself.

Adrian saw Hans shaking his head. Hans pointed to the towel and showed him the drops of his come all over the floor.

Ooops! Adrian thought. He looked at the big drop on Brenny's arm and began to feel embarrassed. Brenny felt his embarrassment and without thinking, put her mouth on her arm and licked it off. She smiled at him.

Hans thought to himself, Oh no! I forgot how sensuous Brenny is. Now I suppose he's going to get another boner. That almost gave me one.

Adrian felt himself getting aroused again, but he also felt Hans' eyes staring at him. Adrian used all his will to make his budding hard-on go away.

Everyone got up and went to the bathroom. No one could urinate and no one knew what to think until it occurred to them that everyone was equal and pitiful. Hans and Adrian looked at Brenny.

Brenny gritted her teeth. She knew that it was her turn.

They returned to their spots on the floor. Adrian and Hans watched Brenny and waited.

Oh no! Brenny thought. Why is this happening? At least those guys were horny. I don't even feel the least bit sexy. I am miserable from being pregnant forever to even think about sex. It was sex that got me into this mess and now I have to beat off?

Brenny felt the disapproving looks of Hans and Adrian. She thought to herself, My own bad behavior got me into this mess, not sex.

Brenny took a couple of deep breaths and tried to clear her mind. She propped herself up against the side of the bed and reached for her genitalia. She could barely reach it, even around the side of her belly.

This isn't going to work, Brenny thought. Hans and Adrian wondered how she was going to masturbate.

Brenny stood, walked to the closet and opened the door. There was a big spider web in front of her and as she knocked it out of her way. She thought to herself, we must have been here a long time for a spider to spin a web this big. Brenny dug through the rubble in the closet until she found one of her duffle bags. It was right beside Hans' karaoke machine.

She looked at the machine and remembered she once had a very different life in the flat. Hans heard her thoughts and tried to remember their life together so long ago. He wished that he could remember the songs he had sung with the karaoke machine.

Brenny pulled the bag out and felt along the side of it. She unzipped a zipper on the bottom to a hidden compartment and pulled out a denim, drawstring bag about 16 inches long and 4 inches wide. She threw the duffle bag back into the closet and closed the door before anything could fall forward.

Brenny walked back to her assigned spot and sat. Hans and Adrian wondered what she had in her bag and if she were allowed to have whatever was in the bag. Then they remembered that the invisible power would have prevented her from taking the bag if it was forbidden.

Her fingers quickly untied the ropes to the top of the bag and loosened the drawstring. She put her hand in the bag and drew out a seven-inch dildo. Her hand dug in the bag and drew out two multi-packs of batteries.

Adrian's eyes grew big and Hans laughed to himself.

I forgot how erotic Brenny is, Hans told himself.

Brenny thought about testing the batteries to see if they were still good, but she realized she would have to use her machine whether the batteries worked or not.

Her hands nimbly broke open a pack of batteries and she inserted them into the controller. She flipped the little switches on the controller and the dildo came to life. The little heart-shaped buttons turned red and the piece of molded plastic moved up and down and around. The french tickler on the end of it made a loud, buzzing sound.

Hans looked at Adrian to see his reaction. Adrian looked curious and fascinated.

Brenny propped herself up by the bed. She could barely reach around herself to insert the dildo. Somehow, she figured how to get it in and she positioned herself. She flipped the switches and the dildo began to work. The dildo hummed and whirled inside her.

Brenny closed her eyes and tried to relax.

She asked herself, What did I use to think about when I used to do this? She searched her mind until she remembered.

Okay, I remember. Now let's see . . . do I want to be the maiden who's been brought to the king's chambers or the virgin who's forced to sacrifice her purity to save her village . . . no, that one's too boring. How about the satyr in a magickal garden? I like that one, but it's a little too kinky for those guys . . . Let's see . . .

Brenny's thoughts were interrupted by disapproving looks of Adrian and Hans.

I can't believe this! She told herself. Here I'm nine months pregnant and I'm not even horny, but I'm going to try to beat off anyway and these guys disapprove of my old fantasies!

Brenny put her head back and thought for a few moments. She looked at both of them and asked herself which one do I want? Then she smiled at them. This pleased Adrian and Hans. They didn't care which one of them that she fantasized about as long as it was one of them.

Brenny chose Adrian and pretended he was inside her. Adrian and Hans both had to fight erections while they watched her in fascination and wonder. They liked it when she touched herself and moved with the vibrator in her.

Brenny wanted to get it over with quickly, so she turned the controls up. She squeezed her nipples and caressed her swollen breasts while the dildo hummed, whirled and groaned with buzzing sounds.

After a while, Brenny began to come and she came violently. Her body jerked several times and her vagina muscles accidentally thrust the dildo into the center of their triangle. After she regained her composure and got her breathing back to normal, she saw it laying on the floor in front of Hans and Adrian. Their eyes were big with surprise.

Ooops! She thought as she retrieved it. Adrian and Hans smiled at her.

Hans thought to himself, "I forgot how hot Brenny is."

They got up and went to the bathroom. This time, their bodies functioned properly. Afterwards, they ate, drank and felt much better. Their day still went by slowly, but they were grateful that they felt better.

XXXVI

Once, Brenny, Adrian and Hans were walking by the market. When they went on walks, they never knew where they were going. They just walked where they were told to walk. This was the first and only time they walked to the market.

They passed many people going the other direction on the sidewalk, but never looked at them. As they were about to turn down a corner, Adrian saw someone pass him that looked familiar. At that moment, Adrian realized that he didn't know anyone on earth but Brenny and Hans.

Adrian was half a block up the next street when he heard someone come up from behind him and call his name. Adrian froze because the voice was familiar.

"Adrian! Is that you? I know it is you!" the man called to him. "It is your brother Kenan."

Adrian knew better than to look back. He continued to walk with the others, but the man caught up with Adrian and tried to talk to him anyway.

Brenny and Hans wanted to look at the man trying to talk to Adrian, but their eyes would not obey them.

"It has been a long time Adrian since I saw you," Kenan told him. "Who is your friend? He looks like one of us. Why does he avoid looking at me? Who is the woman?"

Adrian pretended that he didn't hear him and continued to walk with his eyes forward.

"Why are you being like this Adrian?" Kenan asked Adrian. "I thought you might be like me and the others."

Adrian continued to ignore Kenan.

Kenan put his hand on Adrian's shoulder. Kenan felt flesh before he felt the sadness in Adrian's being. This startled him and hurt him, and Kenan's eyes quickly searched Adrian's eyes for answers. Adrian's eyes asked him to stop looking.

"I am your older brother," Kenan replied with worry. "I am responsible . . ."

Confusion filled Kenan and he forgot what he was going to say. Before he could collect his thoughts, Adrian and his two friends had disappeared in the crowd. Adrian felt intense sadness as he walked away from his brother.

Kenan quickly remembered that he had seen Adrian. He frantically searched the flower market for Adrian, but could not find him. Kenan's heart told him that Adrian lived in Amsterdam and Kenan vowed that he would find Adrian, not matter how long it took.

To Adrian's surprise, he heard Kenan's vow. It was weak and distant, but he heard it. It made him lonely and Adrian wished in his heart of hearts that he could have talked with Kenan.

Not long after this happened, the three were sleeping soundly when they heard the screeching sounds of trucks outside. They heard the sounds of doors of vehicles opening and slamming and men shouting in German.

Brenny, Hans and Adrian knew there was something wrong. It was always quiet when they were in the flat, but now they heard all kinds of sounds. Their eyes opened immediately.

They looked at each other and noticed that they had their errand clothing on. They were afraid and they lay on the floor rigidly. Their eyes searched the flat and saw that it looked much differently.

The three were laying on a carpet from another time and were surrounded by old fashioned furniture of the 1930's. A little boy's metal toy truck lay by Hans' head. It looked abandoned to them.

A woman was making sandwiches in the kitchen. She put them in a small paper bag. A little boy about three years old stood by her. He was crying and pulling on the hem of his mother's dress. They heard the door of the bathroom open and a tall, thin man came out of it.

"I hid our things," the man told his wife.

"Where is your necklace?" his wife asked him. "It was my wedding present to you. Did you hide it, too?"

"Ja," He replied, "I hid it with the other stuff. It is too valuable to me to let the Nazis get it."

"Martijn, I am afraid," his wife told him. "I've got a bad feeling and I think the Germans are lying to us." She had tears in her eyes and her face was furrowed from worry. "Stefanie," he told her as he put his arm around her, "There is nothing we can do but let the Nazis relocate us. There is no place to go and there is no place to hide."

Stefanie replied, "We are being punished for being Jews. Ja, we are being punished and God is letting them punish us. They are His agents."

Martijn shook his head, "Nee, Stefanie, God is not punishing us. It is man. You are imagining a god with the behavior of men, evil men. Just because we are made in His image does not mean that we act like Him.

Someday, God will reveal to us why He let these things happen to us. The reason is probably rooted in free will but this is not the place or time to waste our energy worrying about this."

Martijn reached down to try to comfort his son. His son had big, dark, haunting eyes.

Brenny and Hans looked at each other with terror. The family in the flat was the same family in the pictures that Hans had found. Hans and Brenny knew all of them had gone back in time. Adrian heard their thoughts and knew this was not good . . .

Someone pounded on the entrance door. Brenny and Hans knew it was a soldier.

Probably the soldier who lost his button.

Martijn opened the door and the soldier asked him, "Mr. Martijn Stern and family?"

"Ja," Martijn answered.

"Let's go! You are to be deported right away," the soldier told him.

The family's suitcases were lined up by the door. The little boy continued to cry as his mother put his coat on him. She was trying to comfort him, but the little boy knew something bad was about to happen. His cries turned to high pitch screams.

The little boy's screams started to get on the soldier's nerves.

"Make you child shut up!" warned the soldier.

Stefanie and Martijn tried to comfort their son, but he continued to scream. He jumped down from his mother's arms and stood on the floor screaming.

Brenny thought to herself, he knows . . . This little boy is psychic. He knows that he and his parents are going to die.

The soldier was going to reach over and backhand the boy, but the little boy picked up on his thoughts. The little boy jumped toward the soldier, kicking and hitting the soldier. Although smaller, the little boy stood his ground and tried to fight the soldier.

Martijn scooped up his son and put his hand over his mouth. Stefanie grabbed the paper sack and the two suitcases and followed her husband. The soldier stood in temporary shock. He had rounded up many enemies of the German state for 'relocation', and he had never seen a child so small fight back.

It is a good thing the little Jood won't grow up to be a big Jood, he thought to himself. He would have grown up to be a militant for the Jood Conspiracy.

As the family walked out the door, the soldier asked Martijn, "Are there any others here?"

"Nee," Martijn answered, "It was just us who lived here." The Stern family walked quickly downstairs to the waiting trucks.

Brenny, Adrian and Hans laid perfectly still and pretended they were invisible. It did not work because Adrian jumped when the soldier kicked him in the ribs.

"Get up!" he told all of them. "Get up!" he screamed at Hans as he kicked him in the face. Hans covered his face with his hands and got up as quickly as he could.

The soldier was going to kick Brenny, but he saw she was nine months pregnant and decided to leave her alone. As he turned around, Brenny saw one of the buttons fall

off his uniform. Hans saw it, too.

Their eyes froze on the button. It looked like it was falling in slow-motion. Brenny thought, The little boy must have knocked it loose when he fought back. She searched for Hans' eyes and they were still full of fear. Adrian saw the fear in Brenny and Hans' eyes and he became afraid.

The soldier asked the three for their papers, but they nodded 'no'. He tried to talk to them, but they motioned that they were mute.

The German escorted the trio downstairs. Right away, everyone noticed how differently the street outside Hans' flat looked. Brenny saw a newspaper blowing in the street. She couldn't make out the month and day, but she saw that the year as 1943.

Martijn was already on sitting on the back of the truck when the soldier gestured for him to get off. Martijn complied.

"Who are these people?" the soldier asked Martijn.

"I don't know," Martijn answered.

"I found them in your flat," the soldier told him.

"They must be homeless beggars or thieves who broke into my house while we were getting ready," answered Martijn with a shrug. "Honestly, I never saw them before. You've seen my papers, ja? They say there are three in my family and you saw my wife and son. You also saw how small my flat is. There was little room for us, let alone room for other people."

An officer came by. He told the soldier that they were running behind and told him to hurry up. The soldier told Martijn to get back on the truck. He took Brenny, Adrian and Hans to a Dutch Nazi officer.

The soldier told the officer, "I found these three in a flat over there," and he pointed to Hans' building. "They don't have papers and I don't think they can talk. Can I leave them with you? I have other work to do and my commanding officer says we are running behind."

The officer was short and small. He had short hair under his cap and a big nose that held up his wire-rimmed glasses. Arrogant and self-assured, the officer grunted to the soldier to leave the three mutes with him.

Hans knew that the officer was Dutch and Hans wondered how he could turn against his countrymen and join the Nazis? Hans thought of his relatives the Germans killed long before he was born. The Dutchman thought about Christmases he had experienced as a child. His family would bring out the old black and white pictures of their relatives who had died at the hands of Germans.

Hans remembered that almost every Dutch family lost relatives in that war. Hans' uncle had died at Bergen-Belsen, a notorious concentration camp in northwest Germany.

The officer knew that Hans was thinking about him. He punched Hans in the stomach. Hans doubled over in pain, but could not make a sound. Tears from pain rolled down Hans' face.

Brenny and Adrian frantically tried to pray for Hans' pain and so that Hans wouldn't be hit again. The officer saw Adrian looking worriedly at Hans. He slapped Adrian across the face. Adrian had never been hit before. It outraged him and horrified him that someone could hurt him like that. Adrian was so upset from being hit that he barely felt the pain. The Dutch Nazi officer was going to hit Adrian again, but Brenny stepped in front of Adrian.

As suddenly as the abuse started, it stopped. Adrian, Hans and Brenny wondered if God had intervened.

"Are all of you mutes?" the officer asked them. All three shook their heads 'yes'.

"What kind of clothes are these?" he asked as he touched Brenny's cloak. He was struck by her beauty until he realized how pregnant she was. That turned him off.

"Mute clothes?" he asked and then he began to laugh.

The officer pointed at a truck and told them, "Get on that truck. We will process you when you get to Westerbork."

The Dutch have always been compassionate to the Jewish People. The Netherlands is one of the few countries where Jews have never been persecuted. Since the 1400's, Holland has been a refuge to persecuted Jews. Homeless for over a thousand years, many Sephardic Jews from Spain and Portugal found safe haven in the Dutch lowlands.

Beginning in 1933, the Netherlands had opened the door of hospitality to thousands of legal German Jewish refugees. Many illegal refugees also crossed the border between 1933 and 1940.

On May 14, 1940, the Netherlands surrendered to Germany. In January of 1941, all Jews residing in Holland had to register with German authorities. The Deportation of the Jews out of the Netherlands began in July 1942. In September 1943, the last major roundup of Jews occurred and five thousand, including members of the Jewish Council, were sent to Westerbork. After December 1943, the Netherlands was considered and declared to be Judenrein (free of Jews).

The Germans established four concentration camps in the Netherlands. They were

Transit Camp Westerbork, Concentration Camp Amersfoort, Concentration Camp Vught and Penal Camp Ommen. Two camps, Westerbork and Amersfoort, were used for the deportation of Dutch Jews and other 'enemies' to destruction centers in the East.

Many Dutch families hid Jews and their families. The Dutch churches defended their Jewish brothers. As the Germans continued their oppression against Jews, Dutch churches exploded with angry protests made from the pulpits.

Despite many warnings from the German government, the Dutch clergy continued to speak out. The Dutch Reformed Synodical executive sent a strongly-worded letter to the German government. They called German measures against Dutch Jews "an attack on everything human and decent, and a declaration of war against the Christian church."

The Nazis reacted fast and arrested the most outspoken ministers, killing two of them. The arrests and sometimes death of beloved pastors made the individualistic Dutch more defiant than ever against the Nazis.

The ride to Westerbork took a couple of hours. Brenny, Adrian and Hans were crammed in the truck with many other people. It was hard to avoid touching each other, especially when the truck jostled roughly on rough roads.

When they arrived at the camp, Brenny, Adrian and Hans were put in a special processing room with other "special" deportees. These people included the insane, retarded, blind and other vulnerable people who had gotten lost in all the chaos.

Hans knew about Westerbork and he knew that if they didn't get out of there soon, they would be going east on a one-way train ride. His mind raced to think of something to get them out of there, but it remained blank.

Adrian's vibes told him that Westerbork was a terrible place and that it was some kind of portal to death. All he could do was pray for the others and hope for the best.

Brenny was trying to keep her cool, but she knew things were getting worse for all of them as time progressed. She prayed for the others and mercy for her baby.

They waited most of the day to be "interviewed." Because they couldn't speak, they were processed as 'unknowns' and taken to the train platform.

The noise was stifling. Dust flew and there was mass confusion as people were being loaded into the endless, windowless cattle wagons. Shouts, shrieks, pleas, moans, whimpers, screams, wails, babies crying, prayers and every other sound could be heard from the sea of humanity waiting to meet their fate.

"In die waggonen," the soldier told Brenny, Hans and Adrian. They crammed into

the cattle wagon with eighty-two other people. Because they did not want to touch each other, they slowly moved to different points of the box car. They could not keep their triangle, but at least they were not touching. Adrian found himself in a corner pushed up against the wall with an old man.

The door was quickly closed and it quickly became hot inside the car. People waited for it to move, but it did not move until two hours later.

The train lurched hard, throwing people forward, then back. The train ride began.

Right away, there was a lack of air in the compartment and breathing became difficult. No one spoke to save oxygen and they drew air in short gasps.

There was no place to sit or stand upright. Everyone leaned or crouched against the body next to them.

Adrian knew there was something wrong with the old man who was positioned beside him. The man's eyes were open, but not seeing. Brenny and Hans saw through Adrian's eyes. Adrian heard their thoughts that the old man was dead. He tried to get away from the body, but he was too packed in to move.

The train ride lasted three days with several stops and starts. It got hotter inside the box car and everyone was getting sick from smelling the dead body next to Adrian. Every time the train stopped, the people pleaded for the soldiers to take the body out, but their pleas went ignored.

It was a chilly and damp night when the train rolled into its final destination. The eerie glow of lights and tall watchtowers greeted their eyes as they got off the box car, making the place seem eerie and alien. They saw endless rows of cattle cars and a sea of humanity pouring out of those wagons.

Metal buttons glistened on the uniforms of the SS officers as they paraded up and down the platform. Soldiers held barking dogs at bay with leashes as people, dazed and confused, stumbled about in living nightmare.

Adrian was happy to be out of the box care away from the dead body. He was hoping to breathe fresh air, but the air smelled strange and acrid to him.

Brenny and Hans knew that the air smelled of burning flesh from the crematoriums. Adrian heard their thoughts and understood. He began to wonder if hell was like this or if they were in hell.

"Raus! Los! Raus! Raus!" the soldier shouted at the group that Brenny, Hans and Adrian were in. The soldier shouted louder, "Everyone stand on the line by fives. Men, over there! Women and children, over there!"

Brenny lined up with the women and children, while Hans and Adrian lined up with

the men. They waited for the selection officer to come by.

The selection officer was impeccably dressed in his SS uniform. He was tall and slim. This made him larger than life as not only did he tower over most people, he had the power of life and death in his hands.

The selection officer walked by and began telling the women and children whether to either go to the left or to the right. When he got to Brenny and saw her advanced pregnancy, he pointed to the left.

Hans immediately knew that she was being sent to the gas chambers. Adrian heard Hans' thought. Adrian tried to leave their line to go to Brenny, but he was stopped by an SS soldier with a baton. He hit Adrian in the right temple, almost knocking him out. Hans rushed forward to help Adrian and the soldier hit Hans in the face, breaking his nose.

The selection officer saw that Adrian and Hans were trying to protect Brenny. He saw that they wore the same cloak and stockings that Brenny wore, so he knew that they were together.

Something got the SS officer's attention and he left Hans and Adrian alone. Hans helped Adrian to his feet. Adrian was still seeing stars from his clubbing and blood from his wound ran into his eye. Hans tried to wipe away the blood with the sleeve of his cloak, while trying to wipe away the blood coming out of his nose with his other sleeve.

The selection officer motioned for Brenny to stop. He walked over to Adrian and Hans. He asked them in German if they were willing to give their lives for her? Both understood what he said and both nodded yes. The selection officer thought for a moment and then motioned for them to get in the left line. Bloody and beat up, they got in the line.

The selection officer motioned for Brenny to go in the line to the right. She tried to tell Adrian and Hans not to give their lives for her and the baby, but she had no voice. They heard her thoughts. Hans and Adrian waved sweetly and smiled at her. They were happy that they had saved her and the baby as they walked away toward the chimneys that loomed menacingly in the night sky.

Brenny began her long march in another direction down a pebble-strewn road lined with barbed wire. She passed many rows of barracks. They were long, flat buildings on both sides of the road. She reached a big building. Once there, she and the other women were told to disrobe in a frigid holding room.

Naked, they were shaved everywhere and told to go in the shower room. The mass of wet nude bodies crushed each other as the cold water rained down on them. As suddenly as the shower started, it stopped.

Brenny and the other women were moved into another room. She was given a gray,

sack-like dress and shoes two sizes too large for her. Then she and the others were sent to the tattoo room. All this time, Brenny could see what was happening to Adrian and Hans.

Adrian and Hans were taken to a cold holding room with the others. They were told to take their clothes off. Everyone shivered as they took their clothes off. Their heads were shaved. They were told that they would have to wait for their showers because of a delay.

Minutes seemed to turn into hours and everyone in the room. They also felt nervous, cold, hungry, thirsty, afraid, outraged and lonely for their loved ones. Hans secretly wondered how many of them in the room really knew the truth. He wondered how many of them knew that they were going to die?

Family members tried to encourage each other. All the men worried and some of them prayed, cried, daydreamed or sang praises to God. A couple men cursed God.

Hans stood against the wall. The waiting was beginning to get on his nerves, so he sunk to the cold floor and began to weep. A kapo yelled at Hans to get up and he started working his way through the crowd to beat Hans.

Adrian saw the kapo coming and held his hand out for Hans to grab. Adrian told Hans, "I am frightened, too. Come, if it is the Father's Will for us to die, let us die together like men. I hope that we were able to save Brenny and the baby."

Hans grabbed Adrian's hand and Adrian lifted him up. The kapo saw this and went somewhere else. Adrian and Hans hugged each other. They held each other's hands to comfort each other.

A new kapo came from an inner room and told the men to go into the shower room. Many men held each other's hands but they did not stand out. When the kapo saw Hans and Adrian holding hands, he hissed at them under his breath, "Faggots."

Adrian looked at the kapo and told him with his mind, "No, Brothers."

The kapo heard Adrian's words but didn't see Adrian's lips move. It made him uncomfortable. Spooked, he quickly walked away from Adrian and Hans.

While Hans and Adrian waited for the gas to come out of the shower heads, they prayed for Brenny and the baby. They prayed each other's souls.

"I wish I could sing," Hans told Adrian with his mind. "This is the last thing I would like to do with my life. Music brings me such comfort and I need comfort so badly right now."

"I wish you could sing, too," Adrian replied sadly. He weakly began to pray, Thank you Father for sparing Brenny and the baby. Keep them safe and well. Father, if we are to die like this, give my brother Hans back his voice and remembrance of song so

he may be comforted. I love you and I guess I will be seeing You soon.

Brenny knew that they were about to die. She begged God to spare them, but she knew in her heart of hearts that they were dead men. Everything seemed too hopeless.

Hans felt his voice come back and he smiled at Adrian. He told him, "God has answered your prayer, Adrian."

Adrian smiled back at Hans. He told Hans telepathically, "Do you really want to sing?"

Hans nodded 'yes', although the noise in the gas chamber was beginning to become a low roar. Adrian wondered how anyone could sing in such a place.

Adrian asked Hans, "Do you know of any that would fit this situation but still give hope?"

Tears began to fall down Hans' face and he thought for a moment. He knew of one that might give them both some courage. His voice cracked as he began to sing I Still Believe, but it gained momentum as he sang the song.

Brenny had just started getting her tattoo when she heard Hans sing. Her tears kept falling as she kept begging God not to let them die.

Adrian and Hans began to fill with fear. They knew that they were almost out of time. As Hans finished singing his song, the gas started to fall and drift from the ceiling. Adrian felt his voice come back and he told Hans, "I liked that song. Thank you."

Hans told Adrian to breathe deeply. Men began to cry, scream, beg for mercy and cry out for God. Hans and Adrian felt something familiar and they quickly looked to see what was so familiar. They saw Martijn Stern holding his little boy close to him. The little boy's eyes revealed that he was too terrified to cry.

Adrian and Hans quickly prayed for everyone in the gas chamber. The gas became thicker and the screams of horror and fear became louder. People were beginning to suffocate. Many were beginning to panic. Some tried to climb the walls. Some tried to climb on top of others to try to tear the metal grates off the ceiling.

Adrian was so horrified by what he saw, that he forgot his fear of dying. It was hell on earth and beyond anything Adrian could have ever imagined. People panicked in another wave, tearing Adrian and Hans away from each other. When they finally found each other, they held each other tight.

The gas began to scorch their lungs. Their heads began to hurt and they felt their organs begin to die. The pain was excruciating and each one worried about the other. Hans and Adrian wanted to weep from the pain, but the gas prevented it. There was not enough oxygen left in them to make tears.

Adrian and Hans gritted their teeth and held each other tighter as they began to die. Everything faded to black and they heard beautiful music coming playing far away in the distance.

XXXVII

Brenny's eyes were the first to open. Hans' and Adrian's eyes opened immediately after hers. She wondered why there was so much light in the room and then she saw that the curtains were open. The sun was shining outside. As her eyes adjusted to the light, she saw that she was lying in Hans' bed in his flat. She felt Hans and Adrian in the bed with her.

Hans lay to the right of her on the outside of the bed. Adrian lay on the other side by the wall. Everyone knew that they were home and that they were safely together.

Hans' eyes quickly found hers. "Brenny!" he exclaimed as he hugged her and kissed her lips. He thought of Adrian and saw him behind Brenny. Adrian was holding her and kissing her head and hair.

Everyone began to cry tears of joy and began to thank God for keeping them safe. Then they remembered where they had just been. All three of them began to weep tears of pain and horror. They held each other tight and wept together for a long time. Adrian cried the longest and the hardest. This made Hans and Brenny very sad and worried.

"Adrian," Hans asked him, "Are you all right?"

"No," Adrian replied as he fought his tremors. "You and I were just gassed with many good people. They died, but I get to live and come back to this miserable place. Even though this new trial is over, I am very upset about what happened. I feel so sorry for the people who died and I still feel their fear and pain along with my own."

"I do, too, Adrian," Hans told Adrian sadly. "Many of them were my countrymen and this makes it more personal to me. It just wasn't our fate to continue the death process with them. We were sent there to learn."

"Learn what?" Brenny asked in outrage. "Learn how to live through the most unimaginable nightmare and then die in it at the end?"

Brenny could feel Hans and Adrian's disapproval of her words. She was too outraged to care about their disapproval. She told them, "I don't know where you guys get your faith. We knew at the beginning of this that I was the one who had the least faith. No matter what happens to us, you always have faith.

Sure, I have more faith now, but at what price? How much does faith cost and what does it really require? What kind of and how much work does it take? We should put this on our list of things to think about."

Brenny looked at Hans with amazement as she asked him, "How can you have as much faith as you do?" She looked at Adrian and asked him, "I can feel your hurt and underneath all of it, I can feel your faith." Brenny looked at both of them and said, "I am constantly amazed at how much faith you have. I am constantly amazed at how much faith you help me to have."

There was silence for a while.

Adrian told Brenny kindly, "I think that we were sent there to learn about another aspect of human evil and suffering. I am sure there was a good reason why we were sent there."

At that moment everyone realized that they were talking to each other. Not only that, they were together and the room was full of sunlight. Hans and Adrian also realized they were in bed together holding Brenny between them. Everyone jumped up and went to their respective spots. They sat quietly and reflected about what they had gone through. Adrian continued to shake from being upset.

It began to get darker in the flat and they wondered what they should do next. Brenny thought about how they woke up in the same bed together and how they had their voices back.

Brenny began to speak and Hans and Adrian began to worry if this was permissible. She told them, "I think that we are allowed to talk now and I think we are allowed to touch. Otherwise, we would never have woken together. Let's pray about this and see what the answer is."

Everyone gathered into a tight triangle and held hands. Adrian was still shaking, but all of them prayed together. They thanked God for their baby's safety and for their safety. They prayed for the people they left behind and for the family that once lived there. Brenny, Hans and Adrian thanked God for giving them their voices back and they asked God what they should do next to obey Him.

The Spirit of God answered their prayer and told them that they were starting a new phase of their journey. They were told that they could talk together and touch each other. They were also told they could wear their own clothing when they went out and that time would move faster.

Afterwards, Hans jumped up and walked over to the bookcase with the little pottery cup on the top shelf. He reached up and took the cup. He moved the cup in a counterclockwise motion and heard the little swirl sound of the button inside. Hans felt his spirit being pulled back to Brenny and Adrian, so he turned toward them. He grabbed the handle of his guitar case and brought it with him.

Hans sat by Brenny and Adrian. He dumped out the button in Adrian's hand and Hans told him, "Ja, Adrian, this is the button that fell off the uniform of the soldier that morning. I found it a long time ago and put it away in this little cup. I showed it to Brenny once."

Hans pointed toward the closet, "The family the Germans took left a box of things hidden in the floor. I found the box and it's in the closet. I will show it to you if you want."

Adrian was still shaking and nodded 'no'. "Later," Adrian told Hans, "I am still too upset." Adrian began to sob. "How could people do such terrible things to each other? I saw some terrible things from my world, but I never imagined how bad that evil and suffering really are. This world is worse than I imagined it would be. How can you stand living here?"

Hans held Adrian, "We live here because it is God's Will." Adrian continued to weep. Hans told Adrian, "There has always been suffering here and there always will be until the Judgement of the Days. Living here is not so bad. There are good people here and there are happy things. It's not so bad, Adrian, but I imagine this is very different and difficult to what you are used to."

Hans rubbed his bald head, "I suppose this is the first time you ever had a haircut, too, ja?"

Adrian rubbed his head and felt the stubble. He was about to weep about this when Brenny started laughing.

"What are you laughing at Brenny?" Adrian asked in surprise.

"Both of you. You look funny without hair," she told him.

"You do not have any hair yourself," he replied.

Brenny felt her head and laughed, "Well we're all equal and pitiful again. Do I look funny to you?"

Adrian shook his head, "No, Brenny you still look beautiful to me. You always look beautiful to me."

Hans looked at her and laughed, "You look funny to me because I am used to your long hair, but like Adrian told you, you are still beautiful. You will always be beautiful to us."

"Even if I were bald and pregnant forever?" she asked him.

"Even if you were bald and pregnant forever," answered Adrian. "We love you."

Hans thought for a moment before telling them, "You know, our hair was the only thing that covered us. Now our heads are naked, we are stripped down all the way."

The irony of Hans' words made everyone laugh.

Brenny looked at the cut on Adrian's forehead. "You are going to have a bad scar,"

she told him.

"What do you mean by 'scar'?" Adrian asked.

"It is a permanent mark left on your skin when it is severely hurt," she told him. Brenny looked at Hans and asked him, "What are you going to do about your broken nose?"

"I don't know, Brenny," Hans told her, "It still hurts, I can tell you that. There is nothing I can do about it now so I will worry about it when we have finished our journey. I know it is bad because I can feel it. "

Hans asked her, "Am I ugly now?"

"No, Hans, you're not ugly and you will never be ugly. You are still beautiful to look at even with a broken nose."

Adrian's nerves began to calm down, but he continued to weep. Brenny moved in closer to him and held him. He wept into her shoulder and she tried to wipe away his tears with her hands.

Brenny and Hans prayed for Adrian until he stopped crying. Adrian continued to shake. Brenny put her hands around his.

Hans quietly opened his guitar case. He looked lovingly at the instrument for a long time. He looked at Brenny and Adrian, "As you know, I've missed my guitar for a long time." Hans kissed it. He looked at Brenny and Adrian with twinkles in his eyes as he said, "I remember songs now."

"Hans," Brenny asked him, "Are you sure that you can do this? I don't recall any answer to prayer that said you could play the guitar. I know we have more freedom, but I think we should pray about this."

Hans nodded, "Ja, you're right, Brenny. Let's pray about this, but first let's pray about Adrian. He is still too upset and I am worried about him." Adrian tried to smile at Hans, but it took all his strength to try to calm down.

Hans put his hand on top of Adrian's hand and sincerely told him, "I am worried about you being so upset. I am upset about what happened, too, but I am happy to be back in our little home. I feel very bad about what happened to those people, but I am trying to learn from it and count my blessings at the same time. I am comforted knowing that I can pray for them even though this already happened. They will always be in my prayers."

Hans, Brenny and Adrian prayed together. They also prayed for the people they left behind at the camp. At the end of their prayer, they asked about playing music. They were told they could play music as long as they continued to pray and think regularly. They were also encouraged to talk to each other and to eat together.

Because they were allowed to touch, everyone stretched out their leg so they could feel the other two persons. This comforted them.

It took a while for Hans to tune his guitar and Hans wondered how long it had been since he had last tuned it. As soon as Hans tuned it, his fingers rippled through it and he played a few songs. The sound of the music made Brenny and Adrian very happy.

Soon it became very dark in the flat and Hans knew that it was time to stop playing.

He put his guitar back in its case and put it away. They prayed together for the baby.

Although they were clean, they wanted to wash. Adrian froze momentarily when he saw the water come out of the shower head, but he fought his fear and faced it. After they washed, they ate and drank together. Although they were still tired from their ordeal, they had a nice time talking and visiting together.

Brenny got tired and everyone knew that it was time to sleep. She walked over to the bed and got in it.

Adrian was surprised and he asked her, "Brenny, why are you sleeping up there?"

She replied, "My back hurts and although it has hurt all this time, I want to give it a little rest. I want to sleep on a bed and I am sick of sleeping on the cold floor. I think we were being told that we could sleep like this when we woke up the way we did."

Brenny's words made sense to Adrian and Hans. They were sick of sleeping on the cold, hard floor, too, so they snuggled in beside her. Each one put his arm around her and their arms touched each other.

"Why do you think that we are being encouraged to touch each other?" Hans asked Brenny and Adrian.

Adrian answered, "Probably because it is part of the healing and learning process. I do not mind the touching. At least we get to hold each other."

Hans replied, "Ja, this is a good thing. I'm very happy about this."

"I can tell that both of you are really happy," Brenny told Hans. "I can feel your boner pressing against the front of me and Adrian's is pressing against the back of me."

Hans and Adrian laughed in the dark.

Brenny wondered what it felt like to hold Adrian's member in her hand. She remembered that she had never gotten to do that.

"Do not get any crazy ideas, either, Brenny," Adrian told her.

"What do you mean?" she asked.

"I just heard your thought--you wondered what I would feel like in your hand--you are not going to touch either of us like this until everything is resolved," Adrian told her. "We are already in enough trouble."

"I know," Brenny told Adrian, "But there is nothing wrong with imaging. You should be glad that I wondered. It shows that I still desire you."

Brenny felt Adrian begin to shake. "Why are you still shaking, Adrian? she asked him. Are you still afraid from what happened?"

"Partially," he told her. "But I am also shaking because it feels good to be this close to you."

Adrian moved in closer to her. "At least I am not cold for once," he told her. "I am so grateful for not being cold and I am more grateful to be here with you and Hans."

"Can you make your erection go away?" she asked him. "It's digging into my back and my back hurts enough as it is."

"Brenny! You know I cannot help this. If it continues, I will beat off, okay?" Adrian laughed as he said, "I have had a lot of practice."

"Don't be talking like that, Adrian," Hans told him. "Remember, all of us are equal and pitiful. If you beat off, then Brenny and I will have to, too. I really don't want to do that." Hans' voice revealed how much he didn't like the group masturbation, although everyone already knew this.

"What was wrong with beating off?" Adrian asked Hans. "There is nothing wrong with it. Besides . . . "

Hans finished the sentence with Adrian, "It makes you humble." They both started to laugh.

"I still can't believe that I taught you how to masturbate," Hans told him.

"Is masturbate another word for it?" Adrian asked.

"Ja, that and 'jack off', 'flog the log' and 'spank the monkey'," Hans replied. "There are all kinds of sayings for it, but it means the same thing."

Brenny asked them, "Why do you think we were made to do this? To learn about ourselves? To learn how to love ourselves? To show our individual sexuality to each other? This was too personal and I am still embarrassed and humiliated."

"Just like Adrian and I said, to make us humble," Hans answered. "To make us humble before ourselves and the others. I am still embarrassed and uncomfortable, but Adrian enjoyed our little circle jerks."

"I liked them," Adrian replied. "I used to look forward to them every day . . . after praying for the baby and going on our walks. It was something pleasurable to do than be bored on a long, long day and always having to think and pray. Since I had to do it, I figured I might as well enjoy it. I liked watching Brenny . . . "

Hans laughed, "Ja, I did, too." Hans looked at Brenny as he told her, "Here I thought I knew everything about you, Brenny, and then you pull out your dildo. Where did you get it?"

"Is that what it is called?" Adrian asked.

"Ja," Hans told him.

"I brought it with me from America," Brenny told them, "A girl never knows when she might need one. . . ." Brenny looked at Adrian although she knew he couldn't see her in the dark. She told him, "I bought it to stay faithful to you, so I wouldn't be tempted, but I guess it didn't work. One look at Hans and I forgot that I had backup."

Adrian shrugged at her words and told her kindly, "It is okay . . . I still love you."

He told Hans, "I was always glad when it my turn was last. Otherwise, I always had a hard time fighting off another erection."

Hans laughed, "Ja, me too."

"Do all you humans beat off?" Adrian asked Hans and Brenny.

"The healthy ones do, especially those who aren't in relationships," Hans answered, "But we usually do it in private where God is the only witness."

Adrian thought for a few moments and said, "I think I know why we had to do that. I think all of us know secretly. We were made to do that to force us into deep intimacy. We have been so deeply intimate for so long and we never touched each other. Maybe that is why I liked our little parties."

"We could tell you liked them, Adrian," Brenny told him. "That's because you always took your sweet time doing it and you were creative when you were doing it, too. You always did it at least two different ways when you did it."

Adrian asked her, "What do you mean?"

Hans replied, "You would start out with one hand and finish with the other. Stuff like that."

Let's go to sleep, ja? I want to get some sleep before something new and frightening happens to us again. Besides, I want to get up early and play my guitar."

"And pray," Brenny drearily reminded him. She instantly felt Hans and Adrian's

disapproval.

Adrian told her, "You know that we disapprove of how you talked about prayer. How many times do we have to go through this with you?"

Brenny replied, "I get tired of it, but I do it and you know this. I obey the rules like everyone else. That doesn't mean that I agree."

She felt more disapproval from Hans and Adrian. Their great displeasure made her like she had let them down again and this made her feel sad. She knew that she was beginning to feel negative, so she fought to turn it around.

Brenny told Adrian and Hans, "Okay, I am sorry for offending you. I am not sorry because I am not as enthusiastic as you guys are about praying all the time."

"I don't mind praying," Hans told Brenny, "It makes me feel good when I do it. I thought that I used to pray a lot before, but now I know I didn't pray enough."

"Goodnight, guys," Brenny told them. "I am sorry that I always offend or hurt you. I am glad that you always forgive me. Still, I want you to know that I don't do it on purpose."

"We already know this," Adrian replied.

"I know," Brenny said, "But I wanted to say it anyway. I always wanted to say it but I couldn't. There are a lot of things I want to say, but I will save them for tomorrow. Except one: I love you."

"I love you, too," Hans and Adrian told her.

Hans yawned and then told Adrian, "I have another guitar, Adrian. I will teach you how to play if you like."

"I would like this," Adrian told Hans. "It would give me something new to do to make the time pass faster."

Adrian tried to sleep, but he kept thinking about what he had witnessed and experienced. Because he couldn't sleep, the others couldn't sleep. Finally, they prayed together and asked God to help them sleep. Before long, a blanket of sleep came over them. For the first time in a very long time, they slept peacefully, warm and well.

Although Hans had wanted to get up early, all of them slept very late. They realized that they had missed a lot of sleep lately and God had let them sleep in so they could get well. As always, when one person's eyes opened, the others' eyes opened afterwards.

The first thing they noticed was their hair. It had grown back, but only longer. Everyone's hair was the same length and color. It was also very long.

They began their established routine of praying for the baby, using the bathroom, eating, drinking and washing up. They took their places and prayed for a while. All of them put their feet in the middle of the triangle so they would touch each other.

Hans waited a little while longer and then he took out his guitar. He played for a long time and the music sounded great to them.

Hans had another regular guitar in his closet. One that he had planned to sell, but then forgot about it. Hans gave it to Adrian to play. He showed Adrian how to tune it and showed him the basic cords. Adrian learned how to play right away and he played very well.

Hans was impressed. "Did you play an instrument before?" he asked Adrian.

"I never did," Adrian replied. "I was always too serious about other things to spend my time learning. Now I wished I had learned because I enjoy this very much. It soothes my nerves and my spirit and it makes me happy. I like playing this instrument with you, Hans, and I enjoy the music. I am having fun."

"I am having fun with you, too, Adrian," Hans told him. "I will teach you how to play the classical guitar and other instruments if you like."

Adrian smiled at him and said, "I would like this."

Hans taught Adrian how to play all his instruments and how to read music. Adrian soon became as good a musician as Hans.

One day, Hans and Adrian were playing the guitar. Adrian looked over at him and asked Hans, "I always wanted to know about something and since we are supposed to not have any secrets between us, I was wondering if I should ask you about this."

"What do you want to know Adrian?" Hans replied.

"Did you really beat off to Brenny's picture in her book?" he asked.

Hans rolled his eyes up and asked, "Is this really important?"

Underneath, everyone knew the truth. Adrian wanted to expand on it, so he could intellectualize it and then process it. Adrian also liked to talk about sex, although he did this mostly from curiosity than anything else. Because he was their friend and because he was their partner, they told him what they knew. During these conversations, they learned more about whom they were as beings and intimate beings.

Brenny interjected, "Wait a minute! How did you know that the picture he visualized was in my book?"

Adrian replied, "Because I saw the picture when I read your book."

She was surprised. She asked Adrian, "When you did read it?"

He replied, "It seems like a long time ago now. Right after I saw you in that old house. I took the book off the shelf in your old home, read it and put it back. It was very good, Brenny. "

"You liked it?" Brenny asked him.

Adrian replied, "Your book was rich and elaborate that was intensely beautiful and bittersweet. You told about the lives that people live under the skin and how women where you are from are treated. Your words in your book revealed an incredibly beautiful inner life. It was

When I read your book, I was surprised at the loveliness of your mind, heart and spirit. You are lovely inside, Brenny, with deep dimension and with so many facets of goodness, that you radiate light. You would be beautiful to me even if you were not my mate and I would desire you as much as I do now.

Hans read your words and saw you the same way. That is why he loves you, too."

Adrian decided not to pursue the picture question anymore, so he never said anything about it again. Adrian was glad that Brenny had changed the course of the conversation. He smiled to himself as he thought she really is good for my life despite all that has happened. Maybe there is a reason for everything that happened. This journey has been terrible and wonderful.

If things had not happened the way they did, then I would not be with these two people like this. I am so close to them. We are so close to each other. I never imagined such intimacy.

Hans and Brenny heard his thought. They smiled and shrugged.

Brenny thought for a moment and told Adrian, "Since we are asking each other questions, I would like to ask you some. Who is Kenan? He's an angel, right? I figure that he is because no one else knows you down here but Hans, I, Berend, Kether, Raziel and the Watchers."

Adrian nodded and answered in a worried voice, "You are right. Kenan is an angel and one of my best friends. It is obvious that he thought Hans was an angel, too. I am sure that he figured it out later that Hans was not one of us.

I never had a chance to think about Kenan, but now that I do, I figure that he and some others found a way through the barriers and are living on the earth. He must have been away from the Father for some time because he tried to talk to me and all the other angels knew they could not talk to me."

Brenny asked, "You mean that he and some other angels are living down here, hanging out with humans?"

Adrian laughed as he replied, "I guess you could say that. Look at me. I am here with you and Hans. I imagine that angels are living among people. I wonder if I will get to talk to any of them after our journey is over."

"Do you think that God will address him and the others?" Hans asked Adrian.

"I do not know. Someday, I hope I run into him again so I can talk with him and find out his story. He is my brother.

You are wondering if the Father will punish him. I think that you already know that the Father does not punish anyone."

Brenny interjected, "It seems to me that some of the tests that God put us through were punishment. I don't even want to remember them."

Adrian felt sadness and disappointment. No matter how hard he and Hans tried, they could never get her to stay positive all the time. He thought for a few moments.

Adrian told her, "The Father wanted us to go on this journey together for a good reason. We might not see all the reasons right away, but someday we will."

Hans remembered that Adrian had been talking about Kenan. This reminded Adrian that he had been talking about his friend Kenan.

Adrian told them, "Kenan must be in some kind of trouble-- great trouble- because he was one of the most loyal and dedicated angels in Heaven. His heart was always on fire to serve the Father in any way he could. He would never walk away unless something terrible happened to him. I cannot imagine what kind of a crisis could affect him like that.

I feel bad for Kenan and I want to worry about him. But right now, I can only worry about only you two and our baby."

"Kenan didn't look like he was happy," Brenny said.

"I wonder if he will be caught like the Watchers," Hans replied.

Adrian paused and thought for a moment. Then he said, "I have a feeling that he will not get caught. He will probably turn himself in and accept the consequences of his actions. At least this is the Kenan I know. But then again, I have never known him to walk away from the Father or to commit sin."

Adrian began to laugh as he said, "If I have learned anything, I have learned that everyone can do unpredictable things. Even angels like Kenan.

Angel or mortal, there is not much difference between either. All of us can make mistakes and all of us can learn from them. Angels are as prone to sin as humans if they decide to make their own decisions and those decisions are wrong."

Brenny told him, "You forgot something, Adrian."

"What is that?"

"You forgot that angels suffer, too," Brenny answered. "You are living proof of this, but I am sure that they suffer when they see all the suffering. Maybe it is indirectly, but none of you are insulated or isolated from suffering. Your friend is probably hurting. Those are the vibes I picked up when we saw him."

It was quiet for a few moments. Then Brenny spoke. She said to Adrian, "I have another question. I always wanted to ask you this: Why did you blow up the house?"

Adrian laughed, "That was a little spectacular, huh? I did it to let the ghost out. The ghost was really unhappy and had been there for a long time. By taking away the house, the ghost finally found the way home.

The house was ugly and not fit for people to live in, anyway. When I gave the owner money and treasure, he told me I could do anything I wanted with it." Adrian laughed again as he told her, "I was also showing off for your old boyfriend and his family."

Brenny understood what Adrian meant: he could have made the house go away with his mind if he had wanted it.

Hans asked Adrian, "Why didn't you tell us on the Third Level we would have to stand before God naked?"

Adrian shrugged, "Because I did not know. It was the first time I ever did this"

"You mean everyone doesn't have to appear before God naked?" Hans asked.

Adrian laughed, "No, I think we are the only ones. The Father was making a point by making us be naked."

"I have another question, Adrian," Brenny told him. "If you had not been in Hans' body that night, would this child only belong to Hans?"

"Yes," Adrian told her.

Everyone became silent. Hans told her, "I don't think we should ever talk about this again, Brenny. Our daughter belongs to all of us and this will never change. Thinking about what might have been does not reflect the reality of our lives."

"You are right, Hans," Brenny told him. "To be truthful, I am glad the baby belongs to both of you because I love both of you. Our baby was conceived in love, even if it

was crazy love at the time."

"Do not say that," Adrian replied.

"What?" Brenny asked.

"Crazy love. Our baby was conceived in love, powerful love, not crazy love. We might have been a little crazy, but the love was good, not crazy."

"Sorry," Brenny replied.

Adrian told her, "Do not be, but please watch your words about our child. It matters to me and Hans that only good words are spoken about her and about her conception. She is innocent and good, even if we were not."

"Adrian is right, Brenny," Hans told her, "There is nothing bad about our child or how she came to be."

Brenny smiled at both of them and replied, "Well I am glad she belongs to both of you."

"I am, too, Brenny," Hans replied happily.

Adrian looked at him surprised and Hans smiled at him.

"I have a question for Hans," Brenny said.

"Ja, Brenny?"

"Why did you teach the angels the song Fancy?"

"They asked me to sing them a song about a human who overcomes obstacles and it was the only one that I could remember," Hans replied. He laughed as he said, "Besides, I like the guitar part of it."

Brenny laughed with him. She told Hans, "You taught them a song about a hooker!" Brenny told him.

"Ja, that is true, but she did overcome her obstacles," Hans told her. "The angels knew what it meant and they caught the irony."

When they went for walks, Brenny and Adrian shopped for clothes. Brenny was so big she that could not fit into any of her clothes except the magician's wedding dress. Adrian was a size smaller and five inches shorter than Hans. Few of Hans' clothes fit him, except for the XL t-shirts.

Adrian did not like the feel of new clothes because they were scratchy to him. He bought his jeans at a used store or at the flea market. He would not wear leather, so he wore a pair of felt clogs. Hans decided not to wear leather, either, so he started wearing cloth shoes, too.

When they went out, they no longer had to walk in a triangle. Instead, Brenny held each of their hands as they walked. They were not allowed to talk to anyone on their walks, but they did not care. They did not need to talk with anyone else.

Hans and Brenny explained many things about the world to Adrian. Adrian listened with curiosity and fascination.

Hans and Adrian were playing the guitar and Brenny was sitting with them when they heard someone coming. Raziel appeared to them and without a word, instantly took them to see God. This time, they found themselves in the Throne Room with their clothes on.

They were prepared to see God the first time, but this time they were not prepared. Confused and surprised, they wondered what was going to happen.

As they wondered, God's kind and beautiful voice told them, "You have done well on your journey and I am pleased. It is time for your child to be born and I want her to have a name from each of you. Adrian, I am restoring you back to your natural state." Adrian felt himself changing back into an angel. His wings grew back. Adrian was happy to be his old self, but he became worried.

"Father," he told God, "I am aware angels are not allowed to be on earth except for official business. I want to stay on earth to be with Brenny and Hans raise our child. Please allow me to do this or please turn me back into a human so I can do this. I love my child and I love these people. Please grant me this."

God told him, "Your words please me, Adrian. You may stay with them."

"There is something else, Father, I would like to ask about," Adrian said.

"What do you want to know?" asked God.

"Can Brenny be a wife to Hans and me?"

Hans and Brenny were stunned. No one had discussed the nature of their relationship once the penance was over and the baby was born. No one wanted to go there in their conversations, either. Secretly, all were afraid that they would be separated from each other.

"Why?" asked God.

"Because it is the only compromise I can think of where everybody gets something. All of us love each other and we want to stay together, although no one has openly talked about it. Our child has three parents and all of us should raise her. I do not see why we have to be restricted to the manmade rules of the world. Men have many cultures where they have more than one wife. I cannot see why there cannot be relationships where there are more than one husband. It will not be easy, but I am sure that all of us can work out the problems."

"How would each of you know your wife?" asked God.

"We would each visit her privately," Adrian answered.

"How would you sleep?"

"We would sleep together as we do now."

"Hans, what do you say about this?" God asked him.

Hans was still surprised and he stumbled for words, "I . . . I . . . love Brenny. I could share her with Adrian if she is willing. I have the capacity for that kind of relationship. You know that, too."

God asked Brenny, "What do you want to do?"

Brenny became afraid. It was a lot of commitment and she knew this. Her heart wanted it, but she wanted to think about it. She knew that she had to think fast because everyone was waiting for her answer. The baby kicked her hard and she realized that their baby was listening.

She told God, "I love both of them and I am willing to do this. I should tell you that I am surprised by Adrian's generous offer. They know my strengths and weaknesses. They know that this kind of relationship is going to take a lot of work and I know that they will do their share. I also know that they will help me and encourage when I don't have enough faith or I am tired. They always have. Yes, I will do this, but I am afraid."

"Even if it is forever?" God asked her.

Brenny became afraid again. Then she remembered her feelings about Adrian and Hans. She replied, "Even if it is forever. I prefer forever because I love them forever," Brenny replied.

"Adrian," God said, "Are you willing to commit to this forever?"

"Yes."

"How about you, Hans?" God asked him.

"I will."

"After your child is born, I want Adrian to take Brenny to see her friends. You will learn your fate then."

Brenny, Hans and Adrian instantly found themselves back in the flat. Before anyone could say anything, Brenny's water broke. They looked at each other with surprise and confusion.

A big pain went through her and she knew there was no time to go to the hospital. Another pain hit her. It hit her so hard and fast, that she didn't have time to cry, speak or think.

Hans asked her if she wanted to lie in the bed. She told him no because she did not want to get the bedding wet and bloody. Brenny told Hans to lay a quilt on the floor and she would lay there. He asked her if he should call an ambulance, but she told him there wasn't enough time. The baby was coming out.

Brenny propped herself up by the bed in her penance spot. It was more comfortable and familiar to her. She felt the need to push and the baby's head come out with the next pain. Hans reached down and caught the head. Brenny pushed two more times and the baby slid out.

Adrian did not know anything about human birth. He watched in fascination from the side and prayed.

The baby had a caul on her face and Hans quickly and delicately removed it. As soon as Hans took the caul off her face, she began to cry in a sweet little voice. He held her up for Brenny to see.

Hans told Adrian to get him a towel to wrap the baby up with. While he waited for the towel, he laid the baby on Brenny's stomach so she would stay warm.

Hans thought about the umbilical cord. He looked for his scissors in the cupboard. When he found them, he washed them in hot water with soap.

Adrian had already covered the baby with the towel when Hans took the scissors and cut the cord. He wrapped the baby better with the towel and gave her to Adrian to hold. Adrian was afraid to hold her because she looked so fragile, but he took the bundle from Hans.

Adrian looked at his little baby and knew then what Danel had meant when he said it was a wonderful feeling to hold your own child in your arms. He smelled something sweet and pleasant. He instinctively looked at the table. The dried, white roses had come back to life. Brenny and Hans heard Adrian's thought and they looked at the table with wonder and happiness.

Hans helped Brenny deliver the afterbirth and he put it in a dusty, plastic bag. Adrian

watched in curiosity as he held the baby.

Adrian gently gave the baby to Brenny. Brenny held her, kissed her and instinctively put her to her breast. The baby began to suckle. Hans put the caul in a little wooden box.

After the baby nursed, Brenny handed the baby to Hans. Hans began to weep tears of joy. Brenny and Adrian wept with him.

All three held and kissed their baby until they had bonded with her. Then Hans went to the coffee shop downstairs to see if they would call an ambulance. They had gone out of business and it looked very dusty inside. He saw someone walking by with a cell phone and asked them to call an ambulance. They did. An ambulance came and took Brenny and the baby to the hospital. Adrian and Hans rode with her.

They named her Adrian Rose van der Pallen. Brenny and Hans signed the birth certificate. The baby was beautiful and had lots of hair. She had a serene, sweet nature and had eyes that reflected wisdom and intelligence.

As Brenny lay in the hospital bed, she watched as Hans and Adrian take turns holding the baby. They were happy and this made her happy.

Hans looked up at Brenny and Adrian as he held their little daughter in his arms. He told them, "My parents and sister are going to be happy when they see Baby Adrian."

"Is this their first grandchild?" Brenny asked.

"Ja. They probably thought they would never have any grandchildren," Hans replied.

"Why?" Brenny asked.

"They thought that I was a little eccentric and they always thought I was gay," he told her.

"Why? Because of how you look and because they never saw you with any women?"

Hans chuckled as he replied, "That and because my sister is a lesbian."

"When are you going to tell them?" she asked.

"I was thinking about calling them right now," Hans replied and gave the baby back to Adrian to hold.

XXXVIII

Brenny rented a small suite at a nice hotel by the airport. She had thought about showing up at Mario's house, but she knew that there was going to be a confrontation. Brenny wanted the confrontation to happen in a neutral zone with privacy.

Mario and Justin got to the hotel faster than she expected. She was in the shower, so she telepathically told Mario that she would be there in a couple of minutes. Mario and Justin waited uneasily outside the door. They looked at the room's number. It was 555.

Brenny greeted them at the door in one of the hotel's plush white robes. She had her hair wrapped in a towel on her head. The towel cast a shadow over the top of her face, so it was hard to see her eyes. They began to worry, but when Brenny smiled at them, they knew that they were in the right place. Justin and Mario's tension melted for a few moments before it began to grow again.

Brenny immediately began to feel uncomfortable. It had been a long time since she had seen them. She knew that they were relieved to hear from her and see her, but she also knew they were very unhappy with her. Although she had expected it and was prepared for it, she began to feel awkward and tense.

Mario and Justin entered the dark suite. Mario reached over to turn on the light, but Brenny told him, "No, Mario. I prefer the dark right now. I was in the dark for a long time and bright light sometimes hurts my eyes."

Mario pulled his hand back from the switch. He wished that she didn't want it so gloomy in the room. He was grateful that there was enough light in the room for everyone to see each other.

The greetings were warm and happy, but underneath, they were tinged with bittersweetness. Everyone decided to put away their anxiety until they had set a proper table to talk at. Their spirits did this as their tongues danced carefully and civilly in greetings. Soon enough, the room became somber. Everyone knew that Brenny had gone through some big changes--they could feel it--and it made them feel uncomfortable, worried and curious. They were also angry because she had been gone so long without contacting them.

Justin and Brenny waited for Mario to say something. They could feel the displeasure pouring out of him. They could sense Mario's tongue positioning itself to translate that displeasure

Mario began to talk. He told her, "Let's cut to the chase, Brenny. I'm hurt, Brenny, and Justin's hurt, too. We're your friends and you treated us like shit. You never told us where you were and we had no idea where you were. We didn't know if you were alive or dead. Justin and I were afraid that you had gone through another mirror and this time, you could not come back."

Mario stopped for a moment to pick up psychic vibrations off Brenny. The pupils of his eyes narrowed as they told him something.

He told her in a disbelieving voice, "My power tells me you were chasing dick. Is that true? You never tried to contact us because of a man?"

Brenny nodded 'yes'. She wanted to say something, but decided to let Mario vent his frustration and anger first.

Mario continued, "How could you be so selfish? You never tried to contact us all this time and it scared the hell out of us. We tried to look for you in our crystal balls, but you put a wall around you--a real powerful one--that wouldn't let me see how or where you were. That's fucked up, Brenny. Real fucked up. Is that the way you are supposed to treat your loyal and loving friends?"

Brenny felt worse than she anticipated. Guilt began to creep in and it made her angry because she was sick of feeling guilty and remorseful. She willed the negative emotion out of her soul.

Brenny nodded in acknowledgement. "Yes, I know I didn't contact you and I was wrong for not doing it. I'm sorry . . ." Brenny tearfully told them as she tasted the bitter feeling of regret she had tasted so many thousands of times. "I have been a bad girl. A real bad girl."

Brenny hesitated for a moment and then continued, "And yes, I disappeared because of a man. Two of them, to be exact."

Mario's eyes flashed with anger. "Girrrl, you've been more than bad," Mario snapped at her, "You have been wicked."

Brenny at seen his sarcastic side before, but he had never used it on her. She did not like it and told Mario this with her eyes and mind. He backed off.

Brenny took in a deep breath and steadied herself. "No truer words, Mario," she said, "No truer words. But you know how I am"

"Let me guess," Mario said sarcastically, "Both dicks were so good that you didn't have the time to contact us." Mario was becoming rude again and Brenny was getting tired of it.

She told him with authority, "At first I was in love and I didn't think about contacting anyone. Then something happened and I was forbidden to contact anybody.

I was in a love triangle and I made some big mistakes. I also hurt the two persons I loved and I hurt myself. Then I got pregnant." Brenny shuddered from painful memories.

Mario and Justin instantly knew that she had just had a baby. This surprised them so much that they forgot about their anger. They felt the rawness of Brenny's pain and eased over to the sofa to hear her story.

Brenny's face became serious. She began to pace slowly and deliberately as she remembered what she wanted to tell them. Finally, she began to speak.

She told them, "I stayed in Saint Cloud for a long time and waited for Adrian. I never heard from Adrian and I began to lose faith, even though I had his ring, a ring that God made and gave to him.

The waiting was becoming unbearable and I hated Saint Cloud. I was sick of being there. Oh . . . I also got sick for a couple of months and thought I was going to die."

Mario felt the weight of Brenny's last words. An alarm went through him. He quickly steadied his emotions as he asked her, "Why didn't you call me if you were sick, Brenny? All you had to do was wish for me and I would have been there in a heartbeat. I would have found you anywhere."

Brenny replied, "Because I knew that you would have put me in the hospital. The noise and bright lights of the hospital would have made me sicker. Besides, I was sick from something the doctors wouldn't have been able to fix. I overdosed on magical power. It didn't kill me, but made me very sick for a while."

Brenny continued, "After I got better, I wanted to get out of Saint Cloud. For the first time in my life, I had money. I was loaded."

"We saw your picture in the paper with the big cardboard lottery check," Justin told her.

Brenny began to laugh hard and shake her head. "I was so embarrassed when I saw the picture in the paper. The things you have to do to collect your money . . . "

Brenny thought to herself, I wonder how much I should tell Mario? I don't want to relive everything and I don't want to be here all day. I miss the baby and Hans and I want to get back as soon as possible . . .

"I decided to go on a vacation," Brenny told Justin and Mario. "I had never been many places and I wanted to get out.

I didn't know where I was going to go until I got to the airport. When I got to the airport, I looked at the names of cities on the destination bulletin board and Amsterdam stood out so I got myself a ticket to go there."

"Did you go by yourself?" Mario asked.

"Yes."

"So what happened to you?" Mario asked. "I am feeling power coming out of you that something enormous happened over there."

"Oh Mario, oh Justin . . . You cannot even begin to believe what happened. It was the worst of things and it was the best of things," Brenny told them as she shook her head.

"So what happened in Amsterdam?" Mario asked her.

Brenny smiled and said, "Well, at first I had lots of fun. I checked out the coffee shops. I met and partied with a lot of nice and interesting people while I listened to a lot of good music . . .

I found a cozy coffee shop on a busy street that I really liked. I would go there every day and just sit there and watch the people outside from this big window. Sometimes I'd smoke, sometimes I didn't.

It was fun to watch people from that window. So many of them, all different, going to and fro in all different directions.

After awhile, I began to recognize some of the people who went by the window regularly. One of them was Hans. A person couldn't help but notice him because he was so beautiful. He was beautiful to look at and his spirit was even more beautiful. He glowed light as he walked by this window every day on his way home from work.

We finally met and there was electricity between us. Too much electricity. He had read Amy and was fan of the book. Guys, he had a MN 13 tattoo and he was psychic. He was many things."

Justin and Mario were surprised to hear about the tattoo. They were pleased that someone on the other side of the world liked the book as well as they did. They thought about getting the same tattoo.

"And Hans was too close, right?" Justin asked.

"Yes, Justin, he was too close," Brenny replied. "He was there and Adrian was somewhere else. Still, that didn't make it right. I had promised Adrian I would wait for him and I meant the promise when I made it. One moment with Hans and the promise flew out the window."

"Hans knew about Adrian the first minute he met me. Hans is more psychic than all of us together." Brenny looked at Mario and told him in a sincere voice, "He still spellbinds me. Hans is a Unique like us.

Right at the first, we tried to make everything look innocent, but under the surface we were creating a labyrinth of lies. Our language and our body language told one story, and the way we used to our psychic and psychological energy told a more sordid story.

Hans and I both felt the psychic energy between us immediately. Instead of restraining it, we played psychic games. He cycled his soul through me like Stacy did. We sent out probes into each other and let each other look inside each other's soul. This created intimacy between us, incredible intimacy.

We teased each other with our psychic energies by making sure they were constantly touching. When we first got together, Hans and I never touched each other, but our psychic energies had been all over themselves many times.

Hans asked me if I was married, knowing that I would deny Adrian. He also knew that I would ask him if he was married. I knew that when Hans told me that he had been with a married woman, that he was telling me that he didn't care that there was someone else in my life. He structured the conversation to make sure I knew that I could have him.

Hans' heart and my heart demanded that we find a way to couple them. Their demands became too strong to resist.

I told myself that I was waiting to have sex with Hans because I was giving Adrian a few more days to show up. It was a black lie because I knew where everything was going."

Brenny continued with a hesitant and pained voice, "Inside my heart, I didn't want Adrian to show up because I was having too good of a party with Hans."

I stayed with Hans the first night I met him. We needed to spend a lot of time together so we could begin our confederation. We needed to blend our energy to build a wall of lies and denial. We did this because we wanted to be together and not have to worry about Adrian interfering.

Of course, we denied it to ourselves that we were doing this. On the outside, we were having a good time with each other's company. And we were.

On the inside, we were plotting and planning."

"Sounds like an affair," Mario said wryly.

"It was, but it was so much more. I stayed with Hans even though I knew beyond any shadow of a doubt that God wanted me to be with Adrian. I let myself be tempted and I wanted to be tempted. I was crazy, Hans was crazy, it was crazy and it made Adrian crazy. Still, Hans and I couldn't help ourselves because we were so much in love."

"Where was Adrian, Brenny?" Justin asked.

She replied, "He had been taking care of personal spiritual matters God. He felt he needed to do this before we could be together. He was trying to prepare things for us- to set a holy table for us- and I was in Amsterdam wrecking all his efforts."

Brenny began to pace the floor. She continued with a strained voice, "Adrian came back just as Hans and I were about to have sex for the first time. The seduction was perfect until we heard his voice. We should have stopped right there and then, but Hans and I were determined to be together. We lied to ourselves when we tried to believe that we never heard him. We also knew that he would be back.

Hans and I made love anyway, even though we heard Adrian's voice. Adrian was very hurt, shocked and upset. I could feel his pain and I could feel his heart breaking. Hans knew this and used his psychic energies to direct my mind away from it.

Our recklessness devastated Adrian so badly that he wept. We felt his grief, betrayal and despair, but Hans and I continued to ignore him. Ignoring him was mean and the most destructive thing we could do because it energized Adrian's efforts to get me to talk with him."

Justin and Mario were surprised at Brenny's story. They checked their hearts and their hearts told them that Brenny's story was true.

"This doesn't sound like you Brenny. How did you get yourself into that situation?" Justin asked her.

Brenny replied, "I fell in love with Hans the first moment I saw him and I wanted to be tempted. Hans and I heard and saw all the warnings inside and out.

The attraction was too great. Hans is such a beautiful person and he is a prayerful man. He is a good man, too. I had never been with a good man and I wanted to know what it was like.

Hans is smart and talented. He can speak and read five languages. He's a musician who can sing and even dance. He's a sculptor and makes beautiful things with his hands. There was enormous sexual attraction as well, besides the psychic and other attraction."

"Why didn't Adrian stop you?" Justin asked Brenny.

She answered, "Because Hans and I had free will. Free will has rights and the Laws of the Universe protects them. Hans and I knew this and we knew it prohibited Adrian from stopping us. We also used this law to stop him from trying to talk with us."

Mario asked, "How did Adrian react?"

Brenny replied, "At first, Adrian stayed in his home and grieved. He hoped that I would come home to him. When I didn't, he began to suffer from great loneliness and feelings of hurt and betrayal.

The greatest thing that hurt him was knowing that I didn't want to be with him. I wanted to be with Hans.

Adrian regretted it that he had sent me away from his home the second time. Adrian let Denny and his uncle and Manfred go through the mirror. He never intended to let me go the second time, but his conscience compelled him to make things right for us. He knew that I wouldn't go back on my own, so he let Manfred take me.

Although Adrian had expressed it well to me, he thought that I did not understand that he was going to come after me as soon as he could. We spent a lot of time together the last time we were together. Adrian slowed time down so we could spend enough time together to bond, and forge covenants and alliances between us. We spent an equivalent of a year talking, visiting and resting together in that one earth day that I

was in his world. Adrian showed me how powerful he was to underline his point about coming after me.

Underneath, I knew the truth. I just lost faith, got tired of waiting, was lonely and Hans was there.

Adrian waited for me to get my mind right, but it was always on Hans. Although I was with Hans, Adrian kept trying to contact me and I wouldn't let him get through. Adrian became stubborn and he became overwhelmed with so much emotion that he made a bad choice."

"What did he do?" Mario asked.

"He would not let go. Adrian knew that he should let go, but he wouldn't. He wanted me so bad that he lost his patience. Then he made another mistake."

"What did he do?" asked Justin.

"Adrian tried to appeal to our consciences. He tried to manipulate us by making us feel guilty. This created a lot of conflict among the three of us."

Mario started laughing as he said, "Appealing to peoples' consciences never does work, does it?" he asked.

Brenny shook her head and said, "It never does. It seems to bring out the worst in people and it did for us.

Oh Mario and Justin, Hans and I became so good at lying and pretending. We secretly collaborated to construct all kinds of elaborate denial and deceit mechanisms.

Hans and I put a daily routine together so our lives would look like they had some legitimacy. Hans went to work and I cleaned up the flat and wrote. The truth is, neither one of us wanted to do those things. We wanted to be together every moment of the day and night. Hans and I were in love and had insatiable desire for each other.

We were like a drug to each other. Once we touched, we had to keep touching. The feelings between us grew in intensity . . . but so did our guilt. Our guilt mushroomed fast because Adrian started watching us.

Adrian would wait to find a quiet moment between Hans and me. Then he would whisper kindly to our hearts what he felt, heard and saw to appeal to our consciences."

"Like I said, it didn't work? Did it?" Mario asked Brenny.

Brenny shrugged her shoulders and nodded 'no' rigidly. She told them, "Adrian's strategy backfired because it made me and Hans feel cheap, dirty and ugly. Eventually, we got tired of feeling like this and got pissed off . . . "

Brenny shook her head and the tears flew. "Guilt can be a savage terrain. It turned into anger and war began between our hearts. And it started out so little . . . but became an incredible war that grew with intensity until it almost destroyed us.

We don't know who started fueling the fire of anger first, and that's not important. What is important is that it began to burn and we fed it. All three of us are equally responsible for letting it burn and we let it burn out of control."

Brenny paused for a long time. She gathered her energy to continue.

Brenny told Justin and Mario, "The game of wills began. With it, came the impoverished thinking fueled by negative feelings and energy. Hans and I became angry and defiant because we had no privacy and because Adrian was making us feel guilty.

Adrian became angry and defiant because we would not listen to him.

You would think someone like Adrian could easily beat us in a battle of the wills. Well . . . " Brenny took a long pause before she continued, "Guess what? Hans and I were formidable adversaries because we hooked our minds and psychic energies together.

Adrian never really understood human beings and human beings are treacherous and cunning. Adrian had never experienced evil or even committed it, so he wasn't ready for the evil that human beings can create. Amazing, it is so easy for good human beings like Hans and myself to create evil, too.

You've got to understand--there were a lot of emotions flying around in that room. Everybody was in love. Hans and Adrian were in love with me. Although I denied my love for Adrian, I was in love with both of them.

I asked Hans to teach me how to course my soul through his and once he taught me, we started doing this when we made love. Yes, it felt good, but Hans and I did this to hurt Adrian. We also did some radical and powerful sex magick to hurt Adrian as well. The sex was incredible, but the energy was incredibly negative.

Adrian became devastated when he saw that Hans and me becoming closer. We continued to hurt him in all kinds of ways, including making him wish. Mean, huh?

One time, we actually tried to talk about Adrian. We went through the motions of conversation to try to appease our guilty consciences. I played a semantic game about this and then we played a semantic game to cover the one I was playing.

Against my will, my spirit defended Adrian. That was a good sign that we should have stopped there, but we couldn't and wouldn't.

I gave Hans information about Adrian I shouldn't have. Hans pretended that he didn't want to hear it, but he listened to every word. I gave Hans the information so we

could devise unspoken schemes together to hurt Adrian. Sounds really evil, huh? Well it was. It was very evil. It was destructive and self-destructive."

Brenny's head sadly fell forward and her hands caught it before her chin hit her chest. She pushed her head up and paced back and forth.

Brenny spoke again, "Instead, things escalated. Hate introduced itself. We still don't know who started hating who first, but Adrian and Hans began to hate each other."

"People treat each other like this all the time. You act like you guys committed grievous crimes," Mario told Brenny.

"We did," Brenny replied with sadness. "We committed crimes so bad that they attracted God's personal attention, but I'll tell you about this later.

All of us sank lower and lower. The cycle of abuse and meanness continued for a long time.

We would talk to each other's hearts and say mean things to them. For example, Hans' heart spoke to Adrian's heart and described in detail what it felt like to make love with me. Hans told Adrian how good, fulfilling and pleasurable the sex between us was.

Hans was very ashamed of this later and we cried many tears with him about this.

I reminded Adrian's heart that he once offered to let Jude and I stay in his world until the end of time if I wanted it. I also reminded Adrian that he offered me my heart's desires and Hans was my heart's desire. I knew that this would badly hurt Adrian and it did.

When I did this, Adrian tried to will his pain into me so I would know how greatly my words had hurt him. I felt it coming, blocked it and sent it back. This started a new kind of weapon against each other as we started hurtling negative feelings at each other. Most of the time, we could block this negative energy, but sometimes these feelings made their way through. Whoever got hurt, got more pissed off and the level of the anger increased. To make things worse, I would become really angry when Adrian hurt Hans.

Adrian would remind Hans that God made me for him and he was my one, true mate. At first, Adrian did this to appeal to Hans' conscience. As Adrian started to become angry, the meaning of this message changed and he would say it in a way to make Hans angry.

Although I was an equal partner in this war, Hans and Adrian protected me because they loved me so much. Neither one would say bad things to me.

Believe it or not, by the time we were finished, we had hurled countless, mean, negative and hurtful things at each other. It is amazing how fast they added up!

One day, I woke up and I knew it was time to talk to Adrian. I was sick of the fighting and the feeling of this sickness went all the way through me to the soul. Adrian and Hans were sick of it, too, although Hans didn't want me to talk to Adrian. This is because we both knew that Adrian would never let me see Hans again.

Then something happened. It happened on a Friday, but I still don't know what month or even what year this happened. This date is hidden from me, Hans and Adrian. It will probably always be hidden."

Brenny paused for a moment and thought to herself, I wonder how much I want to tell them? She thought for a couple more seconds and then continued.

"I don't want to go into the details of what happened on this day, but to put it in a nutshell: something surreal and ethereal happened."

"This is the day you got pregnant, huh?" Mario asked Brenny, "My vibes tell me this."

Brenny started to nervously laugh, "Your vibes are right, Mario. I'll tell you about the baby in a little bit. First, I want you to know what happened so you'll know why I disappeared.

Until that Friday, Hans and I lived a double life. On the surface, everything looked happy. Like I told you, I lived with Hans and we had a regular routine. We talked, did things together and we enjoyed each other's company. We were in love, we made incredible love together and we were happy. On the surface . . .

Underneath, it was sordid and ugly. We played psychic and emotional warfare games against Adrian and Adrian eventually returned the negative energy.

At first, Hans and I were responsible for many negative behaviors. They included: deceit, lies, denial, lust, frustration, and betrayal. At first, Adrian was responsible for the negative behaviors of frustration, interference, jealousy and stubbornness.

By the time all three of us were done, we were guilty of much more. I think we created new kinds of sin, too. We had a long time to think about it and we still don't know how many ways and times we committed evil against each other and ourselves.

All we know is that it was too much. The sins at the end included defiance, deviance, fury, voyeurism and destruction. Add in an angel of high rank who has been corrupted, and you have a real dangerous cocktail for character destruction. All of us were held responsible for the destruction and self-destruction that we did individually and collectively.

There is so much to this story . . . I hope I am telling you enough of the basics of it so that you will understand what happened.

All of us created a lot of negative energy and the negative energy doubled, tripled, quadrupled, and more. The negative energy made us sick and we got sicker all the

time.

Jude came back and tried to warn me. He jumped in my dreams and told me that we were creating an enormous amount of negative energy. He said the energy was too powerful he implored me to stop it.

But the destruction didn't stop. We continued the subconscious and conscious guerilla warfare for a long time. The meanness and negative energy between us continued to grow until it consumed us and overwhelmed us. And still we lied to ourselves and said all this wasn't happening. It was such madness!

God stepped in at that point.

"Was He mad at you?" Justin asked.

"No, but He wasn't pleased. He didn't like what was going on and He had seen enough.

God was displeased with Adrian. Adrian was an angel and angels are not supposed to commit evil or even be close to it. To make things worse, Adrian had not only erred, but had erred with humans.

God was displeased with Hans and me. We were good people who loved Him. Before this happened, we had always tried to obey Him. Then we got involved in all that terrible destruction and self-destruction. We stopped asking Him for help or counsel. We still prayed, but we didn't pray for ourselves because we were afraid that He might say something that we didn't want to hear.

Things got so out of hand that God had to save us from ourselves. He decided that we would learn something from what we did. We would learn a lesson and this lesson would teach us profound spiritual axioms.

"What kind of spiritual axioms?" asked Justin.

"Axioms of destruction caused by negative behavior. Axioms of the sins of psychological and psychic warfare. Spiritual axioms of love, forgiveness, kindness and compassion. Axioms of prayer and many other ones."

"Did He make you suffer?" Justin asked.

"Yes, but He let us suffer so we would learn," Brenny answered.

"Why didn't you ask God to forgive you?" Justin probed.

"We did. We began to pray when we realized what we had done and God forgave us immediately. We just needed more than His forgiveness this time. We pushed it too far. Like I said, we almost destroyed ourselves."

Brenny stopped pacing and sat on an upholstered chair that faced the sofa. She told them, "But before we got sober, something significant happened. God touched our souls when we were sleeping. It felt sweet and breezy.

Then the winds of change blew through all of us. The winds savagely searched through us to show us what we had done. They also told us that we were responsible for the thoughts and negative actions. They told us that Adrian, Hans and I were responsible for ours.

We tried to look at what we had done to each other, but it was too hard to look at and we began to feel incredible remorse. Sadness set in and it would not leave. It was awful. There is no way to describe how intense our sadness was.

At first, all of us prayed individually. I prayed in a church. My soul told me if I prayed long enough, God would tell me something. He did. He told my heart I was going to have a baby, a daughter.

God told me to go back and tell Hans. When I told Hans, Adrian heard it as well. At that moment, we knew we were all connected to the baby and were responsible for her.

Adrian came to see me and God gave us a few moments together. Right after this, Hans came home. All three of us were overcome with guilt, shame, sadness and remorse. Our hearts told us that we had to face God about our sins against Him, each other and ourselves. We were wrecks, but somehow we found the strength to pray together and we got our answer right away.

The rules were set. We were not allowed to talk or touch each other although we were intimately connected in other ways. We had to form a triangle so everyone could look at each other. We had to do everything together and stay in close proximity of each other, even when we were allowed outside.

Everyone heard the others' thoughts and prayers. Everyone saw what the others saw through the others' eyes. At first, we did not understand why we had this ability. Later, we were separated many times and we used to find each other.

We were expected to pray and think. No one was allowed to pray for themselves because the others had to pray for them. All of us had to pray for the baby. We were not allowed to pray for anyone or anything else.

God put a blackout on any outside prayer. All three of us have friends or loved ones on the other side, but none of them could pray for us. Adrian comes from the same 'hood' as Jesus and they're homeboys, so you know Adrian's brothers would have prayed millions of prayers for him alone. But nobody was allowed to pray for our sorry asses but us.

We had to think and since everyone heard the others' thoughts, we had to learn how to think differently. Later, we had to read. Books would be placed on the table while we

slept. They were mostly theology books like the Bible and the Book of Enoch. We also read writings by mystics like Flemish mystic Jan van Ruysbroeck.

When the Library of Alexandria burned, God had Raziel choose five books to save. Guess what? We read them, too. Some day, I will tell you about them. God knew that some day in the future all three of us would go on our little camping trip and He wanted to make sure we had something good to read.

God made us equal and He made us pitiful. One of the things God did to make us equal was to give us all the same power for prayer and psychic energy. To do this, He turned Adrian into a human. God stripped away all of Adrian's power and advanced power of prayer.

Adrian was very unhappy about becoming human. It was frightening, uncomfortable and very handicapping for him.

To make us pitiful, we had to be naked in front of each other. I mean, no clothes, jewelry, rubberband for your hair, nothing. Hans and I had to take our crucifixes and other jewelry off. All of us were told to wear our rings.

We had to keep our long hair behind our back so our hair did not cover our chest. We could not cover any body parts with our hands or try to hide them by sitting or standing in a particular way. It was so embarrassing and so humiliating. We tried to close our eyes, but we couldn't.

I remember the first time I saw Adrian naked. Even though he tried to hide his feelings from me, he was very humiliated. I was very uncomfortable, miserable and ashamed when I felt his humiliation.

My feelings of embarrassment, guilt and shame for myself were quickly replaced by pity for him. Adrian's body was heavy and miserable to him and he could no longer depend on his mind for the things that we do with our hands and feet. He was so vulnerable and traumatized. Hans and I pitied him. Adrian was such an innocent because he knew so little about being human.

Being human was so traumatic for Adrian that he wept many times about it. Hans and I felt guilty and ashamed about Adrian's suffering. We blamed ourselves and this made us weep.

We were cut off from our worlds and we were forced into a surrealistic, metaphysical world where we were the only inhabitants. What happened to us would make a great story, except that it really happened. It was like being in a living book, a magickal book. Our story is something that diehard science fiction and fantasy fans would enjoy. Except that instead of going to the Center of the Earth, we went to the Center of the Spirit."

Brenny began to laugh to herself as she said, "I'm a pretty good writer, but I could never have imagined the things that we saw and learned. It was like a dream that

would never end. The only comfort and grounding that we had was each other. Because we couldn't talk to each other, we were also very alone. This made us enjoy each other's company more.

Naked, humiliated and humbled, we had to look at each other all the time it and learn about each other by hearing the others' thoughts and prayers. It was incredibly intense and personal.

We were stripped down and stripped away from our realities. We were like phantoms, walking between worlds and in them.

We felt each others' pain. It was bad enough to feel your own pain, but the weight of the others' pain created incredible suffering. When one person felt bad, the rest of us would feel just as bad. If one of us cried, the others usually cried with them.

We cried an incredible amount of tears, especially at the beginning of our journey. The floor of Hans' flat was soaked with our tears.

Even though we were in so much emotional and spiritual pain, we still had to pray for the baby. Our hearts would tell us when and then we would make a tighter triangle. Hans and Adrian would put their hands on my womb and all of us would pray together.

Although her health and well-being were central in our prayers, the prayer for her took away our pain. Sometimes we would be overwhelmed with endless sadness and regret but then it would be time to pray for the baby and the pain would become erased.

In the beginning, the baby was the only happiness in our miserable lives. We loved her and we were always thankful to God for her. We also knew she was a gift and God was using her as a catalyst to force us to learn about our sins and to help us heal."

Brenny thought for a moment and began to laugh to herself again. She told Mario and Justin, "Did I forget that God threw in a bonus? He made time slow down just for us. Days and nights took forever to end. God forbid us to know how long we suffered like this, but it was a very long time.

Sometimes we got to go outside and go on 'field trips'. We had to walk in a triangle on these trips. One would walk in front of the others and two behind the leader walked to each side. We had to walk with our heads up and our long hair had to be behind our shoulders.

We were made to go on walks through the city. God wanted us to see through His eyes and feel pain like He does. You would not believe some of the stuff that we saw and experienced. We went on lots of 'adventures' where we were constantly challenged and sometimes frightened."

Brenny stopped and began to shake. Mario and Justin exchanged questioning glances.

In a serious, low voice, she told them, "If you knew what God feels every time we hurt each other or ourselves, you would be so careful of what you do! God feels incredible sadness when we hurt, hurt ourselves or hurt others! Plus, He feels our pain. Every bit of it.

God gave us cloaks and stockings to wear when we went outside. They protected our bodies from the outside, but we always were a little cold. Adrian was always the coldest. He was always so pitiful. He would always shiver and shake from the cold. We were always happy when we got home because Hans' flat was nice and warm.

All of us ate from the same bowl and drank water from the same cup. We ate one at a time at the table while the others waited.

We sat in the dark most of the time. At the beginning of our 'journey', we were told to close the black, heavy curtains to the windows that faced the street. This eliminated any distractions and gave the room a kind of a film noir atmosphere. I told you, we lived in a surreal world."

"Is that why you don't want the lights on now?" Justin asked.

"Precisely. I am used to being in the dark and I prefer it."

Brenny thought for a few moments before she continued. Finally, she said, "We were allowed to sleep at night, but we had to sleep on the bare floor with no blanket or pillow. We were naked and the floor was always cold. Sleep was always deep and if we dreamed, we dreamt of each other. As soon as the sun began to come up, we were awake.

If one of us woke up, the others would wake us. We would pray for each other and wait until all of us could go back to sleep.

Sometimes one of us would get lost in a big black hole when we slept. The others had to pray the other one out of the hole. It was so hard and we tried not to panic, but we did anyway.

The time would pass too slowly. It would take forever for a day to end. We had lots of time to think about how we got into our mess. We had lots of time to think and work on personal issues besides the communal ones. We examined almost everything else in our lives, too. Because we heard each other's thoughts, we knew about each others' problems and weaknesses.

Yesterday, I had our baby. As soon as she was born, we got our lives back. Only our lives are forever changed and they don't feel like our own anymore because we are so connected to each other. Adrian Rose is very beautiful and she is the spitting image of Hans.

"You named your baby Adrian?" Mario asked.

"Yes, we named her Adrian. Adrian Rose Van der Pallen. She was named after her fathers and her mother."

Mario didn't believe Brenny's last words. In shock and disbelief, he barely choked out his question to her, "Are you trying to tell us the Hans and Adrian is . . . are . . . her father . . . I mean fathers?"

Brenny began to laugh. She told him, "I know that it is hard to believe, but it's true."

The room began to fill with the energy of Mario's disbelief. He told her, "Wait a minute, Brenny. Let's back up. First of all, I know you are . . . were . . . sterile. How could you get pregnant?"

"I healed myself with power I should never have wished for," Brenny replied.

Mario looked confused. He fought hard to phrase his next question, "But how can an angel--Adrian--be a father? And for the record, how can a child have two fathers?"

"Angels were never meant to have children, but they do. In fact, I met 200 that did," Brenny answered. "It was God that allowed her to have two fathers."

Mario told Brenny, "I have a hard time believing three people can have a child together. I am having a hard time believing this, Brenny."

Brenny shook her head and told Mario, "Think about it: All of us believe in a virgin birth. That is the cornerstone of our faith. God made a child from the three of us, and it was a minor miracle for Him.

God does marvelous and miraculous things all the time. Just look at the world around you and tell me He can't make a child like our baby. Look at the night sky and see the stars and tell me this miracle I tell you of never happened. Miracles are the domain and phenomena of God. God loved us so much, He gave us a beautiful child."

"I hate to interrupt, but I remember something I read once," Justin said, "I remember some angels had children. It's in the Bible."

Brenny told Justin, "Genesis 6:2. They're also mentioned in the Book of Enoch 6:1 and the Book of Jubilees.

The Grigori have been locked up on the Third Level of Heaven since the time of Noah. They have suffered so much. When Raziel took us there and left us with them to wait for our audience with God, we saw and lived with them for a long time.

We were with them for a long time before we went on our 'spiritual vacation'. For a while, all three of us were worried that we were going to be imprisoned with them.

Everyone there is so pitiful. Some of them had cloths on their faces to hide their regret and shame. It might be part of Heaven, but it looked like hell to me. So much despair .

. . I remember that I was so afraid that I started trying to remember scripture that might apply to the situation.

I kept thinking of the Secret Book of James, Chapter 9, verse 7, where Jesus said, "I tell you the truth: whoever receives life and believes in the kingdom will never leave the kingdom, not even if the Father wishes to cast such a person out. The other angels heard me recite this over and over, and believe it or not, it gave them more hope than what I could muster for myself."

"Wait a minute, Brenny!" Mario told her in a loud, disbelieving voice. "Your tale is beginning to get a little tall! First you tell us about a child with two fathers, now you are telling us you, Hans and Adrian were taken by Raziel, the Angel of Knowledge, to the Third Heaven."

Mario's tone became sarcastic and as he said, "And while you were waiting to see God, you ran into renegade angels who have been confined there since the time of Noah? Where's my shovel? I think you are really starting to bury me with bullshit. What kind of drugs are you on? Have you been smoking some of that Dutch super weed?"

XXXIX

Brenny didn't have the time or energy to be defensive, but she felt that she had to defend herself. She asked him, "Mario, when have I ever lied to you about anything? I have never lied to you about anything, ever. You know this. Why would I make something like this up? Why don't you try to believe me? I just got out of a metaphysical prison where I was locked up Hans and Adrian for a very long time. I just had a baby. I am lonesome for her and I am worried about her. It was God's wish for me to come here, not ours." Brenny's heart began to break and the tears started to fall.

Mario was still shocked, but his tone softened. He told her, "My vibes tell me that you are telling me the truth. It is just so hard to believe. I need a little time to think about everything."

The room became quiet and reflective. The darkness of the room made the mood even more somber.

"I don't get it Brenny . . . " Justin told her, "Why did Adrian have to suffer so much? It seems to me that he was more a victim. It doesn't seem fair to me . . . "

An unfamiliar man's voice answered, "Because I would not let go. Brenny and Hans would have stopped if I had not pushed. I did a lot of other things, too, including sinning with humans." Adrian told them, "I am supposed to know better. This was very unacceptable."

Mario and Justin followed Adrian's voice and saw him standing in the corner. He was wearing a hotel robe like Brenny. Mario and Justin figured it out immediately that

Adrian had been in the shower with Brenny. They wondered how long he had been there.

"I have been here all the time, " he told them as he read their thoughts. He came out of the dark of the corner of the room.

Mario and Justin sat absolutely still and no one said anything for a minute. Mario wondered why his vibes had not picked up Adrian.

Brenny wanted to finish answering Justin's question. She told him, "Do not think we were punished. We weren't. We were creatively instructed in the error of our ways so we and others could learn from our mistakes."

Justin told her, "I thought you just said that you had been in prison."

Brenny looked at Adrian and laughed. She told Mario and Justin, "Adrian doesn't like it when I refer to our 'experience' as prison. Hans doesn't, either. They prefer to remain philosophical about it. They look at it as spiritual training. Me, I'm just glad it's over.

All of us changed from our ordeal. Hans and Adrian became kind of holy. Me, I'm still always questioning everything and my spirit still rebels to keep its individuality.

I am more cynical, critical and doubting than ever. The journey did that to me. Just because God told me to go on a trip doesn't mean that I liked it or that I agreed with it. I only agreed to do it because the alternative was unthinkable.

I don't care if my experiences are sage stuff. Sure, I learned a lot, but at what price? Even better, could I have learned it differently? Then there is the fact that I never wanted to be a sage in the first place.

Hans and Adrian are a lot different from me. They were very good males to begin with and now they are better persons. They are always so responsible and serious. So careful about what they say and do."

Brenny laughed to herself as she told Justin and Mario, "It is ironic. Adrian was one of the first angels who not only opposed suffering, but was an activist against it. In the end, he volunteered to experience what he was so against. He never complained once, no matter how badly he suffered."

Mario asked her, "I hear someone speaking German in my mind. What does that mean Brenny? Why do I see swastikas?" A cold chill went through Mario. It was contagious because Justin felt it, too.

Brenny gasped and heavy tension quickly filled the air. Mario began to feel miserable and instantly regretted asking her the question. Mario knew that he had reminded her of something terrible.

It took awhile for Brenny to find her voice. When she found it, she told Mario, "You are a very, very good psychic, Mario. We saw many faces of evil. One time, the Nazis arrested us and sent us to a concentration camp."

"Excuse, me?" Justin said in disbelief.

Brenny began to pace furiously. Then she stopped and took a couple of hard, deep breaths. She told Justin, "The Nazis arrested us and sent us to a concentration camp. I swear, this happened."

Mario's voice was full of sarcasm when he told her, "C'mon Brenny! The shit's getting deep in here again. I started believing the other things you told us--my vibes told me to--but this is unbelievable!"

"Mario, When are you going to get it that God can do anything He wants?" Brenny replied with a terse and irritated voice. "If He can make time slow down for us, He can send us back in time and that is what He did."

One time we found ourselves in 1943 in Nazi-occupied Holland. The Germans came to get the Jewish family that used to live in Hans' flat. They arrested us because we were there and we didn't have any papers. We couldn't talk, so they thought we were mutes as well as Jews. In the end, they put us on a box car with other 'enemies of the Nazi state' and shipped us away to a concentration camp.

Hans and I knew what was happening and Adrian read our thoughts. We were so afraid! Some of the families in the box car tried to believe that they were really being 'relocated'. They tried to cheer each other up, but we knew otherwise. For a very long time, we looked into the faces of people who were on the last ride of their lives.

It was a hot, long, miserable ride. Some people were sick and were throwing up. We were packed like sardines in the box car and as always, Adrian suffered the worst. He was positioned right next to a man who died at the beginning of the trip. The smell of the body became wretched after awhile and everyone in the box car was getting sick from the smell. As much as he tried, Adrian couldn't move away from the body because there was no place to move to.

When we got to the camp, Adrian was happy to be out of the box car away from the dead body. He was glad to be breathing anything but that dead body, but then he smelled the crematoriums and he felt sick again. Our thoughts told Adrian what those chimneys were for and he began to understand how much the camp was a portal to evil.

We waited until the SS selection officer came. The women and men formed lines and the selection officer pointed people to the right or the left. The SS officer sent me to the left. Hans and I instantly knew that I was going to the gas chambers, probably because I was pregnant. When Adrian knew that I was going to die and he rushed toward me, even though he knew that he couldn't save me. A guard hit him on the head with a baton and when Hans rushed forward to help Adrian, Hans got hit in the face so hard that his nose was broken.

The selection officer saw Adrian and Hans were trying to protect me, so he asked them if they wanted to take my place in the left line? Both nodded yes. They offered to die for me and the baby. I tried to tell them not to do it, but they did it any way.

There was some kind of delay and Adrian and Hans weren't killed right away. While they were waiting to die, I was waiting to get this," Brenny pulled back the left arm of the robe. On her forearm were tattooed numbers. Mario and Justin instantly knew that the tattoo was real, very real.

Brenny continued, "I saw and felt everything Adrian and Hans saw and felt. I saw a room full of naked men waiting to go to their deaths. It was an incredible sight and a horrible sight because we knew that all of them were doomed. It was the saddest and most sobering thing that I ever saw.

The gas came and men began to cry, scream, beg for mercy and cry out for God. Some of them really went crazy with disbelief, horror, outrage, you name it. It was like a nightmare, but it was very real.

Hans and Adrian gave each other the strength to die upright with dignity. They suffered when they suffocated and died."

"I died with Hans," Adrian told Justin. "It was terrible and it was wonderful. It was painful to die in that manner, but after I died, I found myself free of pain and I felt my soul going to be with our Father."

Justin asked Brenny, "How can Hans be alive now if they were gassed as you said? I figure that Adrian has his old form back, but Hans?"

"Suddenly," she told Justin, "We found ourselves back in Hans' flat. Oh were we so happy to be home! We didn't care if we had to spend eternity with unending, slow time there. We kept thanking God for letting us be safe and together."

Brenny began to speak, "Our experience at the concentration camp was the turning point for us. From that moment on, things began to improve for us."

Mario and Justin were getting confused. They wanted to believe Brenny, but her story sounded too incredible, even for Mario who lived in the world of psychics and psychic phenomenon.

Brenny and Adrian picked up on their thoughts. Brenny and Adrian exchanged glances and Adrian walked over to them and pulled back his hair. Mario and Justin saw a jagged scar on his temple about two inches long. They knew that he had been hit there.

"What concentration camp were you in, Brenny?" Justin asked.

Brenny froze and shuttered, "I don't know. The Holy Spirit forbids us to remember the name. Does it matter, though? The place was full of death and hopelessness."

The room began to fill with longer shadows while everyone thought.

Mario finally collected his thoughts to talk. He told her, "I had Phil look for you once, Brenny. He came over to the house and read. The first card he pulled was the Hierophant. Right there he stopped the reading. Phil said that the Hierophant card burned his hand and he said he would not be able to find you because you were learning hidden knowledge and servitude."

"I always thought about Phil's reading, Mario. How come the child never showed up in the cards?" Brenny asked. The only female card that presented itself was mine."

Mario replied, "Some things are supposed to remain hidden. Besides, you had to make a choice before your future was set and the child depended on the choice that you made."

Mario thought for a moment and he had an epiphany. He told her, "You are the Hierophant. You and your boyfriends. All of you experienced and interpreted hidden and forbidden knowledge."

"Wow," Brenny said as she realized that Mario's words were true.

It was quiet for a while as everyone thought. Then Mario told Brenny, "Muffin has called me every week since your 'disappearance'. She always wanted to know if I heard from you. She had a baby girl and named her Brenny."

"I knew that she had a girl because Muffin asked me before about this. I never thought about what Muffin would name her. I'm just glad she finally got the girl that she wanted," Brenny replied.

Mario continued, "When no one heard from you for a long time, Muffin started to worry about you. She began to wonder if Denny had killed you and hidden your body somewhere. She called the police, but they wouldn't do anything. A few months later, someone hit her car and totaled it. It got towed to a tow yard. When Muffin went to get her personal belongings out of her wrecked car, she saw your little Bug rusting in a corner of the yard. She called the police and insisted that they search the car. The car was unlocked, so they pulled the trunk latch. The trunk popped open and they found your bloody shirt and bra. The Criminal Bureau of Investigation was called in . . ."

"Nooooo . . ." Brenny replied.

"Yesssss . . ." Mario responded, "She called the Cities' television news rooms. Muffin had read that you had won the lottery, so lots of people began to wonder what happened to you. The police questioned Denny about your disappearance and the reporters began to stalk him. Not only that, some of your other friends in Saint Cloud came forward and told the reporters stories of his abuse to you. He was publicly

embarrassed, humiliated and shamed."

"Nooooo . . ." Brenny told Mario.

"Yesssss . . ." Mario told her. "The police checked your bank account, but there was no activity in it for a long time. They also saw that you had taken the bulk of your lottery winnings out of the bank right before you left. Worse, you took a lot of it in cash and the rest in untraceable, negotiable instruments."

Brenny had a hard time believing what she was hearing. She started to laugh and told Mario, "I decided that I wasn't going to come back to Saint Cloud, so I decided to take the money with me. I paid a lot of taxes on it and it was mine to take with me. I wasn't afraid of thieves because my power was high."

Mario told her, "Wait, Brenny, it gets better! Just like a Ginsu Cooking Knife commercial, there's more. Much more. When the police searched Denny's place, they found a box of money. He said that it was your money, that you had won it at the casino and other places."

"Oops!" Brenny said disbelievingly, "I forgot about it when I left Denny's house. It really was my money, too, and I really won it. I stashed it all over the place, including Denny's file box in the closet where he kept his important papers. When Denny told me to leave his house fast, I didn't think about that money, so I left it."

"Everyone thought that Denny had killed you for sure," Mario replied. "Check this out, goddess--they were about to convene a Grand Jury against him. Justin and I were so glad when Denny's cousin Joe showed up from Europe with a picture of you and him together in a bar in Holland."

Brenny remembered the night. It seemed so long ago. Brenny thought to herself is this another one of God's ironic jokes? Then she marveled to herself, what a small world it is after all! How ironic that something like this would happen, especially the only time I ever had a nosebleed was from a man or because I bumped my nose as a child. I guess it is really true that what goes around comes around . . . "

Mario's tone became a little sarcastic when he told her, "At least we knew that Denny didn't kill you, but we wondered if you were still alive . . . "

"I didn't mean to worry you, Mario," Brenny sincerely told him, "I also didn't mean to worry Justin or Muffin, either. It is just that I was caught up into this extraordinary adventure where I was cut off from the world."

Mario knew that he was getting caustic, so he decided to be nicer. He told Brenny in a kinder voice, "Well anyway, the picture got Denny off a corpus delecti charge, but his reputation was forever besmeared and besmirched. It kinda makes a person believe in karma. He terrorized you for so long and then he got some of it back. Worse, lots of people in Minnesota know what kind of man he is. In the end, he was publicly called on the floor about how he treated you. He didn't get away with it after all."

Mario thought for a moment. He told her, "It is not like you to just drop off the edge of the world and not tell your friends anything. Everyone thought for sure that you had been murdered. After we heard that you were still alive in Holland, we secretly believed that you had met some other kind of tragic end. We believed this because you never called any of us.

You have a lot of friends and we began calling each other for support. All of us became very good friends. We established a network so that if you ever contacted one of us, that we would spread the word. Your son Adam was on the network."

Brenny felt sadness at his words. She said, "Oops. I know that I haven't been a very good friend to everyone or a decent mother to my grown son."

Brenny tearfully told Mario, "I'm sorry. I know it was wrong not to tell anyone I was going to stay in Amsterdam for awhile. First I was partying and then I was in love. Afterwards, I was a phantom, walking between worlds and belonging to no world except for the internal one I lived in.

Mario, I don't have the energy to tell Muffin or the others this story. I am hoping that you will tell her. Tell the others something else. As for Adam, tell him that I will call him in a few days. Tell him about his sister."

Adrian sat by her as she said, "I'm going back to the Netherlands. We have a baby there and both of us are very lonesome for her and Hans. I am very tired. I want to go home and rest. Then I will figure out how to make peace with everyone."

Justin and Mario were disappointed that Brenny was going back to Holland. They had wanted to spend more time with her.

"There are some things I want you to take care of," Brenny told Mario.

Brenny grabbed her purse and pulled out some papers. She told him, "This is my release for Amy and I own it. This is my release for you to act as my agent." She handed the papers to Mario. "I am hoping that you can try to shop it around and get some kind of deal for it even though it was discounted the first time around."

Brenny took two computer disks out of her purse. "I wrote two novels while I was in Amsterdam and I hope that you can get them published. One is a sequel to Amy and it's called The Re-Awakening of Amy. My other book is called Secret Lover. I guess you can tell Jude inspired this one."

Mario and Justin became excited about another Amy book. Especially since Brenny had told them over and over again there wouldn't be a sequel. They couldn't wait to get home to read it.

Brenny pulled another disk out. This is the book of poems I wrote before I left for Amsterdam. It's called The Treasure Book.

"Where did you find enough time to write two books in Amsterdam?" Mario asked Brenny.

She replied, "I told you, we were in denial. We established a regular routine to pretend everything was fine. Hans went to work and I wrote."

Mario looked at Adrian and wondered what the world must be like to Adrian.

"How do you like slumming?" Mario asked Adrian.

Adrian replied, "I do not like it. This world is worse than I thought it would be."

Brenny began to feel lonesome for her baby. She asked them, "Mario and Justin, will you please take care of these things for me? I miss my baby and I need to get home soon . . . "

Mario and Justin agreed to represent her in her legal and intellectual business.

Everyone visited a little longer. The shadows in the suite became longer and everyone knew that the day was getting shorter. The visit drew to a close.

Mario and Justin got up to leave. Brenny looked at them with much love in her eyes. She told them, "You know I love you. I wish you only happiness and a happy marriage together. Please tell Muffin that I love her, too.

You know, the most important things in our lives are our relationships with others. We should foster and nurture each other. It is so easy to do, too. All we have to do is be kind to each other and respect each other.

Instead, we do mean things to each other. Usually, just small, little things. But those little things add up until we become buried under them."

"If you had to go through it again, would you?" Justin asked.

"Yes," Brenny replied quietly, "But these are dangerous thoughts that don't need to be explored."

"Does your baby look anything like you, Brenny?" Justin asked.

Brenny began to laugh and told Justin, "Only the hair. Her hair looks like fathers' hair, too." Brenny nodded at Adrian and he willed the lamp to turn on and the drapes to open. As the room became a little brighter, Brenny took the towel off her head. Long white hair spilled out onto her white robe. Mario and Justin gasped with surprise.

Mario stammered, "I . . . I . . . I . . . thought Adrian's hair was naturally white . . . "

Adrian answered, "It was once another color. A long time ago." Adrian willed the lamp to turn off and the curtains to shut. The room became dark again.

Everyone was silent for a while. Brenny and Adrian stood. She leaned her face into his chest and he put her arms around her.

Justin remembered something and reached for his coat. He pulled out a letter. "Did you say Hans' name was Van der Pallen?" he asked. "Look at this letter . . . "

Brenny didn't recognize the letter right away. Then she remembered: It was one of the two letters that Denny had brought to her when she stayed with Mario and Justin. She put it up to her nose. It smelled like Hans. A pain of loneliness filled her when she realized how much she missed him.

"You left it in your room and it was behind the bed stand on the floor. It must have fallen there," Mario told her.

"I remember . . . I was upset from seeing Denny and reading the letter about George's estate. I put this letter on the bed stand. I was going to look at it later . . . " Brenny replied as she carefully opened the envelop.

Brenny pulled out the letter and a photograph of Hans fell to the floor, right by Justin's feet. Justin picked it up. He and Mario looked at it. Both saw that Hans was as good looking as Brenny described him.

"Hans once told me he wrote me a fan letter," Brenny told Mario and Justin. "Now we know what happened to it."

Mario looked at her and asked her, "My power tells me if you had read the letter, that you would have written Hans back and you would have ended up being with him. My power also tells me that you would never have gone back to Denny."

"And Adrian would never have seen me through the mirror . . . " Brenny said quietly.

"Things could have been different," Justin said.

Brenny looked up at Adrian and he looked at her. Neither knew what to think or feel about this. Instead, they quietly comforted each other. Neither wanted to think of a world without each other.

Brenny finally replied, "Well things aren't different. I met both of them and I love both of them."

"Brenny," Mario told her, "I understand most of what you told us, but I am curious about something."

"What is that, Mario?" Brenny asked.

"What did you mean that God wished for you to come see me?"

"Adrian asked God a question and God said for us to visit you. He said Adrian would

get his answer."

"Did you find your answer, Brenny?" Justin asked.

"Not yet, but I know it will come. I trust that much."

"What is the question?" Mario asked.

"Can all three of us be in a marital relationship?"

"You already are," Mario responded, "My spirit and vibes tell me this.

Brenny thought for a moment, "I know what you're trying to tell me," Brenny told him. "Hans and I pretended we were married that Friday night. It wasn't real . . . "

Mario's power told him something. He told her, "No, Brenny, I see something. I see something that was kept from you until now."

Brenny and Adrian froze and exchanged worried glances. Their hearts told them that Mario was going to tell them something about that night . . . A night they were tired of remembering.

Mario continued, "I see a room filled with great energy and love. I see a confluence of your three spirits and this energy."

Brenny and Adrian looked inside Mario's mind and saw what was hiding from them. Now they knew. She and Adrian exchanged relieved glances.

Mario and Justin got ready to leave. Everyone said their goodbyes. They were tearful with many hugs.

As Mario and Justin left, Brenny told them, "See you sooner next time."

"I will treat those words as a promise," Mario replied with a big lump in his throat. He wondered when he would see her again.

Mario and Justin gave her and Adrian one last hug before they left.

XL

Brenny and Adrian found themselves in an empty room. They put their clothes on and got ready to leave. Brenny looked at Adrian and he looked at her. She thought about how she had made him suffer. A twinge of sadness struck through her and Adrian felt it, too.

"It is okay, Brenny," Adrian told her. "You have felt enough regret. All of us have. Regret is such a negative emotion."

"I know, Adrian. I know."

"We will heal more as time progresses," Adrian told her as he brushed her hair with the palm of his hand. He smiled at her with love and kindness. She smiled back at him. Adrian held her close and she closed her eyes and inhaled his essence. Take me home, she told him with her mind and they were instantly home.

It was very late at night and Hans was looking out the window into the street. The baby was sleeping in the bed.

Hans turned around and smiled at them, "I am glad that both of you are back. I was getting lonely."

Brenny replied, "We were getting lonely for you, too. How is our baby?"

"She's fine, but she doesn't like formula. She wishes for your milk," Hans answered.

The baby began to stir when she heard her mother's voice. Brenny's breasts began to fill with milk and Brenny went over to her.

Before Brenny got to the bed, Hans looked at her and Adrian. He told them, "I have a surprise for both of you." Hans held out his hand and they saw a little white plume.

Adrian and Brenny looked at each other and looked at the baby. Brenny went to pick her up and Adrian stayed close behind Brenny. As Brenny picked the baby up, she and Adrian saw that the baby had little white wings.

Brenny smiled at Adrian and told him, "I guess the baby looks like you, too."

Adrian smiled a big smile.

Hans told them, "Right after you left, she got a little cranky. I checked her diaper and it was dry. I don't know anything about babies and I didn't know what to do. I rocked her, held her, talked to her, kissed her, but she was still fussy. Then I thought that maybe her little shirt was too hot. When I took it off her, I saw the little wings budding out of her back."

Hans began to laugh. He told Adrian and Brenny, "After I took her shirt off, she gave me the biggest, sweetest smile. It was so beautiful. Then she went back to sleep."

By this time, the baby was beginning to wake and she was beginning to fuss a little. Brenny instinctively put the baby to her breast and the baby's eyes smiled at her.

"We have a surprise for you, too, Hans," Adrian told him. "All of us are married together forever. We found this out when we went to visit Brenny's friends just like

the Father said we would."

"It was hidden from us," Brenny told Hans. Their baby continued to suckle.

"What do you mean?" Hans asked.

Brenny and Adrian looked at each other. Neither one wanted to talk about that night, but they knew that one of them was going to have to.

Adrian looked at Brenny and told her kindly, "I will tell him."

"Remember that bad night?" Adrian asked him.

Hans nodded wearily and answered, "Do we have to go there again? How many times have we been there in our minds? I want to forget it and move on."

Adrian replied, "All of us want to forget about it and because of this, we keep missing something. Also, it was hidden from us until now. I think the Father kept it from us because we were in no condition to know the truth of things."

"I don't get what you mean," Hans said.

"Think back on that night, right at the end. Remember right before we fell asleep? Something happened and it was not the intercourse, although it contributed to the energy of what happened."

Hans remembered. He listened intently to Adrian.

Adrian continued, "Remember all the energy in the room? How the room filled with blue light and white fire rained down? Right after that, I thought that here was something wrong. Remember?"

Hans stopped, "I remember," he told Adrian. "I was worried, too."

Adrian continued, "We immediately knew there was something wrong with Brenny, something terrible. I stopped and I was going to pull out of her, but things happened so fast."

Hans added, "We prayed for her together because we knew that something was wrong. We said that we would do whatever we had to do for her to be saved . . ."

"I don't remember this," Brenny told them.

"That is because your spirit was split," Adrian told her. "Your consciousness was fading. The two pieces were barely connected to you and they were gaining their own individuality. We did not know it was this at the time but we knew that it was really serious."

I also told the Father if He would spare you, that I would let you stay with Hans. I told Him that your life was more important to me than who you stayed with."

Hans added, "I prayed the same thing and told God that if He would only help you, I would let you stay with Adrian."

"About this time the blue light started forming a ball and pulsate. It pulsed twice," Adrian said.

Hans added, "This is when God answered our prayer because we instantly felt you with us and you were complete."

The blue ball of light turned into a ball of brilliant white. We looked at it and before we could think, it turned into lightning and struck us with its energy."

Adrian continued, "This is the part we did not remember. Our souls were fused completely together and we felt the energy of all our love put together. This energy was so clear, good, powerful, wonderful and intense. It was such a beautiful moment . . . I remember clearly now."

"Ja, I do, too," Hans replied.

Brenny interjected, "We had the most incredible, fulfilling orgasm . . . "

Adrian gave her a disapproving look and Hans gave her a similar one.

"Okay," she told them apologetically. "We experienced deep and powerful spiritual love, fueled by the energy of the sex."

Adrian and Hans nodded their approval of her changed words.

Hans told Adrian, "So all are of one spirit and are bound together forever?"

"And ever and ever," Brenny told him.

Hans sat. He looked at Brenny and Adrian and said, "I am happy about this, but it still makes me afraid. It's one thing to talk about it and then another thing to find out that you have what you wanted. Forever is a long time and it always is going to take a lot of work especially since the relationship is already very complicated."

Brenny told him, "We can always wait until the Judgement of the Days and ask . . . "

"Do not even think those kinds of thoughts, Brenny," Adrian told her. "There will be no divorce, ever. This would be against God's Will, and it would be against all of us, including our baby."

"Adrian speaks for me about this, too," Hans. "I can live with a triangular marriage. Maybe we don't get what we wanted, but we get what we need, plus we get a

beautiful baby and all of us are good friends."

Hans looked at Brenny and told her, "My love for you grows all the time and this will never change." Hans looked at both of them and said, "I can live with this and I promise to make the best of it."

Adrian looked at Brenny and Hans. He told them, "I promise to work hard to help make this marriage a good one and a happy one."

Adrian and Hans looked at Brenny. "What?" she asked them. "I know that you want me to promise something, but I don't know what to promise. I'm the weak one here and I am afraid. I love both of you and I like the idea of never being separated from either of you, but I am still afraid."

Adrian and Hans felt her fear and worry. They put their arms around her and hugged her, filling her with unconditional love.

"Where am I going to find the time for all this? Both of you deserve private time besides the communal time. We also have a baby that is already starting to consume large amounts of our time."

Brenny burped the baby and afterwards, the baby fell fast asleep. Brenny rocked the baby a few times, kissed her and hugged her slightly. She got up from the chair and put the baby back on the bed.

Hans told her, "We'll help you, Brenny, you know that. We'll always help you."

Adrian walked up behind her and put his arms around her. "We will always help you," he told her as he kissed the back of her head and neck.

Hans hugged the front part of her and kissed her face. "We'll be happy together, so don't worry, okay?"

"What if there is a difference of opinion?" Brenny asked.

"Then we will discuss it, vote on it and the majority wins," Adrian told her.

Brenny told Adrian and Hans, "That isn't fair because both of you think alike and I think differently."

Hans replied, "Adrian and I know that you think differently and we respect this. I think that all of us can be fair when there is a difference of opinion. Nobody will get everything that they want, but they will get what they need."

Brenny looked at the ring on Adrian's finger. She had been wondering why God hadn't changed it back and now she knew. God wanted them to know they were very married and this was one of the clues. An easy clue, too, and they had missed it.

Brenny looked in Adrian's face and then in Hans' face. Her eyes went back and forth between both faces a few more times.

Finally, she told them, "I love both of you, but I am afraid. I don't know how to be married to one person, let alone two. With God's Help and your help, I will do this with you. We will build a relationship together that will always last and grow. One whose foundation is built on compassion, kindness and respect. A relationship that is built collectively with the bricks of friendship and love.

I also promise that I will try to be a good wife to both of you. I have to warn you here that I was never good at keeping promises. If you don't believe me, ask God." Brenny began to laugh ironically to herself. She looked at Adrian and said, "If I had kept my promise to you, then none of us would have had to suffer like we did."

She thought for a few moments, then she looked at Adrian and Hans. In a sincere voice, she told them, "This time I will try with all my might to keep my promise." She continued, "Besides, you guys will keep me in check if I stray too far."

Adrian and Hans smiled big, happy smiles. She had given them more than what they had expected. Brenny felt their pleasure.

"But I still want to know, how did we get to the mystical conjunction?" Brenny asked.

"All of us had a lot of power," Hans replied, "And we used it. It started cycling in the room. Then there was all that love going back and forth. It created a lot of energy by itself. Because love is energy, it was drawn into the cycling energy."

"Don't forget the sex magick," Brenny reminded him.

"If anything ignited the built-up energy in the room, it did," Adrian replied.

Hans told Adrian and Brenny, "All of us knew exactly what we were doing underneath. That was one of the hardest things that we had to admit to. All of us contributed equally to the energy and all of us were responsible for it and for it getting out of hand."

Adrian said, "All that energy and all that chaos must have created the conditions for a mystical conjunction.

Brenny interjected, "That, or God could have set us up." Brenny felt Hans and Adrian's disapproval of her words. She looked at them and said, "I don't care what you think. That is what I wonder about sometimes. I know that those kind of thoughts are alien to your belief systems, but my thinking still remains the same. As for being set up, lots of people have been set up to suffer so that they would do something for the pleasure and purpose of God.

We could have done one little thing differently and it could have saved us a lot of grief. That is because it could have changed the outcome of what happened. One little

thing. We know that now. Sometimes, God prevents us from doing one seemingly insignificant thing. Most of the time, we never see the disaster that was prevented. We only mourn for what we think we lost. But God didn't prevent a lot of little things that could have saved us from the fate we suffered. It makes me wonder. Judas of Ascariot was set up.

I have a feeling that there is too much that we do not know or understand about our journey. I have a feeling that we are always going to be processing our experiences and learning from them. The meanings, the values and the truth keep changing all the time. Underneath, all of us worry if we will ever understand what all of it meant."

Brenny felt her husbands' increasing unhappiness at her thoughts and words. She didn't want to hurt them and she knew that she would if she continued being critical. Her mind searched for something else to say.

She looked at her wedding ring and said, "What happened, happened. We are forever changed by it. Sure, it was hard, but there were many good things, too. Because I went on that journey with you guys, I am a better person. It also made me deeply related to both of you and although it frightens me, I am happy for this relationship. My love for both of you has deepened and ripened."

Hans and Adrian liked what she said. They smiled at her and she smiled back.

"But back to the mystical conjunction. The elements for it were there," she said. "It was spontaneous and it happened by accident."

"I was the higher-level spirit," Adrian added.

Brenny asked, "So do you think that God wanted this to happen?"

"You know Brenny that I don't want to go there," Hans told her.

"I do not want to know, either," Adrian said to her. "It does not matter because it has already happened. Now we have to work with the reality of our lives together."

Hans and Adrian took each took one of Brenny's hands and all three prayed together in a small circle on the floor. They thanked God for their marriage together and asked Him to bless it. They thanked Him for their beautiful baby and asked Him to bless her.

Afterwards, Brenny thought of the baby's wings and began to worry.

"What are we going to do about the baby's wings? If anyone finds out, we will never have a moment's peace and neither will she," Brenny asked Adrian and Hans.

Hans told her, "We'll always keep her with us and we can educate her at home."

"I will teach her how to hide them when she is old enough to understand," Adrian told

them.

"And if we really need to go somewhere without her, we will have Berend and his wife babysit," said Hans. "We can trust them with our secret."

"What about things like visits to the doctor and other normal things parents do regularly with their kids? How are we going to hide her wings for these things?" Brenny asked.

"First of all, she will not need a doctor," Adrian answered. "All of us will use our power to keep her well."

"And if that does not work?" asked Brenny.

"Then we will think of something. We always do," replied Adrian.

Adrian walked over to the baby and prayed. At the same time, he held his hand over her. When he was done, Adrian turned around and said, "Anyone who sees her wings will forget all about them."

Brenny told them, "I am becoming very tired and it is very late. I want to sleep before the baby wakes up again."

Hans smiled, "I can't sleep right now. I am too happy."

Adrian smiled, "I am also happy and I am relieved. I know that I still have a lot to process, but I am not going to worry about it. I am going to enjoy being with my family and our wife."

"Well you guys stay up," Brenny told them. "Play music or something. I am going to bed."

"You do not want to visit with us?" Adrian asked her.

"I'm sleepy, besides, I have forever to visit with you."

"I want to visit with you privately," Adrian told her. "Now that I know the truth of things and know you are truly my wife, I want you like a husband wants his wife."

Brenny stopped and looked at Adrian like he was crazy. She laughed in disbelief as she told him, "I love you very much, but I just had a baby. It is going to take weeks for me to heal so don't be getting any crazy ideas."

Adrian smiled at her and said, "I thought you would say this," and started to laugh. "Okay, then I will heal you."

Brenny felt her womb and stitches healing. It felt warm, good and very pleasant.

"Not fair, Adrian!" Brenny told him, "I am still tired."

"I will do all the work," he told her.

"That's okay, but I decline. I need my sleep more."

"We will sleep tomorrow," Adrian replied.

Adrian whispered in her ear, "I will make you it."

Brenny smiled and laughed, "I'm sure that you would."

"We need this to heal, too," Adrian told her.

"I know," Brenny replied, "But we don't have any place to go and be alone."

"Ja, we do," Hans told her, "The upstairs flat is empty."

"I have just made a bed up there," Adrian said, "One exactly like the one in this room."

Brenny was tired and wasn't ready for this. She was worried and didn't feel comfortable. Her mind searched for excuses. She remembered a good one and said, "Have you guys forgotten something? What about birth control? You had better watch how well you heal me, Adrian. You might heal me so well I could get pregnant again.

I can't believe I'm this old and I'm worrying about getting pregnant! You guys had better think about these things before things go too far."

Adrian and Hans looked at each other and shrugged. Adrian smiled at her and told her, "I will forbid conception in you until someday we decide we want another child . . ."

"Whoa! Wait right there!" Brenny told Adrian. "There will be no more children but this one. That is not negotiable . . ."

"We will talk about it later," Adrian told her. Brenny didn't like his answer, but she was too tired to go in circles with him about it. She figured that she would worry about it later.

Brenny looked at Hans for support. She wanted to hear him promise her that he would never want another child. He shrugged. Then she knew that Hans was no longer going to always be on her side. Hans had changed a lot. Brenny did not know if she liked the changes or not.

She began to worry about this and she forgot to worry about another pregnancy. Brenny began to feel trapped because it seemed to her that Hans and Adrian would always have their will over hers. Of course, it would be democratic and everything

would be friendly, but it was clear to Brenny that they were going to hold her to their high standards.

They expected her to do her part in the relationship. She knew that if she didn't do all of her part, that they would kindly remind her and wait until she did.

After she had finished her thought, she looked up. Adrian and Hans were looking at her with sadness in their eyes. "What?" she asked them. Hans and Adrian had heard her worry. She knew that they did not approve.

"I hate it when you two look at me like that," Brenny told.

"You know that we don't like it," Hans told her, "When you think or feel negative like that. It affects all of us. We also have a baby in this room and her spirit can feel energy. We need to fill the air with positive energy, not negative energy."

Adrian told Brenny, "You were originally worried because Hans used to always side with you and he gave you almost everything you wanted. He changed. I changed. We changed.

You were worried that you are not going to get your way in the future. You know beyond a shadow of a doubt that we will always be fair with you. Because we are so intimately connected, if you do something destructive, it hurts us, too."

Adrian's words were true and Brenny didn't have the strength to contend with them. Her heart told her that she was richer because of her relationship with him and Hans.

Brenny told them, "Okay. You are right. I know how you hate it when I say it, but I am going to say it anyway: I'm sorry. I will try to do better in the future, but you know how I am."

Hans and Adrian began to laugh. "What are you laughing about?" Brenny asked them.

Adrian smiled and said, "We know how you are."

Brenny asked, "And just how am I?"

Hans replied, "You are always the unpredictable, but predictable the woman that we love."

Adrian walked over to Hans and lifted Hans' hand to his mouth and kissed Hans' wedding ring. Adrian looked at Hans and told him, "You are my forever partner with our wife. I just want you to know that I respect this and that I love you. I am glad that you are my family.

Hans kissed Adrian's wedding ring and told him, "I love you, too, Adrian. I am glad that you are my family, too." They hugged each other.

Brenny quietly tried to get into bed. She hoped that they would forget about wanting to make love. She was pretending to sleep when Adrian walked over to her and held his hand out to her. Although her eyes were closed, she knew that his hand was extended to her. She weakly opened her eyes and took his hand. Energy flowed from him into her and it woke her up. Brenny started to shake her head and laugh. Hans and Adrian laughed with her.

Adrian put his arms around Brenny. Instantly, she found herself upstairs standing with Adrian next to the bed that he made with his mind.

He started to kiss her and before long, she was in bed with him. Adrian was more passionate than she remembered and he stayed in her a long time. Adrian was right--she enjoyed it.

When they were finished, they went back to flat downstairs. It was morning by this time. Hans was holding the baby as she had started to wake. Brenny took the baby from him and nursed her.

Brenny was glad when the baby was finished eating because Brenny was tired and wanted to go to sleep. She burped the baby and the baby went back to sleep.

Brenny was ready to lie down with the baby when Hans told her, "I want to visit with you, too."

"Can't we do this later?" Brenny told Hans, "I am so sleepy! Besides that, I just got out of hell."

Adrian and Hans' faces revealed their disapproval of what she had just said. She was too tired to defend herself. Brenny told them, "I know. I know. You don't like what I just said."

She thought for a few moments and asked Hans, "Can't you wait a little longer?"

"Brenny," Hans answered, "I have waited a long time to be with you again. You know that. My spirit is lonely because it needs that kind of intimacy with you."

Adrian told Hans, "Just tell me when you want to come back so you do not have to walk down the cold stairwell."

Brenny instantly found herself upstairs with Hans. He made very emotional love to her and he stayed in her for a long time. She enjoyed the intercourse with him and soon forgot about being sleepy.

After a while, Brenny's breasts filled with milk and they began to leak. Hans knew it was almost time to feed the baby, so he finished his lovemaking with her.

He told Adrian mentally they were ready to come back and Adrian instantly brought them back to the flat. Adrian was sitting in the red chair holding the baby. He had

already changed her diaper and he was smiling at her.

The baby could feel her mother near. She began to fuss and move her head from side to side looking for Brenny's nipple. Brenny took the baby from Adrian and fed her.

Adrian and Hans began to yawn and stretch. Brenny was glad to see them yawn and yawned with them. Good, Brenny thought, now maybe they will want to get some sleep so I can have some.

As soon as the baby was burped and sleeping, everyone gravitated toward the bed. Hans slept on right, next to the wall. The baby slept between him and Brenny, and Adrian slept on left side where his wings could hang over the side of the bed.

As Adrian promised, they slept all day. They only woke up to care for their baby together. They slept until the next day when they heard someone knocking on their door.

Hans was the only one to hear the knocking, so he got up, put his jeans on and answered the door. It was Berend.

"The Lord told me your penance is over and the neighbors told me you had your baby because you used their phone to call an ambulance," Berend said as he looked over at the bed. He saw the baby, Brenny and Adrian sleeping. He also saw the baby and Adrian's wings.

"Ja," Hans told him, "Adrian is an angel and the baby is part angel. We are a family now and this is our secret, ja?"

"Did you get what you wanted?" asked Berend.

"Ja, I think so," Hans answered, "We suffered a lot, though, and we had to learn how to have a relationship together."

Berend looked at Hans' hair and the hair of the others sleeping.

Hans ran his hand through his hair, "Ja, our hair turned white and our baby's hair is white, too."

"I only came by to tell you while you were on your retreat, the Dutch authorities kept coming by looking for your wife," Berend told Hans. "I thought you might want to take care of this."

"Thanks for telling me, I appreciate this," Hans told Berend. "I will tell the others when they wake."

"I took some of your money and invested it. You are now a richer man," Berend said.

Hans answered, "Thank you. I didn't need any more money, but thank you anyway."

You can continue to manage the money for us, ja? We want to use our time for our baby and our relationship."

Hans yawned, "I am going to go back to sleep for a while, okay? The baby will be getting up soon and I want to rest until she does."

"It was nice to see you," Hans told Berend as he yawned again..

"It was nice to see you again, too," Berend told Hans, "You look different with clothes on."

Hans laughed, "I feel different with them on, too."

The baby woke up a half hour later and all three of them cared for the baby. As they sat in the bed, Hans told them about Berend's visit.

"I know why the authorities were looking for me," Brenny told Hans, "My friend Muffin told the police she thought my old boyfriend murdered me. Remember Joe White Feather in the bar that time? He took our picture? Well it was that picture and my picture with him that convinced the authorities I was still alive. I imagine the authorities came by to interview me, but Kether kept them away from the door."

Hans told her, "I wondered if they were looking for you because you have been here illegally for so long. I think we should get married so you can stay here legally. Like I told you once before, I know someone who can marry us. He is my father and he is a minister. He's a pretty cool minister, too. He marries gays and lesbians and other non traditional couples."

"Where does he live?" Brenny asked.

"By Alkmaar," Hans replied. "We can take a train there . . . "

"I will transport us," Adrian told Hans.

"We can do that, too," Hans replied, "But remember, not all train rides are bad ones . . . "

"I know," Adrian told Hans, "But I would rather use my will to take us there. I am not ready for a train ride yet. One of these days I am going to face my fear and ride one. But All three got dressed and got the baby dressed. When they were ready to go, Adrian told Hans, "Think of where you want to go and I will take us there."

Hans thought of his father's church and they were instantly transported there.

The church was small and simple. "I think my father is in his office," Hans told them. "Follow me."

Brenny and Adrian followed him to a small office at the farthest end of the church. A

man sat at his desk. He had an opened Bible and notepad with a pen in front of him.

"Vader! It's me, Hans," Hans told the reverend.

Brenny was expecting Hans' father to be handsome and fair like Hans. Instead, he looked very ordinary and he had brown hair.

Hans' father looked up and smiled, "It's nice to see you!" He looked at Hans' face and asked him, "What happened to your nose? And what happened to your hair? Nee, wait a minute. I don't want to know because I don't want to hear one of your crazy stories. You can tell your Moeder and Zuster. They always listen to you."

Hans' father looked over at Brenny holding the baby, "Is this your baby?"

Hans' face lit up with a smile as he told his father, "Ja, this is our baby, her name is Adrian." Hans nodded at Adrian and said, "We named her after him. He is the father, too."

Reverend van der Pallen was becoming confused. He got up from his desk and looked at the baby.

"She looks exactly like you, Hans," the reverend told him.

Hans went over to the baby and took her out of her blanket. Hans' father saw the little wings and froze.

"She also looks like my brother Adrian, too," Hans replied.

Hans' father looked at Adrian and saw Adrian's wings. He hurried back to his chair and sat. Hans introduced Brenny and Adrian to his father.

"What do you want Hans?" his father asked.

"I want you to marry us," Hans replied. "That way, Brenny can legally stay in this country. We have a family now and I don't want any problems with the foreign police."

Hans' father saw that Hans, Brenny and Adrian wore the same kind of wedding ring. He connected it and asked Hans, "Exactly who wants to get married here?"

Hans replied, "All three of us. Really, we are already married, just not legally. Ours is a plural marriage . . . "

"I don't want to hear about it, Hans. You have surprised us too many times and I don't know if I want to know about this one. Everyone in the family knows how you are." Brenny and Adrian looked at Hans with questions in their eyes.

Hans shrugged and told them with a smile, "I was a little eccentric as a child."

Reverend van der Pallen asked his son, "Do you know that only two people can get legally married in this country? "

Hans nodded 'yes'. He asked his father, "But can you put Adrian's name in the ceremony, too?"

The reverend replied, "Ja, but it will not be legal."

Hans replied, "We know, but I do not want Adrian left out. He is our full partner, too."

"Did you get married at City Hall?" his father asked.

"No, but we can," Hans answered.

Hans knew where to go. Adrian sent Hans and Brenny to this office with his will. Hans wanted Adrian to go with them, but he preferred to wait with the baby in Hans' father's office.

Adrian asked him, "Do you want to hold the baby?"

Hans' father's face lit up and smiled, "Ja, I would like this. She is our first grandchild."

Hans' father held baby Adrian. He touched her wings and noticed she felt touch in them. He loved her sweet face and demeanor.

The pastor looked at Adrian and asked him, "How are things back home in Heaven? We ministers are always trying to figure this out."

Adrian smiled, "I do not know. Brenny, Hans and I recently saw the Father, but I did not get a chance to look around to see what has changed."

Hans' father looked at Adrian and said, "I believe you. I believe you because extraordinary things always happen to Hans."

Adrian looked at him puzzled.

Reverend van der Pallen told Adrian, "I prefer that you don't tell me any more. It's better for me and the rest of the family not to know too much. I know that my son is a good man and this is all that I need to know."

Hans and Brenny came back legally married. They were uncomfortable because Adrian hadn't been part of it.

Adrian sensed their demeanor and told them, "Do not feel bad about this. It is only a paper. It does not mean anything past man's law."

Brenny and Hans nodded in agreement.

"Now what do we have to do?" Hans asked his father.

"You should have witnesses," Hans' father told him. "I will call Moeder and Lisanne and see if they will be witnesses, especially since we have this secret."

The reverend looked at the baby's wings and asked Hans, "You prefer to keep this secret, ja?"

Hans replied, "For the everyone's sake. If people find out about this, we would never have any rest or privacy."

Hans' father called Hans' mother and sister. They came to the church right away.

Brenny was surprised that Hans' mother looked normal like her husband. She also had brown hair. Hans' younger sister, Lisanne, was different. She was beautiful and fair just like her brother. Brenny wondered if their baby would grow up to look like Lisanne. An epiphany struck Brenny's heart and she knew that their baby would not only be beautiful, but a prophet as well.

Hans' father married Hans, Brenny and Adrian. Afterwards, he baptized the baby. It was a happy day for everyone.

One brick at a time, Adrian, Hans and Brenny built a life happy life together. Hans converted the former coffee shop downstairs into a studio. He installed one-way glass in the windows of the studio so that he, Adrian or Brenny could look out but no one could see in.

Adrian began to sculpt with Hans and he found that he liked it. They sculpted together as they listened to music. Through their window, they watched for and prayed for the people who went into the flower shop across the street. Hans and Adrian also continued to play music and sing together.

Hans' art tastes had changed and now all he wanted to sculpt were angels. Hans' first angel sculpture was a statue of Kokablel with his celestial mandolin.

Adrian sculpted things of the earth like people and animals. Eventually, the studio became too crowded and Berend found an art dealer to sell some of their art. Although they didn't need it, Hans and Adrian made a lot of money. They donated the money to charity.

As time passed, Hans' broken nose healed, and Brenny's tattoo and Adrian's scar faded. The wounds inside healed much slower.

XLI

It was early afternoon. As soon as Brenny's feet hit the street, she began to walk fast. Brenny savored being alone because she rarely went out by herself. She worried how much time she had before she had to be back. There were a lot of things that she wanted to do.

She stopped at a restaurant and ordered a hamburger. It seemed like it took forever to get it. She looked forward to eating it as she put it up to her mouth and took a big bite. It tasted like sand. Brenny put it down, paid for it and left.

Brenny stopped at a tobacco shop and bought a pack of cigarettes and a disposable lighter. Hurriedly, she opened the cigarettes and took one out as she stepped out of the store. She lit it and sucked on the filter. She couldn't inhale any smoke because it didn't light. Brenny tried lighting it again, and it still wouldn't light.

She threw the cigarette away and tried to light another one. It wouldn't light. Brenny thought to herself, Adrian . . .

She put the pack of cigarettes in her pocket and walked for a while. She looked at the buildings and people. She took a tram and began to enjoy the ride when the pangs of loneliness set in. She got off at the next station and switched trams to take her to her neighborhood.

It was late afternoon when she got home. Brenny opened the door and saw Hans and Adrian sitting on the floor playing guitar together. The baby was playing with a ball in front of her fathers. She turned around and said telepathically to Brenny, "Moeder!"

Brenny took her backpack and jacket off. She scooped up her baby and kissed her. Brenny held Rosie in her arms for a while until she got restless. After Brenny put her down, Rosie toddled over to fathers.

Adrian and Hans stopped playing guitar. Adrian looked at Brenny and held out his right hand.

She looked at him and said, "What?"

"You know what I want, Brenny," Adrian told her.

Brenny walked over to him and pulled the cigarettes from her pocket. She put them in Adrian's hand.

"The fire, too," Adrian told her.

Brenny fished out the lighter from her pocket and put it in his hand. Adrian willed them to disappear.

Brenny looked at him seriously and said, "I suppose you made my hamburger taste

like sand, too?"

"You should not be eating that," Adrian told her. "It was the flesh of some poor animal and it is not good for you. You have got good food here to eat.

Why were you trying to smoke again, Brenny? I thought I cured you of that."

Brenny sucked in the bottom of her lip and looked down. She told him, "I just wanted to remember what it was like to smoke. I'm not nursing anymore, so I don't see why I can't have a cigarette once in awhile."

"Those things will kill you," Hans told her, smiling.

Brenny shook her head and pursed her lips. She told him, "I remember, Hans. Those were the first words you ever said to me."

Hans smiled at her again. His smile was infectious and she smiled back at him.

"Did you have a nice time, Brenny?" Adrian asked her.

"I would have had a better time if I could have been allowed to eat my sandwich and smoke a cigarette. What if I had stopped for a beer, would you have turned it into water?"

"Probably. That is not good for you, either," Adrian told her.

Brenny looked at both of them and said, "Not too much on this planet is good for you. That's part of the human condition."

Adrian told her, "Hans does not want to smoke or eat dirty food and he is happy. You can learn to be like that, too. Besides, you have a family now and we do not want you to do self-destructive things."

"But how come I can't have what I want?" Brenny asked Hans and Adrian.

Hans answered, "Brenny, you got what you wanted. You wanted both of us and you have us. You wanted to be happy and you are."

Brenny replied, "I would be happier if I had a cigarette. I forgot what it's like to have one. Better yet, I would rather have a joint."

Brenny felt Adrian and Hans' disapproval. She knew that they didn't want her to get high.

"Why?" Adrian asked her.

"Because I feel like it," Brenny replied. "Because I am a consenting adult who wishes

to smoke a little dope." Brenny stopped. She knew how the conversation would go if she did not stop fueling it. Hans and Adrian would debate nicely with her until somehow she lost the discussion. One of these days, she told herself, I am going to figure out how they do this.

Hans asked her, "Do you want something that you can have? Do you want one of us to give you some private time? Just say the word and tell us who. The one not chosen will watch the baby."

Brenny told Hans, "I don't want to bone."

Adrian looked at her and said, "Brenny! I wish you would not use that term. 'Bone' is such an ugly word. You know how ugly words and their meanings affect a person's aura and energy."

"Okay," she said, "I know."

Adrian asked her, "Do you want to be with one of us?"

Brenny shook her head 'no' and told him, "If I wanted one of you, I would want Hans. He used to be nice to me and let me do what I wanted to." Brenny looked at Adrian and told him, "Hans never said anything when I smoked cigarettes and dope, or drank a few beers. I never abused them, either. You are too strict, Adrian."

"Those things are self-destructive," Hans told her.

Brenny replied, "So is living."

She looked at Adrian and told him, "there is one reasonable thing that I want. I don't want to be fat anymore. I have been fat since I was pregnant. It's not fair, either. I eat and drink the same things you do and I am fat while both of you have slim bodies."

"How many times do we have to talk about this, Brenny?" Adrian asked her. "I figure that if you are fat, then the Father made you to be that way. You know that is why I do not make it go away. I do not mind it and neither does Hans. We love you for yourself."

Brenny shook her head. She knew this conversation wasn't going anywhere and decided to change the subject.

"Okay, what have you been talking about while I was gone?" Brenny asked them, "I know that you have been discussing something and you didn't want me to know until you were ready to tell me."

Hans and Adrian looked at each other sheepishly and smiled. Then they looked at her.

Brenny told herself, oh no! They want me to do something I won't want to do. I should never have gone on that walk. I knew that they were scheming, too, but I was

so desperate to get out by myself. They knew it and they took advantage of it. Brenny was becoming uncomfortable. She also became angry at herself. Although she had a little private time, her food and her vice had been taken away from her. She became to worry if it had been worth it.

Brenny knew that when Hans and Adrian wanted something, they were persistent. They were always kind and nice, but they were always persistent. She realized that they would have schemed together whether she had gone out or not.

"Why would you say that, Brenny?" Hans asked her kindly.

"Because it just dawned on me," Brenny told them, "That you knew that I would try to build walls with my mind if I went out by myself to keep you guys from watching. One of these days I will learn how to build them from penetration and I will have my privacy, no matter how brief it may be. I realize now that you probably wanted to talk together before you talked to me. What's the secret? What do you want? How much do I have to pay for my temporary parole where I was denied the simple pleasures of smoke and meat?"

Brenny felt Adrian and Hans' displeasure at her word 'parole'. She watched their faces and waited to see if they would say something about her language. They didn't. Worry began to fill her.

Hans and Adrian had been expecting her to worry and they felt her fear. They looked at her with love and kindness as they asked God to take away her anxiety. This made her worry more.

She told them, "Okay, guys. What is it? You know how I feel about surprises. I don't like them and I don't want them. Sometimes it feels like there is still a jack-in-the box around every corner, ready to jump out at you when you least expect it. You know how I feel about surprises, so what do you want?"

Hans and Adrian looked gave each other looks of encouragement. Then Hans told Brenny, "Adrian and I have been talking and we think our baby should have a sister or brother to play with and learn with. We don't want her to be alone."

Brenny was shocked and sat by the table. "Are you guys crazy?" she asked them skeptically. "Who wants to be the father?"

Adrian and Hans gave her disapproving looks. She returned their looks with one of her own. It was an angry and contemptible look that it instantly wounded Hans and Adrian. Brenny saw the hurt in their eyes and she regretted hurting them.

Adrian fought his hurt. He looked at her and told her, "We do not care. The child would still belong to all three of us."

She thought for a moment and said, "Okay. Then I have another question. Who is going to be the mother because I am not going to do it."

Adrian and Hans' eyes revealed that she had hurt them again. She wished that they would say something but she knew that they wouldn't. Brenny knew that Hans and Adrian would never argue with her or challenge her because they thought it was negative, destructive and a waste of energy. She also knew that they were waiting for her to realize how destructive and hurtful she was being.

Brenny felt outnumbered and she was worried that she was going to lose the debate like she usually did. She frantically fought for words and thoughts as she realized that she had been ugly to Adrian and Hans."

"Sorry husbands," she told them. "I have been rude, inconsiderate and unkind."

"So?" Hans asked in a hopeful voice.

"So I'm sorry," Brenny replied.

Hans told her, "That isn't what I meant."

"I know," she answered.

Brenny desperately looked for a way out and then she thought of something. She told Adrian and Hans, "We can't have another child because it would be unequal.

She looked at Hans and said, "If you and I had a child together, it would be 100 percent human and probably not be very good company for an exceptional child like Rosie."

Brenny looked at Adrian and told him, "If you and I had a child, then it would probably be more exceptional than Rosie."

She looked at both of them and said, "The only way I would have another baby is if she or he were be exactly like Rosie--one-third of all of us. Since this is impossible, the subject is closed."

Hans and Adrian looked at each other and burst out laughing. "See, I told you that she would say something like this," laughed Adrian.

Her husbands looked at her with big smiles.

"Oh, no!" she told them, "Don't even go there. Besides," Brenny looked at Adrian, "You told God each one would visit me privately."

Hans looked at her sincerely and told her, "That was before we found out how completely we are connected. Things change--we've changed--and we want another child."

A chill ran through Brenny. She had just told them something that they had been waiting to hear. She had just opened the door they had wanted her to open. At that

moment, Brenny realized how well Hans and Adrian had things planned out.

Adrian went to get his baby. He quickly covered her with a blanket, slung the diaper bag over his shoulder and disappeared.

"Where did Adrian go?" Brenny asked as a knot of fear squeezed tight inside her stomach.

Hans felt her dread and hugged her. Hans held her tightly as he replied, "He took the baby to Berend's house. Berend and his wife are going to watch her."

"Why?" Brenny asked. "Where are we going that we can't take her with us?"

"We are going to make a baby," Hans answered.

Brenny became more afraid and Hans sensed her fear. He kissed her face as he held her close to him. "Why are you so afraid?" he asked her.

Brenny willed for Adrian to hear what she was about to tell Hans, "Because I don't know if I am ready to have another child and I don't want to find out, either. It is not on my list of priorities. I don't like being pregnant and I don't want to have morning sickness like I had before. I'm too old and too cool to be getting pregnant again."

Brenny felt Adrian behind her and he put his cheek against hers. "We will help you," he told her, "I will take your sickness away this time because I have my power back. You are not too old and you will like it when you have a new baby in your arms."

She took Hans' arms off her and turned around and told Adrian, "I just told you a few minutes ago, I don't like being fat. If I have another baby, I might get fatter and I don't want to risk that."

"I just told you before," Adrian told her, "That we do not care about the extra flesh. It is not important. We are your husbands and we want another child. Our baby deserves a sister or brother. She should have some company besides us."

"Couldn't we get a pet . . . say a dog?" Brenny asked, "A pet would be company for Rosie. Amsterdam is filled with dogs, I am sure we could easily find one to adopt . . ."
" She felt Hans' and Adrian's disapproval and stopped trying to barter.

Brenny sat on the side of the bed. She did not understand how they were planning to create a child from all of them. They had been waiting for her to wonder about this.

"Adrian is going to enter me and we are going to join our spirits into one," Hans told her. "Together, as one spirit in my body, we are going to make love to you and join our spirit with yours. We think this will work."

"This is too kinky for me," Brenny replied, shaking her head.

"It wasn't kinky before," Hans answered.

"It was different then," Brenny told Hans.

"How?" asked Adrian.

"That time, I split my spirit in half and kept both of you separate most of the time. Sorry, but I can't do that anymore. I don't have the power or the inclination. Besides, it's too dangerous. Thrilling, but dangerous."

Adrian held his hand out to her and she looked at it. She knew that he wanted her to take it, but she didn't want to. Adrian's eyes sought her eyes out and locked them into his. "You have to trust us, Brenny," he told her, "We are your husbands and we would not ask you do something that bad. Now will you please take my hand?"

Hans reached his hand towards her and asked her, "Would you please take my hand, too?"

Brenny still felt outnumbered, but she instinctively took their hands. She knew that no matter what she thought or how she felt, that she was responsible for her part of the maintenance of their relationship. That included taking the others' hands when they were outstretched to her. They held her collectively as they whispered assurances into her face and ears.

Adrian put his hand on her abdomen and she felt warmth radiate from his hand into her. The warm feeling made her feel horny.

Brenny started to laugh. "Not fair, Adrian," she told him.

"I am helping make you fertile so you can conceive," Adrian told her.

"What happens if we don't conceive tonight?" Brenny asked.

"Then we'll keep trying like others do," Hans answered, "But, we think it will only take once. At least in theory."

Brenny took her clothes off and she lay in the bed. She thought about putting the quilt over her, but she left it off knowing that it would soon be off anyway. Then she remembered what they were going to do and she felt overwhelmed. Her feelings of desire went away as she began to cry.

Hans looked at Adrian and told him, "I knew she'd do this. I told you that she would cry."

Hans and Adrian felt bad that they had made her weep. They got in bed with her and held her.

"Please, Brenny, do not cry," Adrian told her, "You are going to make us cry. We

have cried too many tears of sadness together to cry any more of them. We love you and if having another child is going to upset you this much, we will drop the subject . . . for now. It will still be in our hearts and minds, though."

Hans told her, "It's okay, Brenny. We won't try this today. We'll just lay here and hold you until you feel better. Okay?"

Brenny looked at Hans and saw tears. She looked at Adrian and saw that he had tears, too.

She smiled at them as she felt them radiate love into her from their hearts into hers. It was healing and she stopped crying. The seriousness and depth of their love touched her spirit and she began to feel a little spark inside her wishing to create life.

"I love you both so much," Brenny told them. "So much, that I want both of you to be happy. Let me think for a moment."

She closed her eyes and thought. She thought about Rosie, a baby she never thought she would have. Secretly, Brenny had been worried if Rosie would ever have children to play with. Berend and his wife were childless, and Brenny knew that Rosie would never be able to go to nursery school because of her wings.

Brenny thought about being sick, but then she remembered Adrian would take that part away from her. She remembered what it was like have to be nine months pregnant for a very long time. Brenny remembered how unbalanced she always felt and how she always had to struggle to get up off the floor. Hans and Adrian would be able to help her more this time. Then she thought of something else.

She looked at Adrian and said, "God told you that there is only one-half of a generation left. All of us know a generation's length is known only to God. What if 'one-half' of this generation is only a few years? Do you think it is fair to bring another child in the world for so short of time?"

"It does not matter, Brenny," Adrian told her, "If the world ends today, tomorrow or whenever. It is the quality of life you have and live that matters."

Brenny realized that having another child might not be so bad. She knew that Adrian and Hans were good fathers.

"Will you let me have a cigarette if I agree to do this?" Brenny asked both of them, "Just one?"

"Not negotiable," Adrian replied, "Ask for something good and I will give it to you."

"Okay," Brenny said, "I want a joint then. That is something better than tobacco and it's not negotiable because I will have it. Maybe not right away because I will be pregnant, but I will have it."

Adrian and Hans remained silent. She told them, "Can we pray about having a baby first?"

Hans and Adrian smiled. "We were hoping you would say this," Hans answered.

All three got out of bed. They stood, put their wedding rings together and prayed. Then Adrian put his hands on her womb and blessed it to conceive for them.

Afterwards, Brenny got up and lay in the bed. She told them, "I agree to do this because I love and trust both of you and because it is in the best interest of our child. Still, don't get any new ideas, okay? I don't want to be doing this all the time. This is going to be an exception to the makeup of the intimate part of our relationship. I still want to be alone, individually, with each of you in the future."

Hans told her, "I wish you would stop worrying. This is a happy day for us, so can you try to be happy with us?"

Brenny put her face in her hands and started to laugh. "I can't believe I am going to do this with you!" she told them. "Although this is kind of kinky to me, I am afraid I may enjoy it too much."

"How can this be kinky when you are with your husbands?" Adrian asked her seriously. "We are of the same spirit."

Brenny answered, "This is not normal."

"What is 'normal', Brenny?" Hans asked her. "I wasn't born yesterday and I have noticed nothing is 'normal' in this world or the next. We are lucky we have each other and such a good relationship between all of us. We are lucky to have as much love as we have between us and the family we have. Many others aren't as lucky or as happy."

"Okay, Hans, I get the drift," Brenny told him. "I am getting starting to get cold and worry again. Hurry up and do what you have to do before I change my mind."

Adrian looked at her and told her, "We will merge ourselves together now, but we are going to take our time with you. We want to make sure we do it right because we have to create enough love and energy to make it work."

"Who do you want us to look like, Hans?" Adrian asked her.

Brenny remembered the unkind words that she had said to Adrian after they had come back from Minneapolis. She had told Adrian that if she had to choose between them, that she would choose Hans over Adrian. She regretted those words.

Hans and Adrian heard her thoughts. She told Adrian, "I am sorry I said those unkind words to you, Adrian. This was disrespectful and I promised that I would never do it again. I broke my promise."

You know my heart and you know that I love you. I just don't like it when someone tells me I can't do something, even if it is something I want to do that is not good for me.

Thank you for loving me enough to want me to stop. Deep-down, I appreciate it, although I don't completely agree with you or Hans about everything. Some things that you think are bad for me are really not that bad. Anyway, will you forgive me for saying what I said?"

"I forgave you when you said it," Adrian told her, "You know this. I knew that you were trying to see if you could make me angry because you were frustrated. You know that I cannot get jealous of Hans."

Brenny looked at both of them and asked them, "I always wonder why neither one of you get mad at me when I sometimes get mad at both of you."

Adrian and Hans started to laugh. "We do not get mad at you, Brenny, " Adrian told her, "Because our love and relationship with you is too important to wound it with anger."

"Besides," Hans interrupted, "We know how you are."

Hans and Adrian looked at each other and burst out laughing.

"What do you mean by that?" Brenny asked them.

Adrian answered, "For one thing, you worry too much. You always did."

"I remember when you used to worry, Adrian," she told him. "You used to worry a lot."

"That was before," Adrian replied. "Going through all the trials we did taught me how useless it was to worry. I wish you had learned that, too, but all of us are different."

"Do we have to talk about the Crucible?" Brenny asked. 'Crucible' was the name that they had collectively given the 'journey' that God had sent them on. Brenny had spoken the unspeakable again. She knew that it would make them uncomfortable, but she was eager to change the subject. Secretly, she hoped that the Name would take away their desire, but she knew better. Besides, she knew that she had put her name on the contract to collaborate with them. Brenny knew that she was going to help them create a child.

Hans and Adrian quickly recovered from their dread. They knew that Brenny was right and they knew that they had to change the type and direction of the energy in the room. They also knew that they needed to do this collectively, so they cleaned their spiritual houses quickly. This banished all negative thoughts and energy.

"So who do you want us to look like, Brenny?" Adrian asked.

Brenny thought for a moment and told them, "It doesn't matter." She looked at Adrian and Hans happily as she told Adrian, "I want you to make it so dark in here. I don't want to see, just in case I open my eyes. If both of you are going to be with me, I want to know and experience both of you equally. The darkness will give me that."

Adrian and Hans smiled at her approvingly. They had been hoping that she would say that.

Adrian looked at Hans. Hans looked back at Adrian and told him, "Let's do it." Adrian slipped into Hans' body. The room became black and she could not see anything.

They held her and kissed her. Brenny began to feel desire for them and she began to yearn for the darkest intimacy with them. They felt her yearning and they also wished for this kind of intimacy.

The room became darker as she felt the walls, floor and ceiling tear away. She was cushioned by the darkness because the bed was gone as well. Brenny felt her spirit instinctively open and it began to slightly glow with white light. She felt the energies of life and love flow through her. It energized her growing passion for them. They kissed her and touched her lovingly and passionately.

When they were ready to enter her, they told her in a combined, kind voice, "Finish opening for us."

Brenny flung open the rest of the doors to her spirit as she submitted to them. They entered her and everyone froze from the shock of what they felt. They braced against each other as great currents of love and passion from sexual and spiritual intercourse struck through them. It was beautiful, profound and powerful. Before anyone could think, they began to weep tears of joy as they began to make love.

They made love most of the night. After each time they exchanged their love and spirits, the energy escalated in the room. The last time they made love, Brenny felt a tiny spark begin to burn inside her womb. Adrian and Hans felt it too, so they began to concentrate on fertilizing the little seed. This escalated their passion and it escalated for a long time. Then Hans and Adrian poured themselves into her and she poured herself into them. They felt life begin inside her.

Afterwards, the darkness was not as thick. The walls, ceiling, floor and bed came back. Adrian and Hans separated from each other. She shook in their arms while they nursed her with love and kindness. After the big tremors left her, Adrian took the darkness away and the room filled with the shadows of late night.

Brenny was ready to go to sleep when she weakly asked Adrian, "Shouldn't you go get Rosie now?"

Adrian told her, "Berend and his wife can keep her a little longer. We asked them to keep Rosie all night."

"Why?" Brenny asked as she began to yawn.

Hans replied, "Because we knew that if you would agree to make a child with us, that you would need a lot of care afterwards."

Adrian told Brenny, "We wanted to help you emotionally and we did not want the baby to feel any negative feelings."

"Is it a boy or a girl?" Brenny asked.

"I do not know yet," Adrian told her. "We have to wait until all the energy in the room subsides and we will know."

There was a lot of energy in the room, but Brenny wanted Adrian to try to see anyway. She was very sleepy and she wanted to know before she went to sleep. Adrian put his hand on her belly and transferred his thoughts to them. Right away, they saw a boy and he looked a lot like Adrian.

"I see him!" Brenny exclaimed. "He is so beautiful!" She, Hans and Adrian wept tears of joy. When their tears of joy subsided, all three thanked God for His gift.

Brenny was almost asleep when she began to worry and doubt. Each time Brenny had a negative thought or would start to worry, Adrian and Hans would pray for her, encourage her and tell her that they loved her. After awhile, the thoughts and worries went away and she finally fell asleep.

Adrian kept her from getting sick, but could not keep her from the other miseries of being pregnant like melancholy and being bloated. Adrian and Hans never left her side and they helped her every way they could.

Like last time, when it was time for their baby to be born, the baby came out fast. Like before, there was no time to get to the hospital. Adrian, Brenny and Hans named their son Danel Kokablel. He looked very much like Adrian, but he also looked a little like Hans. Rosie was happy to have a brother. Danel had white hair like the rest of the family and Hans' father baptized him.

On the other side of the world, Mario acted as agent for Brenny's books. He

worked tirelessly until he found a publisher for them. The Reawakening of Amy became a best-seller and subsequently, people became interested in The De-evolution of Amy, its predecessor. It was reissued and it became a best-seller as well.

The interest was so great in the first Amy book that there was a demand for first editions. The few people who owned first editions, including prisoners and former prisoners, found their valuable book becoming more valuable.

Mario gave Brenny a party to celebrate the success of her books. Because Brenny and her husbands did not want to travel to the United States, Mario brought the party to

Amsterdam. He chartered a small plane to bring guests to the Netherlands.

Berend and his wife babysat so that Brenny, Adrian and Hans could go to the party. They also babysat for Brenny's grandson Tristan, as Mario had brought Adam and his wife with him on the plane. All three children slept together on Berend's spare bed. Rosie and Danel slept on each side of side of Tristan and they covered Tristan with their wings.

Mario rented a hall for the night. The No Name Group was there and they

played for the party. Hans and Adrian played with them. Hans played the trumpet, saxophone and other instruments while Adrian played the guitar. Both of them sang with the band.

They played a few songs when, Hans announced microphone, "This

song is for our wife's good friend Mario." They began to play "Celebrate" and everyone danced to it and had a good time.

Between sets, Anna skulked slowly over to Adrian and tried to put her hands on him.

He told her to leave him alone, but she wouldn't. When she tried to touch him again, he willed her hands to be shocked. Hans was watching and went over to Adrian.

"What did you do to her?" Hans asked Adrian.

Adrian replied, "I made sure that she keeps her hands off of me. I did not like it when she touched me, and besides, I'm married." Adrian shrugged and laughed.

Hans started to laugh with Adrian. He told Adrian, "I should have thought of that a long time ago," he told Adrian. "It might have saved poor Wolf a swim in the canal."

Stacy came to party and right away, she noticed Hans' sister. She introduced

herself to Lianne and it was love at first smile. They spent the whole night talking and dancing. Stacy did not go back to the US with Mario. Instead, she stayed with Lianne and they were happy together.

Hans' parents also came to the party. By now, they had accepted Hans'

non-traditional life and marriage. They were happy for him and they loved Brenny, Adrian and the children. They sat at the table with Adam and Karen.

Muffin and her husband Enrique sat at the adjoining table with Lila, Paulie and Raoul.

Brenny was in the bathroom when Anna burst in. She turned on the cold

water and put her hands under the water. Tears streamed down her face, smearing her makeup. She saw Brenny and said, "Your husband burned my hands."

Brenny looked at her and asked, "Which one?"

"The newest one."

"I don't have a newer one. I married them both at the same time."

"The one that's not Hans."

"Adrian would never do anything to harm you unless you provoked him. What did you do?"

"Nothing," Anna replied.

Brenny looked at Anna and remembered how she had tried to put her hands and body all over Hans.

"You tried to touch my husband, didn't you?" Brenny asked.

Anna looked down as new tears sprouted in her eyes. It took her a few moments to think and then she whined, "It's not fair."

"What's not fair?" Brenny asked.

Anna struggled to pull her head up. She told Brenny, "You have two men who are absolutely beautiful and they only want to be with you."

Brenny began to laugh. "That's right, Anna, they only want to be with me," Brenny told her with a smile. "Stop trying to interfere and leave them alone. I am going to ask Adrian to teach Hans to burn your hands the next time you bother him, too. So keep your hands off my husbands. Understand? Because this is a party held in my honor, I will tell Adrian to stop the pain, but from now on, leave him and Hans alone. I mean it. They don't like it and I don't like it. I'm not jealous, but I don't care for the hassle and negative energy."

Brenny went back out into the party. Hans and Adrian were still playing with the

band. She told Adrian with her mind, make Anna's hands stop hurting. He smiled at her and nodded. Anna was still crying in the bathroom when her hands stopped hurting. From then on, she was afraid of Hans, Adrian and Brenny. When she had to go by them, she always walked in circles around them.

Kether came to the party, but few people saw him. He visited with Uncle Denny and Manfred. Hans' father thought for a moment that he had seen an angel out of the corner of his eye talking with some Indians. Reverend van der Pallen shrugged. He knew that he probably had seen another angel. Then he laughed to himself. Hans was connected to this party and everyone in the family knew how Hans was . . .

Kenan came to the party with a woman, who was coincidentally named Angel. Kenan kept her close to him while he visited Adrian, Hans and Kether.

Brenny decided to take a break from dancing and saw Justin leaning against

a wall, lighting up a joint. She went over to party with him. They were talking when Justin passed the herb to her. Out of habit and desire, she put it up to her lips when she heard Adrian speak to her with his mind, "You know better, Brenny! You are nursing and besides, you do not need it." She looked across the crowd and saw Adrian playing with the band. She saw him watching her and he smiled at her. Brenny looked at Muffin and saw that Muffin had been watching. Muffin smiled at her.

The band was beginning to play Try Jah Love when Muffin sat beside Brenny and told her, "I have to go to the bathroom, but I wanted to see if you wanted to go with me." Muffin looked down at her closed hand.

"I'm right behind you, Muffie," Brenny told her.

As soon as they got in the women's bathroom, Brenny's friend and confederate handed her a joint and a lighter. Muffin told her, "Justin says 'cheers'."

"I am going to thank him after I am done smoking this," Brenny replied as she lit it. Muffin pulled a beer out of her purse and handed it to Brenny. Brenny smiled and laughed. She opened it and took a drink.

Muffin asked Brenny, "You don't think that Adrian or Hans will come in the bathroom do you?"

Brenny shook her head and said, "No. They know better. They know how far not to push."

Adrian and Hans leaned against a pillar waiting for her. Some of the ladies smiled at Brenny's husbands as they went in and out of the women's bathroom. Adrian and Hans smiled back as they waited patiently.

When Brenny and Muffin finally exited the bathroom, they felt two pairs of eyes looking at them. Muffin smiled warmly at Brenny before she looked across the room for her husband. Muffin found him and she gravitated gracefully in his direction.

Adrian and Hans tried to hide their unhappiness behind the kindness in their eyes, but Brenny could feel it. She looked into their eyes and they looked into hers. Their eyes were intense with the power of love and concern they felt for her.

Brenny shook her head and began to laugh. Under the skin, everyone knew what she had been doing. Under the skin, no one was going to say a thing because it wasn't worth the suffering it would cause.

Brenny started to laugh again, happily and melodically. She laughed because she was happy to see them. They felt her happiness and they knew why she felt it. This pleased them. They had missed her, too.

All of them laughed together. After they stopped laughing, Hans and Adrian smiled at her. Brenny beamed back a smile as bright as her spirit. Adrian and Hans found themselves mesmerized again.